

*Routledge Studies in Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*

# A HISTORY OF CLASSICAL CHINESE THOUGHT

Li Zehou

Translated, with a philosophical introduction,  
by Andrew Lambert



“Li Zehou is arguably China’s most important contemporary philosopher. In a generation in which we have experienced a precipitous rise of Chinese influence on the world order, we are from a contemporary philosophical vantage point offered this sustained reflection on the evolution of this antique Chinese philosophical tradition that brings its most prominent figures and themes into the present philosophical discourse. Li Zehou reinterprets and re-conceptualizes major ideas and concepts within the broad compass of this tradition, and replete with his own philosophical speculations, makes them available as a resource for a changing world cultural order.”

—Roger T. Ames, *Peking University, China*

“Presented here in English for the first time, Li Zehou’s *A History of Classical Chinese Thought* stands as a major work in twentieth-century Chinese philosophy, one that remains highly relevant to contemporary East-West dialogue. Lambert’s studious translation captures both the delicacy and breadth of the author’s mind, affording readers a new appreciation of what it means to ‘do’ Chinese philosophy.”

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“Li Zehou is the most outstanding but controversial philosopher in contemporary China. He was the youngest protagonist of the ‘aesthetic debate’ in the new born socialist China in 1950s. He came back after the Cultural Revolution with his idiosyncratic elucidation on Marxism and Kantian philosophy to become the flag bearer leading the ‘aesthetic fever’ and the ‘cultural fever’ throughout the ‘New Enlightenment’ period of 1980s. *A History of Classical Chinese Thought*, a major work from the 1980s, exhibits Li’s unique interpretation of traditional Chinese thought, and Confucian philosophy in particular. Li’s work ushered in the Confucian turn, prevalent in China today, and brought Chinese philosophy into dialogue with Western philosophy.”

—Tsuyoshi Ishii, *University of Tokyo, Japan*



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# A History of Classical Chinese Thought

Li Zehou is widely regarded as one of China's most influential contemporary thinkers. While known in the Anglophone world for his work in aesthetics, this book is the first English-language translation of Li Zehou's detailed study of traditional Chinese thought. It includes chapters on the classical Chinese thinkers, including Confucius, Mozi, Laozi, Sunzi, Xunzi, and Zhuangzi, and also on later eras and thinkers such as Dong Zhongshu in the Han dynasty and the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians.

The chapters in this book not only discuss these historical figures and their ideas but also consider their historical significance, and how key themes from these early schools shaped later periods and thinkers. The book highlights the breadth of Li Zehou's scholarship and his syncretic approach. His explanations of prominent thinkers and key periods in Chinese intellectual history blend ideas from the Chinese and Western canons, while also drawing on contemporary thinkers in both traditions. The book also includes an introduction written by the translator that explains key themes in Li Zehou's work, and its prospects for fostering cross-cultural dialogue with Western philosophy.

*A History of Chinese Classical Thought* will be of interest to advanced students and scholars interested in Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy, and Chinese intellectual and social history.

**Li Zehou** is widely regarded as China's leading scholar of traditional and modern intellectual history and philosophy. In philosophy, his specialization is aesthetics and ethics, but he has also written on Kant, ancient thought, and modern political thought. He is the author of *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics* (1995), *Four Essays on Aesthetics: Toward a Global View* (with Jane Cauvel, 2006), and *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (2010).

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# Foreword

## Translator's Introduction

Li Zehou has been described as “the most creative living Chinese philosopher as well as the most controversial.”<sup>1</sup> Born in Hunan province in 1930, he graduated from Peking University in 1954. Although an active scholar since the 1950s, he attained much greater prominence after the Cultural Revolution in China with the publication of several works in the late 1970s. Before he left China in 1992 and settled in the United States, Li was credited with providing inspiration for the Chinese democracy movement of the 1980s. He has published over 30 books and has the distinction of serving as a Fellow of the International Institute of Philosophy (IIP) in Paris, an honor also granted to Feng Youlan.<sup>2</sup>

Li is best known in the English-speaking world for his work on aesthetics, with three of his books available in English (*The Path of Beauty*, *Four Essays on Aesthetics: Towards a Global View*, and *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*). His work addresses a great variety of topics in Chinese thought. However, this volume offers an introduction to Li's scholarship beyond aesthetics. The essays, written separately at various points in Li's career, address a variety of topics in Chinese philosophical thought, covering thinkers from Confucius to the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians. Five of the first six essays feature the pre-Qin thinkers Confucius, Mozi, Laozi, Sunzi, Hanfeizi, and Zhuangzi. These essays not only discuss these historical figures and their ideas but also consider their historical significance, and how key themes from these early schools reappeared in and shaped later periods and later thinkers. There are also studies of Qin and Han thought (Chapter 5) and Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism (Chapter 7). The final two chapters in this volume focus on core themes in Chinese thought and their influence on thinkers in the modern era.

Li's work is distinguished by the breadth of his scholarly interest and his syncretic approach—his explanations of prominent thinkers and key periods in Chinese intellectual history blend ideas from both the Chinese and Western canons, while also drawing on contemporary thinkers in both traditions. Given the boundary-defying nature of Li's account of the development of Chinese thought, the reader is best prepared by

considering some of the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives that Li draws upon.

### Li Zehou and the Articulation of a Chinese Modernity

A useful starting point for approaching Li's work is to locate it within a shared concern of twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals: the struggle to find an intellectual foundation for a Chinese modernity. The collapse of the dynastic system in China after approximately two millennia prompted intense debates, partly fueled by the shock of defeat to Western powers in the Opium Wars, about what forms of social political order should undergird a modern China. Some blamed the Confucian tradition for China's contemporary woes, viewing it as unscientific and oppressive, and favored reform by adopting Western institutions and social ideals. One manifestation of this movement was known as *quanpan xihua* or 'wholesale Westernization,' and its best-known representatives were Chen Xujing (1903–67) and Hu Shi (1891–1962). On the opposite side, conservatives such as Xu Tong (1819–1900) staunchly defended traditional culture and opposed liberalization. A more moderate view also emerged, favored by reform-minded Confucian literati, such as Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), and captured by the slogan *zhongti xiyong*: Chinese root with Western applications. This approach favored making use of Western science and learning where possible, while preserving the roots of Chinese culture. It was against this cultural and intellectual backdrop that Li's own philosophical response emerged.

Li's response was not to simply adopt one or more of these approaches—wholesale Westernization, conservatism, or the grafting of Western learning onto Chinese culture—but instead developed his own novel theoretical framework. Broadly speaking, three strands of thought were relevant to Li's understanding of Chinese modernity: the Chinese intellectual tradition, rooted in a past dominated by Confucian thought and culture; the prospects for a Marxism with Chinese characteristics; and Western learning and science, to which China had been so dramatically exposed to during the decline of the imperial system. Li's thought can be read as offering, albeit often indirectly, an account of how these intellectual currents are tied together within a single, evolving and living tradition. Collectively, these three interlinked strands reveal a philosophical and social vision rooted in Chinese history, culture, and thought, but which often proceeds using Western terms and theoretical constructs. To highlight the originality and contemporary relevance of this vision, let us consider each of the three strands, starting with Li's treatment of traditional Chinese thought.

The task of finding value in Chinese thought was made more difficult by the dim view of traditional culture taken by Chinese reformers in the early twentieth century, and further criticisms followed in the Communist

era. The ‘Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius’ campaign of the 1970s, for example, partly drew on a Maoist interpretation of Chinese history. In the face of such challenges, Li resisted premature or sweeping dismissals of China’s rich heritage, while selectively highlighting the value of elements of traditional Chinese thought and its canonical figures. An additional layer of difficulty arose from the need at that time to be sensitive to political issues, and to be mindful of tones and wording.

One of Li’s most impressive feats was the rehabilitation of the Confucian school, which is articulated in this volume’s first chapter, “Reevaluating Confucius.” Li acknowledged the flaws and failings in the classical Confucian view of society, thereby avoiding open disagreement with the official doctrine of the time, but also emphasized the unduly neglected strengths of the Confucian social vision. The weaknesses included the conservative nature of Confucian social thought, its excessive recourse to the perspective of the nobility, and the failure to adequately describe and theorize the economic and technological progress that followed the collapse of the Zhou Empire. The strengths of the Confucian system lay in its primitive democratic spirit, which sought to preserve unity between the different roles and layers of society, by finding a place for different voices in a single ritual-governed polity. As part of an analysis of this social order, Li also offers a detailed analysis of the meaning of *ren*, often translated as humaneness.

This nuanced and enhanced reading of the early Confucians made credible Li’s assertion of the importance of traditional Chinese thought to a Chinese modernity. He did this by pointing out the value in classical Confucianism, and then linking it strongly to the present. Specifically, Li identified a distinctively Chinese ‘cultural-psychological formation’ (*Wenhua-xinli jiegou*), which could be traced back to the early Confucians.<sup>3</sup> This term expresses the idea that there are certain concepts, modes of thought, and ways of experiencing whose influence persisted through history and served to fashion a distinctive Chinese outlook or form of life. Describing this theory, Li wrote:

The history of ideas should investigate how culture and traditions are sedimented in people’s psychological formations; it should also investigate the connection between classical thought and the formation and shaping of the characteristics of the Chinese nation.

(Ch. 9)

In this way, the idea of a discrete Chinese tradition emerged, one distinct from a Western tradition and with its own modes of thought and approaches to experience. Furthermore, the theory’s implied determinism and historicism meant that Chinese modernity could not but be an extension of the Chinese past. This did not mean that China could or should resist all forms of outside influence, but that external influences would

have to be grafted onto existing values, cultural norms, and ingrained ways of seeing the world. More concretely, this approach cast doubt on the claims of those who advocated the wholesale adoption of Western modes of learning, science, and democracy; they were ignoring a deeper historically constituted reality—a nebulous cultural unity that, however vague its boundaries and terms, carried with it its own logic and implications for modern life.

The idea of a *cultural-psychological formation*, so central to Li's account of Chinese history and modernity, draws deeply upon Marxist and Hegelian thought, and this is the second starting point for contextualizing Li's work. One concern about Li's use of Marxist thought and analysis should be addressed at the beginning. Academic work on Marx done in mainland China in the 1970s and 80s is sometimes treated with skepticism, conducted under the shadow of the Marxist orthodoxy prevalent at the time. The more ideologically driven forms of Marxism featured dogmatic assertions and dubious generalizations regarding economics, history, or society, which fell out of favor in the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union if not before. Those wary of such politicized Marxism might therefore wonder whether Li's social analysis relies on misguided assumptions. This worry might be allied to concerns about the political pressures and limited scope for academic expression in China in the mid 1980s when *A History of Classical Chinese Thought* was first published, thereby raising questions about the book's contemporary relevance and value.

This concern about the use of Marxist ideas in Li's work is misplaced, however, for several reasons. First, Li's use of Marxist theory is highly selective. He does not appeal to the economic determinism of the later Marx, or to false consciousness, and his analysis is not class-based; nor does he present a highly teleological or deterministic theory of history—the kind that grinds toward revolution and millenarianism. Rather, Li focuses on the earlier Marx's work, such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, and the interest in human nature and its shaping by social, political, and economic forces. These issues raise meaningful philosophical questions, which continue to invoke discussion today.

Second, it is precisely because Li makes creative use of Marxist and Hegelian thought that he is worth reading. His work forms an interesting contrast with approaches currently prevalent in English language work on Chinese thought—such as a focus on Confucian role ethics or possible forms of contemporary Confucian democracy. English translations of Li's writings arrive at a time when Marxist thought, long neglected, is considered to be of only minor relevance to the field.<sup>4</sup> This makes Li's approach striking and thought-provoking, opening up new vistas for thought rather than presenting minor tweaks to familiar and well-worn lines of argument. Furthermore, as the zeitgeist in public debate and social theory move back toward a concern with social polarization and economic inequality as accoutrements of globalization, so some of

Marx's ideas once again provide a focal point for discussion. Given this, Li's work can be considered timely, as a contribution to this renewed debate about the role of economic and political forces in shaping the human subject and its values.

Li's use of Marxist ideas was also well suited to a particular historical moment in China. The influence of older Marxists had diminished, with the Maoist peasant-centric revolution and centralized economic control producing questionable results, and China was looking for new philosophical foundations for society in the 1970s. In providing a fresh reading of Marx, Li filled that theoretical lacuna.

For obvious reasons, there is little explicit reference to Marx in a history of Chinese thought from Confucius up to the nineteenth century. Rather, the book uses Marxist theoretical perspectives and a historicist approach to the explanation of social phenomena, as seen in the appeal to a *cultural-psychological formation*. Consistent with Marx's historical materialism, this idea indicates how external social practices and material forces shape people's conscious experiences and engagement with the world. Shared psychological entities, broadly construed so as to include concepts and norms, structure or 'form' the conscious minds of those who share the same social and material tradition. Furthermore, as external culture and material forces evolve, so do people's mental or psychological lives.

The influence of Marxist and historicist thought is also seen in Li's playful term 'Western root with Chinese application' (*xiti zhongyong*). Discussed in Chapter 9, this is a reworking of the popular reformist slogan mentioned earlier: 'Chinese root with Western applications' (*zhongti xiyong*). Subverting the notion that an established Chinese tradition (*zhongti*) can make use of features of Western civilization such as science and the technocratic management of society (*xiyong*), Li's analysis of Chinese history appeals to theoretical frameworks and social analysis that originates in the West (*xiti*) in order to derive conclusions about, and prescriptions for, Chinese society (*zhongyong*). This approach is redolent with Marx's belief that the surface level events of a society or tradition can be explained by 'hidden' theoretical constructs (such as the cultural-psychological formation), which are not themselves discussed in the literature and life of that tradition. This approach is apparent in the book's first chapter, in Li's assessment of the historical Confucius.

By emphasizing the humanistic strand of Marx, Li was able to connect Marxism with important Chinese cultural questions. In particular, Li reintroduced a concern with the inner life of the individual, which had been lost amid socialist theory that focused on social engineering and economic determinism. Yet Li did so in a way that differed from the conventional liberal notion of the free individual, understood in Lockean terms as a pre-social individual already possessing certain determinate

features and rights. The cultural-psychological formation located the individual in a broader social and cultural matrix.

This insight allowed for discussions of the human subject and human subjectivity in ways that spoke to traditional Chinese thought. The traditional approach to human subjectivity was characterized as, among other things, “conquering the self and returning to ritual” (*Analects* 12.1). The Confucian focus on the sociality of the individual—constituted by social roles, shared common goods, and a multigenerational perspective—and on harmony between a person and a more vast cosmological order was brought into dialogue with the Marxist view that the human subject is determined by social, cultural, and technological forces to a greater extent than the ideal of the autonomous liberal self allows.

In Li’s work, this view is explored as a dialectic between ideas found in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*—the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humans. Humans strive to remake and reform the environment in ways more amenable to themselves but, at the same time, their inner natures and dispositions also undergo alteration as a result of the encounter with the surrounding environment. This is an evolving relationship of mutual influence, in which a kind of symbiotic harmony is reached. Li does not view ‘human nature’ as a fixed and essential notion; rather the characteristics associated with humans evolved as their particular cultural, geographical, and historical tradition evolved. An ideal endpoint in such evolution arrives when human practices, in the broadest sense of the term, are in full harmony with the laws of nature and applicable technological or social forces.

The prominence of the human subject in Li’s writings conveys a faith in human freedom, and the possibility of transcending the more deterministic elements of his explanatory framework. As Li reinvigorates Confucianism through the use of Marxist thought, so he also seeks to enrich Marx’s thought by providing a richer picture of the inner life of persons, one sympathetic to the idea of human freedom. The ideal of freedom had great power in post-Mao reform-era China, but to articulate it involved turning to Western thought beyond Marx. This is the third vector in Li’s general philosophical orientation and, while thinkers such as Freud and Clifford Geertz occasionally appear in the text, it is most clearly illustrated in Li’s use of Kant’s (1724–1804) thought.

Li was as an accomplished Kant scholar who had already published a substantial commentary on Kant in 1979, *Pipan Zhexue de Pipan* (A Critique of Critical Philosophy). Kant’s writings provided a framework to discuss the mental and ideal aspects of human life, and allowed Li to produce a theory of subjectivity (*zhutixing* 主體性) or, to use Li’s term, *subjectality*. The term ‘subjectality’ was intended to underline a difference from subjectivism. Subjectality emphasizes the importance of first-person experience, in contrast to deterministic macro-level theories of social



forces, but also rejects shallow subjectivism. The latter understands the inner lives of people as being private and without connections to history, culture, and the surrounding environment, such that personal values have no deeper source than personal choice and commitment.

Li's theory of the human subject integrated Marx and the Confucian tradition, and ameliorated the tension between the determinism of the later Marx and the voluntarism of Mao—the idea that the sheer strength of human will could transform society. His theory developed Kant's account of abstract cognitive or perceptual structures or formations that condition the subject's experiences of the world; for Li, unlike Marx, the inner life of the individual is real and never a matter of false consciousness. However, Li rejected Kant's notion of transcendental a priori knowledge and the idea of the ahistorical and acultural synthesizing activity of the intellect (a transcendental ego, in Kant's terms). Instead, as noted earlier, the forms or categories through which the individual experienced the world were the products of the accumulated historical experience. Such experience 'sedimented' or accrued in people's minds, shaping thought, conscious life, and self-understanding. There is thus a kind of openness to the form of human subjectivity, and a freedom from a determinate and essential nature.

Alongside this openness in the form that human subjectivity takes, another Kantian theme is that each person has a distinct perspective on the world. This is because a person's 'psychological formation' is a mixture of accumulated human, group, and individual experiences. Alongside the shared categories and emotions that constitute a tradition, there is variation in individual experience and the resulting concepts used to grasp the world. Li thus found a way to articulate a distinctiveness of the individual person. Furthermore, the individual also possesses a dignity stemming from the powers of judgment involved in applying acquired concepts and ideas in practice. The cultivation of these powers through education is possible and desirable, and the resulting rational control can be applied to humans and the environment for the sake of human well-being.

In more general terms, and setting aside questions of the accuracy of Li's representation of Kant, Li made possible a turn in Chinese intellectual life. This was toward the resources offered by the European Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the individual and the inner life of the human subject. This way of developing Marxist ideas had not been plausible previously, since such thought had been negatively regarded as part of Western bourgeois capitalism.

Moreover, Li offered a novel way of reading Kant, which differed significantly from the New Confucians in Taiwan and Hong Kong, such as Mou Zongsan. Mou, for example, stressed the transcendental and supra-sensible aspects of Kant's work, inviting comparisons with Buddhist thought; Mou's 'moral metaphysics' was partly an articulation of

the transcendental goodness of human nature and the possibility of direct intuitive moral knowledge, independently of the senses or cognitive categories. In contrast, Li's adaptation of Kant was grounded in a materialist and historicist understanding of human thought and moral value.

### **Li Zehou's Characterization of the Chinese Intellectual Tradition**

Drawing on these three intellectual traditions—Confucian, Marxist, and Kantian—Li is able to offer a distinctive account of the features of the Chinese intellectual tradition. As this synthetic cross-cultural methodology suggests, his approach to intellectual history is not simply to provide an analytic overview of important ideas and thinkers but to identify the underlying logic of social and historical trends and to track their influence across eras. For Li, history is developmental, with later stages building on earlier ideas and events. Yet, while there is continuity within a tradition, there is also a core to it; and in China, this core is provided by the Confucian tradition. This core has several features, described in Chapters 8 and 9. These include an emphasis on kinship ties, the importance of personal cultivation that produces social and political authority, the valuing of historical and textual study, a culture of optimism or delight, a stress on the unity of the human and the cosmic (discussed later), and an emphasis on practical utility and a distinctive conception of wisdom.

One noteworthy feature of this Confucian core is described in Chapter 9 as *legan wenhua*. This is sometimes translated as 'a culture of optimism' but is better understood as indicating a culture characterized by a sensitivity toward socially grounded pleasure or delight. To explain this characterization of the Chinese tradition, Li proceeds by a comparison with classical Greek and Christian views of the world.

Classical Greek and Christian metaphysics often posit two distinct realms. For example, Plato's forms constitute an ideal realm, distinct from the imperfect world of the senses. Access to this realm is arrived at through intellectual excellence in which the body plays little or no role. Similarly, a Christian creator God is the source of truth and perfection, and humanity must appeal to divine grace in order to overcome a flawed human nature and enter a more perfect realm beyond mortal life. The individual's relationship with God was more important than all worldly relationships, including those of the family. Li notes that this kind of religious mentality has been very important in Western culture, which has been labeled as a 'culture of guilt.'

In contrast, Li claims the Chinese tradition has a 'one-world' view in which the only realm from which ultimate human meaning can be derived is the concrete, historical, social human world. No higher transcendental realm exists to explain human life and guide conduct. The Chinese

tradition thus contrasts with those that derive their ethical and social codes from a transcendental realm of perfect intellectual forms or a creator deity; the search for existential meaning in China was confined to the human realm. This search is ‘optimistic’ because the Chinese tradition, unlike other traditions, has not valued denigration of the body, self-sacrifice, or self-abnegation. This was a tradition characterized by a faith in everyday life and the possibility of finding meaning through the realization of pleasure in everyday social interaction.

Li’s work is not merely an account of a particular historical tradition, however. In his intellectual history the very meaning of ‘intellect’ and ‘wisdom’ are rethought. In several of the chapters, he explores an alternative conception of wisdom that differs from prominent accounts in the Western tradition (Li, like many scholars of his time, makes extensive use of the broad term ‘*xifang*’ or ‘Western’ as a useful conceptual foil for discussions of Chinese culture and history). On the question of what ‘wisdom’ means in history of Chinese thought, Li writes in Chapter 9:

I use the word ‘wisdom’ (*zhibui* 智慧) here not only to indicate the ability to think or a mode of the intellect. For this characteristic is not merely intellectual, but also refers to all internal psychological structures and mental powers. These include elements of ethics and aesthetics such as ethical consciousness, one’s attitude towards life, and the capacity for intuition. The characteristic feature of Chinese thought is how intelligence resides in an amalgamation of intellect and all these elements. Wisdom is an accumulated inner life and acculturation that enables people to advance their lives.

(p. 309)

Partly because a creator God or a timeless transcendental realm had no important role to play in guiding human decisions and judgments, so excellent practical reasoning had to find other starting points. Chinese cosmology is grounded in ceaseless transformation and creation (*sheng-sheng buxi*), and the interaction of various mutually entailing forces and energies, as indicated by ideas such as vital energies (*qi*) and the force or weight of circumstances (*shi*). One consequence of this metaphysical picture is the identification of complementary and interrelated paired forces or tendencies—more commonly known as yin and yang. The yin-yang framework is found, as Li explains, in texts such as the *Daodejing* or *Laozi* (see Chapter 3) and, later, the *Yizhuan* (Chapter 4); but the military strategists, responsible for texts like Sunzi’s *Art of War* (Chapter 3), provide the earliest comprehensive formulation of this way of thinking.

The *Art of War* represents a mode of thinking that had lasting influence on the tradition. Such thinking understands practical affairs through the use of mutually opposed but interrelated categories, such as night and day, male and female, hot and cold. Understanding any situation—and

therefore making wise choices and living well—consists in grasping the relevant paired forces at play in the situation, and grasping the direction of events and outcomes to which these will give rise. The more careful the observation and far-reaching the anticipation, the more effective will be the action.

Li's achievement is to present this account as a distinctive form of practical reasoning or wisdom. This way of acting can be contrasted with other forms of practical reasoning and representations of the world. Since the account involves a degree of objectivity, seeking to track forces in the world, it differs from action originating in blind instinct, mere subjective preference, or trial and error—all of which involve little if any systematic thought.

Admittedly, this form of practical reasoning lacks the detailed causal pathways and theoretical models of natural phenomenon and processes of modern natural science. It is still empirical and this-worldly, however, and free from superstition or the positing of supernatural entities. More importantly, it also has an advantage over these more elaborate scientific accounts of the world. In everyday life, problems arise in a dynamic and fluid manner, and often involve a number of variables or considerations too great for any individual mind to track them. Under such conditions, scientific models might be of less help when action is needed in the immediate present and there is limited time for investigation. Instead, a schematic model of the world that roughly tracks the practically important features of a situation is useful, one that the individual can apply in order to generate practical judgment and choice. Lying in between the uniformed subjectivity of desire or preference and a detailed but non-commonsensical scientific blueprint, and addressing conditions that are dynamic and changing, the yin-yang model of practical wisdom represents a useful compromise. Li describes how the influence of yin-yang theory on accounts of wisdom in the Chinese tradition persisted until China's encounter with Western science highlighted its shortcomings.

Yin-yang theory forms one part of a Chinese approach to practical wisdom that Li describes as 'pragmatic reasoning.' Li emphasizes that the Chinese tradition never developed a deeper concern with the mechanisms and processes that underlie the observable events of the social world, in the way that Baconian scientific method did. The intellectuals of the Confucian tradition were, Li insists, always primarily concerned with practical benefit and social well-being. If something benefitted the population at large, then the mechanisms behind it were of secondary concern. Heuristic-based thinking, such as yin-yang theory, served this practical goal well; but it became a barrier to developing other modes of theoretical thought and partly explained why the scientific method and its fruits appeared relatively late in China.

Another feature of Li's overview of the Chinese intellectual tradition is his challenge to the orthodox view of intellectual lineages within the

tradition. Li rejects the notion that the ideas that constitute the Confucian tradition should be understood as a single lineage that is often described as ‘*Kong-Meng-Cheng-Zhu*.’ He rejects the idea that Mencius (372 BCE–289 BCE) was the heir to the original Confucian school and that the Cheng Brothers and Zhu Xi later revived and refined the tradition’s key ideas. Such a gloss ignores how different schools in early China borrowed from and influenced each other, and how each contributed to the cultural-psychological formation that came to characterize the Chinese tradition.

For example, while Xunzi (d. 238 BCE) and Mencius are often discussed in terms of their differences, Chapter 4 emphasizes their commonalities—described as ‘the Confucian school’s spirit of optimistic striving’ (p. 118)—and ascribes the differences to different historical circumstances. The more developed capacity to control the natural environment and increase agriculture output of Xunzi’s time led to a different account of how to secure the enduring Confucian ideal of *tianren heyi*, or the unity of humanity and cosmos. For Mencius, this was something achieved through inner-regarding personal cultivation, such as the cultivation of the four shoots (*siduan*) or emotional responses. In Xunzi’s thought, however, the more developed social and technological means for ordering society, not available at the time of Mencius, played a greater role. In turn, Li argues, the *Yi Zhuan* or *Commentary on the Book of Changes*—though not typically associated with Xunzi—is an extension of Xunzi’s thought. Xunzi’s concern with *tian*, which here means the natural world, can be seen in the *Yi Zhuan*. Therein, it is transformed into a more complex cosmological notion. It becomes continuous with human life, inseparable from it, and also acquires an ethical connotation. Distinct from Xunzi’s notion of *tian* as external environment, and also Mencius’ sense of *tian* as an internal commander, *tian* is still external, but also includes moral and emotional qualities. This is one example of how a deeply rooted ideal, such as the unity of humanity and the cosmos (*tianren heyi*), evolves through successive iterations while remaining at the core of the Confucian tradition as a whole.

The importance of connections between superficially different thinkers or eras within the tradition is also seen in Chapter 6. Here, Li discusses how the *Zhuangzi* played a formative role in the emergence of Zen Buddhism. Both “cultivated an aesthetic attitude” (p. 221), idealizing a person who is completely free and, unlike the Confucian ideal person, does not value integration into the social world. In the same chapter, however, we also see Li’s willingness to challenge familiar associations. The supposed unity of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing* texts, conventionally understood to constitute a single classical Daoist philosophy, is rejected. Li argues that the *Daodejing* presents a political philosophy that involves engagement with the world, while the *Zhuangzi* seeks a metaphysics of transcendence and detachment. Seen clearly, the *Zhuangzi* focuses on a very different set

of concerns, such as the equivalence of life and death, transcending benefit and harm, and nourishing the body and prolonging life.

Perhaps the most striking commentary about the lineage of Chinese thought concerns Li's view of the Neo-Confucians, including Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. In contrast to later thinkers who treated figures such as Zhu Xi as sources of authority, Li is often critical of the Neo-Confucians for what he regards as their excessive focus on inner states and inward-looking cultivation. This preoccupation led to the neglect of the external world and wider society, and contributed to the social and political problems that faced the empire during that period.

Li's view of Neo-Confucianism is provocative and suggestive because he sees it as primarily an ethical theory, not metaphysical or epistemological. According to him, the Confucian way is an approach that stressed pragmatic reasoning, human relationality (Li's later work refers to this as '*guanxi-ism*,' or the study of human attachment), and social benefit. Under the challenge of Buddhism and its sophisticated metaphysics, however, this ethical system needed a more philosophical foundation. Accordingly, Neo-Confucian philosophers attempted to situate Confucian teachings about human attachment within a cosmological framework that made sense of them. This framework particularly stressed the patterning or principle (*li*).

'Principle' (*li*) referred to some form of abstract order that inhered in the world (or within human nature) and which could be either grasped through the investigation of things or given full expression from within with the right kind of training or stance. Li Zehou's materialist historicist methodology, however, understands the Song-Ming study of pattern or principle (*Lixue*) in terms of the historical context and social system within which it emerged. It provided an abstract justification to a conservative order of hierarchical human relationships and their accompanying responsibilities. While seemingly grounded in cosmology and metaphysics, Li Zehou's explanation implied that such principle or patterning was a theoretical construction that effectively served to justify the status quo. Regardless of whether the language of patterning and principle was true in any objective sense, the social responsibilities and demands of Confucian society had, at the very least, an intellectual framework that purported to make sense of them, and distinguished the Confucian way from the growing influence of Buddhism.

Critics of Li Zehou's approach to Neo-Confucian thought might argue that it is unfairly reductive, treating Neo-Confucian thought as a kind of governing ideology that merely reinforced the existing order. In his defense, however, Li does offer an extended discussion of the Neo-Confucian project, which he treats largely as a single enterprise, downplaying the distinctions between the School of Principle, *Lixue*, and the School of Mind, *Xinxue*. He proceeds via comparisons with Kant, specifically on the idea of a foundational transcendental principle—such as the categorical imperative—that marked the intersection of a metaphysics of the human

subject and human experience, and a practical code governing human action. The Neo-Confucians can be understood as undertaking a roughly analogous project: seeking foundational principles or laws that link the ethical to the most basic features of reality and human experience. They, however, came to a different conclusion from Kant, in that they did not locate the source of their governing abstractions or principles in some a priori feature of the human subject that transcends time and place; instead, its source lay in the workings of the universe and society, or in a human nature made manifest through engagement with the world.

In general, however, Li remains critical of Song-Ming Confucianism and argues that it constituted a regrettable departure from earlier Confucian philosophy and values. What was lost in its exaggerated concern for inner-directed refinement and moral consciousness was a meaningful concern with ‘kingliness without’—that is, with the cultivation of the skills and habits required to govern the state and lead the people, as the Confucian exemplars of antiquity had been able to do. *The Analects* and the *Mencius* had treated both personal self-cultivation and virtuous rulership as two sides of the same coin, but Li believes that this duality had been lost in Neo-Confucian doctrines.

The Neo-Confucians’ lack of serious engagement with the specific practical problems of the day, coupled with a misplaced confidence that quasi-religious self-cultivation would lead to practical effectiveness, were, Li argues, partly responsible for China’s subsequent decline and the crisis of confidence in traditional Confucian society.

Li’s critique of Neo-Confucianism is particularly interesting because it offers a nuanced response to the attack on Confucianism in the twentieth century—the claim that it was responsible for China falling into a state of disorder and vulnerability to foreign powers. Li’s analysis of the Confucian tradition as a whole suggests that this claim is partly true and partly false. It is partly true in that Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism had a pernicious effect on Chinese bureaucrats, with the excessive concern with bookish learning and personal virtue leading to a state less able to respond to complex political problems and external threats. However, according to Li’s analysis, Song-Ming Confucianism constituted a departure from earlier Confucian philosophy. Thus, while Neo-Confucianism might be connected to China’s social and political decline, the same accusation could not be made against classical Confucianism. This allows Li to defend the relevance of the Confucian tradition to a modernizing China, and to reject the view that the answer to China’s malaise lay in its wholesale abandonment of Westernization.

### **Assessing Li Zehou’s Scholarship**

The breadth of Li’s scholarly interests and the tendency for his ideas to evolve through successive iterations make simple assessments of his work

difficult. Despite this, it is possible to sketch some of the ways in which Li has influenced present and future work on Chinese thought.

First, Li's work blends innovation with tradition. Li reenergized traditional Chinese thought by introducing Marxist and Kantian perspectives. He has sought to offer modern interpretations of traditional ideas, such as 'sageliness within and kingliness without' (*neisheng waiwang*), while affirming those aspects of the tradition he regarded as "rational and full of vitality" (p. 327). Perhaps the best illustration of this appeal to the modern to renew the ancient is his interpretation of *tianren heyi*, or the unity of humanity and the cosmos. Li provides a new conceptualization of this term, suited to the 'new' China of the post-1949 era. This was a society moving away from a stable conservative order and toward a more technologically and scientifically orientated worldview. In Li's interpretation, the external, *tian*, is understood as an array of material, technological, and social forces, while *ren* was the human subject expressed by Li's notion of subjectivity. Unity arises as the human subject seeks to make the external forces more hospitable to human life, utilizing science and technology, while also being conditioned by and gradually accommodating to them.

This modern formal unity involves an understanding of human subjectivity or nature that differs from earlier accounts of *tianren heyi*. It features a richer inner psychological life, a less fatalistic approach to the external world and a greater interest in freedom, but it is also one that grasps and abides by the empirical laws that science reveals. In a comparative context, Li believes that this form of freedom is more mature than that posited by extreme forms of liberalism, which overemphasize an inner willfulness without due regard for the wider social and natural world.

Second, Li's work is also important for articulating a middle path between Westernization and conservatives who defend Chinese culture, seeking its preservation and insulation against Western influence. He is not unique among Chinese thinkers in trying to find a path between these, but his account of one such middle way is distinctive. It is rooted in his theory of sedimentation—the ideas and feelings through which the human subject understands the world as the product of an evolving historical and social milieu.

On the one hand, Li takes seriously the differences between cultural traditions and their role in the creation of human subjectivity; however, he does not defend the idea of a culture having an essence, something that must be preserved indefinitely. The open nature of the driving dialectical relationship between the human subject and its environment means that the cultural and psychological formation that comprises the Chinese tradition is always open to the absorption and accumulation of new practices and ideas, including those from outside of China. However, at the same time, such evolution is rooted in a distinct tradition of cultural transmission, stretching back to the clan systems and ritualized practices



of Chinese antiquity. This includes the ideas through which subjects cognize the world and affectively experience it. As a result, doctrines that offer far-reaching and foundational claims about the nature of the world or the human subject, such as Christianity or liberalism, cannot become dominant in China in any simple way—for they can have influence only insofar as they fit with or can be integrated into existing categories and concepts that define the Chinese worldview at the present time. Such a nuanced position seems largely correct: there is a Chinese tradition that exerts a wide-ranging and coherent influence on an emerging Chinese modernity; but it is not monolithic or inert. New ideas or practices can become sedimented into the evolving cultural-psychological formation of the tradition. It is an open question whether the cultural-psychological formation of those in China and those outside will merge at some future point.

Li's approach thus offers a vision of a modernized Confucianism, one that is fitted for the challenges of contemporary society. Like other modernizing interpretations, it clearly distinguishes between elements of traditional thinking worthy of retention and those best left in the past. It is one account of how Confucianism in the twenty-first century can have meaning and relevance, alongside other scholarly accounts of Confucian thought—as pragmatic, as an ethics of virtue, as offering a meritocratic corrective to democracy, and so on.

Third, Li's work can also serve as a source of ideas for discussions beyond the Chinese tradition. In recent debates with Michael Sandel on the role of justice in the good society, for example, Li claims that harmony is a higher regulative ideal than justice.<sup>5</sup> Justice relies on reason and logical discourse to generate rules that order society, but Li seeks greater recognition for the role of the emotions in creating stable social arrangements. This suggests a confidence that an order emerges from the natural, social and historical realms that, if trusted and allowed to shape affective responses, can harmonize human actions and desires, as well as human relations and the relation between humans and the natural world. This source of order, however, is not always represented in explicit rational discourse and negotiation. Customary norms, for example, might be forms of life that instantiate such well-grounded emotional responses, even if no explicit rational justification for them is readily apparent. Li argues that insistence on the integration of reason and emotion is a feature of the Chinese philosophical tradition, in contrast to the sole focus on logical and propositional reasoning found in the tradition upon which Sandel draws. For Li, the regulation of social morals and markets through both emotional and rational responses is, *pace* Sandel, the most secure way to protect the common good and bring about the good life for all.

Li's work also invites us to rethink the place of the aesthetic in everyday life. Mainstream Anglo-American aesthetics typically explores a narrow notion of beauty. Discussions concerning aesthetics are usually confined

to areas of human conduct outside of the public realm and moral debate, and associated with escape from the everyday into a special realm of aesthetic experience. Such experiences arise, for example, in the disinterested contemplation of fine art or exquisite objects in museums and art galleries. Within Western theory there has been some criticism of such approaches, with John Dewey's *Art as Experience* the origin of many important criticisms of classical aesthetics.

Li's work on the place of beauty and aesthetic experience in human flourishing can enrich this emerging sub-discipline in contemporary Anglo-American aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> Li's theory suggests that the role of the aesthetic in setting the ends of human life and in guiding action is much broader. Aesthetic experience is a pervasive guiding force in everyday life, and this demands a more thoughtful exploration of the intersection between the aesthetic and the ethical.

Li offers the provocative suggestion that 'beautiful' aesthetic experience can itself play a defining role in what count as meaningful forms of life.<sup>7</sup> Echoing the figure of Confucius at 70 (*Analects* 2.4) who resided in feelings that reliably guided conduct, the creation of events that are aesthetically pleasing to all involved could be regarded as an ethical goal. This might be compared with the integration of all members of a community in a shared ritual event, where each finds a role in producing the event and draws delight and satisfaction from their contribution. The Confucian *junzi* or cultivated person has an important role here, in leading the group in the construction or invention of such social events.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a cultivated aesthetic sensibility might help to bridge the divide between areas of human life that are currently compartmentalized, such as work and leisure. It could provide guidance by, for example, helping to reform working conditions so as to yield greater aesthetic value, or by indicating what forms of labor or work are more aesthetically pleasing and so more worthwhile. An analysis of human conduct that starts from aesthetic experience is possible because Li believes that aesthetic experience is veridical, not subjective, being rooted in the external social world; and, also, he believes that the story of human evolution is one in which beauty (including harmony) eventually becomes the highest guiding ideal for human life. Li thus invites us to consider how the sensuous nature of human experience, rooted in shared and stable social practices, can be trusted to guide human action, on a more-or-less equal footing with the ideals of individual deliberation.

### A Note About Translation

Finally, it is worthwhile to consider the role of translation in conveying Li Zehou's work. The oft-heard phrase 'Traduttore traditore' (roughly, 'the translator is a traitor') hints that translation is inevitably interpretation rather than a literal transmission of data from one language to another,

and the present volume well illustrates this. It is particularly challenging since it interweaves classical Chinese language and details of ancient customs, modern Chinese thinkers, Western theorists, and a number of neologisms. This creates a variety of technical and philosophical difficulties.

For example, Li's own theoretical framework for understanding the Chinese tradition and its evolution raises questions about how to render Li's quotations from classical Chinese texts. The conventional approach would be to use established English translations for the passages he cites. Since Li is offering novel interpretations of many philosophical thinkers and schools, however, inserting standard translations might obscure his philosophical vision. In what follows, I have tried to make use of established translations by James Legge, Ames and Rosemont, Eric Hutton, and others, but modified these when necessary to reflect Li's philosophical framework. If no published translation seemed to fit, I offered my own translations. The priority has been to convey Li's distinctive readings of the early texts, even if this temporarily renders well-known passages unfamiliar.

There is also a historical question hanging over Li's work. In one sense, Li clearly intends his ideas to be understood as an ahistorical set of ideas that express a determinate logic or viewpoint. But the papers gathered here were written over an extended period of time, and Li's thinking has evolved over a long and distinguished career. For example, his early work on Kant has a more critical tone, while his later work conveys greater appreciation (see, for example, Li's *Zhexue Gangyao*). Also, later editions of the *A History of Classical Chinese Thought* feature changes in vocabulary, with language connected to the more doctrinaire aspects of Marx's theory of history removed—gone are references to a 'slave-based system' that form part of Marx's stages of historical development. Similarly, does Li's use of a phrase like '*zhutixing*' in this text carry the same connotations as its use does 20 years later, when it is translated using Li's own neologism 'subjectality'? A further question arises in response: should the translation reflect the views of Li Zehou at the time he wrote the book, or should it read like the views of the contemporary Li Zehou? It is not the reader's role to answer such questions, but it is helpful to keep in mind that the original text is a richer and more open work than any translation can capture.

Consider one final example of the philosophical issues at play below the surface of the finished translation. In translation theory, there is a tension between a commitment to express the author's or text's original vision, and the need for a text that speaks to a reader located in a specific social and historical milieu, one disconnected from the original text. The ideal translation satisfies all such demands; in practice the human translator must use his or her judgment to balance these demands. The keener the attempt to fully capture the author's original world that gave rise the text, the greater the risk of moving away from the contemporary readers who are the *raison d'être* for any translation. Gayatri Spivak, for

example, emphasizes the need to ‘surrender’ to texts and to the author’s world.<sup>9</sup> Failure to do so produces texts that are ‘safe’—grammatically accurate but failing to capture what was distinctive about the original. Others, however, such as Dongming Gu, have argued that the reader is the primary focus of translation.<sup>10</sup> Following post-structuralists such as Barthes, they agree that the author is ‘dead,’ and that each text is remade for a particular audience.

This tension is relevant to Chinese philosophical texts in general, and especially to a contemporary Chinese thinker such as Li Zehou. A prominent call among translators of Chinese philosophical texts has been to ‘let the texts speak for themselves,’ thereby avoiding the imposition of alien conceptual frameworks. In the case of the present volume, however, Li Zehou is using Western theorists such as Marx and Kant to offer innovative readings of the Chinese tradition. He is reevaluating the Chinese tradition, rather than offering a transmission of traditional views.

Accordingly, a different heuristic seems appropriate for this translation, which might be described as follows. Translations are inevitably situated in a particular historical moment, and this includes translations introducing modern Chinese thinkers to English-language readers. The historical and institutional context for such translation is that of universities—assuming most readers will be academics—and, in particular, academic departments such as philosophy. As a discipline, philosophy has proceeded largely in ignorance of non-Western traditions. As social and economic changes bring these traditions inescapably into view, however, and attention is paid to non-Western traditions, questions arise about the status of Chinese philosophical thought. One attitude found in philosophy departments is to doubt whether these works are really philosophy. If they are not, then they may be ignored.

In response to such context, a guiding aim of this translation has been to produce a text that speaks to these readers. In order to effectively introduce contemporary Chinese thought into such Anglophone philosophy departments, it is necessary to present their members with texts that, as far as possible, engage them. Engagement happens when those philosophers realize that the Chinese tradition is relevant to their own research and teaching. Clearly, *A History of Classical Chinese Thought* contains ideas, insights, and arguments that can be brought into dialogue with, and enrich, existing research in Anglophone departments, particularly in ethics, aesthetics, and the philosophy of history. The task of the translation is to make clear such connections. This means, for example, finding words both faithful to terms in the original text and also suggestive for the reader, connecting the text with more familiar ideas and debates. It also means taking care to avoid language or phrasing that obscures the conceptual and imaginative connections between the original text and existing or possible research programs.

Li’s work is characterized by the boldness and suggestiveness of its vision and numerous thought-provoking claims and ideas. However, partly as a

consequence of such a vast and ambitious syncretic project—integrating Kant, Confucius, and Marx—and partly as a matter of personal style, Li—as he admits in the postscript—sometimes sketches a vision rather than fully exploring the implications of his ideas. It is the suggestiveness of these ideas, and the feeling that more can and should be said about them, that guide this translation; it aims to speak to contemporary Anglo-phone thinkers who are well-placed to expand and enrich Li’s legacy.

## Notes

1. John Zijiang Ding, “Li Zehou: Chinese Aesthetics from a Post-Marxist and Confucian Perspective,” in *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chung-ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 246.
2. For recent discussions of Li’s work, see the collection of articles focusing on his work in *Philosophy East and West* 66.3 (2016) and 66.4 (2016). See also the dedicated issues of *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, 31.2 (1999), and *Philosophy East and West* 49.2 (1999); the latter focuses on Li’s work in aesthetics.
3. For a detailed glossary containing many of Li’s neologisms and key terms, see D’Ambrosio Carleo III, and Andrew Lambert, “On Li Zehou’s Philosophy: An Introduction by Three Translators,” *Philosophy East and West* 66.4 (2016): 1057–67. A useful recent collection of essays on Li’s thought is *Li Zehou and Confucian Philosophy*, edited by Roger T. Ames and Jinhua Jia (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018).
4. Other recent translation of Li’s work include: *A New Approach to Kant: A Confucian-Marxist’s Viewpoint*, translated by Jeanne Haizhen Allen and Christopher Ahn, Singapore: Springer Nature, 2018; and *The Origins of Chinese Thought From Shamanism to Ritual Regulations and Humaneness*, translated by Robert Carleo III, Leiden: Brill, 2018.
5. Li Zehou, “A Response to Michael Sandel and Other Matters,” *Philosophy East and West* 64.4 (2016): 1068–147.
6. See, for example, Sherri Irvin’s, “The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48.1 (2008): 29–44, and Yuriko Saito’s book *Everyday Aesthetics* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007).
7. See Li’s three translated works on Chinese aesthetics, *The Path of Beauty* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), and *Four Essays on Aesthetics: Towards a Global View* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).
8. For an account of the creation of aesthetic social events as an ethical task, see Andrew Lambert, “Determinism and the Problem of Individual Freedom in Li Zehou,” in *Li Zehou and Confucian Philosophy*, edited by Roger T. Ames and Jinhua Jia (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018), 94–117.
9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 179–200.
10. Mingdong Gu, preface, *Translating China for Western Readers: Reflective, Critical and Practical Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

# 1 Reevaluating Confucius

A great deal of scholarly work has been done on Confucius (551 BCE–479 BCE), yet much divergence in opinion remains. An important reason for this divergence is a lack of clear understanding about the societal changes taking place around the time of Confucius, which has resulted in myriad interpretations of the nature and significance of Confucius' ideas. Exploring the characteristics of that society is not possible in this work, which can only analyze some of Confucius' ideas. These ideas include multiple mutually intersecting and reinforcing elements and dimensions, which gave rise to a *cultural-psychological formation* (*wenhua xinli jiegou* 文化心理结构) that has exerted tremendous influence on the Chinese people.

How to accurately grasp and describe this formation is perhaps the key to understanding Confucius. The Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods were marked by a transition from a nascent patriarchal clan system, which preserved the traditions of clan-based society, to a developed system of regional states. Although Confucius' thought was an expression of certain aspects of clan and aristocratic society during this time of unprecedented change, its relative independence and stability meant that the cultural-psychological formation initiated by Confucius endured through the ages and continued to develop.

## The Characteristics of 'Ritual'

Regardless of which school of thought a scholar belongs to, it is difficult to deny that Confucius vigorously maintained and defended the codified ritual tradition of the Zhou dynasty (*Zhouli* 周禮). The *Analects* mentions ritual or ritualized practice (*li* 禮) numerous times, clearly expressing Confucius' dismay at the decay of ritual in his social world, and demanding that people restore and abide by many aspects of the Zhou ritual tradition.

So, what is the Zhou ritual tradition? The general consensus is that it is a set of decrees, institutions, norms, and rules of etiquette or protocol that were fixed in the early Zhou dynasty. It might be characterized as the standardization and systematization of one kind of clan governance,

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which was itself based on primitive shamanistic ceremonies. As part of the nascent patriarchal clan system of the later Shang and the Zhou dynasties, it remained bound up with multiple aspects of clan and kinship life, and its structure and ideology were a direct extension of earlier primitive culture. What follows is a description of some of the characteristics of the Zhou ritual tradition.

On the one hand, there were clear and strict rules of order, which involved ordered hierarchies of seniority, class, status, and age, with the primitive clan ceremonies that previously included all in society being monopolized by small numbers of nobility. On the other hand, because the basic economic structure inherited the social structure of communal clan-based society, this set of ceremonies and rituals preserved a degree of primitive democratic and populist spirit. It is possible to find traces of this in the *Yili* 儀禮, a text which became known as the *Book of Rites* and was transmitted to the Han dynasty as the first of the three texts on ritual. The first chapter of the *Yili*, “The Capping of the Scholar Ceremony” (*shiguan li* 士冠禮), constituted an extension and modification of the ceremonies in earlier clan society that marked coming of age and the entry into society. For example, “Drinking Rituals in Country Districts” (*Xiangyinjiu li* 鄉飲酒禮) emphasized great respect for elders, and the *Book of Rites* described this differential treatment for men of different ages as follows:

60 year-olds are seated, 50 year-olds stand in waiting and listen to the orders of government. This is how respect for the aged is made clear. 60 years gets three dishes, 70 gets four, 80 gets five, 90 gets six; this is how nourishing the elderly is made manifest. The people knowing respect for the aged and nourishing the old is the beginning of filial and fraternal conduct.<sup>1</sup>

From this it is clear that filial piety and fraternal responsibility presume respect for seniority. I agree with Yang Kuan’s view, that this kind of ritualized respect for seniority was not just a rite of respecting elders at a drinking party.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it showed the characteristics of a primitive assembly, with a particular role in the structuring of political authority in ancient China. Both within and beyond China, many early clans had this kind of assembly. For example, among the Ewenki people in China, “for the past sixty plus years, at each level of the community, some important matters would be discussed and resolved through a ‘*Wulileng*’ 烏力楞 assembly. This assembly was mainly made up of elderly males and females from each family, and the longer a man’s beard the greater his authority.”<sup>3</sup> The ‘*Pinli*’ 聘禮 (betrothal gifts) and ‘*Sheli*’ 射禮 (archery etiquette) chapters of the *Yili*, among others, also can all be traced back to various rites and shamanistic activity associated with clan society.<sup>4</sup> Each chapter of the *Yili* described highly specific rites, and these could not

be fabricated by later generations; nor were they meaningless literary flourishes; as primitive rites, their original form had an important social function. It was through such primitive ritual activity that ancient clans bound the collective together and created unity. Such social order and convention were instrumental to economic production and daily life and underpinned the entire society's survival and success.

As a result, these rituals had, for each clan member, great power to compel and restrict, much as law had in later times. In effect, the rituals constituted a kind of unwritten common law. By the time of the later Shang and the Zhou dynasties, the rites and ceremonies that functioned as common law gradually became the exclusive preserve of the clan nobility.<sup>5</sup> Confucius' attitude to the Zhou ritual tradition was consistent with his defense of this system of clan government and the primitive ritual preserved by it. For example, Confucius and Mencius consistently 'revere elders': "In his ancestral village he was most deferential as though almost at a loss for words";<sup>6</sup> "When drinking wine in his village, he would wait for those with canes to depart before leaving";<sup>7</sup> "In the world there are three objects of the highest respect, rank, age and virtue."<sup>8</sup>

'Ritual' is a capacious term, but its origins and core meaning is respect for and sacrifice to ancestors. Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) wrote:

The vessel holding jades, presented to deities or ancestors during ceremonies, were known as *li* 豐 (vessel); by analogy, the wine used for sacrifice to deities were also called *li* 醴 [the character *li* 豐 with a wine radical added]. Further, offerings to deities were known as *li* 禮 or ritual [the character *li* 豐, with a deity radical added].<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) wrote:

The character for ritual came later. In the bronze inscriptions, we sometimes see the use of the character *li* 豐. Based on the composition of the character, it was a vessel that contained luxuriant stringed jade and was used for offerings to the spirits. The "precious shells and jade" reference in the 'Pan Geng' 盤庚 chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 should be understood in this way, thus confirming the original meaning of the character for ritual. The ritual was possibly generated from sacrifices to deities, and therefore the character for deity was combined with the character for vessel to form the character for ritual. Later, its meaning was extended to include people, and later still it expanded to include all rituals for auspicious and inauspicious affairs, as well as military matters and banquets.<sup>10</sup>

It is thus clear that the distinguishing feature of the Zhou ritual tradition was that it took primitive rituals and ceremonies, centered on sacrifices to ancestral spirits, and remade, systematized, and expanded them.<sup>11</sup>



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They were transformed into a set of governing customary laws and regulations (a system of rites with legalistic force).<sup>12</sup> The backbone of these laws and regulations was a hierarchical system of kinship and patrilineal succession, which was extended outward through a political and economic system based on enfeoffment, inheritance, the well-field system, and patriarchal clan rules. As for the Confucians or Ruists, represented by figures such as Confucius, they emerged from among the organizers and leaders of primitive rituals and shamanic practices—the shamans, officials, and scribes—to become the expert overseers and preservers of what was to become Confucian ritual and ceremony.

Late Qing scholar Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1869–1936), also known as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 wrote, “In the earliest times, humans were governed by shaman-officials.”<sup>13</sup> Zhang believed that Confucians originally were ‘shaman-officials’ (*shushi* 術士, a term also used by Zhang’s teacher, Yu Yue 俞樾 [1821–1907]) and were in charge of ritual and helping the ruler to accord with yin and yang forces in order to teach and transform the people. This meant that they were important figures both religiously and politically.<sup>14</sup> The great Confucian figures of antiquity, such as Emperor Shun’s minister Gao Yao 皋陶, Shang minister Yi Yin 伊尹 and the Duke of Zhou 周公 were all such shaman-officials, serving as both overseers of ritual and auxiliary rulers. The later Confucian idealization of a ‘prime minister’ (*zaixiang* 宰相) who helped the emperor rule the empire originated from this earlier role.<sup>15</sup>

Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) believed that men of virtue learned from the sages and the sages learned from the common people,<sup>16</sup> and that the great synthesizing figure was not Confucius but the Duke of Zhou. Moreover, “The greatness of Confucius was that, in studying the Zhou ritual code, he could capture its essence in a single phrase.”<sup>17</sup> It was not Confucius but the Duke of Zhou who comprehensively sorted, remolded, and standardized the primitive rituals of high antiquity up to the Shang dynasty. At the time this was a hugely important transformation. Wang Guowei argues in *Yin Zhou zhidu lun* (*On the Institutions of Shang and Zhou*)<sup>18</sup> that Confucius repeatedly emphasized that he “loved the ancients but did not innovate”;<sup>19</sup> “followed the Zhou”;<sup>20</sup> and “dreamed of the Duke of Zhou,”<sup>21</sup> indicating that he intended to preserve the Duke of Zhou’s legacy in toto. The following passages also show Confucius upholding a ‘governing by ritual’ that is founded upon customary norms that require trust or faith:<sup>22</sup> “A ritual vessel that is not a ritual vessel, ah, a ritual vessel indeed!”<sup>23</sup> “Ji has established eight lines of dancers in the court. If this is tolerated, what cannot be tolerated?”<sup>24</sup> “You begrudge the sheep, and I the ritual”;<sup>25</sup> “If the way consists of law and use of punishments to order them, people might follow the law but lack a sense of shame. If led by virtue (*de*),<sup>26</sup> and ordered by means of ritual, then the people will have a sense of shame and act with propriety”;<sup>27</sup> “All men must die but if there is no trust in the ruler, he cannot survive.”<sup>28</sup>

However, Confucius' era was already one in which ritual and ceremonial music were in decline. The clan system of government and collectivist social structures were collapsing.<sup>29</sup> In the Spring and Autumn period, many clan-based states were wiped out and many nobles could not hold on to their inherited status; some fell into poverty and some undertook minor civic duties. Some of the clan nobility abandoned old conventions and focused on land and private enterprise, forming a new rising class and quickly becoming powerful and wealthy. Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280 BCE–233 BCE) commented, “the partition of Jin and the conquest of Qi were both the result of the great wealth of their many ministers.”<sup>30</sup> Great economic power led them to seize political authority and to pursue mergers and annexations in military affairs, all of which led to the complete collapse of the traditional Zhou ritual system of control that emerged from the tribal alliances among clans—with the emperor at the apex, the feudal lords below in the regions, and ministers and officials at all levels.<sup>31</sup> Blatant oppression and exploitation, and the advocating of warfare, removed the veil of tender-hearted ‘ritual propriety’ and ‘virtue’ from that layer of society, and made plain the maintenance of an ideology and political logic of oppressive exploitation.<sup>32</sup> The Legalist school of thought, from Guan Zhong 管仲 (ca. 723 BCE–645 BCE) to Han Fei, steadily gained the ascendancy.

During this period of turbulent change, Confucius was clearly on the side of the conservatives and reactionaries. His political posturing was manifested in the maintenance of order, based on ritual and his opposition to politics and penal code. In addition, in terms of economy, he advocated the continuation of economic structures already entrenched in society, and would rather have uniform poverty than too great a division between rich and poor. This was to avoid destroying the original clan and administrative structures (“What is fearful is not that the people are poor, but that wealth is unequally distributed, not that they are few in number but are discontent”),<sup>33</sup> Opposition to the pursuit of wealth (amassed by taxation) and to the harm to the established order between ruler-minister and father-son, and to the personal honor of clan nobles, became key ideas of Confucius:

The Master said, “Wealth and social eminence are things that all people desire, and yet unless they are acquired in the proper way I will not abide them. Poverty and disgrace are things that all people hate, and yet unless they are avoided in the proper way I will not despise them.”<sup>34</sup>

A true gentleman is one who has set his heart upon the way. A fellow who is ashamed merely of shabby clothing or modest meals is not even worth conversing with.<sup>35</sup>

The head of the Ji family was richer than the Duke of Zhou had been, and yet Qiu collected his imposts for him, and increased his

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wealth. The Master said, “He is no disciple of mine. My young friends, beat the drum and assail him.”<sup>36</sup>

The Master said, “Even in my early days, a historiographer would leave a blank in his text, and he who had a horse would lend him to another to ride. Now, alas, there are no such things.”<sup>37</sup>

The Master said, “Dressed in a tattered robe quilted with hemp, yet standing by the side of men dressed in furs, and not ashamed—ah! it is You who is equal to this!”<sup>38</sup>

These passages all reflect clan nobility who had lost their wealth and fallen on hard times. Although Confucius traveled everywhere, striving to restore the ritual system of Zhou, he was frustrated. History inexorably moved on, from the early patriarchal clan system to the later more advanced system of regional states. This was a great leap forward in the society. On the back of this, the glorious civilizations of the Warring States appeared, and, later, the Qin and Han empires flourished. At the same time, however, the large number of primitive ritual practices preserved by the patriarchal clan system were lost, including various democratic and humanistic remnants integral to the clans, as well as the populist regimes of many small and mid-sized city states of clans in the Spring and Autumn period. History always entails the playing out of such tragic contradictions. Engels wrote:

Since the exploitation of one class by another is the basis of civilization, its development moves in a continuous contradiction. Every advance in production is at the same time a regression in the condition of the oppressed class, that is, of the great majority.<sup>39</sup>

Engels was referring to capitalism’s increasing use of machinery. But primitive society’s advance to a class society was an even better illustration of this logic. The advance of society, increases in production and in wealth, come at the cost of the majority of people making great sacrifices. For example, in primitive society and in class society, wars are often an important factor in the advancement of history, and yet they bring regret, protest, opposition to the suffering that war brings, and a popular clamor for justice.<sup>40</sup>

Both sides are often reasonable, and thus we can say that this is an irresolvable and tragic historical paradox.<sup>41</sup> The new emerging class in China, made powerful by wealth, suppressed the ritualized governance of the clan nobles. It treated agriculture and warfare as a foundation, established an unsentimental rule of law, boldly practiced oppressive exploitation, replaced the populist spirit of the clan nobles with the authoritarian control of a ruler, and brought about the collapse of the outdated form of clan governance based on the male head of household. When these happened, they represented reason and progress in history.

However, on the other hand, the opposite side also possessed a certain rationality and popular spirit. This view included: lamenting the final collapse of the clan system; opposing the relentless spread of wars of conquest; dreaming of the return to an ancient ‘Golden Age’ with less oppressive exploitation; attempting to preserve a system of governance which were relatively tolerant of clan members; and dissatisfaction with, renouncement of, and attacks on shameless exploitative oppression.<sup>42</sup> The relation between history, reality, and people is often one of complexity and contradiction. Trying to assess all these in terms of a simplistic ‘good versus bad’ is contrived and a failure to accord with reality. Confucius’ upholding of the rituals of Zhou was conservative and backward, and even reactionary (being against the flow of history), but his thought was proto-democratic and popular in that he opposed a cruel exploitation and extortion, and sought to uphold and revive an ancient system of clan government that was relatively mild. Confucius’ teachings about humaneness were thus founded upon these kinds of contradictory foundations.

### The Formation of Confucian Humaneness (*Ren*)

The majority of Confucian scholars recognize that the most important category of Confucian thought is not ritual but humaneness (*ren*).<sup>43</sup> The former implies compliance; the latter indicates creation. Although the character *ren* 仁 had been around for a long time, Confucius was the first person to place in at the center of a system of thought. So, what is *ren*?

The character *ren* (仁) appears over 100 times in the *Analects*. Its meaning is broad and varied, so no single explanation will capture its full meaning. The past 2,000 years have not yielded a definitive account and, moreover, later interpreters have each read their own meaning into the term and offered different interpretations. By grounding an interpretation in particular phrases from the *Analects*, it is possible to derive mutually opposed accounts of *ren*: “*Ren* is to love others” versus “To overcome oneself and return to ritual propriety, this is *ren*.” Among the 100 appearances of the term in the text, determining which is the most important or accurate gloss and taking this as the touchstone for understanding the rest is problematic and not necessarily the right approach. The sum of the parts does not equal the whole, and so when an organic whole forms, it gains its own distinctive characteristics. Confucius’ idea of *ren* had a similarly holistic quality. Its constitutive parts entail, permeate, and regulate each other. Accordingly, the parts are self-regulating, mutually interchangeable, and relatively stable. This enabled *ren* to absorb or rebut frequent challenges to its integrity and endure over time as a coherent idea. Thus, it became a distinctive mode of thought and a cultural-psychological formation (*wenhua-xinli jiegou* 文化心理結構), one that left a deep imprint on the emerging Han culture.<sup>44</sup>

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There were four features of *ren* that generated this mode of thought and its philosophical structure. These were i. a foundation in bloodline and kinship, ii. psychological principles or regularities, iii. humanism, and iv. personal character. A more general characteristic, and a fifth feature, was practical rationality. There are many complex questions regarding this framework that require detailed study, but this work can present only an initial account of the issues and offer a tentative hypothesis.

### *i. A Foundation in Bloodline and Kinship*

Confucius talked about humaneness when explaining ritual propriety, so it was directly relevant to the upholding of ritual propriety. As described earlier, ritual propriety was based on blood relationships and served a system of clan governance based on hierarchy. To maintain or revive it is the fundamental aim of ‘humaneness.’ Therefore:

It is rare for someone who is filial to parents and deferential to elders to be found of defying authority. There has never been a person who was not fond of defying authority and yet initiated rebellion. Cultivated people concentrate on the root, and once the root is established, then the way grows. As for the filial and deferential person, isn’t this the root of being fully human?<sup>45</sup>

“Why do you not serve in government?” Confucius replied: “What does the *Book of Documents* say about filial piety? Being filial and friendly towards brothers is carrying out the work of government. In doing this I am employed in governing. What else is government?”<sup>46</sup>

A young man should be filial at home and respectful to elders when out in the world, diligent and sincere, broadly love the multitude, and stay close to virtue.<sup>47</sup>

When the cultivated person is diligent towards his intimates, then the common people are inspired to be humane.<sup>48</sup>

Bearing in mind Mencius’ comments that “Affection for parents is humaneness”<sup>49</sup> and “The fruit of *ren* is service to parents,”<sup>50</sup> it is clear that *ren* strongly implies consanguineal bonds. Filial piety (*xiao*)<sup>51</sup> and fraternal deference or brotherly respect (*ti*) structured the clan system and its hierarchy around both vertical (filial) and horizontal (fraternal) biological ties. From antiquity to the Zhou dynasty, this was the core of the patriarchal clan system of rulership (and was the meaning of the Zhou ritual tradition or *Zhouli*); it also constituted the politics of the time (hence Confucius’ comment that to be filial is to engage in government) and is also captured by the traditional Confucian call to “cultivate the person, order the family, rule the nation and bring peace to the empire.” What was referred to as ‘*jia*’ (家)—often translated as family—during the Warring States and by the Confucians of the time was not the individual

household or extended family of later periods but the clans and tribes that were similar to the idea of a nation (*guo*).<sup>52</sup> The phrase bring peace to the empire also included the entire network of clans (presided over by enfeoffed noblemen), larger clan groupings or tribes (governed by feudal lords) and tribal alliances (under the control of the emperor).<sup>53</sup>

Only in this way can we understand Confucius' comment "Serve your father in the household and serve your ruler beyond," or Mencius' claim that "The root of the empire is the nation, the root of the nation is the household, and the household is rooted in the person." Note also Confucius' statements, such as "Revive embattled states, restore disrupted family lineages, raise up men of talent,"<sup>54</sup> which are echoed by Mencius:

Release captives, young and old; do not take any more vessels from conquered states; discuss the important matters with the people of Yan; appoint a ruler for them and then withdraw the troops.<sup>55</sup>

This was a call to revive the earlier authority of the clan-based tribal states. Confucius took filial piety and fraternal deference as the grounds of humaneness; he took affection for the extended family and respect for the elders as the standard for humaneness; he upheld the hierarchical tradition that recognized paternal authority in the clan; and he opposed the separation of politics and the penal code from ritual propriety and virtue.<sup>56</sup> All of these were concrete reflections of ancient historical facts. As Engels wrote, "In view of the decisive part played by consanguinity in the social structure of all savage and barbarian peoples, the importance of a system so widespread cannot be dismissed with phrases."<sup>57</sup>

At a time when clan society and kinship relations were collapsing, Confucius picked up consanguineal ties and historical traditions and promoted them as a philosophical position. He offered a clear political explanation of blood and kinship relations and the hierarchical system, which shaped the organization of society and transcended the biological world and frameworks derived from it. He thereby extracted the features of clan society from its particular historical confines, and highlighted their universal and long-lasting social significance. This was hugely important. In particular, he identified a direct connection between them and derivative psychological norms, and connected them to an even wider set of considerations.

## *ii. Ritual Propriety Initiated Externally*

*Li* originally referred to a collection of customary norms, ceremonies, rituals, and magic that functioned as an external constraint for people. *Analects* phrases such as "filial piety at home, fraternal deference outside" originally indicated this kind of unreflective ritual. For example, the empire-wide mourning rituals promoted by Confucius and Mencius

(such as the three years of mourning prescribed in *Analects* 17.21) were long-established traditional ritual practices that people were required to respect and follow.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, during an era in which ritual and music had lost their relevance and power, suspicion and opposition to this collection of traditional rituals and ceremonies (and so to the clan system of government) were widespread. It was also at that time that new understandings and explanations of ritual began to emerge. Among these, some thought that ritual was not merely a collection of external ritual forms and practices to be blindly followed, but ought to include a focus on the intrinsic qualities of ritual. For example:

Zi Dashu had an interview with Zhao Jianzi and was asked by him about rituals of bowing, yielding precedence, and moving from one position to another. “These,” said Zi Dashu, “are matters of deportment and not of ritual.”

“Allow me to ask,” said Zhao Jianzi, “what we are to understand by ceremonies?”

“Ritual is the regular warp and weft of the Heavens, the duties of the Earth, and the behavior of the people. . . . Since people lose their nature ritual is therefore used to support that nature. There were the six domestic animals, the five beasts [of the chase], and the three [classes of] sacrifice to support the five flavors. There were the nine [emblematic] ornaments [of robes], with their six colors and five methods of display, to maintain the five colors. There were the nine songs, the eight airs, the seven sounds, and the six pitch-pipes, to maintain the five notes. The responsibilities of ruler and minister, high and low, followed the characteristics of the Earth. For both husband and wife, as well as within the home and the outside world, there were separate spheres of affairs. Father and son, elder and younger brother, aunt and sister, maternal uncles and aunts, father-in-law, the relation of one’s children their mother’s family, and brothers-in-law—all were illuminated by images from the Heavens. There were duties of government and administration, services especially for the people, [legislative] vigor, the force of conduct, and attention to what was required by the times—all accorded with the phenomena of the four seasons. . . . For grief there are mourning and crying; for joy, songs and dancing; for pleasure, beneficence; for anger, fighting and contests. Pleasure is born of love, and anger of hatred. Therefore [the sage kings] were careful judges of conduct and sincere in their orders; they apportioned misery and happiness, rewards and punishments, to regulate the people in life and death.”<sup>59</sup>

This passage makes clear that ritual is not merely ceremony, though it also proves that they were not initially distinguished, and both were an extension of primitive religious ceremonies and shamanistic practices.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, contemporary Confucianism distinguishes the two, and strives to articulate the inherent qualities of ritual. At that time, ritual was already explicitly acknowledged as providing social norms, which included important political order; it was no longer simply a capacious and varied assortment of primitive ceremonies.

The preceding passage also suggests that the understanding of ritual as political order and social standards started from natural human sensitivity to taste, sight, sound, and smell, as well as happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy. Governing norms could not be separated from a human interest in food, sex, attraction, and aversion.

That being so, an additional issue arises: what is the ‘human nature’ that functions as a foundation here? Confucius’ answer to his disciple Zaiwo’s question about three years of mourning captures his thinking:

Zaiwo said, “The three-year mourning period for the death of parents is too long. If cultivated persons were, for three years, to give up observing ritual propriety then the rituals would be ruined. If for three years they give up the performing of music, then musical practice would collapse. The old grain has been used up and the new crop is ready for harvest. The different woods used for making fire have gone through their full cycle—surely a year is enough (for mourning one’s parents)?” The Master replied, “Would you be comfortable eating fine rice and wearing colorful garments?” “I would,” replied Zaiwo. “If you are comfortable, then do it,” said Confucius. “When cultivated persons are in mourning, it is because they find no pleasure in fine food, no pleasure in the sound of music, and no comfort in their usual lodgings; hence they do not shorten the mourning period to a single year. But if you are comfortable with this then, indeed, enjoy them.”

When Zaiwo had left, Confucius said, “Zaiwo is truly inhumane. If it only after being cared for by parents for three years that an infant can finally leave their bosom. The ritual of three-years of mourning for parents is practiced throughout the empire. Certainly Zaiwo received his three years of loving care from his parents!”<sup>61</sup>

Re-interpreting ‘ritual’ so that it accorded with his approach as a whole, Confucius attributed the traditional ritual practice of three years of mourning to the intelligible everyday love of parent and child; he directly related the foundations of ritual to psychological need. In this way, he defined all ritualized consanguineal bonds in terms of filial piety and fraternal deference, with these grounded in the everyday love between parent and child. This was to explain the external trappings of ritual and ceremony in terms of inner personal need, and to elevate seemingly rigid and oppressive norms to the level of self-conscious ideals for living. A religious and mysterious matter was transformed into



everyday emotions, thereby melding together ethics, norms and psychological desire. Ritual was humanized by acquiring this internal psychological ground, and the psychological norms noted previously became the basic structure of human consciousness. These changes—from spirits or gods being the defining authority to people’s inner drives and self-consciousness, and from obedience to these spirits to obedience to people and oneself—marked a new era in ancient Chinese thought.

Confucius’ account of ritual was free from lofty and obtuse reasoning or mysterious doctrines, and was better suited to everyday life than to the aforementioned account of ritual in the *Zuo* *zhuan*. It possessed a general plausibility and a practical efficacy. The important point here is that Confucius did not link human emotion and psychology to the worship of external objects or to some ethereal realm, but integrated them into the world of human relations in which the parent-child relationship was key. He created a unified whole in which the three elements of religion—concepts, sentiment, and ceremony—merged with and permeated commonsense ethics and everyday psychology; none of this was built on esoteric theology or faith.<sup>62</sup> This, combined with other elements, meant that Confucianism was not a religion but could perform the function and role of religion—something rare in the history of the cultures of the world.<sup>63</sup> The defining feature of Confucian culture and the doctrine of humaneness was that it did not establish an external system based on mysticism and faith but presented a realistic model of ethics and psychology.

Precisely because concepts, emotions, and ceremony (actions) were determined by, and found fulfillment in, the ethics and psychology of everyday life, so the psychological norms therein were derived from the ordinary sensibilities of normal people, and this enabled the doctrine of humaneness to consistently avoid the suppression of desire found in religious asceticism. Confucius did not have a concept of original sin and forbidden desire and, on the contrary, affirmed the reasonableness of ordinary desire and the reasonable guidance provided by it. Upholding the legitimacy of normal everyday living and the needs of both body and mind meant that religious renunciation of the world was avoided, as well as pessimism about lived reality. Confucianism and Confucian thought’s active engagement with this world and its commitment to psychological norms were two sides of the same coin.

In addition, since humaneness emphasized this internal psychological foundation, it occupied a much more important position than ceremony and also made the idea of ritual subordinate to it. Confucius originally used humaneness to explain ritual so as to revive its status, and yet the process became more important than that goal. The humaneness ‘discovered’ and promoted by Confucius, i.e., the human psychological foundation, actually became the essential idea: the external blood links (expressed in ritual) yielded to the inner mental world of humaneness. Thus, the *Analects* declares, “What has a person who is not humane got

to do with ritual? What has a person who is not human go to do with music?”;<sup>64</sup> “In referring time and again to ritual, how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk? And in referring time and again to making music, how could I just be talking about bells and drums?”;<sup>65</sup> “In observing ritual propriety, it is better to be modest than extravagant; in mourning, it is better to express real grief than to worry over formal details”;<sup>66</sup> “Those today who are filial are considered so because they are able to provide for their parents. But even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you do not respect your parents, what is the difference?”<sup>67</sup>

Here, both external form (ceremony and its props such as jade, silks, bells, and drums) and external matters (i.e., the practice of ritual) are subordinated and secondary. What is essential and primary is the person’s internal ethical and psychological state, which might also be called human nature. Mencius later greatly developed this embryonic viewpoint. As a result, this second, inner aspect of humaneness is of a very different order from the first (which stresses blood ties and fraternal deference), and further removed from traditional ritual and ceremony. It’s more tentative and abstract (compared to the explicit clan system of organization), and yet also more concrete and practical, since human psychology is susceptible to being molded.

### iii. Humanism

Grounded in these affective psychological regularities, the external trappings of this doctrine of humaneness were the proto-democratic and humanistic aspects of the primitive clan system. The classical lexicon *Shuowen Jiezi* gloss reads, “*Ren* comes from the character for person (*ren* 人) and the character for two (*er* 二), and means people’s kinship.” This corroborates the Mencius comments that “To be humane is to be human,” and “Honor old people as we do our own aged parents, and care for other’s children as one’s own.” This interpretation of humaneness orthodox from the Han dynasty is thus highly credible. This meant the extending of concern from nearest and dearest to other people, the extension of love from preferential, graded love to a broad love for the multitude, and the growth from affection toward parents (among close blood ties of clan nobility) to humane conduct toward the population (all clans, tribes, and freemen involved in tribal alliances). However, the so-called barbarian tribes (those outside the tribal alliances) took kinship duties and social hierarchy as basic and demanded that all members of the clan or tribe strictly observe social hierarchy and establish a kind of broad love or affection in relations with others. The Confucian approach strongly emphasized the human disposition toward sociality and interaction, and the internal order, harmony, mutual help, and adjustment found within clans; these were, in turn, based on distinctions of greater and lesser authority, noble and common, young and old. This kind of

‘primitive humanism’ was the outward manifestation of Confucius’ doctrine of humaneness. Confucius rarely conveyed any animosity; on the contrary in the *Analects* we find the following passages: “Care for others”;<sup>68</sup> “Make the elderly content, create trust among friends, and cherish the young”;<sup>69</sup> “In enacting government, what need is there for killing?”;<sup>70</sup> “If tolerant, you will win over the multitude . . . if generous you will be able to make use of others”;<sup>71</sup> “The Master said of Zi Chan, ‘in nourishing the people, he was generous’”;<sup>72</sup> “If the people have plenty, you will not be left to want alone. If the people are in want, you cannot enjoy plenty alone”;<sup>73</sup> “To put the people to death without having instructed them—this is called cruelty. To expect a job to be finished without having first given notice—this is called oppression”;<sup>74</sup> “The Master asked, ‘Was anyone hurt?’ He did not inquire about the horses”;<sup>75</sup> “The Duke of She asked about government. The Master said, ‘Good government obtains, when those who are near are made happy, and those who are far off are attracted’”;<sup>76</sup> “All the influences of civil culture and virtue are to be cultivated to attract [distant populations]”;<sup>77</sup> “The people from all quarters will come to him, bearing their children on their backs—what need has he of a knowledge of farming?”<sup>78</sup>

These passages make clear that Confucius’ political and economic proposals involved strenuously upholding a hierarchical order featuring superiors and inferiors, noble and common, which constituted the clan-based system of rule. These passages also show that Confucius’ outlook remained rooted in a primitive democracy and humanism, which were staunchly opposed to excessive and cruel exploitation. This is also the outlook expressed by the Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyong* 中庸). Both historically and today, explanations of the doctrine of the mean abound, but I believe that the inscription on a Warring States bronze recently excavated from a Zhongshan tomb—“taxes were appropriate, and the common people followed”<sup>79</sup>—expresses the essence of Confucius’ way: preserving a tender-minded clan-based form of primitive democracy and humanism, while also implementing class-based rule.

This humanistic dimension of *ren* is significant. It shows that humaneness tied together the whole of society through shared benefits and cost (including clans, tribes and alliances, as well as men of service at the level of the fiefs, feudal lords in the feudal states, and the emperor as head of the empire). It also became an important standard for quantifying *ren*. Thus, although Confucius in the *Analects* was greatly unhappy at Guan Zhong’s overstepping of his authority with regard to ritual and ceremonial propriety, and accused him of not understanding ritual, he nevertheless approved of Guanzhong’s understanding of humaneness:

“Did Guan Zhong know the rules of propriety?” The Master said, “The princes of states have a screen intercepting the view at their gates. Guan had likewise a screen at his gate. The princes of states on

any friendly meeting between two of them, had a stand on which to place their inverted cups. Guan had also such a stand. If Guan knew the rules of propriety, who does not know them?”<sup>80</sup>

Zi Lu said, “The Duke of Huan caused his brother Jiu to be killed, when Shao Hu died with his master, but Guan Zhong did not die. May not I say that he was wanting in virtue?” The Master said, “Duke Huan assembled all the princes together, and not with weapons of war and chariots—it was all through the influence of Guan Zhong. What sort of humaneness was this? What sort of humaneness was this?”<sup>81</sup>

Zi Gong said, “Guan Zhong, I apprehend, was wanting in virtue. When the Duke of Huan caused his brother Jiu to be killed, Guan Zhong was not able to die with him. Moreover, he became prime minister to Huan.” The Master said, “Guan Zhong acted as prime minister to the Duke of Huan, who made him leader of all the princes, and united and rectified the whole kingdom. Down to the present day, the people enjoy the gifts which he conferred. But for Guan Zhong, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side. Will you require from him the small fidelity of common men and common women, who would commit suicide in a stream or ditch, no one knowing anything about them?”<sup>82</sup>

This makes clear that humaneness imposed on the individual many social duties and demands; *ren* treated social relations between persons (this originally meant clan nobility), and social interaction generally, as the defining quality of human nature and an important benchmark of humaneness. Mencius’ comment that, “someone without a father or a lord is an animal”<sup>83</sup> also confirmed that the difference between animal nature and human nature resides in these kinds of social relations. When a person leaves behind parents and siblings, as well as hierarchical social relations and social duties, then they are no more than an animal. Such thinking also formed the basis for later Confucian philosophy’s opposition to Buddhism (from the Six dynasties to the time of Han Yu), and Ming-Qing opposition to Song Neo-Confucians (due to the latter’s empty mind doctrine and denial that scholarship should practically benefit the nation). Clearly, humaneness was not just blood ties and psychological principles; they were the foundation, but the distinguishing features of humaneness were the demand for social interaction and the shared responsibility.

Thought always has its grounds in practice. It is difficult to explain the grounds of Confucius’ primitive humanism in the pre-Qin era as being anything other than the remnants of the proto-democratic system internal to the clans of the pre-Warring States patriarchal clan system. Until the Western Han, the Confucian school and the classics were still the major upholder of this primitive democratic spirit, and this was seen in the Han

New Text Confucians' concern with the *Mingtang* design for civil and sacred architecture and with non-hereditary imperial succession.<sup>84</sup>

All this shows that it is too simplistic to accuse Confucius of being deceptive or hypocritical. It's difficult to explain why the label 'hypocrite' has come to be the dominant view of the *Analects* and the crucial idea of humaneness. Engels wrote:

The more civilization advances, the more it is compelled to cover the evils it necessarily creates with the cloak of love and charity, to palliate them or to deny them—in short, to introduce a conventional hypocrisy which was unknown to earlier forms of society and even to the first stage of civilization.<sup>85</sup>

Although Confucius was not the first step in the civilization and his ideas often became tools of 'hypocrisy' in later eras, Confucius nevertheless possessed a certain integrity. The hypocritical elements could not have exerted much influence either at the time or in later eras. After all, Confucius belonged to the early stages of civilized society.

#### *iv. Personal Character*

Corresponding to this external humanism, and integral to its regulation, is the internal dimension of humaneness, which promotes the initiative and independence of individual character. This aspect is also extremely important. At a time when ritual and musical order were fading and the Zhou Emperor was powerless, having lost his authority and purpose, Confucius offered a psychologized account of humaneness to explain ritual. This placed the burden of reviving Zhou ritual directly on to the individual members of the clan nobility (the *junzi* 君子 or cultivated person). Confucius demanded that they self-consciously and proactively take on this great historical task, and make it their lives' mission. Confucius stressed the importance of humaneness multiple times in the *Analects*: "Humaneness comes from oneself. How can it come from others?"<sup>86</sup> "Is humaneness far away? I desire humaneness and humaneness is here";<sup>87</sup> "In the drive to be humane, do not yield even to your teacher";<sup>88</sup> "In being humane, desiring to establish oneself, one first establishes others, and desiring to attain it, one first leads others to it. Being close to and drawing an example from others, this can be called the method of humaneness."<sup>89</sup> These passages, and others, make clear that humaneness was lofty but also near at hand and achievable. It involved not only a sense of historical responsibility but also a degree of personal or subjective initiative, and it presented an ideal personality alongside a plan for individual conduct. The outward humanism, the internal psychological norms, and the foundation provided by blood ties were to collectively find expression in the formation of character:

If people are proper in their comportment then others will follow without command; if they are not proper then others will not follow even when commanded.<sup>90</sup>

If you yourself were not so greedy, others could not be paid to steal.<sup>91</sup>

Confucianism emphasizes that personal cultivation is the root of “ordering the household, governing the state and bringing peace to the empire,” and this naturally required the preservation of customary clan leadership.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, it also demanded that what was once the concern only of clan leaders be demanded of every member of the clan nobility. As a result, the demand to ‘establish ritual and create music’ was no longer mysterious or opaque, and ritual was no longer the sole preserve of clan leaders, including primitive shamans, high officials, scribes, and rulers. Rather, ritual became historically informed responsibilities and overriding duties that every clan member could and ought to uphold. This inevitably led to the rise of the individual personality and of personal initiative, independence, and historical accountability. Confucius, taking himself as an example, pursued this self-reflective project of the person of great character, imbued it with a sense of historical responsibility, as these passages show: “Heaven produced the virtue that is in me. Huan Tui—what can he do to me?”<sup>93</sup> “After the death of King Wen, was not the cause of truth lodged here in me?”<sup>94</sup> “The Heavens are going to use your master as a wooden bell clapper.”<sup>95</sup>

This pursuit of the perfect individual character led directly to a view of thought that emphasized study and education, in order to gain all forms of practical and historical knowledge. Confucius offered a series of scientific propositions, general norms for educational psychology that are still relevant today. These include, “By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they are far apart”;<sup>96</sup> “Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous”;<sup>97</sup> and, “He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egotism.”<sup>98</sup> Notably, this was the first time that certain concepts pertaining to epistemology (such as knowledge, thought, and learning) had been fully highlighted. On the one hand, factual knowledge was crucial; and on the other hand, controlling and training the will were important, and this meant proactively restraining and making demands of oneself, as the following passages suggest: “Restraining oneself through ritual propriety”;<sup>99</sup> “Subdue one’s self and return to ritual propriety”;<sup>100</sup> “The firm, the enduring, the simple, and the modest are near to humaneness”;<sup>101</sup> “The humane man is cautious in his speech.”<sup>102</sup>

The pursuit of knowledge and learning, and the emphasis on control and shaping of the will became the two mutually supportive arenas of personal cultivation. This arduous process of self-cultivation and powerful

sense of historic mission would eventually elevate the ‘humaneness’ of the individual person to its highest level, as the *Analects* records:

The determined scholar and the man of humaneness will not seek to live at the expense of diminishing their humaneness. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their humaneness intact.<sup>103</sup>

The cultivated man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to humaneness. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In times of danger, he cleaves to it.<sup>104</sup>

They sought to act humanely, and they did so; what was there for them to resent?<sup>105</sup>

Men of humaneness are sure to be bold, but those who are bold may not always be humane.<sup>106</sup>

The humane are free from anxiety.<sup>107</sup>

The following passages further clarify this approach:

The commander of the forces of a large state may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him.<sup>108</sup>

When the year becomes cold, then we know how the pine and the cypress are the last to lose their leaves.<sup>109</sup>

Suppose that there is an individual who can be entrusted with the charge of a young orphan prince, and can be commissioned with authority over a sovereign state, and whom no emergency, however great, can unsettle—is such a man a cultivated man? He is a cultivated man indeed.<sup>110</sup>

The scholar-official may not be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance. His burden is heavy and his course is long. Humaneness is the burden which he considers it is his to sustain—is it not heavy? Only with death does his course stop—is it not long?<sup>111</sup>

All of these passages establish and commend the humaneness that constitutes great character. Being humane (*ren*) is not to be equated with being a sage (*sheng* 聖), however. ‘Sage’ refers to practical, publicly recognized achievements (as defined in *Analects* 6.30: “A man extensively conferring benefits on the people, and able to assist all”). Humaneness, however, resides within the inner subjective realm of the ideal character. In effect, this means that humaneness is lodged in the subject’s worldview or outlook on life. Confucius transformed the thoughts and desires of people who were originally religious folk into this kind of individually self-aware state of humaneness, which did not require obedience to any god. There was thus no need for the world-transcending approach of Buddhism and Christianity in order to create a spirit of self-sacrifice, to do good within the world, or to motivate acting without fear when the moment arrives, teaching without growing weary, and remaining indifferent to success or

failure, safety or danger, glory or shame: “Isn’t he (Confucius) the one who keeps trying even though he knows it is in vain?”<sup>112</sup> “I do not hold any ill will against the Heavens, nor blame other people”;<sup>113</sup> “When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?”<sup>114</sup> This ideal character established by Confucius, based on humaneness (the *junzi* 君子),<sup>115</sup> supplanted the ideal of the religious follower but featured similar potency and effectiveness.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wrote:

On account of this excellence which distinguishes moral philosophy from all other operations of reason, the ancients always understood under the name of philosopher the moralist principally; and even at present the external appearance of self-control by means of reason leads us, through a certain analogy, to call a man a philosopher, however limited his knowledge may be.<sup>116</sup>

The Confucius who established this outlook on life, and created such a long-lasting effect on history, has an important place in the history of Chinese philosophy, and one that is distinct from the other schools of thought—including the Logicians, Mozi, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the Legalists—and ought to be evaluated accordingly. Hegel’s (1770–1831) account of the history of philosophy views Confucian thought as merely a collection of moralizing strictures that take the form of Earthy aphorisms, but this is a mistakenly superficial view of Confucius’ philosophy.

#### v. *Practical Rationality*

As mentioned earlier, when thinking about structure, the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and the four components described so far do not equal the organic whole that is humaneness. This whole is the product of the interaction of the four components, which in turn determines their shared property. This property is the attitude or tendency toward what I have called ‘applied theory’ (*shijian lilun* 實踐理論) or ‘pragmatic rationality’ (*shiyong lixing* 實用理性). It became an important folk characteristic of Confucianism and of China’s cultural-psychological formation.

This practical or pragmatic rationality primarily indicates a rational awareness or rational attitude. At a time of renewed interest in skepticism and atheism, Confucius provided ritual with a humanistic explanation that generally conformed to that wider trend.<sup>117</sup> Instead of resorting to the occult or the fanatical, events and tradition were explained in a calm, realistic, and reasonable way. The repressive control or the hedonistic release of desires was replaced by the reasoned control, guidance, and satisfaction of them. There was neither nihilism nor egoism with regard to self or others, but rather a balance that emerged from the pursuit of humanism and good character.



The attitude toward traditional religious spirits and ghosts was similar. The commands of a creator deity were unnecessary and there was no blind obedience to irrational authority; it was, however, still possible to provide assistance to the world (humanism) and to perfect the self (as individual character with a sense of mission). The human world was not abandoned and the self was not deprecated—‘repay animosity with virtue’ notes the *Analects*—and all things are to be weighed on the scales of practical reason and dealt with accordingly. For this reason, “The Master did not talk about four things: strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, and spirits”;<sup>118</sup> “He sacrificed to the dead, as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits, as if the spirits were present. The Master said, ‘I consider my not being present at the sacrifice, as if I did not sacrifice.’”<sup>119</sup> “While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve the spirits? . . . While you do not know life, how can you know about death?”<sup>120</sup> As always, it was difficult to prove or disprove the existence of ghosts or spirits, and affirmation and denial of them was thus largely a matter of faith or conviction. Confucius’ response to this problem was to accept their existence but not discuss them—a clear-sighted policy of avoidance. Mozi dismissed this view in the “*Gong Meng*” chapter of the *Mozi*, “The Confucians take Heaven to be inscrutable, and take the ghosts to lack efficaciousness”;<sup>121</sup> in fact, however, this precisely characterizes the rational spirit of the doctrine of humaneness.

This kind of rationality contains an important kind of practical realism. It does not engage in theoretical debates, seeking to resolve difficult and abstract philosophical questions, but views engagement in such pure abstraction as unnecessary. What matters is how to find the appropriate means to manage our practical lives. When Confucius said, “Respect ghosts and spirits but keep them at a distance, this can be called ‘knowledge,’” the ‘knowledge’ here is not theoretical but is the know-how of practical reasoning. It does not seek salvation in the next life nor rely on reincarnation and karma or the immortality of the soul, but rather views ‘immortality’ and ‘salvation’ as achievements that belong to the affairs of this world. “Advance when given office; hold yourself in reserve when removed from office” means advancing and creating such achievements in office, while writing and offering insight when without an official post.<sup>122</sup> None of this requires religious zealotry or mystical teachings; it requires only the practical guidance of reason, and the concomitant shaping of emotion, desire, and will. Here what matters is not opinion and speculation but action itself: “The cultivated man wishes to be slow in his speech and earnest in his conduct”;<sup>123</sup> “Listen to what they say, and look at their conduct”;<sup>124</sup> “The cultivated man would feel shame if his words were better than his deeds”;<sup>125</sup> “The reason why the ancients did not readily give utterance to their words, was that they feared lest their actions should not come up to them.”<sup>126</sup> Here, we find none of the fractious tension found in ancient Greece between the Apollonian and

Dionysian spirits (fully developed discursive rationality versus full-blown mysticism).<sup>127</sup> In Confucianism, both attitudes are unified in a practical rationality.

Consanguinity, psychology, humanism, and personal character formed an organic whole characterized by a mode of thought that featured such practical reasoning. They were an organic whole because their mutual influence and complementary functions were balanced, self-regulating, and self-directing; they also possessed a hermetic quality, consistently resisting external interference and harm. For example, the second element (psychological norms, including affection that varies according to role and relationship) restricted unilateral or uncoordinated development of the third element (humanism), and in doing so it made clear why the Mohist criticisms, based on their impartial care and anti-warfare doctrines, ultimately fail. Another example of such mutual balance and regulation is that the third element (humanism) makes excessive focus on the fourth element (character development) impracticable, namely, the unilateral pursuit of individual achievement and pleasure or personal salvation. All such schools—whether the egoistic doctrine of Yang Zhu in pre-Qin times or Buddhism at the height of its influence—were absorbed into Confucianism and disappeared.

Furthermore, Confucianism seeks a balance between loyalty to others and reciprocity (a self-regarding virtue), and willful boldness (which brings shared benefit) and incorruptibility (which ensures personal integrity). Though nominally opposed, these are, in fact, mutually enhancing and serve to stabilize this organic structure. To summarize, each element functions in response to the other elements and influences the entire system; if isolated from each other, they lose their meaning.

Confucius' doctrine of humaneness initially emerged during the collapse of the early patriarchal clan system and the disintegration of clan governance, and thus bore the stamp of the clan and nobility structures of that era. However, ways of thinking and intellectual tradition are never passive. As soon as they are formed they possess a degree of independence and become a powerful force within tradition. After the collapse of the primitive culture of shamanism (of rites and ceremony), Confucius was the first person to offer this new model. He himself might not have been aware of it, but the model—founded on kinship ties, with the humane affections between parent and child as their dynamic core, and its outward-directed humanism and idealized inner character—became a psychological model grounded in practicality and free from otherworldly demands. By teaching students and compiling texts, Confucius ensured this model had social impact and gradually came to permeate the lives, relations, habits, customs, behaviors, and thoughts of a great many people; and it gradually spread over time through explicit transmission, osmosis, and education. Other features of the approach include: approaching human life in a positive spirit, a clear-headed and rational

attitude, prioritizing practicality and human affairs while marginalizing speculation and the supernatural, skill at managing relations within the group, and maintaining an emotional satisfaction and balance in everyday life while avoiding irrational urges and blind obedience. These established a subconscious collective archetype of the Han people,<sup>128</sup> and a national cultural-psychological formation.<sup>129</sup> It is thus no surprise that Confucius became a virtual synonym for Chinese culture (in which the Han people were central).

Only when this cultural-psychological formation is understood can certain characteristics of Chinese philosophical thought be grasped accurately. It explains, for example, how the concern with ethics has prevailed over ontology or epistemology, and how the categories of classical Chinese thought are to be understood—including yin-yang theory, five-phase theory (*wuxing*), psycho-physical energy (*qi*), *dao* or way, the spiritual or spirit-like (*shen*), principle or ordered pattern (*li*), and heart-mind (*xin*). Whether they address materialism or idealism, these are all ideas dealing with practice and function, and not substance or objects. Chinese philosophy focuses not on the substantive or constitutive elements of objects but on the qualities of things and events, function, effect, and relationality. Interest in the objects of the material world lags far behind interest in the relation between things or events and human life. China's five phases of metal, wood, water, fire, and Earth are different from the Greek and Persian four elements of land, water, fire, and wind, in that the former focus on their function within human life. Consistent with this, ancient Chinese discourse emphasized interpenetration and complementarity (yin-yang) within apparent contradiction or opposition, and self-regulation as a means of maintaining an organic unity and dynamic balance and stability. No single aspect or mode was dominant: in the midst of yin there are yang tendencies and in the midst of yang there is yin. Traditional Chinese medicine makes this characteristic even more apparent and is thus unlike Persian philosophy, which stresses the mutual expulsion of darkness and light, or Greek philosophy, where *agon* and victory or defeat are paramount. The characteristics of Chinese thought go back a long way, and can even be traced to prehistoric culture.<sup>130</sup> Confucius grasped this historical feature and captured its pragmatic reasoning in his account of humaneness. He stressed the dynamic accommodation and balance of each individual element, emphasizing authority (*quan* 權), timeliness (*shi* 時), hitting the mark or balance (*zhong* 中), harmony but not sameness (*he er bu tong* 和而不同), and finding the medium between excess and deficiency (*guoyou buji* 過猶不及), and later generations continuously developed this approach. Confucius failed in his political endeavors at the time, but he succeeded in establishing a national cultural-psychological formation or pattern (*wenhua xinli jiegou*). His ideas had a profound effect on the Chinese people that few if any other intellectual doctrines could match, and Confucius' standing and importance in Chinese history stem from this.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

After Confucius, Confucian thought split into eight schools, and there was an ongoing evolution. Some of the factors in the aforementioned formation were disproportionately emphasized, and so gave rise to new systems of thought or new derivations. Ultimately, however, these were reabsorbed by the original and dominant formation, or became supplements to it. For example, Zengzi 曾子 probably emphasized consanguineal relations and class, which meant that in the *Analects* he appeared extremely conservative and dull-witted. Yan Hui 顏回, however, seemed to value the perfection of personal character (“With a single bamboo bowl of rice, a single gourd dish to drink . . . while others could not have endured the distress, he did not allow his joy to be affected by it”<sup>131</sup>), and this approach eventually developed in the Zhuangzi school of Daoism.<sup>132</sup> In the context of ancient Chinese society, Daoism was always as an antagonistic supplement to Confucianism that achieved great vitality and appeal. Xunzi, however, developed the external dimension of Confucian tradition—summarized as ‘govern the state and bring peace to the empire’ (*Zhiguó píngtiānxiá*)—making humaneness (*ren*) subordinate to ritual (i.e., principle and order). The Legalism of Han Fei developed this view to its fullest possible extent, such that an opposing view emerged, and in the Han it was duly absorbed by the original formation, which prized humaneness. The Zisi-Mengzi school clearly exaggerated the psychological principles and claimed humaneness, righteousness (*yi*), ritual propriety, and wisdom as elements of an innate human nature and offered a corresponding political theory. They also stressed kinship ties, humanism, and individual character. This became the orthodox Confucian tradition. However, all of these schools—including Mencius, Xunzi, Zhuangzi, and Han Fei—maintained a clear and calm rational attitude to life; that is, they preserved the basic Confucian spirit of practical rationality. Interest in debates that were removed from human affairs (such as those of the School of Names), or in nonrational or faith-tinged schools (Mohists), did not fit with the humaneness model and were ultimately excluded from the mainstream of Chinese culture.

As mentioned previously, this set of cultural ideas that were established by Confucius came, during the long course of Chinese society, to permeate most people’s perceptions, actions, habits, beliefs, ways of thinking and emotional states. Whether consciously or unconsciously they became the guiding principles by which people dealt with all manner of social affairs, relationships and life; they also constituted the common psychological outlook of the people and defining features of their character. What is important here is that this set of cultural values became sedimented and transformed from theory into a cultural-psychological formation. Regardless of personal opinions about it, it became a historical reality. Through numerous changes in class and epoch this formal

structure has maintained stability, becoming a kind of national culture and mindset. It was never completely under the control of economic and political changes, but maintained a degree of independence and followed its own logic of development.

On the one hand, it was not a fixed, atemporal, and a priori structure, but was historically rooted in and determined by the small-scale economic production of agricultural society. This social base was present throughout all eras of Chinese history and never disappeared. Patriarchal kinship relations and concepts derived from them survived for the longest time. This is the primary reason why the cultural-psychological formation of Confucianism persisted for so long.

However, on the other hand, this set of ideas formed a relatively stable outlook and national character at an early point in history, and was able to address the needs of each social class. If this were not so, it would be difficult to explain the enduring and common themes in the nation's culture, psychology, thinking and art. It is true that historicism cannot be separated from class analysis; but class analysis and a class perspective cannot be equated with, or take the place of, historicism. The notion of class cannot fully capture all historical phenomena. Some things—particularly cultural phenomena, including material and spiritual civilization, and language—do not possess characteristics easily analyzed in terms of class; and yet they are not outside of history or society. They remain the products of history, even if not the products of class or class struggle. In the transmission of culture, class is often not the only or decisive factor. Thus, the Marxist analysis applied to Confucianism by Chinese scholars in the twentieth century cannot tell the whole story.

Only by attending carefully to this complex situation, can the specific and hugely disparate elements of cultural traditions and national characteristics be adequately analyzed. Every nation, whether in terms of content or form, will have its advantages and its problems, high points, and vulgarities. The Confucian formation, based on humanness, is no different. To summarize, Confucius was born during the final collapse of the clan system of governance, and the concrete economic and political plans he put forward were too conservative for the times. However, the residual democratic spirit, and the primitive humanism found therein, as well as the emphasis on individual cultivation that was possible only with the collapse of the clan system, also constituted a spiritual legacy imbued with a rational quality. His descendants approached these ideas via their own needs and demands and took what they needed. Some exaggerated their conservative elements while others focused on the rational aspects; but all reinterpreted, reconstructed, and reevaluated them in ways that were of use to a particular class or era. As a result, there emerged the Confucius of Dong Zhongshu (179 BCE–104 BCE), the Confucius of Zhu Xi (1130–1200), and even the Confucius of Kang Youwei (1858–1927). There were the Confucians who focused on the *Gongyang Zhuan*

commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, who sought to dethrone the King of Zhou, and install in his place the King of Lu, thereby reforming the system. Finally, there was the Confucius of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, which claimed that human desire was dangerous and the human heart-mind is unfathomable.

The presentation of Confucius evolved with each era or the interests of the prevailing class, and became greatly detached from, and distorting of, the original. Confucius clearly ‘transmitted but did not create’ and yet he had been described as drawing on the old to change the system; Confucius had a desire and passion for thought, yet Song Confucianism demanded, “enlighten the heavenly patterns and extinguish human desire (明天理滅人欲).”<sup>133</sup> These deviations were, however, never completely detached from the doctrine of humaneness that characterized the original formulation. The national cultural-psychological formation that took practical reason as its standard was preserved and consistently extended. Furthermore, during the long-lasting era, this formation fused with various elements of traditional society to form a unity. Moving to the present day, as pointed out long ago by Qing-era scholar Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), ‘Confucius’ remains a figure molded by Song Confucianism. The Confucius attacked by the May Fourth movement was precisely this Song dynasty Confucius. As Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1888–1927), co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, wrote:

The attack on ‘Confucius’ is not really an attack on Confucius himself. It is an attack on the figure or authority crafted by the rulers of particular eras; this is not to attack Confucius but to attack the soul of authoritarian government.<sup>134</sup>

It was precisely this authoritarian, ascetic, classist Confucius that became the personification of an ideology and the upper stratum of feudal society. It was therefore natural that he became the target of a bourgeois democratic revolution. Even today there remains the important and difficult task of eliminating the harm caused by this Confucius. Furthermore, this Confucius is also closely connected with the archetypal Confucian doctrines of maintaining the blood-based hereditary class system, reverence for ritual and ceremony, and a conservatism that opposed reform and renewal. It is also connected to the fact that the archetype emerged in the classical period when levels of material production were extremely low and the improvement of them was not considered important; instead, the original outlook was satisfied with a mutually shared poverty and achieving a spiritual victory or the perfection of personal character. The phrases “find comfort in poverty and delight in the way (安貧樂道)”<sup>135</sup> or “Why speak of profit (何必曰利)?”<sup>136</sup> took virtue, and not the material, as the measure of value. It advocated a kind of a form of economic equality suited to the closed system and lifestyle of small-scale labor-intensive

agricultural production, and was rooted in the enduring clan-based social system.

Such a system was not merely the product of feudal society and its small-scale agricultural production; it was directly related to the Confucian archetype of humaneness. Furthermore, it was forever a serious obstacle to China industrializing and entering the modern age. It would be a great error to fail to see clearly the social and historical problems deriving from this formation, or to take note of the unwholesome influence it has exercised on the psychology, worldview, and habits of a great many people (regardless of class).<sup>137</sup> One of the great achievements of Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) was his sustained and perceptive critical exploration of the problem of so-called national character. He criticized the ‘Ah Q mentality,’ exposing and denouncing a certain kind of inhumane apathy, narrow self-pitying, spineless apologetics, acceptance of slave-like subordination, satisfaction with poverty and lack of progress, as well as ‘virtue’ and a ‘spiritual civilization.’<sup>138</sup> These are not just the characteristics of a ruling class, but also under fixed social conditions and class rule, displaying a generic national character and psychological outlook, along with their strengths and weaknesses. In fact, these are also part of the problems of the cultural-psychological formation that derives from Confucius’ doctrine of humaneness. Although the blame for these cannot directly be traced back to Confucius, they are clearly connected with Confucian doctrine. This is why Lu Xun often directed his ire at the figure of Confucius.

The pragmatic rationality inherent in the archetype of humaneness also has its drawbacks and weaknesses. To some extent, it inhibited the development of science and art. Since it emphasized real human life, and put too much emphasis on the practical utility, so it neglected or even opposed abstract scientific thinking. This meant that ancient Chinese science remained for a long time at the level of crude empiricism, lacking developed theoretical approaches or interest in pure analysis.<sup>139</sup> Without the development of abstract analysis and theory, the unimpeded development of modern science was impossible. This point is particularly salient today; we must overcome the part of national character that persists with this flawed way of thinking, a flaw which is linked to Confucianism.

At the same time, because pragmatic rationality often served to control, guide, and regulate emotions—expressed in phrases such as ‘moderating emotion with reason’ or ‘issuing from emotion, constrained by ritual and righteousness’—so the emotions of everyday life and the arts were often voluntarily suppressed, and could not be fully expressed. On the streets of China, there are relatively few rowdy drunkards, and this is an advantage of the national character. At the same time, however, the ideal of being able to bear all manner of burdens is actually part of a slavish mentality. In art, ‘meaning beyond words’ or a high degree of suggestive connotation is undoubtedly a successful aesthetic style; but as indicated

by the phrases ‘Literature upholds the way’ and ‘dissatisfaction without anger,’ the demand that art should follow and serve the narrow demands of government and realpolitik is a great short-coming that harms the development of art. It was only because the Lao-Zhuang Daoism and the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) provided opposing and supplementary traditions that Chinese art could flourish to some extent. Still, the humanistic outlook and ideal personality type associated with the Confucian doctrine of humaneness did, at least, exert some positive influence on the content of art and literature.

However, these weaknesses of this cultural-psychological formation are merely part of the story. This same formation also had its strengths. There is a reason why the Chinese people and Chinese culture boast such indomitable vitality, which has survived and flourished despite several thousand years of inner and outer adversity. China is the only one of the world’s great civilizations to have done so (Ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and India all disappeared long ago), and this is directly related to the strengths of the Confucian psychological-cultural formation based on humaneness. The humane outlook and idealized personal character, rooted in the populist spirit of the clan system; the practical rationality that attended carefully to reality and prized practical and political know-how; the optimistic striving and can-do attitude that characterized the spirit of practical application; in the long history of China, these influenced and edified many men of high ideals. Throughout Chinese history this tradition often inspired progress. Although late feudal society often merged Confucianism with the imperial system of government, many of the great ideas of Chinese culture at that time, which provided the basic concepts, sentiments, thoughts, and attitudes of the Chinese people, can all be traced back to this humane Confucian cultural-psychological formation. Literary evidence of it comes from various Chinese cultural heroes, including Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), “To be the first to feel the suffering of the empire and the last to enjoy its delights”<sup>140</sup>; Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077), “I am of one body with the people, and share all things”<sup>141</sup>; Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), “Confucius said ‘Establish humaneness,’ Mencius said ‘Grasp righteousness’”<sup>142</sup>; Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), “Everyone is responsible for the fate of the world”<sup>143</sup>; and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), “The six classics require me to begin to remake the state, how can a worthy man fear the Heavens?”<sup>144</sup> Such commitments convey the radiance of Confucian humaneness. Lu Xun wrote:

Since ancient times, there have been people who have quietly labored away, and those who have desperately striven; those who plead on the people’s behalf and those who sacrificed themselves in the pursuit of fairness. Although this is no more than offering an ‘official history’ of the family lines of monarchs, ministers and generals, still it



is not possible to conceal these people's glory. This is the backbone of China.<sup>145</sup>

It must be accepted that this backbone bears some relation to the cultural-psychological formation represented by Confucius.

The "Summary of the Rules of Propriety" [*Quli* 曲禮] chapter of the *Book of Rites* states, "The sages initiated ritual propriety as a means to educate people, for if the people have ritual propriety then they are aware that they are different from mere animals."<sup>146</sup> Ritual propriety, possessing the force of external compulsion and restraint, was the social mark that distinguished people from mere animals (since the latter also live in groups). Confucius explained ritual propriety in terms of humaneness, transforming superficial ceremonies and rites into a cultural-psychological formation. Such ritualized practice became the grounds of self-consciousness and awareness of shared humanity. Ritual made people aware that the value and significance of the individual was located in practical life and in ordinary interactions with other people. In the everyday this-worldly interactions within the community, a social ideal could be realized, personal character fully developed, and the heart led to contentment and ease. This is the meaning of 'dao' or 'the way of the Heavens' (*tiandao* 天道) or popular notion that the way resides in the ordered human relations of everyday life (道在伦常日用中). Thus, there was no need to turn away from life in this world, to deny everyday life, and to seek the redemption of the soul or spiritual consolation in an idealized world. It was precisely this that enabled China to finally shed its earlier religious, theologically grounded system of rulership; in the future, it might enable China to avoid the kind of popular religion found in the United States and its irrational mystical fervor. This kind of religious fervor is vastly different from the psychological structure and thinking based on humaneness that characterizes the Chinese nation (especially the Chinese intelligentsia). This cultural-psychological formation locates the meaning of human life in the everyday interactions of ordered human relationships, whereby the ideals of human life are satisfied by the social nature of ordinary daily interactions and the human connections within groups. Perhaps in the future this will spare us from the so-called authentic existence of people, whereby the individual is adrift in a uniform and machine-like alienated world, feeling alone and desolate. We might also be spared sinking into a generic animal-like state, overtaken by barely understood lust, having lost our human qualities. These are the alienating effects of a post-capitalist society, and exacerbated by a high degree of material development and technological power, and are what the existentialists made much of as the fear of anonymity or obscurity.

The structure of humaneness is that of rational elements sedimented (*jidian* 積澱) within a psychology characterized by embodied feeling. This means the merging and unifying of psychology and ethics. Perhaps this

formation based on humaneness (*ren* 仁) can enable people to live happy and harmonious lives within advanced material civilization, and live with a spiritual ease? Perhaps taking the biological connection between parent and child as the foundational bond, along with a psychology grounded in warm human feelings, can enable Chinese society to preserve and enjoy a joyful state of mind that is grounded in their own tradition?

However, this will only be possible when China escapes material poverty and backwardness and removes the remnants of small-scale agrarian production that have been partly preserved by Confucian humaneness and its concomitant social systems and psychology. Their removal is the major contemporary task we face. Only then, utilizing the power of one-fifth of the world's population and the fine tradition based on humaneness, might it be possible to make a contribution to human civilization as a whole. At the very earliest, this will be in the twenty-first century. Today it is possible to take a far-sighted view of things; it is also important to see things from the perspective of a long and rich history, as the Chinese nation is poised to join the nations of the world, and Chinese civilization merges and harmonizes with global civilization. In doing so, we can undertake further research and exploration of the Chinese cultural tradition and the cultural-psychological formation based on humaneness. Only in this context will the reevaluation of Confucius truly have great significance.

## On Mencius

The Confucian lineage split into eight schools after Confucius. Yet Mencius' position as the 'second sage' of Confucianism was secured for several hundred years, because Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) elevated the Mencian school, and Zhu Xi made the *Mencius* one of the four books of Confucianism, alongside the *Analects*. The ideas of Confucius and Mencius differ in several areas, but Confucius' use of humaneness to explain ritual—the idea that external social norms transform an inner self-consciousness—was developed by Mencius to the fullest extent. Thus, if we look not at history in its entirety but just the history of ideas, we can see the thinking that connects Confucius and Mencius.<sup>147</sup>

Like Confucius and many other peripatetic scholars of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, Mencius was primarily concerned with the idealistic ambition to govern the state and bring peace to the empire. Mencius traveled to multiple states in succession to speak with their rulers, putting forth his own political and economic thought. As with all of the major schools of the pre-Qin period, Mencius offered a system of government based on social philosophy, and the main focus of the seven chapters of the *Mencius* are political and economic problems. The text was distinguished by its urgent humane and populist

tone. In fact, this was a final flourishing of the ideas of clan-based society and tradition. This final flourishing foreshadowed the fact this tradition was later to become lost and forgotten. As often happens in the dialectic of ideas, the more history advances, the more critics like to refer to an idealized glorious past in order to confront and oppose present realities. Confucius only lamented “the way does not prevail in the empire,” whereas Mencius launched a fierce attack on this. Confucius’ historical role model was the Duke of Zhou, but Mencius repeatedly mentioned the sage kings Yao, Shun, and Wen. Confucius spoke only of ‘increasing the population,’ ‘enriching them’ and ‘teaching them’<sup>148</sup> such that “Those near at hand are pleased and those at a distance are drawn to you”;<sup>149</sup> but Mencius envisioned a more complete and utopian humane government and kingly way. The reason for this is that the clan-based system had already completely collapsed by the warring states period; ‘ritual’ had become completely synonymous with ‘ceremony’ and lost its importance. For this reason, Mencius no longer needed to follow Confucius in using humaneness to explain and defend ritual propriety, and instead boldly championed his doctrine of ‘humane governance’ (*renzheng* 仁政).

Economically, this meant the revival of the well-field system (*jingtian zhi* 井田制) in agriculture.<sup>150</sup> The *Mencius* explains this in various ways, such as: “Human government starts from the regulating of field boundaries” (3A3); “Regulate production on behalf of the people” (1A3); “Looking upward, it is sufficient to ensure service of parents; looking downwards it ensures care for wives and children. In good years, there is a surplus, in years of famine it is possible to avoid death” (1A3); and “Let mulberry trees be planted about the homesteads with their five *mu*<sup>151</sup> and persons of fifty years may be clothed with silk. In keeping fowls, pigs, dogs, and swine, let not their times of breeding be neglected, and persons of seventy years may eat flesh” (1A3).

Politically, ‘respect the worthy’ (*zunxian* 尊賢) and “Traditional states are not based on ancient trees” (1B7) both express Mencius’ views. “Give honor to men of talents and virtue and employ the able, so that offices shall all be filled by individuals of distinction and standing” (2A5); do “not offend the great families” (4A6). A general standard for this approach is “Protect the people and be a true king” (1A7), unifying all under heaven. At the same time, Mencius vehemently attacked the conduct expressed in the following passages: “In your kitchen there is fat meat; in your stables there are fat horses. But your people have the look of hunger, and in the wilds there are those who have died of famine. This is leading on beasts to devour men” (1A4); “What are now called ‘good ministers’ were, in ancient times, called ‘robbers of the people’” (6B29).

Mencius’ views on military affairs are captured by the following passages: “Those skilled at warfare should suffer the highest punishment” (4A14); “One who does not find pleasure in killing men can unify them” (1A6); “People who can be employed, with sticks which they have

prepared, to oppose the strong armor and sharp weapons of the troops of Qin and Chu” (1A5).

On social structure, we find:

At times of death, or on moving from one dwelling to another, there will be no quitting the district. In the fields of a district, those who belong to the same nine squares render all friendly offices to one another in their going out and coming in, aid one another in protection and defense, and sustain one another in sickness.

(3A3)

To summarize, the idea of ‘humane governance as the kingly way’ (*renzheng wangdao* 仁政王道) was inextricably linked to the benefits and burdens, and the fears and happiness, of the masses:

The people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is of little importance.

(7B60)

If the ruler delights in the people’s delight, the people will also delight in his delight, if he is anxious about the people’s troubles, they will be anxious about his troubles. There has never been a case of delighting with the empire and being anxious with it and yet not being a true king.

(1B11)

Tyrants Jie and Zhou losing the throne arose from their losing the people, and to lose the people means to lose their hearts and minds. There is a way to get the kingdom: get the people, and the kingdom is got. There is a way to get the people: get their hearts, and the people are got. There is a way to get their hearts: it is simply to collect for them what they like, and not to lay on them what they dislike.

(4A9)

Clearly, Mencian ideas of humane government and ‘winning the hearts of the people’ are connected to a concern for material well-being of the people and are central to Mencius’ philosophy. ‘Humane government’ was not a simple ethical idealism.

Mencius’ conception of sagehood also adopted the Confucian system of thought that was based on humaneness; but he made the second element of that system, psychological principles or norms, the starting point for his entire theoretical framework, with the other elements deriving directly from this. Mencius’ economic and political creed expressed by ‘humane governance as the kingly way’ was entirely founded on psychological principles pertaining to sentiment. In other words, ‘humane

governance as the kingly way' was possible not because of external conditions but solely a matter of the ruler's striving and focus:

All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others. The ancient kings had this commiserating mind, and their way of government was based on this. When a commiserating mind was the basis for enacting a commiserating government, then ruling the kingdom was as easy as rolling something in the palm of your hand. (2A6)

'Humane governance as the kingly way' (*renzheng wangdao*) is sympathetic government. This sympathetic government is founded upon a heart-mind that cannot bear the suffering of others, and the latter became the necessary and sufficient condition for the former. Importantly the idea of a heart-mind that cannot bear the sufferings of others is not mysterious or exceptional; it is something that everyone possesses. Accordingly, any monarch or ruler just has to become conscious of it, recognize it within themselves, and enact this kind of sympathetic government; the empire can then be unified.

The king asked again, "Is such a one as I competent to love and protect the people?" Mencius said, "Yes." The king replied, "How do you know that I am competent for that?" Mencius said, "I heard the following incident from Hu He: 'The king,' said he, 'was sitting aloft in the hall, when a man appeared, leading an ox past the lower part of it. The king saw him, and asked, "Where is the ox going?" The man replied, "We are going to consecrate a bell with its blood." The king said, "Let it go. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, as if it were an innocent person going to the place of death." . . . Mencius replied, "The heart seen in this is sufficient for you to be king. . . . Your servant knows surely, that it was your Majesty's not being able to bear the sight, which made you so act."

(1A7)

The king saw the ox being led away and his heart-mind was not able to endure it. If this kind of empathetic response was just extended to the commoners, then 'humane governance as the kingly way' would be realized.

Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, and extend this to the elders of other families; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, and extend this to the young other families—do this, and the kingdom may be made to go around in your palm. . . . The language shows how king Wen simply

took his kind heart, and exercised it towards others. Extending kindness to others is sufficient for the protection of all within the four seas; but if one does not extend it, he will not be able to protect even his wife and children.

(1A7)

Here, Mencius had greatly expanded Confucius' idea of a 'way of loyalty and empathy' (*zhongshu zhidao* 忠恕之道), which was based on 'extending oneself to others' (*tuiji jiren* 推己及人), making it the basis for governing the empire. The order in all social relationships and ideal conceptions of happiness were all founded on this psychological principle—namely, the emotional norm of being unable to bear the suffering of others. This reflected a historical reality in which the clan tradition of those philosophers had collapsed and the ideal of 'humane government as the kingly way' lacked a basis in reality. However, from the perspective of abstract theory, Mencius had indeed grasped and illustrated the key Confucian idea. As with Mozi's impartial care, Laozi's inhumane realism (*wuqing* 無情), and Han Fei's self-interest, Mencius had given Confucianism a firmer foundation and demarcated its territory.

Mencius not only highlighted the sentiment-based psychology of 'being unable to bear the suffering of others'; he also gave this idea an a priori metaphysical quality. Mencius' explanation of this phenomenon was:

When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus: even now-a-days, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favor of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing.

From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that feelings of approval and disapproval are essential to man. The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. The feeling of approval or disapproval is the principle of wisdom. Men have these four principles just as they have their four limbs. . . . If fully developed, they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas. If denied that development, they will not even enable a man to serve his parents.

(2A6)

This passage refers to the well-known idea of the ‘four shoots’ or ‘four beginnings.’ It constitutes Mencius’ claim that ‘human nature is good’ and also explains his view that the difference between humans and animals resides in humans innate inner moral sensitivities and virtues, understood as the four qualities of humaneness, a sense of rightness, ritual propriety, and wisdom (with humaneness between the foundation of the four). Any person would want to help the child in the well; not in order to curry favor with others or for any other gain, but as an unconditional response to an inner sense of anxiety and pity (*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心), and because of the inability to bear the suffering of others. This is the direct manifestation in thought of ‘knowledge of goodness’ or ‘intuitive capacity for good.’ It is thus clear that Mencius took Confucius’ emphasis on being content with oneself that lay behind his psychological-ethical explanation of the requirement of three years of mourning, developed it in the rich ethical psychological theory of the ‘four shoots,’ and also gave it a basis in the a priori. This had a huge influence on Chinese philosophy and ethics.

Theory in philosophical ethics, regardless of time or place, is always of two types: ethical relativism and ethical absolutism. Ethical relativism holds that morality has its ground in present conditions—including the environment, questions of profit and loss, and education; there cannot be any universal moral principles or ethical standards. On this view, human nature is not inherently good, but human nature can be made good or bad. Human nature contains no innate or a priori moral properties. Gaozi in the Mencius, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, French materialists, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), Max Weber (1864–1920), and the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict all take such a view in their accounts of human society and culture. On the other hand, Mencius, the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians, Kant, G.E. Moore (1873–1958), and Christianity all hold that morality is independent of human profit and loss, the environment, or education. It is universal, objective, and its norms cannot be negated; people can only obey and follow along with them. In the case of ethical relativism, because morality has its root in human social life, then ultimately its origins are always linked to human sensibility. With ethical absolutism, however, morality is above the human realm and so has no connection with human sensibility. It exists as a transcendental and a priori order that commands and guides sensibility.

Yet the Chinese absolutism that Mencius represents has two particular features. First, it emphasizes the a priori universal and absolute aspects of morality and thus demands the unconditional acceptance of ethical obligation. In this respect it is similar to Kant’s categorical imperative.<sup>152</sup> Second, however, it combines this a priori universalism of the categorical imperative with the human emotions of the empirical world (principally in that Mencius’ account of a sense of anxiety or pity is an account of empathy), and takes emotion to be morally basic. Accordingly, the a priori ethical order that renders human nature as good is confirmed and

validated by this-worldly emotional experience. Here, a transcendental a priori structure merges with sensible experience. Thus, a universalizable ethical rationality is not separated from the sensible and yet transcends it; it is an a priori order and at the same time an empirical phenomenon. As Mencius stated,

The principles of our nature and the determinations of righteousness are agreeable to my mind, just as the flesh of grass and grain-fed animals are agreeable to my mouth.

(6A7)

Humaneness, rightness, ritual propriety and wisdom, these are rooted in the human heart-mind. Their growth and manifestation are a harmony appearing in the countenance, a rich fullness in the back, and the character imparted to the four limbs. Those limbs understand to arrange themselves, without being told.

(7A21)

This a priori moral metaphysics is directly connected to feeling, physiology, the body, and vitality, and so seems itself to be a sensibility or involve elements of it. This is an early expression of the distinctive idea in Chinese ethical philosophy that form and function are not separated (*tiyong buer* 體用不二), and the cosmos and humans form a unity (*tianren heyi* 天人合一). It also gave rise to the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian debates and disputes about *xing* 性 (nature) and *qing* 情 (sensible affect): what is the relationship between human nature or *xing* (here including humaneness, morality, reason, and fundamental structure) and sensible affect or *qing* (including Mencius' heart of commiseration, human experience, sensibility, and response to phenomena)? Does *xing* become apparent only as a result of *qing*, with *qing* the means to manifest *xing*, or is *xing* fundamental and *qing* follows from it, or are the two difficult to separate? Which is first and which follows? Which one governs the other? Are they one of a kind or is there some form of dualism? There are multiple possible answers to these questions. Given that *qing* or sensible affect is considered to be a psychological reality that is closely connected with other psychological, biological, and social realities (hence the phrase 'seven emotions and six desires' *qiqing liuyu* 七情六慾), it lacks the transcendence and independence of *xing* or human nature, which represents pure rational principle. This gave rise to various later schools who took themselves to be the legitimate heirs to Confucius and Mencius but who mutually disagreed and opposed each other. Zhu Xi emphasized that humaneness was human nature and that love or affection was the emotional dimension while opposing the view that humaneness was a function of emergent awareness; the Lu-Wang school held that nature and sentimental affect were the same; and passion-endorsing Dai Zhen believed that vital fluids and qi energy are central to the heart-mind and



knowledge and resisted explaining nature in terms of principle (*li*). In truth, these questions were never explored by the original Mencius.

Understanding human existence as an ethical order or reality and understanding it in terms of social psychology are two sides of the same coin, and these cannot be separated. Mencius merely emphasized that a priori goodness was in unison with moral psychology and this was what distinguished humans from everything else.<sup>153</sup>

While Mencius emphasized a priori human goodness, he also emphasized empirical learning (*xue* 學). He held that if what was acquired after birth was not cultivated, then this innate goodness would remain buried: “That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small. The mass of people cast it away, while superior men preserve it” (4B47); “Seek and you will find them (the four shoots). Neglect and you will lose them . . . the things sought are within ourselves” (7A3).

Both Mencius and Xunzi belong to Confucius’ school of Confucianism, and both emphasize learning. Xunzi’s learning is directed to improving flawed human nature, whereas Mencius’ version aims at enlarging an inherently good human nature. For Mencius, all postnatal experiences and learning develop self-awareness and preserve and enrich the inner sense that is the grounds of good nature; this is what is known as ‘preserving goodness’ (*cunshan* 存善). Mencius developed Confucius and Zengzi’s emphasis on personal character according to this kind of internal feedback mechanism: humane governance → a heart that cannot bear the suffering of others → the four shoots → ordered moral character, and thereby gave moral psychology a hitherto unprecedented degree of philosophical sophistication. Unlike Xunzi, who believed that the difference between humans and animals lay in external standards of ritual, Mencius held that this difference was based on the human ability to develop an inner moral sense. This kind of inner moral sense distinguished man from beast but also accounted for the difference between the sages and the common people. That said, we also find, “What kind of man was Shun? What kind of man am I? He who exerts himself will also become like him” (3A1). This suggests that any person could achieve this kind of character, as confirmed by the well-known declaration that “Anyone can become a Yao or a Shun” (6B22). The attainment of such moral character involves an element of pursuing perfection:

A man who commands our liking is what is called a good man. He whose goodness is part of himself is called ‘trustworthy.’ When goodness is abundantly realized it is called ‘beautiful.’ He whose abundant goodness is brightly displayed is called ‘great.’ When the great man exercises a transforming influence, he is called a sage. When the sage is beyond our knowledge, he is called spirit-like.

(7B71)

This highest level of ‘spirit-like’ (*shen*) is what Confucius was referring to when he said, “At seventy I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the mark” (2.4). It means, within the constraints of a final reality that is moral in nature, unifying, and satisfying both rules and personal ideals. Such a person is difficult to fathom and defies predictions, but is not some kind of divine being.

Accordingly, what is worth noting is that the process and its stages described by Mencius, and the ethical dimension thereby entered, are both characterized by their distinctive perceptual and affective elements. In both of these, and in the ethical nature characterized by the four shoots, sensibility and its accompanying psychology are central. Mencius wrote:

To dwell in the wide house of the world, to stand in the correct seat of the world, and to walk in the great path of the world; when he obtains his desire for office, to practice his principles for the good of the people; and when that desire is disappointed, to practice them alone; to be above the power of riches and honors to dissipate, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend—these characteristics constitute the great man.

(3B7)

Thus, when the Heavens are about to confer a great office on any man, they first exercise his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. They expose his body to hunger, and subject him to extreme poverty. They confound his undertakings. By all these methods they stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and supplement his incompetencies.

(6B35)

The mass of men waits for a King Wen, and then they will receive a rousing impulse. Scholars distinguished from the mass, without a King Wen, rouse themselves.

(7A10)

Those well-known words have aroused people’s hearts consistently for the past 2,000 years. They suggest the ideal character of the Chinese nation and its intellectuals in particular. This ideal moral character is not religious in spirit, but instead occupies a sensible realism that is aesthetically appealing. Such a person is not the faithful servant of God but a subject with an independent and self-generating moral intent. Mencius stated:

The exercise of love between father and son, the observance of righteousness between sovereign and minister, the rules of ceremony between guest and host, the display of wisdom by the talented, and the

fulfilling the heavenly course by the sage—these are matters of what is fated (*ming*). But there is an adaptation of our nature (*xing*) for them. The superior man does not say, in reference to them, “It is what is fated.”  
(7B70)

This passage indicates that the Mencian moral qualities of humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and sagacity are not to be treated as subservient to an external divine command, but should be regarded as inner nature. Although Mencius talked of ‘heavenly decree’ or ‘fate’ and emphasized establishing heavenly decrees (*liming* 立命) or fulfilling what is decreed (*zhengming* 正命), this expressed the transformation from a heteronymous morality based on divine order to an autonomous morality based on the four shoots and an inherent knowledge of what is good. Because Mencius stressed moral autonomy, the value of individual character was uppermost, alongside moral responsibility and a sense of historical mission. This metaphysical transformation of the fourth component of Confucius’ *ren*-based order was, in the history of ideas, Mencius’ greatest achievement. This is also expressed at moments of choice involving matters of life or death:

I like life, and I also like rightness. If I cannot keep the two together, I will let life go, and choose rightness. I like life indeed, but there is that which I like more than life, and therefore, I will not seek to possess it by any improper ways. I dislike death indeed, but there is that which I dislike more than death, and therefore there are occasions when I will not avoid danger.

(6A10)

This passage again stresses not religious sacrifice but a choosing self. It is not obedient to the authority of an external god or spirit, but listens to an inner voice of ‘desire’ and its supreme ethical imperatives. It is the highest order or realm of existence, and everything in the world is lower than it and belongs to it. Mencius’ raising up of this kind of moral character certainly has its root in reality. Mencius stated:

There is a nobility of Heaven, and there is a nobility of man. Benevolence, rightness, loyalty, and trustworthiness, with unwearied joy in these virtues; these constitute the nobility of the Heavens. To be a duke, a minister, or high official; this constitutes the nobility of man. The men of antiquity cultivated their heavenly nobility, and the nobility of man came to them in its train. The men of the present day, however, cultivate their heavenly nobility in order to seek for the nobility of man, and when they have obtained that, they throw away the other—their delusion is extreme.

(6A16)

This moral character indicated by the term ‘heavenly nobility’ is the source of the real-world human nobility exemplified by serving as a duke, minister, or high official. Its origin lies in the clan system of remote antiquity. During Mencius’ time, this system had already collapsed and he criticized the abandoning of this more fundamental heavenly nobility and its morality of humaneness, righteousness, loyalty, and trust for the mere ‘nobility of man’ as dukes, ministers, and high officials. In addition, he strongly emphasized the transcendental aspect of a morality integral to this heavenly nobility. Mencius’ talk of such independent personal character, in which moral autonomy was the highest standard, would have been difficult to imagine during Confucius’ era. Confucius stood “in awe of great men” (*Analects* 16.8), and at court, “when speaking with those of higher rank, he did so blandly, but precisely” (10.2); “When the prince’s order called him, without waiting for his carriage to be yoked, he went at once” (10.20).

However, Mencius wrote, “Those who give counsel to the great should regard them with disdain, and not look at their pomp and display” (7B34); “A prince who is to accomplish great deeds will certainly have ministers whom he does not call to go to him. When he wishes to consult with them, he goes to them” (2B11/2); “In the kingdom there are three things universally acknowledged to be honorable. Nobility is one of them; age is one of them; virtue is one of them. . . . How can the possessor of only one of these be presumed on to look with disdain on one who possesses the other two?” (2B11/2).

These passages reflect the fact that society at the time of Mencius had liberated people from traditional clan-based ritual order and granted them independent status.<sup>154</sup> All ideas have their origin in actual social conditions. However, Mencius made these social conditions the foundation of great individual moral character; in so doing he became a great innovator in the history of ideas and exerted much influence on later generations.

So how can this autonomous moral character be attained? Aside from the ‘learning’ (*xue* 學) described previously, Mencius also had a highly distinctive theory about this—his doctrine of nourishing *qi*—energy or energetic forces (*yangqi* 養氣):

The will is the ruler of the energetic forces (*qi*). This energy pervades and animates the body. . . . Hold firm the will, and do no violence to these forces (*qi*). . . . I am good at nourishing my flood-like energy (*qi*). . . . This *qi* energy is exceedingly great, and exceedingly strong. Being nourished by rectitude, and avoiding impairment, it fills all between Heaven and Earth. This is the *qi*: It is the accompaniment of rightness and the way. Without it, man is in a state of starvation. It is produced by the accumulation of rightful deeds; it is not obtained by isolated acts of rightness. If one’s actions cause the mind

to feel disquieted, then this energy is starved. I therefore say, “Gao has never understood rightness (*yi*), because he makes it something external.”

(2A2)

This is somewhat mysterious. Many glosses and explanations have been offered over the past 2,000 years. Aside from the biologically orientated doctrine of nourishing life (*yang sheng* 養生), I believe that this largely refers to the ethical matter of focusing of one’s rational capacity. Such rational coalescence is the basis of the will (*zhi* 志) and ensures rational control in the realm of sensible behavior and also a rewarding sense of personal enrichment. The strength of will required for effective ethical practice is different from that found in ordinary experience, and this is because it involves an accumulated rationality, which is referred to by Mencius as an “accumulated sense of rightness” (*jiyi* 集義, 2A2). It is something that is consciously and purposefully cultivated and developed, and this amounts to ‘nourishing qi’ (*yang qi*).

If accumulating a sense of rightness is a case of rational focus or coalescence, this ‘coalescence’ is not merely thought; it is developed through conduct and activity. It therefore encompasses both knowledge and practice. Because there is a coalescing of rational command in the will and emotions, so rightness cannot be (as Gaozi claimed) something external. What is the relationship between the kind of energy (*qi*) produced by an accumulated sense of rightness and the four shoots, including the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others? Mencius did not say. But what is clear is that Mencius emphasized the coalescing of a rational sensibility. A person, with this sensibility that emerges through an accumulated sense of rightness, is able to harmonize with the heavens and Earth. This is something Mencius described repeatedly: “To preserve one’s heart-mind, and nourish one’s nature (*xing*), is the way to serve the Heavens” (7A1); “Where the cultivated person passes he transforms, where he resides he exerts a spiritual influence. Above and below, Heaven and Earth, flow in harmony” (7A13). This is the way of ‘sageliness within’ (*neisheng* 內聖) that was first proposed by Mencius which then continued through the *Zhongyong* and the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians.<sup>155</sup> This contrasted with the way of ‘kingliness without’ promoted by Xunzi, the *Yizhuan*, Dong Zhongshu and also the later doctrine that all learning must bring practical benefit to people (*jingshi zhiyong* 經世致用). These two approaches formed the two different strands of the Confucian tradition. Sometimes they accorded with and complemented each other, and sometimes they developed in sharp opposition. They consistently enriched Confucius’ idea of a social-psychological formation based on humaneness, and became the main elements in the psychological makeup of Chinese culture. The chapters of this volume seek to explore the details of this complex history.<sup>156</sup>

## Notes

1. *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Shisanjing zhushu zhengliben 十三經注疏整理本, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), “Xiangyinjiu yi” 鄉飲酒義, 61.1904a. All *Liji* translations based on James Legge’s translation, with some modifications.
2. Yang Kuan 楊寬 (1914–2005), *Gushi xintan* 古史新探 [A New Approach to Ancient Chinese History] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1964), 297.
3. Qiu Pu 秋浦 (1919–2006) et al., *Ewenkeren de yuanshi shehui xingtai* 鄂溫克人的原始社會形態 [The Form of Primitive Ewenki Society] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1962), 62.
4. Yang Kuan (1964) contains some valuable studies of these.
5. In the *Liji* (in the “Mingtangwei” 明堂位 chapter, for example), we often see that in the transition from the sage kings such as Shun 舜 to the Three dynasties, the Xia dynasty marks an important turning point because it is the origin of much ritual. For instance, in the “Jiaotesheng” 郊特牲 chapter, we find, “The feudal lords adopting the capping ritual marked the final phase of the Xia Dynasty.” *Liji zhengyi*, 26.945b.
6. *Analects*, 10.1.
7. *Ibid.*, 10.13.
8. *Mencius*, 2B2.
9. Wang Guowei, “Interpretations of Ritual” chapter, in *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林 [Guantang Anthology] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1959), 6.290–91.
10. Guo Moruo, “Kongmeng de pipan” 孔孟的批判 [Critique of Confucius and Mencius], in *Shi pipanshu* 十批判書 [Ten Critiques] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1954), 82–83.
11. The *Liji*’s “Jitong” 祭統 section (a summary account of the sacrifices) reads, “Of all the methods for the good ordering of men, there is none more urgent than the use of ceremonies. Ceremonies are of five kinds, and there is none of them more important than sacrifices. . . . It is by sacrifice that the nourishment of parents is followed up and filial duty to them sustained. . . . In sacrifice there is recognition of what belongs to ten relationships. There are seen in it the method of serving the spirits; the righteousness between ruler and subject; the relation between father and son; the degrees of the noble and mean; the distance gradually increasing between relatives; the bestowment of rank and reward; the separate duties of husband and wife; impartiality in government affairs; the order to be observed between old and young; and the boundaries of high and low.” See *Liji zhengyi*, 49.1570a–81a. The earlier mentioned capping ritual is also related to such sacrifice: “Capping is the beginning of ritual propriety. For this reason, the sage kings treated it as a matter of importance. Treating the capping ceremony as a grave matter and implementing it at court was the means by which the self was humbled and the ancestors revered.” See *Liji zhengyi*, 61.1884b–5a.
12. “Primitive ritual and ceremony” (*yuanshi liyi* 原始禮儀) means totems (images of animals representing the various early tribes) and taboos. These shaped the superstructure and ideology of the primitive society. Here, ceremonies involved a set of standardized rules and regulations concerning due order that could not be violated. Engels (1820–1895) once said about Christianity, “In all previous religions, ritual had been the main thing” (in “Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity,” *Sozialdemokrat*, May 4–11, 1882), and this applies even more so to primitive shamanistic ritual practice. All sorts of detailed protocol were the manifestations of such regulation. Therefore in certain ritual practices each hand or foot movement was strictly prescribed; no gesture could go amiss and no sequence can be shortened or

omitted; failure meant sacrilege and disrespect, which would bring disaster to the entire clan. The *Yili*'s numerous rules and the *Zuozhuan*'s 左傳 many pronouncements that “this is ritually proper” or “this is not ritually proper” all reinforce this point, as does source material from minority groups. The latter includes, “The Ewenki produced a long-lasting set of productive rules that everyone had to respect, and whose influence was broad. For example, when hunting it was not permitted to say ‘Let us form a circle’; the head of a deer or dog must never be dropped from a reindeer; fishing must be done only with a net; and the fish’s sternum must never be cut. The Ewenki believed that violating these taboos would anger the spirits which would negatively impact on their catch.” (Qiu Pu et al., *Ewenkeren de yuanshi shehui xingtai*, 68).

13. Zhang, “Gangu” 幹蠱 [Venous Insects] chapter, in *Qiu shu* 堉書 [Preemptory Book] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Publishing, 2014), 32.
14. See Zhang, “Yuanru” 原儒 [Tracing the origin of Confucians], in *Guogu Lunheng* 國故論衡 [Assessing Scholarship on National Heritage] (Beijing: Shangwu Publishing, 2010), 149–52.
15. Later historians commonly note that Confucian ‘ritual’ (禮) comes from sacrificial rites and ceremonies (*jishi* 祭祀), and that rituals, shamans (*wu* 巫) and scribes (*shi* 史) are interlinked. As Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵 (1879–1956) notes, “The sacrificial overseer, invoker, divider and scribe were all officials of managing matters related to the heavens, while what is often called the ‘grand minister’ (*taizai* 太宰) actually administered general affairs for the tribal chief and was in charge of animal slaughter and the kitchen. . . . Since sacrifices and ceremonies necessarily involved ritual animal sacrifice, mactation was under the remit of officials who managed matters related to heaven.” (*Guoshi yaoyi* 國史要義 [An Outline of Imperial History] [Shanghai: Zhonghua Publishing, 1948], 5); “The earliest form of ritual focused on sacrificial rites. Over time ritual evolved to cover all manner of affairs, while the sacrificial overseer and scribe merged. By the Zhou Dynasty there was a much greater concern with the affairs of the people; the sacrificial overseer and scribe, which in antiquity were officials in charge of matters related to the heavens, became officials of governing people” (Ibid., 6). As the Spring and Autumn Annals records, almost all the aspects of state life, such as ascending the throne, leaving the territory, forming alliances, hunting, construction, births, deaths and marriages, were subject to sacrificial rites and ceremonies. Such sacrificial ceremonies were directed at spirits, and the requisite rituals included songs (including dance and music) in praise of spirits, divination to determine the will of the spirits, and instructions or petitions directed at the spirits (see *Du Guoxiang Wenji* 杜國庠 (1889–1961) 文集 [Collected Works of Du Guoxiang] [Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1962], 274). Thus, although the name ‘Ruist’ or ‘Confucian’ (儒) appeared quite late, its name had from early times derived from the officials and figures who oversaw sacrificial ceremonies, such as shamans, general overseers (尹 *yin*), scribes, and shaman-officials.
16. This expresses the idea captured by twentieth-century thinker Liu Shipai’s 劉師培 (1884–1919) phrase, “In ancient times ritual originated in common customs,” whereby the ‘ritual’ of the sages came from the customs of the common people. See Liu Shipai, “Guzheng yuanshi lun” 古政原始論, in *Liu Shenshu yishu* 劉申叔遺書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 683.
17. See Zhang’s “Yuan Dao” 原道 [Tracing the Origin of the Dao] chapter, section 2, in *Wenshi Tongyi* 文史通義 [General Principles of Literature and History] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1985), 141.

18. Wang Guowei, “Yinzhou zhidulun” 殷周制度論 [On the Institutions of Shang and Zhou], in *Guantang jilin*, 451–80.
19. See *Analects*, 7.1.
20. *Analects*, 3.14.
21. *Ibid.*, 7.5.
22. Confucius, by viewing legal injunctions and punishments as being opposed to ritual and excellence, opposed the views expressed on the Eastern Zhou legal bronze vessel, the *Zhuxing Ding*. The three commentaries of *The Annals* all suggest that the agricultural taxes (*chushuimu*) in the state of Lu were against ritual propriety. This suggests that this conception of ritual, was part of the ancient politics and economy of clans and nobility, and stood against the codified law. However, by the Warring States period, Confucians stated that, “There is no conflict between ritual, musical ceremony, administrative injunctions and the penal system; this is the kingly way” (*Yueji* [Record of Music] 樂記, “Yueben” 樂本 section, see *Liji zhengyi*, 37.1264a). Ritual and music were viewed as belonging to the same category as legal and penal matters. The situation had thus changed greatly; this was more like Xunzi (ca. 313 BCE–238 BCE) and not Confucius. In fact, by the time of the Warring States, ‘ritual’ had come to mean simply ‘ceremony’ and had lost its importance. “During the Spring and Autumn Period, all the ministers and officials who spoke of governing the people took ritual propriety as a benchmark. But during the Warring States, there were few who spoke of ritual apart from the Confucians. The Warring States indifference to ritual is confirmed by the events described in the text *Zhanguoce* [Strategies of the Warring States]. The original character for ritual (禮) typically refers to rituals and ceremonies imbued with human feeling. This is completely different to the meaning of the character during the Warring States Period, when it is a standard for all ethics and politics” (Luo Genze 羅根澤 (1900–1960), *Zhuzi kaosuo* 諸子考索 [Investigation of the Masters] [Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1958], 235). Also relevant is the “Customs in the late Zhou” entry in section 13 of the Ming-Qing dynasty text *Rizhilu*. It notes that, “The Spring and Autumn period valued ritual and prized sincerity, but the seven warring states did not discuss either. The Spring and Autumn period revered the Zhou kings, but the seven warring states did not mention them. The Spring and Autumn period strictly observed sacrificial ceremonies and prized formal visits and shared pleasures; but the warring states did not bother with such things. The former period featured patriarchal lineage and clans, while the latter period never spoke of these.” This was the abandonment of the feudal and the creation of a system of more local administrative units; regional states had replaced the bonds of blood and kin. See Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), *Rizhilu jishi* 日知錄集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 1005–6.
23. *Analects*, 6.25.
24. *Ibid.*, 3.1.
25. *Ibid.*, 3.17.
26. What is *de* 德, often translated as virtue or excellence? This awaits further research. Its original meaning was clearly not ‘morality,’ and it might have referred to each clan’s customary laws and norms, which would explain the line in the “Jinyu” chapter of the *Guoyu*, “Different clan names mean different *de*, different *de* mean different groupings.” *De* thus appears to be connected with ritual.
27. *Ibid.*, 2.3.
28. *Ibid.*, 12.7.



29. As expressed by, for example, *Analects*, 19.19: “The people have long been scattered.” Here ‘people’ refers to the freemen of their society; thus people had left the communities where they had lived for many generations. Similarly, the “Discourses of Zhou” chapter of the *Guoyu* 國語 [Discourses of the States] notes, “The people despise the ruler.” See *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2002), 75.
30. See *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1998), 25.
31. Legendary Qi minister Tian Heng’s attempt to lend more and take in less when managing agricultural taxes, and the burden on the people, was in fact a reflection of power and not an attempt to buy popular support.
32. These included Deng Xi’s bamboo penal code, the tax regime based on the division of land into *mu* or one fifteenth of a hectare, the award of military commission based on larger units of land, and the casting of the bronze vessels to codify the law.
33. *Analects*, 16.1. Confucius supported prosperity and wealth among the people, but viewed them as less important than contentment and equality.
34. *Analects*, 4.5.
35. *Ibid.*, 4.9.
36. *Ibid.*, 11.17.
37. *Ibid.*, 15.26.
38. *Ibid.*, 9.27.
39. *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), vol. 3, 333.
40. This conflict was expressed early on in Chinese history, in chapters such as the *Shijing*’s “Cai wei” 採薇 [Gathering ferns] (see *Maoshi* 167). King Xuan headed north on a distant military expedition. Short of food and water, and unable to return, we find the lament, “Husband and wife will be separated, because of the Xianyun tribe.” And yet fighting wars to repel foreign aggressors remained the just thing to do. In later times, figures such as Du Fu 杜甫 (in his poem “Xinhun bie” [The Newlywed’s Departure] also articulated this conflict.
41. See Hegel’s discussion of tragedy in his *Aesthetics*. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), vol. 2, 1193–1205.
42. Compared to the wars in the Warring States era, which aimed to kill in order to gain cities or territory, and to the large-scale conscription and suppression of the Qin and Han empires, the impoverishment of the Western Zhou and its relative ‘tranquility’ is striking. Admittedly, the Zhou ritual tradition did involve some degree of menace or threat, as expressed in the *Analects*, 3.21: “Duke Ai asked Zaiwo about the alter to the spirits of the Earth. Zaiwo replied: The Xia clans used pine wood, the Yin people used cypress and the Zhou people used the Chestnut. It is said that they [the Zhou] wanted to make people fearful” [Note: the Chinese character for ‘chestnut’ also appears in the term used for fearful]. However, Confucius did not approve of this aspect of Zhou culture, as he makes clear in his response to Zaiwo: “You don’t discuss what is past, you don’t remonstrate with what happens conventionally, and you don’t resent what is long gone.” See *Analects*, 3.21.
43. In fact, not all agree; scholars both home and abroad hold the opposing view. For example, Herbert Fingarette (1921–2018) holds that external ritual practice is crucial, not an internal psychology (i.e., humaneness). Fingarette’s account of ritual is similar to the one presented here; however, he misses the importance of how ritual, as something external, is transformed into humaneness, an inner quality. See his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1–17.

44. This formation was finally fixed in the Han dynasty. See the chapter on Qin and Han thought in this volume.
45. *Analects*, 1.2.
46. *Ibid.*, 2.21.
47. *Ibid.*, 1.6.
48. *Ibid.*, 8.2.
49. *Mencius*, 6B3.
50. *Ibid.*, 4A27.
51. The *Shangshu* frequently records the depths of such filial commitment, with the “*Yaodian*” 堯典 [Canon of Yao] chapter noting how the people’s grief upon the death of the emperor was so great that “they also wished to perish.” See *Mencius*, 5A4. Similarly, the “*Kanggao*” 康誥 [Declaration to Prince Kang] chapter notes that if people are ‘not filial or friend-like’ in their relations, and do not serve their parents, then both empire and the people will be imperiled. See *Shangshu zhengyi* (Shisanjing zhushu zhengluben), 14.433a–b. Both the *Shangshu* and *Book of Odes* emphasize the importance of filial conduct, and the “Duke Wen” section of the *Zuozhuan* notes, “filial piety is the beginning of ritual.” See *Shangshu zhengyi*, 14.440a–52a; *Maoshi* 244; *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* (Shisanjing zhushu zhengluben), 18.573a. In oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, filial conduct is related to the characters for the aged (*lao* 老) and for disciplining (*kao* 考). It is clear that filial conduct indicated respect for the aged and seniors, and this was a remnant of the clan system. It is also worth mentioning here that the object of ‘loyalty’ (*zhong*) was people of the same standing and not lords or rulers, a meaning which emerged only later.
52. The *Record of Zhang Binglin’s Lectures on Traditional Chinese Studies* (*Zhang Taiyan guoxue jiangyanlu*) notes, on 65, “The *Great Learning* states that those governing the state (*guo* 國) must first order their household (*jia* 家). This was a feudal period and the household and the state are not clearly distinguished. What is referred to as household included households with one thousand or one hundred chariots, and that is why one who did not order his household could not rule the state. Later, when China was divided according to administrative divisions of prefectures and counties, the household and the state were very different. Thus the Tang emperor Tai Zong could govern the state while his household affairs were in chaos.”
53. The emperor (*tianzi* 天子) of the later Shang and the Zhou dynasties might be thought to be occupy a higher position and have greater authority than the leader of the tribal alliances. However, I believe that they were similar or roughly equivalent. Indeed, Wang Guowei notes, “In the generations after the Xia Dynasty, the Shang Kings Tai and Heng proclaimed themselves ruler, and after Tang banished Jie, he also declared himself ruler. Presumably, the relation of the feudal lords to the emperor was similar to the relation between the later feudal lords and the heads of the tribal alliances, and did not involve the distinction of ruler and minister (*Guantang jilin*, “On the Shang and Zhou,” 466).
54. *Analects*, 20.1.
55. *Mencius*, 1B18.
56. The values involved in “affection for extended family and respect for the elders” do not conflict with the ideal of promoting men of talent. Raising up the worthy was a tradition that already existed in primitive clan society, and complemented the ideal of affection for family and respect for elders. This is reflected in admiring words found in *Analects*, 12.22, “When Shun ruled the empire, he promoted Gao Yao as minister, and the inhumane were kept at a distance. When Tang ruled the empire, he selected Yi Yin and promoted

- him, and the inhumane were kept at a distance.” Confucius did not rail against the hereditary system of the clans (as some scholars have claimed), but in fact sought to preserve some of its remnants.
57. *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 3, 210.
  58. Three years of mourning was not a Zhou custom but came from the late Shang (see Mao Xihe’s *Sishu Gaicuo* [*On Corrections in the Four Books*], chapter 9. Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 [1623–1716], *Sishu gaicuo* 四書改錯 [Siku quanshu], 9.2a–3b). The “Wuyi” 無逸 (“Against Luxurious Ease”) section of the *Book of Documents* describes a Shang ruler defending the three-year rule. See *Shangshu zhengyi*, 16.508b–509a. Scholars disagree on the origins of this ritual, however. New Text Confucian scholars, as well as Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887–1939) and Guo Moruo believed that it was an innovation of Confucius based on old rites; Old Text Confucians, as well as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950) and others believed it was a Shang ritual. This work takes the latter view.
  59. *Zuozhuan*, “Duke Zhao, 25th year.” See *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi*, 51.1666a–75a.
  60. From the Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States, from the *Zuozhuan* to the *Xunzi*, there were multiple explanations of ritual. Among these, one common concern was the distinction between ritual (*li* 禮) and ceremony (*yi* 儀). This involved various glosses on ritual, including ‘the patterns of ritual,’ ‘the appearance of ritual,’ ‘the content of ritual,’ ‘the qualities of ritual,’ ‘the root of ritual,’ and ‘the fruits of ritual.’
  61. *Analects*, 17.21.
  62. See Georgi Plekhanov’s (1856–1918) *On the So-Called Religious Seekings in Russia*: “Religion may be defined as a more or less orderly system of conceptions, sentiments and actions. The conceptions form the mythological element of religion; the sentiments belong to the domain of religious feelings; the actions to the sphere of religious worship or, as it is otherwise called, of cult. We shall have to dwell first and foremost on the mythological element of religion” (*Selected Philosophical Works* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976], vol. 3, 307). [www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1909/religion/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1909/religion/index.htm).
  63. The Mohists, in order revive the restraining power of ancient tradition, tried to establish a religion. See, the Mozi chapters “Heaven’s Will” (*Tianzhi*) or “Explaining Ghosts” (*Ming gui*). They lost out to the Confucians, however.
  64. *Analects*, 3.3.
  65. *Ibid.*, 17.11.
  66. *Ibid.*, 3.4.
  67. *Ibid.*, 2.7.
  68. *Ibid.*, 11.22.
  69. *Ibid.*, 5.26.
  70. *Ibid.*, 12.19.
  71. *Ibid.*, 17.6.
  72. *Ibid.*, 5.15.
  73. *Ibid.*, 12.9.
  74. *Ibid.*, 20.2.
  75. *Ibid.*, 10.17.
  76. *Ibid.*, 13.16.
  77. *Ibid.*, 16.1.
  78. *Ibid.*, 13.4.
  79. “The sage kings of old served by securing the worthy and then securing the people. When reverent in his administration of ritual, the good men would come; offering deep care, the good men felt affection; when taxes

- were appropriate, the common people followed him.” See *Wenwu (Cultural Relics)*, 1 (1979): 7.
80. *Analects*, 14.16.
  81. *Ibid.*, 3.22, 14.16. Some have taken “What sort of humaneness was this?” to mean that Guan Zhong was not humane. However, looking at the full textual context, this seems implausible.
  82. *Ibid.*, 14.17. The phrase “we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side” refers simply to the appropriation of alien culture in the creation of the early ‘Chinese’ dynasties like the Xia. Resistance to such amalgamation, which contrasted with continuity with the culture of antiquity, was an important tenet of the Confucian school. The strong emphasis on treating the tribal alliances as the limit of the cultural world was a way of distinguishing between one’s own and one’s enemies.
  83. Mencius, 3B9.
  84. The nature of the *mingtang* 明堂 design has long been a disputed issue. I believe that it is a continuation of the Neolithic era *dafangzi* or ‘large dwelling.’ It was both a sacred temple and a site for government rituals, since in early times the two functions were not separate.
  85. “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1972), vol. 4, 174.
  86. *Analects*, 12.1.
  87. *Ibid.*, 7.30.
  88. *Ibid.*, 15.36.
  89. *Ibid.*, 6.30.
  90. *Ibid.*, 13.6.
  91. *Ibid.*, 12.18.
  92. In ancient times, clan leadership necessarily involved leading by example. Only when wisdom, courage, humility, and a conciliatory attitude all surpassed the norm would a person be chosen to lead. Furthermore, he must take responsibility for the fate of the clan and, upon meeting disaster, he must be the first to reflect on his own conduct or step down. In the literature there are many examples of the longevity of this custom, including the self-sacrificing actions of the Shang emperor Tang, and the imperial admissions of fault issued by later emperors.
  93. *Analects*, 7.23.
  94. *Ibid.*, 9.5.
  95. *Ibid.*, 3.24.
  96. *Ibid.*, 17.2.
  97. *Ibid.*, 2.15.
  98. *Ibid.*, 9.4.
  99. *Ibid.*, 6.27.
  100. *Ibid.*, 12.1.
  101. *Ibid.*, 13.27.
  102. *Ibid.*, 12.3.
  103. *Ibid.*, 15.9.
  104. *Ibid.*, 4.5.
  105. *Ibid.*, 7.15.
  106. *Ibid.*, 14.4.
  107. *Ibid.*, 9.29.
  108. *Ibid.*, 9.26.
  109. *Ibid.*, 9.28.
  110. *Ibid.*, 8.6.
  111. *Ibid.*, 8.7.

112. *Ibid.*, 14.38.
113. *Ibid.*, 14.35.
114. *Ibid.*, 12.4.
115. *Junzi* (cultivated person or gentleman) and *xiaoren* (the base person) were originally opposing terms of social class (or social levels). ‘*Junzi*’ originally referred to a knight or warrior, a clan noble who also belonged to the realm of men of service (*shi* 士). However, Confucius transformed the term *junzi* into an ethical term to describe character: “If a cultivated man abandons humaneness, how can he be worthy of that name?” (4.5).
116. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A840/B868.
117. Such attitudes appear in several places in the *Zuozhuan*: “The way of the Heavens is distant, while the human way is near. We cannot reach the former.” (*Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi*, Zhao 18, 48.1581b–82a). “The people command the spirits, so the sage kings first secured the welfare of the people, and then strove to serve the spirits” (Huan, 6, 6.201a). “If the ruler listens to the people, the state will flourish; if he listens to the spirits, then the state will perish” (Zhuang, 32, 10.342b).
118. *Analects*, 7.21.
119. *Ibid.*, 3.12.
120. *Ibid.*, 11.12.
121. See Sun Yirang 孫怡讓 (1848–1908), *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2001), 12.459.
122. *Analects*, 7.11.
123. *Ibid.*, 4.24.
124. *Ibid.*, 5.10.
125. *Ibid.*, 14.27.
126. *Ibid.*, 4.22.
127. See Russell’s (1872–1970) account of Greek philosophy in his *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 32–43.
128. This archetype is distinct from the kind described by C.G. Jung (1875–1961), since it is not a mysterious entity that transcends society and history but a product of social and historical sedimentation.
129. What is meant by ‘cultural-psychological formation’? This would require a separate work to explain. As a stop-gap, one could refer to Ruth Benedict’s (1887–1948) *Patterns of Culture*. However, that only describes how culture is like an organism, which is very different from the account offered here.
130. See the chapter on Qin and Han thought in this volume. The “*Shuogua*” 說卦 chapter of the *Book of Changes* notes: ‘the path that constitutes the cosmic order (*tian*) is the interaction of yin and yang.’ See *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (Shisanjing zhushu zhengliben), 9. 383a. In the ancient Chinese medical text the *Huangdi Neijing*, the “*Tianyuanji dalun*” chapter of the “Basic Questions” (*Suwen*) notes, “Thus, in yin there is yang and in yang there is yin.” See *Huangdi neijing suwen buzhu shiwen* 黃帝內經素問補注釋文 in *Zhengtong daozeang* 正統道藏, vol. 21, 38.246c.
131. *Analects*, 6.11.
132. See Guo Moruo, “Criticism of Zhuangzi” 莊子批判, in *Ten Criticisms (Shipipan shu)* 十批判書 (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1996), 163–84.
133. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (n.d.), ed., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1986), 20.207.
134. Li Dazhao, “Ziran de lunliguan yu Kongzi” 自然的倫理觀與孔子 [Naturalistic Morality and Confucius], in *Li Dazhao uanji* 李大釗選集 [Selected Writings of Li Dazhao] (Beijing: People’s Publishing, 1959), 80.

135. The earliest textual reference for this popular expression is in the Daoist classic the *Wenzi* or *Master Wen* (文子), “*Shangren*” (上仁) section.
136. Mencius 1A1.
137. For more on this aspect of Confucianism, see my book *Zhongguo jindai sixiang shilun* [A History of Modern Chinese Thought] (Beijing: People’s Press, 1979).
138. See Lu Xun’s, “The True Story of Ah Q,” in *Lu Xun Selected Works*, translated by Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 (1915–2009) and Gladys Yang (1919–1999) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), vol. 1, 102–54.
139. At least in terms of epistemological approaches; there were other reasons for this retardation, including economic, class, and historical factors. These are discussed later.
140. Fan Zhongyan, *Yueyang louji* 岳陽樓記 [Yueyang Pavillion] (Hong Kong: Shangwu Yinshuguan Youxian Gongsi, 2002).
141. Zhang Zai, *Western Inscription* 《西銘》. See the full translation in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition from Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), vol. 1, 682–689.
142. Wen Tianxiang, *Wenshan xiansheng quanji* (文山先生全集) [Collected Works of Master Wen].
143. Gu Yanwu, *Rizhi lu* (日知錄) [*Record of Daily Knowledge*].
144. Wang Fuzhi, *Chuanshan yishu* (船山遺書) [*Wang Fuzhi’s Surviving Works*].
145. Lu Xun, ‘Have the Chinese Lost Their Self-Confidence?’ in *Silent China: Selected Writings of Lu Xun*, translated by Gladys Yang (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
146. *Liji zhengyi*, 1.17a.
147. Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and the present-day New Confucians focus only on the connections among ideas. This leads them to neglect Xunzi and promote Confucius and Mencius. However, these intellectuals have not considered the function, meaning and place of abstract ideas within historical reality. See the fourth chapter in this volume on Xunzi, the *Book of Changes* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and also chapter eight on engagement in practical matters and statecraft.
148. *Analects*, 13.9.
149. *Ibid.*, 13.16.
150. The well-field system was a method for distributing land dating from the late Zhou. A square area of land was divided into nine equal units, with eight families each farming their own unit while also working collectively on the ninth communal unit. Output from this communal field went to the landowner or ruler as tribute.
151. A *mu* 畝 is approximately one-fifteenth of a hectare.
152. See Chapter 7 in this volume on Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism.
153. The key Mencian concepts of humaneness (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), ritual propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and sagacity (*sheng* 聖) all align neatly with the five elements that make up Confucius humaneness-based philosophy: psychological principles equate with humaneness, the ideal of peaceful rulership is righteousness, the foundation of consanguineal relationships is ritual propriety, individual character is a matter of wisdom, and practical rationality is sagacity. Regarding the importance of the latter, practical rationality, its importance can be understood through a comment by Zhu Xi about trustworthiness (*xin* 信): “The relation of trustworthiness (*xin*) to the four shoots (humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom) is like the role of Earth (*tu* 土) in the five phases. Earth has no fixed position and is unnamed, and does not transmit *qi*, and yet the other four

elements of water, fire, metal and wood attain their vitality through it. Thus these four phases, like the four seasons, rely upon Earth.” See Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1983), 238. Similarly, practical rationality permeates the other elements of the Confucian structure of humaneness.

154. The same idea can be found in other places in the classical texts. See, for example, the “*Qice*” [The stratagems of Qi] section of the *Zhanguo ce*: “King Xuan of Qi granted an audience to Yan Chu. The King said to Yan Chu: Come forward! Yan Chu replied: Let the king come forward! The king was enraged and asked: Are kings more esteemed or are scholar-officials more esteemed? Yan Chu replied: Scholar-officials are esteemed, kings are not.” See *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 11.408.
155. For example, Wen Tianxiang’s “*Zheng qige*” 正氣歌 [Ode to well-regulated vital-energy] took Mencius’ account of flood-like *qi* and presented it as a form of ethical guidance.
156. Originally published in the *Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* 2 (1980): 77–96.

## 2 A Preliminary Exploration of the Mohists

This chapter does not attempt a unified account of the Mohist school, but neither does it focus only on Mozi the historical figure.<sup>1</sup> I believe Mozi's thought was representative of small-scale productive labor, and elements of Mozi's thought were consistently manifested in later agricultural uprisings and the thinking of well-known heterodox Confucian figures such as Yan Yuan and Zhang Binglin. These are issues worthy of investigation.

### Ideas Representative of Small-Scale Producers and Workers

The gradual collapse of pre-Qin clan traditions was accompanied by an unprecedented liberation of different ways of thinking. This led to a period of great eminence for Mohist thought, which represented the small-scale productive labor of the artisan classes, and it became an important rival to the Confucian school. This rise was probably connected to the conditions of relatively limited government and free thought that existed at the time. These artisans, who constituted the productive forces of society, were liberated from the restrictive control of the primitive clan system. It was from this group that Mozi emerged. One might say that the distinctive ideas of China's small-scale producers and laboring class first appeared as systematic theory in the figure and text of Mozi (this does not include the later works in Mohist Logic). These ideas are the feature of Mozi most worthy of study.

If we treat this claim as the starting point for Mozi's thought, then his work might be summarized as the emphasizing of labor, especially labor's importance to social life that lay behind material production, and the elevation of the values of effort and physical exertion. Mozi held that the difference between humans and animals lay in the human reliance on their own labor for survival. The Mozi states:

Humans differ from the birds, beasts and insects. The birds, beasts, and insects have their feathers and furs for coats and fur coats, have their hoofs and claws for sandals and shoes, and have water and grass for drink and food. . . . Now, man is different from these. Those



who exert themselves will live. Those who do not exert themselves cannot live.<sup>2</sup>

This simple fact contains an important truth. Mozi believed that only when the different classes or levels diligently labored and performed their roles could society survive and avoid decay:

Now, the five grains are the people's mainstay and the source of the ruler's revenue. When the people lose their support, the ruler cannot have any revenue either. And without food the people will not observe order. Therefore, food should be secured, land strenuously cultivated, and expenditures cut down.<sup>3</sup>

The farmers set out at daybreak and come back at dusk, exerting themselves to sow seeds and plant trees to produce much soy beans and millet, and they dare not be negligent. Why do they do this? They think exertion will result in wealth, and negligence in poverty; exertion will produce plenty, and negligence famine. Therefore, they dare not be negligent. The women get up at dawn and retire in the night, exerting themselves to weave and spin to produce much silk, flax linen, and cloth, and dare not be negligent. Why do they do this? They think exertion will produce wealth and negligence poverty; exertion will produce warmth and negligence cold. Therefore, they dare not be negligent.<sup>4</sup>

Many other textual examples could be cited here. Mozi's entire political philosophy is founded upon this simple and plain logic. What concerned Mozi was "the hungry not getting food, the cold not having clothing, the laborers not getting rest."<sup>5</sup> He demanded that "the hungry be fed, the cold clothed" and laborers have sufficient rest. If they could not rest but had to constantly serve the ruler, then they could not be productive. This kind of extreme emphasis on productive labor as the basis for social life can be compared with Confucius' emphasis on "overcome the self and return to ritual propriety" (*keji fuli* 克己復禮) and "Good form, conduct, loyalty and sincerity (*wen xing zhong xin* 文行忠信)," and his rebuking of requests to study husbandry or gardening (c.f. "A small man indeed, is Fan Xu," *Analects* 13.4). Such comparisons make very clear the differences in class consciousness between the two thinkers.

Of course, Mozi's talk of effort and application also includes the ruling clan nobility:

Now the rulers go to court early and retire late, hearing lawsuits and attending to government and meting out justice for the whole day, and dare not be negligent. Why do they do this? They think exertion will bring about order, and negligence chaos; they believe exertion

will produce safety, and negligence danger. Therefore, they dare not be negligent.<sup>6</sup>

When the gentlemen do not exert themselves when attending to matters of government, the jurisdiction will be in chaos. When the common men do not exert themselves at work, supply will not be sufficient.<sup>7</sup>

Mozi does not oppose class distinctions and class-based governance; as Guo Moruo once noted, Mozi served and advised rulers and lords. Mozi also believed, like all wandering scribes who sought support for their ideas but made no direct contribution to production, that if it was possible to make the rulers and ministers use language appropriately, then the state would be properly ordered. It is therefore clear that valuable contributions involved more than just primary production by farmers and weavers:

When one farmer's produce is divided among the world, a person cannot get even one liter of grain . . . evidently that cannot feed the hungry of the world. This is not as good as learning the way of the ancient sage kings . . . and persuading rulers and kings to follow it.<sup>8</sup>

Like Confucius and Mencius, Mozi did not see working with the mind as being opposed to work with the body, or oppose the division of labor between the rulers and those ruled. He also stressed that the worthy and able should govern the empire and that such people were the 'root' of government. However, there were some differences from Confucius and Mencius. First, Confucian talk of elevating the worthy arose within the constraints of the clan traditions of obeying one's elders, and this was a reflection of the interests of the nobility. Mozi's 'promote the worthy,' however, aimed at breaking that tradition and the favoritism granted to kin. He believed that a person's social status and lineage were unimportant, and that only the truly worthy were to be elevated—this reflected the interests of the lower classes.

The ancient sage-kings greatly emphasized the exaltation of the virtuous and the employment of the capable, without special consideration for relatives, or for the rich and honored.<sup>9</sup>

Reward the virtuous and punish the wicked without partiality to relatives and brothers.<sup>10</sup>

If capable, even a farmer or an artisan should be raised up.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, and this is the second difference between Confucius and the Mohists, the Confucian elevation of the worthy was for the purpose of servicing ritual and music, and implementing the ideals of benevolence and appropriate government. This was to engender a peaceful empire and

enrich the common people. Mozi, however, directly focused on feeding and clothing of the common people:

When the virtuous person manages the districts, he goes out before sunrise and comes back after sunset, plowing and sowing, planting and cultivating, gathering harvests of grains. As a result, grains are plentiful and people are sufficiently supplied with food.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, government based on exalting the worthy aims to contribute directly to material production, in order to meet the existential needs of the people. All other concerns, such as ritual propriety or music and pleasure, are secondary and should be fitted into this overarching goal without violating it. Mozi opposed the extravagant government of clan nobility, which contravened his general aims, and instead advocated frugality:

There is no need to cleverly combine the five tastes or harmonize the different scents. And efforts should not be made to procure rare delicacies from far countries. . . . The ancient sage-kings authorized the code of law regarding clothing, saying: “Be satisfied with clothes of blue or grey silk in winter which are light and warm, and with clothes of flax-linen in summer which are light and cool.” What causes extra expenditure but does not add benefits to the people would not be allowed by the sage-kings.<sup>13</sup>

In areas such as eating, clothing, transport, and dwellings, only the satisfaction of basic needs was desirable. Anything beyond this was a matter of extravagant consumption. This is why Mozi condemned music (*fei yue* 非樂):

In caring for the world, the humane do not think of doing that which delights the eyes, pleases the ears, gratifies tastes, and eases the body. When these deprive the people of their means of clothing and food, the humane person does not undertake them.<sup>14</sup>

It was not that Mozi did not know the pleasures people felt at music, beautiful complexions, fine tastes, grand buildings, and spacious living. However, they required that “heavy taxes be collected from the people,”<sup>15</sup> while making no direct contribution to material life. Further, they could not protect the state, made it difficult for the rulers to “start the day early and retire late, hear lawsuits and attend to the government,”<sup>16</sup> and they impeded farmers and weavers from “going out before sunrise and coming back after sunset, plowing and sowing, planting and cultivating” or “rising early, sleeping late to sew and weave.”<sup>17</sup> As a result, such sensory pleasures were to be thoroughly suppressed.

Mozi openly opposed lavish funerals. They “interfere with people’s work and waste people’s wealth,” such that “the state will become poor, the people few, and the jurisdiction disorderly.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, “Regarding clothing and food, which are the necessities of life, there are rules. How then can there be none regarding funerals and burials, which are the necessities of death?”<sup>19</sup>

To summarize, Mozi prioritized food and clothing while all other consumption was to be maximally reduced, prohibited, or abolished. During a time when material wealth was far from abundant and many workers were often poverty stricken, Mozi’s ideas were readily understood. They exposed and criticized the decadent lives of the aristocratic rulers and were thus progressive. However, society was developing and production was expanding. Surplus value was increasing and wealth was relentlessly accumulating, while social consumption and need were rapidly expanding (especially among the upper-class nobility), and this was an unstoppable historical trend. Production and consumption are causally connected and mutually determine one another. For this reason, Mozi’s attempt to place strict limits on, or even abolish, all human consumption beyond basic existential need violated objective rules of societal development; it was impractical, and had almost no chance of success. This is simply the tragedy inherent in the narrow outlook of small-scale producers and laborers. As laborers, they knew the difficulties involved in agriculture and in production and opposed all forms of extravagance and decadent enjoyment. But as small-scale producers, they are limited to what they hear and see in their own small world; they are oblivious to the distinction between working with the mind and working with the body, ruling, and being ruled. Since the lifestyles of consumption of the upper social strata were increasingly ostentatious and extravagant, and that their demands constantly increased and could not be satisfied by simple diet and clothing, then the idea of subjectively imposing human controls on them was little more than a fantasy.

Many of Mozi’s other key ideas were also founded on this division between small scale producers and other social forces. For example, Mozi opposed the idea of fate:

If the doctrine of the fatalist were put to practice, the superiors would not attend to government and the subordinates would not attend to work. If the superior does not attend to government, jurisdiction and administration will be in chaos. If the subordinates do not attend to work, wealth will not be sufficient.<sup>20</sup>

When Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu ruled the empire, they said: “We must feed the hungry, clothe the cold, give the weary rest, and the disturbed peace.” Thus, their good name was heard all over the world. Can this be ascribed to fate? In fact, it is due to effort.<sup>21</sup>

Could the ancient sage kings guarantee that the five grains would ripen and be harvested and that floods and droughts would never

occur? And yet, no one was frozen or starved. Why was this? It was because they made full use of the seasons and were frugal in their own maintenance.<sup>22</sup>

Simply put, fate contrasts with effort (*li* 力) and exertion or strength (*qiang* 強), and Mozi believes that the difference between sufficiency and starvation, warmth and cold, the well-governed and chaotic, honor and shame, the noble and vulgar or security and danger resides in human effort (i.e., productivity) and not in fate. Even social ethics and ethical standards are transformed by this distinction:

People are gentle and kind when the year is good, but selfish and vicious when it is bad.<sup>23</sup>

Those lords fond of war do not understand that it is neither humane nor righteous, and neighboring lords do not understand this either; therefore, attacks and assaults go on generation after generation without end. This is what I mean when I say they do not understand matters of importance. . . . What do I mean when I say people do not understand things of importance but understand trifles? Supposing someone entered the orchard and garden of another and took the other's peaches and prunes, melon and ginger. He will be punished by the superior when caught and condemned by the public when it becomes known. Why? Because he did not share in the labor but took the fruit, appropriating what was not his.<sup>24</sup>

Whether the people's nature (*xing*) was good or bad depended on whether the harvest was good or bad; and the latter largely depended upon the effort made by people and not upon fate. Thus, fatalism should be denounced. Accordingly, an ethics of 'humaneness' and 'rightness' (*renyi* 仁義) should be founded upon the rights that derive from respect for the fruits of labor. Mozi believed that the chaos caused by frequent war, fighting, and usurping of rulers was caused by a failure to understand this fundamental logic. The preceding points make clear that Mozi applied the perspective of the small-scale producers and laborers to evaluate and affirm or condemn all aspects of social life. He advocated frugality and modest funerals, and was opposed to music because, from the perspective of small-scale producers, the creation and accumulation of any wealth was always difficult, and required efforts to economize, conserve, care, and protect. Mozi's condemnation of fate, his emphasizing of labor, and his valuing of application followed the same reasoning. This simple logic often led the thinkers from the upper classes, either consciously or unconsciously, to look down upon or denigrate Mozi. Lacking direct experience of production, it was difficult for them to fully embrace this emphasis on striving or effort and the rejection of fatalism. Having relative wealth and enjoying a high standard of living, it was difficult for

them to pay serious attention to frugality and austerity. Their strategy for governing the country and their social ideals could not easily accommodate material production as foundational; most were mired in more abstract theories and ideologies based on human nature and social systems. This was particularly true of the Confucians.

Mozi regarded moral requirements and ethical norms as being directly related to material life, grounded on the utilitarian nature of practical living.<sup>25</sup> Mozi's most famous doctrine of impartial care (*jian ai*) illustrates this well, with its way of universal care and mutual benefit:

It is certain that [filial sons] desire to have others love their parents. Now, what should I do first in order to attain this? Should I first love others' parents in order that they would love my parents in return, or should I first hate others' parents in order that they would love my parents in return? . . . "When a peach is thrown to us, we would return with a prune." This is to say whoever loves others will be loved and whoever hates others will be hated.<sup>26</sup>

This is precisely the small-scale producers' and laborers' concept of exchange relationships writ large. "Even the worthy ruler will not show favors to ministers without merit. Even the affectionate father will not love useless sons."<sup>27</sup> Importantly, though Mozi also talked about '*ai*' (care or love), it is very different to the Confucian notion of *ai*, since the latter is grounded in the psychological bond between father and son that arises through biological connection. This difference has various implications. First, Confucian 'love' was unconditional and beyond calculation of profit and loss, but Mohist 'love' was conditional and based on actual material benefits and outcomes. It did not originate from an inner state of 'humaneness' (*ren*), but from the morality (*yi*) of outward mutual benefit. This morality, expressed in terms of benefit (*li*), was grounded on the idea of a measuring stick that was common to small-scale production and labor. In fact, this provided a philosophical foundation for the later Legalist school to criticize Confucian humaneness (*ren*) and love (*ai*) as being hypocritical. According to it, everything could be assessed expediently, in terms of benefit or harm. In this regard, Guo Moruo's remark that the Mohists and Legalists were known to have collaborated in the state of Qin was insightful.

Second, because Confucianism was based on the psychological principles and biological connection of the father-son relation, it emphasized 'graded love,' on a sliding scale from closer to more distant. Mozi's impartial caring started from mutual assistance and so did not promote, and even opposed, such graded love. But because the former was based on existing patriarchal clan blood lineage, it found strong practical support. Mozi promoted the great benefits of avoiding chaotic war, which stemmed from mutual assistance that did not

discriminate between intimate and stranger, but which became a pipe dream detached from reality.<sup>28</sup>

Attempting to use universal concern to stop warfare and establish peace was a kind of utopian thinking often seen among the small-scale producers and workers. Since, within the narrow context within which they worked, these producers and laborers had the experience of being able to cooperate and generate mutual benefit, so their representatives and thinkers readily expanded these experiences into a theory of government or ways to save the world. Similar phenomena can be seen in later historical periods or in the thought of other nations.

Naturally, Mozi's impartial caring had historical origins. The final summarizing chapter of the *Huainanzi*, "Outlining the Essentials" (*Yaolue* 要略), states that Mozi "turned his back on the Zhou way and used the government of the Xia dynasty." Mozi also wrote that "Impartial caring and mutual benefit were also practiced by the ancient sages and the six kings," while other classical texts also frequently claim that Mozi continued the way of the Xia and of King Yu.<sup>29</sup> This shows the ancient origins of Mozi's ideas. The specific reason is that during the time of Yu and the Xia dynasty, the patriarchal clan system had not been fully established; the primitive system, which lacked class and social distinctions, continued on a vast scale. The remnants of this ancient tradition lingered in peoples' minds and gave rise to Mozi's idea of impartial caring. As a result, many people believe that the short piece "Great Harmony" (*Datong* 大同), which the Confucians placed in the "Ceremonial Usages" (*Liyun* 禮運) chapter of the *Book of Rites*, is actually a Mohist idea. In the great harmony of the world before "Kings Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, Cheng, and the Duke of Zhou":

People did not treat only their own kin with affection, nor treat as children only their own children; the old lived a full span, the strong had their role, the young had their elders; the pitiful, the lonely, the fatherless, the orphans, the abandoned, and the disabled were all nurtured . . . valuable goods were neither abandoned nor hoarded selfishly; effort was not withheld but nor was it expended only on oneself.<sup>30</sup>

This scenario moved qualitatively beyond the Confucian ideal of a healthy society, and could be considered an expression of Mohist ideals. Impartial caring was a distinctive program seen in ideas such as, "Regard the states of others as they see them, regard the others' households as they see them, and view other persons as they see themselves";<sup>31</sup> "The strong do not assail the weak, the noble do not demean the lowly, the clever do not deceive the foolish";<sup>32</sup> and "Those who are old or without a wife or child will be served and nourished to the end of their days, while the young, the weak and orphans will have care and that which they can rely on to develop."<sup>33</sup>

Aren't these all very similar to the 'great harmony' ideal mentioned earlier? This was the ideal world of the workers, who helped each other, enjoyed close affection and shared benefits, without plunder, exploitation, or oppression. What is important is the promotion of impartial caring and the fantasy of a great harmony; but this lacked the veil of humaneness and tenderness proposed by the Confucians, and the accompanying mindset and emotions. Furthermore, this ethical fantasy of promoting the worthy, helping others, and sharing the wealth was built upon a practical utilitarian foundation (i.e., the aim of prosperity):

The gentlemen in the world like riches and honor, and dislike poverty and humility. Now how can you obtain the former and avoid the latter? There is no better way than to be worthy. What then is the way of being worthy? It is when the strong are anxious to help others, the wealthy endeavor to share it with others, and those who possess the way diligently teach others.<sup>34</sup>

This appears to be contradictory but is actually true, reflecting the typically contradictory nature of small-scale producers and workers: they seek to make material reality the foundation while emphasizing mutual help and impartial care, and even the sacrificing of oneself for this.

Alongside the aforementioned values of 'effort' and 'impartial caring,' the third pillar constituting Mozi's tripartite thinking is his account of heaven's will (*tianzhi*) and understanding spirits or ghosts (*minggui* 明鬼). This third pillar might initially seem strange. In a seemingly clear-sighted and practical theory that begins from experience and practical benefit, what need was there of an anthropomorphized god? Why did the Mozi, who promoted human effort and opposed fatalism also appeal to 'Heaven' or 'spirits' that reward or punish in order to govern the human world?

This requires an explanation from the characteristics of the small-scale producers and workers. They needed a kind of faith that served as a spiritual support, which enabled them to transcend their limited experience of the world. In the narrow mindset produced by the daily life of small-scale producers and laborers there could not be a broader mindset or (relatively) scientific worldview, and so Mozi could not possibly adopt the kind of outlook found in the "Discourse on Heaven" chapter of the *Xunzi* or in the *Yizhuan* commentary on the *Book of Changes*. Traditional religious consciousness could more easily persist within the limited knowledge and backward mindset of the small-scale producers, remaining untouched, and they became preservers and guardians of influential traditions and habits. Due to the nature of their social existence (the unorganized and narrow confines of the living environment and the status of the small-scale producers) and the prevailing social consciousness (the remnants of religious traditions), the small-scale



producers were susceptible to the illusion of an all-powerful god-like figure being the supreme power. 'Impartial caring and mutual benefit,' 'relying on one's efforts,' and such like were social principles and political ideals that necessarily relied for their existence on establishing the motivations and standards of complete obedience and faith; only then could they be realized.

Thus, although Mozi treated practical benefit as foundational, his principles for governing society were not founded upon the modern idea of a social contract made between equal individuals, but rather on the foundation that every person must obey the supreme deity. That is to say, the rules and norms of the human world are not made by human accord and will but came from the heavens, and must be obeyed. This is what is meant by 'Heaven's will' (*tianzhi* 天志) or 'heavenly intent' (*tianyi* 天意):

If the administrative and penal codes accord with the will of Heaven they are called good; if they go against the will of Heaven they are called bad government. With this as the model and establishing this as the standard of morality, whether the lords and the ministers are humane or not can be measured . . . thus the will of Heaven cannot but be followed, and doing so provides the model for right conduct (*yi* 義).<sup>35</sup>

When the emperor does good, Heaven rewards him. When the emperor errs, Heaven punishes him. When the emperor is unjust in reward and punishment and not judicious in hearing lawsuits, Heaven issues forth disease and calamities, and the frost and dew are untimely. The emperor must then . . . prepare clean cakes and wine to pray and invoke the blessing of Heaven. . . . Therefore, appropriate conduct does not come from the ignorant and lowly but from the worthy and wise. . . . Who is wise? Heaven is wise.<sup>36</sup>

Standards, rules, principles, and legal norms like impartial caring, the rejection of offensive war, humaneness and rightness, and frugality could not be set by the 'ignorant and base' lower classes or common people. Instead, these originated from something even more 'worthy and wise' than the emperor: heaven, understood as an anthropomorphic spirit. The small-scale producers and laborers also projected their own hopes and desires onto heaven, hoping that a fair and upright ruler would govern the world and restrain the nobility. They idolized this lord they created and to which they offer everything. Mozi's emphasis on effort and impartial caring had little to do with modern individualism, but originated in a religious anthropomorphism, which clearly manifested such characteristics.

As a result, although self-reliance and opposition to fatalism were advocated, it remained impossible for people to grasp their own destiny, or to establish and oversee their own legal, penal, and political codes, or even

to determine right and wrong; these were to be handed over to a noble and wise god-like deity:

If all the people in the world believed that the spirits are able to reward virtue and punish vice, how could the world be in chaos? Since the government of the ancient sage-kings was like this, the ancient sage-kings must have believed in the existence of spirits and ghosts.<sup>37</sup>

The ghosts and spirits are wiser than the sages by as much as the sharp-eared and keen-sighted surpass the deaf and blind.<sup>38</sup>

The humane men of old . . . brought the empire into harmony, and centralized all that was within the four seas. Then they diligently led the people of the empire to do service to the highest deity (*shangdi* 上帝), hills and rivers, and the spirits and ghosts.<sup>39</sup>

Compare this with the *Analec*s: “The Master did not speak of what was obtuse, the military, disorder or spirits” (7.21); “Not yet mastering the affairs of men, how could I master the world of spirits?” (11.12). The Confucians stressed the intrinsic value of people and their privileged status, and in comparison Mohists were clearly less advanced. This backwardness was the result of the difference between the small-scale producers or workers and rulers with their various cultural achievements.

Mozi’s political idea of ‘esteeming superiors’ (*shangtong* 尚同) can be understood in a similar manner. ‘Esteeming superiors’ involved the demand for a unified will, outlook, and conduct. Unified by whom? Unified from ‘above’—that is, unified by district heads, monarchs, the emperor, and through heaven.

“What the head of the district thinks to be right, all shall think to be right. What he thinks to be wrong, all shall think to be wrong”;<sup>40</sup> “What the monarch thinks to be right all shall think to be right, what he thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong”;<sup>41</sup> “What the emperor thinks to be right all shall think to be right, what he thinks to be wrong all shall think to be wrong.”<sup>42</sup>

In a word, the district, the state, and the empire are all unified under one supreme authority. As a result, “Governing a state in the empire is the same as ruling a single family clan; commanding all the people in the world is the same as commanding a single individual.”<sup>43</sup> As the religious mentality demanded that an anthropomorphic deity govern, so in the corresponding political realm a completely dictatorial ruler was required.

To summarize, on the one hand is the demand to promote the worthy and able, while on the other is the emphasis on obedience and esteeming superiors. One calls for impartial caring and equality, the other advocates autocratic rule. One emphasizes striving and effort while rejecting fatalism, and the other reveres ghosts and spirits, and heaven’s will. These appear to be contradictions, which express the dualistic nature of weak

and divided small-scale producers and workers. As a result, it was possible to have a utopian social ideal centered on a capacious concern that included every household and person, and to advocate politically for a dictatorial system; and it was also possible to have a sober and proactive attitude, grounded in lived experiences, alongside a religious outlook that was imbued with a fanatical spirit. All of these dualistic aspects were present.

Rejecting fatalism and reducing expenditure (which focus on production), promoting mutual benefit and impartial care (which are utopian fantasies), and heaven's will and esteeming superiors (which are religious and autocratic) constitute the three main pillars of Mozi's thought. These three are mutually entailing and difficult to separate, and the philosophy is distinguished by its valuing of labor and the demand for mutual caring—things that the exploitative classes lacked. However, generally speaking, this philosophy was not well-suited to emerging social trends, and tensions and antimonies in emerging historical forces condemned it to an inauspicious fate. At various times throughout history, these social-scale producers and workers were usually exploited and subject to the rule of others, and the school that represented their way of thinking—Mohism—gradually died out. Mozi's thought did not find a receptive audience during his time or with later thinkers, and was subject to sustained criticism, as the following passages show:

Mozi's 'impartial caring' omits the father; but to have neither king nor father is to be a beast.<sup>44</sup>

Through life toil, and at death indifference: [Mozi's] way is one of great meanness. Causing men anxiety and sorrow and melancholy, and difficult to put into practice, I fear it cannot be regarded as the way of a sage. Contrary to the minds of men everywhere, men will not endure it. . . . It is far from the way of the ancient sage-kings.<sup>45</sup>

Mozi was fixated on the useful and so did not understand refinement.<sup>46</sup>

Mozi saw the value of making things uniform, but not the value of difference . . . when there is uniformity but not difference, then administrative injunctions will not be put into practice.<sup>47</sup>

If Mozi, at his greatest, was able to possess the whole world, or at least a single state, then he would have people unsettled from wearing coarse clothes and eating bad food, and though they might be sad he would deny them music. If it were like this then the state would be impoverished. If the state were impoverished then, then it could not provide satisfaction for people's desires, and this being so then a system of rewards would not work.<sup>48</sup>

Mozi's way was frugal and difficult to follow . . . if the models and norms of the empire were derived in this way, then there would be no way of distinguishing between the noble and the base. But

generations are different and time moves on, and affairs and undertakings are not necessarily uniform.<sup>49</sup>

Xunzi in particular, from the perspective of a ruling class developing its own economic and political projects and with an outlook broadened by increasing productivity, focused on how good government could ensure sufficient clothing and food. “Wealth and goods will flow forth as if from a spring, surging like rivers or seas . . . what problems of scarcity would the world have?”<sup>50</sup> “Scarcity is not a common disaster that the whole world faces; it is Mozi’s personal concern and a mistake in judgment.”<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, rulers should use grand musical performance, beautiful spectacle, and exquisite tastes to delight and enhance themselves and to convey authority:

The former kings . . . understood that in the matter of being a lord and superior to others, a lack of beautiful things and ornamentation will leave one incapable of uniting the people, a lack of wealth and generous endowments will leave one incapable of managing one’s subordinates, and a lack of strength and the power to inspire awe will leave one incapable of stopping those who are violent and overcoming those who are brutal. Thus, former kings were sure to strike great bells, beat sounding drums, blow on reeds and pipes, and play lyres and zithers in order to fill up their ears. They were sure to have carving, polishing, engraving and inlay, insignias and ornamentation in order to fill up their eyes. They were sure to have fine meats and good grains, the five flavors and various spices in order to fill up their mouths.<sup>52</sup>

That is to say, the rulers and the ruled, rich worthies and poor commoners, should be distinguished by their pleasures and their clothing, food, lodgings, and conduct. This contrasted with Mozi’s demand for equalized consumption, a leveling of society, and a retreat to greater frugality, which would have led society into poverty and chaos: “Esteeming frugality will lead to a rise in poverty and, although fighting is rejected, there will be increasing conflict.”<sup>53</sup> This clearly expresses the broader vision of an exploitative ruling class that was in the ascendancy and was benefiting from increased production and rising living standards. In both theory and practice, such an approach better suited the needs of that time.

### **Mohist Thought Has Not Disappeared**

Since the Qin and Han dynasties, Mohist thought and its representations have gradually faded from the scene, and no similar doctrines or groups emerged in later times. This was largely because, although the artisans and farmers that constituted the small producers and workers

continued to exist in large numbers for some time, there was never again the atmosphere of social and ideological freedom that arose with the collapse of the patriarchal clan system during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Particularly after the elevation of Confucian norms and the Eastward spread of Buddhism, the culture of the small producers and workers lagged behind, isolated and limited, as they remained bound up in their own small worlds for generations. While under the control and direction of the governing social ideology it was difficult for them to produce another thinker or school comparable to Mozi.

As a result, only when society fractured and there was intense conflict between classes, involving a demand to clearly demarcate the struggle between classes, and with each class striving to express the consciousness, guiding principles and slogans constitutive of their own interests and ideals, could such a movement appear and put forward an agenda. This was usually during times of rural unrest and rebellions. Rural uprisings usually involved all manner of manual workers and artisans, and because they were disciplined and had structured training (including mentor-mentee relations, professional occupations, and so on), so they often formed the backbone and leadership of the revolts.

Chinese history features frequent and large-scale agricultural rebellions and conflicts. However, many of the writings pertaining to them are lost and the ideologies that drove them cannot be known. Furthermore, since many were conducted recklessly, with poor administration forcing the people to rebel, there was not necessarily time or opportunity to offer a thought-out account of the rebellion. Despite these issues, and incomplete though the historical materials might be, it is still possible to discern in them that these rebellions showed a close affinity with several of Mozi's ideas described previously.<sup>54</sup>

An early example is the uprising of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang after the death of the First Emperor of Qin, summarized by Chen Sheng's well-known slogan "Are kings and nobles given their high status by birth?"<sup>55</sup> This is not especially profound, but it could be considered equivalent to Mozi's statement that "Officials are not always noble, and the common people are not forever base."<sup>56</sup> Mozi's idea suggests that, in times of peace, the worthy should be raised up, and that worthy and capable individuals could also be found among so-called base people, who could be given responsibility. Cheng and Wu's claim suggests that, in times of turmoil, the same people could become generals or even emperors. In opposing the lack of opportunities to transcend class boundaries, and also fatalistic doctrines that suggested the nobility and wealthy were determined by cosmic forces, the language is the same in both cases.

A similar view is preserved in the scattered and fragments snippets of the Daoist text, the *Classic of the Great Peace* (*Taipingjing* 太平經): "Heaven has bestowed upon people good fortune, with all people able to

rely on their own efforts, and to clothe and feed themselves.”<sup>57</sup> Again and again, we find ideas of resistance such as:

The very wise oppose the bullying of those without sufficient, the strong oppose the bullying of the weak, and the young oppose the bullying of the old; all act take a stand in opposition, and Heaven will readily support them.<sup>58</sup>

Such attitudes can be linked to Mozi’s advocating of ‘effort’ and ‘impartial care.’<sup>59</sup> Although the *Classic of Great Peace* quickly became an orthodox text, used by the ruling class to punish the bad and reward the good, and to cultivate the way and pursue immortality, it nevertheless contained elements linked to rural uprisings (such as Zhang Jiao [ob. 184] and the Yellow Turban Rebellion).

The common ideology of successive agricultural revolts and wars all featured an anthropomorphic deity (also known as ‘Heaven’s will’ or *tianyi* 天意). This transcended nature and served as a commanding force, providing evidence and support that rationalized and legitimated the uprisings. It also played a role in the formation of organized groups, the creation of a common will, and maintaining discipline. Rural uprisings often opposed corrupt officials and lent popular support to virtuous public servants and rulers, and even strove for universal care, equality, and sharing the burdens of hardship. But they also supported or even demanded distinctions in class and social standing, which had much in common with the preceding noted contradiction in Mozi’s thought. Although most of the rural uprisings were under the banner of Daoism or Buddhism, and paid no attention to Mozi, this was because they knew little of him and he was neither a spirit nor a Buddha.

It is true that some of the ideas propagated during the rural revolts and wars were more radical and drastic than Mozi’s. Those undertaking large-scale executions, for example, could hardly claim to be against war; and the equal distribution of land and wealth was an idea not found in the Mozi. Also, Confucianism, the dominant ideology from the Han dynasty onward, also opposed too great a disparity between rich and poor, and spoke of broad concern. It also discussed divine fate, with the more mystical Eastern Han Confucianism believing in divine signs of ordination as a basis for political authority, and these ideas also influenced rural revolts. However, during rural uprisings, religious faith and that spirit of concern were mainly expressed as a unified will (*tongyi yizhi* 統一意志), and a plan to mobilize the masses and gain strength through organization; and such goals were implemented directly by groups engaged in revolt battles. This is all quite different from the Confucian position, and is closer to the distinctive elements of the Mohist thought.

This characteristic was seen most strikingly during the establishment of Taiping heavenly Kingdom (*Taiping Tianguo* 太平天國) during the

Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s. A humanized Christian god was granted the highest authority, ruling over humans and worldly affairs. A millenarian kingdom was to bring about the ideal of heavenly peace on Earth. The rebellion's proposed political program would, "Ensure the realm enjoyed the great blessings of the heavenly father and emperor. Fields should be accessible to all, food shared among all, and clothing available to all. Money is for public use, equality is to be everywhere, and no person should live hungry or cold."<sup>60</sup>

They also emphasized principles governing human relationships and broad ethical concern, such as, "There are many men in the empire who can form generations of brothers; and there are many women who can form sisterhoods."<sup>61</sup> Simply put, standing before a common deity, people were to care for each other and uphold equality. They should work together, enjoying what they have and with enough clothing and food, and in a world at peace. This basic outlook seems still closely linked to the Mozi, as the following passage suggests:

Heaven desires to have men find benefit and love one another, and is loathe for them to hate and harm one another. . . . All states in the world, large or small, are settlements of Heaven, and all people, young or old, honored or humble, are its agents.<sup>62</sup>

The thinking and actions of the Taiping Rebellion, which came more than 2,000 years later, was far more extreme, concrete, and complete than the Mozi. What was particularly striking during this time of war was that universal love required shared suffering and that struggle was opposed to fatalism. However, what astonished even their opponents was the call to, "to treat the amassing of men as a skill, to use the willingness to face death as a technique, able to endure hardship and hunger . . . those who die do so willingly, those who cross rivers do so willingly, and those who climb mountains do so willingly."<sup>63</sup> This, too, is comparable to such classical commentary as, "Mozi's recruits numbered 180 and all would walk into fire or step on knives; even in death they would not turn back"<sup>64</sup> or "Taking one's own toil to be the highest achievement. . . . Battered and worn (his person) might be, but he does not give up."<sup>65</sup>

The significance of such comparisons lies not in the arbitrary selection of superficially similar phenomena, but how they collectively display the shared characteristics of a single class (workers)—something that was more difficult to do with the higher echelons of society. That said, however, equality and universal love were merely utopian; a strict class-based system was the reality. The Taiping heavenly Kingdom, particularly after Nanjing became its capital, featured all manner of class-based rule, autocratic governance, asceticism, anti-capitalist fantasies, and religious superstition. These showed some points of similarity with Mohist views on heaven's will, ghosts, frugality, and promoting the worthy. These

similarities were not random and superficial. Admittedly, the thought of Taiping Rebellion leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864) did not derive directly from Mozi and, setting aside the ideas taken from the Christian missionaries, arguably has closer ties to Confucianism.<sup>66</sup> However, what matters most is its spirit or essence. This is found in the distinctive ideology of the great mass of lower class laborers, and includes both their strengths and weaknesses.

If the Mohist school had never existed, then large-scale rural rebellions and conflicts would not have been as frequent. That said, small producers and laborers would still have been a constant fixture of history, and this social foundation meant that certain ideas, practices, and forms of organization resembling the Mohists consistently appeared during the long history of secret underground societies. These involved codes of personal loyalty, fastidiousness about promises and oaths, the enactment of universal care, as well as ideals such as fording boiling water and marching over fire. For example, in the classic novel *The Water Margin*, the heroes of Mount Liang faced adversity together, called each other brother, valued hierarchy and personal status, and admired capable officials. There were many other developments and events that indirectly revealed Mohist influence and, as a result, discussion of the transmission and influence of Mozi's ideas is a complicated affair.

Simply speaking, the transmission of Mohist thought can be characterized in two ways. First, it was absorbed into the dominant social and political ideology. Many Mohist ideas such as practical benefit and the emphasis on effort seeped into or were integrated into Legalist and Confucian thinking. Both Mohism and Confucianism emerged from the backdrop of ancient clan traditions, and both affirmed the clan system and its protocols. Both were extremely active in the areas of human affairs, and the political and economic realms. Both emphasized the goodness of fathers and the filial conduct of sons, the appropriate virtues between older and younger brothers, and both advocated using the worthy and employing the capable. The difference was that the Confucians proceeded from the standpoint of clan and nobility, wherein differences in rank and class were prominent, emphasized culture based on ritual and music, emphasized the value of the individual, and sought to maintain the Zhou social system.

The Mohists, however, began from the small producers and workers in the lower strata of society, opposed decadent consumption, and condemned anything that did not contribute to productivity; they also valued mutual help within a collective, held on to the fantasy of a world of universal love, and demanded the reinstatement of Xia dynasty forms of government. However, both are very different to Daoism, which completely rejected the clan system, and sought a return to a more ancient and animal-like world that rejected all artifice, culture, and order, and took a very passive attitude toward human affairs. They were also different



from the Legalists, who directly represented the interests of the ruling class, and from those schools that propagated certain technical doctrines or political policies found in the upper echelons of society but lacking in practical grounding—such as the School of Names, the Yin-Yang Theorists or the Political Strategists. Wang Zhong was correct when he wrote of Mozi that, “among the nine ancient schools of thought, only the Confucians could really compete with him; none of the other philosophers could compare.”<sup>67</sup> As a result of these shared origins and characteristics, Confucians did not have to exert too much energy in absorbing many of the ideas and concepts in the Mozi. Han Yu wrote:

The Confucians ridiculed the Mohist ideas of esteeming superiors, impartial care, elevating the worthy, and their belief in ghosts and spirits. But Confucius respected those who served in office, and would not speak ill of the ministers of the state he resided in, and only autocratic ministers of the Spring and Autumn period were ridiculed—isn't this 'esteeming superiors'? Confucius cared for the population and embodied humaneness and appropriateness in one's conduct, whereby sageliness consisted in offering extensive relief to the masses. Isn't this 'impartial caring'? Confucius valued individual talent, and used virtuous conduct, speech, governance and culture to praise and direct students, and when a person died but their name was not celebrated this was considered shameful. Isn't this 'elevating the worthy'? Confucius advocated that the performance of rites to ancestors should be done with reverence, as if those ancestors were present; he ridiculed those who paid only lip-service when performing the rites. Isn't this acknowledging the existence of ghosts and spirits? Confucians and Mohists both affirmed Yao and Shun, and both condemned the tyrant rulers Jie and Zhou. Both took self-cultivation and having the correct state of mind as the basis for governing the empire. Why is this mutuality not recognized? [. . .] Confucius inevitably makes use of Mohist ideas and Mozi similarly makes use of Confucian ideas.<sup>68</sup>

Han Yu, as a guardian of orthodoxy, was famous for upholding the way of Confucius and Mencius and rejecting Buddhist heterodoxy, so it might appear strange that he held such a view of Mozi. Of course, Han Yu exaggerated the commonalities between Confucius and Mozi, and he failed to mention those things that directly conflict with Confucian ideas such as Mozi's condemnation of music and of ritual. Nevertheless, Confucius and Mozi do have this common ground, and ideas such as elevating the worthy, frugality, condemning warfare, universal love, and esteeming superiors can readily serve as a basis for dialogue between Confucians and Mohists. It also possible to find commonalities with Confucians (such as Dong Zhongshu) regarding the will of heaven or the

recognition of spirits and ghosts. This is because in a world of small-scale agricultural production all levels of society could accept these practices and ideas. But class differences set the limits for such mutual absorption and sharing. Han Yu's claim that "broad caring (*bo ai* 博愛) is humaneness (*ren*)"<sup>69</sup> should not be taken as equivalent to Mozi's impartial care. *Ren* is grounded in the intimate and respectful Confucian family, where love consists of distinctions and gradations, and is only then broadened outward. Furthermore, Mohist egalitarian ideas, such as eroding distinctions (*qin chadeng* 侵差等), viewing things in terms of equality (*youjian yuji* 有見於齊), and making rulers and ministers alike work hard, and their countercultural ascetic thought and practices, were rejected by the Confucians who represented the upper classes of society.

The second characteristic of the transmission of Mohist thought is arguably more significant than the first. It concerns those Mohist ideas that go beyond what was accepted by orthodox Confucians and were criticized or rejected by them, but which sometimes appeared in the thought of unorthodox Confucian figures. These figures and ideas illustrated what heterodox Confucian thought could accommodate, and were what made it unorthodox. 'Unorthodox' meant reflecting to some extent the viewpoint, ideas, feelings and trends of small producers and laborers that were more worthy of attention.

Consider the early Qing thinker Yan Yuan, whose assumed name was Xi Zhai (习斋), which served to emphasize the character 习 (*xi*). This typically means 'learning' or 'study.' However, *xi* did not refer to the cultural study and learning valued by orthodox Confucianism; rather it indicated practical training and ability associated with physical activity and artistic training. "Xi Zhai's teaching consisted in resisting desires, arduous effort, serving the family and nourishing one's kin; and beyond this, in studying the six arts and being versed in current social affairs."<sup>70</sup>

Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704) himself had personal experience of agricultural work: "I earnestly undertake farming duties, and am too busy to eat or sleep; evil thoughts are far from my mind and do arise within me."<sup>71</sup> He wanted to use such physical exercises (including all kinds of physical artistic training) to rework Song Neo-Confucianism. He repeatedly emphasized that all things require one to make an effort: "We must only approach matters through practice and physical cultivation, and not simply put our energies into words and letters";<sup>72</sup> "The more one reads, the more the confusion grows; the more one examines things, the less one knows; the more one deals with financial affairs, the less one's strength";<sup>73</sup> "Those who study are dim-witted, and the more they study, the more dim-witted they are";<sup>74</sup> "As for equating lots of reading with learning, such learning was why the sages disappeared."<sup>75</sup>

Yan Yuan's emphasis on practical skills and the empirical reminds us of Mozi. Mozi also wrote that, "Though the scholar has learning, it is action that is the root"<sup>76</sup> and "Words must bring trust and actions must

bear fruit; the union of words and action is like joining the halves of the tally, and there is no word that is not realized in action.”<sup>77</sup> It is no surprise that some historians of Chinese philosophy believe, “Yan Yuan’s practical epistemology appears to be Confucian on the surface, but is in fact a revival of Mozi’s practical learning.”<sup>78</sup>

In his social theory, Yan Yuan staunchly opposed the Confucian idea of valuing righteousness or justice above material benefit. He believed that, “In understanding justice in terms of material benefit, the sages and men of virtue were fair, just and reasonable. The material benefits at the heart of justice are what the noble man values. It was a mistake of later Confucians to talk of being upright about matters of justice or appropriateness and not seek practical benefit,”<sup>79</sup> and “In this world, is there anyone who ploughs and sows but does not seek a crop? Is there anyone who shoulders nets and carries hooks but who does not seek to catch fish?”<sup>80</sup> Such views start from the material reality of productive life, and they are similar to how Mozi’s moral framework and ethical principles—including his accounts of humaneness, justice, and universal love—were founded upon practical material benefits in everyday life.

Yan Yuan placed special emphasis on ritual and etiquette, imbuing them with spiritual or quasi-religious qualities. His ideas about the equitable distribution of land showed some similarities to Mozi’s religious beliefs and the utopian fantasy of universal love. Yan wrote, “When thinking of the fields, shouldn’t people be able to enjoy and benefit from them together? Can a father or mother seek to make just one child wealthy while leaving all the others poor?”<sup>81</sup> Yan Yuan’s promotion of learning and work, his emphasis on practicality, equality and economy, reviving the old, as well as his fierce attack on the empty rhetoric of the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians regarding patterning or principle (*li* 理), gave him a special place in the populist intellectual movements during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in China. He was neither a committed orthodox neo-Confucian like Wang Fuzhi or Gu Yanwu, nor someone with a more modern approach to reformist ideas, such as Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–95), Tang Zhen 唐甄 (1630–1704), and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–77). Rather, Yan was somewhat fixated on the ancients, held a narrow view of things, and focused on direct experience and pragmatic values while being hard-working and industrious. His theoretical approach was thus characteristic of small-scale producers and laborers. His theory, practice and school of thought were the same as Mozi’s, and did not last long before disappeared. “The practical school of Yan Yuan and Li Gong 李塉 (1659–1733) was organized with justice (*yi*) as the highest value. But it could not avoid the kind of worry that Zhuangzi had raised about Mozi: that such a *dao* was frightful and that the world could not bear it”; “Yan’s way was too arduous and, as with the Mohists, few took it up and it soon disappeared.”<sup>82</sup>

Moving forward a few hundred years, Mozi was once again rediscovered in modern China. The first edition of the late Qing revolutionary

periodical *Minbao* overlooked Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi, and raised up Mozi as China's great teacher of equality and universal love. It also featured an illustration of Mozi himself. Even Liang Qichao was moved to declare that "Yangism (the egoistic philosophy of Yang Zhu 楊朱) has destroyed the country, and if we desire to save it, we must return to the works of Mozi."<sup>83</sup> At that time and later, there was great interest in the Mohists and their doctrines, and the historical figure of Mozi was popular for a time. From late Qing, when interpretations of Mohist thought were bound up with the arrival of acoustic and electronic media, to the pro-Mozi Marxist revolutionary Du Guoxiang, many important scholars of the modern era discussed Mozi.<sup>84</sup> Mozi has been granted a stream of auspicious titles, such as 'Great Thinker of the Common People' or 'Philosopher of the Working Class,' and some have called this 'the revival of Mohism.'<sup>85</sup> Yan Yuan was also revered during the same period.

Of course, the revival of Yan Yuan's (and Li Gong's) philosophical movement was not the direct result of its Mohist content. In his book *Qiu Shu* [*Book Written in Oppression*], late Qing thinker Zhang Binglin paid great homage to Yan, propelling him to an unprecedented and prominent position as a great thinker in the tradition of Xunzi.<sup>86</sup> Later, in the era of the Northern warlords, Xu Shichang 徐世昌 (1855–1939) also revered the work of Yan and Li, and when John Dewey (1859–1952) visited China many people held up Yan Yuan as an example of pragmatism. In recent decades there have been many studies of Yan's work, all praising him as a materialistic philosopher.

Few of those works, however, address the dualistic nature of Yan's work as described earlier; and even fewer attend to the somewhat anachronistic aspects of his thought. Contemporary scholar Tu Weiming pointed out that Yan Yuan held some obscure views. These include an ahistorical view of world events and a view of rites and ceremony as religious matters, which meant he was inclined to be reactionary and against science, and therefore is better described as a conservative. In this regard, Tu captures the basic contours of Yan's work more accurately than many other writers.<sup>87</sup> However, Tu fails to bring out the origins of Yan's most characteristic ideas or lay bare their foundation—namely, the historically rooted characteristics of China's small-scale producers and workers. I believe identifying these characteristics is important, and this chapter has attempted to connect these with Mozi, while treating them as an important element in the history of Chinese thought. Yet despite this, Yan Yuan himself claimed to be a Neo-Confucian who passed on the Confucian way.

The reason why I move from Mozi to these issues is because of the significant revival of interest in Mohism and Yan Yuan's ideas in recent years. Of course, praise for Mozi and Yan Yuan arose against a background of all manner of issues and considerations. For example, Mohism

has been misunderstood as a form of modern egalitarianism and universal love. The most important question here, however, is whether or not Mohist thought belongs to the same lineage as modern democratic populism.

Throughout modern Chinese history, up to the present, I believe there has always been a vibrant undercurrent of populist thought whose foundations can be traced to small agricultural producers and workers. Due to differences in world history (such as Marxism defeating democratic populism in Russia), this current of Chinese populist thought was unable to undergo independent development, as populism had in Russia. It failed to develop a thorough and systematic theoretical basis, a clear political program, common institutions and an effective social movement. In contrast, Russian populism, for example, once gave rise to a campaign for intellectuals to return to the countryside to be among the people. Nevertheless, this kind of populist thought has been absorbed, both explicitly and implicitly, into modern Chinese politics and the intellectual milieu, and with great effect. This is particularly so with intellectuals who had close ties to the land, or with thinkers or politicians who were steeped in rural life and consciously or unconsciously expressed this through their lives. Such populism even entered the thinking of those who were supposedly Marxist revolutionaries.

In some essays in my *History of Modern Chinese Thought* [*Zhongguo Jindai Sixiang Shilun*], I made a similar point, and offered Zhang Binglin as a paradigmatic example. According to Lenin's classic formulation, the primary feature of populism was that it reflects traditional and hierarchically structured farming communities' resistance to, and desire to avoid, a future defined by capitalism. They were small-scale producers with a rich past but no future, who opposed and resisted capitalism. They opposed exploitation and oppression, capitalist economics, politics, thought and culture, as well as a decadent consumerist lifestyle. They often viewed the labor, morality, and religion of small-scale producers as a means of resistance, or as contemporary weapons for use against corruption. Their social ideal was often an egalitarian utopia, and their epistemology was usually a narrow practical empiricism, which stressed personal acquaintance, praxis, implementation, and endurance, and which placed little value on mediated or secondhand knowledge, abstract thought, reading, or theory.<sup>88</sup>

Zhang Binglin disliked capitalism and wanted to preserve the 'primitive perfection' (*yuanshi de yuannan* 原始的圓滿) of the old society. He advocated using religion to inspire trust and to boost the people's moral character, and he opposed the economic development that came with modernization, as well as government by representatives of the capitalist class. In response, Zhang proposed a kind of nihilistic escapism.

Admittedly, Mozi, Yan Yuan, and Zhang Binglin appear to lack an obvious connection. Zhang Binglin, for example, did not entirely approve

of Mozi.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, these thinkers are connected in the inner workings of their ideas. In addition, many others besides Zhang Binglin were also influenced by the Mohists, from great revolutionaries to well-known conservatives. This includes Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988)—even though he appeared to oppose Mozi. Though approaching things from a different starting point or in different ways, all shared in this connection with the Mohists. Indeed, the ideas and events integral to this viewpoint are those that China—as a country founded on a long tradition of small-scale producers and workers, too numerous to count, and characterized by peasant-led revolution—manifests clearly and so should not be considered strange.

More recently in China, the adoption of the viewpoint of small-scale production to resist contemporary thought or trends in society has occurred in various guises and contexts. The viewpoint retains great force, elicits widespread response, and resonates in the minds of many. Thus, it cannot be taken lightly. Even so, however, it was of little use on the path to modernization that China embarked upon. Farmers and skilled artisans had already broken through the economic barriers facing small-scale producers, and moved toward modern forms of life and production, remaking themselves in the process. This leads to pertinent and important questions. These include how to self-consciously and appropriately analyze this mode of thought that has such deep roots in the tradition (for example, what view of society follows from Mozi's three main pillars of thought?). Furthermore, we must also assess its strengths and weaknesses. For example, Mozi's belief in ghosts and autocratic rule should not blind us to how this view benefited the workers (as Guo Moruo pointed out); but nor should it blind us to how it was bound up with great failings of the small-scale producers. Hence, we must thoughtfully confront its two-sided nature and explore both sides with rigor. In this way, there is value in viewing Mozi as an archetypal mode of thought, located in the long flow of history and grounded in a secure base, and thus treating him as a subject still worthy of investigation. I invite readers to consider these questions further.<sup>90</sup>

## Notes

1. The character *mo* 墨 originally referred to the black ink marker of a carpenter. See Qiu Shi 求是, "Jinshi zakao" 經史雜考 [Miscellaneous Studies in the Histories], *Xuexi yu ikao* 學習與思考 [Study and Thought] 6 (1986): 36.
2. "Condemnation of Music I," *Mozi jiangou*, 8.256. All Mozi quotations are based on Y. P. Mei's, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1929; rpt. Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1973). Some quotations have been modified for clarity or accuracy.
3. "The Seven Causes of Anxiety," section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 1.25.
4. "Against Fatalism III," *Mozi jiangou*, 9.283–4.
5. "Condemnation of Music I," *Mozi jiangou*, 8.251.
6. "Against Fatalism III," *Mozi jiangou*, 9.282–3.

7. "Condemnation of Music I," *Mozi jiangou*, 8.256.
8. "Lu's Questions," *Mozi jiangou*, 13.473.
9. "Exalting the Worthy II," section 1, *Mozi jiangou*, 2.55.
10. "Impartial Caring III," section 9, *Mozi jiangou*, 4.123.
11. "Exalting the Worthy I," section 6, *Mozi jiangou*, 2.46.
12. "Exalting the Worthy II," section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 2.50.
13. "Economy of Expenditure II," sections 3 and 4, *Mozi jiangou*, 6.162, 164.
14. "Condemning Music I," section 1, *Mozi jiangou*, 8.250.
15. *Ibid.*, section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 8.251.
16. "Exaltation of the Virtuous II," section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 2.50.
17. *Ibid.*
18. "Simplicity in Funerals III," section 11, *Mozi jiangou*, 6.176.
19. *Ibid.*, section 12, *Mozi jiangou*, 6.188.
20. "Against Fatalism I," section 6, *Mozi jiangou*, 9.272.
21. "Against Fatalism III," section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 9.278.
22. "The Seven Causes of Anxiety," section 3, *Mozi jiangou*, 1.28.
23. *Ibid.*
24. "The Will of Heaven III," sections 6–7, *Mozi jiangou*, 7.215.
25. Mozi opposed the Confucian three-year mourning period and believed it would hinder sexual relations between men and women ("Simplicity in Funerals III," section 5), thereby interfering with the desired increase in population.
26. "Impartial Caring III," section 10, *Mozi jiangou*, 4.124.
27. "Befriending the Learned," section 6, *Mozi jiangou*, 1.5.
28. Mozi also provides a diagnosis of the problem: "Suppose we try to locate the cause of disorder, we shall find it lies in the want of mutual love. . . . The thief loves only his own family and not other families, and steals from other families to profit his own family. He loves only his own person and not others, as the robber does violence to others to profit himself. . . . The minister loves only his own house and not the others, and so disturbs the other houses to profit his own. The feudal lords love only their own states and not those of others, and so attack the other states to profit their own. All of the chaotic events of the world arise from this cause" ("Impartial Caring I," *Mozi jiangou*, 4.98–99).
29. "Impartial Caring III," *Mozi jiangou*, 4.119.
30. See *Liji zhengyi*, 21.769a.
31. "Impartial Caring II," *Mozi jiangou*, 4.102.
32. "The Will of Heaven I," *Mozi jiangou*, 7.194.
33. "Impartial Caring III," *Mozi jiangou*, 4.115.
34. "Honoring the Worthy III," *Mozi jiangou*, 2.70.
35. "Heaven's Will II," *Mozi jiangou*, 7.206.
36. "Heaven's Will III," *Mozi jiangou*, 7.208.
37. "On Ghosts III," sections 1 and 11, *Mozi jiangou*, 8.220, 235.
38. "Geng Zhu," section 2, *Mozi jiangou*, 11.422.
39. "Against Offensive War III," section 1, *Mozi jiangou*, 5.139–40.
40. "Esteeming Superiors I," section 4, *Mozi jiangou*, 3.75.
41. *Ibid.*, section 5, *Mozi jiangou*, 3.75.
42. *Ibid.*, section 6, *Mozi jiangou*, 3.75.
43. Esteeming Superiors III, section 8, *Mozi jiangou*, 3.95.
44. *Mencius*, 3B14.
45. *Zhuangzi*, "All under Heaven," in Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896), *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2012), 10b.1075.
46. *Xunzi*, "Undoing Fixation," in Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1917), *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1988), 15.392.
47. *Xunzi*, "Discourse on Heaven," *Xunzi jijie*, 11.319–20.

48. *Xunzi*, “Enriching the State,” *Xunzi jijie*, 6.185–86.
49. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 BCE–ca. 86 BCE), “Grand Historian’s Preface,” *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1959), 130.3289, 3290–1.
50. *Xunzi*, “Enriching the State,” *Xunzi jijie*, 6.187.
51. *Ibid.*, 6.185.
52. *Ibid.*, 6.186.
53. *Ibid.*, 6.188.
54. Intellectual historian Hou Wailu 侯外廬 (1903–1987) notes, “I think that the slogans of these Chinese agricultural conflicts can be traced back to the later years of the Warring States, and a rule put forward by a lowly religious group, a branch of the Mo-Xia school. As the *Lüshi Lüshi Chunqiu* records, those who kill others must die, those who harm others are punished, and this is a rule of Mozi. Previously, few scholars have paid attention to this.” Hou Wailu, “My Research on Chinese Social History” [*Wodui zhongguo shehuishi de yanjiu*], *Lishi yanjiu* [Journal of Historical Research] 3 (1984): 25. I think, however, that in interpreting this as “a call to raise the banner for individual rights,” Hou applies an anachronistic modern frame of reference and loses sight of the key characteristics of Mozi’s views.
55. Recorded in Sima Qian’s, *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記), “House of Chen She” (陳涉世家) chapter in the “Genealogies” (世家) section.
56. “Exaltation of the Virtuous I,” section 6, *Mozi jiangou*, 2.46.
57. Wang Ming 王明 (1911–1992), *Taipingjing hejiao* [A Reconstruction of the Classic of Great Peace] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1960), 242.
58. *Taipingjing hejiao*, 695.
59. Qing Xitai 卿希泰 (1928–2017) writes, “The ideas of the *Classic of Great Peace* were an extension of related ideas in the *Mozi*. Mohist teachings were one of the sources of Daoist religious thought.” See *A History of Daoist Religious Thought in China* [*Zhongguo daojiao sixiang shigang* 中國道教思想史綱] (Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Press, 1980), vol. 1, 129–31. See also Wang Ming’s, *A Study in Daoist Thought and Religion* [*Daojia he daojiao sixiang yanjiu* 道家 and 道教思想研究] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1984), 99–107.
60. “Tianchao Tianmiao Zhidu” 天朝天廟制度 [Heavenly Land System], in *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan: Taiping tianguo* 中國近代史資料叢刊-太平天國, edited by Wang Chongmin 王重民, Wang Hui’an 王會庵, and Tian Yuqing 田餘慶 (Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguang she 神州國光社, 1952), vol. 1, 321; this was a policy manifesto issued by the leaders of the rebellion about the establish of Nanjing as the capital of the kingdom.
61. *Yuandao Xingshi Xun* [Instruction on the Original Dao to Awaken the World]; a text written by Taiping Rebellion leader Hong Xiuquan. See “Taiping zhaoshu” 太平詔書, in *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan: Taiping tianguo*, vol. 1, 92.
62. “Necessity of Standards,” sections 3–4, *Mozi jiangou*, 1.22.
63. Zhang Dejian, “*Zeiqing huizuan*” [Report on the State of the Enemy], in *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan: Taiping tianguo* 中國近代史資料叢刊-太平天國, vol. 3, 159.
64. He Ning, ed., *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1998), “Taizuxun,” section 17, 20.1406.
65. “Tianxia,” section 2, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 10B.1077, 1080.
66. The thought of Hong Xiuquan and the rural uprisings do not directly come from Mozi but are connected to the Mohists. This simply confirms the fundamental strengths of this kind of thought.
67. Wang Zhong 汪中 (1744–1794), “Preface to the *Mozi*,” in *Shuxue jiaojian* 述學校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2014), 232.



68. Han Yu, “On Mozi,” in *Hanyu wenji huijiao jianzhu* 韓愈文集彙校箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2010), 1.126.
69. Han Yu, *Yuandao* (原道) [The Origin of Dao]. See Philip J. Ivanhoe, *On Ethics and History: Essays and Letters of Zhang Xuezheng* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 133.
70. Fang Bao 方苞 (1668–1749), “Li Gang zhumu zhiming” [Epitaph for Li Gang’s Tomb], in *Fang Wangxi Quanji* 方望溪全集 [The Collected Works of Fang Bao] (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 10.121.
71. Yan Yuan, *Yan Yuan ji* 顏元集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1987), 624.
72. *Ibid.*, 663.
73. *Ibid.*, 252.
74. *Ibid.*, 168.
75. *Ibid.*, 169.
76. “Self-Cultivation,” *Mozi jiangou*, 1.7.
77. “Impartial Caring III,” *Mozi jiangou*, 4.116. Contrast this quote with *Analects* 13.10: “They are determined to be sincere in what they say, and to carry out what they do. They are petty people.”
78. Hou Wailu 侯外廬, ed., *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史 [Overview of the History of Chinese Thought] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1980), vol. 5, 374.
79. Yan Yuan, *Yan Yuan ji*, 163.
80. *Ibid.*, 671.
81. *Ibid.*, 103.
82. Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), *Qingdai Xueshu Gailun* 清代學術概論 [Introduction to the Learning of the Qing Dynasty] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 22, 19.
83. Liang Qichao, “Zimozi Xueshuo” 子墨子學說 [The Ideas of Mozi], in *Liang Qichao lun zhuzi baijia* 梁啟超論諸子百家 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2012), 243.
84. See the “Afterword,” in Guo Moruo’s, *Shipipanshu* [Ten Books of Criticism], 408–29.
85. See Fang Shouchu’s 方授楚 (1898–1956), *Moxue Yuanliu* 墨學源流 [The Origin and Development of Mohist Thought] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Publishing, 1937; rpt, Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2015), 218–36.
86. Also known as Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936).
87. Tu Weiming, “Yen Yuan: From Inner Experience to Lived Concreteness,” in *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 186–215.
88. Several theories and practices that arose during China’s Cultural Revolution pushed this approach to its extreme.
89. See his short piece “Daohan weiyao” [Subtle Words of the Great Han nation].
90. Originally published in the journal *Xuexi yu sikao* [Study and Thought], 5 (1984): 65–75.

### 3 Sunzi, Laozi, and Han Fei

Rumor has it that Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) once declared the *Laozi* to be a book of military strategy, and historically this question has aroused much debate.<sup>1</sup> In the Tang dynasty, Wang Zhen 王真 (fl. 809) wrote, “5000 words and not a single section that does not touch on military matters.”<sup>2</sup> In his commentary on the *Laozi*, Song essayist Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112) wrote, “When it comes to practical wisdom, Laozi is of a kind with Guan Zhong and Sunzi.”<sup>3</sup> Wang Fuzhi wrote, “Laozi learned from the military strategists” and “was the forefather of deception and cunning means.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Zhang Binglin declared that the text was likely a model for the Zhou military strategist texts *The Metal Tablets* (*Jinban* 金版) and *The Six Secret Teachings* (*Liutao* 六韜).<sup>5</sup>

Mao Zedong was a great military and political strategist, and the preceding comment reflects his own experience. My own view is that it is not clear whether the *Laozi* is simply a military text, but it is closely connected to the military strategists. The issue lies not in how skilled military men of later times made use of the text, but in how its own ideas might have their origins in military affairs. In the *Laozi*, the practical experience of military strategists was combined with historical observations and insights to produce a political and philosophical theory. Later these ideas evolved directly into political strategies for governing (as seen in Han Fei). This was a very important strand of ancient Chinese thought, due to its long-lasting influence on Chinese autocratic rule. It is also important for a theme that permeates human life and affairs—a sober and calm rational attitude, which left an indelible mark on the Chinese people.<sup>6</sup> This line of thought is thus an important component in the Chinese cultural and psychological formation (*wenbua-xinli jiegou* 文化心理結構).

#### The Features of the Military Strategists’ Dialectic

In my book *The Path of Beauty*, I suggested that China, from the middle of the neolithic period onwards had experienced endless savage and

complex warfare. “Since the time humans started to use wood to make weapons, has there ever been a time without war? Emperor Dahao confronted 70 wars before bringing order, the Yellow Emperor faced 52 wars; Emperor Shao Hao faced 48, while Kun Wu faced 50 wars before establishing order.”<sup>7</sup> The history books also contain records of the earliest conflicts, among which were battles between the Yellow and Yan Emperors, as well as battles between the Yellow Emperor and Chi You, leader of the ancient Nine Li tribal alliance (*Jiuli* 九黎). Since Chinese texts on war were so developed at an early date, it is still worth studying them several thousand years later, particularly because they were grounded in genuine experience of long, complex and savage wars. There are already many accounts of Sunzi’s *The Art of War*, so this work will focus more on the reasoning of the military strategists.

What was distinctive about this reasoning?

First, everything was based upon realistic assessments of benefit and harm, and no appeals to emotion or to the supernatural or divine will (*tianyi*) were allowed to interfere with rational judgment or planning:

No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique. If it is to your advantage, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are. Anger may in time change to gladness; vexation may be succeeded by contentment. But a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life. Hence the enlightened ruler is heedful, and the good general full of caution. (*The Art of War*, “Attack by Fire.”)<sup>8</sup>

What enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge. Now this foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by observation of astrological phenomena (*du* 度). Knowledge of the enemy’s dispositions can only be obtained from other men.<sup>9</sup>

Only during war, with its planning, strategizing, judgments of events, selection of weapons, and use of skills, can the highest human awareness and rational powers be most fully developed. Only then is the great value of sober, clear-sighted rational attitude made fully manifest. This is because interference from the emotions, superstition, or any kind of irrationality can have an immediate and catastrophic effect, irreversibly deciding matters of life or death. It was essential to ‘plan first and make war later’ (*xianji houzhàn* 先計後戰). Dealing with matters on the basis of emotion or seeking the guidance of spirits could result in the destruction of the state or clan and was extremely dangerous. Thus, the opening lines of the *Art of War* are, “The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or

to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.”<sup>10</sup> This is not something common in everyday life or indeed any other realm.

The second characteristic of this approach is the importance of observing, understanding and analyzing every relevant element and valuing acquired experience. Prosecuting war requires attention to human factors, timing, and geography. Geographic considerations include high or low strategic positions, distance, accessibility, and so forth. ‘Human factors’ include military leaders, orders, troops, strategy, and logistics. Furthermore, ‘knowing oneself’ must be accompanied by ‘knowing one’s adversary’:

If we know that our own men are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the enemy is not open to attack, we have gone only halfway towards victory. If we know that the enemy is open to attack, but are unaware that our own men are not in a condition to attack, we have gone only halfway towards victory. If we know that the enemy is open to attack, and also know that our men are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the nature of the ground makes fighting impracticable, we have still gone only halfway towards victory.<sup>11</sup>

In warfare there are no constant conditions, just as water retains no constant shape. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called spirit-like (*shen* 神).

(Ibid., “Weak Points and Strong Points”)<sup>12</sup>

To understand all details and to carefully attend to all circumstances is of the utmost importance in warfare. Discussing military matters only on paper was a great taboo for military strategists. Meaningless debate and speculation during war, as well as empty talk that solved nothing, were not permitted. More than anything else, the importance of concrete and practical thought stands out.

The third characteristic concerns relevance. Analysis of complex experience and careful attention to the actual circumstances confronting one were important to quickly grasp those points most relevant to the battle. This involved the skill of discerning what was relevant, thereby removing the danger of being misled by irrelevances:

When the enemy is close at hand and remains quiet, he is relying on the natural strength of his position. When he is distant and tries to provoke a battle, he is anxious for the other side to advance. . . . Movement amongst the trees of a forest shows that the enemy is advancing. The appearance of a number of screens in the midst of thick grass means that the enemy wants to make us suspicious. The rising

of birds in flight is the sign of an ambush. Startled beasts indicate that a sudden attack is coming.<sup>13</sup>

This appreciation of what is advantageous or disadvantageous to war, through recognition of relevant signs, is not a case of simply noticing the phenomena; rather it's about quickly grasping their implications for any act of war:

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when capable, we must seem incapable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.<sup>14</sup>

Humble words and increased preparations are signs that the enemy is about to advance. Violent language and driving forward as if to the attack are signs of retreat. . . . Peace proposals unaccompanied by a sworn covenant indicate a plot. When there is much running about and the soldiers fall into rank, it means that the critical moment has come. When some are seen advancing and some retreating, it is a lure.<sup>15</sup>

Such passages pay attention to the differences and contradictions between appearances and the actual states of affairs. This situation exists in everyday life and experience too, but only under conditions of warfare does its great importance and significance really stand out. The slightest carelessness can lead to the greatest of mistakes, with effects reaching far into the future.

Because of this, the thinking of the ancient military strategists during war involved more than induction based on bare experience and logical deduction. They also sought clarity about the purpose of their actions and the resulting benefits and harms; and they demanded careful and precise observation and clear understanding, untainted by emotions, which allowed them to quickly dispense with everything of secondary importance. Further, they avoided unnecessary or confusing regulation, and quickly and accurately distilled the essence and key points of the situation at hand. As a result of this approach, while carefully observing multiple and diverse phenomena, the military strategists sought a summative bipolar dialectic representation of events—this was a system of thought that grasped contradictions while quickly, accurately, and explicitly distinguishing important elements. This enabled them to grasp the larger picture and to make the requisite decisions. This style of thought—a kind binary analysis—used opposing and apparently contradictory categories to summarize a situation and quickly capture its key features. The *Art of War* contains many opposing categories, which form mutually opposed binary pairs. These include: enemy and friend, peace and war, victory and defeat, life and death, advantage and disadvantage, advance and retreat, strong and weak, attack and defense, active and resting, false and real, work and rest, hunger and satiation, many and one, courage

and cowardice, etc. Any situation or event can be recast in terms of these opposing terms, which is used to guide and inform strategy and action (whether that is advancing or retreating, attacking or defending, etc.). This is a method that relies not on induction or deduction but on more direct intuition; it is a style of thought that is simplified yet extremely effective. In ordinary experience, this kind of thinking usually remains unconscious or obscured, since in everyday life it is not always necessary to consciously employ this style of dichotomous thinking, or to apply it to every object in order to arrive at knowledge and action.<sup>16</sup>

This way of thinking using conflicting opposites was born from the experience of warfare, rather than in conceptual conflict generated by language and debate. As a result, it's concrete content and approach has maintained a strong connection with untutored everyday life, and retained the richness of lived experience. The many opposing paired terms contained in the *Art of War* are both extremely practical and wide-ranging. They are intimately connected with life experience, and capture the experience of struggling with life's many issues without resort to the intellectual abstractions found in debates constrained by language.

The fourth distinctive feature is as follows. This dialectical style of the military strategists was a way of gaining the knowledge necessary for wars that involved pressing issues of life and death. The aforementioned topics of careful observation, understanding, analysis, appraisal, reflection, and policymaking all arise in this context of such subjective acts (those involved in leading an army). Even natural phenomena such as topography are viewed from the vantage of whether or not they are beneficial to the war effort. Accordingly, when the other appears as an object of knowledge, it is not something calmly observed in a detached manner, but rather is attached to, and shared in, the subject's weals and woes; it is grasped by starting from the subject's own practical aims. It is not seen or treated as something stable, independent, and detached from the subject's interests and conduct.

This approach not only emphasizes the mutual dependence and interpenetration of these mutually opposed binary categories; even more important are the waxing and waning or flow between the two polarities, and how they can be proactively utilized:

Chaos is produced from order, cowardice is produced from courage, weakness emerges from strength.<sup>17</sup>

If he is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is superior in strength, evade him. If he is readily angered, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, so he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize, what matters is not merely discovering, describing, and understanding these contradictions or conflicts; it is about utilizing and

developing these conflicts, acting with the conditions, making flexible decisions, and transforming one's own conduct. It is about not being constrained by existing decisions or earlier accounts of the situation. "None of the five phases is constantly dominant, none of the four seasons is the constant standard."<sup>19</sup> In order to ensure that the enemy is ultimately defeated and oneself is preserved then, however objectionable it might seem, "Some roads must not be followed, some armies must be not attacked, some towns must not be besieged, some positions must not be contested, some commands of the sovereign can be disobeyed."<sup>20</sup> Later generations of military strategists often declared that, "As for skilful use of subtleties, this resides in being of one mind."<sup>21</sup> This is all quite different from the 'contradictions' and style of thought inherent in the detached observing of nature or in abstract reasoning and thought.

Generally speaking, I believe that if we are to correctly understand ancient China's conception of dialectical method, then we must understand why it had its own distinctive form, a form that can be traced back to the pre-Qin military strategists. They started from the simple and mysterious binary categories of primitive society, such as night and day, sun and moon, man and women, as well as the later categories of yin and yang, and enriched them, giving them grounding in ordinary life. Extracted from their mysterious or magical religious trappings, they ceased to be a simple and static account of events in the natural and human world. Instead, these categories became a simplified way of thinking about conduct in rapidly changing contexts, where subjective and objective merged in the question of "Who will defeat who?" This approach emphasized grasping the whole picture, concrete practicability, and involved dynamic activity that was also calm and rational. This is the distinctive core of Chinese dialectical thinking. It is distinct from ancient Greek dialectic, which emphasized debate, and constitutes an important element of Chinese practical rationality.

The *Art of War*, as we have seen, talks of military affairs that also touch upon politics. Military affairs are just a special form of political struggle, and the text is clear that the politics should control military affairs. Though the text discusses military affairs in many places, the real meaning lies beyond military issues, as these famous lines show:

To contest one hundred battles and win them all is not the height of excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. . . . Thus the highest military achievement is to attack the enemy's plans; the next best is to prevent alliances; the next is to attack the enemy's army in the field; and the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities. . . . Therefore the skilful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting, and he captures their cities without laying siege to them.<sup>22</sup>

Planning and strategy were more important than war; politics was more important than military matters; wise planning was more important than force; and human affairs were more important than heaven and Earth or ghosts and spirits. The thinking of the military strategists, as exemplified in the *Art of War*, came to constitute an intellectual tradition that was present in later periods in China. In the *Laozi*, in particular, this thinking is presented as a philosophical system. This is not to say that the *Laozi* is the direct heir of Sunzi or the military strategists (notably, some have claimed that the *Art of War* was produced in the Warring States period, after the *Laozi*), merely that some of its key ideas resemble those of the pre-Qin military strategists.<sup>23</sup>

### The Three Levels of the *Laozi*

The *Laozi* is an extremely complex and much-disputed text. Appraising and distinguishing the many different elements and the intricate relationships between them are greatly challenging, and more than this short work can achieve. Here, I can offer only a few exploratory comments, from the perspective of the Chinese dialectical method previously described.

In several places the *Laozi* explicitly mentioned military matters, and these appear to be a direct extension of what is found in the *Art of War*:

Wanting to weaken another, he will first strengthen him; wanting to overthrow another, he will first raise him up; wanting to depose another, he will first solidify him.<sup>24</sup>

Those who are good officials do not wage war; those who are good at waging war are not belligerent, those who are good at vanquishing their enemies, do not join issue.<sup>25</sup>

There is a saying about using the military: I would not think of going on the offensive but only of holding my ground; I would not think of advancing an inch but only of giving up a foot.<sup>26</sup>

One scholar has written that, “The second half of the *Laozi* (the so-called *Dejing*) explicitly discusses military affairs and strategy; in summarizing the rules of warfare it develops these into a view of social history and of how to live. The first half of the text (the *Daojing*) provides a theoretical framework for thinking about military affairs and strategy, and also provides a justification for elevating this to a kind of cosmology and worldview.”<sup>27</sup> However, this rather overstates the issue.

The Daoist school lineage presumably emerges from scholar officials, and is a historical record of the *dao* or the way of success and failure, preservation and loss, the auspicious and inauspicious, and the past and present. Later its essence was understood as a call to preserve oneself through refinement and non-aggression, and to sustain



oneself through humility and remaining lowly. This was the art of the South-facing ruler.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, all that can be said is that the *Laozi's* dialectical method absorbed, preserved, and extended many of the military strategists' ideas; but we cannot say that the majority of the text's key points are discussions of military matters and warfare. As the preceding *Hanshu* (History of Han 漢書) quote points out, as a Daoist text, the *Laozi* is bound up with recording and reflecting the historical reality of the “*dao* or way of success and failure, preservation and loss, the auspicious and inauspicious, and the past and present.” This *dao* is not only concerned with military matters but also politics. The *Laozi* reflects on and summarizes both the tumultuous military and political struggles of the time, and the historical lessons learned from the collapse of many feudal states during these complex struggles. One outcome of this reflection was that the dialectical method applied in military matters was then applied to the realm of politics. Sunzi said: “In all fighting, conventional methods may be used for joining battle, but unconventional methods will be needed to secure victory,”<sup>29</sup> while the *Laozi* notes, “Use the conventional to govern the state, use the unconventional when deploying troops.”<sup>30</sup> The *Laozi* thus transformed the ‘unconventional’ method of the military into the ‘conventional’ method of statecraft. It elevated the military approach to dialectic into ‘the art of the South-facing ruler’—that is, into the basic principles and strategies for ruling and controlling a state.

By elevating its status, the *Laozi* preserved and developed the dialectical method of the military strategists. This meant preserving the intuitive binary mode of thinking, with application both to the subject's conduct and to practical effects and outcomes. It is often said that the *Laozi* advocates passivity, but, in fact, it repeatedly states that the sage or the feudal lords exercised a positive philosophy of government: “They gained the empire by remaining without purpose.”<sup>31</sup> Thus this dialectic method retained the distinctive active approach on the part of the subject. Now, however, this was not activity in response to rapidly changing military affairs, but rather responses that rely on a grasp of history extending over time. This approach, admittedly, might appear to be quietistic, similar to the conduct of a disinterested bystander.

Laozi took the various binary pairings found in the military activities discussed in the *Art of War* and expanded them to cover phenomena in the natural world and human experience, such as clarity and confusion, high and low, long and short, before and after, straight and crooked, beautiful and vile, cherishing and abusing, completion and deficiency, harm and benefit, skill and clumsiness, stammering and eloquence.<sup>32</sup> This turned a cluster of apparent conflicts or contradictions into universal principles that permeate all manner of things and events.

The capacity to encapsulate historically acquired experience, and take a sober and detached view of events, further enhanced the military strategists' outlook. This was a calm and rational attitude, undisturbed by emotion, which was in time elevated to a core philosophical principle, expressed in these famous lines of the *Laozi*: "Heaven and Earth are not humane, they treat the myriad things of the world as merely sacrificial straw dogs; the sage is not humane, he takes the masses to be merely straw dogs," and "Get rid of virtues and then there will be humaneness."<sup>33</sup>

This stance was subject to criticism. Zhu Xi wrote that "Laozi's mind is the most poisonous,"<sup>34</sup> while Han Fei said that "the humane is one who delights in caring for others, and from their birth their heart contains things they are unable to do."<sup>35</sup> Of course, other critical voices could be listed. This is a key point where differences emerge between the Daoism of Laozi and a Confucianism based on humaneness (*ren*). When discussing human conduct, the military strategists and Daoists stress objective reality and not emotion; but the Confucians regard a psychology grounded in human emotions as of utmost importance. Zhang Binglin wrote,

I believe the difference between Daoism and Confucianism is that the former is ruthless . . . its actions are not just, since innocents are killed; although the state might be secured it is something shameful. This is the difference between the two and why one should be promoted and the other removed.<sup>36</sup>

For *Laozi*, the events and transformations of the world do not involve, and need not involve, emotion. So, too, the rulership of the sage. What matters is objective compliance with the models and norms—德 *de* and 道 *dao*. So, what are *de* and *dao*?

The original meaning of *de* remains unclear and requires further investigation. As I mentioned in the early chapter on Confucius, its original meaning was clearly not 'morality,' but was perhaps the customary code of each clan. In the Shang oracle bone inscriptions and in the *Shangshu*, *de* appears often but it does not become an important term until the Zhou dynasty. In the early Zhou, the terms 'jing de' 敬德 (respect for *de*) and 'mingde' 明德 (illustrious *de*) frequently appeared, and the character *de* was widely found on bronze inscriptions. By the early Zhou, the ideological status assigned to the *Di* (帝) deity of the Shang had already been replaced with *de*, whose meaning combined cosmological and human affairs.<sup>37</sup> In the oracle bones, *de* has a meaning similar to *xun* (to follow or accord): "It expresses the idea of acting and then observing" wrote revolutionary Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946),<sup>38</sup> while the 'Great Teacher' chapter of the *Zhuangzi* states that, "Accord (*xun* 循) is a function of *de*."

I believe that the meaning of *de* evolved from this norm or function of 'acting in accordance' or 'following along' (*zunxun* 遵循) to a more

substantial and embodied quality, and finally to a demand for a certain kind of personal disposition. In the early Zhou *de* assumed a very high status, and was probably connected to the Duke of Zhou establishing a model patriarchal clan system at that time. *De* gradually evolved from the demand to ‘follow’ norms and rules to an aspect of personal character. At the same time, 天 *tian* (which appears infrequently in the oracle bones) claimed the place previously given to the Shang deity *Di*, thereby effacing the hitherto-important governing anthropomorphic deity. This marked a great shift in thinking, and a distinction between the Shang and Zhou periods. This was also one of the Duke of Zhou’s great achievements, and something for which Confucius was repeatedly praised. It is a topic that has yet to be explored in sufficient detail.

*De* is primarily a set of behaviors but they are not ordinary behaviors. They largely involve ceremonies and punitive expeditions in which clan and tribal chiefs serve as models, and are thus importantly political forms of conduct. *De* is closely connected to the quasi-magical rituals used in obeisances to clan and tribal ancestors, which gradually evolved and expanded to become a set of unwritten rules governing social norms, expectations, and customs, and which aimed to preserve and develop the clan or tribe. In the early Zhou, the notion of *jingde*—respect for *de*—was prominent; ‘*jing*’ referred to the demand for strict accordance and submission, which in turn entailed circumspection and an element of worship. As a result, *de* had this connection with the earlier more primitive traditions of quasi-magical rituals. It was also connected to the worship of ancestors, and to religious faith implicit in ‘Heaven’s will’ (*tianzhi*) or ‘the way of Heaven’ (*tiandao*).

The Duke of Zhou was known through the ages and in the annals of history for establishing ritual and creating music. Wang Guowei, in “Discussions of the Organization of the Shang and Zhou,” emphasized the historical significance of the Duke of Zhou’s establishment of lineal descent, enfeoffment, and sacrifices to ancestors. The Duke was able to systematize and standardize the remnants of the chaotic late Shang ritual system, and this meant that *de* acquired many of the conventional and ceremonial qualities associated with ritual. This also served to establish and cement the institutionalized system, based on patriarchal clan lineage, which bound sacrifice to ancestors to society and government. This is the part of *de* that is present in *li* (禮 ritual and ritualized conduct).

The *Book of Rites* states,

That the sages established ritual norms and lead them with reverence is what is meant by ritual; that ritual marks the distinctions between those of different ages is a matter of excellence (*de*).<sup>39</sup>

In the Illustrious Hall, the model of Heaven applies. As for the standards of ritual, excellence is the model. . . . The Illustrious Hall

is modeled on the Heavens; the rituals and measures are modeled on excellence.<sup>40</sup>

All the way to the Warring States period, *li*, *de*, and *jing* were often used interchangeably and linked together. As with *de*, so *li* also stresses respect or reverence (*jing* 敬). “Reverence accompanies ritual; without reverence, the ritual cannot proceed.”<sup>41</sup>

From the preceding, we have some sense of the origins of *de*. It been variously understood as a device of those in power, a quality of character, and even as a form of morality, though the latter was a much later usage. However, in the *Laozi*, *de* has a meaning derived from later usage, one strongly linked to the question of the political arts. In the text, political skill is elevated to the level of an abstract philosophy in an unprecedented manner, just as the text elevates the dialectic of military strategy to a similarly high status.

“It is because the most potent (*shang de* 上德) do not strive to excel that they are potent (*de*),” “Persons of the highest potency do not strive to do things.”<sup>42</sup> The greatest difference between the dialectical method in the military strategists and the *Laozi*, and the key focus for development in the latter, is its idea of ‘non-striving’ or ‘doing without action’ (*wuwei* 無為). ‘Non-striving’ is the ‘highest potency.’ The ‘potency’ of these kinds of ancient customary practices is not something one has to consciously pursue or be preoccupied with; ‘non-striving’ allows society, life, human affairs, and politics to proceed on their own terms, and produces the highest potency and *dao* or the way. These latter three terms (*wuwei*, *shangde*, *dao*), along with absence (*wu* 無), unity (*yi* 一), and simplicity (*pu* 樸), are the core concepts of Laozi’s thought.

These operate at many different levels, the first being political thought. All of the pre-Qin schools were essentially political philosophies that offered a theory of society, and the Daoists were no different. The *Laozi* took the theories of warfare from the military strategists and transformed them into the political doctrine of the ‘art of the South-facing sage,’ a phrase that meant traditional rulers serving in a sage-like manner. *Wuwei* is thus a part of the sagely way.<sup>43</sup> The ruler must not *strive* to act or bring about a particular state of affairs, and only then is there nothing left undone. On surface the ruler does not care, but in fact there is nothing he does not care about. If instead of non-striving there was ‘striving’ (*wei*), then the ruler would not reside in ‘absence’ or ‘indeterminacy’ (*wu*) but would be caught up in what was present and determinate, and would therefore be constrained and unable to take an all-encompassing view of things. Since all determinate things, no matter how much they are expanded, are still limited, finite, and temporary—only ever constituting one part of something more complex. Although ideas such as absence (*wu*), emptiness (*xu* 虛), and way-making (*dao*) appear superficially to

be empty logical negations or simple wholes, in fact they are superior to their correlate terms determinate (*you* 有), substantial (*shi* 實), and utensil or object (*qi* 器). It is the former terms that represent completeness, the grass roots of things, authenticity, and existence. It is these that the ruler should elevate to the most esteemed positions, which define the attitudes he should adopt, and the general plan that he should follow. As the “*Jie Lao*” chapter of the *Han Feizi* states:

As a general rule, potency, by not striving, accumulates; by having no desires, it matures; by not thinking, it becomes settled; and by not making use [of things], it becomes secure. If you strive for it and desire it, then potency will have no place to lodge itself. If potency has no place to lodge itself, it cannot become whole.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, the *Art of War* line, “Capable and yet appearing incapable, able to deploy and yet appearing unable” suggests that the military strategists ‘way of deception’ shares a common origin with the *Laozi*. The latter claims that “Great perfection seems incomplete”; “Great fullness seems empty”; “The most upright seem crooked, great skillfulness seems clumsy, great speech seems to stammer.”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, some have believed that the text was inherently about deceit<sup>46</sup> and that later ages treated such conspiracy as a model.<sup>47</sup> Later rulers and politicians of all ranks, and even ordinary people, learned much about worldly affairs from this way of thinking. This includes, for example, ideas such as concealing one’s intentions or feigning ignorance, retreating in order to make progress, and defense as a means of attack. The *Laozi* turned oppositional terms used in military strategy into abstract and general ideas, but they never lost their practical efficacy. Furthermore, their relevance to social life and the scope of their application were enlarged in unprecedented ways.

Another distinctive element of the *Laozi*’s dialectical approach is that, among the paired and opposing terms, special emphasis is placed on the polarity associated with ‘softness,’ ‘weakness,’ and ‘the low.’ This way of thinking is seen in the famous line, “Preserving the weak is called strength” (Ch. 52), and also in the following: “Weakness is how the way operates” (Ch. 40); “What is honored has its root in what is lowly; What is lofty has a base down below” (Ch. 39); “An army that is too strong (*qiang*) will not be victorious; a tree that is too strong will break” (Ch. 76); and “The most supple things in the world ride roughshod over the most rigid” (Ch. 43). Aside from encouraging rulers to be modest and diligent, and to value foundations (“The sage is without heart-mind, and takes the people’s heart-mind as his own”), we learn that only if people reside in the soft and the weak will they never be defeated. Furthermore, one’s abilities, strengths, and advantages should not be easily revealed, and should even be concealed; and one should not compete or contest using strength or power. By ‘preserving the feminine,’ ‘honoring the soft,’

and 'knowing sufficiency' one can protect oneself, ensure longevity, and remain resilient while defeating one's opponent without being forced to change. This way of thinking encapsulates rich worldly experience and was instrumental in articulating a particular form of wisdom. "Laozi did not put the empire first"; "An aggrieved army is bound to win"; "First take a step back and then respond"; "It is better to suffer humiliation (to gain one's ends)"; "When exacting revenge, ten years is not too late"—all these phrases suggest that conciliation and yielding result in preservation and the accumulation of strength, which can be used to ultimately gain victory. This can be considered Chinese wisdom. It maintains an unemotional, sober, and calm attitude without losing the subjective dimension of action, and it sustains kin, nation, and the individual. This is not a dialectical style that proceeds via clear and distinct thought, but one that secures human welfare. The *Laozi*, as a political dialectic and an 'art of living' that preserves life and avoids undue interference, has deep roots in society.

The *Laozi* is also replete with fear and lament, and it recognizes history as "the way of victory and defeat, preservation and loss, disaster and blessing, past and present." The ancient clan tradition of 'long-standing government and enduring peace' was rapidly disintegrating and many states had embarked on vicious campaigns. Many became extremely powerful but then suffered defeat and destruction: "Where gold and jade fill the halls, none will be safeguarded."<sup>48</sup> So, what can be done about this? Like the Confucian and Mohist focus on the way of Yao and Shun, attempting to use that glorious past to make the present better, the *Laozi* also strives for an idealized society. However, this society is one even more ancient than the one longed for by Confucius and Mozi. The text harks from the primitive era of 'small states with small populations':<sup>49</sup>

Even though they have ships and carts, they will have no use for them. Even though they have armor and weapons, they will have no reason to deploy them. Make sure that the people return to the use of the knotted cord.<sup>50</sup>

Cut off sageliness, abandon wisdom, and the people will benefit one-hundred-fold. Cut off benevolence, abandon righteousness, and the people will return to being filial and kind. Cut off cleverness, abandon profit, and robbers and thieves will be no more.<sup>51</sup>

In this kind of society, everything is 'natural' or 'spontaneous.' People experience an animal-esque existence, ignorant and without knowledge or desire, and without any particular direction. "There is no greater calamity than not knowing what is enough. . . . The worst calamity is the desire to acquire" (Ch. 46). All that humans have deemed to be progress, from literary arts to all forms of civilization, are to be abandoned. Facing an existential threat, the clan nobility of the time looked to their idealized

recollections of an earlier time for a blueprint to save themselves. In the more ancient society, everything was relatively tranquil, secure, unhurried, and balanced. “Neighboring states regarded each other from afar,” but did not invade, nor interact: “The common people, even until old age and death, had no mutual dealings.”<sup>52</sup> People did not develop too fast or too much, lived together without incident, and avoided struggles to the death and relentless destruction.

The *Laozi*’s ‘non-striving’ (*wuwei*) conveys this kind of social ideal. Many philosophical texts have dealt with this before, and there is no need here for a repeat. In recent years, some works have also denied this, however, emphasizing instead the *Laozi* is simply the art of rulership or that *wuwei* means not violating norms. Their social prescriptions are correspondingly proactive and positive. This is too simplistic, however. In the text, admittedly, ‘non-striving’ and ‘preserve the feminine’ are proactive political philosophies, or skills of rulership. However, this kind of being proactive politically specifically relies upon a passive account of social life. It is difficult to accept that a social ideal that involves flipping history on its head, completely abandoning literature and all technology, could be considered proactive and progressive. Zhuangzi continued to develop this social ideal, but did not develop a political philosophy. Han Fei and other Legalists, as well as the early Han Daoists, did develop a political philosophy based on non-striving and the art of the ‘South-facing’ ruler. However, they altered the original social meaning of the *Laozi*, in the service of an emerging slave-owning class during that time. That was certainly one way of being ‘proactive’ and ‘progressive’ with the *Laozi*’s ideas.

This is a complex matter. We must be aware of the differences and conflicts between Laozi’s political discourse and his social discourse, as well as their mutual connections and interplay. Nevertheless, the *Laozi*’s distinguishing feature is its transformation of concrete social and political discourse into abstract philosophical thought.<sup>53</sup> This is expressed most clearly in the concept of *dao* or ‘way.’ If we say that *de* (potency) and *wuwei* (non-striving) represent the *Laozi*’s social and political theories, then *dao* (way or way-making) and *wuming* 無名 (having no name) are the *Laozi*’s philosophical foundation. The idea of a ‘heavenly way’ (*tian-dao*) has a history stretching back into ancient China, but in the *Laozi* it finally acquired a philosophical purity and simplicity. This is what makes the *Laozi* the text that it is. This is why today the order of ‘*de*’ and ‘*dao*’ are reordered into ‘*daode*,’ with *dao* coming first. The first line of this reconstituted text—“The way (*dao*) that can be spoken of (*dao*) is not the constant way (*dao*)” (Ch. 1)—immediately presents a profound philosophical theory. Even Hegel, who thought little of Eastern culture, recognized that this was philosophy.

“Reversal is the movement of the *dao*” (Ch. 40). This phrase probably best sums up *Laozi*’s *dao* or way. Mutual-contrarian and mutually

constituting opposites interact dynamically, completing and transforming each other. What was originally only a dialectic in military strategy was now distilled into the governing rule of this particular *dao* or way. *Dao* is a general rule, the highest truth, and also the most authentic dimension of existence. These three (rule, truth, and existence) are merged together and cannot be separated in the text. As a result, no finite concept or language can be used to define and delimit *dao*, or explain its meaning. Words are traps, have limitations, and are utterly different from that boundless unity and absolute truth of *dao*. “I do not know its name. If forced to give it a title, I would call it ‘*dao*’; if forced to give it a proper name, I would call it ‘Great’” (Ch. 25). This passage conveys the impossibility of using limited language, knowledge, and experience to define and standardize *dao*; it does not imply that *dao* is a physical substance beyond sense experience or knowledge. The text also suggests that *dao* is a ‘unity’ (*yi*), ‘simple’ (*pu*), and is difficult to discern (*weihuang weihu* 惟恍惟惚). Ancient thinkers often failed to clearly distinguish between rules and function, on the one hand, and substance and existence on the other; for them, these were grasped intuitively as one unified whole. This mixing together in a single system of substance and function, existence and rules, implied a non-experiential, non-perceptual, and mystical quality, expressed variously as pantheism and animism. I suspect that the many contemporary debates over whether the *Laozi* is materialist or idealist are partly the result of paying too little attention to this feature of classical philosophy.

*Dao* in *Laozi*, unlike its portrayal in current works in history of philosophy, also entails the observation and articulating of natural phenomena. Passages such as, “A blustery wind does not last all morning; a heavy downpour does not last all day” (Ch. 23) and “Not even Heaven and Earth can keep things going for a long time” (Ch. 23) use natural phenomena to shed light on human affairs; they are not investigations into natural phenomena. Passages such as, “There were things that merged to take on determinate form, emerging before Heaven and Earth,” (Ch. 23) “Though vague and indefinite, there are images in it; though vague and indefinite, there are events in it” (Ch. 21) also emphasize the precedence of *dao* over notions of ‘images,’ ‘things and events,’ and ‘Heaven and Earth.’ However, this kind of precedence is not necessarily temporal, since the *Laozi* shows no interest in cosmology and the origins of the universe.<sup>54</sup> To understand the *Laozi*’s dialectical approach as an account of natural and cosmological principles is, I believe, to overlook its true origins in social struggle and human experience. It is precisely this foundation that distinguishes pre-Qin philosophy from ancient Greek thought. The dialectical approach of ancient Greece was deeply rooted in argumentation, and each school was characterized by an interest in exploring the natural world. In their origins, Chinese and Western philosophy are



different. It is commonly said that Western philosophy seeks truth while Chinese philosophy inquires after the way, and there is some truth in this. The Chinese dialectical approach, and even its cosmology, are never separated from human conduct. “Always eliminate desires in order to observe its mysteries. Always have desires in order to observe its manifestations” (Ch. 1). One could say that one becomes acquainted with *dao* by banishing the purposiveness of fixed goals, while having purpose in observing how the path or *dao* unfolds. These two—having purpose and not having purpose—are unified, the only difference is the nominal phrasing. This underlines the singular origin and function of the *Laozi*’s dialectic approach, and its grounding in the realm of human affairs. It might appear that *Laozi*’s *dao* consists in objective rules that have no immediate connection to humans, but in fact it is only a lack of connection to emotions, but not a lack of connection to human activity. The text’s philosophical dialectic is simply the elevation of the political and social dimensions of the *Laozi*’s ideas about the military, government, history, and society.

As noted earlier, the oppositional categories used in the Chinese dialectic are based in practical experience, and this characteristic is preserved in the *Laozi*, albeit as a philosophy of high-level abstractions. The text develops a conception of *dao* as the general tendency of contradictions to lead to transformation, expressed in such terms as, “Seeing but not looking, hearing but not listening, acquiring without grasping,” but it still states that the true way requires ‘preserving the feminine,’ ‘valuing the soft,’ ‘extreme emptiness,’ and ‘maintaining quiet diligence.’ Between the conflicting and opposed terms there is still a clear preserving or affirming of one side. That is to say, the conflicts are never fully separate from concrete experience; they are not pure logical abstractions. The *Yizhuan* is similar, except that it advocates preserving and affirming the opposite set of conflicting terms, such as hardness, the male, and relentlessly striving to improve oneself.<sup>55</sup> What these two texts have in common is that they integrate a dialectical approach with specific elements of social life and norms, so that the dialectical approach becomes the basis for managing and pacifying the empire and implementing general rules of government. The significance of the dialectical method thus lies in its application to the realm of concrete and subjective human action and experience. What later generations took from the *Laozi*’s dialectic was not knowledge of nature, or precision in thought, or a certain spiritual mastery, but rather practical wisdom for life. Through this kind of practical worldly wisdom, which is multifaceted, flexible, and all-encompassing, it is possible to become aware of a kind of transcendental wisdom and gain great spiritual satisfaction.

Later generations had some grounds for understanding the *dao* of the *Laozi* as the remnant of primitive shamanism and mythology, and even as a religion, with *Laozi* as its high priest. Certainly, the *Laozi* suggests

that all finite and sensible objects have no substantial existence, and describes the *dao* as ‘vague and elusive.’ Furthermore, it arguably contains the ideas, later developed by Zhuangzi, of nourishing the body and preserving life. This is seen in strangely worded passages such as “The spirit of the valley never dies; it is known as the mysterious female; the gate of the mystery female is known as the root of the world” (Ch. 6) and “Concentrate your *qi* 氣 (vital energies) and attain the utmost suppleness” (Ch. 10). These features give the text’s conception of *dao* a veneer of primitive magical myth.

However, if we consider the text in its entirety or look at its defining features, we see that the sense of ineffable mystery that accompanies *dao* has none of the necessity of the theoretical logical found in religious theology. The sense of mystery that shrouds *dao* largely comes from indeterminacy and the imprecision associated with it, which are mainly the result of the diversity and flexibility associated with the operations of *dao*. Consider the remarkably un-mysterious and relentlessly practical *Art of War*:

The ultimate skill is to have no form—such subtlety! The ultimate skill is to be inaudible—such daemonic power! In this way it is possible to hold the enemy’s fate in one’s hands.

(*Art of War*, “Weak and Strong Points”)<sup>56</sup>

This account of military dialectic emphasizes the imprecision involved in grasping and applying this dialectical method, due to its complexity and variability. Later, in the approach to artistic creation that traces back to Zhuangzi, the indeterminacy of this ‘method of having no method’ (*wufazhifa* 無法之法) became more prominent.

Thus, although the *dao* of the *Laozi* includes norms with an objective existence, the flexibility that emerges in more subjective or personal applications of them partly explains why it has this mysterious quality. If this is correct, then phrases such as, “It prefigures the ancestral gods” (Ch. 4) and “Standing alone, it does not suffer alteration, all-pervading it does not pause” (Ch. 25) do not refer to a religious being (as a religious theology would), nor to an unchanging natural world (as materialism would), nor to a realm of eternal form (idealism); rather, these phrases emphasize subjectively grasped general principles that also have an objective existence:

Encountering it you will not see its front, following behind you will not see its back.

(Ch. 14)

Good fortune rests upon disaster; disaster lies hidden within good fortune. Who knows the highest standards? Perhaps there is nothing

that is truly correct and regular! What is correct and regular turns strange and perverse; what is good turns monstrous.

(Ch. 58)

Passages such as these describe the changeability, flexibility, and vagueness of these regularities. It was the attempt to understand such regularities that led to this vagueness having a mystical quality. This mysteriousness can also be traced back to the ‘way of deception’ of the military strategists. Sima Tan’s essay in the *Records of the Grand Historian* is worth quoting here:

The Daoist school advocates non-striving (*wuwei*), and also says “There is nothing that is not striving (*wubuwei* 無不為).” The essence of this idea is easy to put into practice, although the words are difficult to grasp or explain. The Daoist’s methods took emptiness or absence as their root, and responding to natural events as their practical guide. They held that things and events did not have a final state or fixed form, and so were able to delve into the grounds of all things. Because they sought neither to get ahead of things and events, nor to follow behind them, so they were able to master them all.

(“Preface to the Records of the Grand Historian”  
[*Taishigong zixu* 太史公自序])<sup>57</sup>

This expresses clearly the connection between the philosophical and political dimensions of *dao*.

*Laozi*’s refinement of the idea of general and ubiquitous binary conflicts, and how terms such as ‘esteem the soft,’ ‘preserve the feminine,’ and ‘not granting precedence to the empire’ express a concrete response toward such conflicts, were milestones in the long history of Chinese thought. Xunzi and the *Yizhuan* absorbed the ideas of the *Laozi*, and offered early forms of the ‘A and not A\*’ everyday dialectic (where a situation is to be limited to A and should not be allowed to develop into A\*). Both paid attention to and strove to maintain stability and harmony in human life, preventing these practical conflicts from intensifying and a possible swing from one extreme to the other. In this, both share commonalities with *Laozi*’s ideas of valuing the soft and preserving the feminine.<sup>58</sup>

Some today might criticize *Laozi*’s ‘esteem the soft’ or Confucius’ ‘The path of the everyday mean’ (*Zhongyong zhi dao* 中庸之道) as being passive, conservative, backward, or even reactionary. However, this is merely a case of using an abstract modern form of this dialectic of opposition and conflict to criticize the ancient Chinese dialectical form, which is rich in practical experience. Thus, it is not clear that such criticism is warranted. In real life, particularly in ancient Chinese agrarian society,

apart from the special situations involving military struggle, not all conflicts intensified or sublated. If we are mindful of the organic dimension of human life, where the aim is to sustain the stable functioning of organic systems, then it is reasonable, within certain limits, to emphasize the interdependence and integration of opposing categories, which negate and complete each other, and prevent extremes of agitation, negation, destruction, or transformation. Since the Chinese dialectic originates in and is a response to social conditions, government, and human affairs, with these giving it its distinctive characteristics, so we should not overlook its deep roots in real social life. We cannot use some general and abstract standard to deny its validity, and this applies equally in the case of Laozi's philosophical dialectic.

### Sagely Wisdom That Enriches the People

Han Fei's taking on aspect of the *Laozi* seems logical.<sup>59</sup> This is not only because of the *Hanfeizi* chapters "Explaining Laozi" (*Jielao* 解老) and "Understanding Laozi" (*Yulao* 喻老), but also because during the Warring States, and the Qin and Han periods, the well-known Daoist-Legalist school that followed the Huang-Lao school of Daoism gradually gained political status, and Han Fei was an important figure in this process.<sup>60</sup> Whether in the logic of their thought or the development of society, the line of thought that runs from the military strategists, the Daoists, the Legalists and then to the Daoist-Legalist school, is an interesting one. The complex relations among them deserve careful attention, but the term 'Daoist-Legalist school' (from the Mawangdui silk scripts) and the "Explaining Laozi" and "Understanding Laozi" chapters of *Hanfeizi* suggest that, in general, the Legalists adopted the *Laozi*'s political idea of 'non-striving,' as a method for the 'South-facing ruler.' However, they transformed it into a political doctrine aimed at the brazen wielding of the ruler's power.

The *Laozi* elevates the dialectic of the military strategists into a philosophical doctrine, and adds reflections based on historical experience, "observing the past and the alternations between gain and loss." Such philosophical reflection, although poetically vague at times, and tinged with righteousness indignation, is distinguished by its calm and disinterested rational attitude (compare this with the *Yizhuan*).<sup>61</sup> Han Fei not only inherited this attitude but also actively developed it. Much can be said about Han Fei, but discussion here will focus on how he develops the *Laozi*'s characteristic mode of thinking. Three points will be developed.

First, this calm and disinterested attitude was developed into a colder, unemotional egoism by Han Fei. He brought all questions of social order, values, and relations within the remit of this cold calculating of profit and loss, as well as all human conduct, thought, and even emotion itself. All were reduced brutally to individual profit and loss. Individual gain or loss

became the yardstick for all measurements, observations, and estimates, for which Han Fei offered many famous arguments:

Regarding parents' relation to children, when males are born, they congratulate each other, and, when females are born, they kill them. Equally coming out from the bosoms and lapels of the parents, why should boys receive congratulations while girls are killed? Because parents consider future convenience and calculate long-term benefits. Thus, even parents in relation to children use the calculating mind in treating them, how much more should those who have no affection of parent and child?

(Hanfeizi, "Six Conflicts [*Liu fan* 六反]"<sup>62</sup>)

When the cartwright finishes making carriages, he wants people to be rich and noble; when the carpenter finishes making coffins, he wants people to die early. Not that the cartwright is benevolent and the carpenter is cruel, but that unless people are noble, the carriages will not sell, and unless people die, the coffins will not be bought. Thus, the carpenter's motive is not a hatred for anybody but his profits are due to people's death.

(Hanfeizi, "Being Prepared in the Domestic Realm [*Bei nei* 備內]"<sup>63</sup>)

The master would, at the expense of his housekeeping, give hired workmen delicious food and, by appropriating cash and cloth, make payments for their services. Not that he loves the hired workmen, but he says that by so doing he can make the workmen till the land deeper and pick the weed more carefully. The hired workmen, by exerting their physical strength, speedily pick the weed and till the land, and, by using their skill, rectify the boundaries between different tracts of ground and the dykes separating different fields. Not that they love their master, but that, they say, by so doing their soup will be delicious and both cash and cloth will be paid to them.

(Hanfeizi, "Right Outer Congeries of Sayings, part 1 [*Waichushuo zuoshang* 外儲說左上]"<sup>64</sup>)

This sharp, cold, and somewhat chilling approach was unwavering. It broke through the veil of social class, which presented society as something beautiful and forgiving, and revealed a crueler side: in order to survive, people were calculating, in competition, and willing to devour each other. All relationships were questions of cost-benefit, the result of clinical calculations, and without additional dimensions.

This approach reflected the thoroughgoing collapse of the primitive clan traditions and ideas of the late Warring States period. As a result, the social order and the social relationships of ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife, which were once filled with solemnity and

gentility, lost their original foundations. In their place were all the brutal facts of life and history, which involved intense mutual struggle and cruelty, leading to claims that ‘ministers seek to kill rulers’ and ‘sons seek to kill fathers.’ There were no other yardsticks to assess social life, since the once-sacred primitive rituals had lost their solemn power. The genteel humanistic way of Confucius and Mencius was nothing more than ineffective and pedantic talk. Without a god, and with emotions deemed unreliable, only cold, rational calculations of profit and loss could be used to comprehend everything, defeat plotters, and secure the safety and survival of the ruler. The governing order could only be grounded in such cold rational analysis, and it was on this that the absolute authority of the autocratic ruler was based:

The sovereign is interested in appointing able men to office; the minister is interested in securing employment with no competent abilities. The sovereign is interested in awarding rank and bounties for distinguished services; the minister is interested in obtaining wealth and honour without achieving anything. The sovereign is interested in having heroic men exert their abilities; the minister is interested in having friends and partisans pursue private gain.

(Hanfeizi, “Solitary Indignation [*Gufen* 孤憤]”) <sup>65</sup>

In governing the state, the sage seeks to compel the people to do him good but never relies on their doing good to him out of affection. For to rely on the people’s doing good to him out of affection is dangerous, but to rely on compelling them to do so is safe.

(Hanfeizi, “Ministers Apt to Betray, Molest, or Murder the Ruler [*Jianjieshi chen* 奸劫弑臣]”) <sup>66</sup>

Stating things so bluntly perhaps offered people something new. Consider the pedantic doctrines of humaneness and rightness of the Confucians, and Mozi’s argumentative approach and doctrine of impartial concern: all these are pleasant words, quaint emotions, and romantic ideals that, under a coldly calculating gaze, are seen as nothing more than risible nonsense and objectionable pretense. Military affairs are a direct continuation of government, and here one might even say that government is an extension of military affairs. Human relations are like an emotionless struggle, with each party fighting for their own interests and human life becoming a battleground. Understood in this way, military texts like the *Art of War* and the *Laozi* could readily be applied in the areas of politics and human life.

This was Han Fei’s great contribution to the history of ideas. As the *Art of War* was useful in the realm of warfare, so Hanfeizi proved exceptionally useful in the arena of political struggle. Two thousand years later, during the cultural revolution of the 1970s, we again saw behavior

and theorizing that proclaimed, “In political struggles, no words can be trusted.” This had all been vividly articulated earlier, by Han Fei. So why is it that the daily experiences and human affairs of later generations could, by reading Han Fei, enable people to be filled with sage-like wisdom? Is this perhaps because it helps people to calmly see through a superficially attractive outer layer and expose the cold hard facts underneath—to show the true face of humanity?

The second point to make about Han Fei’s thought is the unprejudiced intensification of this calculating approach. In theory, as many works in the history of philosophy point out, Han Fei elevated the role of the concept of *li* 理 (pattern or principle), using it to explain the idea of *dao*:

*Dao* is that which makes all things as they are, and is that which the myriad principles (*li*) represent. Principles (*li*) are the patterns (*wen* 文) that constitute things. . . . Hence the saying: ‘*Dao* is the principle of all things.’ Things have their respective principles and therefore cannot trespass against each other. Inasmuch as things have their respective principles and therefore cannot trespass against each other, principles are determinants of things and everything has a unique principle. Inasmuch as everything has its unique principle and *Dao* disciplines and exhausts them, then everything has to undergo transformation; this being so, they have no fixed operation.

(Hanfeizi, “Explaining Laozi [*Jielao*]”)<sup>67</sup>

In general, *li* (principles) are what distinguish the square from the round, the short from the long, the coarse from the fine, and the hard from the brittle. Accordingly, it is only after principles become settled that the *dao* can be grasped.

(Hanfeizi, “Explaining Laozi [*Jielao*]”)<sup>68</sup>

Through a grasp of the myriad manifestations of patterning and principle (i.e., through practical contradictions and conflicts), Hanfeizi was able to arrive at an account of *dao*—ascribing to it practical distinctions and thereby making it more determinate.

*Li* refers to the concrete rules governing objectively real entities, and especially to the tension and conflict between the mutually opposed paired categories. In this, Han Fei continued the Daoist tradition: “Be empty and reposed, keep behind others, and never assert yourself before anybody else”; “Discard both like and hate and make your empty mind the abode of the *Dao*.”<sup>69</sup> Simply put, this was a demand for great calmness; only then could the heart-mind be empty, and only then could one objectively understand phenomena. Subjective feelings of delight, anger, and so on could easily lead people to prejudiced views. To this end, Han Fei proposed the method of ‘investigating and verifying’ (*canyan* 參驗):

“compare the results of testimony, and thereby hold every utterance responsible for an equivalent fact”;<sup>70</sup> “To be sure of anything that has no corroborating evidence, is stupid.”<sup>71</sup> Situations were to be understood from all angles, and information carefully arranged, cross-referenced, and validated. The *Hanfeizi* references many historical stories and real-life figures in order to defend and promote its viewpoint. Among the most important is Han Fei’s emphasis on practical verification:

If only the heated and hammered metal is inspected and only the blue and yellow colors are observed, even the legendary Blacksmith Ou could not ascertain the quality of a sword. But if you hit herons and wild geese on the water and kill ponies and horses on land with it, then even the stupidest will be in no doubt whether the sword is blunt or sharp. . . . Similarly, if only manners and clothes are looked at and only words and phrases are listened to, then even Confucius could not ascertain what kind of a person he is. But if you test him with an official commission and examine his work, then even the mediocre man is not in doubt whether he is stupid or intelligent.

(Hanfeizi, “Eminence in Learning [*Xian xue* 顯學]”)<sup>72</sup>

Here, *dao* has lost its poetic and elusive aspect but gained a practical precision. In Han Fei’s hands, ‘a clear-minded and calm rational attitude’ became a detailed exploration of the many dimensions of human affairs, social relations, and the business of government. Similarly, he carefully distinguished and analyzed all manner of situations, such as: the complex and fluid relationship between right and wrong, destruction and honor, good and bad, and victory and defeat; and the intricacies of human emotional life in such contexts as power struggles and interpersonal rivalry, jealousy, collusion, deception, slander, and entrapment. The perceptive and meticulous nature of this thinking was something rarely seen before or since, and leaves a deep impression on the reader. It surpasses both the military dialectic offered by the *Art of War* and *Laozi*’s metaphysics.

The third point about Han Fei is as follows. This cold and rational attitude and careful thought brought about a greatly enhanced interest in efficiency and material gain. As already discussed, this was a characteristic shared by Sunzi, Laozi and Han Fei, but Han Fei developed it to an extreme. He wrote:

Words and deeds should take function and utility as aim. To be sure, if someone sharpens an arrow and shoots it at random, then though its pointed head may by chance hit the tip of an autumn hair, he cannot be called a skilful archer. For he lacks a constant aim and mark. . . . Now, when adopting words and observing deeds, if someone does not take function and utility as his aim, he will also be



shooting wildly, regardless of how profound the words may be and the deeds may be.

(Hanfeizi, "Inquiring into Dialectic [*Wen bian* 問辯]")<sup>73</sup>

This passage highlights the differences in thought between Han Fei and the Logicians school, including Gongsun Long and Hui Shi. Han Fei was not interested in abstract debate with no practical purpose, but in thought that was directly relevant to human life. Thus, he did not seek to investigate every logical possibility or every form of conceptual discourse, but to investigate concrete possibilities and the paradoxes of everyday life.<sup>74</sup> For Han Fei, even clarifying right and wrong, discriminating true and false, and distinguishing between correct and incorrect were of secondary importance; what mattered was how to resolve practical problems. Apparently similar examples of affirmation and denial could, in different contexts, have fundamentally different meanings and practical implications. Thus, so-called truth comes to depend upon practical requirements, human relationships, intended goals, and other factors. It does not exist independently. The follow passage makes this clear:

There was a rich man from Song. Once it rained and his mud fence collapsed. Thereupon his son said: "If the fence is not immediately rebuilt, thieves might come." The father of his neighbours said the same thing to him. That evening thieves did come and steal a great deal of his wealth. Thereafter, his family had high regard for his son's wisdom but suspected the father of the neighbours. Now, what these two men said turned out to be true. . . . The difficulty lay not in getting knowledge, but in situating that knowledge.

(Hanfeizi, "The Difficulties of Persuasion [*Shuo nan* 說難]")<sup>75</sup>

Here it is clear that the difficulty lies not in following a line of reasoning, or grasping knowledge, or speaking clearly. What is difficult is what to do with knowledge, how to apply it and how to grasp the practical implications of it:

The difficulties of persuasion, generally speaking, are not problems with the knowledge through which the ruler is persuaded . . . the difficulties of persuasion lie in knowing the mind of one persuaded, in order to fit the wording to it. If the one persuaded strives after high fame but you speak of great profit, one will be considered low-bred, accorded mean treatment, and sent far away. If the persuaded strives after great profit but you speak of high fame, one will be considered mindless and ignorant of worldly affairs and one's arguments will never be accepted. If the one persuaded secretly strives after great profit in but ostensibly seeks high fame and you speak of high fame,

then you will be accepted in words but, in fact, kept distant. If you speak to him of great profit, your advice will secretly be adopted but you will be publicly ostracized. . . .

If you talk about great men to him, he thinks you are intimating his defects. If you talk about small men to him, he thinks you are showing off your superiority. If you discuss an object of his love, he thinks you are expecting a special favour from it. If you discuss an object of his hate, he thinks you are testing his temper.

(Hanfeizi, "The Difficulties of Persuasion [*Shuo nan*]"<sup>76</sup>)

This is precise and detailed, and practical and concrete; Han Fei's writing style is famed for its cautious precision. It has an unassailable logical force that derives from clear lines of inference. This logical force resides not so much in formal logical precision but in its unemotional judgments on all matters. For example, in Han Fei's writings discussed in this piece, there are no dedicated discussions of logical form or argumentative method; and there are no explorations of the problems of right or wrong, verification or truth as these arise in people's reflective experience. Instead, discussion focused on how to deal with different kinds of concrete personal relationships, applying appropriate knowledge therein, and the complexity and capriciousness of the world of human emotions. For Han Fei, this kind of 'knowledge' was much more important than knowledge itself, and this is what later thinkers described as "Human affairs correctly understood are the sum of learning and study; when human feeling is refined it results in literature." This is also a Chinese tradition, and though a good tradition it has perhaps even more of the bad about it.

Han Fei served the ruler of a large and unified autocratic state, which was quite unlike the *Laozi's* ideal of a small state with a small population. As a result, Han Fei consistently opposed ideas such as 'value the soft,' 'preserve the feminine,' and 'avoid competition' and instead focused on the conflict between the two mutually opposed categories. He suggested these were 'mutually incompatible' (*bu bingrong* 不並容) and 'could not exist together' (*bu liangli* 不兩立), and he emphasized strength, military force, and power: "Whoever has great strength sees others visit his court; whoever has little strength visits the courts of others."<sup>77</sup> He completely rejected the ideals of humaneness and rightness (*renyi*) and advocated harsh laws and severe punishments: "The way of the enlightened ruler was to unify the law, not to seek wisdom; they were committed to the arts of rulership and did not admire trustworthiness" ("The Five Vermin");<sup>78</sup> "Through this, I know that an advantageous position and social position can be relied upon, and wisdom and virtue are not worthy of admiration."<sup>79</sup> The Daoist-Legalist thinkers adopted the *Laozi's* emphasis on advantageous or strategic position (*shi* 勢) and the arts of rulership (*shu* 術), which were the kind of non-striving that constituted the 'arts

of the South-facing ruler'; and a prerequisite for this was occupying the highest possible strategic position, and thus having control over matters of life and death. What played the crucial role in deciding political matters was not personal morality or worth but objective matters of strategic political position. The *Laozi* states, "The sharpest implements of the state should not be revealed to others" (Ch. 36), while Han Fei states, "As a commoner, Yao could not govern even three people, whereas the wicked Jie, as emperor, could throw the empire into chaos"<sup>80</sup>—both convey the same view. The 'arts of rulership' (*quanshu* 權術) of the autocratic ruler "are hidden in the bosom and used for comparing motivations and to secretly manipulate the officials."<sup>81</sup> Namely, the autocratic ruler must use methods of ruling that are difficult for others to fathom. Therefore, he will not reject secretive plots and cruel machinations but, rather, will actively resort to all manner of them. Only then can he preserve his strategic advantage and political power. The doctrine of self-interest reaches its apex with Han Fei and then becomes part of court political thereafter. This approach of Han Fei is strikingly different from Confucian political theorizing, which stressed personal moral character as the basis for 'sageliness within, kingliness without.'

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In the "A Reevaluation of Confucius" chapter earlier, I mentioned Hegel's view that, in all practical affairs, the Chinese far surpassed all other Eastern peoples, and this underlined the pragmatic rationality of the Confucian view. The *Laozi* and Han Fei supplemented and enriched this practical orientation, but in another way—through a dialectical approach to practical experience. The Chinese people, whether in politics, commerce, empirical science or human relations, are accustomed to giving careful consideration to the issue, being calm and cautious, carefully planning, dealing in realistic possibilities and sound logic, avoiding fanaticism, and emphasizing ability and results. This has some advantages. At the same time, however, it restricts and suppresses a freer and more idealistic use of the imagination, affects the ability to derive pure logical abstractions, and limits the development of abstract thought. Furthermore, this mode of rationality and its capacity for thought are fused with everyday life, and this restrictive framework hinders a broader expansion of thought. Consequently, this mode of thinking lacks sophistication when attempting purely logical reasoning, and is even crude, vague, and rooted in generalizations. It lacks strict standards for universal inference and for differentiating concepts, and it neglects abstract thought. Such is the style of wisdom and intelligence contained in the military-political-lifestyle dialectic of Sunzi, Laozi and Han Fei. Combined with Confucian thought, these left an unhealthy mark on the kinds of psychology and intellectual dimensions of Chinese culture.

*The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) states that the way of Shen Buhai and Han Fei is “cruel and lacking affection, and everything is rooted in the *dao* and power,”<sup>82</sup> and the Legalists are described as being “exclusively focused on status and lacking in human feeling.”<sup>83</sup> The final outcome of the struggle between the *Laozi*, Hanfeizi and some Daoist-Legalist schools, on the one side, and the humanistic psychology of the Confucians on the other, was—because of the existing social structure—a political structure that featured a tradition of autocratic government. This is seen in Western Han ideas such as “conventionally Confucian and covertly Legalist,” (陽儒陰法), i.e., being outwardly lenient to transform the people’s hearts while retaining strict laws, and “making use of both Confucianism and Legalism to govern” (王霸雜用). In terms of culture and its link to psychology, the *Laozi*’s belief in valuing the soft and preserving the feminine, and Han Fei’s doctrines of self-interest and commitment to cost-benefit analysis, were eventually abandoned. A morality featuring a milder humanism, in which the collective was highly valued, gained the upper hand. No society can be founded upon the extreme calculating approach of Han Fei, so how could this have been enacted in a small-scale agrarian society that was bound together by ties of blood and clan? Such a society was sustained by the deep-rooted Confucian norms of ethical duties and an emotional inner life. The worldly wisdom and refined thinking of Sunzi, Laozi, and Han Fei fitted in with the Confucian spirit of practical rationality, and so the ideas of these thinkers were integrated into existing Confucian norms, and found application in politics and daily life. The *Laozi*’s search for truth in human life, which was later merged with the *Zhuangzi*, became a supplement to Confucian thought, and the *Laozi*’s exposition of multiple conflicting forces and contradictions was directly incorporated in the *Yizhuan* and eventually became the Confucian view of the world. Han Fei’s ideas found validation in later Confucian systems of thought, including Dong Zhongshu’s autocratic theory of the three cardinal bonds (*san gang* 三綱) in the Han dynasty. This ‘calm rational attitude,’ alongside Confucian practical rationality, constituted the basic character of Chinese wisdom. In summary, the ideas of these thinkers were absorbed into the Confucian tradition.

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## Notes

1. This chapter will discuss only the *Laozi*, and not its author or when the text was formed; the latter might be estimated to be the end of the Warring States period.
2. *Daode zhenjing lun bingyao yishu* 道德真經論兵要義述 [On Discussions of Military Affairs in the Daodejing] (*Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 ed., vol. 13), “Xubiao” 敘表, 632a–3b. This text is pedantic and difficult to read.

3. *Laozi jie* 老子解 [Explaining the Laozi] (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 ed.), vol. 1, chapter 36. Su Zhe sought to unify Confucianism and Daoism, and raised *Laozi* to the status of a sage. Thus he wrote that, “The relation of the sage to the everyday world is such that the sage leaves his mark and there are those that follow it; the sage rides the patterns of the world and the everyday world makes use of such wisdom” (Ibid.).
4. Wang Fuzhi, *Songlun* 宋論 [Treatise on the Song Dynasty], “Shenzong” [Emperor Shenzong] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1964), 6.129.
5. Zhang Binglin, *Qiusbu* 楛書 [Book Written in Oppression], “Rudao” 儒道 [The Confucian Way], 8.
6. In Chapter 1, “Reevaluating Confucius,” I mentioned that none of Mencius, Xunzi, Zhuangzi, or Hanfeizi mention Laozi; this is because Laozi had no connection with the Confucian school; instead, he expressed his own ideas in his own distinctive style.
7. Luo Mi 羅泌 (1131–1189), *Lushi* 路史 [The Great Histories] (*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 ed.), “Qianji” 前紀, section 5, 1.5.30a.
8. All translations are based on *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, translated by Lionel Giles (1875–1958) (London: Luzac and Company, 1910). Some quotations have been edited for clarity. See *Shiyijia zhu sunzi jiaoli* 十一家注孫子校理 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2012), C.283–4.
9. Ibid., “The Use of Spies,” See *Sunzi*, C.290–1.
10. Ibid., “Laying Plans,” *Sunzi*, A.1.
11. Ibid., “Terrain,” *Sunzi*, C.229.
12. See *Sunzi*, B.125.
13. Ibid., “Army on the March,” *Sunzi*, B.192–4.
14. Ibid., “Laying Plans,” *Sunzi*, A.12–13.
15. Ibid., “Army on the March,” *Sunzi*, B.195–7.
16. In this regard, it is similar to Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1908–2009) analysis of the myths found in many cultures around the world, which are also found to universally possess a dichotomous structure. See his *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).
17. Art of War, “Strategic Advantage,” *Sunzi*, B.94.
18. Ibid., “Laying Plans,” *Sunzi*, A.14–18.
19. “Weak Points and Strengths,” *Sunzi*, B.125.
20. “Variations in Tactics,” *Sunzi*, B.16971.
21. This phrase appears, for example, in *Songshi* 宋史 [Song History], Biography of Yue Fei 岳飛 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1977), 365.11376.
22. “Strategies for Attack,” *Sunzi*, A.45–51.
23. See, for example, Qi Sihe’s 齊思和 (1907–1980), “Sunzi bingfa huzuo shidai-kao” 孫子兵法著作時代考 [The Dating of the *Art of War*], in *Zhongguoshi Tanyan* 中國史探研 [Investigations in Chinese History] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1981), 218–27.
24. *Daodejing*, 36. English translations based on James Legge’s (1815–1897) 1891 translation, with some editing for clarity.
25. Ibid., 68.
26. Ibid., 69.
27. Tang Yao 唐尧, “Laozi binglüe gaishu” 老子兵略概述 [Laozi’s Military Strategy], in *Zhongguo zhexueshi wenji* 中國哲學史文集 [Collected Works on the History of Chinese Thought] (Changchun: Jilin People’s Press, 1979), 31.
28. Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Hanshu* 漢書 [History of Han] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1962), “Yiwenzhi” 藝文志 [Bibliography], 30.1732,
29. “Strategies for Attack,” *Sunzi*, B.87.
30. *Daodejing*, 57.

31. Ibid.
32. The use of opposing categories was a way of thinking found during times of great change, as frequently noted in texts like the *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*. As the famous statesman of the Warring States, Yanzi 晏子 (Yan Ying 晏嬰), once said, “Clear and turgid, large and small, long and short, hurried and gentle, sorrow and joy, hard and soft, slow and fast, high and low, entering and leaving, complete and scattered, all mutually assist each other,” *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 20.
33. *Daodejing*, 5 and 38, respectively.
34. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (n.d.), ed., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1986), 137.3266.
35. Wang Xianshen, *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1998), “Jie Lao” 解老 [Commentaries on Laozi’s Teachings], 6.131.
36. Zhang Binglin, “Rudao” [The Confucian Way], in *Qiushu*, 8. way Zhang also emphasized the similarities between Daoism and the military strategists, regarding in areas such as cunning and subversion.
37. See Zhang Guangzhi 張光直 (1931–2001), *Zhongguo qingtongqi shidai* [The Era of Chinese Bronze Vessels] (Beijing: Sanlian Publishing, 1983), 307.
38. Qiu Shi 求是, “Jingshi zakao” 經史雜考 [An Eclectic Study of the Histories], in *Xuexi yu sikao* 5 (1984): 35.
39. *Liji zhengyi*, “Xiangyinjiu yi,” 61.1902a.
40. Kong Guangsen, *Dadai liji buzhu* 大戴禮記補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2013), “Shengde” 盛德 [Abundant Excellence], 8.155.
41. *Zuozhuan*, Xi 11th.
42. *Daodejing*, 38.
43. According to Herrlee Creel (1905–1994), there are 12 instances of *Wuwei* in the Laozi, and six touch on leadership. See Creel’s, *What Is Taoism?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 54. Creel makes a distinction between ‘contemplative Daoism,’ ‘purposive Daoism,’ and ‘Hsien (Spiritual) Daoism.’ This is insightful, but the later date in his dating of the text, and his account of the relationship between Daoism and Legalism both contain errors.
44. See *Hanfeizi jijie*, 6.130.
45. *Daodejing*, 45.
46. Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽 (1911–1992), *Zhouqin daolun fawei* 周秦道論發微 [Thoughts on the Way in the Zhou and Qin Periods] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1982), 12.
47. Zhang Binglin, “Confucianism and Daoism,” in *Qiu Shu*, 8.
48. *Daodejing*, 9.
49. This is possibly related to the legend that Laozi was from the south, where primitive clan society endured for much longer than in the central plains.
50. *Daodejing*, 80.
51. Ibid., 19.
52. Ibid., 80.
53. Some think that, behind the name of Laodan, the *Laozi* is in fact a conglomeration of different schools of Daoist thought, and that this explains the varied content of the text. See, for example, D.C. Lau’s (1921–2010) introduction to his translation of the *Daodejing*, *Lao tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin Classics, 1963), viii–ix.
54. This point marks the difference between the pre-Qin *Laozi* and the Han-dynasty *Huainanzi*.
55. See Yu Dunkang 余敦康, “Lun Yizhuan he Laozi bianzhengfa de yitong” 論易傳和老子辯證法的異同 [Comparisons between the Dialectical Approach

- of the *Yizhuan* and the *Laozi*], in *Zhexue Yanjiu* 哲學研究 [Philosophical Research] 7(1983): 46–53.
56. See *Sunzi*, B.112.
  57. See *Shiji*, 130.3292.
  58. This is reminiscent of how Ji Zha, a politician from the State of Wu during the Spring and Autumn period, praised the delights of Zhou culture: “They sang to him the sacrificial odes. He said, ‘How wonderful! This is to be upright but not stiff, flexible but not bent, closely present but not oppressive, distant but not lost, to change without license, to repeat without tiring, to grieve without being unhinged, to delight without wild indulgence, to use without ceasing, to possess wide virtue without display, to be beneficent without waste, to appropriate without greed, to conserve without sinking low, to act without dissipation’” (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 29). This passage shows that this style of thinking associated with the *Laozi* had become an important theory during the Spring and Autumn period, and that it was a form of general knowledge that emerged not from observation of nature but from experience in the world of human affairs.
  59. Creel focus on the Legalist Shen Buwei’s emphasis on ‘technique’ (*shu*) and ‘a way’ (*dao*), and argued that Shen’s *dao* was not holistic but about political techniques. Creel also believed that Shen’s conception of *wuwei* came from the *Analecets* passage 15.5: “If anyone could have effected proper order without striving (*wuwei*), surely it was Shun. What did he do? He simply assumed an air of deference and faced due South.” Thus, the approach to government of this so-called Legalist was not based on laws but on methods—the art of rulership. Shen’s notion of law was people upholding the demands of their office or social station, and had some connections to the Confucian school. These issues, and the differences between Shen and Han Fei, require further study.
  60. See Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “Mawangdui Laozi Jiayi benjuan qianhou yishu yu daoia” 馬王堆老子甲乙本卷前後佚書與道家 [The Mawangdui *Laozi* A and B Manuscripts and Daoism], in *Zongguo Zhexue* [Chinese Philosophy] (Beijing: SDX Joint, 1983), vol. 2; rpt. *Qiu Xigui xueshu wenji: Gudai lishi, sixiang, minsu juan* 裘錫圭學術文集·古代歷史、思想、民俗卷 (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2015), 271–85.
  61. *Shiji*, 63.2147.
  62. See *Hanfeizi jijie*, 18.417.
  63. *Ibid.*, 5.116.
  64. *Hanfeizi jijie*, 11.274.
  65. *Ibid.*, 4.84.
  66. *Ibid.*, 4.100.
  67. *Ibid.*, 6.146–7.
  68. *Ibid.*, 6.148.
  69. “Yielding Authority,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 2.48.
  70. “Being Prepared in the Domestic Realm,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 5.116.
  71. “Eminence in Learning,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 19.457.
  72. *Hanfeizi jijie*, 19.460.
  73. *Ibid.*, 17.394–5.
  74. While Han Fei did point out some well-known logical paradoxes, it was always to make a point about everyday life and not for the sake of conceptual analysis.
  75. *Hanfeizi jijie*, 4.93.
  76. *Ibid.*, 4.85–7, 88–9.
  77. “Eminence in Learning,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 19.461.
  78. See *Hanfeizi jijie*, 19.451.

79. *Hanfeizi* “Criticizing Strategic Position,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 17.388.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*, “Criticisms of the Ancients III,” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 16.380.
82. See *Records of the Grand Historian*, “Biography of Laozi and Han Fei” (*Shiji*, 63.2156).
83. *Shiji*, 130.3291.



## 4 Key Features of the *Xunzi*, *Yizhuan* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*

### The Characteristics of the Human Race

Xunzi is sometimes thought of as a Legalist, or as a Confucian who moved toward Legalism, or even as someone who “clearly showed the influence of the Hundred Schools.”<sup>1</sup> However, he is traditionally described as a Confucian, and this is still, relatively speaking, the best description to use. However, what counts as tradition was largely decided by Confucians, and Xunzi is often contrasted with the orthodox Confucian and Mencian tradition, and particularly the unusual ideas of Mencius. In fact, there are commonalities between Xunzi and Confucius and Mencius, and their shared lineage is more important than any differences. Xunzi can be thought of as continuing the Confucius and Mencius tradition and passing it on to texts like the *Yizhuan* commentary to the *Book of Changes* and the *Zhongyong* (*Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸), taking from the other Masters’ texts and also inspiring Han Confucianism. In the history of Chinese thought, Xunzi is an important bridge between the pre-Qin and Han era.

Xunzi was the same as Confucius and Mencius in that, “being a person, means living in the present age but having one’s intentions rooted in the ways of old.”<sup>2</sup> In politics, economics, culture, and thought, Xunzi largely followed the line of Confucius and Mencius. For example, “If an action ever involves injustice or in a killing involves an innocent then, even if it means gaining the empire, the humane person will not do it.”<sup>3</sup> “If those who are worthy are all on a par then the ruler’s relatives are the first to be ennobled; if the capable are all on par, then old friends are the first to be given official positions.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the preceding passage includes certain presumptions (being equally worthy or equally able), it still upholds the Confucian idea of ‘treating kin as kin’ and ‘respecting those deserving of respect’; similarly, “not committing a single act of injustice” (行一不义) is a phrase found in both the *Xunzi* and the *Mencius*.<sup>5</sup>

All of these passages can be directly compared to those in the *Mencius*:

The true king uses the myriad things as resources, and this is his means to nourish the people. He takes only one-tenth of the produce

from the fields. The mountain passes and markets are overseen but no fees are collected. The exploitation of mountain forests and dammed marshes is not taxed, but is prohibited in certain seasons.<sup>6</sup>

Lighten taxes on the fields, make fair the tariffs at markets and passes, lower the numbers of merchants, rarely raise corvee labor parties, and do not drag people away during the times for agricultural work.<sup>7</sup>

In particular, the “*Dalu*” 大略 (Grand Digest) chapter of the *Xunzi* is redolent with ideas from the Mencius: “Let families has a plot of five *mu* (one fifteenth of a hectare) for their residence and one hundred *mu* for their farmland.”<sup>8</sup> “That the Heavens give rise to the people, is not due to the ruler, but that the Heavens establish the ruler is due to the people.”<sup>9</sup> Consider also: “Follow the way and not one’s lord”<sup>10</sup>—passages like these are also comparable to Mencius’ famous phrases that ‘the people are supremely precious’ (*min wei gui* 民為貴)<sup>11</sup> and “If the Heavens wished the empire to go to a good and wise man then it would go to a good and wise man.”<sup>12</sup>

All of these passages (there are many others) indicate that Xunzi, like Mencius, continued the Confucian traditions. This tradition, which I have already discussed elsewhere, was one of a democratic clan system and humanistic traditions, which were rooted in the hereditary system of ancient society’s clan nobility.

What these political and economic proposals have in common is captured by a single point: “In all things, self-cultivation is primary.” ‘Self-cultivation,’ ‘ordering the family,’ ‘governing the state,’ and ‘bringing peace to the world’—these were also necessary steps demanded of any ruler under the primitive clan system. Only by starting from one’s own person could trust be gained within a clan, such that one could then become an authoritative leader of the tribal or a tribal alliance. Thus, ethical commitments such as Mencius’ “Any person can become a Yao or a Shun” or Xunzi’s “All people can be made to be like a Yu,” are truths that have been passed down through thousands of years of history. This ancient system soon disintegrated during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, but its mark on people’s thinking and in tradition was not entirely erased. The Confucians, who advocated ‘trusting and loving the ancients’ preserved it, transforming the existing sociopolitical system into an ideology based on the morality of personal bonds and relationships, as defined by the Confucians. I believe this was one of the most striking features of Confucian doctrine. It had tremendous influence on later Chinese culture, and all three of the classical Confucian sage-thinkers shared this approach.

However, different historical eras differ greatly. By the late Warring States period, the clan-based polity and economy had completely disintegrated, and a system of separate regional states had been established. Faced with this situation and as the upholder of Confucian tradition, Xunzi

also adapted a flexible approach. For example, Confucius and Mencius talked only of humaneness and rightness, and rarely of warfare—"I have never studied military matters" (*Analects* 15.1). Xunzi, however, often discussed warfare. However, here too, discussions were never separate from humaneness and rightness:

Those who are humane care for the people, caring for the people, they despise what is harmful to people. [. . .] Military forces are that by which one prohibits violence and does away with what is harmful. They are not for struggle and contention.<sup>13</sup>

Confucius and Mencius used humaneness and rightness to explain ritual, and did not emphasize punishments and the penal code; but Xunzi very much did. Further, ritual and laws became a key point of difference between Xunzi and the two earlier Confucians. Yet this apparent difference was still within the overarching Confucian path or framework mentioned earlier: "There are chaotic rulers but there are no intrinsically chaotic states; there are men who create order but there are no rules or defined system of rulership";<sup>14</sup> "The Proper use of equipment and measures is what flows from good governance—it is not the source of good order. The refined ruler is the source of good order."<sup>15</sup> These passages continue to return to the theme of attracting or holding sway over people as a ruler, by virtue of personal cultivation: "'May I inquire about how to run the state?' I answer: 'I have heard of cultivating one's person but have never heard of 'running the state.'"<sup>16</sup>

Xunzi represents Confucianism for a new era; he is not a Legalist, but he is not a Confucian in the same way that Confucius and Mencius were. This 'not in the same way' refers to how, in Xunzi's thought, the democratic spirit and the humanistic strand are hugely pared down; consequently, the class-based nature of ruling comes through more clearly. The modern reader of the *Xunzi* does not find it as free and liberating as the *Mencius*, and I believe that the reason lies in these differences.<sup>17</sup> The *Xunzi* is more methodical, more logical, and gives greater weight to materialism; but has less of that emotionally appealing humanistic sentiment or primitive populist drive.

The reason for this lies also in the idea of 'self-cultivation,' but one that develops quite differently from the Mencius' excessive focus on the inner, psychological dimensions of humaneness and rightness. Xunzi revives an emphasis on the constraining and controlling effects of external models and norms. 'Ritual' was originally a form of external regulation and constraint, but Confucius approached it through the concept of humaneness in an attempt to give a psychological foundation to what was an external norms and models in ancient times. Mencius developed this line of thinking, and it became a philosophical account of an inner human nature. Xunzi's criticism of Mencius for "Neglecting the model of the former

kings and not knowing tradition” alluded to this. Mencius did not appreciate that, in early times, both for the social group and for individual concerned with personal cultivation, ritual sustained order and was imbued with an objective authority. What the three thinkers had in common here is that all paid attention to how to integrate the order and norms of human social life with subjective psychological structures of individual people. This was the so-called problem of human nature. Where they differed was in their response. Confucius only focused on the cultural psychological formation of the individual personality, while Mencius of the psychology implicit in this formation, and the value of individual character (the second and fourth elements in the structure of humanness discussed in Chapter 1); this was a move from inner to outer. Xunzi, however, sought to develop the collective norms and models that brought order to the state and peace to the empire (the third element in humanness, also discussed in Chapter 1). Here, ritual is explained in terms of providing a benchmark for conduct; this is a move from outer to inner.

As everyone knows, ritual is a key concept for Xunzi. What is ‘ritual’? Where does it come from? This was not entirely clear at the time of Xunzi:

All things involve ritual. When dealing with birth, it adorns joyous experience; in sending off the deceased it provides it adorns grief. In making official sacrifices, rituals embellish feelings of reverence, and in marshalling troops they inspire feelings of awe-inspiring majesty. In this, the hundred kings were alike, and past and present are united, although no one knows how it came to be like this.

(*Xunzi* 19.7)<sup>18</sup>

Despite this apparent bafflement, Xunzi offered his own rationalized account of how activities that were originally bound up with sorcery and totemic symbolism came to adorn ceremony and official speech:

What are the origins of ritual? I say that men are born with desires which, if not satisfied, cannot but lead men to seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy their desires men observe no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for them not to contend over the means to satisfy their desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The ancient kings abhorred such disorder; so, they established the regulations contained within ritual and moral principles in order to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction. They so fashioned their regulations that desires should not want for the things which satisfy them and goods would not be exhausted by the desires. In this way the two of them, desires and goods, sustained each other over the course of time. This is the origin of ritual.

(19.1)<sup>19</sup>

Humans inborn nature is such that they cannot but form communities; and if these communities have no social divisions then there will be strife; and if there is strife then there will be disorder.

(10.3)<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the Ancient Kings acted to control them with regulations, ritual, and moral principles, in order thereby to divide society into classes, creating therewith differences in status between the noble and base, disparities between the privileges of age and youth, and the division of the wise from the stupid, the able from the incapable. All of this caused men to perform the duties of their station in life and each to receive his due; only after this had been done was the amount and substance of the emolument paid by grain made to fit their respective stations. This indeed is the way to make the whole populace live together in harmony and unity.

(14.2)<sup>21</sup>

Here, 'ritual' is not simply formal ceremony, governed by turgid rules, nor can it simply be understood entirely in terms of traditional thinking; rather, it is considered to be rational product of history. Its role in the stratified social order and in government regulation is treated as a necessary condition of the survival of the group. For Xunzi, ritual originates in the sharing of the group (of which the foremost is the shared enjoyment of food), as only through ritual can the group avoid disordered strife. It is clear that, first, people much exist as part of a social group. This being so, it follows that, second, there must be a system of fixed standards and measures that delineate social status; otherwise, the group will lack the means to survive. This is what is meant by 'ritual.' Notably, contemporary scholars of ancient human anthropology have also pointed out that the characteristics of human nature have their origins in the shared partaking of food.<sup>22</sup> Two thousand years ago, Xunzi focused on the rational communal and shared elements of ritual, and used these to explain the difference between humans and animals. This was a truly remarkable insight:

What makes a man really human lies not primarily in his being a featherless biped, but rather in his ability to draw boundaries. For example, the ape resembles a man in form and is also a featherless biped, but the gentleman will nonetheless sip a broth and eat minced meat made from him. Hence, what makes a man human lies not in his being a featherless biped but in his ability to draw boundaries. Even though wild animals have parents and offspring, there is no natural affection between them as between father and son, and though there are male and female of the species, there is no proper separation of sexes. Hence, the proper way of man lies in nothing other than his ability to draw boundaries. Of such boundaries, none

is more important than that between social classes. Of the instruments for distinguishing social classes, none is more important than ritual principles.

(5.4)<sup>23</sup>

Fire and water possess vital energy (*qi*) but have no life. Trees and plants possess life but lack awareness. Birds and beasts have awareness but lack a sense of morality and justice. Humans possess vital energy, life, and awareness, and add to them a sense of morality and justice. It is for this reason that they are the noblest beings in the world. With respect to physical power they are not as good as an ox, in swiftness they do not equal the horse; yet the ox and the horse can be put to their use. Why is that? I say it is because humans alone can form societies and animals cannot. Why can man form a society? I say it is due to the division of society into classes. How can social divisions be translated into behavior? I say it is because of humans' sense of morality and justice.

(9.6)<sup>24</sup>

To summarize, Xunzi viewed 'ritual' as constituting social models, norms, and standards, and offered a perceptive account of its historical origins. Ritual provides the distinctions and measuring sticks that allow "noble and base have their distinctions, old and young are different, rich and poor, light and heavy all have their respective names";<sup>25</sup> and ritual was not only the unique creation of the sages—it was regarded as that which 'the hundred kings accumulated,' the fruit of a long historical process.

Because Xunzi starts from the concrete realities of human survival, so he places classification (*lei* 類) on a higher plane than ritual and law: "The *Book of Rites* contains the model for the primary social distinctions and the categories (*lei*) used for the guiding rules and ordering norms of behavior" (1.8).<sup>26</sup> Further, the *Ruxiao* chapter identifies the difference between the 'correct Confucian' and the 'great Confucian' as follows. With the former, "Their discourse and conduct incorporate the great models. Nonetheless their intelligence cannot solve a problem that the model and their instruction did not cover. What their study and experience have not yet reached, their knowledge cannot properly classify" (8.10);<sup>27</sup> however, the latter, "Use the ancient to continue the present, and the one to handle the myriad. Even if they lived among wild beasts they could distinguish what truly belongs to the categories of humanity and justice as easily as distinguishing black from white. When they meet extraordinary things and bizarre transformations that have never been seen or heard of before, by brusquely picking up one corner, they are able to state its guiding principle and proper category, and can duly respond to them" (8.10).<sup>28</sup>

Thus, classification or category (*lei*) is indicative of the natural order and principles governing different living things, especially, humanity:

“Ancestors are the root of categories” (19.2).<sup>29</sup> Classification explains why ritual and models can be the baseline rationality for the myriad norms of the world. So in Xunzi’s discussions of ‘community,’ ‘distinctions,’ ‘ritual,’ and ‘laws,’ the most important aspect is: “To summarize policy and strategy for governing, words must be equalized with actions, and the categories unified” (6.8).<sup>30</sup> That is, all social order and norms (i.e., ritual) are necessary for life in clans and groups, and these are not a priori psychological norms or naturalized morality, as Mencius thought; Xunzi’s categories have a concrete socially grounded content. Thus, Xunzi’s humanism is different from Mencius’ humanism. It does not draw upon a priori moral psychology but instead distinguishes humans and animals through external social models and norms. This is not a goodness that emerges independently in the individual, as a kind of good human nature, but is the result of compelling demands made of the individual by the collective. For Xunzi, the internal moral dimension of humaneness and rightness must originate in external models and norms. Thus, ritual is the standard indicating the ‘correct way’ and ‘human path’ of humaneness and rightness:

The craftsman’s plumb line is the acme of straightness; the balances provides the perfect measure of the flat, the carpenters compass and square are the perfection of roundness and squareness; so too is ritual the ultimate in the human way.

(19.2)<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, Xunzi provided the ritual that inhered in the traditions of the clan lineages with a historical rationale, revitalizing the tradition for the contemporary era or ‘putting new wine in old bottles.’ ‘Old bottles’ because Xunzi, like Confucius, still gave ritual a crucial role, and still valued individual status and standing as well as ordering the family. ‘New wine’ because the content and social meaning were different: the starting point was no longer ritual for nurturing of clan nobles or leaders but a system of social norms and models that brought order to the collective. As a result, ritual was not orientated around the goals of individual goals of humaneness, rightness, filial piety, and brotherly affection but emphasized ritualized laws and norms that were directed toward the collective; and the former was subservient to the latter:

At home, to be filial towards one’s parents and outside to be properly courteous towards elders is the minimum standard of conduct. To be obedient to superiors and well-intentioned in dealings with inferiors is a middling standard of conduct. To follow the way rather than one’s lord and to follow rightness rather than one’s father is the highest standard of conduct. When the conscious will finds contentment in ritual, and when speech is issues from the categories entrenched

in ritual then the Confucian way is complete. Not even a Shun could add so much as a single hair to this.

(29.1)<sup>32</sup>

Accordingly, people should naturally want to “Model themselves on the later kings, in order to unify the rules regulations” (8.10),<sup>33</sup> and “Exalt the ruler’s authority,” revering only one power. Xunzi lacked the democratic and humanistic spirit of the clan traditions, but added convincing arguments about hierarchical governance, which would later develop into the theoretical basis for an autocratic state, which maintained order through strict distinctions in social hierarchy. This led Qing scholar Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–98) to write, “Two thousand years of learning is all the learning of Xunzi.” This kind of social governance based on the collective, with its historical-rational theoretical framework, might be compared with the approach of Confucian and Mencius. These latter two schools still relied upon the traditional clan-based framework of emotion, psychology, and morality, while Xunzi’s approach was more practical and progressive. This is probably connected to the fact that Xunzi, being in the state of Qi, absorbed some of the ideas of Guan Zhong (including thinking about rulership from the perspective of regional states).

Xunzi’s ‘human nature is bad’ derives from the fact that he starts from order based on laws and models governing the collective. Xunzi explains the claim ‘human nature is good’ as the claim that people, prior to experience, possess a rational sensitive to moral goodness. In reply, Xunzi’s ‘human nature is bad’ claims that people must consciously make use of practical social norms and models to laboriously reform themselves. Hence the phrase, “goodness lies in conscious exertion” (23.1).<sup>34</sup> Goodness is the result of controlling, curtailing, and transforming ones ingrained natural (or animalistic) dispositions. This struggle between good and bad nature originates in different understandings of social order and rules. Mencius attributes them to an a priori moral psychology, while Xunzi understands them in terms of concrete social history. The former thus emphasizes inward cultivation of subjective consciousness, while the latter emphasizes an artificially constructed objective reality. Xunzi’s objective reality includes nature as well as internal ‘human nature.’ As a result, while both promoting the shared ideal of self-cultivation, Mencius and Xunzi did so by following very different paths.

This leads logically to Xunzi’s second key theme: ‘the distinction between the natural and the human’ (*tianren zhifen* 天人之分). Xunzi believed that human existence necessarily involved a struggle with nature. In response, Xunzi advocated arduous effort, and the need for learning (*xue* 學). In the *Analects*, the need for learning is stated in the very first passage, and the first chapter of the Xunzi is also “An Exhortation to Learning.” Although Xunzi described the content and course of such study as, “Starts by reciting the classics and finishes with reading the Book of Rites,” we know from



the preceding discussion that Xunzi's account of learning was in fact much broader than this. His theory states that, "those who study are human, those who abandon it are animals" (1.8);<sup>35</sup> "What must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it is called 'acquired nature'" (23.1).<sup>36</sup> Xunzi joined together learning and action, such that the 'exhortation to learning' and acquired or molded human nature are intrinsically connected. This 'learning' is in fact not restricted to the idea of self-cultivation, but is connected to the existence of the entire human race; namely, to be skilled at using surrounding objects, or at creating things, in order to fulfill one's own purposes:

The potter moulds his clay and thereby produces vessels, but the vessel is produced by the acquired nature of the craftsman, it is not produced by the inherent nature of the person.

(23.7)<sup>37</sup>

A man who borrows a horse and carriage does not improve his feet, but he can extend his travels 1,000 *li*. A man who borrows a boat and paddles does not gain any new ability in water, but he can cut across rivers and seas. The gentleman by birth is not different from other men; he is just good at "borrowing" the use of external things.

(1.3)<sup>38</sup>

This places great importance on Confucius' experience: "Tradesmen wanting to be good at their trade must first sharpen their tools" (*Analects* 15.10).

This approach forms the backbone of Xunzi's entire theoretical approach. Xunzi's theory of ritual, of acquired nature, his 'exhortation to learning' and his 'distinction between the natural and the human' all follow from it, and form a coherent system. The logical foundations of this complete system are as follows. Humanity (society) must band together (form groups) if it is to secure its own existence, and successfully struggle against nature (the natural world). This gives rise to ritual. Ritual is integral to shared enjoyment and ending strife; it establishes norms, models, and order that enable the group to survive and propagate. This order consists in controlling, remaking, and restraining people's natural desires (reforming their inner natures). In order to maintain social order (external) and to control natural desires (internal), it is necessary to learn, to engage in action or practice, and to 'acquire' (skills or second natures). Clearly, learning and practical action are directly linked with basic human existence. For Xunzi, then, learning and practical action constitute an important foundation. Mencius' conception of learning is harnessing and bringing out the original heart-mind, returning a fundamental nature that involves a transcendental goodness. Xunzi's learning, however, involves external standards and models as indicated by the phrase "wood that has been marked with the plumbline will be straight" (1.1).<sup>39</sup> This leads to a

cosmology in which “The natural world is to be seen in its brilliance and the Earth in its vast expanses” (1.14).<sup>40</sup>

It is in such a context that the idea of ‘the distinction between the heavenly (or nature) and the human’ (*tianren zhiben* 天人之分) appears:

The cultivated person reveres what is within himself and does not admire what is of Heaven, and in this way makes progress each day; the petty person misunderstands what is within himself and admires Heaven, and so with each day he diminishes himself.

(17.6)<sup>41</sup>

How can glorifying Heaven and contemplating it be as good as tending to its creatures and regulating them? How can obeying Heaven and singing it hymns of praise be better than regarding what the Heavens ordain and then using this? How can anxiously watching for the season and awaiting what it brings be as good as responding to the season and exploiting it? How can depending on this to increase naturally be better than developing their natural capacities so as to transform them?

(17.10)<sup>42</sup>

This has long since become an outstanding and famous epithet, an anthem for human life. It fully expresses how humans rely on their own efforts to survive and prosper, and is what distinguishes humans from all other things. If we say that Mencius was the first in the history of Chinese thought to establish the idea of the outstanding individual character, then Xunzi was the first to establish the great collective spirit of the human tribe. Xunzi placed this spirit at the apex of the worldview based on the triumvirate of “Heaven, Earth and man”: “Heaven has its seasons; Earth its resources and man his government. This is why it is said that they can form a triad” (17.2).<sup>43</sup>

Heaven and Earth are the beginning of life. Ritual and moral principles are the beginning of order. The cultivated person is the beginning of ritual and moral principles. Acting with them, allowing them to permeate, accumulating them over and over again, and coming to delight in them is the beginning of the cultivated person. Thus, Heaven and Earth give birth to the cultivated person, and he in turn gives pattern and reason to them. The cultivated person thus forms a triad with Heaven and Earth.

(9.15)<sup>44</sup>

This passage offers the traditionalist account of the importance of studying hard, active government and making the different levels of ordered society accord with the regularities and principles of the heavens and the Earth; but it also makes the theoretical point that humans

can be masters of the myriad things of the world, and stand alongside the heavens and the Earth—there is no talk about a need to seek divine intervention. Xunzi wrote, “The good farmer does not stop ploughing because there is a lack of water; the merchant does not stop trading because he suffers a loss, and so the learned and cultivated person does not, on account of being poor or in dire straits, slacken off in following the way” (2.5).<sup>45</sup>

This expresses the irrepressible spirit of the Confucian developed to its extreme. If we say that Mencius development of Confucianism is primarily about ‘sageliness within,’ then Xunzi is primarily about ‘kingliness without.’<sup>46</sup> ‘Kingliness without’ has a much more practical and applied quality than ‘sageliness within’ and is more fundamental. Human psychology and morality are grounded in outward practical activities, and which can only then gradually be internalized, firmed up, and accumulated in personal character. Thus, the aspects emphasized by Xunzi are the more basic:

Even a famous thoroughbred like Qiji cannot cover ten paces in a single stride. But in ten yokings even a worn-out nag can. Its achievement consists in its not giving up. If you start carving but give up, you cannot cut even a rotting piece of wood in two. Yet if you carve away and never give up, even metal and stone can be engraved.<sup>47</sup>

Isn’t this mindset of laborious and persistent practical effort the Chinese people’s all-important practical virtue?

Works discussing Xunzi are already numerous, and I believe that of Xunzi’s ideas, the most important are those described previously, namely, tracing origins of ritual and its role in establishing human social order, emphasizing the importance of dedicated learning, consciously utilizing social models and norms to restrain and reform oneself, and using and controlling nature.

Significantly, people often fail to pay sufficient attention to the fact that in Xunzi’s idea of controlling heaven’s propensities and utilizing them (recall the distinctions between the natural and the human), it remains important to abide with the heavens. For Xunzi, ‘Heaven’ cannot determine human fate, and people cannot depend upon nature or blame ‘Heaven.’ People must rely on their own efforts to respond to and make use of the regularities of the natural world, and thereby secure their livelihoods. Thus, Xunzi says:

Strengthen the root and reduce expenditure and the Heavens cannot make you poor; prepare well and act at the appropriate time, and the Heavens cannot make you sick; if you conform to the way and are not caught in two minds, then nature cannot bring about calamity. Thus, flood and drought cannot cause famine, cold and

heat cannot cause sickness, and inauspicious and freak events cannot cause misfortune.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, however, Xunzi also believed:

The sage purifies his natural ruler, rectifies his natural faculties, completes his natural nourishment, is obedient to the natural rule of order, and nourishes his natural emotions and thereby completes nature's achievement.<sup>49</sup>

On the one hand we have, "Only the sage acts not seeking to know nature";<sup>50</sup> and on the other we find, "When conduct is minutely controlled, nourishment is minutely moderated, and life suffers no injury—this is called 'understanding nature.'"<sup>51</sup> That is, people take action and their fate is not determined by 'Heaven' which cannot control human affairs (in fact, Mozi's influence is strong here, including the ideas of making great efforts, denying fatalism and strengthening the agricultural base). Consequently, it is not necessary to attempt to fathom the mysteries of heaven—making clear the rules for human society is sufficient. However, on the other hand, humans and their environment are both natural entities and thus have an element of 'Heaven' or the natural. So, Xunzi also took seriously the questions of how to manage this aspect of humanity, how to accord with objective natural laws, such that "Heaven and Earth perform the work of officers, and the myriad things serve as foot soldiers," which amounts to 'knowing Heaven' (*zhitian* 知天).<sup>52</sup>

Xunzi's ideas of 'the distinction between the natural and the human' and 'controlling Heaven's propensities and utilizing them' do not dismiss but in fact show understanding of how to regulate and harmonize the relationship between nature ('Heaven') and human affairs. Xunzi was not interested in aspects of nature that bore no relation to human affairs, but sought to understand how nature as it pertained to people could be controlled and remade by those people. And in this relatedness and remaking there is obviously the problem of how to accommodate objective natural laws. If attention is only paid to the artificial or manmade, then actions will proceed blindly and fail to attain their desired aims and results. It is thus necessary to emphasize the need to attune to objective natural laws. Thus, contrary to superficial appearances, and though Xunzi talked of the distinctions between heaven and the human, his thinking still embodies the idea of the unity between humans and heaven (*tianren heyi* 天人合一). But Xunzi's interpretation is very different to Mencius', since the latter's account is redolent with inward directed thoughts of mysterious willpower and control of intentions. Xunzi writes:

By plowing in spring, weeding in summer, harvesting in autumn, and storing in winter, the four activities do not miss their proper season.

Thus, production of the five foods is not interrupted, and the hundred clans have more than enough to eat. The ponds, lakes, pools, streams, and marshes being strictly closed during the proper periods means that the fish and turtles are in plentiful abundance and the hundred clans have surplus for other uses. The cutting and pruning, the growing and planting not missing their proper season is the reason the mountain forests are not denuded and the hundred clans have more than enough timber. The function of the sage king is to scrutinize Heaven above and establish Earth below; he fills up and puts in order the space between the Heavens and the Earth, and he makes his contribution to the myriad things.<sup>53</sup>

Emphasizing three times the idea of not missing the proper season, suggesting planting and harvesting in accord with objective rules governing the world, and while observing the distinctions between the natural and the human, it is also necessary to accord with heaven (*shuntian* 順天). This kind of ‘according with Heaven’ (achieving unity between heaven and man) is a more practical and realistic conception.

Clearly, there is something of a tension here, particularly given the ‘human nature is bad’ doctrine. On the one hand, “Inborn nature embraces what is spontaneous from nature . . . what cannot be learned, and what requires no application to master is nature”;<sup>54</sup> but, at the same time, people must “transform original nature and develop our acquired nature,”<sup>55</sup> thereby “unifying original and acquired natures.”<sup>56</sup> That being so, is the heavenly (nature) from which human’s original nature comes good or bad? Furthermore, Xunzi said,

I say that inborn nature is the root and the beginning, the raw material and undeveloped constitution. Acquired nature is the patterning and adorning, the flourishing and completion. If there was no inborn nature, there would be nothing for acquired nature to improve; if there was no possibility of acquired nature then inborn nature could not refine itself. Only after inborn and acquired nature have been unified is the concept of the sage realized, and the achievement of uniting the world brought about.<sup>57</sup>

Conscious human efforts at reforming their natures have a particular object—their inborn natures. This much is clear. However, how is this kind of reform possible? How can ‘bad’ inborn nature be amenable to reform? Wang Guowei once remarked, “Xunzi declares that human nature is bad, and that goodness is acquired through conscious effort, but how is this reforming possible?”<sup>58</sup> Xunzi believes that because humans have intelligence and are able to learn and, because the heart-mind somehow knows or recognizes the rites, it is possible to regulate human desires. How can the heart know or be fitted to rites? Xunzi does not offer a clear

answer. For Xunzi, this is a process of learning rooted in the material world, moving from feeling to reasoning. However, Xunzi also believes that the heart-mind that performs this rational function also has an a priori quality: "As a general principle, the faculty of knowing belongs to the inborn nature of man."<sup>59</sup> The reason why humans can reform themselves and learn ritual is because they draw upon this kind of intrinsic perspicacity. In Xunzi's words, "The roots of ritual lie in according with the human heart-mind."<sup>60</sup> Here, the duality of 'Heaven' and 'inborn nature' appears: the Confucian struggle with, opposition to and reform of nature (heaven), which could benefit the human community in terms of dealing with natural exigencies (external) and emotions (internal); on the other hand, however, it is necessary to know, follow, and adjust to the natural (heaven), such as being in step with the four seasons (external) and having a perspicacious and knowing nature (inner).<sup>61</sup> In most discussions of Xunzi, the second interpretation is taken to be more important. For example, Xunzi insists that "the mind knows by its emptiness, unity and stillness" and in this way the heart-mind arrives at great insight regarding knowledge of things.<sup>62</sup> This leads people in both knowledge and action to accord with objective principles and laws (i.e., 'the way').

Clearly, the distinction between the natural and the human (*tianren zhi-fen*) points toward some kind of insightful personal state and a striving spirit; if effectiveness is to be achieved, then 'the unity of Heaven and man' (*tianren heyi*) must be secured, and this demands that respect for natural laws be treated as fundamental. The Chinese idea of 'the unity of Heaven and man' can be traced back to the long history of small agricultural producers, and is a foundation from which Xunzi, despite his emphasis on the distinction between the human and the natural, could not extract himself.

The previous chapter stated that the *Laozi's* dialectical method was related to the military strategist. Now we might add that Xunzi's emphasis on struggling against nature (*tian*) while also according with it, is, unlike the ancient Greek mariners or the industry of modern times, related to the rapidly developing and maturing agriculture of his time. Xunzi highly values agricultural production, and he discusses agricultural issues more than many other thinkers. Agricultural production involves struggling with nature, since it relies on equipment and intensive cultivation; but it requires acting by attending to and following the objective laws of nature (*tian*). The state of farming in pre-Qin times is unknown to us, but if we look at later works on farming, they emphasize that "effort and capability will overcome poverty" and that "if work in the fields is not done with determination, then the granaries will not be filled,"<sup>63</sup> "Those wishing to be skilled at what they do must first sharpen their tools . . . they must be skilled in the use of tools, and prompt in following orders"; "Observe the layout of the land, and where moisture and dryness reside"; "Rely upon the Earth and look for the first days of spring."<sup>64</sup> These ideas are very similar to those expressed by Xunzi.

When Xunzi criticizes Mozi's restrictions on excessive consumption, he begins by emphasizing that people create sufficient agricultural output to meet their needs:

Regarding the five foods of the soil, if a farmer expertly manages them, his acreage will produce many baskets in the first harvest and can be harvested a second time. With expertise, the melons, peaches, jujubes, and plums will bear fruit such that each vine and tree fills many baskets. Beyond this, with supreme expertise, aromatic herbs and vegetables and the hundred edibles will be overflowing. Beyond this, such expertise will ensure at least one of the six domestic animals or a wild beast can permanently provide carriage [. . .] while those that supply food and nourishment cannot be counted.<sup>65</sup>

So, an emphasis on tools and labor as a means to exploit nature and nourish life is placed alongside long-established farming practices such as taking care to abide by the laws of nature and following the seasons and the lay of the land. Perhaps this is the true foundation of Xunzi's thought? This makes Xunzi's worldview appear to be both materialist and yet also circular ("from beginning to end, and then from end to beginning, like a circle without beginning or end"<sup>66</sup>). In terms of epistemology, there is an emphasis on emptying, unifying and stillness, the removal of disturbing subjective prejudice and emotions, and objectively and calmly becoming acquainted with the world; but there is also criticism of abstract thought not sufficiently grounded in reality, as well as emphasis on the practical and experiential aspects of knowledge.<sup>67</sup> Xunzi shares the former approach—the ideal of a clear-sighted rational attitude—with Laozi and Han Fei, but differs in that Laozi and Han Fei viewed history with greater apathy. Although Xunzi seldom discussed a priori morality or the psychology of emotions, he nevertheless had the Confucian school's spirit of optimistic striving—accumulating goodness and not losing it. Xunzi complained that, "Laozi had some insight into bending and yielding, but not into being upright," thereby resolutely affirming humans subjective capacity for practical action; and he held to the ideal that humans could form a triumvirate with heaven and Earth.<sup>68</sup> Xunzi is calmly rational as well as optimistic and positive. This positive reforming of the natural world gives a new meaning to the traditional idea of the unity of the natural and the human. It's early emotive and somewhat mystical religious quality acquired an authentic practical material foundation—some continued in later generations, through the sacrifices of idealists and revolutionaries. This is Xunzi's greatest legacy, and this despite the fact that the theoretical implications of his ideas were never fully worked out.

From the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians to the New Confucians of the present, all were united in attacking Xunzi and praising Mencius. Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming both continued the Mencian tradition, believing

it to represent the true orthodox lineage of Chinese traditional thought. And the last 30 years of mainland scholarship have either praised Xunzi's materialism or criticized his Legalist tendencies to demand respect for the ruler and authority for ritual. But these appraisals fail to grasp the heart of Xunzi's thought. Mencius offers some wonderful insights, but if his thought was uncritically developed as whole then Confucianism would long ago have become a kind of mysticism or a religion. Because of Xunzi's emphasis on active human effort and because his account of human nature as bad (with its implied reform of the natural) clearly opposed Mencius' a priori conviction of human goodness, it was possible to control and limit this religious tendency. Furthermore, Xunzi's adoption of the level-headed rationality of the Mohists, Daoists, and Legalists, and his valuing of practical historical experience, greatly enriched the Confucian tradition of valuing human action and social traditions. Accordingly, he raised the Confucianism optimism about human life to the lofty worldview wherein humans formed a triad with heaven and Earth. 'Heaven' was now demystified and under human control, and the human in this triad was no defined not by a priori moral structures but by a life of practical activity. Through the accumulation of learning, the person became master of the myriad things, enlightened regarding the nature of the cosmos. It was precisely this idea that provided an indispensable connecting link within Confucianism, joining Kong-Meng moral philosophy to the worldview of the *Yizhuan* and *Zhongyong*, and to the cosmology of the Han Confucians. Xunzi wrote,

All rites begin with coarseness and are brought to completion in acculturation. . . . Through rites, Heaven and Earth are conjoined, the sun and the moon shine brightly, the four seasons observe their natural order, the stars and planets move in order, the rivers and streams flow, and the myriad things prosper. Through them, love and hatred are tempered, and joy and anger made to fit the occasion. The rites are indeed perfection!<sup>69</sup>

This is an early articulation of what Dong Zhongshu sought to express in his system of mutual interaction between heaven and humanity. Thus, it might be said that without Xunzi there would have been no Han Confucianism, and without Han Confucianism it's hard to imagine how Chinese culture might have developed. Even that bitter opponent of Xunzi, Tan Sitong, was moved to write:

Xunzi came after Mencius, and promoted the model of the former kings and revered imperial rule. In this he opposed Mencius' populist thinking, and I was critical of this as being a case of the village worthy [since Xunzi was accused of being a ruler's lackey while apparently upholding the Confucian ideal of remonstrating with rulers].



Yet Xunzi investigated the intersection of nature and the human, and extensively developed what had not previously been developed. He thus made up some of Mencius' deficiencies while also influencing the later Wang Chong School. How can this be derided?<sup>70</sup>

There are two points to note here, and both are interrelated. First, "investigated the intersection of nature and the human" and "extensively developed what had not previously been developed" both describe how Xunzi gave 'the unity of the natural (Heaven) and the human' an objective and practical quality, raising it to the level of a worldview. Second, he fully developed a calm and insightful attitude of rational criticism, which was a foundation for later thinkers from Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), Wang Chong 王充 (27–97), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) to Dai Zhen and Zhang Binglin. Through his practical approach, Xunzi developed the pragmatic reasoning of Confucius' idea of humaneness (*ren*). This kind of rationality was not about scientific verification of the natural world but rather an attempt to apply commonsense experience to the nature, thereby resisting all transcendental superstition and invention. Xunzi wrote "the operations of nature show consistency; they do not exist because of the sage-king Yao nor disappear because of the tyrant Jie" and "Heaven does not suspend winter because men dislike the cold, Earth does not reduce its broad expanse because men dislike long distances";<sup>71</sup> similarly, Wang Chong wrote, "How can we know nature, since Heaven does not declare its intentions . . . and today it does not express any desires, offers no clues to the things of this world. Why is that?" and "The operations of Heaven are not from a desire to nourish life since things develop by themselves. This is what is natural."<sup>72</sup> The same thread runs through both of these thoughts, and has often served to resist the tendency toward determinism, preordination, and mysticism in Chinese philosophy. From the Zisi-Mencius school to Dong Zhongshu and Chenwei theology in the Han, from the Wei and Jin to the Sui and Tang eras, thinkers such as Xunzi, Wang Chong, Fan Zhen 范縝 (ca. 450–ca. 510), Liu Yuxi, and Liu Zongyuan all provided this kind of clear-minded rational critique and corrective. In Chinese philosophy and in the formation of the Chinese cultural-psychological structures this played a role whose importance is difficult to overestimate.

### The Establishment of a Confucian Worldview

This section will discuss the connections between Xunzi's thought and the *Yizhuan* or *Great Commentary on the Book of Changes* text. This will be based on the historical development of the relevant theories. It will not explore the origins of the *Yizhuan*, its historical era, or the relations between different parts of the text; nor will it attempt to discuss differences between the *Yizhuan* and the *Book of Changes* regarding

origins and characteristics.<sup>73</sup> The most striking features of the *Yizhuan* are, I believe, its continuation of the spirit of striving that was laid out in Xunzi's thought, alongside the abandonment of ideas such as 'the distinction between the natural and the human' (*tianren zhiben*) and 'control natural propensities (*tianming* 天命) and make use of them.' These were transformed into "As the heavenly movements are ever vigorous, so the cultivated person drives himself on without respite";<sup>74</sup> the text also bestowed upon nature a sense of the ethical, and gave unequivocal prominence to the metaphysical idea of "one movement of *yin* and one movement of *yang* is called *dao* (the way),"<sup>75</sup> thereby creatively establishing a comprehensive worldview. The *Yizhuan* eventually became the most important and finest work in Confucian philosophy.

The *Yizhuan* is distinguished by the way it synthesizes all branches of Confucian thought with the *Laozi* and Legalist doctrines. It also features important connections with the Yin-Yang School. *Tian* in the *Yizhuan* typically refers to the external natural world, like it does for Xunzi. However, in the *Xunzi*, when *tian* refers to the natural world, it bears no relation to people, but rather is distinguished from them, and lacks intrinsic value or meaning. However, the *Yizhuan* bestows upon the external natural world (*tian*) a distinctive meaning and value, and creates analogies to the world of human affairs; as a result, *tian* has an ethical aspect, and even an affective dimension. As mentioned earlier, unlike industrialized society, people whose lives are grounded in agricultural production have long been used to 'following *tian*.' In particular, this means according with the regularities of the four seasons, and cycles of night and day, hot and cold, while the importance of good crop weather to production and livelihoods left a deep impression in people's thoughts. Such a relationship led people to have feelings and thoughts about nature and the world, including cherishing it and feeling gratitude toward it. Building on Xunzi's ideas, the *Yizhuan* forged deeply rooted traditional thinking and feelings about 'the unity of Heaven and humanity' (*tianren heyi*) into a coherent system. Within this system, the most important attitude is: "The great attribute of Heaven (*tian*) and Earth is the production of life (*sheng* 生)."<sup>76</sup>

This is distinct from Xunzi's notion of *tian* as external nature, and also Mencius' sense of *tian* as an internal commander. *Tian* is external, but also involves moral character and emotional qualities. In this respect, it is close to Mencius. However, it is not like the a priori morally good heart-mind of Mencius and is more like Xunzi's broadly conceived historical progression of outwardly directed human activity within nature. The *Yizhuan* has said much about the origins and evolution of human history and cosmic events and so, on the whole, is closer to Xunzi than Mencius:

Anciently, when Baoxi had come to the rule of all under Heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the Earth. He

contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things.<sup>77</sup>

The *Yizhuan* describes the evolution of human history since the time of figures such as Baoxi, Shennong, Huangdi and Yao and Shun, and connects this tradition with the eight trigrams of the *Book of Changes*. The eight trigrams represent symbols used in divination, and encapsulated primitive people's understanding and accumulated experiences of natural phenomena and historical processes. The *Yizhuan* offers a philosophical account that elevates the standing of these considerations, thoroughly intertwining human history and the history of the natural world, and systematizing this relationship. This is the basic theme of the *Yizhuan*, as the following passage suggests:

Anciently, when the sages made the *Changes* (*yi* 易), it was with the intent that (its figures) should be in conformity with the patterns underlying the natures (of men and things), and the ordinances (for them) appointed (by Heaven). With this view they exhibited in them the way of Heaven, calling (the lines) yin and yang; establishing the way of Earth, and calling them the weak (or soft) and the strong (or hard); and the way of men, under the names of humaneness and righteousness.<sup>78</sup>

Heaven and Earth existing, the myriad things then got their existence. All the myriad things having existence, afterwards there came male and female. From the existence of male and female there came husband and wife. From husband and wife there came father and son. From father and son there came ruler and minister. From ruler and minister there came high and low. When the distinction of high and low had existence, afterwards came the arrangements of ritual propriety and righteousness.

(*Xugua* Commentary, sec. 30)<sup>79</sup>

From heaven and Earth to the myriad things, and then to male and female, husband and wife, and to the ordered relations and ritual and righteousness: 'change' (*yi*) permeates them all. What was originally divination that used the past to explain the future (the *Yijing* is full of historical case studies) became, under the impetus of the Confucian spirit of humaneness and the calm rational approach of the Daoist and Legalist, a philosophical worldview that was both rational and emotional. It was both a worldview, a consciousness of history, and also a philosophy of

human life. This union of a worldview and a philosophy for human life is one of the characteristics of Chinese philosophy.

The *Yizhuan* conveys a historically sensitive rationality. It objectively describes the progress of history and the origins of the human way—from the way the matching of men and women to the household centred on father and son, and then to the rituals and norms of rulers and ministers, and also including the creation of vessels, the command of oxen and horses, the making of bows and arrows, the building of palaces and homes, the creation of a writing system—all of these described a natural historical progression. It also includes spirits and ghosts, life and death, the auspicious and inauspicious, which became part of that which could be explained and understood. Consequently, the text emphasizes that the universe and nature, along with humanity, form a single harmonious whole with humanity, and that this is greater than all else. In addition, there is no longer any need for a separate creator deity.<sup>80</sup>

The great man (*daren* 大人) may take priority over the cosmos (*tian*), and it will not act in opposition to him. . . . If Heaven will not act in opposition to him, how much less will men! How much less will ghosts or spirits?<sup>81</sup>

Although, the *Yizhuan* contains accounts of sorcery, superstition and other things that could not be rationally explained, formulated, or assessed (quite possibly this had something to do with the popular tradition of using astronomy and the astrological calendar to predict human affairs), its general outlook is close to the atheistic approach of Xunzi. The *Yizhuan* declares, “When we contemplate the spirit-like way of Heaven, we see how the four seasons proceed without error. The sages, in accordance with this spirit-like course, laid down their instructions, and all under Heaven yield to them,” and this is identical with Xunzi’s idea of establishing a spirit-like way.<sup>82</sup>

The *Yizhuan* is about sensibility. It integrates the ‘human way’ with the ‘heavenly way,’ human life and the world, as well as history and nature, and bestows upon the latter a vigorous and vital quality. The original idea of nature indicated by the term ‘*tian*’ is not imbued with a sense of ceaseless growth and a positive, optimistic quality of progressing onward. This is captured by the phrase “Daily renewal is called abundant potency, ceaseless production is referred to as change (*yi*).”<sup>83</sup> The optimism of human life thereby seeped into a view of nature in general, and eventually this became a philosophy of both nature and history that melded together a worldview and an account of human life.

This is ‘philosophy’ because the way of the heavens, the way of the Earth, and the human way are integrated through the kind of mutual resonance represented by paired ideas such as *Qian* and *Kun* (the heavens

and the Earth), yin and yang, hard and soft, and this amounts to the mutual interpenetration and stimulation of forces that are both in tension and also mutually complementary. This framework is used to explain the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*, and so to explain all things: the origin of the universe, the occurrence of all events, and the norms governing human affairs. It is a way to know the past and also divine the future; within the *Yijing*'s framework, the myriad things, time and space, and human affairs all manifest intimate relationships of mutual influence and sway. "The realm of the transformations of Heaven and Earth proceeds without error; by ever-varying adaptation all things are completed without exception."<sup>84</sup> The text relies on this notion of harmonious regularities between nature and history to establish an ordered schema. This characteristic of the *Yizhuan*, which involves absorbing Daoist and Legalist ideas, was the beginning of attempts by Qin and Han Confucians to establish a new era, grounded on a unified and holistic cosmology:

Heaven is esteemed; Earth is low. (Their symbols), *Qian* and *Kun*, are determined accordingly. Things low and high appear displayed in a similar relation. Noble and base have their places assigned accordingly.<sup>85</sup>

It was through the *Changes* that the sages exalted their virtue, and enlarged their sphere of occupation. Their wisdom was lofty, and their rules of conduct solid. That loftiness was patterned after the Heavens; that solidity, after the pattern of Earth. The Heavens and Earth having their positions assigned to them, the changes take place between them. The nature of humans having been completed, and being continually preserved, it is the gate of all good courses and righteousness.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore of all things that furnish models and visible figures there are none greater than Heaven and Earth; of things that change and extend an influence (on others) there are none greater than the four seasons; of things suspended (in the sky) with their figures displayed clear and bright, there are none greater than the sun and moon; of the honoured and exalted there are none greater than he who is rich and noble; in putting things to use, and inventing and making instruments for the benefit of all under the sky, there are none greater than the sages.<sup>87</sup>

Compared to the *Laozi*, the *Yizhuan*'s dialectic is self-consciously systematic, includes fixed orders, and is no longer piecemeal and fragmentary. There is an unchanging structure behind the changes. This ordered scheme is also extremely clear-cut and simple. The basic format of the *Yijing* is made up of transformative change (*bianyì* 變易), where the myriad things and human affairs endlessly transform); no change (*buyì* 不易), where each of the trigrams represent common and formulaic objective regularities that do not change; and the simple and practicable change,

(*jianyi* 簡易), which involves grasping the gist of these regularities. Xunzi wrote, “Those proficient with the changes do not divine”<sup>88</sup>—for Xunzi and those of his era, the idea of the changes (*yi*) had already morphed from divination to philosophy, or from superstition directed toward a deity to self-governance.

Those who are good at speaking of ancient times are sure to have some measure for the present. Those who are good at speaking of Heaven are sure to have some evidence from among humankind. . . . Thus one sits and propounds it, but when one stands up one can implement it, and when one unfolds it then one can put it into practice.<sup>89</sup>

This kind of “Investigating the interface of the heavenly and the human, and changes that penetrate the past and present”<sup>90</sup> as a unified explanation of the natural world and human history, has its origins in ancient traditions, namely, that of using natural imagery to divine human affairs. The *Yizhuan* gave such activity a philosophical veneer, one that was then systematized and writ large across the world during the later Han period.

The idea that “*tian* and the human mutually resonate and respond” is already present in the *Yizhuan*. Not only is the cosmic way able to influence the human way, but the human way influences and shapes the cosmic way. Thus it is written, “Though word and deed, the consummate person is able to move the Heavens and the Earth; how could this not require caution?”<sup>91</sup> As a result, humans are able to be ‘co-partners’ with the heavens and the Earth: “The great man harmonizes his potency with Heaven and Earth, his brilliance with that of the sun and moon, his order with the four seasons, and also accords with the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of ghosts and spirits.”<sup>92</sup> People must accord with the way of the heavens and follow the regularities of yin and yang; but the heavens (as the natural world) also have the properties of human character and virtue. Thus, the heavens and humans form a single coherent vital energy or *qi*, and the idea of ‘*tian*’ as nature and ‘*tian*’ as having purpose or intention are here fully integrated.

Unlike Laozi’s *dao*, which is one of detached objectivity and the disinterested view of the bystander, the *Yizhuan* is filled with the spirit and feelings of human existence and striving. Laozi moved from the human way up to the heavenly way, from virtue to the way and the human way became passively accepting of this greater cosmic way. The *Yizhuan* derives the human way from the cosmic way, but this human way actively participates in the heavenly way. The *Yijing* originally uses divination to set human conduct, and this involves the preemptive avoidance or embracing of the harm and benefit rather than being merely the forecasting of a predetermined fate. Thus, the attending to latent omens and observing subtle indicators are the way to secure human success. In the *Yizhuan* this characteristic is raised to the level of a philosophy, such that,

“One yin movement and one yang movement is referred to as ‘*dao*,’ following them is good, bringing them to completion is a matter of natural dispositions.”<sup>93</sup> From the heavenly to the human means that people are to observe the ways of the heavens and accord with them in order to bring out the functions and effects implicit therein. This is the difference that historians of philosophy often point to, between Laozi’s dialectical emphasis on valuing the soft, preserving the female, and prizing stillness and the *Yizhuan*’s dialectical emphasis on valuing the hard, vigorous action, and taking the initiative.

When analyzed, one reason for this difference is that the *Yizhuan* systematically assigns a determinate empirical content to the general rules for transformation that ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ represent. The entire text develops by treating yin and yang as its core:

They [the sages] contemplated the changes of yin and yang, and formed the trigrams, and from the movements between strong and weak, they produced the diagrams for divination.<sup>94</sup>

The hard and the soft have their fixed and proper root.<sup>95</sup>

The specific manifestations of yin and yang are down to the *Qian* hexagram and the *Kun* hexagram, and the text gives these the philosophical meanings of ‘vigour’ (*jian* 健) and ‘accordance’ (*shun* 順), respectively.

*Qian* represents the greatest vigour in the cosmos. The power of its operations consistently brings change, and it knows where danger lies. *Kun* represents the greatest accord or receptivity in the cosmos. The power of its operations consistently manifest prompt response, for it understands obstruction.<sup>96</sup>

Many have pointed out that the *Qian* hexagram represents such qualities and functions as the sun, the male, movement, growth, energy, and firmness. The *Kun* hexagram symbolizes the moon, the female, nurturing, accepting, softness or accord, and tranquility. The *Yizhuan* stresses that these two phases or aspects cannot be separated, and that yang guides while yin forms the base. Between guiding and forming the base, it is the former that is more strongly emphasized. In the *Yizhuan*, the *Qian* hexagram takes precedence. “Great indeed is the power indicated by the *Qian* hexagram. All things owe to it their beginning and it permeates the cosmos”;<sup>97</sup> “How great is *Qian*—strong, vigorous, undeflected, correct; it is pure, undefiled and sublime.”<sup>98</sup>

The *Yijing* repeatedly declares its approval of that which is represented by the *Qian* hexagram, and with regard to the tensions generated between *Qian* and *Kun*, yin and yang, it is *Qian* and yang forces that provide the impetus for propelling them forward. This is another point of difference with the Laozi. Laozi merely reveals these tensions and transformations in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion, and does not consider how

such transformations might be possible; not being clear about the forces driving transformation, Laozi's account thus lapses into passivity, and could only describe existing static phenomena. In contrast, the *Yizhuan* attends to the dynamic processes of these tensions, in which "the firm and the soft mutually wear on each other, and the eight hexagrams mutually impact each other."<sup>99</sup> The text thus has an order and structure that acknowledges such evolution and progression, and these are formed into a systematic blueprint.<sup>100</sup> This is one in which the resolute and the firm clearly constitutes the guiding force, in sharp contrast to the quietistic human wisdom of the Laozi.

There were some fundamental differences here. The *Laozi* adopted a dismissive attitude toward the social turmoil and change of the time, but the *Xunzi* and the *Yizhuan* instead offered a defense of and arguments for this new era. The following *Yizhuan* quotes reflect this point:

Heaven and Earth undergo their changes, and the four seasons arrive at completion. With Tang and Wu there were changes in propensities of things, which accorded with the Heavens, and responded to men. Great indeed is what takes place in a time of change.<sup>101</sup>

After the death of Shen Nong, Huang Di, Yao, and Shun arose. They penetrated the changes, and made use of the people without their becoming weary. They were spirit-like in their transformation of them, causing the people to approve their actions. When a series of changes has run its course, another change ensues. When it obtains its course, it will persist. Hence, these were aided by the Heavens; they met with good fortune, and advantage.<sup>102</sup>

Times were changing and that change was beneficial. Compared to the Laozi, the *Yizhuan* conveys a far-sighted optimism about the new historicism, and this is the defining spirit of the *Book of Changes*. Later reformers, down to Tan Sitong in the late Qing, still relied upon the *Book of Changes* to provide a theoretical justification for their own actions. The *Yizhuan*, as with the *Xunzi*, emphasizes ritual, the fixing of social position, monarchy, and an explicit system of punishment. The *Xugua* commentary on the *Changes* reads:

When things are subjected to restraint (*xu* 畜), then there is ritual, and hence the previous hexagram in the sequence *xiao xu* 小畜 [small restraint] is followed by the hexagram *lü* 履 [treading the proper course].<sup>103</sup>

The superior man, in accordance with this [hexagram Lü], discriminates between high and low, and settles the aims of the people.<sup>104</sup>

These are all very different from the Laozi's opposition to ritual. Despite this, however, the *Yizhuan* and the Laozi share several key characteristics. First, both approaches embrace a dialectic of pragmatic reasoning, and both are directly applicable to practical life, political struggles, and the



ordering of human relationships. Their dialectic is not conceptual, nor is it purely abstract theory. Both make concrete experiential demands. For example, the *Yizhuan* states,

That which goes becomes less and less, and that which comes waxes more and more;—it is by the influence on each other of this contraction and expansion that the advantage is produced. The looper caterpillar coils itself up, and thereby will straighten itself again; worms and snakes go into hibernation, and thereby keep themselves alive. When we minutely investigate things and so enter into the spirit-like within them, the greatest practical benefit is attained.<sup>105</sup>

All comings and goings, all yielding and extending, are about benefiting people and being efficacious; they never depart from the tensions and transformations found in human thought and in the experience of social life. This is identical with the *Laozi*.

Second, both seek balance, harmony, and stability among things and events. The *Laozi* achieves this by cleaving to the soft and prizing the feminine and prioritizing stillness, while the *Yizhuan* does this by being pro-active, valuing vigorous conduct and the firm. Yet the *Yizhuan* also emphasizes that this ‘firm masculine’ must accord with the ‘soft feminine,’ and thus firmness and softness must achieve a mutual ordering. The vigorous yang forces cannot be carried to excess, otherwise failure, collapse, and loss will result.

“The dragon exceeds the proper limits;—there will be occasion for repentance”:—a state of fullness should not be indulged in long.<sup>106</sup>

The *Dui* hexagram has the meaning of pleased satisfaction. The strong (lines) in the centre, and the weak (lines) on the outer edge (of the two trigrams), indicate that in pleasure what is most advantageous is the maintenance of firm correctness. This accords with the Heavens, and corresponds with the human.<sup>107</sup>

The method of *Qian* is to change and transform, so that everything obtains its correct disposition according to the propensity of things; the great harmony is preserved in unity. The result is advantageous, and pure.<sup>108</sup>

‘The Great Harmony is preserved in unity’ (*baohetaithe* 保合太和) means seeking harmony, balance and stability. Although the *Qian* hexagram (yang, firm) represents supreme vigor, it nevertheless must recognize danger; and though the *Kun* hexagram (yin, soft) represents supreme accord, it must be mindful of causing an obstruction. The *Yizhuan* frequently and quite explicitly emphasizes all manner of troubling situations and repeatedly warns that modesty and diligence are needed for the preservation of order.

The greatest excellence of the Heavens and Earth is generation. What is most precious for the sage is position. That which upholds this position is humaneness. That which gathers a large population is wealth. The right administration of that wealth, correct instructions to the people, and prohibition against wrong-doing—these constitute righteousness.<sup>109</sup>

It must be said that, like Xunzi, this offers a new way of understanding Confucianism since the time of Confucius, from the perspective of government based on a new social class. In summary, Xunzi followed the Confucian tradition and absorbed many things, including Daoist, Mohist and Legalist ideas, and moved toward a more expansive world, one that ranged from the heavens, the Earth and the natural world to systems governing human affairs. The *Yizhuan* bestow upon this move toward the external world an element of sublime philosophy. Later, Confucians such as Dong Zhongshu followed this line of intellectual development and, out of the *Yizhuan*'s worldview, constructed a more complex and intricate cosmology.

### *Tian, Ren, and Dao*

Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) said, “The *Zhongyong* is an extension of the *Yizhuan*,”<sup>110</sup> while Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) also connected the *Yizhuan* and *Zhongyong*, stating that, “Many important ideas in the *Zhongyong* are equivalent to those in the *Yizhuan*. . . . A close connection exists between them.”<sup>111</sup> However, in fact, the two texts are very different. The *Yizhuan* contains a worldview, while the *Zhongyong* translates that into an account of inner nature. The *Yizhuan* moves from the cosmic to the human, offering several arguments about the external world: the universe, history, and life. The *Zhongyong* focuses solely on cultivating a personal sensibility, and uncovers the structure of inner mind and nature. Thus, while both belong to orthodox Confucianism, their vectors of their thought are not aligned. It is precisely because of the *Zhongyong*'s quest for an inner sensibility that it is highly regarded by the founding emperor of the Liang dynasty, Emperor Wu of Liang, the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians who so focused on human nature, and even the New Confucians of the present era.

One might say that the *Yizhuan* was a continuation of the *Xunzi*, and absorbed the *Laozi*'s understanding of *dao*, and thereby established, via its historical viewpoint, a worldview in which the cosmic and human were connected; if so, then we can say that the *Zhongyong* extended the *Mencius* and its conception of *dao*, and established a similar worldview via an exploration of inner nature. The key characteristic of the *Zhongyong* is that it provides the Confucian project of personal cultivation with the foundation of a metaphysical worldview, in the form of

general guidelines summed in the opening lines: “What *tian* commands is called natural tendencies, drawing out these natural tendencies is called the proper way, cultivating this way is called education.”<sup>112</sup> Natural tendencies are elevated to the level of the cosmic commands and thus the cosmic (in the form of commands) are further linked to the human (in the guise of human nature)—this is an extension of Mencian theory. It stresses that human nature is bequeathed by *tian*, and so is necessarily a kind of a priori goodness. People must work to realize their own good natures, and this is the meaning of the ‘*dao*.’ To resolutely cultivate the person and so become aware of this is the meaning of ‘education.’

The *Zhongyong* began a far-reaching historical evolution; though it appears cautious and restrictive, its concise and profound theory in fact surpasses the *Yizhuan*. Its similarities with the latter stem from the absorption and adaption of the Daoist worldview. To a certain extent, Confucian and Daoist differences are manifested as the different priorities accorded to *tian* and *dao*. In Daoism, ‘*dao*’ is the highest function and essence—hence, “*tian* models itself on the *dao*” (*Laozi*), and *dao* is above *tian*. In Confucianism, the opposite is the case, with *tian* being above *dao*. The reason why the Confucian school holds this view can be traced to the views articulated in the *Yizhuan* and *Zhongyong*.<sup>113</sup>

‘*Dao*’ is inanimate and has no direction or essence; ‘*tian*’ is animate (as ceaseless production [*sheng sheng*], as completion [*cheng*] and as humanness [*ren*]), and is close to and connected with the human. This is how the *Yizhuan* understands ‘*tian*,’ in terms of life and feeling that are shared with humanity. In the *Zhongyong*, however, human nature becomes the commands of *tian*, and according with the propensities of *tian* is what is meant by ‘*dao*.’ The basic character of both cosmos and human is ‘ceaselessness.’ The *Yizhuan* speaks of “the manifold operations of *tian*, and the exemplary person’s ceaseless efforts as improvement,” while the *Zhongyong* speaks of how “the most complete engagement is ceaseless.”<sup>114</sup> Both take the Confucian emphasis on learning, education, human action, and personal cultivation and add to them a conception of *dao* as nature and *tian* as some kind of controlling power. The *Zhongyong* greatly emphasizes this:

Study the *dao* broadly, ask about it in detail, reflect on it carefully, analyze it clearly, and advance on it with earnestness.<sup>115</sup>

While others accomplish this with a single try, I will try a hundred times, and while others will accomplish this with ten tries, I will try a thousand times. If in the end people are able to advance on this way, even the dull are sure to become bright, and the weak to become strong.<sup>116</sup>

This makes clear the proactive nature of personal cultivation.

Evidently, ‘*dao*’ here is no longer something removed from humanity, but has become something connected to, and inseparable from, the human. The *Zhongyong* emphasizes that, “As for the proper way, this

cannot be deviated from even for an instant; that which deviates is not the proper way.”<sup>117</sup> This takes the ‘*dao*’ of Laozi and Han Fei, in which a ruler faces a world of things governed by impersonal, cold objective regularities, and transforms it into a *dao* that penetrates and is unified with every moment of human existence conduct, cultivation, and consciousness. ‘The way of the cosmos’ (*tiandao*) and ‘the way of humans’ (*rendao* 人道) are thus the same *dao*. This is already a traditional Confucian idea, but the *Zhongyong* elevates it to the level of a metaphysical worldview. As a direct result, in this unification of *tiandao* and *rendao*, wherein the regularity of the objective world and the purposiveness of subjective existence are unified in a single *dao*, humans become partners with heaven and Earth (*can tiandi* 參天地) and attain the highest realm and can nurture and support the transformations and growth, reaching the point at which the highest realm of equilibrium and focus (*zhonghe* 中和) are attained.

*Zhongyong* reads,

The moment at which joy and anger, grief and pleasure, have yet to arise is called a nascent equilibrium; once the emotions have arisen, that they are brought into proper focus is called harmony. This notion of equilibrium and focus is the great root of the world; harmony is then the advancing of the proper way in the world. When equilibrium and harmony are realized, the Heavens and Earth maintain the proper places and all things flourish in the world.

This might be compared with Xunzi’s line, “What is it to establish equilibrium or the mean (*zhong* 中)? This is a matter of ritual and ceremony.”<sup>118</sup> This shows how different the two are. Unlike the *Yizhuan*, the *Zhongyong* suggests that the unity of the human and the cosmic (*tianren heyi*) comes from individual cultivation and the attaining of an elevated subjective state of being. This is not greatly connected with the operations and transformations of an external material world. The demands of a subjective consciousness are fundamental here and take priority.

The *Zhongyong*’s core idea is *cheng*, or sincere engagement. Mencius also discusses *cheng*: “On self-examination to find that one is sincerely engaged (sincere), there is no joy greater than this.”<sup>119</sup> Xunzi also offers an extended mention of *cheng*:

When the exemplary person cultivates the heart-mind, nothing is better than sincere engagement . . . though the Heavens and Earth are vast, if they are not fully engaged then they cannot produce the transformations of the myriad things; though the sages are wise, if they are not sincerely engaged they cannot transform the populace; though father and son are affectionate, if they are not sincerely engaged then they will become estranged; though the ruler and his ministers have respect, if they are not sincerely engaged then they will be debased.

Thus, sincere engagement is what the exemplary person upholds and is the root of administering affairs.<sup>120</sup>

Mencius talks of *cheng* from the viewpoint of inner life of the mind; Xunzi approaches it from external affairs and their governance. In the *Zhongyong*, Mencius and Xunzi are brought together, though it is Mencius who serves as the root. But what is ‘*cheng*’ 誠?

The *Zhongyong* states, “Sincere engagement is the way of the cosmos, to be sincerely engaged is the proper human way.”<sup>121</sup> “Sincere engagement is first made the essence of the cosmos;” on the one hand, the *Yizhuan* could be said to have moralized and humanized nature, but on the other hand it could be described the other way—as the move from transcendent to the inner. Thus, the actual logic of this process is: first, moral qualities (*cheng*) are attributed to the cosmological foundation (*tian*), while the universe is given a moral metaphysical significance; this is then treated as the source and essence of self-conscious human nature (“Understanding born of sincere engagement is attributed to natural human tendencies”),<sup>122</sup> people must strive to achieve personal cultivation in order to attain this (“Sincere engagement born of understanding is attributed to education”).<sup>123</sup> In this way, the ethical cultivation of the human subject and this moralized cosmological root (*tian*), generalized outward activity (sincere engagement), inner cultivated a priori form (being sincerely engaged), and affective psychological state form a unity, one in which the subjective inner cultivated ethical state becomes the decisive element. As a result, the orderly Confucian social relations of ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother and friends now depend upon the cultivated inner consciousness (particularly the three great virtues of wisdom, humaneness and courage) for its existence. Here, the path of ‘self-cultivation’ (*xiushen* 修身) and ‘governing the state’ (*zhiguo* 治國) have completely lost the practical form that they had in the *Xunzi* and the *Yizhuan*.<sup>124</sup> They gradually became the kinds of ineffable processes and realms that even sages might not be able to fathom or bring about. The *Zhongyong* talks approvingly of ghosts and spirits and discusses omens: “The fullest engagement is spirit-like,” “The way of fullest engagement entails foreknowledge.”<sup>125</sup> The same text also states,

Exemplary persons are concerned about what is not seen and anxious about what is not heard. There is nothing more present than what is imminent and nothing more manifest than what is inchoate. Thus, exemplary persons are ever concerned about their uniqueness.<sup>126</sup>

This seeking of a resonance between the cosmic and the human by starting from an inner state inevitably carries a quasi-religious undertone. This was lacking in Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and the *Yizhuan*, but

was elevated in later Song-Ming Confucianism. Thus, while the text is similar to Xunzi and the *Yizhuan* in belonging to the Confucian school and focusing on the relationship between ‘*tian*’ and the human, there are also great discrepancies.

That said, the *Zhongyong* is still distinct from the later Confucian *Lixue* movement, since it attempts to combine psychological norms, individual cultivation, and external governance into a worldview. And while this worldview is different from that found in the *Yizhuan*, being a kind of discourse focused on the internal, it is still not at the level of later *Lixue* Confucianism, which offered a metaphysics based on the moral nature of the mind. The *Zhongyong* is, however, a precursor of the latter.

What the ‘govern the state and bring peace to the empire’ ideology of the authoritarian Han and *Qin* states needed, however, was not a worldview that emphasized the cultivation of subjective consciousness; it was a cosmological system that reaffirmed the external world, both nature and society. So, it was Xunzi and the *Yizhuan*, and not Mencius and the *Zhongyong*, that paved the way for this kind of systematic cosmology.<sup>127,128</sup>

## Notes

1. Guo Moruo, “Xunzi de pipan” [Critique of Xunzi], *Shipipanshu*, 185.
2. “Jundao” [The way of the Ruler], *Xunzi jijie*, 8.236.
3. “Wangba” [True Kings and Hegemons], *Xunzi jijie*, 7.202.
4. “Fuguo” [Enriching the State], *Xunzi jijie*, 6.193.
5. Mencius, 3A2; Xunzi, “Ruxia” (儒效) [Achievements of the Ru], “True Kings and the Hegemons.”
6. “Wangzhi” [The Rule of a True King], *Xunzi jijie*, 5.160.
7. “Enriching the State,” *Xunzi jijie*, 6.179.
8. “Dalue” [The Grand Digest], *Xunzi jijie*, 19.498.
9. *Ibid.*, *Xunzi jijie*, 19.504.
10. “Chendao” [The Way to Be a Minister], *Xunzi jijie*, 9.250.
11. *Mencius*, 7B14.
12. *Ibid.*, 5A6. Guo Moruo pointed out the following about the commonalities between Xunzi and Mencius: “Xunzi’s view (about having honor due to personal judgment and circumstances, or having disgrace in both one’s personal judgment and circumstances) clearly comes from Mencius’ idea of heavenly honor and human honor (*tianjue renjue*, 6A16).” (*Ten Criticisms*, 205); “As with Mencius, there is a valuing of the kingly way (*wangdao*) as a matter of principle.” (206) “Mencius’ idea that the Heavens will deliver the empire to the worthy or that it will deliver the empire to the hereditary heir is a different way of saying the same thing” (214). Guo Moruo is here pointing out the shared origins of Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi.
13. “Yibing” [A Debate about Military Affairs], *Xunzi jijie*, 10.279.
14. “Jundao” [The Way to Be a Lord], *Xunzi jijie*, 8.230.
15. *Ibid.*, *Xunzi jijie*, 8.232.
16. *Ibid.*, 8.234.
17. Guo Moruo: “I initially felt little appreciation for Xunzi the man. I admired Confucius and Mencius because, of all the early schools, their thought was rich with a sense of people as the foundation. Xunzi gradually departed from this core idea.” (*Ten Criticisms*, 423–4).

18. *Xunzi jijie*, 13.369.
19. *Ibid.*, 13.346.
20. *Ibid.*, 6.179.
21. *Ibid.*, 2.70–1.
22. Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins: What New Discoveries Reveal About the Emergence of Our Species and Its Possible Future* (London: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1977), 66–7.
23. *Xunzi jijie*, 3.78–9.
24. *Ibid.*, 5.164.
25. *Ibid.*, 13.347.
26. See *Xunzi jijie*, 1.12.
27. *Ibid.*, 4.140.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 13.349.
30. *Ibid.*, 3.95.
31. *Ibid.*, 13.356.
32. *Xunzi jijie*, 20.529.
33. *Ibid.*, 4.138.
34. *Xunzi jijie*, 17.435.
35. *Ibid.*, 1.11.
36. *Ibid.*, 17.436.
37. *Ibid.*, 17.441
38. *Ibid.*, 1.4.
39. *Ibid.*, 1.2.
40. *Ibid.*, 1.20.
41. *Ibid.*, 11.312–13.
42. *Ibid.*, 11.317.
43. *Ibid.*, 11.308.
44. *Ibid.*, 5.163.
45. *Ibid.*, 1.27–8.
46. I say ‘primarily’ because Mencius also addresses ‘kingliness without, and Xunzi addresses ‘sageliness within.’
47. “Quanxue” [An Exhortation to Learning], *Xunzi jijie*, 1.8.
48. “Tianlun” [Discourse on the Heavens], *Xunzi jijie*, 11.307.
49. *Ibid.*, 11.310.
50. *Ibid.*, 11.309.
51. *Ibid.*, 11.310.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Xunzi, “Wangzhi” [The Rule of a True King], *Xunzi jijie*, 5.165.
54. “Xing e” [Human Nature Is Bad], *Xunzi jijie*, 17.435.
55. *Ibid.*, 17.438.
56. *Xunzi jijie*, 13.366.
57. “Lilun” [Discourse on Ritual], *Xunzi jijie*, 13.366.
58. Wang Guowei, “Lun xing” 論性 [On Human Nature] in *Jing’an wenji* 靜庵文集 [Collected Essays of Wang Guowei] (Guangxu 31, 1905), 1a.
59. “Jiebi” [Undoing Fixation], *Xunzi jijie*, 15.406.
60. “The Grand Digest,” *Xunzi jijie*, 19.490. Chen Dengyuan 陳登原 writes, “Xunzi says that what is moved is the heart of goodness [in Xunzi, “Discourse of Music”], and that the heart’s intentions are like water, and that everyone has a heart sensitive to ritual [in the “The Grand Digest”]. All these expressions are states of the heart-mind related to Mencius’ idea of a heart that feels shame and disgust” (*Guoshi jiuwen* 國史舊聞 [Past Histories] [Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1958], vol. 1, 281). This is not quite correct, however. Mencius’s idea of the “heart-mind” involves an a

- priori ethical affective sensibility, while Xunzi's account of the heart-mind includes both a priori and experiential cognition but does not include an affective aspect.
61. Because Xunzi's 'heart-mind' (*xin*) was associated with having a role in the formation of a sage, it acquired a somewhat mystical quality. However, in general, it indicates a heart untroubled by subjective emotions that is able to grasp external rulers and norms. It was very different from Mencius' account of the heart-mind, and drew from Laozi and Mozi.
  62. "Jiebi" [Undoing Fixation], *Xunzi jijie*, 15.397.
  63. *Qimin Yaoshuxu* 齊民要術 [Essential Techniques for the Welfare of the People, Preface], a text on ancient Chinese agriculture, attributed to Northern Wei official Jia Sixie 賈思勰 (fl. ca. 533–544). See Shi Shenghan 石聲漢 (1907–71), *Qimin yaoshu jinshi* 齊民要術今釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2009), preface, 3.
  64. *Qimin yaoshu jinshi*, 1–2.
  65. "Fuguo" [Enriching the State], *Xunzi jijie*, 6.184–5.
  66. "Wangzhi," *Xunzi jijie*, 5.163.
  67. Xunzi resolutely opposed the School of Logicians, while clearly laying out his own practical rationality. This is seen in passages such as: "Such problems as 'hard and white,' 'identity and difference,' and 'dimension and dimensionless' are not inherently beyond question, but the gentleman nonetheless does not engage in debate concerning them because he places them beyond the boundary of his endeavors" ("Xiushen" [Cultivating Oneself], *Xunzi jijie*, 1.31); "'killing a thief is not killing a person'—such phrases are a confusion about the use of names and bring chaos to the use of names" ("Zhengming" [Correct Naming], See *Xunzi jijie*, 16.420); "[They] discuss the useless but with formal discriminations, and who deal with matters of no urgency yet use precise investigations." ("Fei shierzi" [Against the 12 Masters], *Xunzi jijie*, 3.98).
  68. "Tianlun" [Discourse on the Heavens], *Xunzi jijie*, 11.319.
  69. "Lilun" [Discourse on Ritual], *Xunzi jijie*, 13.355.
  70. Tang Shitong, "Zhi Tang Fochen" 致唐佛塵 [Letter to Tang Caichang (1867–1900)], in *Zhongguo Zhaxue* [Chinese Philosophy] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1980), vol. 4, 121.
  71. "Tianlun," *Xunzi jijie*, 11.311.
  72. Huang Hui, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1990), 18.775–6.
  73. Guo Moruo wrote, "The similarities between the two (Xunzi's 'Dalüe' chapter and the *Second Tuan Commentary*) are clear. The *Yizhuan* clearly develops Xunzi's language. It extends his analysis from human relationships of ruler-minister and father and son to a cosmological view of Heaven, Earth and the myriad things"; "The *Xi Ci* commentary has at least one section that is influenced by Xunzi, as can be seen in its system of thought." Guo, "Zhouyizi zhizuo shidai" 周易之製作年代 [The Time of the Zhouyi's Compilation], in *Qingtong Shidai* 青銅時代 [Early Bronze Age] (Shanghai: Qunyi Publishing, 1946). 78.
  74. *Zhouyi zhengyi* (Shisanjing zhushu zhengluben), "Qian," 1.11a.
  75. *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.315b.
  76. *Ibid.*, 8.349b. *Xunzi jijie*, 13.349; 5.163.
  77. "Xici II," section 2, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.350b–1a.
  78. "Shuogua," section 2, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 9.383a–4a.
  79. *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 9.396a–b.
  80. Needham (1900–95) and Bodde (1909–2003) both emphasize this absence of a creator as the key feature of Chinese philosophy, and this is particularly



clear in the *Yizhuan*. See the chapter in this volume, “Some Thoughts on Chinese Wisdom.”

81. “Wenyan” Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.27a-b.
82. “Guan Tuan,” section 1, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 3.115a.
83. “Xici I,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.319a.
84. *Ibid.*, 7.314a-b.
85. *Ibid.*, 7.302a-b. This clearly shows the influence of Legalist thought.
86. *Ibid.*, 7.321b-2a.
87. *Ibid.*, 7.340b.
88. *Xunzi jijie*, 19.507.
89. “Human Nature is Bad,” *Xunzi jijie*, 17.440-1.
90. See *Hanshu*, “Biography of Sima Qian,” 62.2735.
91. “Xici I,” See *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.325a.
92. “Wenyan” Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.27a.
93. “Xici I,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.315b-17a.
94. “Shuogua” Commentary, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 9.382a-b.
95. “Xici II,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.347b.
96. *Ibid.*, 8.376b.
97. “Tuan” Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.8b.
98. *Wenyan* Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.25a.
99. “Xici I,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.303b-4a.
100. In later generations, including the present, some scholars regard the *Zhouyi* as an all-encompassing system, incorporating astronomy, numerology, and so forth.
101. “Tuan,” Commentary, “Ge,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 5.238a.
102. “Xici II,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.352a-3b.
103. “Xugua” Commentary, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 9.394b.
104. “Xiang” Commentary, “Lu,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 2.75a.
105. “Xici II,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.358a-b.
106. “Xiang” Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.13b.
107. “Tuan” Commentary, “Dui,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 6.275b.
108. “Yuan” Commentary, “Qian,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 1.8b-10b.
109. “Xici II,” *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.349b-50a.
110. Xiong Shili, *Yuanru* 原儒 (Beijing: Longmen lianhe shuju, 1956), vol. 2, 1.
111. Feng Youlan, *Xinyuandao* 新原道 (Shanghai: Shangwu Publishing, 1945), 61.
112. *Zhongyong*, 1, Roger Ames and David Hall, trans., *Focusing the Familiar: A Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 89.
113. From the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi on ‘tian’ and ‘principle’ (*li* 理) are the unified, serving as the highest concept, expressed as ‘dao,’ and this latter term (in contrast with *qi* 器 [vessel/entity]) did not refer to natural substance.
114. *Zhongyong*, 26.
115. *Ibid.*, 20.
116. *Ibid.*
117. *Ibid.*, 1.
118. “Ruxiao” [On the Achievements of the Ru], *Xunzi jijie*, 4.122.
119. *Mencius*, 7A4.
120. “Bu Gou” [Nothing Improper], *Xunzi jijie*, 2.46, 48.
121. *Zhongyong*, 20.
122. *Ibid.*, 21.
123. *Ibid.*

124. “Those who realize these three (virtues) realize who to cultivate their persons,” *Zhongyong*, 20.
125. *Zhongyong*, 24.
126. *Ibid.*, 1.
127. See my discussion of this issue in the chapter on Qin and Han era thought.
128. This article was originally published in the *Journal of Chinese Humanities* [*Wenshizhe*] 1(1985): 12–22.

## 5 Qin and Han Dynasty Thought

Qin and Han thought was located between the philosophical high points of the pre-Qin and Wei-Jin eras, and its leading representative was Dong Zhongshu. Both at home and abroad it has been generally overlooked or dismissed as idealism, metaphysics, or even as a degradation of Confucian learning. But I believe that the opposite is the case. The Qin and Han thought characterized by the creation of a systematic cosmological framework based on the Five Phases was an important stage in the development of Chinese philosophy. The practical achievements, territorial expansion, and material civilization of the Qin and Han unified the nation and created a stable foundation for the Chinese nation. Qin and Han thought thus played a role in generating China's cultural-psychological formation.

### **The Synthesis of Daoism, Legalism, Yin-Yang Cosmology, and Confucianism**

The development of Qin-Han thought was linked to a large unified empire's need for a new ideology. 'New' here refers to a departure from the long-lived traditional clan structures and ideology. Scattered, independent, and semi-independent states during the Spring and Autumn period, which were built upon primitive clans and tribes, gradually merged; they became a vast and unified authoritarian empire, which centralized power and was a regional force (this describes the transition from the seven states of the Warring States period to the Qin-Han period). This extremely turbulent transition period gave rise to all manner of ideas, doctrines, and schools. From the late Warring States onwards, they persistently challenged and criticized each other, and so a new trend of mutual absorption and integration emerged. This can be clearly seen in the progression from Xunzi to the *Lüshi chunqiu*, and on to the *Huainanzi* and the *Chunqiu fanlu*. Furthermore, in texts and thinkers such as the *Wenzi* and the *Jie Guanzi*, Lu Jia and Jia Yi, as well as in excavated texts such as the *Jingfa*, this move toward synthesis is expressed from multiple viewpoints and in various ways. These works and thinkers no

longer belonged to any single school or philosophy; they either hashed together several schools or treated one school as basic while drawing on other schools. However, not all pre-Qin schools were part of this synthesizing trend, and not all were equally absorbed or preserved. Some ideas, doctrines, or groups prominent in the pre-Qin period gradually faded or disappeared, while others were dynamic and influential throughout. The School of Names and the Mohists belonged to the former category, while the latter included Confucians, Daoists, Legalists, and Yin-Yang theorists. The latter four were the currents of thought that established a new mode of thought in the Qin and Han periods. The complex and historical evolution that marked the relationship between the three schools of Confucianism, Daoist-Legalism, and Yin-Yang theory is a fascinating topic; it is, however, beyond the scope of this present work.<sup>1</sup>

Here, I can focus only on how, despite the many twists and turns of this historical process, Confucian thought increasingly swallowed up the other three schools, and became the established orthodox position. The absorption of Legalist and Yin-Yang ideas can be clearly seen in the Xunzi and *Yizhuan*. Compared to Confucius and Mencius, Xunzi and the *Yizhuan* are more orientated toward the wider world and put forth a worldview dealing with such questions as how to unify the cosmic, the worldly and the human (*tian, di, ren*). This was significantly different from what had come before. Confucian thought itself was constantly changing and developing and, furthermore, at the same time as Mencius and Xunzi were loudly condemning heteronomy and those outside the traditional masters' texts, they were actively absorbing such ideas. This is a general norm that applies to any doctrine that is to survive and develop in a sustainable manner. However, a turning point was reached with the *Lüshi chunqiu*.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* attempted to synthesize the Hundred Schools and produce an empire unified intellectually:

To rule the country by following popular opinion is surely to endanger the country. How do we know this? Laozi prizes leniency, Confucius prizes humaneness, Mozi prizes honesty and Guan Yinzi prizes integrity . . . the drum and the gong produce a single sound. The same laws and regulations give rise to a single mind. The wise do not benefit from cleverness and the foolish do not suffer from stupidity, so there is one body. The courageous do not advance and the fearful do not fall behind so there is one force. Therefore, unity bring government and difference brings chaos. Unity brings peace and difference brings danger.

(*Lüshi chunqiu*, *Buer* section)<sup>2</sup>

The empire must have a Son of Heaven in order to unify it. The Son of Heaven must maintain unity to preserve the empire. When

there is unity there is governance, whether there is heteronomy  
there is chaos.

(*Lüshi chunqiu*, *Zhiyi* section)<sup>3</sup>

This is clearly an attempt to end the disputes of the pre-Qin schools, and find consensus in a unified set of ideas. The need for unity in thought arose from the demand for political unity. How then was unity to be achieved?

One hears that the peaceful society of old was the result of following Heaven and Earth. The records of the twelve lunar cycles all dealt with government and chaos, preservation and destruction, and knowledge of preserving life and securing good fortune. If above is the measure of Heaven and below are Earthly experiences, and man is the judge in between, then what is right and wrong cannot be missed.

(*Lüshi chunqiu*, *Xuyi* section)<sup>4</sup>

The idea of deriving the human from the cosmic, i.e., using ideas of cosmology and nature to address human affairs, was found already in the *Book of Changes* (“Heaven and Earth are fixed . . . nobles and commoners have their places”), but was made concrete and systematic in the *Yizhuan*. It developed a complete system, from the natural to the social, into an all-encompassing cosmological order that incorporated human affairs and politics—hence the idea that, “If the measure above is Heaven and below are Earthly experiences . . . man is in between as the judge.”<sup>5</sup> This was the novel contribution of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, and is mainly seen in the intellectual model provided by the record of the 12-part lunar cycle (*ershibi yueling* 十二紀月令).

During the Han dynasty, Gao You declared that the *Lüshi chunqiu* “greatly surpassed the writing of all other schools.” Gao claimed, “The book treats ethics as the standard, nonaction (*wuwei*) as the guide, humaneness and rightness (*yi*) as the test of conduct, and public justice as the gauge of character.”<sup>6</sup> The elements of other schools found therein, thus the text was regarded as belonging to the Eclectic School (*zajia* 雜家). However, the problem was: what was the relationship between the various schools that made up this mixed bag? What is most noteworthy here is that the practical basis for the *Lüshi chunqiu* should have been the well-established Legalist tradition (including Lü Buwei himself), which had already achieved much within the state of Qin. However, this grand plan for governing a state still retained many Confucian ideas. In the case of the Yin-Yang school, the reasoning behind the use of its cosmological schema to provide a framework for this plan was relatively clear, since the Yin-Yang school was directly linked to government. Indeed, Zao Yan had long ago used the mutual progression among the five elements as

a means to explain succession of the imperial dynasties. However, why Confucianism was used to provide the substantial core of the Eclectic School is less clear. It is thus worth comparing the Confucian ideas found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* with the original Confucian teachings. For example, the *Lüshi chunqiu* reads, “Anyone who rules the country must adhere to what is fundamental . . . and nothing is more fundamental than filial piety.”<sup>7</sup> This is very similar to comments in the *Analects* such as “The cultivated person addresses the root . . . and filial piety and fraternal deference are surely the root of humaneness.”<sup>8</sup> The *Lüshi chunqiu*, however, emphasizes filial piety from the viewpoint of the ruler:

If the ruler is filial, he enjoys a good name, his subjects follow him and his rulership is acclaimed through out the empire. If the officials are filial, they do their utmost in their service to the ruler, they have integrity in their administration and will die honorably if needed. If the common people are filial, they work hard on the land, are resilient in battle and will not flee. Isn't filial piety the only method that secures all great goods and banishes all the great harms, and which all the empire can follow?

(*Xiaoxing* 孝行 section)<sup>9</sup>

In the teachings of the former kings, nothing is more esteemed than filial piety and nothing is more apparent than doing one's utmost. Filial piety and doing one's utmost are what are most desired by rulers and parents, while esteem is desired by subordinates and children.

(*Quanxue* 勸學 section)<sup>10</sup>

This is superficially similar to the original Confucian teachings, but there is, in fact, a significant difference. One sought to consolidate the interests of the patriarchal clan system, while the other focused on strengthening a unified empire and a governing order based on an authoritarian ruler. The former conveyed a moral sentiment, while the latter was purely a matter of practical necessity. The former was founded upon kinship and the psychology of clan membership, which is integral to classical Confucianism, while the latter made filial piety serve the political needs of imperial governance, which reflects Legalist thinking. This is a case of being similar in appearance but different in substance, and reflects how the ruling class attempted to repurpose and use classical Confucianism to suit new social conditions. In addition, this trend is even more apparent in the replacement of ritual (*li*) with order or principle (*li*),<sup>11</sup> the preparedness to use military force, and the focus on “Governing the state through principles (*li*) so that laws and precedents are established, and the empire will submit.”<sup>12</sup> Legalist views of the art of ruling, as well as the Daoist and Legalist notions such as the South-facing ruler ‘residing in stillness’ (*zhujing* 主靜) and ‘non-action’ (*wuwei*), are even more

apparent in other parts of the *Lüshi chunqiu*. Absorption of the Agrarian School also proceeded from practical needs of the ruler:

In ancient times, the sage kings first let their people engage in farming. Farming by the people was not only done for the sake of using the land productively; the spirit generated through farming was crucial. They the people farmed, they were humble and easy to command, the borders were peaceful and the ruler was held in esteem. When people farmed they were honest, and being honest they had few selfish pursuits. When selfish pursuits were few, the laws were respected and people had a common purpose.

(*Shangnong* 上農 section)<sup>13</sup>

Some scholars believe that the *Lüshi chunqiu* is a ‘new’ Confucian text. Why ‘new’? They do not have a clear explanation. I believe its ‘newness’ lies in the following. On the basis of the Legalists’ extensive experience of political reality, and in response to the demands of a new social base (later period slave society) and political structure (a unified authoritarian empire), there was a sustaining and reworking of the Confucian hierarchical kinship system.

Given the successive accomplishments of the Legalists, the question emerges as to why Legalist thought did not continue and develop further. This is a complex matter. On the one hand, the Legalists such as Lu Buwei were wise enough to know that, although the Legalists’ agricultural and military policies had been successful, their harsh laws and brutal methods could not remain effective in the long term. On the other hand, however, we find the following intriguing phenomenon. A Qin dynasty text titled *The way of the Official* (为吏之道), excavated at Yunmeng in 1975, urged readers “to be tolerant, loyal, trustworthy, committed to peace and free from resentment . . . kind to subordinates, free from abuses . . . be humble and respectful and willing to yield . . . inclusive in your governing . . . and be disciplined but lenient with punishments.”<sup>14</sup> This suggests that Qin dynasty policies were perhaps not as extreme as Han Fei’s work suggests or as implied by the First Qin Emperor’s conduct. Unsurprisingly, we read in the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

Governing the people is a matter of rules and regularities . . . what are these as they apply to the people? These are desires and dislikes. What desires and what dislikes? People like honor and benefit and dislike humiliation and harm. . . . When power is used excessively, such that it violates such regularities, then the more such power is wielded then the more difficult will become governing the people. . . . Thus authority is needed but should not be relied upon exclusively. Compare this to flavoring with salt. Salt must always be used with a purpose. It not properly used, then salt can make something inedible.

Authority is also like this: it only works when applied for a purpose. How is it applied? It attaches to the love of benefit. When directed by the love of benefit then authority can be asserted. But if authority is asserted excessively, then the love for benefit is suppressed.

(*Lüshi chunqiu*, *Yongmin* 用民 section)

This suggests that harsh laws and severe punishment were mere methods and were not fundamental to governing. Thus, Legalist approaches were often criticized, and the use of authority was recommended only when it could be defended. However, the *Lüshi chunqiu*'s claim that authority was founded on the people's desire for benefit, and that the principles governing the overseeing of the people were love of benefit and honor and dislike of humiliation and harm, were not Confucian in spirit. Thus, the foundations of so-called new Confucianism were very different from the theory and practice of classical Confucianism. The new approach amounted to an attempt to absorb and rework various schools, while remaining grounded in the Legalists' political method of securing practical results. Confucianism was central to this new amalgam because of its closer connection to ancient social and economic traditions than other schools. Confucianism was not a fleetingly popular theory or mere idealism, but rather had long-established roots in the ancient hierarchical clan-based social order. Accordingly, it was about to maintain its influence and cultural impact in a society in which the basic economic unit was small-scale domestic agricultural production. The authoritarian state during the latter stages of the clan-based system still relied upon it to maintain social order. Confucianism consistently stressed that filial piety and fraternal deference were the foundations of the state, as well as the hierarchical order provided by social class, and this approach was both expedient and highly effective. Even a proponent of Daoism like Sima Tan made the following evaluation of Confucianism:

The rituals that order the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, and the distinctions that regulate husband and wife, young and old, cannot be changed.

(*Shiji* [Records of the Grand Historian], *Taishigong Zixu* section  
[Note on the Office of Grand Historian])<sup>15</sup>

This is the immutable social order and the rules for interpersonal conduct advocated by Confucians. The Yunming bamboo texts also claim that: "The ruler should cherish others, ministers should be loyal, fathers kind and sons filial . . . these are the root of government." This quotation illustrates how Confucianism was the guiding force in the confluence of the various schools and streams of thought, the basis of which was a firm grounding in social and historical reality. The *Lüshi chunqiu* purposefully consolidated the theoretical foundations for a unified and stable



dynasty that could replace the Zhou dynasty. It was thus no accident that it focused on adopting Confucianism.

The Qin dynasty unified China quickly after the First Qin Emperor dismissed the Legalism-inclined Lu Buwei, but it disintegrated with similar speed. This historically unprecedented rise and fall provided a lesson for all later eras, starting with the Han period, and thinkers derived various conclusions from it. The famed gloss of Han intellectual Jia Yi 賈誼 (200 BCE–168 BCE) was that the Qin, “failed to rule humanely and with good judgment, and failed to realize that the conditions conducive to attack and those conducive to protecting what is gained are not the same.”<sup>16</sup> In short, though Legalism was helpful in gaining the empire, retaining what was won required ruling with humaneness and good judgment, which meant a return to Confucianism. After a period of intense turmoil, the early Han rulers needed to adopt a strategy of ‘non-action’ that enabled recuperation and recovery. This meant that all thinkers at that time adopted a Daoist outlook. Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 240 BCE–170 BCE) discussed many explicitly Confucian themes such as ‘humaneness and righteousness,’ ‘education,’ and even the revival of ritual and music; however, all of these were discussed in the context of the Daoist theory of non-action: “If you reside in benevolence and are robust about righteousness, and modest so as to remain popular, then you can rule the world without effort.”<sup>17</sup> The text also offered accounts of cosmology, nature, and human society. Jia Yi also subordinated concrete Confucian prescriptions about government to the so-called six modes of efficacy: personal virtue (*de* 德), the way (*dao* 道), individual nature (*xing* 性), spirit (*shen* 神), enlightenment (*ming* 明), and the force of circumstance (*ming* 命). He conceptualized the entire universe through this framework. “The six modes or six forms of beauty are the powers that give rise to yin and yang, the Heavens and Earth, and humans and the ten thousand things.”<sup>18</sup> This was an attempt to construct a cosmology.

The text *Wenzi* 文子 (The Book of Master Wen), long regarded as a forgery, used Daoism to integrate Confucianism and Legalism. It began by discussing the place of nature in human affairs, and revered Laozi while also emphasizing humaneness and righteousness. This approach reflected the early Han category of a miscellaneous school, and could not have been fabricated at a later date.<sup>19</sup> What is important here is that Daoist accounts of the relation between nature and the political, and of non-action, took on a new significance in the *Wenzi*. Daoist theory ceased to be merely regressive fantasies of ancient sages like Laozi and became practical political and economic measures. Daoist cosmology acquired a political and economic foundation, upon which formed the demand to unite philosophically the human (government and society) and the heavenly (nature and the cosmos), thereby generating a new theoretical framework for a unified empire. This was very different from the classical Daoism of the pre-Qin period.

The *Huainanzi* put forth a new system. If we say that the *Lüshi chunqiu* took the first step in creating this system, then the *Huainanzi* was, logically at least, the second milestone.

The *Huainanzi* includes discussions of the human world and everything in the cosmos:

This book of twenty chapters articulates the laws that govern the Heavens and the Earth, it examines human affairs and the way of the rulers. It speaks of the small and the great, the fine and the coarse.

(*Yaolue* [Outline of the Essentials])<sup>20</sup>

The text describes in great detail the origins and evolution of the cosmos; the forms and changes among concrete entities; and the plurality, complexity, and exchanging nature of the objective world. Therein, the functional role of the five phases as well as yin and yang are more central and developed than they are in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. However, what is most interesting is that while the text responds to the demands of the era by offering a new system, one with a Daoist veneer that insults Confucianism and rejects humaneness and rightness, it nevertheless is still permeated with Confucian qualities. Take the idea of non-action as an example. It is a foundational Daoist concept but is sometimes understood in the text as a demand to act in accord with objective laws in order to be successful. Here the ‘action’ opposed by ‘non-action’ is not what original Daoism opposed, but is action that violates objective law:

The terrain determines that water will flow to the East but humanity must help it so that there are channels along which it can move. Crops begin growing in the spring but humans must cultivate them so that they produce the five grains. If man had left things as they were, then Gen and Yu would not have succeeded and the wisdom of Hou Ji would have been lost. ‘Non-action’ means that personal volition should not interfere with general laws, individual desires should not distort proper methods, affairs should be dealt with according to rules. Success will follow from such methods. Using fire to bake a well or water from the River Huai to flood the mountains is wishful thinking that contravenes nature. This is what is meant by ‘action.’

(*Xiwu* 修務 section)<sup>21</sup>

Wasn’t the promoting of action and the opposition to letting things take their natural course in tension with original Daoist thought, and even a revising of it? Wasn’t such a position closer to the ‘moving in accord with the Heavens’ (*shuntian er dong* 順天而動) advocated by the *Yi Zhuan*? The explanation is quite straightforward: both farming and government necessarily involve action. The pure non-action advocated by Laozi and Zhuangzi would have meant a return to primitive society,

which was impossible. Social life and human survival relied upon the this-worldly engagement of Confucians, Agrarians, and even Legalists, which sought to accord with objective laws. When Daoists were faced with political and economic challenges, their outlook was bound to change. However, how to integrate respect for objective laws of nature (Daoism and the Yin-Yang School) with developing subjective ability and influence (Confucianism and Legalism) was a key issue that Han thinkers sought to address. It was only natural that the Yin-Yang school, which focused on astronomy and mathematics, and Daoism, which emphasized the operation of the laws of nature, provided the political and administrative frameworks for that period. If we look beyond the external trappings of Daoism, then the inner spirit of Confucianism can be found, with its emphasis on human activity and its positive, this-worldly orientation. This was the key message to be found in the *Huainanzi*, even if it did not appear in every part of the text.

Another important and related message was the emphasis on the mutual responsiveness between the cosmos and the human:

The sage keeps the cosmos (*tian*) in his mind and thus can transform the world. Thus, when the spirit within is sincere and the energy (*qi*) forms and moves in the cosmos, then illustrious stars appear, the yellow dragon descends and the auspicious phoenix arrives. . . . There is mutual penetration between the cosmos and humans. . . . The ten thousand things are interconnected and the spirits mutually reconciled.

(*Huainanzi*, *Taizu* 泰族 section)<sup>22</sup>

This probably sounds implausible to the contemporary reader. However, there was a great deal of common scientific knowledge about nature contained in the *Huainanzi*, which attempted to connect the human and the cosmic, and which assumed the existence of various objective laws, whose causes could not be observed or known, but which connected all manner of social and natural phenomena. This was an important idea. There were many subjective assumptions contained therein, but at the same time, the foundation was people empirical knowledge of the natural world. For example:

When the wind is about to blow, grass and trees stand still but birds take flight. Just before it rains, the dark clouds have not yet gathered, but fish have already submerged. This is because the Yin and Yang energy (*qi*) is already in motion. Thus, cold, warm, dry and wet mutually follow their order.

(“*Taizu*” section)<sup>23</sup>

Each part of the Earth gives rise to its own order. Hence there are more males in the mountains and more females in the marshes, more

darkness near swamps and more deafness in windy areas . . . all reflect their energy (*qi*) and all accord with their order.

(“Dixing” 地形 section)<sup>24</sup>

The first quote is an empirical observation, while the latter is a more subjective judgment. The first evidences a scientific disposition, while the second tends toward a religiousness that stresses individual will and purpose. These two are, however, often conflated and not clearly distinguished. If one ignores the details and adopts a broad view, then it was a progressive attempt, under the historical conditions of the time, to draw many different entities and phenomena into a unified cosmic framework of mutually integrated, interconnected, and law-governed ‘categories.’ Such entities and phenomena included astronomy, topography, climate, the seasons, all flora and fauna, the various institutions governing human affairs, and the legal and political systems. Approaching this from a general perspective, this can be thought of as an advance in intellectual theorizing. Perhaps, from a personal point of view, the writers of the *Huainanzi* were perhaps dissatisfied with the centralization of power; however, objectively, their work reflected the Han dynasty’s decades long development, the abundance of national strength, and the far-reaching conquest of nature. The text displayed a capacious world-view, rich empirical knowledge, and a magnanimous spirit, and in doing so brought this cosmological system to maturity.

Dong Zhongshu’s role was thus merely to only to add the final flourishing to this structure. Unlike the main compilers of the *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Huainanzi*, Dong did not have the authority of a nobleman or king through which he could enlist writers to construct a system. And his *Chunqiu fanlu* does not appear from the outside to be a work that completes the construction of a system. He used the then well-known *Gongyang* Commentary in his discussions of specific political matters, in an attempt to derive universally valid political and legal norms from events in the Spring and Autumn period. Continuing the spirit of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, Dong’s defining characteristic was the attempt to forcibly integrate politics with the operations of the natural world. In particular, the Yin-Yang school provided the basic framework for this system, while the five phases of the Yin-Yang school (representing *tian* or the cosmos) and the way of kingly government (which applied to the human realm) were integrated, and their mutual influence was the core of this theory. Everything developed from them:

A ruler cannot be ignorant about the cosmos (*tian*). Its intentions are rarely manifest and its way is difficult to understand. Accordingly, such intentions are to be observed by appreciating how Yin and Yang forces move between the solid and the insubstantial. Discerning the ins and outs of the five phases, and how they proceed

or reverse though the large and small, broad and narrow, is how to apprehend the way of the cosmos. . . . The ruler bestows awards and punishments, life and death, in their proper measure and in a manner similar to the four seasons. He appoints officials according to ability, in a manner congruent with the five phases. His loving of humaneness and detesting of cruelty, and his employing virtue while pushing away harsh punishment, accord with Yin and Yang. This is what it means to be able to partner with the cosmos.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Tiandi yinyang” 天地陰陽 section)<sup>25</sup>

In Dong’s theory, the anthropomorphic or personified cosmos (*tian*, which has will and intent), is dependent upon the natural world (yin and yang forces, the four seasons, the five phases) to manifest itself. The personification of the cosmos has roots in religion while understanding *tian* as the natural world come from scientific practices such as astronomy. The personified *tian* possesses a mystical authority and sense of will and purpose, while the naturalized notion of *tian* is machine-like or quasi-mechanical. The former relies on the latter to manifest itself, and is indicative of humanity’s submission to the ‘heavenly will’ or ‘heavenly intent.’ In other words, this means human compliance with the mechanical order of yin and yang, the four seasons and the five phases. Conversely, the cosmic will and its guiding function are unified with objective empirical regularities (those of yin and yang, the four seasons and the five phases). The organic forms of humans and the hierarchical ethical systems of social beings are all this-worldly extrapolations of a cosmos constituted by the five phases and yin and yang. The key point here is an approach to the interaction of world affairs, politics, and institutions, on the one hand, and yin and yang, the four seasons and the five phases, on the other, and an understanding of how they could be brought into a harmonious, stable, and unified equilibrium, so that both are mutually consolidated and reinforced.

Dong Zhongshu’s contribution was his detailed reconciliation of basic Confucian ideas (including humaneness and righteousness) with the five-phase cosmology of the Yin-Yang school that was popular during the Warring States era.<sup>26</sup> Dong thus grounded Confucian ethics and politics on a systematic cosmology, substantiating the idea of a unity between the cosmos and humanity—a Confucian ideal that dated back to the Yi Zhuan and the *Doctrine of the Mean*—and thereby completing the task of integrating Confucianism with other schools that began with the *Lüshi chunqiu*.

### Dong Zhongshu’s Cosmological Account of *Tian* and Humanity

Let us exam how Dong Zhongshu theorized the relationship between the cosmic (*tian*) and humanity. Dong made *tian* the supreme master of the

universe and human affairs: “The great ruler of the hundred spirits.”<sup>27</sup> However, Dong’s theory did not regard *tian* as merely a personified deity or spirit; it was better understood as a kind of ordered system with multiple mutually interconnected and complementary elements. These elements were: *tian* or the heavens, the Earth, humanity, yin and yang, and the Five Phases—ten elements in total:

*Tian* has ten points and only ten. The Heavens are one, the Earth is one, Yin energy is one, Yang energy is one, fire is one, metal is one, wood is one, water is one, Earth is one and humanity is one. When added together, these ten are the measure of *tian*.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Guanzhi xiangtian” 官制象天 section)<sup>28</sup>

The combination of these ten great elements produces the four seasons and the five phases:

The qi energy of the Heavens and the Earth integrate and form a unity, divide to form Yin and Yang energy, separate to form the four seasons, and when falling into an order they form the five phases.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxing xiangsheng” 五行相生 section)<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, ‘*tian*’ partly refers to a governing power, the ‘great ruler,’ but it is also one of the ten elements, and also refers to the overall system itself. This last point is of great importance, because it is where Dong’s account of heavenly or divine will (*tianzhi* 天志) differs from the account of heavenly or divine will found in the pre-Qin Mohist school.<sup>30</sup>

The cosmos (*tian*) features five phases: the first is that of wood, the second fire, the third Earth, the fourth metal and the fifth is water. Wood is the starting point of the five phases, while water marks the completion, and Earth is the midpoint of the five phases. This is the order of the cosmic process.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxing zhiyi” 五行之義 section)<sup>31</sup>

The ‘order of the cosmic process’ is the key idea here. The cosmos manifests its character and capacities through the ordered processes of the five phases. Dong believed that there were two fundamental processes and two kinds of basic capacities. One was ‘mutual production’:

The cosmos consists of five phases, which are wood, fire, Earth, metal and water. Wood produces fire, fire produces Earth, Earth produces metal, metal produces water. Water serves winter, metal serves autumn, Earth serves late summer, fire serves summer and wood serves the spring. Spring presides over birth, summer presides over growth, late summer presides over cultivation, autumn presides over

the harvest and winter presides over storage. Storage is completed in the winter. What the father gives birth to his son makes grow; what the father grows his son cultivates, and what the father cultivates his son brings to completion.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxingdui” 五行對 section)<sup>32</sup>

The other process and capacity was the mutual overcoming of each element of phase.

Wood is agriculture and agriculture is the people. If they do not follow but revolt, then the Minister of the Interior must order the punishment of the rebellion’s leaders and restore order. It is thus said that metal overcomes wood. Metal is the Minister of the interior. If the Minister of the Interior is weak and incapable of commanding the officers and troops, then the Minister of War must punish him. It is thus said that fire overcomes metal. . . . Earth is the servant of the ruler. If the ruler is extravagant and wasteful, exceeding due bounds and neglecting propriety, then the people will rebel. When the people rebel, the ruler is lost. It is thus said that wood overcomes earth.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxing xiangsheng” section)<sup>33</sup>

Dong’s five-phase cosmology was focused on politicized hierarchical human relationship and the social system, with the mutual overcoming of the five phases comparable to the relationship of parent to child.<sup>34</sup> Sons inevitably inherit, preserve, and extend fathers’ affairs, just as winter succeeds summer. At the same time, the five phases also constituted a form of hierarchical order, with different elements able to limit and restrain each other—i.e., ‘mutual overcoming,’ ‘mutual production,’ and mutual overcoming constituted a natural feedback system, which was also the way of the cosmos (*tiandao*).

The progression among the five phases proceeds according to due process. Each of the phases performs its function by fulfilling its capacity. . . . So it is that wood controls production, metal controls destruction, fire controls heat, and water controls cold. It is the measure of the cosmos (*tian*) that people are employed according to their order, and officials appointed according to their abilities.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxing Zhiyi” section)<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the five phases, the four seasons were similar—that the ruler’s administration had to accord with the four seasons. In fact, Dong placed even greater emphasis on the four seasons than on the five elements:

The ruler partners with the Heavens (*tian*), and this is called the way. The king has four modes of government and there are four seasons, and these four modes resemble the four seasons since the categories

are connected. The Heavens and the human have this in common. Spring is set as a time of celebration, summer as a time for rewards, autumn is for penalties and winter is for punishments. Celebrating, rewarding, penalizing and punishing are as indispensable as spring, summer, autumn and winter.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Sishi zhifu” 四時之副 section)<sup>36</sup>

The four seasons of nature were like the four emotions of the ruler or the people—delight (spring), pleasure (summer), anger (autumn), and grief (winter):

Only the human way can be partner with the cosmos. The cosmos takes the desire for benefit as its will and the nurturing of growth as its affair, and spring, autumn, winter and summer all bring about such ends. Similarly, the ruler takes the desire to benefit the empire as his will and the becalming and pleasing of the world as his affair, and liking, detesting, happiness and anger are all involved in this end. Therefore, the ruler’s liking, detesting, happiness and anger are the empire’s spring, summer, autumn and winter. . . . The ruler of the people uses liking, detesting, happiness and anger to transform the common customs, just as Heaven relies on warmth, cool, cold and heat to transform the grasses and trees.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wangdaotong san” 王道通三 section)<sup>37</sup>

To summarize, once the common categories and structures that human affairs and politics shared with natural laws and regularities were recognized, then there could be mutual influence and coordination. In other words, the various different categories of the seasons, growth cycles, the human body, the political system and rewards and punishments were all drawn together and represented in the five phase cosmology patterns, in which different events had a common form and different qualities had a common structure. This was a system within which the cosmic and the human were mutually entailing and subduing, and it was the basis for administering the empire. The ruler should govern in accord with the particularities of the five phases. Thus, for example, spring was suited to farming since, “spring is wood and has the quality of life, the basis of farming. It promotes agriculture and the people should not be prevented from responding to the season.”<sup>38</sup> Autumn and winter, however, are severe, so “all officials are given warnings and criminals are executed.”<sup>39</sup> In this way, not only was the human world peaceful, but the harvest was also regulated. If one violates the particulars of the five phases and upsets the flow of *qi* energy by doing in the spring what is ordained to happen in the autumn, and by doing that in the winter what should be done in summer, then the empire will be beset by problems. People will suffer from disease and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the cosmic order will be destroyed, disasters will occur in the natural world, and the royal court will be imperiled.



Clearly, Dong Zhongshu brought together the operations of five phase movements and a volitional and deterministic order in which *tian* was dominant. Within the system, the complex nature of *tian*—as both personified higher power and material nature—is presented as the merging of mechanical system and teleological order, with both entailing the other. Dong and his followers used natural phenomena, such as eclipses, earthquakes, fires, floods, and the reactions and mutations of animals and plants (for example, “Wood marks abnormality; leaves fall in spring and flowers blossom in autumn”) as a channel through which the heavens could warn rulers. This appeared to become the norm in later eras.

Dong developed this cosmology primarily as a means to validate the authoritarian powers of the ruler and also political order in society: “Only the Son of Heaven is ordained by *tian*, and the empire is ordained by the Son of Heaven”;<sup>40</sup> “The three cardinal principles of the kingly way can be sought in *tian*.”<sup>41</sup> Such absolute authority and the order based on the three cardinal principles were originally part of Qin dynasty Legalist theory.<sup>42</sup> Dong reinforced this by adding a lofty cosmology. He also conferred ethical value on ubiquitous yin and yang forces, which were referred to as ‘lowly Yin and lofty Yang,’ ‘noble Yang and base Yin,’ “all which is detestable is Yin and all that is good is Yang,” “Yang moves towards accord, but Yin moves towards reversal,” and “All goodness is rooted in the rulers, everything vile is traced back to the ministers.”<sup>43</sup> The aim here was to confirm the authoritarian power of the ruler and the rigid hierarchical order that existed at that time. However, there was another side to Dong’s theory. Although Dong affirmed the ruling order, at the same time he located it within a universal framework of the five phases that no one could escape. Dong transformed the natural world into a moral world, a personified, naturalized heaven that included intention, commands and sensibility. It was thus a kind of idealistic theology. However, this theology was characterized by its emphasis on the relationship between social order (dynastic rule) and naturalistic laws, and the harmonious and stable whole that the two formed. All individual elements, including the most exalted such as the heavens, the ruler, and parents were subordinated to this whole:

The ultimate righteousness transforms the positions of the Heavens and the Earth, rectifies the procession of Yin and Yang, strictly adheres to the way and does not fail to be critical. Thus, restricting offerings is not deemed being disrespectful to the spirits, and dispensing with a heavenly-ordained king should be deemed as disrespecting superiors. Refusing the command of a father-figure is not deemed disobedience, and severing ties with one’s maternal relations is not a failure of filial piety or kindness. These can be righteous!

(“Jinghua” 精華 section)<sup>44</sup>

On this account, every item, whether it was the ruler or subordinate, punishment or virtue, found its place and was constrained by the system in its entirety. The Son of heaven was an authoritarian ruler, but was subject to the limits and constraints of this system when exercising administrative control. In contrast to the theories of Han Fei, Li Si, and the Legalists, the ruler did not have absolute and unrestrained power. The emperor was far above the people but he was still constrained by the system.

This constraint was largely manifested as opposition to arbitrary punishments and executions. This was why Dong repeatedly emphasized that ‘virtue’ (*de*) was yang and punishment was yin, that the heavens (*tian*) prized humaneness and detested killing, and that “*tian* is humaneness.”<sup>45</sup> He wrote, “Just as the summer heat lasts a hundred days and the winter frost just one, so do virtue and education stand in relation to punishment. Thus, the sages strengthened their affection and reduced their severity, deepened their virtue and reduced their punishments. In so doing they were partners to the Heavens”;<sup>46</sup> “When governing wantonly administering punishments goes against the Heavens and is not the kingly way”;<sup>47</sup> “The ruler acts according to Heaven’s volition. Thus, he rules through leniency and education rather than punishment.”<sup>48</sup> Dong drew on lessons learnt in the Han dynasty about the collapse of the Qin dynasty, and drew on the Confucian discourse on humaneness and rightness. In doing so they elevated an expanded cosmology to the extent that it functioned to constrain the power of the ruler. The *Chunqiu fanlu* contains several statements about respecting the people, and these might appear to be close to the original Confucian thought.<sup>49</sup> In fact, they were very different, since they were based on respect for the ruler as the absolute authority—and this was an idea derived from the Legalists. Dong confirmed as much when he wrote, “The crucial message of the Spring and Autumn Annals was the subordination of the people and the elevation of the ruler, and the subordination of the ruler and the elevation of the Heavens” (*Yubei* 玉杯).<sup>50</sup> Such comments were characteristic of Dong. The ruler held absolute authority over the people, who could only restrain the ruler through recourse to the heavens, and ‘the Heavens’ were a cosmological order structured by the five phases. Clearly, of paramount importance was this structure and its preservation. For Dong, the mutual responsiveness and harmony between the cosmos and humanity secured the stability and survival of the entire system, and this was the meaning of *dao*, or the way. It was both the way of the heavens (*tiandao*) and the way of the people (*rendao*). It was the laws governing the operation of the natural world and also the political process in the world of human affairs. Such thinking was captured in phrases such as “The cosmos does not change and neither does the way” and “Rectify the way without seeking profit, cultivate the principles without worrying about achievement.”<sup>51</sup> That is to say, what matters are the way and its norms as a whole, not the benefits or achievements pertaining to just one small part of the whole. This was

different from the Legalist emphasis on results, but also different from classical Confucianism's rejection of profit as a motive. The aim here was not a personal ethics but an objective cosmological order.

So, what were the details of the political order and social system that made up Dong's cosmological theory? Socially, the system emphasized filial piety and fraternal deference (*xiaoti* 孝悌), and sufficient food and clothing. Heaven sustained the system through the upholding of filial piety and fraternal deference, while the Earth nurtured it by producing clothing and food.<sup>52</sup> "Filial piety is part of the weft of the cosmos and is righteousness on the Earth."<sup>53</sup> Filial piety was the root of ethical human relations and was a demand of the social structure of the time—an economy based on small-scale agricultural production. Such views were needed to consolidate the socio-economic structure. Yuan dynasty scholar Wang Zhen noted, "Why did the ancients preach filial piety, fraternal deference and agricultural labor in the same breath? Because filial piety and fraternal deference are the roots of establishing one's person, and agricultural labor is the root of nurturing life. These augment each other and cannot be separated."<sup>54</sup>

Aside from the aforementioned creation of absolute power, a feature of Dong's political system was the recommendation of an organized civil service:

Dong Zhongshu replied (to the emperor), "When training scholars nothing is more important than the imperial academy. It draws accomplished scholars and is the foundation of learning. I humbly propose that an imperial academy be established, staffed with eminent teachers who will train scholars for the empire." The Martial Emperor, Wu Di, established officials responsible for state schools, on the advice of Dong Zhongshu.<sup>55</sup>

Dong Zhongshu said, "I humbly suggest that all the marquises, prefectural magistrates and those with a salary of 240,000 catties or more should select the talented from among their officials and people, and that each should send two of them to the court." The prefectures then selected talented and filial people according to Dong's recommendation.<sup>56</sup>

The *Chunqiu fanlu* thus stressed,

The king should order his officials so that there are three prime ministers, nine ministers, 27 departments heads and 81 section heads—altogether 120 people—so that his body of ministers will be complete. I have heard that in the apparatus used by a wise ruler, the great warps of Heaven are completed from three beginnings, turn four times and are completed. Is not the structure of officialdom like this apparatus.  
(“Guanzhi xiangtian” section)<sup>57</sup>

The Records of the Grand Historian (*Shiji*) reported that at the time of the Martial Emperor:

An examination was held every year. Those who could pass in one or more field filled the vacancies in the literary office, and those with excellent marks qualified as a department head in a ministry. The Minister of Examinations would submit a list of exceptional talent to the emperor, and the exam would make these known. Those who neglected to study, assuming they were unable to pass in any field, were dismissed. . . . As a result, many of the ministers, department heads and officials were accomplished scholars.

(“Rulin liezhuan” 儒林列傳 [Biographies of Scholars])<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis here was on edification, the creation of a bureaucracy, a focus on scholars rather than soldiers, and establishing a civil service based on the filial and literate and selected through recommendation and examination.<sup>59</sup> These were an important pillar of authoritarian imperial power. This political and education system, established in the Han era partly through Dong’s efforts, was a key moment in history, and is important to understanding Chinese history after the Han dynasty. This system differed from the classical Confucian accounts of politics and education. The ideas found in the Great Learning were based on the aristocratic kinship ties of the clan-based state. This new system required an entire bureaucracy for an enormous and unified empire. Classical Confucians political ideals and its system of rulership were built on kinship ethics and the moral behavior of individual clan rulers. However, the later system derived its ethics and legitimacy from its adherence to a natural cosmic order. Political life was no longer dependent upon sages who led the way, but on adherence to an objective ‘heavenly way’ (*tiandao*); and the latter required the establishment of this administrative structure, one that resembled the heavenly or cosmic.

The Han bureaucracy was superficially similar to modern bureaucracies. It featured the separation of functions, administrative regulations and clear lines of operational hierarchy, as well as an absence of favoritism and other guarantees of mechanical and rational modes of operation. It adopted the separation of powers to some extent (for example, from the Han to Qing dynasties, administration was separated from monitoring). It did not accept that ‘fathers cover up for sons,’ as Confucius had suggested, and instead argued that the greater good took precedence over the duties of kinship. All of these developments were a continuation of the Legalist tradition.<sup>60</sup> However, in practice, the bureaucratic system that came down from antiquity remained subordinate to the economic and political structures based on kinship and clan hierarchies. The bureaucracy remained entangled with personal connections and human attachments and this greatly reduced the impact of Legalist ideals on

the system. As a result, the Confucian view that persons ruled, not laws, remained in effect; therefore, this system differed greatly from the efficient bureaucratic mechanisms of modern capitalism.

Dong Zhongshu helped the Martial Emperor to establish, and provided a theoretical justification for, an early form of China's 'scholar-bureaucracy' civil service. This differed from both modern and medieval Western bureaucracies, in that it established clear norms of rulership and channels of communication between the masses (the peasants), the gentry (the bureaucrats), and the emperor. It also revived, in institutional form, the Confucian ideal that those who excel in their studies should become officials, and this again attracted roving scholars who had been cast adrift when the old clan system had collapsed and mobility between communities had become easier. The bureaucracy partly helped to stabilize the unified empire—an important function of this cosmology-based system. As Wang Zhen noted:

The sages make laws and set the standard for conduct so that all people get food and clothing and respect their parents and elders. Scholars are the first to educate them and peasants are the first to feed them. The roots of the scholar consist in learning while the roots of the peasant lie in farming. There is no peasant who does not work . . . which the Han regulations reflect. There is little learning that is not arduous, which the Han regulations regarding filial piety reflect.

(*Treatise on Agriculture*, "Xiaoti Litian" 孝悌力田)<sup>61</sup>

A scholar and a peasant: one studies, the other tills the Earth. From Dong's time until the present, this has been the dominant Confucian strategy for ordering the state and regulating the family. Dong's ideas offered a novel theory for an emerging ruling order in a new dynasty and in a new social reality.

Delving further, we find that this apparent novel theory in fact has few new elements, since almost everything was adapted from earlier thinkers. The idea of holding the emperor in the highest esteem and making officials subservient comes from Han Fei, while the interaction between the cosmos and humanity was first mentioned in the *Huainanzi*. What is novel about this system is that it combined all of these into a single system. Just as the *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Huainanzi* were variations of Legalism that included a Confucian sensibility, so Dong's contribution was his use of the Confucian sensibility to transform the cosmology of the Yin-Yang school. The *Hanshu* claimed that Dong was the first Confucian to promote Yin-Yang theory, and that he "steeped his soul in the enterprise and made possible later unification, thereby becoming the leader of the Confucians."<sup>62</sup> How did Dong transform Yin-Yang theory? In his assessment of the Yin-Yang school, Sima Tan wrote:

Yin and Yang, the four seasons, the eight positions, the twelve measures and the 24 divisions: all contain teachings and laws that enable

those who abide by them to prosper, while those who violate them perish. It is said that this makes people feel constrained and fearful. That things germinate in spring, grow in summer, are harvested in autumn and are stored in winter are cardinal principles of the heavenly way, and cannot be violated if the world is to have general laws. It is thus said that universal conformity with the four seasons cannot be given up.

(*Records of the Grand Historian*, “Postface”)<sup>63</sup>

This is to say, the natural laws discussed by the Yin-Yang school should be observed by humanity (including rulers). The weakness of this view, however, is that everything appears to be predetermined by nature, and humans are powerless before these laws—thus, they feel ‘constrained and fearful.’

Dong Zhongshu’s work was characterized by three important insights, which also addressed theoretical weaknesses in the Yin-Yang school. First, he used the Confucian ideas of humaneness and righteousness, and their positive outlook on life, to correct the excessively passive attitude and submissiveness that the Yin-Yang school engendered in people. Although Dong’s five-phase cosmology emphasized the law-like regularities of an objective structure, it was also replete with human initiative. It sought to secure an exalted position for humanity, such that nothing else other than humans could participate in a triumvirate alongside the heavens and the Earth, and the nature of the heavens and the Earth was to value humanity, “Humanity is above the myriad things, and is the most esteemed under the Heavens”;<sup>64</sup> “The Heavens, the Earth and humanity are like the limbs, combining to form a body. All are indispensable.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, humanity is an integral part of the cosmos, and human exertions play a significant role within it. The heavens only make things possible, but their realization requires the efforts of humanity.

Dong’s well-known theory of human nature expressed a similar view:

Goodness is like rice, while human nature is like the rice plant. The rice plant, however, is not rice. Although human nature gives rise to goodness, human nature cannot be called ‘goodness.’ Rice and goodness involve people following the Heavens but their production is external to the Heavens, not internal.

(“Shixing” 實性 section)<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, through their foresight and positive efforts, people are able to redirect or transform established inauspicious tendencies. For example, “Duke Huan of Qi accomplished great things by remaining vigilant about his concerns. In general, anyone who is not vigilant with regard to their concerns will suffer adversity, while those who are vigilant will meet good fortune” (*Yuying* section).<sup>67</sup> Fortune and misfortune are not entirely decided passively, fixed by objective matter. Order and disorder, peace

and turmoil, all resided within oneself. Dong emphasized the mutual responsiveness between the heavens and humanity to promote the idea that humanity could influence the heavens, and that human affairs could influence cosmic intent (*tianyi* 天意). To do this he made use of mystical or religious forms, but the core idea was the dynamism of the people and the ruler's administrative powers. Thus, intriguingly, within what appeared to be a fixed and objective framework, greater emphasis was placed on human initiative than in competing theories and doctrines.

If what the Heavens makes strong is harmed by humans then that strength is diminished. If a defect from the Heavens is improved by humans then that defect is made better. Therefore, diminishing or improving are all up to people. Isn't humanity the successor of the Heavens? If humans do not build upon the qualities that emerge, then how can they become established.

(“Xuntian zhidao” 循天之道 section)<sup>68</sup>

In this way, humans were able to become co-participants alongside the heavens and the Earth.<sup>69</sup>

The second feature of Dong's thought was its emphasis on flexibility. The Confucian tradition spoke of the regular (*jing* 經) and the contingent (*quan* 權), and Dong also discussed these at length. “The Spring and Autumn Annals have their consistent meanings, but also involve response to changes”;<sup>70</sup> “The Spring and Autumn Annals feature regular ritual practice, but also transformations in ritual practice”;<sup>71</sup> “Although contingency is an overturning of regularity, as long as it remains within reasonable limits, it is permissible; if not, then it must not be enacted, even when faced with death.”<sup>72</sup> There must be both fixed principles (regularity) and flexibility, as long as this is broadly compatible with the principles. Why should this be so? Because Dong emphasized the stability and endurance on the entire system, rather than the intransigence of any detail or part. Dong did not oppose reform and even advocated changes to the political system. He sought the dynamic equilibrium of the entire system rather than the fixing of every element within it. Maintaining balance, order, and stability within this dynamic state was a progressive development of the Confucian doctrine of the mean (*zhongyong*). When two opposing movements achieve balance and coordination, then the entirety also gains a corresponding stability.

Allow the rich to show their wealth but not so much as to become arrogant; allow the poor enough to survive but not so little that they become desperate. Use this as a standard to regulate all so that there is no deficiency of wealth and those above and below will live contented, and governing will be easy.

(“Duzhi” 度制 section)<sup>73</sup>

Thus, although there were some fixed rules in Dong's account regarding the mutual entailment and succession of the five phases, there was relative flexibility with regard to practical application and interpretation. This was not simply because there is some flexibility and adaptability in any self-regulating organic mechanism that allows for feedback. It was also due to the fact that when science and culture were in their infancy in ancient times, people were prone to make freer and even more subjective interpretations of events. Dong himself produced several creative interpretations to satisfy political expediency.

The third, and the most important, difference between Dong's cosmological system and the 'constraint and fear' of the Yin-Yang school was that Dong introduced emotional and psychological elements from the Confucian doctrine of humaneness, which served to humanize the natural world. For example, "Humaneness is the heart-mind of the Heavens";<sup>74</sup> "In observing the volition of the Heavens, one finds that its humaneness has no limits. When humanity follows the prompts of the Heavens, he benefits from its humaneness and becomes humane";<sup>75</sup> and "The Heavens, like humanity, has feelings of joy and anger, and a heart from happiness and sorrow."<sup>76</sup>

Despite the counterintuitive introduction of human sentiments, the world was no longer devoid of feeling and entirely separate from humans, as the Yin-Yang scholars and Daoists believed; it was tinged with sentiments intelligible to humans. Thus, Dong's cosmology did not consist solely of objective laws that were external to humanity, but included things that were related to human psychology. Dong's account of '*tian*' had both a naturalistic and an ethical dimension, and a religious and emotional quality, which were all thoroughly integrated. On the one hand, this gave his system a mystical quality that has been criticized as a religious teleology that violates scientific understanding of the natural world. However, understanding *tian* and humanity as a single entity that was linked together by physical nature as well as through sensibility and emotion continued the Confucian spirit. This was important for the establishment of a view of the world and of life that stressed a positive outlook and good health. It preserved and developed foundational elements of Confucianism and Chinese philosophy.<sup>77</sup> Further, since both fate and order were determined by this cosmological system in its totality, then there was no need of a transcendent creator deity.

### **Yin-Yang and the Five Phases**

Once the Yin-Yang five-phase framework, with its emphasis on the mutual responsiveness of the heavens and humanity (*tianren ganying* 天人感應), became the orthodox view it dominated Han dynasty thinking for centuries. This was no coincidence, however, but an inevitable product of the era. As noted earlier, the *Huainanzi*, the *Jing Fa*, and many



later works all demonstrated an inclination to connect the human with the heavenly when discussing politics and other issues. For example, the excavated Daoist text the *Jing Fa* features the following passage:

Punishment and virtue shine brightly like the sun and the moon when aligned. . . . They mutually enhance each other, reversing and following each other. When punishment is dim, virtue is bright. Punishment is Yin and virtue is Yang; when punishment is vague then virtue is corrupted . . . when the way of the Heavens is grasped by humans, it becomes their object.<sup>78</sup>

An excavated bronze mirror from the Han dynasty bears a similar inscription: “The sage makes mirrors by drawing qi energy from the five phases . . . the power (*de*) deriving from the five phases is the essence of the mirror.”<sup>79</sup> This suggests that Dong was not the first to make connections between Earthly events, yin and yang forces, the five phases, and astronomical phenomena. Such thinking emerged earlier and persisted for a long time.

The origins and evolution of the Yin-Yang five-phase framework is a drawn out and complicated affair that is beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty feature the five directions (north, south, east, west, and the center), and the term the ‘five ministers’ (*wu chen* 五臣). The Book of History, purportedly written in the Shang or Zhou dynasties, defines the five elements (*wu cai* 五材)—water, fire, metal, wood, and Earth. In the Spring and Autumn period, there were accepted formulations of the five flavors (sour, bitter, sweet, hot, and salty), the five colors (blue, red, yellow, white, and black), five sounds, five standards (*wu ze* 五則: the heavens, the Earth, the people, the seasons, and the spirits), the five stars, and the five spirits. The number five was used for all tangible and intelligible phenomena: astronomy, geography, climate, life and death, bureaucratic systems, politics, personal ideals, and so on were all located within an ordered system. In some respects, there remained a form of mysticism, and those attached to the Yin-Yang school did indeed attempt to mysteriously predict natural events and dynastic changes. But this approach also encompassed a great deal of accumulated experiential knowledge, which people then organized into a comprehensive system to develop a more theoretical grasp of events. At that time, the number five was probably not the only number of significance; it appears there were also ordered systems based on the numbers eight, six, and four.<sup>80</sup> These were not passed down simply because they were overtaken by the use of the number five before developing further. Regardless, this suggests a need at that time for some kind of ordered system, both ideological and cognitive in nature. It was needed to serve the recently unified empire; and there was the need to develop thought and scholarship in ways that could organized initially varied and fragmented experiences.<sup>81</sup>

During its evolution, the five phases doctrine was influenced by two factors. The first was mystical doctrines and the second was the quasi-scientific organization of empirical knowledge. The two are interconnected.

The earliest mention of yin and yang in the extant literature is by Bo Yangfu in the Western Zhou period, who wrote, “The *qi* energy of the Heavens and Earth does not lose their orderliness. If they did, then it must be caused by the people. When yang forces are subdued and cannot manifest themselves, and yin forces are suppressed and cannot dissipate, the result is an Earthquake” (*Guoyu*, “Discourses of the Zhou” section 1).<sup>82</sup> Yin and yang referred to two forces or functions within the transformation of nature. Similarly, Laozi noted that everything bears yin and carries yang, and the *Book of Changes* used yin and yang as two basic concepts for interpreting the hexagrams. The Confucians later adopted the Yin-Yang framework. It was probably the Yin-Yang school theorists in the Warring States who merged Yin-Ying theory and Five Phase theory. The merger was an attempt to explain the cosmos and human life based on the interactions of certain fundamental forces. Significantly, this integrating of the two systems introduced the idea of dynamic forces to Five Phase theory. Consequently, the five-phase structure was imbued with self-generative and self-regulating properties. Transformations—mutual entailment and mutual succession—among the five phases were possible on account of the waxing and waning of interdependent but opposed yin and yang forces. The role of yin and yang in driving transformations between the five phases saved the system from becoming a rigid table of associations with little interpretative value. Dong Zhongshu wrote:

Metal, wood, water, and fire each obey that which is dominant and follow Yin and Yang to function as a single force. But this is not simply because of Yin and Yang; rather, Yin and Yang arise because of them and assist that which is dominant. Thus, lesser Yang arises because of wood and helps the emergence of spring; greater Yang is the result of fire and assists in the cultivation of summer. Lesser Yin arises because of metal and is partly responsible for ripening in autumn, while greater Yin arises in water and helps with storage in winter.

(*Chunqiu fanlu*, “Tianbian Renzai” 天辨人在 section)<sup>83</sup>

Here, yin and yang are not independent of the five elements; rather their energies jointly function together as a single force. Studies in cultural anthropology suggest that the myths of all primitive societies are structured around two factors, positive and negative, and these serve as the fundamental forces that explain the various features of the world. In ancient China, paired opposing categories, such as day and night, sun and moon, male and female, appear to have eventually evolved into the two categories of yin and yang. However, yin and yang never developed the

abstract character we see in the modern notion of a ‘contradiction’; rather they remained anchored in a concrete reality and empirical nature. They were never fully abstracted into purely logical categories, but remained bound up with specific observable conditions, as well as with time, space, the environment, and lived experience. For example, yang is linked to light, heat, summer, day, the male, rising, and motion, while Yin stands for darkness, cold, winter, night, the female, falling, and stillness. The philosophical categories of yin and yang, like the five phases, were thus not purely abstract, though they were not entirely concrete substances or elements either. They represented generalized forces or functions that were mutually opposed and complementary, and which had specifiable properties. Despite the inclusive and empirical character of yin and yang forces, with their mutual opposition, dependency, interpenetration, complementarity, and transformation, each had its own distinctive form. This includes distinctions between yin and yang as primary and secondary, as well as dominant (with yang constituting the upper position) and fundamental (yin). Thus, yin and yang were not categories of rational thought, nor were they primarily perceptual experiences, but were part of a pragmatic rationality. This was a prominent feature of not only yin and yang theory but of Chinese philosophy and thought in general.

We can illustrate this by further examining the Five Phase Theory. When compared to Greek or Indian accounts of Earth, water, fire, and wind (or air), the Chinese account features wood instead of wind and also adds metal. This suggests that after the Chinese framework became detached from primitive divinities associated with primitive religion, it was more closely connected to everyday human experience. Thus, the *Zuo zhuan* contains the following, “The Heavens produced the five elements (*wu cai* 五材) and the people use them. All are essential.”<sup>84</sup> A commentary on the *Book of Documents*, the *Shangshu Dazhuan* reads, “The people need water and fire for cooking, while metal and wood are used for building. Earth is the basis for the growth of everything and is also used by man.”<sup>85</sup> Earth in particular occupies a distinction among the five phases, since “the former kings made everything by mixing earth with metal, water or fire,” and that earth has the highest position among the five suggests a connection to agriculture as the foundation of life.<sup>86</sup> Since the Five Phase Theory proceeded from the attempt to capture lived experience rather than interpret natural phenomena, it was more concerned with the roles, functions and effects of the five phases than with the five elements as materials or substances. The “*Hong Fan*” chapter of the *Book of Documents* notes the effects of the five basic elements:

The five elements are water, fire, wood, metal and earth. Water moistens what is below, fire heats what is above, wood curves and straightens, metals accords with animal hides, and earth provides farming. Moistening what is below corresponds to saltiness, heating what is

above corresponds to bitterness, curving and straightening are sour, according with animal hides is heat, while farming is sweetness.

(*Shangshu*, "Hongfan" section)<sup>87</sup>

Guo Moruo offers the following explanation:

From water it is deduced that moisture moves downwards, from fire it is deduced that heat rises, wood gives rise to the concepts of curves and straightness, metal gives rise to according with animal hides [this probably expresses the idea that metal is malleable and yet tough] and from the Earth crops grow. Then, they are like the five flavors . . . moistening below is salty as salt comes from sea water, while heat rising is bitter because when things are burnt they become bitter.<sup>88</sup>

Evidently, the orderly process of mutual entailment and mutual succession among the five phases has its roots in everyday experience. Wood can produce fire, fire leaves ash (earth), metal comes from under the earth (is mined from underground), condensation forms on cold metal (metal gives rise to water), and plants grow in water (water gives rise to wood). Similarly, water extinguishes fire, fire smelts metals, metal cuts wood, wood (as wooden ploughs) overturns the Earth, and Earth dams water. All of these qualities and functions embody the processes of everyday social life. This kind of summative account of various characteristics, functions, and uses of the five phases is clearly bound up with the laws of nature and people's practical experiences. The idea of mutual entailment (one phase initiating another) represents an empirical shorthand for human affairs and practice, although it also includes an account of the properties of the particular elements. For example, metal and stone must have a certain degree of hardness before they are able to overcome wood. This merging of the characteristics of objective matter with human activities and experiences differentiated Chinese Five Phase Theory from theories about pure substance (such as theories about earth, water, fire and wind or theories about atoms) or pure mathematics (such as the Pythagorean school). There is therefore a certain logical connection between Dong's system and the idea of the mutual responsiveness of the cosmos and humanity. This account, which merges natural law and natural function with human activity and experience, extends to the structure of the cosmos while preserving the intimate connection with human life.

To put things slightly differently, this pragmatic rationality, which was closely tied to practical life, did not develop into a thought characterized by abstraction and analysis, nor toward a pure empiricism based on observation and experimentation. Rather, it developed by grasping the broad implications bound up in the relationships between things and events. It proceeded from function (what water does) to structure (representation of the relations between the elements), with different things

and events organized into a system based on closeness or similarity in functional effects. This kind of inclusive integration proceeded from the viewpoint of pragmatic reasoning, and bestowed upon the primitive, simple system of thought certain characteristics, which I shall briefly list. First, the most crucial 'part' was not any single discrete function, force or property but rather the entire system taken as a whole. The whole was not identical to the sum of its parts but was greater than them. In other words, the system as a whole possessed properties that could not be reduced to all the individual functions. Second, the operation of the system was not a matter of simple linear cause and effect but involved the interaction of all functions and forces, including feedback mechanisms. Third, the system was not static but existed in a state of dynamic equilibrium among constantly changing forces and functions; it was therefore self-regulating. Fourth, the ongoing changes involved repeated cycles, such that the stability of the system was not disturbed or destroyed. Fifth, human comprehension of the system remained at a primitive level, based on imprecise direct perception of events and lacking in analytical rigor (for example, no mathematical analysis was possible).

Is this interpretation of this 2,000-year-old Five Phase Theory anachronistic, imposing a modernized and tenuous reading upon it? Certainly not. The founders of modern systems theory acknowledge that the ancient past also featured thinking grounded in systems theory, just as there was also dialectical method in ancient times. Both originate in the unadorned experiences of everyday life. Due to the particular conditions in China, both systems theory and the dialectical method flourished.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, they bore the marks of ancient and primitive times—generality, rooted in immediate experience, crude, somewhat fantastical and mystical. This was particularly true of Dong's cosmological system, which mixed good and evil, ethics, hierarchy, administration, attire and so on. Although these played a role in governance at that time, they had little to do with science. Instead, they were grounded in ideology and a way of thinking that history quickly left behind.

However, Yin-Yang and Five Phase Theory does have a scientific dimension, which reflected objective phenomena and could be applied within practical life. This was passed down through history and continuously refined and augmented. Within this system, the ordered set of various features and functions, as well as their mutual interactions, were better understood as mechanistic and deterministic rather than as matters of volition and subjective conjecture. The most important and representative outcome of this system-based approach was Chinese medical theory.

In recent years, several works have discussed how Chinese medicine is based on systems theory. The founding theories of Chinese medicine are found in the *Huangdi Neijing*, a text that formed during the Qin and Han periods. This classic continues today to effectively guide the practice of Chinese medicine. That Chinese medicine and its theories have endured

for thousands of years, and overcome various challenges to remain relevant, can be considered a miracle in the history of the world's civilizations. Crucially, the theories of Chinese medicine are connected to the cosmology of the Qin and Han periods. They emerged in ancient times, and included ideas such as the mutual responsiveness of the cosmos and humanity, the five movements (*wu yun* 五運) and the six kinds of *qi* energy—which sound a little tendentious and implausible to the modern ear. It is therefore easily dismissed as mere superstition or nonsense, especially during the modern era of advanced applied science and advanced instrumentation. Yet the practice of traditional Chinese medicine, over the course of millennia, has established the validity of the theory. The theory of meridians, or lines of energy that flow through the body, has proved to be well-founded and effective, even though the possible physical basis for the theory remains unclear. Furthermore, meridian theory is intractably linked to Five Phase Theory, as well as *zangxiang* theory (how the hidden viscera manifest observable symptoms in other parts of the body). Collectively, these form a single system. Western medicine moves from the concrete to the abstract but, conversely, Chinese medicine moves from the abstract to the concrete. Starting from the abstractions of Five Phase Theory, it arrives dialectically at a treatment for *this* particular person, at *this* time and place and for *this* ailment. Chinese medical treatment thus varies with the times of day and the year, and the patient's age and sex. While both Chinese and Western medicine recognize certain therapeutic standards, the norms of the former allow for greater flexibility and variation. I often say that modern medicine must continue to develop for many years before it can adequately and scientifically explain Chinese medicine and its systems, which have developed over millennia through practical and personal experience. Today, theoretical explanation in Western medicine has only reached the level of generalizing from a limited set of experiences; it remains unsure about the bio-physical mechanisms in the human body in its entirety. It is thus unable to explain the observations and theories of traditional Chinese medicine, even though the latter has its own limitations.<sup>90</sup>

Chinese acupuncture and moxibustion are also based on meridian theory. Meridians no doubt involve some kind of yet unknown physical basis for transmission, such as electromagnetism or a chemical pathway. But, regardless, Chinese medicine understands meridians in terms of their functional characteristics, as conduits for information, and as a self-regulating feedback system, based on a self-contained circulatory system. Meridians are one part of traditional Chinese medical theory, and it is all based upon understanding a network of functional effects and structures. Therein, everything must be explained and treated in terms of a dynamic equilibrium that sustains the growth and development of the living organism, and understood in terms of a self-regulating and organic system. Traditional theories dealing with the internal organs, for

example, mainly address their function as a whole rather than a specific organ and its anatomy (though it does also address this). Attention focuses on understanding the organs in terms of the changes between phases or states and the systematic relation of all functions, rather than on the condition of any individual organ. And the philosophical basis for this theorizing was Yin-Yang and Five Phase Theory, and the analogy of the human and the cosmic:

The Heavens have the sun and the moon; humans have two eyes. The Earth has nine regions; humans have nine openings. The humans have wind and rain; humans have happiness and anger. The Heavens have thunder and lightning; humans have melody. The Heavens have four seasons; humans have four limbs. The Heavens have five sounds; humans have five viscera (*zang* 臟). The Heavens have six laws; humans have six organs (*fu* 腑). . . . The Earth has twelve waterways; humans have twelve meridians . . . a year has 365 days; humans have 365 joints.<sup>91</sup>

Compare the preceding account with the following passage from the *Chunqiu fanlu*:

Humans have 360 joints, which pair with the number of the Heavens. The flesh of the body pair with the thickness of the Earth. Above the ears hear and the eyes see, resembling the sun and the moon. The body has openings and channels, like valleys and rivers. The heart-mind has joy, anger, happiness and sorrow, similar to the spiritual qi energy. . . . In the human body, the top of the head is round like the shape of the Heavens, and the hair is like the stars. . . . The 366 small joints pair with the number of days in a year. The twelve major joints correspond to the number of months. Internally, the five organs correspond to the Five Phases. Externally, the four limbs pair with the four seasons. Blinking corresponds to night and day. Tensing and relaxing corresponds to summer and winter. Delight and grief correspond to Yang and Yin.

(“*Renfu tianshu*” 人副天數 section)<sup>92</sup>

The two passages are almost identical. Both are fantastical and completely inaccurate. However, both are similarly scientific at certain points. Consider the following: “The sky is overcast before rain, and a person has symptoms before then falling ill. This is due to a rise in Yin forces. . . . A patient feels worse at night and roosters crow at dawn. . . . This is due to diminishment or accumulation of yin or yang qi energy” (*Chunqiu fanlu*, *Tonglei xiangdong*” 同類相助 section).<sup>93</sup> This passage is not far removed from the *Huangdi Neijing*’s accounts of physiology and pathology. Both using material forms of yin and yang *qi* to explain the mutual

responsiveness of the heavens (here understood as day and night) and humanity (here understood in terms of the body and disease). In addition, both the *Chunqiu fanlu* and the *Huangdi Neijing* authors believed that qualitatively different but structurally analogous things and events could mutually influence each other. For example, summer, Southerly winds, heat, fire, day time, red, and bitter flavors constituted a series of connected types, as did winter, Northerly winds, cold, water, white, and sweet flavors. Having different properties but similar structures they were able to interact. Just as Dong's political theories touched upon how the biological of the human body was implicated in the mutual responsiveness of humans and the cosmos, so the *Huangdi Neijing's* medical theories also discussed the interactions of humans and the cosmos in political terms.<sup>94</sup>

East begets wind and wind nourishes wood. Its feature is tender, and its function is to nurture. Its power is to unleash *Yang*, while its order is wind. West begets dryness and dryness adds vigor to air or metal. The feature of metal is clear, and its function is to restrain. Its power is sharp.

The reception of the two texts differs greatly, and there is a great difference in terms of guiding ideology and extent to which their claims are taken to be reliable. Nevertheless, they share the same contemporary philosophical worldview—a cosmology rooted in systems theory. In the biography of Dong Zhongshu in the *Han Shu*, we learn that the Martial Emperor, Han Wudi, said,

I have heard that those skilled at speaking about the Heavens are able to justify their claims through reference to the humanity, and those skilled at discussing the past can point to experiences in the present  
(*Han Shu*, 'Biography of Dong Zhongshu').<sup>95</sup>

In the *Neijing*, the Yellow Emperor said,

I have heard that those skilled at speaking about the Heavens are surely able to respond to the human. Those skilled at speaking about the past are surely able to point to experiences in the present. Those good at talking about qi energy are able to make clear how this relates to things. Those skilled at explaining interactions follow the changes in the Heavens and Earth. Those skilled at describing change and transformation follow the patterning of the noumenal and illustrious.

(*Huangdi Neijing*, Suwen classic, "*Qijiao biandalun*" 氣交變大論)<sup>96</sup>

These two passages are essentially the same. One begins with politics and the other with medicine, but both focus on the heavens and the



human, the past and the present, and both sought common laws governing the interaction between them. Such was the intellectual zeitgeist of the times. In ancient Chinese philosophy, ‘the heavenly’ and ‘the human,’ as well as ‘the past’ and ‘the present,’ were always linked together. This was the case in the *Yi Zhuan*, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* and the *Huainanzi*, as well as in the thought of the Yin-Yang School and Dong Zhongshu. The *Han Shu*’s biography of Dong reads, “The manifestation of the cosmic and the human is the way of the past and the present. Confucius, when compiling the Spring and Autumn Annals, observed the way of the Heavens above while studying human emotions down below, and he consulted the past while analyzing the present.”<sup>97</sup> This mixing of naturalistic and historical thought is a prominent feature of Chinese philosophy.

Nowadays it is easy to ridicule and mock the absurdity of these theories, but they contain ideas that are still of value today. These include the stress on treating humans and the cosmos, nature and society, and even body and spirit as a unified and organic whole. How to integrate humanity (as both individuals and societies) and the environment, so as to produce a viable equilibrium that sustains adaptation and evolution, remains a difficult issue. This includes the question of how to harmonize protection for the environment, ecological balance, and human need, though this is not the only issue. An even more important question is how to synchronize people’s psychological and spiritual states with the natural world. In a sentence, this is the great problem of how to unify humans and nature. In one sense, this is clearly not something that primitive systems theory and crude ancient schemes can provide guidance on. Nevertheless, the achievement of constructing a cosmology in antiquity that embraced so many complex questions cannot be denied.

### The Historical Impact of Five-Phase Schema

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of this systematic cosmological system took time. Once its position in academic discourse was established and it became the dominant framework, however, its influence was far-reaching and enduring. It became a traditional and habitual mode of thought in China.

Its most obvious influence, and a pernicious one, can be seen in an astrological and theological approach greatly popular in the Western Han period, and which institutionalized during the Eastern Han. This was *Chenwei* theology—a mixture of divination, religious superstition, and Confucian philosophy—and Dong Zhongshu is blamed by intellectual historians for creating its corrupting influence. To call it a ‘theology’ is to overstate the case, however, since it was an extremely crude form of superstition, used in short-lived political proclamations and enigmatic creeds, and lacked a developed theoretical foundation. In fact, it occupied only a minor position in everyday social life and gradually faded from

the scene after the Eastern Han period. Therefore, the *Chenwei* phenomenon does not capture what was truly influential about this cosmological scheme. Of much greater significance was the fact that five-phase cosmology seeped into so many areas of Chinese social thought. It gave rise to various spurious theories that superficially resembled science. These endured for millennia, featuring in both public and private life, and were unreflectively adopted in both thought and action. Even today, remnants of this approach appear, as seen in the practice of fengshui (where, for example, the burial site of the dead can supposedly affect the fortunes of the living) and in fortune-telling. The theoretical basis for all such practices is rooted in yin-yang, five-phase cosmology and the notion of the mutual resonance of the human and the cosmic (*tianren ganying*). Since these appear scientific, experience-based and theoretically grounded, and accord with thousands of years of tradition, it might be asked: given that Chinese medicine, which is also rooted in yin-yang five-phase theory, is effective, might fengshui or fortune-telling also be reliable?

In fact, this question is a distraction, and what matters is the impact of five-phase cosmology on the Chinese psychological formation. For instance, this closed system of pragmatic reasoning never progressed toward the experienced-based observational approach of genuine science and the verification of experimental results, nor did it develop abstract theory that went beyond observed phenomena. Approaches to thinking in China, as well as all branches of science (even mathematics), remained stuck at the level of crude empiricism.<sup>98</sup> Arguably, this defect is related to the early emergence of the schematic thought of five-phase cosmology. Within it, all experiences were categorized and almost every issue could supposedly be resolved by reference to the system. This meant that there was no impetus for thought to transcend what was immediately obvious and engage in more abstract reflection in order to discuss the essence of things. Thus, it was not that the Chinese lacked the capacity or even the interest in abstract thought, for the pre-Qin Logicians and Mohists showed that the opposite was true. Rather, thought was captivated and restricted by the five-phase system and ossified. Because the systematized whole was emphasized, so the concrete analysis and testing of individual and discrete phenomena was neglected. In the case of Chinese medicine, because the systematic framework represented by five-phase theory appeared to work, so dissection of the human body and examination of its component parts was overlooked and developed only slowly. The intuitive and primitive qualities of this cosmological system, and the fact that it ossified at an early point in time, came to be weaknesses in the formation of traditional Chinese thought.

Furthermore, this approach also negatively impacted the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the tradition. Three characteristics were particularly relevant: insularity, circularity and orderliness. The insularity led to a psychology and personality type that was self-satisfied. This thinking

gave rise to expressions of conceit, of stubborn conservatism, based on the idea that the theory provided all that was intellectually necessary, and consultation with anything external was unnecessary. Circularity denied the possibility of evolution, so that any move forward was merely a repeat of the past. Historical change became merely the circular motion of the cosmic way (*tiandao*). Orderliness brought the problem of social stratification, where everyone was to know their place and accept their cosmically ordained fate. Any effort made could be rendered superfluous or be restricted by the fixed order inherent in the system, and people believed that their place was fixed within a web from which escape was impossible. Thought was to be appropriate to one's station and standing of the individual was completely dependent on an authoritative common order that transcended human personality. As a result of this, rulers were cherished and ministers loyal, parents were kindly and children filial, while husbands led and wives followed, and this became the enduring cosmically grounded model for social conduct.

Arguably, the reason why the notion of 'heavenly principle' (*tianli* 天理), propagated from the Song Confucians onwards, could exert such long-lasting control over peoples' minds rests in the cosmological scheme that begin to seep into ordinary life during the Qin and Han dynasties, and which came to constitute a tradition in its own right. During the Xia and Zhou dynasties, small agricultural producers were not mobile, but formed a closed and self-sufficient economic system. This, along with the enduring hierarchical clan and kinship system, bequeathed a firm and enduring practical foundation to this cosmological outlook.

Of course, the reality was more complex than this. This closed, circular and order-seeking cosmological scheme could also bestow some positive influence on the people's mindset. This closed system could also absorb external influences and thereby increase its flexibility and capaciousness. One example of this is alien religious teachings, which were tolerated and even developed. People were thus granted some religious freedom, as long as there was no threat to vital Confucian political and religious institutions. In its long history, and apart from occasional attacks on Buddhism caused by political and economic expediencies, China has never experienced brutal religious conflict or persecutions.<sup>99</sup> This is because this cosmological outlook required a degree of change, transformation and renewal, as a way of responding to the environment and regulating the self. Only in this way could the system survive; as the "Great Treatise" (*Xi Ci*) commentary to the *Book of Changes* notes, "When changes are exhausted, then transformation arises, when there is transformation then there is flow, and with flow comes longevity."<sup>100</sup>

As Chinese history from the Han to the Tang shows, China readily accepted and assimilated foreign ideas, as long as they did not conflict with the basic system or fundamental principles. For example, although there was a belief in fate and doubt that things ever truly evolved, this

same faith thinking could also serve to motive prolonged struggle or fight. The Chinese people are rarely thoroughly pessimistic and always willing to optimistically look to the future. Though they might be mired in difficult times, they believe that, one day, circumstances would change, since this is simply the way of the cosmos (*tiandao*) or its meaning (*tianyi*). These latter two phrases refer to an objective cyclical change that has no endpoint, and indicates that there is little faith in an all-powerful anthropomorphic deity of the kind found in Western religion.<sup>101</sup>

Another example of this closed system's double-edge quality is the contrast between how the fascination with orderliness makes people conservative and fearful, unwilling to take risks, and yet also educates people to be considerate of the larger picture and avoid extremes in both conduct and character. This latter feature secures harmony and stability in life, the body and in human relations, and this in turn gives the individual person a sense of belonging. There is no sense of loneliness or alienation, and no need to follow a religious deity. Thus, the strengths and weaknesses of this system are all bound up together and inseparable. I once wrote,

As the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine* (*Huangdi neijing*) makes clear, the main characteristic of Chinese thought is its profundity. Yin and yang mutually enrich each other, the five phases mutually inform each other, a dynamic balance is achieved, there is a harmony of the mean, and the whole is grasped in its entirety. As a result, some ways of thinking, some ideas and some habits—and even some hobbies and pastimes—are still used by the Chinese today in everyday life.<sup>102</sup>

More historical analysis is needed concerning this methodology emphasis on bifurcation and opposed pairings, while also recognizing that Chinese people today are more concerned with breaking out from this inward-looking tradition and its associated practices. It is important to avoid sinking into eclecticism and the kind of tragic situation represented by Lu Xun's Ah Q.

As noted earlier, the Qin and Han dynasties created a foundation for the material civilization (including productive capacity and technology), territorial boundaries and intellectual civilization (the arts, ideas and customs) of later dynasties. The Han dynasty in particular was responsible for China's distinctive cultural-psychological formation. While this formation can be traced back to antiquity, it matured during the Han period. The doctrine of humaneness (*renxue* 仁學) that Confucius inherited from antiquity only reached maturity during the Han dynasty, after several administrative edicts on matters such as respecting Confucian teachings, the way of filial conduct, and respect for the hierarchical clan order. In addition, the cosmological scheme promoted by Dong Zhongshu—the picture of the cosmos and humans existing in a state of mutual resonance and mutual responsiveness (*tianren ganying*)—was

also partly responsible. Although Dong Zhongshu's Confucianism and five-phase cosmology were quite different from Confucius' own teachings, the original spirit of Confucius—including its base in kinship, a distinctive psychology, the ideal of peaceful governance, pragmatic reasoning and the idea of finding a mean in everyday life—was preserved and expanded through yin-yang and five phase cosmology.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the value of this cosmology increased further because it provided an ethical foundation by functioning like a religion. Confucianism thus marked a new phase through this cosmological framework, not only absorbing various schools including Legalism, Daoism and the Yin and Yang school, but also firming up its central place in the hearts and minds of the people as it became an integral part of everyday day social life. Through this cosmology, Confucianism left an indelible mark that withstood the challenge of later influences.

This explains why Buddhism, after its arrival during the Wei-Jin period—when it was accepted by emperors and the common people alike—could not fundamentally alter China's politics, culture and ways of thinking. Many later religious movements met a similar fate, including Judaism and Islam. Indeed, many followers of these religions were, in fact, assimilated into Chinese culture. Why did China, unlike Medieval Europe or Islamic nations, never experience acute conflict between church and state, or see politics become subservient to religion? Also, since Buddhism was twice declared China's official religion during the Northern and Southern dynasties period, why did it not have a lasting influence on Chinese history?

I believe the answer derives from the bureaucratic system of government established in the Qin and Han periods and from the way of thinking derived from this cosmological system in response to that bureaucracy. As noted earlier, everything in this system—from the emperor to the common people, and including spiritual life—was assigned its place within the larger whole, and the relationships between all things were similarly fixed by the larger collective. Each component was therefore constrained to some degree by the others, and ultimately by the system as a whole. It was the system that possessed the highest authority and trustworthiness, and it was what was referred to by 'the way of the cosmos' (*tian-dao*), 'cosmic or heavenly intent' (*tianyi*), or even just 'the cosmos' (*tian*). Accordingly, the emperor received his commands from *tian* or this cosmic system as a whole, and since his conduct followed *tiandao* he acquired absolute authority in the Earthly realm. It was therefore unnecessary and even perhaps impossible for an anthropomorphic deity to occupy the most important place in the system, creating conflict between politics and religion or forcing the political to become subservient to religion. Similarly, there was no way that any religious institutions could insert themselves into the administrative structures already developed from this cosmology. Conversely, however, for any religion to survive, it had to fit

itself into this existing framework. Accordingly, Buddhists eventually had to pay homage to the emperor and the concern with parental authority, and Buddhist teachings became subservient to the Confucian tradition. In addition, the Chinese tradition of pragmatic reasoning was by nature skeptical, which led intellectuals to unceasingly critique any form of irrational religious fervor.

Eventually, the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians transformed the externally derived cosmological model of the Qin and Han period into a psychological theory, grounded in an ethical self-awareness; the objectivity of the cosmological system was thus transformed into a subjectivity derived from a moral source. This ensured the defeat of Buddhist teaching and theory. Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, like Qin-Han cosmology, was not itself a religion, but contained religious elements and functioned somewhat like a religion, ensuring that no other religion was needed.

Confucius declared, “We cannot associate with birds and beasts—am I not one among the people of this world?” (*Analects* 18.6). Dong Zhongshu wrote, “That which the Spring and Autumn period governs is both others and oneself . . . security is brought to others by humanness (*ren*), and I am made upright through righteousness (*yi*).”<sup>104</sup> These quotes make clear that the difference between humans and animals is that humans can self-consciously act for their fellow humans, holding themselves to moral standards (*yi*) while sympathizing with and loving others (*ren*). Significantly, the meaning of individual existence no longer resided in the individual, nor in some kind of communion with a deity, or in physical or mental enjoyment or in an afterlife. Instead, it resided in this earthly life—in ordinary living, in ordered human relationships conducted within the framework of daily life and in the connection between oneself and others. This connection between self and other does not include the atomic individual of modern capitalism. In ancient China, this human connectedness was viewed in terms of closeness or remoteness, within an organized system with degrees of affection and care (*aiyou chadeng* 愛有差等). Fully realizing this organized system, as the highest expression of a cosmological system of mutual resonance and responsiveness between the cosmos and the human, was the major concern of Qin-Han thought, and Dong Zhongshu was a key representative of this movement.<sup>105</sup>

Confucius’ original notion of humaneness (*renxue*) was mainly a moral doctrine about clan nobility serving as social role models; by the Han dynasty, *renxue* had become a cosmology for an imperial order, based on the idea of the mutual responsiveness of the cosmos and humans. As both a system of thought and a more scientific conception of the world, this was an improvement. It also provided a theoretical platform from which Wei-Jin metaphysics and Song-Ming theories of the mind emerged. Seen in this way, the historical significance of Qin and Han thought, including Dong Zhongshu, becomes clearer.<sup>106</sup>

## Notes

1. The Huang-Lao school that flourished in the early Han period combined Daoist and Legalist ideas—see the chapter in this volume on Sunzi, Laozi, and Han Fei.
2. See Xu Weiyu 許維通 (1900–1950), *Lüshi chungqiu jishi* 呂氏春秋集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2009), 17.467–68.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.469.
4. *Ibid.*, 12.274.
5. *Lüshi chungqiu jishi*, “*Jidong*” Almanac 季冬紀 [The third month of winter], “*Xuyi*” 序意section.
6. Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (1917–2006), *Lüshi chungqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 [Collation and Explanation on the *Lüshi chungqiu*] (Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing, 1984), Preface, 2.
7. *Lüshi chungqiu jishi*, 14.306.
8. *Analects*, 1.2.
9. *Lüshi chungqiu jishi*, 14.306–7.
10. *Ibid.*, 4.88.
11. This appears to accord with the Xunzi and Han Feizi, which argued that the rites meant the upholding of the filial way (*xiaodao*). This was faithful to earlier history, in which the authority of the ancient rites originated in the filial order of clan kinship ties.
12. *Lüshi chungqiu jishi*, 5.115.
13. *Ibid.*, 26.682.
14. *Weili zhidao* [The Way of the Official]. See Liu Hainian 瀏海年, “*Cong Qin jian ‘Weili zhidao’ kan Zhili Sixiang*,” 從秦簡為吏之道看治吏 in *Zhanguo Qindai fazhi guankui* 戰國秦代法制管窺 (Beijing: Falu Chubanshe, 2006), 364–77.
15. *Shiji*, 130.3289.
16. Jia Yi, “*Guo Qin lun*” 過秦論 [Flaws of the Qin Dynasty], in *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校注, edited by Yan Zhenyi 閻振益, Zhong Xia 鍾夏 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2000), 1.3.
17. Wang Liqi 王利器 (1912–1998), ed., *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2012), A.28.
18. *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 8.325.
19. Although generations of Chinese scholars dismissed the *Wenzi* as forgery, in 1973 archaeologists excavated a 55 BCE tomb near Dingzhou, Hebei, and discovered a *Wenzi* copied on bamboo strips.
20. *Huainanzi jishi*, 21.1454.
21. *Ibid.*, 19.1321–23.
22. *Ibid.*, 20.1375.
23. *Ibid.*, 20.1374.
24. *Ibid.*, 4.338–40.
25. Su Yu 蘇輿 (1874–1914), ed., *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1992), 17.467–68.
26. Pang Pu 龐樸 (1928–2015) writes, “Texts show that the rhetoric that linked the five Confucian virtues of humaneness, rightness, ritual, wisdom and trustworthiness to the five phases of water, fire, wood, metal and Earth not only appeared in the ‘Four Seasons’ and ‘Five Phases’ sections of the *Guanzi* (viewed as a Warring States text), but also appeared in the relevant chapters of the *Lüshi chungqiu*, the *Book of Rites* and even the *Huainanzi*. That is, before that time, such an idea was absent. It was only with the *Chunqiu fanlu* that Dong Zhongshu added this dimension to the five phase theory, and paired the five Confucian virtues with the five phases. This was an innovation of Dong Zhongshu.” *Boshu Wuxingpian yanjiu* [A Study of the Five

- Phase Chapters in the Silk Manuscripts] (Jinan: Qi Lu Publishing, 1980), 82.
27. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 14.398.
  28. *Ibid.*, 7.216–17.
  29. *Ibid.*, 13.362.
  30. See the “Will of Heaven” chapter of the *Mozi*, which claims, “If the son of Heaven does something good, then Heaven (*tian*) has the power to reward him. If he does something bad, Heaven has the power to punish him. . . . Heaven loves the people generously. It sets forth one after another the sun and the moon, the stars and the constellations to lighten and lead them. It orders the four seasons, spring, fall, winter and summer, to regulate their lives. It sends down snow and frost, rain and dew, to nourish the five grains, hemp and silk, so that the people may enjoy the benefit of them.” See *Mozi jiangou*, 7.196, 200–201. Burton Watson (1925–2017), trans., *Mo Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 84, 88.
  31. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.321.
  32. *Ibid.*, 10.315.
  33. *Ibid.*, 13.367–70.
  34. Dong’s formulation here arguably derives directly from the school of Mencius and Zisi, and their theory of five phases as an ancient formulation. Zhang Binglin noted that in the *Biaoji* [Record on Examples] chapter of the *Liji*, traditionally attributed to Zisi, “Water, fire and Earth are comparable to parents and child, in a manner comparable to Dong’s use of the five phases to compare ministers and sons serving their rulers and fathers.” (*Taiyan Wenlu* [Writings of Zhang Taiyan], “Zisi Mengke Wuxingshuo” [On Zisi’s and Mencius’ Five Phase Theory]; See *Taiyan wenlu chubian* 太炎文錄初編 [Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Publishing, 2014], 8–9.)
  35. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.322.
  36. *Ibid.*, 13.353.
  37. *Ibid.*, 11.330.
  38. *Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wuxing shunni” 五行順逆 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 13.371.
  39. *Ibid.*, “Weiren zhetian” 為人者天 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 13.376.
  40. *Ibid.*, “Weiren zhetian” section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.319.
  41. *Ibid.*, “Jiyi” 基義 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 12.351.
  42. See, for example, the *Hanfeizi* chapter “*Zhongxiao*” [Loyalty and filiality]: “The subject serves the ruler. The son serves the father. The wife serves the husband. Whether the three (lower positions) obey, then the empire is ordered. When they disobey, then all is in chaos. This is constant way (*changdao*) of the world . . . Though a ruler might not be fit, still his subjects dare not attack him.” See *Hanfeizi jijie*, 20.466.
  43. All of these descriptions appear in the ‘Yangzun yinbei’ 陽尊陰卑 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.323–28.
  44. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 3.87.
  45. *Chunqiu fanlu*, “Wangdao tongshan” section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.329.
  46. *Ibid.*, “Jiyi” section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 12.352.
  47. *Ibid.*, “Yangzun yinbei” section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.328.
  48. *Hanshu*, Biography of Dong Zhongshu, 56.2502.
  49. The following passage from that text illustrates the point: “The cosmos (*tian*) does not produce people for the sake of the ruler, but rather establishes rulers for the benefit of the people. Thus someone whose virtue is sufficient to bring comfort and joy to the people is divinely appointed. A ruler whose evil brings harm to the people will be removed by the cosmos.” See *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 7.220.
  50. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 1.32.



51. *Hanshu*, 56.2519; *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 9.268. Dong's description here is similar to the better known but less-clear formulation that appears in the *Hanshu*: "Follow righteousness without seeking benefit and be clear about the way without calculating about achievement." See *Hanshu*, 56.2524.
52. For further details, see the 'Li Yuanshen' 立元神 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 6.168.
53. "Wuxing dui" section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 10.315.
54. Wang Zhen 王禎 (1271–1368), "Xiaoti litian" 孝悌力田, in *Nongshu* 農書 [Treatise on Agriculture] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1956), 1.7.
55. Xu Tianlin 徐天麟 (1205 jinshi), "Xuexiao shang—Taixue" 學校上太學 [State Schools, *Taixue* Section], in *Xihan Huiyao* 西漢會要 [Institutional History of the Western Han Dynasty] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Publishing, 1977), 25.253.
56. "Xuanju xia" 選舉下 [Appointment of Officials], in *Xi Han Huiyao*, 45.521–22.
57. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 7.214.
58. *Shiji*, 121.3119.
59. See the "Fuzhixiang" section of the *Chunqiu fanlu*: "Those who could repulse the enemy only after they had taken up arms were never valued by the sages. . . . Thus civilian virtue should come first, and only then military power." See *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 6.154.
60. According to the Postface of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, "The Legalists did not distinguish between kinfolk and strangers, nor between aristocrats and commoners. Once a judgment was passed, it meant an end to honor among relatives and respect for superiors. . . . However, the Hundred Schools have not been able to change such matters as respect for sovereigns, the subordination of ministers and the impossibility of transcending clearly-defined ranks and stations." See *Shiji*, 130.3291.
61. Wang Zhen, *Nongshu*, 1.8.
62. *Hanshu*, Biography of Dong Zhongshu, 27A.1317, 56.2526.
63. *Shiji*, 130.3290.
64. "Tiandi yinyang" 天地陰陽 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 17.466.
65. "Liyuanshen" 立元神 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 6.168.
66. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 10.311.
67. *Ibid.*, 3.72.
68. *Ibid.*, 16.457.
69. This emphasis on initiative was not accidental, but reflected social forces present at the time. After the rise of the Han dynasty, productive forces developed quickly and science continued to expand. These led to an unprecedented conquest of nature. The achievements of the Han dynasty were reflected in its arts as well as its philosophy. See Chapter 4 of my book *The Path of Beauty*.
70. "Jinghua" section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 3.89.
71. *Ibid.*, "Yuying" 玉英 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 3.74.
72. *Ibid.*, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 3.79.
73. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 8.228.
74. "Yuxu" 俞序 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 6.161.
75. "Wangdao tongshan" section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.329.
76. "Yinyangyi" 陰陽義 section, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 12.341.
77. Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, following its assimilation of Buddhist thought, transformed this cosmology into an internal psychology that elevated ethical behavior as foundational; yet this psychology was still largely characterized by the same sentiment. See the chapter "Some Thoughts on Neo-Confucianism" in this volume.

78. See *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu Jingfa* 馬王堆漢墓帛書經法 (Beijing: Wenwu Publishing, 1976), “Shidajing” 十大經 section, 65.
79. Sun Ji 孫機, “Jizhong Handai de Tu’an Wenshi,” 幾種漢代的圖案紋飾 *Wenwu* [Cultural Relics] 3 (1982): 67.
80. Counting in fives was a practice that appears to have originated in Eastern regions, perhaps in conjunction with the Shang dynasty. For example, the *Book of History* and archaic divination judgments feature the five phases. Eight and six appear to originate with the Zhou and Qin nations in the West. The Qin used a ordered system based on the number six. The ‘Basic Record of the First Emperor’ section of the *Records of the Grand Historian* mentions, “counting with six to keep the record.” See *Shiji*, 6.237. The use of six as a standard was still prevalent at the time of Han scholar Jia Yi.
81. The use of numbers to organize and understand the universe naturally occurs once thought has developed to a certain level. The theories of Pythagoras in ancient Greece, though filled with mysticism, included scientific ideas still worthy of consideration today.
82. Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 (1878–1955), *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2002), 26.
83. See *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 11.334.
84. *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 27.
85. Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908), *Shangshu dazhuan shuzheng* 尚書大傳疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2015), 4.165.
86. *Guoyu jijie*, “Zhengyu” section, 470.
87. *Shangshu zhengyi*, 12.357a.
88. Guo Moruo, *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu* 中國古代社會研究 [A Study of Ancient Chinese Society] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1964), 114.
89. Chung-ying Cheng has also pointed that Chinese philosophy is characterized by organicism, internal dynamism, harmony and dialectic. However, his analysis did not include systems theory or the characteristics of Chinese medicine. See his “Towards Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 4 (1977): 209–45.
90. For further discussion, see my preface to Liu Changlin’s 刘长林 *Neijing de zhexue he zhongyixue de Fangfa* 內經的哲學和中醫學方法 [The Philosophy of the Canon of Medicine and the Methodology of Traditional Chinese Medicine] (Beijing: Kexue Publishing, 1982), 8–9.
91. *Huangdi Neijing, Lingshujing* [Spiritual Pivot], “Xieke” section. The five viscera or *zang* were the heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys, and the six organs or *fu* were the stomach, gall bladder, the bladder, large and small intestines, and the *sanjiao* or ‘triple burner,’ a putative organ that generates energy. See *Huangdi Suwen Lingshu jizhu* 黃帝素問靈樞集注 (Zhengtong daoze), “Xieke” 邪客 section, vol. 21, 20.445b–c.
92. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 13.354–55.
93. *Ibid.*, 13.359–60.
94. See, for example, the “Xuntian zhidao” section.
95. *Hanshu*, 56.2513.
96. *Huangdi neijing Suwen buzhu shiwen*, 41.282b.
97. *Hanshu*, 56.2515.
98. Einstein (1879–1955) one famously remarked that, “Development of Western science is based on two great achievements: the invention of the formal logical system (in Euclidean geometry) by the Greek philosophers, and the discovery of the possibility to find out causal relationships by systematic experiment (during the Renaissance). In my opinion, one has not to be

astonished that the Chinese sages have not made these steps. The astonishing thing is that these discoveries were made at all.” (Einstein’s letter to J.S. Switzer [1875–1965], April 23, 1953, in *Selected Works of Albert Einstein* [Beijing: Shangwu Publishing, 1976], 574.) This comment suggests several things that should interest researchers into the history of Chinese philosophical thought. I believe that China’s failure to make such progress in the area of abstract theorizing severely limited its progress in science.

99. In China, three separate attacks on Buddhism are known collectively as “San Wu miefo” [lit. the three Wu Emperors’ destruction of Buddhism] with each attack launched by an emperor with the posthumous name Wu. Emperors Taiwu and Wu of Northern Zhou reigned during the Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589), while Emperor Wuzong reigned during the Tang dynasty.
100. *Xi Ci II* 繫辭下 [*Appended Texts of the Classic of Change (Yijing)*], also known as *The Great Treatise II*. James Legge, trans. *The I Ching: The Book of Changes* (New York: Dover, 1964).
101. These views were related to the fact that astronomy and astral predictions were already highly developed in antiquity. Such disciplines were important in the formation of Yin-Yang and Five-Phase Theory.
102. See my foreword to Liu Changlin’s book, *Neijing de zhexue he zhongyixue de fangfa*.
103. The early Confucian emphasis on independent and commanding personal character, as expressed in Mencius’ line “Those who counsel great figures should look down upon them” (7B34), had clearly faded by this time. This was partly due to due social causes, since the era of clan dominance had passed; but since individual character had also become subservient to a fixed social and cosmological scheme, the cause partly resides in the realm of ideas too. Nevertheless, during the Han dynasty, scholars would still refer to natural disasters as warning to the emperor and even urge abdication, and during the Salt and Iron Discourses, the ‘erudite worthies’ (the Confucians) argued vehemently with the modernists and emphasized high moral standards and reputation—all of which showed that the original Confucian emphasis on personal character did not disappear entirely, but continued to contrast with later events and thinking.
104. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, “Renyifa” 仁義法 [The Method of Humaneness and Morality], section 8.249. Interestingly, Dong Zhongshu suggests that humaneness is external and morality internal, which differs from Mencius and the Song-Ming Confucians. This accurately expresses the distinction between a cosmological system and an ethics rooted in the mind.
105. I say ‘major concern’ because there were other intellectual trends and ideas around at the time, such as those developed by Wang Chong.
106. This chapter was originally published in the journal *Chinese Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui kexue)*, 2 (1984): 115–37.

## 6 Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism

In the *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Shen Buhai, and Han Fei are covered in a single biography (chapter 63). The *Laozi* and *Hanfeizi* might be placed together, since both are social and political philosophy and discuss political machinations.<sup>1</sup> But it appears somewhat strange to include Zhuangzi here also.<sup>2</sup> Though related in various ways, Zhuangzi and Laozi differ in their most fundamental characteristics. Laozi's political philosophy involved engagement with the world, while Zhuangzi sought a metaphysics of transcendence and detachment. Unlike Laozi and other philosophers, Zhuangzi rarely spoke of strategies and methods for 'governing the state and bringing peace to the empire' (*zhiguo pingtianxia* 治國平天下); instead, the text discusses a different set of issues, including the equalizing of things, the equivalence of life and death, transcending benefit and harm, and nourishing the body and prolonging life.

Despite this, there is good reason for the *Records of the Grand Historian* to group together the Zhuangzi, Laozi, and Hanfeizi. The *Zhuangzi* contains many strident social and political declarations, and in this respect the text shares common themes with the *Laozi*: the rejection of humaneness (*ren*) and rightness (*yi*), criticism of the Confucians and Mohists, the rejection of sageliness and knowledge, and a return to the primitive and to the pronouncements of Laozi. Consequently, during the Qin and Han periods, when political thought was the dominant topic and dialectic and a metaphysics of emotion were not yet widespread, it is understandable that Sima Qian would group Zhuangzi, Laozi, and Hanfeizi together; he also treated the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, including the "Old Fisherman," "Robber Zhi," and "Breaking Open Trunks" (*Quqie* 祛篋) as being more representative of Zhuangzi than the inner chapters.

In later periods, however, literati usually focused on the inner chapters.<sup>3</sup> The ideas in these chapters had some influence on the formation of Chan Buddhism, and were even more influential in the development of Chinese art. There are also contemporary scholars outside China who compare Zhuangzi's thought to existentialism.<sup>4</sup> These observations

suggest that Zhuangzi does offer a distinctive philosophy, different from other schools—different from the sociopolitical thought of the Confucians, Mohists, Laozi, and Hanfei, and different from the cosmological thought of the Qin and Han eras. A philosophical ontology centered on the pursuit of the ideal character and realm of human existence, of which Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism were representative, became an important element in the development of Chinese thought.

### Zhuangzi's Philosophy as Aesthetics

The inner and outer chapters of the *Zhuangzi* form an integrated whole. The ideas and expressions therein might appear detached from reality, while their purist philosophy of life and this-worldly wisdom seem to transcend the ages. Yet they remain a product of Zhuangzi's place and time, rooted in home soil.

The 'glorious' old society had disintegrated and a brutal new regime was rapidly approaching. The economic and political systems of early clan society collapsed and the rapidly developing material civilization, as well as history, were about to make a great leap forward. Production and consumption expanded greatly. During this period, there was a sustained increase in wealth, pleasures, and desire, while exploitation, plunder, and oppression were also intensifying rapidly. The "Robber Zhi" chapter of the *Zhuangzi* notes, "The shameless become wealthy. Those who inspire confidence are prominent."<sup>5</sup> Shameless greed, selfish cunning, sinister ruthlessness, and so on—civilization and progress brought levels of evil and suffering that had not been seen before. People became increasingly enslaved to the wealth, power, and influence that they produced, and these came to govern and control people's minds and bodies.

It was against such a backdrop that Zhuangzi launched his spirited fight. He opposed people becoming the slave of material objects and being used by them, and demanded the recovery of people's fundamental nature (*benxing* 本性). This was probably the earliest rallying call against alienation in the history of global thought, coming at a time when civilization was just starting out. This constituted the essence of Zhuangzi's social and political thought, and is criticized by intellectual historians today for being backward and reactionary:

In ancient times, the Yellow Emperor *Huangdi* was the first to appeal to humaneness and righteousness and it interfered with the hearts and minds of people. After him, Yao and Shun wore their thighs bare and the hair off the calves of their legs, in their labours to nourish the bodies of the people. They toiled painfully with all the powers in their five viscera at the practice of their humaneness and righteousness; they tasked their blood and breath to make out a code of laws—yet they were unsuccessful. Yao then sent away his conspiratorial

minister Huan Dou to Mount Chongshan, exiled the Chiefs of the Three Miao to San-wei, and banished the Minister of Works to the dark lands in the North; but these deeds also failed to bring order to the world. Indeed, by the time of the kings of the Three Dynasties, the world was in a state of great unrest. Among the lowest type of character were Jie of Xia and Robber Zhi; among the good there were Zeng Can and Shi-yu. Finally, the Confucians and the Mohists appeared. Thereupon, complacency and hatred of one another produced mutual suspicions; the stupid and the wise imposed on one another; the good and the bad condemned one another; the boastful and the sincere ridiculed each other—and the world fell into decay.

(Zhuangzi, Ch. 11, “Letting Be and Exercising Forbearance”)<sup>6</sup>

In addition to humaneness and rightness, technological progress was also undesirable:

The use of bows, cross-bows, hand-nets, stringed arrows, and contrivances with springs involves much knowledge, but the birds are troubled by them above; the knowledge shown in the hooks, baits, various kinds of nets, and bamboo traps is great, but the fishes are disturbed by them in the waters; the knowledge shown in the arrangements for setting corrals, and the corrals and snares themselves, is great, but the animals are disturbed by them in the marshy grounds.

(Ch. 10, “Breaking Open Trunks”)<sup>7</sup>

Zigong said, ‘There is a machine here, by means of which a hundred plots of ground may be irrigated in one day. With the expenditure of a very little strength, the result accomplished is great. Would you, Master, not like (to try it)?’ . . . The gardener put on an angry look, laughed, and said, ‘I have heard from my teacher that, where there are ingenious machines, there are sure to be cunning doings, and where there are such cunning doings, there is sure to be a scheming mind. But, when there is a scheming mind in the breast, its pure simplicity is impaired. When this pure simplicity is impaired, the spirit becomes unsettled, and the unsettled spirit is not the proper residence of the *Dao*. It is not that I do not know (of the machine which you mention), but I should be ashamed to use it.’ Thereupon, Zigong looked blank and ashamed; he hung down his head, and made no reply.

(Ch. 12, “Heaven and Earth”)<sup>8</sup>

This being so, what could be done? The answer was a return to the most primitive forms of society of ancient times:

Therefore, in the age of perfect virtue, on the hills there were no foot-paths, nor excavated passages; on the lakes there were no boats

nor dams. [. . .] Men lived in common with birds and beasts, and all creation was one. [. . .] The people occupied their dwellings without knowing what they were doing, and walked out without knowing where they were going. They filled their mouths with food and were glad; they slapped their stomachs to express their satisfaction.

(Ch. 9, "Horse's Hooves")<sup>9</sup>

Where they lay down was where they lived and when they got up they proceeded at their leisure. People knew their mothers but not their fathers. They lived among the wild deer, ploughed for food and wove cloth to cover themselves. They harboured no thought of harming others. This was the glory of perfect virtue.

(Ch. 29, "Robber Zhi")<sup>10</sup>

This was clearly a fantasy that glorified primitive existence. Several romantics who criticized modern civilization, including Rousseau and the contemporary romantics, loved to glorify and exaggerate the virtues of nature, whether biological or in everyday life. They insist only a return to nature could ensure the recovery and liberation of authentic 'human nature.' By comparison, Zhuangzi was one of the earliest and most thorough thinkers to hold this view. He demanded that humans discard civilization and acculturation, and return to a primitive state of ignorance, without awareness or goals. Hence, the claim that, "People did nothing when at rest and went nowhere particular when then moved" (Ch. 9, "Horse's Hooves") and, like the beasts, "People lived and didn't know why they lived" (Ch. 8, "Webbed Toes").<sup>11</sup> Only in this way could people obtain true happiness.

History, however, did not develop according to such logic. In general, history does not return to the past. A material civilization does not die out but instead develops further, and technology plays an analogous role in human life. Although the cost for such progress is high, this is the nature of history. It is advanced through conflicts between civilization and morality, progress and exploitation, matter and spirit, happiness and suffering, and is filled with tragic contradictions. This is the reality of development and is unavoidable. It is how Marx and Engels in their time explained the historical development of capitalism. The significance of Zhuangzi (and some later thinkers who also criticized civilization) does not lie, therefore, in his lack of realism and his call for a return to nature; rather, it lies in how he exposed the dark side of class society, his accounts of suffering, his attack on injustice and his coverage of the despicable conduct of the powerful. Particularly powerful and incisive are Zhuangzi's sayings such as, "The man who steals a buckle is put to death, while the man who steals a state becomes a prince, and it is in the house of the prince that humaneness and righteousness dwell" (Ch. 10).<sup>12</sup> Such sayings still serve as pertinent criticisms today, and provoke profound reflection.

Zhuangzi's highly original critique of civilization differed from that of Laozi, in that he was the first to give prominence to the existence of the individual person. Zhuangzi's criticisms were made from the perspective of the individual: he was concerned not with ethical and political questions but with questions concerning individual existence, in both body (biological life) and mind (spirit).

Therefore, I have tried to show that since the time of the Three Dynasties (Shang, Xia and Zhou), there has been no one who has not altered his nature under external influence. The common man sacrifices his body for profit, the scholar sacrifices his life for fame, the high officials for their family and the sages for the world. The pursuits and ambition of these people differed, but the injury to their natures and their sacrifice were the same. . . . Boyi died at the foot of Mount Shouyang for the sake of his reputation, Robber Zhi died atop the Eastern Heights while seeking profit. Their deaths were different but the injury to their lives and natures was the same.

(Ch. 8)<sup>13</sup>

Today exemplary persons endanger their bodies and discard their lives in the pursuit of things. Is this not wretched?

(Ch. 28, "Kings Who Wished to Resign the Throne")<sup>14</sup>

When a man receives his bodily form, he no longer changes but waits for the end. Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes in harmony with them, he pursues his course to the end, with the speed of a galloping horse which cannot be stopped—is it not sad? To be constantly toiling all one's lifetime, without seeing the fruit of one's labour, and to be weary and worn out with one's labour, without knowing where he is going to—is it not a deplorable case? Men may say, 'But it is not death'; yet of what advantage is this? When the body decays, the mind will follow—is he not pitiful? Man's life has always been a muddle like this.

(Ch. 2, "The Sorting that Evens Things Out")<sup>15</sup>

Zhuangzi was deeply upset that men led meaningless lives of strife, rushing around in lives that culminated only in death, with their minds enslaved to their bodies. From the high-ranking to the insignificant, from robbers and thieves to sages and worthy men, all were enslaved by external things, struggling for fame, profit, for families or for their states. Their causes differed but the results were similar and equally injurious to themselves and their fundamental nature (*benxing*). All of this was the result of people being enslaved (both body and mind) by the things of the world.

Some scholars have argued that Zhuangzi and Yang Zhu were the same person, since both valued the preservation of human life. People were not



to be enslaved by anything external to the body, whether fame and profit or moral ideals of humaneness and rightness. Such things lacked meaning and value. The only truth was that humans are alive. For this reason, it was claimed that the essence of the *dao* was the control of the body.<sup>16</sup> Zhuangzi stated that, “I’ll rest half way between being of use and being good for nothing”<sup>17</sup> and “To do good without approaching fame, to do evil without approaching punishment . . . preserves the body and enables a full life.”<sup>18</sup> Both statements express Zhuangzi’s thoroughgoing commitment to the preservation of life.

Such ideas reflect the fears of a turbulent society: “In the present age those who have been put to death lie thick as if pillowed on each other; those who are wearing the cangue press on each other on the roads; the condemned can be seen everywhere” (Ch. 11, “Letting Be, and Exercising Forbearance”);<sup>19</sup> “In times like the present, men do well to escape punishment” (Ch. 4, “In the Human World”).<sup>20</sup> In theoretical terms, this was an important development in the history of thought: contradiction and conflict between humans as embodied creatures, and their social existence as members of particular communities (households, states, etc.) and the ends that such membership served (fame, profit, and so on). Questions arose about the true meaning of human life, about human nature, and the capacity of humans to resist being influenced and determined by external systems and environments. Put simply, the question of human freedom had arisen. Zhuangzi was the first to address this question from the perspective of the individual, and it was a key philosophical issue for him.

Admittedly, Zhuangzi could not formulate the issue with precision. As Marx’s *German Ideology* notes:

Individuals find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, and become subsumed under it. This is the same phenomenon as the subjection of separate individuals to the division of labor and can only be removed by the abolition of private property and of labor itself.<sup>21</sup>

Only with the progress of history can private ownership and alienated labor be eradicated. Until such a time arrives, alienation is an inevitable part of the advance of human civilization. The desire to skip historical epochs and return to or rediscover human’s intrinsic nature amounts to a turning back of the tide of history, which is impossible. For Zhuangzi, this was a return to the ‘freedom’ of antiquity. It was a demand to eliminate private property and all civilization and, instead, to lead a naïve and animal-like existence. But, in fact, ‘intrinsic nature,’ ‘independence,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘authentic existence’ are historically determined and constrained. Natural instincts are not intrinsic human nature, and an animal-like natural existence is not free: a natural animal-like existence is not a

freely chosen ideal. Moreover, as a biological entity, any individual must die. No individual can preserve life forever.

Zhuangzi clearly understood this point.<sup>22</sup> The problem of how to escape the suffering of the world and transcend life and death could not find resolution in the material world, and instead was manifested in the pursuit of an idealized mentality and personality. The question of individual existence (both mind and body) became a matter of autonomous personal character and mental freedom, and this was the core of Zhuangzi's philosophy.

Zhuangzi used exaggeration to convey this ideal personality in his various attempts to describe and promote it. What Zhuangzi was striving for is clear both from the beautiful images in the stories of the "Free and Easy Wandering" chapter and from the use of terms of personal distinction such as the 'ultimate person' (*zhiren* 至人), the 'authentic person' (*zhenren* 真人), or the 'sacred being' (*shenren* 神人). His pursuit of the ideal character proceeded via his arguments about *dao*, or the way, which provided an ontological ground for his philosophy.

*Dao*, or way, is an extremely complex idea in Zhuangzi's thought, and it has been discussed at great length by intellectual historians. Some gloss the 'way' in spiritual terms, some understand it in material terms, while others understand it as a deity. Some say the way is objective, others that it is subjective in nature. In short, it appears omnipresent and timeless. It precedes the heavens and the Earth, and is prior to the myriad things and events and greater than everything, including spirits, deities, nature, and civilization. It is beyond sensation, and defies words and is ineffable; yet it can be grasped and understood by humans. It has no will, no desire, no human character; it does nothing yet there is nothing that it does not do. As Zhuangzi said:

The way has its manifestations and is reliable but is without action or form. You can hand it down but not receive it; you can obtain it but not perceive it. It has its own source and root. Before the Heavens and the Earth existed, it was there, present since antiquity. It animated the spirits and deities; it gave birth to the Heavens and the Earth. It exists beyond the supreme polarity, yet it cannot be called lofty. It exists below the limits set by the six directions, yet it cannot be called deep. It emerged before the Heavens and the Earth, yet you cannot say it has been there for long. It comes before the earliest time, yet it cannot be called old.

(Ch. 6, "The Great Source as Teacher")<sup>23</sup>

"That which is called the way—where is it?" "It is everywhere," replied Zhuangzi. . . . "The way cannot be heard. If heard, it is not the way. It cannot be seen. If seen, it is not the way. It cannot be spoken. If spoken, it is not the way. That which imparts form to forms is

itself formless; there the way can have no name. . . . The way is not a question, for questions have no answers.”

(Ch. 22, “Knowledge Rambling in the North”)<sup>24</sup>

Here, form is boundless, filled with mystery. So, what are the characteristics of this form? According to Laozi, “The way models itself after nature”;<sup>25</sup> “Only when the way is lost does the doctrine of rightness arise. Only when rightness is lost does the doctrine of humaneness arise”;<sup>26</sup> “Pursuing the way means that action decreases with each day. It decreases further and further until one reaches the point of taking no action.”<sup>27</sup> On this point, the way of Laozi and Zhuangzi is identical. That is, the way consists in being or doing what is natural without any artifice. It stands above and yet is present in everything. This is exactly what people ought to carefully study:

This teacher of mine, this teacher of mine—he passes judgment on the myriad things but he doesn’t think himself righteous. His largesse extends through ten thousand generations but he doesn’t think himself humane. He is older than the oldest antiquity but he doesn’t think himself long-lived. He covers the Heavens and holds up the Earth, carves and fashions limitless forms, but doesn’t think himself skilled. It is with him alone that I wander.

(Ch. 6)<sup>28</sup>

When asked to explain the piping of heaven (*tianlai* 天籟), Ziqi said, “Blowing on ten thousand things in different ways, so that each can be itself; each leads itself, but who does the sounding?” (Ch. 2).<sup>29</sup>

Everything has life and death, a beginning and an end, all confined within a given time and space. Only the way transcends all this. It has no beginning, no end, no life, no death, neither joy nor anger, neither attraction nor repulsion. It appears as the source and transformation of all things, and so pervades everything. “Heaven cannot but be high. Earth cannot but be broad. The sun and moon cannot help but move. All creation cannot but flourish. This is in accordance with their way” (Ch. 22).<sup>30</sup> Thus, the way is everything and everything is also this unified whole.

It is worth noting that this pantheistic ontology did not function as a genuine cosmology within Zhuangzi’s thought. He was not interested in exploring or verifying the nature of the universe, either as being or non-being, idea or matter, nor how the world comes into being and evolves. These questions were unimportant to Zhuangzi. When he talked about the way, the heavens, non-action or nature, it was as though he was indulging his “unbridled fancies, extravagant language and romantic musings” (Ch. 33, “*Tianxia*”).<sup>31</sup> His many fables and stories aimed solely to give prominence to examples of idealized characters. Thus, the way

that he spoke of was not the fundamental reality of nature but the reality of the human. He elevated humanity to the level of the universe and spoke of it in these terms. That is, he pointed out that man's fundamental existence and that of the universe and nature were one.

For Zhuangzi, the form of humanity's existence was infinite because he could free himself from all enslavement by things and obtain absolute freedom. He "treats things as things and is not a thing to them" (Ch. 20).<sup>32</sup> He could wander free and easy, "shouldering the blue sky and nothing can hinder or impede him" (Ch. 1, "Free and Easy Wandering").<sup>33</sup> He depended upon nothing and was not controlled or restricted by any kind of relationship. Thus:

Though the vast swamps burn, they cannot burn him; though great rivers freeze, they cannot chill him; though the swift lightning splits the hills, it cannot harm him and though howling gales whip up the sea, they cannot frighten him. A man like this rides the clouds and mist, straddles the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. Even life and death have no effect on him, much less the rules of gain and loss!

(Ch. 2)<sup>34</sup>

If life and death were nothing to such a person, then how much less were mere worldly questions of benefit and loss. This is the 'ultimate man,' the authentic man, the sacred being, the great and venerable teacher; in short, this is Zhuangzi's ideal character. Therefore, I agree with the following traditional assessment found in the history of Chinese thought, but which has not been given much attention:

Zhuangzi's true teachings are in the chapter, 'The Great and Venerable Teacher.' What is this so-called great and venerable teacher? It is the way. The one who understands the way is the authentic person, the great and venerable teacher. These three terms, though distinct, all refer to the same thing. When speaking of it as essence it is called the way; speaking of it as a person, it is the authentic person or great and venerable teacher. Since Zhuangzi understood this he was also to treat life and death, a brief life and longevity, in the same fashion. Nothing could disturb his mind's composure. At the juncture between life and death, one should be content with the moment and willing to follow along, such that grief and joy have no way to enter. When people today talk about Zhuangzi they do not recognise this aspect of his thought. . . . Isn't this what people describe as discarding a pearl that sheds its radiance far and wide, while prizing an empty wooden casket?<sup>35</sup>

Thus was Zhuangzi's ontology and epistemology. Both consisted of arguments for this independent, self-reliant, utterly free, and boundless

personality. Zhuangzi's relativism, nihilism, and agnosticism all indicated that the existence and changes in specific things, including being and non-being, greatness and smallness, and right and wrong, were merely limited, partial, and insignificant. Exploring them in detail was unnecessary since, as Zhuangzi notes, "The Heavens, Earth and I arose together, and all things and I are one" (Ch. 2).<sup>36</sup> All things are fundamentally in flux, complete and form a whole, and if we arbitrarily distinguish these into being and non-being, right and wrong, large and small, then the true nature of their existence will be lost. "So those who divide fail to divide; great discriminations are not spoken; Great Humaneness is not humaneness" (Ch. 2).<sup>37</sup> All forms of knowledge are partial, relative, and limited. Genuine knowledge is "an understanding that stops when it reaches what it does not understand."<sup>38</sup> Such knowledge can only be attained through direct experience, not language, concepts, judgment, and logic. "Those who understand it do not speak about it, those who speak about it do not understand it. Therefore, the sage teaches a doctrine that does not find expression in words" (Ch. 22).<sup>39</sup> "Who can understand arguments that do not call for words, a way that needs no elucidation? If he can understand this, he may be called the celestial repository. Pour into it and it is never full, draw from it and it never runs dry, and yet who knows from where the supply comes. This is called the 'store of light'" (Ch. 2).<sup>40</sup> Simply put, Zhuangzi's ontology and epistemology both urge humanity to model themselves on natural entities. Knowledge and striving are superfluous, while unconscious and purposeless processes conform to the operations of nature. Only in this way would harmony with the way be found:

The authentic person of the past knew nothing of loving life or hating death. He emerged without delight; he returned without a fuss. He came briskly and went briskly; that was all. . . . This is what is called not using the mind to repel the way, and not using the human to help out the Heavens. This is what I call the authentic person.

(Ch. 6)<sup>41</sup>

What do you mean by the heavenly and the human? Ruo of the North Sea declared, 'Horses and oxen have four hooves—this is what is meant by the heavenly. Putting a halter on a horse's head, piercing the ox's nose—these are the human.' So I say: do not let what is human destroy the heavenly.

(Ch. 17, "Autumn Floods")<sup>42</sup>

Everything artificial and all conscious goal-directed human activity, knowledge, deliberation, or calculation can only impair the way. The way is the natural world, unity, completeness, and a chaotic whole, while the human is partial, deficient, and divided. "Every day they bored another hole and on the seventh day Hundun died."<sup>43</sup>

How then is it possible to fully attain this ideal character, which forms one body with the way? Since the way is non-action and follows nature, humans ought to be content with the present and accord with their place, remaining unperturbed by everything: “Had you called me an ox, I should have considered myself an ox; had you called me a horse, I should have considered myself a horse”;<sup>44</sup> “He does not delight in longevity, nor grieve over a premature demise. He finds no glory in success, nor despair in failure”;<sup>45</sup> “To understand what you can do nothing about and to be accepting of that as with fate, this is the ultimate virtue”;<sup>46</sup> “Life and death, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and riches, worthiness and unworthiness, slander and fame, hunger and thirst, cold and heat—these are the transformations of things, the effects of fate.”<sup>47</sup> This is thoroughgoing fatalism, an absence of action. Evidently, Zhuangzi did not believe that human action changes the constraints and parameters of reality, including life and death, preservation and loss, poverty and riches, or slander and fame. Thus, the supposed ‘absolute freedom’ of humanity, its independence and self-reliance, are not found in the self-conscious choices of practical life or in voluntary social engagement; rather, freedom, self-reliance, and transcendence in the everyday world are found in a kind of psychological stance or mental imaginary. Through ‘mental fasting’ and ‘sitting and forgetting,’ Zhuangzi obliterated the differences between the self and other things, unified life and death, transcended benefit and harm, and treated longevity and early death the same. Personal independence is not something achieved through voluntary choice and practical action.

Zhuangzi’s well-known stories about dreaming that he was butterfly, and being discovered drumming happily on a tub and singing after his wife’s death, show that conventional distinctions such as dreaming and being awake, life and death, can be transcended at the level of the spirit. To define or normalize either dreaming or being awake, life or death, would represent a biased attachment to unreal categories. Before it is liberated, the mind is confined and limited by external but unreal phenomena; but these mental restrictions are removed when the binary oppositions are considered as one psychologically. “How do I know why it is so? How do I know why it is not so? . . . Zhuangzi didn’t know if he was Zhaung Zhou dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou.”<sup>48</sup> Only in this way can a person find unity with nature and the cosmos, such that things no longer exist but are unified with the way. Only here can the authentic processes of life be experienced, where one is “content with the moment and ready to follow along, and grief and joy have no way of entering.”<sup>49</sup> Only thus, can a person become the ‘ultimate man,’ the authentic person, or the sacred person, who “enters water without getting wet and fire without being burned”; such a man “rides the changes of the six energies and wanders in the limitless.”<sup>50</sup> This is the highest ideal in Zhuangzi’s thought.

For Zhuangzi, such a spiritual state was the defining feature of this idealized personality, and was achieved through mysterious techniques like ‘mental fasting’ and ‘sitting and forgetting.’ As a result, “the body became like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes,” as though “one has lost the self” (Ch. 2). Such graphic and disturbing images describe the state to be attained. Zhuangzi stressed the elimination of the ‘false self’ (*jiawo* 假我) or ‘what is not me’ (*feiwo* 非我), in which humaneness, righteousness, goodness, beauty, fame, and profit dominate. Only when such a self has been discarded can the true self emerge.

Only this kind of ‘true self’ can, like the cosmos, effortlessly merge order and purpose, so that the objective is also the subjective, the rule-governed is also purposeful and the human is also the natural. This is *dao*. Clearly, then, Zhuangzi’s highest ideal was not an anthropomorphic deity; instead, he described an ideal psycho-spiritual personality. His philosophy was thus not grounded in religious experience but was guided by an attitude of aesthetic appreciation. His philosophy was thus a kind of aesthetics.<sup>51</sup> He advocated adopting an aesthetic attitude toward all aspects of human life, discounting profit and loss, success and failure, right and wrong, achievements and failures. A person was to forget the self, subject and object, self and others, and thus let the self and the universe merge into a singularity. This approach is captured in the following lines: “Heaven and Earth are very beautiful, yet they say nothing”;<sup>52</sup> “Oblivious of everything, possessing everything; an infinite calm in which all beauty follows.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, rather than approach Zhuangzi via his cosmology and epistemology, the essence of this thought should be grasped via his aesthetics.

Since Zhuangzi’s thought was aesthetic and not religious, he did not seek to ameliorate people’s fear and sadness toward death; nor did he devalue the physical existence of the body as a condition of salvation of the soul and spiritual transcendence. He was thus very different from medieval Christianity and modern thinkers such as Dostoevsky (1821–81) and Kierkegaard (1813–55). Further, unlike Buddhists, he neither denied the value of ordinary life nor demanded the extinguishing of desires and passions. On the contrary, Zhuangzi embraced this life, and did not devalue the sensuous. This can be seen in the aforementioned ideas of preserving the body and living out one’s natural span, avoiding a premature death from foul play, and being content with the moment and ready to follow along with things. The same values appear in Zhuangzi’s approach toward death, which sees it not as a religious emancipation but an aesthetic form of transcendence. Death was not a form of salvation but rather a form of liberation, and this made possible a tangible and felt sense of freedom and happiness:

There are no rulers among the dead, and no subjects, and nothing is defined by the seasons. The spring and autumn are as endless as the

Heavens and the Earth, and even the happiness of the ruler on his throne cannot compare to death.

(Ch. 18, "Perfect Enjoyment")<sup>54</sup>

While this was a moral fable, it nevertheless emphasized pleasure or delight. Such pleasure was not a vulgar sensual pleasure—although it was not entirely distinct from the pleasures of the senses. Zhuangzi was entirely against the denial or elimination of sensory pleasure in order to transcend this world and secure some kind of divine grace or supreme happiness based on suffering (the opposite of pleasure). Zhuangzi fostered an unforced and aesthetic attitude toward life, which regarded life and death as equals, removed the distinctions between things and the self, transcended benefit and loss, and found no difference between right and wrong. For Zhuangzi, this was the supreme pleasure, even if "the body was like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes."

Thus, Zhuangzi and Laozi superficially appear lacking in feeling and compassion. In reality, however, both thinkers differed greatly in this regard. Laozi discussed politics and emphasized reason and thus really was lacking in feeling. "The Heavens and Earth are not humane. The sage is not humane. He treats all things as straw dogs" (*Laozi*, Ch. 5). As noted earlier, however, Zhuangzi appeared to be indifferent and yet did have feelings. Many of his remarks appear callous and aloof but in fact betray a love of life and the senses. A feature of Zhuangzi was that, although he appeared to have transcended human life and matters of life and death, he did not abandon or dismiss them. "Be warm like spring with all things";<sup>55</sup> "Everything returns to its primordial state";<sup>56</sup> "His joy and anger are as natural as the four seasons. He is in harmony with all things and no one knows his limit";<sup>57</sup> "Being in harmony with the cosmos is called the 'joy of the Heavens.'"<sup>58</sup> This talk of spring, human feelings and harmony suggest that Zhuangzi did not dismiss nature, the world or existence as illusory and absurd. On the contrary, he embraced their existence while seeking a personality that was united with the myriad things.

Zhuangzi strived to describe the natural world. His stories were extravagantly written and imbued with a fantastical beauty. When Zhuangzi's philosophy and the Confucian spirit are compared, the latter's claim that of unity between the heavens and the human (*tianren heyi*) show that the two were close in fundamental values, and both were very different from religion, Buddhist thought or modern existentialism.

Zhuangzi's Daoism thus complemented Confucianism, through the addition of an ideal personality of the kind that the Confucians had not fully developed. Daoists of later eras thus helped Confucianism to resist or absorb alien views, such as those of Buddhism. This feature was an important part of the traditional Chinese cultural-psychological formation.

Admittedly, Zhuangzi taught that typically conscious and purposeful human activity could in fact, be like nature, and proceed without



consciousness or deliberate intent. This was completely wrong. As a result, the absolute freedom of Zhuangzi's ideal personality could never be anything more than a fantasy. True freedom of the body and mind for the individual arises when the human community establishes effective control over what once seemed inevitable. The so-called transcendence of Zhuangzi was simply fleeing from things that were inevitable. Such an approach was doomed to failure. In fact, Zhuangzi's philosophy exercised a negative influence on Chinese culture and the Chinese nation more generally. This, combined with fatalistic Confucian ideas that included the acceptance of one's fate, preservation of the way, contentment in poverty, and being neither for nor against anything, played a substantial role in creating a submissive character. It was one that did not resist adversity, engaged in the deception of oneself and others, and which drifted with the prevailing currents of the time.

### A Metaphysics of Personal Character

Zhuangzi's philosophy appeared to have little influence and remained as if buried during the Qin and Han periods. The latter were characterized by the conquest of the external environment, the development of productive forces and the enrichment of worldly life. It was not rediscovered until the Wei and Jin periods. However, it is worth noting that from the pre-Qin period to the Wei-Jin era, and during the Han dynasty, the doctrine of 'nourishing life' (*yang sheng* 養生) was associated with Zhuangzi. In Wang Fuzhi's commentary on the Zhuangzi, Wang explains a key line in "The Primacy of Nourishing Life" chapter—"Follow the meridian; go by what is constant" in the following way:

The central meridian in the front of the body is called '*ren*' (任), and the meridian in the rear part is called '*du*' (督). [. . .] 'Following the meridian' means to use refined and subtle energy (*qi*) to accord with emptiness. If one stops where one can go no further, then progress will be smooth.<sup>59</sup>

This is an explanation of the text from a medical perspective. The theory of two meridian lines of energy, *ren* and *du*, was an essential part of traditional Chinese breathing exercises intended to nurture health and preserve life. Such ideas continue to have influence even today. The art of caring for life that Zhuangzi presents in the third chapter, and others, was related to the fasting of the mind, sitting and forgetting, and the idea that the ultimate person can breathe through his heels. All focused on the regulation of the breath in a traditional system of breathing exercises. The 'Daoyin Diagram' (*Daoyintu*) unearthed at Mawangdui, which depicts breathing exercises for strengthening the body, suggests that this system was also popular during the Han dynasty.

This emphasis continued into the Six dynasties period, and could be seen in texts such as Jin dynasty scholar Ge Hong's 葛洪 (284–364) *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 [The Master Who Embraces Simplicity]. The later chapters of that text dealt with governing the state and pacifying the empire—Confucian themes—but the early chapters detailed Daoist practices for securing longevity and immortality. By this time, Zhuangzi's thought had merged with Daoist folk religion and alchemist theories aiming at immortality that were popular from the Qin and Han onwards. The pursuit of longevity and immortality was arguably a vulgarization of Zhuangzi's thought, but it is reasonable to claim that Zhuangzi's ideas of preserving the body and completing one's life span did find application in the areas of medicine and physiology.

Zhuangzi's theory of nourishing life differed from those of the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine* (*Huangdi Neijing*) and from Han dynasty thought. The former focused on the individual embodied person, though its spirit was broadly Daoist, while Han thought involved a systematic cosmology that was Confucian in origin. Both, however, formed part of Chinese medical theory and physiology and they soon merged. Such convergence could already be found in pre-Qin times. Mencius' claim that "I am good at nourishing my flood-like energy (*qi*)" could be said to convey ideas related to Zhuangzi's thought. Mencius also identified a connection between ethics and five-phase theory, and the latter became the basis for Han cosmological theory. Zhuangzi placed the individual body and mind at the center of his vision and argued that if the individual were authentic and free then the relationship between the heavens and humanity, and between humans, would be complete. In Confucian thought, the value of the person is derived from relationships between people, but Zhuangzi sought value in the individual who was liberated from human social relationships.

It was thus unsurprising that Zhuangzi became popular during the Wei and Jin periods, when the old social order collapsed and human life was devalued due to relentless wars. I once wrote:

Because external authorities were subject to doubt and denial, a new receptivity towards inner character emerged. Earlier and widely-accepted values—found in ethical codes, the belief in ghosts and spirits, legends and fatalism, and the restrictive textual studies of the classics—were now regarded as false or subject to doubt. They were neither reliable nor valuable. Rather, the truth was that humans were doomed to die and that their short lives were full of sorrow and misfortune.<sup>60</sup>

People now sought to discard externally imposed standards and restrictions in order to attain the authentic self. This was a distinctive mode of thought from the Wei-Jin period onwards.<sup>61</sup> Affirming the self while

disdaining external standards (such as power, fame and profit) were important elements of the philosophy of the time, regardless of whether they were feasible goals. The drive toward self-consciousness defined Wei-Jin thought, while a method for the cultivation of human character was the primary achievement of Wei-Jin era Neo-Daoism (*xuanxue* 玄學).

Accordingly, one might say that Neo-Daoism simply was Zhuangzi's philosophy. Admittedly, He Yan 何晏 (196–249) and Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) developed an ontology—'absence or non-being is the root' (*yiwu weiben*)—that derived from Laozi and overlooked Zhuangzi. Furthermore, they were guided by Confucianism and placed Confucius above Laozi. However, Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263) and Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) were scholars who opposed Confucianism and elevated Zhuangzi in both theory and practice, and they ensured that Zhuangzi's thought left an indelible mark on the Chinese intellectual tradition. The legend of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, which included Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, had great influence during their own time and in later generations. They were broadly faithful to Zhuangzi's thought and implemented it, while also adopting a complex and at times contradictory attitude toward Confucianism. Ji Kang dismissed the sage kings Tang and Wu and looked down upon the Duke of Zhou and Confucius, while Ruan Ji regarded the Confucian gentleman living in the vast world as comparable to lice living in a pair of pants. Lu Xun suggests that this view stemmed from the fact that they lived in such turbulent times and was thus not a deep-seated attitude.<sup>62</sup>

Yet both thinkers strove for the kind of ideal character described by Zhuangzi—the great man that distinguishes himself from all the ordinary people of the world. As Ruan Ji remarked,

Being in union with the maker of things, the great man lives with the Heavens and the Earth. He roams and drifts through the world and achieves completion along with the way. He transforms, dissipates and reforms. He has no fixed form.<sup>63</sup>

There is an important point here. Thinkers such as Ruan Ji wanted to consume elixirs and secure longevity or immortality. But they were also aware that nourishing life required nourishing the spirit (*shen* 神) and so they paid greater attention to freeing the spirit from the world. Twentieth-century scholar Tang Yongtong writes, "In caring for life, some stressed the nourishing of the spirit. For example, Ji Kang sought to transcend the body and valued the spirit more."<sup>64</sup> The question of the relation between body and spirit has since become central to philosophy (where body and spirit are distinguished) and art (where body is used to express spirit). Zhuangzi had already put forth the idea that the spirit is used to preserve the body (*shen yi shou xing*, Ch. 11). That is the goal of nourishing the spirit is to keep the body alive and intact.

In addition, the evaluation of people by attending to both their body and spirit has, since the Three Kingdoms period text *Renwuuzhi* [On Human Character], been central to making the striving for and praising of individual personality into the major philosophical debate. Zhuangzian political theory, much esteemed by Sima Qian, also developed during this period. This included Ji Kang and Ruan Ji's idea that there is no distinction between a ruler and his subjects and Bao Jingyan's 鮑敬言 (n.d.) theory of "no sovereign"; both drew on Zhuangzi's political thought, though they played a subordinate role in their thought compared to the question of body and spirit.

In both theory and depth, Ji Kang's and Ruan Ji's use of the *Zhuangzi* should be understood in relation to how He Yan and Wang Bi interpreted Laozi. Such interpretation was already different from the original *Laozi*. He and Wang proposed that absence or indeterminacy (*wu*) is the ground of reality. People should free themselves from various concrete, limited, and partial 'details' in order to grasp what is whole and unlimited. What is truly substantial evades capture by language, concept, image or thought, and these merely aid people to experience and grasp it. Once grasped, a person can discard and forget such aids, and it is only after discarding and forgetting them that a person can arrive at what is truly substantial. Wang Bi argued that the use of words brings divisions, and divisions mean that the ultimate reality is lost:

I do not want to speak, because I seek to illuminate what is substantial and to use that to order what is incidental, thereby revealing what is ultimate. . . . Thus, one should cultivate what is substantial and cease words, make oneself cohere with the cosmos (*tian*) and follow the transformations.<sup>65</sup>

The way can be called 'indeterminacy' (*wu*); it is all-encompassing and everything proceeds from it. The way is so-called because it is silent and without form, and cannot be formed into images. Thus, the way cannot be substantiated and serves only to inspire the intentions.<sup>66</sup>

Wang Bi and others approached the question of what is fundamental from the perspective of Confucian thinking about governing. They believed what is fundamental or most substantial will furnish a theory of rulership. "The masses cannot govern the masses. Only the ruler can govern the masses. Movement cannot govern movement. Only what is stable can govern the empire."<sup>67</sup> This meant that the cosmological charts of the Han dynasty, which detailed complex operations or systems, should not be used as the theoretical foundation for governing the empire. Instead, the way, the inclusive unity that does nothing yet leaves nothing undone, provided the theoretical basis for rulership.

What is most important here is that the nature of 'absence' or indeterminacy (*wu*) is the nature of the ideal personality rather than the nature of the cosmos. As with Zhuangzi's thought, so Neo-Daoism also used the

features of human personality to encapsulate and command the cosmos. What is interesting about Wei-Jin Neo-Daoism is not that it is yet another investigation of the nature of the cosmos and objective laws of nature, but rather that it explains how to grasp the fundamental and crucial features of a changing and turbulent world, both human and natural. Ultimately, the aim is to establish an authoritative ruler as the representation of what is most important and substantial. Thus, while Neo-Daoism has much to say about being or indeterminacy, the essential and the incidental, speech and thought, body and spirit, it was primarily concerned with how to be a sage able to govern the entire world. Furthermore, Wang Bi's thought is superior to He Yan's, for the following reason:

He Yan maintained that the sage lacks joy, anger, sorrow or pleasure; Wang Bi disagreed. Bi argued that the sage is superior to other people on account of his heightened understanding, while he possesses the five emotions just like other people. His superior understanding means that he is able to identify with and harmonize with the totality, such that he is constituted by indeterminacy. But since he is like others in having the five emotions, he cannot but react to external things with emotion. However, the emotions of the sage are such that, though he reacts to things, he is never captive to them.<sup>68</sup>

This is simply the political application of Zhuangzi's idea to "respond to everything aright without regard to place or circumstance" (*Zhuangzi*, Ch. 22, "yingwu wufang" 應物無方). Evidently, Wang Bi's distinctions between the fundamental (*ben* 本) and the incidental (*mo* 末), one and many, and stillness and motion, were an attempt to distinguish the phenomenal world in its diversity, constant motion, and change, from a more fundamental reality that is empty, quiescent, and unified. Wang's aim was not to explain the cosmos or nature, but to cultivate an ideal socially and politically orientated personality (the sage) who could lead and govern all things. This personality will possess latent and boundless possibilities, and so will manifest itself in various aspects of reality. This is why the sage, though he will react to all things, will never be enslaved by them. He can be preoccupied with endless affairs of state and still be at ease with himself. He does nothing yet there is nothing he does not do. "Achievements and events in the external world are finite and can be exhausted. But the ground of the inner spirit is primate, inexhaustible and fundamental. The latter (the mother) produces the former (the child)."<sup>69</sup> This is perhaps the real meaning of the suggestion that only the sage can embody the indeterminate (*tiwu* 體無). Doing nothing (*wuwei*) represents the art of rulership that Daoism had long since been advocating.<sup>70</sup> In his thought, Wang Bi elevated what was a political theory into

an ontology. Hence, the idea of indeterminacy or absence (*wu*) in Wei-Jin Neo-Daoism was an inquiry into human nature.

There are differences between Wang Bi's and He Yan's accounts of Laozi's thought, and Ji Kang's and Ruan Ji's understanding of Zhuangzi. One was a social-political account of governing a state, while the other focused on the detachment of the individual's mind and spirit from the world. Nevertheless, they shared the key theme of creating an idealized character and thus were part of the same intellectual trend.

The theme of personal character is the philosophical core of indeterminacy or absence. According to Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, or Wang Bi, the great man or sage is he who identifies with indeterminacy or absence appears quiescent or indifferent, but is in fact full of emotion. Wang Bi admitted that, 'reacting to things with the five emotions' did not prevent one from becoming a sage, and only by doing so while not being enslaved by the emotions can a person become a true sage. It was widely acknowledged that Ji Kang and Ruan Ji were highly emotional people, and it was a common line of thought to stress the emotions while offering a speculative approach that seems, from the outside, to be devoid of emotion. For example:

Wang Zijing says that "on the shaded mountain path, the mountain and river add beauty to each other, too much to appreciate. In times of autumn and winter, however, it is hard to find relief from the gloom."

"Who resides deeply in emotion is simply me."

"Even trees can be so, let alone humans."

These sayings all reflected the value of emotion. This trend toward valuing emotion was also found in literary works during this period, ranging from Lu Ji's 陸機 *Rhapsody on Literature* (*Wenfu* 文賦) to Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 *Critique of Poetry* (*Shipin* 詩品). All set forth a new aesthetic, whereby poetry proceeds from emotion, and this trend also influenced philosophic thought. This trend was linked to the social turmoil and suffering of the time and to looser external restrictions on human life. Looking at the period overall, then, I believe that the essence of Wei-Jin Neo-Daoism was Zhuangzian rather than deriving from Laozi. Neo-Daoism attempted to establish personality as a kind of fundamental reality—one replete with emotion but also independent and self-sufficient, and which was capable of absolute freedom and limitless transcendence.

Another aspect of Neo-Daoism, marking a distinct stage of the movement, is found in Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 227–272) and Guo Xiang's 郭象 (252–312) *Zhuangzi zhu* (Annotated Zhuangzi). Scholars have discussed already how these two commentators differ from He Yan and Wang Bi, and also from Ji Kang and Ruan Ji. Xiang and Guo strove to overturn Ji and Ruan's use of Zhuangzi to reject Confucian political thought, social

thinking and ideals of personal character. Guo Xiang explained that his thoroughgoing reinterpretation of Zhuangzi sought to explain the way of sageliness within and kingliness without.<sup>71</sup> It sought to harmonize sageliness within (ideal character) with kingliness without (the ruling political order). Therefore, politically, Guo Xiang held that although having a ruler could be harmful, this was preferable to being without one. Socially, Guo affirmed the social distinction between the noble and the base; he argued that the relation between ruler and subject, superior and inferior, elder and younger brothers, outer and inner, all conform to the natural law of the cosmos.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the traditional Confucian ethical code comes to be identified with Zhuangzi's way of nature. With regard to ideal personality, Guo's understanding of the first chapter of the Zhuangzi is significant. He argued that the story of the Peng bird and the quail did not indicate that the ideal personality was lofty and distant. On the contrary, Guo claimed that Zhuangzi was saying that, though the Peng bird and the quail differed in size and range, they could both wander freely and easily, and neither was superior to the other. "Although there is difference between great and small, when located where they feel at ease they follow their natures, display their aptitudes and play out their proper roles. Thus, their happiness is equivalent. How can one claim there is superiority of inferiority among them?"<sup>73</sup> When this interpretation is connected to other Zhuangzi ideas—such as according with the times and conforming to the world, dragging one's tail in the mud and residing halfway between being useful and useless—then the supposedly ideal personality becomes mere conformity to custom and the environment. Guo Xiang argued that:

The sage is not distinct from the world but needs to keep up with the times. So, an emperor conducts himself in the manner of an emperor and a ruler in the manner of a ruler. How could he flout customs and conform only to himself?<sup>74</sup>

Guo Xiang believed that putting a ring through the ox's nose or putting a halter on a horse, so that they serve human need, are also actions that belong to natural human instinct:

Can one avoid using oxen and riding on horseback during one's life? When using oxen and riding on horseback, can one avoid piercing the ox's nose and putting a halter on the horse's head? The ox does not reject its nose being pierced nor the horse the halter, because this is the way it is naturally ordained to be. When things conform to what is ordained by the Heavens this is because they have their grounds in the Heavens—though they are designated as human actions.<sup>75</sup>

This is obviously contrary to Zhuangzi's original idea.<sup>76</sup> Zhuangzi advocated the rejection of human artifice and action, and returning to the

natural. Guo Xiang, however, affirmed human practices, arguing that it was a part of nature:

So-called non-action does not mean folding one's arms and remaining silent; and talk of keeping away from the dirt-ridden world does not mean living a hermit life in the mountains and forests.<sup>77</sup>

Ministers manage affairs, but the sovereign enables them to function. The axe cuts the timber but the artisan enables the axe to function. When each adjusts himself to what he is capable of then natural order will spontaneously arise, and there will be no positive, deliberate action. . . . So, let all perform their proper function, and high and low find their proper place. This is the ultimate form of non-action.<sup>78</sup>

Here the rationality of society is affirmed, alongside the ethical codes concerning hierarchical human relationships, politics, and the idea that people should conform to convention. Only in this way can a person be truly free and able to 'wander' and achieve the desired end of reacting to things but not being enslaved by them. With regard to the sage who governs the state, "though he works without end, his spirit-like energy (*shenqi* 神氣) is not affected. Though he engages in all manner of actions, he remains poised and spontaneous."<sup>79</sup> For the common people, however, "patterned order has its manifestations, and things have their fixed polarities; each might be described as events, which are ordered and unified . . . there is no escape from such binds."<sup>80</sup> Simply put, 'non-action' means adapting to what exists. To ride one's chariot upon the warp and weft of the universe is but to follow the nature of all things. Adopting to what exists and following the nature of things mean following the governing social order. Guo Xiang's approach thus developed, in a vulgar and artificial manner, only one aspect of Zhuangzi's thought and neglected the critical stance he took toward social life and its problems. What was lost was the spirit of rebellion and progress that was central to Ji Kang's and Ruan Ji's accounts.

Guo Xiang also did away with the substantive meaning of 'indeterminacy' (*wu*) that Wang Bi developed as an extension of the *Laozi* and the *Book of Changes*. He also denied the distinction between underlying essence and the observed world. Everything was reduced to contingencies that were the product of chance and spontaneous happenings. This meant that there was no need to articulate or develop an ideal personality, and Zhuangzi's philosophy then becomes a matter of mere expediency and cleverness. Guo Xiang's interpretations have long been regarded as capturing Zhuangzi's original meaning, and people have often read the text through the lens of Guo Xiang's annotations. As a result, Zhuangzi's thought came to be regarded as pernicious. Thus, while Guo Xiang's account made a contribution to the speculative study of Zhuangzi, including highlighting of the importance of the concept of contingency, Guo's main contribution was the distortion of the text.



### Momentariness and Eternity as the Highest Realms

It is generally agreed that Chan Buddhism originated in China.<sup>81</sup> Buddhism underwent many changes after it was introduced to China, and this led to the emergence of the Southern Chan school. It was founded by Huineng 惠能, the Sixth Patriarch, and this sect focused on sudden enlightenment. Its doctrines were later developed more fully and became the Chinese Chan Buddhism, with its own distinctive features.<sup>82</sup>

I will not focus here on the origin and development of Chan thought, nor assess its successes and failures with regard to society. These have already been fully discussed elsewhere. Some identify the importance of Chan as its break with scholastic orthodoxy. Some condemn the Chan school for its imposters and thieves, while others argue that Chan masters are either sophists or cunning schemers.<sup>83</sup> While I believe these views have some foundation, I will not explore them here. Instead, I will briefly discuss the key characteristics of the Chan school of thought as a product of the Chinese tradition.

Huineng was the founder and paragon of the Chan school, and though illiterate he attained enlightenment. One of his main teachings was that a person should not be reliant on words. One could not become a wise follower through thought and reasoning, since language and the written word were man-made shackles. They were limited, dealt in generalities, and were one-sided, preventing people from grasping the true nature of reality. The human attachment to thought, knowledge, and language led to results that were against their real interests and prevented them from grasping the truth. As we saw in the previous section on Zhuangzi and Neo-Daoism, this way of thinking emerged very early in Chinese history; but the Chan school developed it further. Both Zhuangzi and the Neo-Daoists used language, concepts and reasoning to express their ideas. Although Zhuangzi used metaphors and fantastic stories, and Neo-Daoism featured clever abstractions, neither dispensed with language (both spoken and written), concepts, or thought. Later, however, the Chan school urged that all of these be discarded. In their place, people were to rely on imagistic and intuitive means to express and transmit what was initially thought to be incapable of such transmission. Such expression and transmission did not involve any set language or symbols and so amounted to more subjective and esoteric signs—which was seen most clearly in the phenomenon of the koan:

He called on Shitou and asked: “Who is he who has no companion among the ten thousand things?” Shitou immediately covered his mouth with this hand, and the inquirer was suddenly enlightened.<sup>84</sup>

The Master asked the monk where he came from. The monk said: “I recently left central Zhejiang Province.” The Master asked: “Did you come by boat or by land?” The monk replied: “I came by neither

boat nor land.” The Master asked: “Well, how have you come here?” The monk said: “What obstacles are there?” The Master at once flogged him.<sup>85</sup>

A monk giving a sermon asked Lingshan: “What is the meaning of ‘lifting a bouquet of flowers?’” The Master replied: “Once a word has been uttered, it cannot be overtaken, even by a four-horse team.” Again, the monk asked: “What does ‘Kasyapa smiled’ mean?” The Master replied: “The mouth is the gate of woes.”<sup>86</sup>

“Covered his mouth with his hand” signifies the ineffable. “The Master flogged him” means that something cannot be divulged. This is because when it is expressed in words an error is made, and once it is expressed then it is no longer the truth. This also explains “the mouth is the gate of woes” and “once uttered, [it] cannot be overtaken, even by a four-horse team.” Therefore, the enlightenment preached by the Chan school was not a matter of intellectual cognition, though nor was it non-cognitive. It was a form of comprehension and feeling that cannot be described. Accordingly, the koans of the Chan school often featured slaps and kicks. In preaching a religion it is difficult to avoid the use of the spoken and written word, since this would make it impossible to communicate and transmit ideas and doctrines. The Chan school would thus have found it difficult to continue its existence. Thus, though no dependence upon words or letters is required, the school did still rely on the written and spoken word.

After many words had been set down and many principles expounded, it then became even more necessary to stress that what was really being sought did not depend upon language. There was a need to remind people that human language is not identical with reality and cannot be used to articulate or approach the structure of that reality. This explains why, aside from discussions of sacred texts and principles, koans proliferated and became so widespread in Chan Buddhism.

The Master said that the patriarch commented: “A certain man had comprehended something.” The patriarch said: “What was it?” The Master said: “As soon as one asserts it substantively, then one has missed it completely.”<sup>87</sup>

Being asked what was the first principle of the holy doctrine, the Master said: “By telling it to you, it will become the second principle.”<sup>88</sup>

. . . The Master asked Zhang Men when the latter when to see him off: “Abbot, you often said that the triple world exists only because of the mind and all things because of cognition.” Pointing to a piece of stone in the courtyard, Zhang Men said: Say whether the stone is in or outside of the mind. The Master said: In the mind. Zhang Men said: Why is it that the monk-traveller puts a stone in the mind?

The first principle is that which cannot be spoken. “As soon as one asserts it substantively, then one has missed it completely” means that, in the act of speaking, this becomes the second principle. If one clings to the theoretical position that the three realms (of desire, form and formlessness) exists only because of the mind, then this is equivalent to having a piece of stone placed in the mind, heavy and uncomfortable. The same applies when a people cling to things and confine themselves rigidly to correct language and dogmatic thought. These cases go against the truth of emptiness—i.e., that there are no entities.

The abbot Wulong visited Feng Jichuan and told him the following: Once a government official asked the Venerable Teacher of Sizhou what his surname was. The Venerable Teacher said: “My surname is ‘What’ (*He* 何).” The official then asked: “What state are you from?” The Venerable teacher replied: “I am from ‘Where’ [the same term: *He*].” Now, what is the meaning of this?

Abbot Wulong said: “The Venerable Teacher’s real surname was not *He* (What); nor was he a native of the state of *He* (Where). He was a mendicant, who roamed around getting whatever alms he could.” Feng laughed and said: “The Venerable Teacher decided to take the name ‘He’ and live in ‘He’ country.”

The two continued to exchange their thoughts on this for some time and wrote to Master, requesting him to resolve the issue. The Master said: “Give 60 blows. The Venerable Teacher should receive 30 blows because he should not have said that his name was ‘He.’ Jichuan should be given 30 blows because he should not have said that the Venerable Teacher decided to take the name ‘He.’”<sup>89</sup>

Any explanation, affirmation, or denial in these ‘answers’ is merely cleverness or pretence, and the beatings were thus deserved. Simply stated, the Chan school maintained that breaking free from attachment to all language, thought, concept, or reasoning was essential. The “secret explanation” of his precepts that Huineng gave on his deathbed makes this clear:

When anybody asks you doctrine, if the question is about ‘being,’ then talk about ‘non-being’; and if the question is about ‘non-being’ then talk about ‘being.’ If the question concerns the profane, then talk about the sacred. If the question is about the sacred, then talk about the profane. The two methods have a common cause and from them emerge the teachings of the way.<sup>90</sup>

Being and non-being (determinacy and indeterminacy), the sacred and profane, are all boundaries imposed by concepts and language. They are not real and so it is necessary to escape from such attachments through

the use of striking contradictions and conflicts in language. When asked about non-being, a person should deliberately speak of being and vice-versa. Only by transcending distinctions and stipulations (such as human-made concepts and abstraction speculation, or good and evil in morality, love and hate in psychology, or emptiness and presence in ontology), it is possible to experience and comprehend a more fundamental reality. This exists prior to and beyond linguistic distinctions, concepts, logic and theory, and so cannot be articulated. As a result, people remain shackled by words, logic, and theory and are prevented from attaining enlightenment.

The Master asked Yangshan: “How many teachings of the Buddha and how many devil’s sermons are there in the 40 sections of the Nirvana Sutra?” Yangshan replied: “All are devils’ sermons.”<sup>91</sup> “However, we now take them as the Buddha’s words and understanding; yet what was seen, sought and written all lie within the category of names, jokes and puns which might be called ‘vulgar words’ or ‘dead remarks.’”<sup>92</sup>

Even Buddhist scriptures and theory were ‘devils’ sermons,’ mere jokes, puns, or vulgar words, to say nothing of other modes of language or thought. Clearly, Chan teaching was greatly removed from the Neo-Daoist teachings that words cannot fully capture what is intended, and that words are to be forgotten as their meaning is grasped. Moreover, Chan thought highlighted that underlying reality could only be grasped through conflict in language and thought. In one passage, Huiming asked the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, to teach him about truth. Huineng replied:

“If you see truth and repel all outward attractions, such that no thought arises, then I will instruct you.” This approach took time. Huineng said, “Think not of good or evil, but see what at that moment your own face looks like, the face you have even prior to your birth.” Huiming received perfect enlightenment through these words, and said, “Though I stayed at Huangmei, I never knew my original face. Now having received your instruction, I feel like someone who drinks water and knows by himself whether it is cold or warm.”<sup>93</sup>

The ‘original face’ and ‘the face you have even prior to birth’ refer to the necessity of ceasing all conscious thought—all conceptions and ideas of cause and effect—being without any intention, as though one had never been within the phenomenal world of cause and effect. Only in this way it is possible to really understand that world which transcends good and evil, right and wrong, and cause and effect, and which is identical to non-being or indeterminacy. This can never be attained by thinking, since it is a form of mysterious feeling or comprehension. This is why it

was compared to drinking water and knowing its temperature. It cannot be spoken and transmitted to others. Generally, this was the key idea repeated emphasized by the Chan school, as summarized in the following exchange:<sup>94</sup>

Once, when the Master was sitting, a monk asked him, “What are you thinking of, [sitting there] so fixedly?” The master answered, “I’m thinking of not thinking.”

The monk asked, “How do you think of not thinking?” The Master answered, “Nonthinking (*fei siliang* 非思量).”<sup>95</sup>

As mentioned earlier, what is unspeakable still has to be spoken and what is inexpressible still has to be expressed. While the Chan school held that a person cannot slip into ordinary thinking, reasoning and language use, some content must nevertheless be conveyed. This required the fullest use of various forms of meaning and ambiguity within everyday language; and it also meant that the language and teachings of the Chan school were highly idiosyncratic, subjective, and subject to change. Consider this question for example: “What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?” The idea here is to inquire in to the nature of Chan Buddhism. But the Chan masters replied as follows: “The cypress tree in the front courtyard” (Master Zhaozhou, 778–897), “There is no meaning at all in his coming from the West” (Master Damei Fachang (752–839), “A coffin and two dead men” (Master Mazu Daoyi, 709–788).

Consider another example. Someone asked: “How to become a Buddha?” The best-known replies of the Chan masters included: “A desiccated turd” (Master Yunmen, d. 949), “Three catties of flax” (Master Dongshan, 807–869). Such responses seem to have been a generic way for masters to dismiss the question as misguided. The questioner is rebuffed with a nonsensical phrase, such as “the rod of Deshan” or “the shout of Linji,” and such answers are intended to elicit a surprise that might result in enlightenment (*satori*). This is why the Chan school regarded these koans, fantastical dialogues, and strange actions as the key to enlightenment, and as models for teaching. As a result, koans were greatly prized.

Another implication of this refusal to become dependent upon words and letters is the belief that language (including speech, concepts, and thought) is a means to convey public meaning, with shared rules that must be observed by the community. The Chan school believed that if ultimate reality was to be grasped, it could not be through such shared means; it would only be approached through individual feeling, insight, and experience. Enlightenment was not knowledge or acquaintance but momentary understanding arrived at through experience of life’s conundrums and the connection between life and death, and it thus could not be transmitted by universal rules or common standards. It must be attained by the individual through personal experience, which led to the

distinctive awareness that all is one, and that everything was Buddha nature. As there is no reliance on language or thought, it is possible, and even necessary, to attain enlightenment through an individual's own intuitive grasp of everyday life and ordinary behavior and practice.

The Chan Buddhists concluded that to attain enlightenment one should and could not rely on any external authority or model. They stressed understanding by oneself and through self-reliance, advancing through one's own efforts—even to the extent of discarding superstition and rebuking the Buddha and patriarchs:

When the Master stopped at Huilin Temple, it was so cold that he took one of the wooden Buddha images there and made a fire with it to warm himself.<sup>96</sup>

In this place, there was neither Buddha nor Patriarch. Bodhidharma was an old stinking barbarian, Father Sakyamuni a desiccated turd and the Bodhisattva of Wisdom and the Bodhisattva of Universal Benevolence were carriers of dung.<sup>97</sup>

Even Bodhisattvas and the Buddha were no more than dried-up turds useful only as fuel; there was therefore no need to talk of lesser beings. "Tan replied: 'It is dark outside.' A paper taper was lit and handed to the Master. When he was on the point of taking it, Tan suddenly blew out the flame. The Master was fully enlightened and proceeded to make his offering."<sup>98</sup> This passage demonstrates that people should not rely on external guidance but should follow their own nature to conquer the darkness and find the way.

Since neither the logic of everyday thought nor common standards were relevant, enlightenment for the Chan school often involved special acts of individual perception and intuitive experience, or a mystical leap within individual experience. In this way, an individual might attain enlightenment under any circumstances or condition, since enlightenment is random and contingent in nature. For example:

One day, Zhixian was sweeping the ground and weeding when a piece of rock that he brushed struck a bamboo stem. The resounding sound suddenly brought him to a state of enlightenment.<sup>99</sup>

One koan story featured a monk who explained that when wild geese flew away his nose was painfully tweaked by his Master, and leading him to attain enlightenment. Another told how a monk attained satori when his thumb was sliced off. Both stories, along with Chan techniques such as the method of cutting-off all the stems and the single utterance method, illustrate the guiding spirit of Chan. Within the broader lineage, it is emphasized that these contingent methods are not Chan per se, but only manifestations of it. If one becomes attached to them, treating them

as fixed patterns to be imitated, this would be equivalent to emphasizing language, method, and logic, and thus lead to serious error.

Of course, the Chan school also attends to spiritual cultivation and the calming and stilling of the mind. Such processes can take a long time, as the following popular lines make clear: “Clouds cover a thousand hills so that peaks are shrouded; pattering down in front of the steps, the rain penetrates ever deeper.” Yet this spiritual cultivation is meant only to create the conditions for instantaneous enlightenment. The key point remains that attaining enlightenment has no standard method and cannot be accomplished by sitting absorbed in meditation all day:

When living, one sits up and lies not,  
When dead, one lies and sits not;  
An ill-smelling skeleton!  
What is the use of constant effort?<sup>100</sup>

I, Huineng, know no device,  
My thoughts are much involved,  
The objective world ever stirs the mind,  
And what is the use of attaining enlightenment?<sup>101</sup>

Another example of this Chan school view is in the following passages:

A monk asked: “How shall I cultivate myself for enlightenment?”  
The Master said: “Enlightenment cannot be achieved through cultivation. If one speaks of having achieved it through cultivation, then once cultivation is completed, one has returned to a natural state.”<sup>102</sup>

When asked how to practise discipline, meditation and wisdom, the Master said: “I have no such useless furniture.”<sup>103</sup>

These examples all indicate that, for Chan, enlightenment is not achieved by straining body and mind, by sitting for long periods or going without sleep and reflecting excessively, and thus one should not cultivate oneself with the explicit aim of enlightenment. Instead, one should lead a life that is much like an ordinary person does (which includes lying, sitting, and thinking). At a certain point, after a certain degree of accumulation, and on the occasion of some occurrence, there will be a sudden breakthrough. This individual and idiosyncratic path is the way to a grasp of fundamental reality.

Someone asked: “When a monk cultivates himself to gain enlightenment, should he strive earnestly?” The Master replied: “Yes, he should. That person then asked: How should he strive earnestly?” The Master responded: “When hungry, one eats, and when tired, one goes to bed.” He then asked: “Everyone does this. Is this the same as the Master striving earnestly?” The Master said: “No, there is a

difference.” He then asked: “How do they differ?” The Master said: “When taking meals, such a person is not willing to do so but thinks about a hundred questions; when it is time to sleep, he is not willing to do so, but is mindful of a thousand issues.”<sup>104</sup>

A monk asked the Master: “I am a novice and beg you to show me the path, Master.” The Master replied: “Have you eaten your gruel?” The monk replied: “Yes, I have.” The Master then replied: “Then go wash your dishes.” The monk was immediately enlightened.<sup>105</sup>

In the morning one has to eat gruel and after eating, one must wash one’s dishes. When hungry, one must eat, and when sleepy, go to bed. These are natural occurrences in everyday life. To neglect them and exert oneself in meditation to gain enlightenment will not lead to success. Enlightenment is only possible in the course of everyday life. This is what the Chan school meant by its popular sayings that “Your everyday mind is the way (the dharma)” and “All sounds, colors and things pass by without lingering, and pass through without stopping. They roam freely and everywhere the dharma is established.”

Hundreds of spring flowers; the autumnal moon;  
A refreshing summer breeze; winter snow;  
Free the mind of all idle thoughts,  
And how enjoyable every season will be!<sup>106</sup>

Someone asked Kesong: “Why does Maitreya Bodhisattva not practice meditation for the purposes of spiritual cultivation? Why does he not banish his worries and sorrows?” Kesong replied: “The true mind is pure by itself, so he does not need to practice meditation for spiritual cultivation. His mind is originally empty of fancies, so he does not need to banish his worries and sorrows.” Darun was asked the same question, and he replied: “When the religious mind has already attained emptiness, there is no need to engage in spiritual cultivation. When all worries and sorrows are banished, there is no longer any need to seek to destroy them.” Master Hai was also asked, and replied: “There was originally no meditation for spiritual cultivation nor is there any worry or sorrow.” Of these three replies, the last one was clearly the best. It pointed out that there was originally no so-called spiritual cultivation, nor any worry or sorrow. Deliberately striving for quietude and freeing oneself from vain thoughts would necessitate affirming and clinging to quietude and vain thoughts, which is the opposite of ‘no thought.’<sup>107</sup>

[The student asked:] “Pray and guide me to the right path, Master.” The Master said: “Be a killer and an arsonist.”<sup>108</sup>

In other words, the fruits of enlightenment are not to be attained by spiritual cultivation.



A disciple at a Chan monastery composed a four-line poem which he showed to others. It read:

In the square pool there is a turtle-nosed serpent,  
Ridiculous indeed when you come to think of it!  
Who will it be that will pull out the serpent's head?

Thereupon, the emperor asked: "Why only three lines?" The Master replied: "I intend to wait for someone to finish the poem." Later, Abbot Yuanjing of the Sui dynasty, after reading the first three lines, supplemented them with his own line: "In the square pool there is a turtle-nosed serpent."<sup>109</sup>

After the serpent's head had been pulled out, there was again a turtle-nosed serpent in the square pool. This illustrates the view that, ultimately, nothing is gained by racking one's brains to seek the origin of Buddha-nature, since this is nonsense and can never be achieved. For Chan, the true attainment of enlightenment, also known as "the great moment of satori" or "the sudden realization of truth," is the state between not deliberately seeking and not non-seeking, between not being conscious and not being unconscious, between not eliminating ideas and concerns and not constantly bearing them in mind. In other words, it is that state which is everywhere and yet nowhere, in which one abides and does not abide.

As noted earlier, attaining enlightenment is not the result of speculative cognition and reasoning, but involves the intuitive experience of the individual. It does not mean detachment from real life, since it can arise through a dramatic shift in everyday experiences. Transcendence is achieved in the realm of perception, which requires that a person is not detached from sense experience. It differs from ordinary perception because it is a form of perception that involves spiritual transcendence, but it differs from spiritual transcendence, since that often requires the discarding of perception and detachment from it. The Chan school does not require a quiet environment (such as mountains or forests) or specific rituals or rules for sitting meditation. Rather, Chan holds that if one becomes attached to any attempt to discard perception for the sake of spiritual transcendence, then one will achieve the opposite result. One will find oneself in a state far inferior to a state of transcendence. In Chan, transcendence is about residing in the mindfulness of sensory experience.

We might inquire further into the nature of the Chan doctrine of sudden enlightenment, wherein transcendence is not detached from sensory experience. What is the great moment of satori, without possession of worries or sorrow, which involves the sudden realization of the truth? I believe that its most salient and concrete manifestations suggest a certain mystical conception of time, namely that of the intuitive perception of eternity in a moment or a moment that can be eternity. This is a cornerstone of Chan thought.

The Chan school's sudden enlightenment directly touches on the relationship between a transient moment in time and the eternity of the world, the universe, and human life. This is not a matter of logic but of intuitive perception and of comprehension from within direct experience. In other words, under certain circumstances or in certain situations, it is possible to feel that this transient moment has transcended all time, space, and the laws of cause and effect. The past, present, and future seem to blend together, becoming indistinguishable and require no discrimination. One no longer knows where one's body and mind are (in space or time) or from where they came (cause and effect). This clearly involves the transcending of all boundaries between object and subject, and between the self and others. One entirely merges with the world (the natural world), forming one eternal existence. In this way, one attains and even becomes the true nature of reality.

This leads to the question: What am I? If all time, space, cause and effect are transcended, then I no longer exist, since the 'I' produced by my parents in this time and space are also discarded. The feeling of 'eternity in a moment' directly comprehends this. This idea is accurately expressed in the lines of a well-known koan, "It is neither mind, nor Buddha, nor anything."<sup>110</sup> According to the Chan school, this is the true self of the true Buddha nature. Those who transcend achieve a unity with determinate existence. Clearly, this does not mean that the 'I' of the sphere of reason, ideas and feelings believe in, belong to or submit to Buddha. On the contrary, it means that during this 'eternity in a moment,' I am Buddha and Buddha is I, or I and the Buddha are one.

The Chan school frequently maintained that there are three states of awareness (*jingjie* 境界). The first is expressed as "fallen leaves dot the empty hill; where shall I find the track?" This describes the state of mind of seeking the essence of Chan but being unable to achieve that. The second state is expressed as "a desolate mountain rarely frequented by people; only water flows and flowers blossom." This describes the state of having broken with dharma-attachment and ego-attachment, and apparently having attained enlightenment, but without actually having done so. The third state is expressed as "a sky of eternity, the breeze and moon of one moment." This describes the attainment of eternity in a moment, whereupon that twinkling instant has become eternal. In terms of time, the moment is eternal; in space, all things merge into one. This is the highest state of awareness for the Chan school.

Here we should note that while one moment is an eternity, it is also necessary that there be this single moment (time), otherwise there will be no eternity. It follows that this eternity both transcends time and yet must arise within an awareness of time. As the experience of time is necessary, a concrete awareness of space is also needed. Therefore, this kind of eternity is not detached from the real and perceived world and falls under the remit of, is not unaware of, the web of cause and effect. It is transcendence

without being detached from sensible experience. What is important is that once such enlightenment is reached, the original phenomenal world comes to appear quite different. The mountain still remains the mountain, the river remains the river, and activities such as eating and sleeping remain as they were before. External things undergo no change, and do not need to. Yet, after the perceptual experience of a momentary eternity, the significance and nature of external things has fundamentally transformed. They no longer appear as a reality to be clung to, nor do they constitute an emptiness to be sought after. They are neither reality nor emptiness, because in fact there is nothing called emptiness or being. Being and non-being, substance and illusion, existence and extinction . . . all involve attachment and lack transcendence. To speak of emptiness and non-being would be to insist on a reality that transcends emptiness.

Early Chan Master Yuquan Shenxiu is credited with the verse, "Take heed to keep it always clean; let not dust collect upon it." But this is mistaken. Shenxiu is advising active pursuit of Buddha-nature as a fundamental reality—a pursuit that makes it impossible to attain that special feeling of the unity of the self and the Buddha. In genuine transcendence, where "I am the Buddha" and "Buddha is I," all distinctions vanish, including those of being and non-being, matter and emptiness, life and death, joy and sorrow, good and evil, prosperity and decline, high and low, etc. Everything merges without distinction, and such 'being' is indescribable.<sup>111</sup> All desires and reflections are extinguished with both mind and world forgotten. Since such unspeakable existence transcends time and space, cause and effect, and transcends all distinctions between being and non-being, it brings a sense of freedom, of being liberated from all mundane affairs. As a result, it is not necessary to care about worldly affairs; deliberately sitting in meditation for the sake of spiritual transformation is also unnecessary. When hungry, one eats; when sleepy, one sleeps. All is emptiness, yet nothing is called 'empty.' Live is lived as naturally as before, except that one has attained the sacred and transcended the ordinary. This is because one has passed through the gate, following one's own distinct path and thus acquired that special feeling captured by phrases such as "the moment can be an eternity" and "I am the Buddha."

Another feature of this perception of 'momentary eternity' is spiritual contentment or joy. All kinds of religious experience typically feature joy or spiritual contentment. It is comparable to a kind of moral satisfaction, but since a person identifies with the deity or feels ordained in some way by the deity, then the happiness is more intense than its ethical counterpart, and seemingly purer and more certain. This is a phenomenon that requires further investigation by psychologists. To deny or ignore it makes it difficult to explain the joy of fanatical religious believers—people who accept death with pleasure or those with an inner joyful tranquillity in their hearts. It is moral and yet also another state of mind, where experience and perception transcend morality. Religion has functioned as a

social and political opium, and part of its success in doing so is due to its engendering this kind of emotional experience.

The state of enlightenment articulated by the Chan school is one example of such experience. It is the release of delight that results from the long quest for, and eventual attainment of, enlightenment. What differs from the emotional experiences of other religious devotees, however, is that the religious mystical sensation accompanying Chan enlightenment exhibits less passionate fervour and less ecstatic joy. It is more placid and quietistic. Chan does not pursue extrication or elevation from emotional conflict or a troubling sense of sinfulness. Rather, it places emphasis on arriving at the aforementioned forms of perception while remaining within a mundane life that remains unperturbed, and sustains contact with, and appreciation of, nature. Unlike an arousing poetic articulation of great distress or intense joy, Chan conveys its poetic flavor through its appeal to gentle and pastoral charms. The highest form of delight for the Chan school is an unusually detached state of mind, in which delight itself dissolves. Delight dissolves because, having become unified with the Buddha, the 'I' or ego has merged with the cosmos and so feelings of the ego—including delight—no longer exist.

The Chan school speaks of contact with nature in glowing terms. The detached state of mind and momentary eternity sought by Chan are often perceived and comprehended through the medium of nature. When the various religious and mystical layers are removed, this kind of perception and comprehension is similar to aesthetic delight. Aesthetic delight takes many forms, and one important form concerns what is delightful to the mind and spirit (*yuezhi yueshen* 悅志悅神). When the mystical sensation alluded to by the Chan school is separated from its theological overtones, it is akin to this particular form of aesthetic experience. Therein, subject and object merge into one, utility is transcended, and a carefree state is achieved. In addition, there is a sense of harmony between the entire world and oneself. Particularly in the appreciation of natural scenes, there is a feeling of forming one body with nature, and a sense of the existence of a purposeful cosmos. This is an extremely complex kind of aesthetic sensibility. Many natural scientists have spoken of how, in their work on the natural world, they have developed an unusual sense of cosmic purpose. They vaguely discern a kind of purposefulness or that which resembles orderliness. Some scientists have interpreted this as merely a product of the imagination, while others have been converted to religious faith as a result. At its base, this is simply an aesthetic feeling.

It is unsurprising that the Chan school has preserved many myths and poems dealing with enlightenment that show affinity with nature. This can be seen in the earliest fabricated legend *Jiaowai Biezhuan* (The Esoteric Transmission Outside of the Scriptures):

Sakyamuni, The Enlightened One, was once preaching to his disciples on the Mount of the Holy Vulture. He held up a flower before

those assembled. At this moment, all his disciples kept silent. Only the Old Venerable Mahakasyapa quietly smiled. The Enlightened One said: "I have the most precious treasure, spiritual and transcendent, the sophisticated mind for nirvana, knowledge of the world, existing and otherwise, and the mysterious gate of dharma, which does not depend upon words and letters, being an esoteric transmission outside the Scriptures; and how I hand this flower over to you, Old Venerable Mahakasyapa."<sup>112</sup>

By raising a flower and smiling, Buddhist teachings were transmitted between minds—a captivating image. Aside from this, there were many other utterances or replies that lead people to grasp the Chan school aesthetic and poetic sensibility. These include: "Green bamboo is Dharmakaya; yellow flower is Prajna"; "Being asked what is the essence of Buddhism, the Master said: Grass turns naturally green in spring";<sup>113</sup> "When asked about the traditions of Tianzhu Mountain, the Master said: White clouds often drift here to seal the entrance; neither wind nor moon flows through the hills around";<sup>114</sup> "When asked how to avoid stagnation in silence or language about thought, the Master said: Think of Jiangnan in February, the fragrance of flowers is everywhere where partridges cry." These use the aesthetic effect of poetry to intimate the spiritual enlightenment of Chan.

While many poems and chants of the Chan school use analogy to express their ideas, however, they are often conceptual generalizations and so, in effect, poems that are ethics, propaganda and preaching. They not only go against the original aims of Chan, but also lack aesthetic taste. I therefore believe that poems that expressed the spirit of Chan are closer to Chan Buddhism than many of the Chan school's own poems. For example, the poems of Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (701–761) are more deeply imbued with the essence of Chan than those of the Chan school. Similarly, consider this Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (352 or 365–427) couplet: "I pluck chrysanthemums under the Eastern hedge; then gaze long at the distant Southern hills."<sup>115</sup> Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) provides another example:

Glancing at the river's rushing stream,  
I do not think it necessary in my state of mind to vie with it,  
Seeing the white clouds drift in the sky,  
I think it essential to keep leisurely company with them.<sup>116</sup>

Although unrelated to Chan, these poems convey calm and detached sentiments and states of mind which touch upon the purpose of the cosmos, the significance of time and the mystery of eternity. They thus are aligned with (though not necessarily identical with) the deeper meaning and the 'way' of the Chan school without lapsing into mysticism. This seems to straightforwardly demonstrate that the supposedly mystical

awakening integral to the Chan school is in fact a kind of aesthetic awareness or perception. Today, therefore, we should eliminate the religious trappings of Chan and rediscover its original face, which is expressed as ‘momentary eternity’ and ‘all things form one body.’<sup>117</sup>

The reason why the cosmic purposefulness that Chan derives from the contemplation of nature, is understood as an awaking to the divine, is because the phenomena of the natural world appear to be without purpose. Flowers bloom, water flows, birds fly, and leaves fall, and all happen without consciousness, purpose, thought, or planning. That is, they are ‘mindless’ (*wuxin* 無心) events. Yet within this mindlessness or purposelessness, it is possible to glimpse a great mindfulness or purpose which causes all things to be as they are; this is the so-called divine or spiritual. Only in the midst of this mindlessness and purposelessness might it be felt. In comparison with it, all conscious, goal-directed, or purposeful things, actions, or thoughts hardly bear mention and only hinder its disclosure. To use the language of Chan, it is not that preaching makes even obdurate rocks nod, but that they were already nodding before the preaching. That is to say, nature is already Buddha-nature, and this does not depend on the actions of humans.

D.T. Suzuki, in his comparison of Chan and Christianity, emphasized their mutual accordance. He suggested that both take as their goal the attainment of the psychological state of “dry bone and dead ashes.”<sup>118</sup> This chapter seeks to illustrate that of greater importance is that, while functioning as a religious experience, Chan preserves a positive interest in ordinary life, sentient beings, and vitality. This is comparable to Zhuangzi. Even though the body is like dry bone and the mind like dead ashes, vitality is still present. This, one suspects, is very different from other religions, including other schools of Buddhism. The fables, allusions, and metaphors that constituted Chan’s koans featured natural phenomena with emotional impact, and these were not simply about decay, decline, or the cold. On the contrary, these natural phenomena are often full of vitality—such as flowers blooming, grass growing, birds flying, and fish jumping. They appeal to human sensation and declare: ‘Observe nature in its full glory!’ The tree of life is an evergreen, so do not interfere with or destroy it! This is the spirit of the famous Japanese Zen haiku:

Morning glory!  
the well bucket-entangled,  
I ask for water.<sup>119</sup>

Chan does not seek or recognize a transcendent realm beyond worldly experience, but rather seeks the transcendent within such experience. It therefore differs from those religions that seek spiritual purification by encouraging disdain for worldly experience. As stated earlier, Chan affirms the contents of the experiential realm and the joy found in nature

and life. This is where aesthetic perception and experience differs from religious sensibilities and experience. This might appear paradoxical: Buddhism, which negates life and rejects the world, is eventually transformed into Chan, which is filled with vitality and has brought consolation and strength to Chinese intellectuals through arts such as poetry and painting. Surely this is a process of sinicizing Buddhism?

People often regard Zhuangzi and Chan as being mutually related, and view Chan as a repetition of Zhuangzi's ideas.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, both contain many related and shared features. These include: breaking with conventional standards of judgment, viewing things and the self as empty, obliterating the difference between subject and object, equating life with death, stressing personal understanding of, and affinity with, nature, and seeking detachment from worldly affairs. Particularly in the realm of art, Zhuangzi and Chan often form a harmonious unity, and cannot easily be distinguished from each other.

Although Zhuangzi and Chan are connected in many ways and have much in common, differences between them remain. These differences also reveal the ability of Chinese thought to absorb and assimilate alien ideas in order to enrich itself. Firstly, Zhuangzi's rejection of conventional standards of judgment, and his treating life and death as equals, broadly belong to relativistic and rational argument, while Chan emphasizes intuitive understanding. Chan strives to avoid abstract argument and talks even less about fundamental reality and an abstract meaning of the way (*dao*). Chan confines its discussion to present-day life, events, landscapes, flowers, birds, mountains, and clouds. This involves a leap of intuitive inspiration that neither analyzes nor synthesizes, and is neither fragmentary nor systematic.

Second, Zhuangzi lauds an ideal personality or character—the ultimate man, the authentic person, or the divine being—who roams with leisurely freedom, as the first chapter of that text illustrates. Chan, however, stresses intuitive grasp or insight that had a mystical experiential quality. Zhuangzi, along with Wei and Jin era Neo-Daoists, generally focuses only on questions of life and death; but Chan seeks to see through the bonds of life and death, and to have no abiding thought on anything relating to life or death. Zhuangzi thus values life and does not regard the world as illusory; he teaches that one should not become bound up by the many concrete and limited things of the world, but should instead transcend them. Thus, he elevates the individual to the level of a personality that is co-creator with the cosmos. In his aesthetic expression, Zhuangzi often excels in his energy and scale, as well as in his rustic sensitivity.

Chan views the world, its objects and the self as illusory and the entire cosmos, including the ideal personality, as a mere 'dry turd,' lacking all value. True reality exists only in the awareness of the mind. Chan neither values nor makes light of life. It is indifferent to the things in the world, regardless of their apparent significance. Therefore, there is no reason to

strive for any form of transcendence, since transcendence itself is absurd and insignificant. Consequently, Chan does not seek the ideal personality but only a state of mind that is the ultimate understanding of truth. It is true that Zhuangzi adopts an indifferent attitude toward life; however, the Chan school treats the appreciation of momentary eternity as the basis of awakening (satori), and thus this attitude toward life and state of mind—as well as this experience of the cosmos as unified—are more prominent than they are in Zhuangzi. In aesthetic terms, Chan has greater charm and refinement.

The commonalities between Zhuangzi and Chan are of great significance. They show that absorbing foreign influences did not cause Chinese thought to lose its original character, but rather enriched it. In this regard, the Chan tradition has great affinities with Confucianism. Moreover, Chan eventually moved closer to Confucianism and Daoism over time, until being absorbed by them; its beginnings and ends were thus rooted in those two schools. This is perhaps the main difference between Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhism: although the latter came from China, it developed in such a way that it never returned to Confucianism and Daoism.

D.T. Suzuki argued that a reason why the Chan school could only have arisen in China was that the Chinese tradition stressed practical activity. This was unlike the Indian tradition, which elevated only the spirit and devalued physical labor and activity—so much so that the needs of Indian monks had to be fed by others. The Chan school promoted earning one's own living. Monks carried water and cut firewood, and did farm work and everyday physical labor in order to earn a living. As the Tang era Chan master Baizhang Huaihai noted, "A day without work is a day without food."

While this point is important, the influence of the Confucian tradition is of greater significance.<sup>121</sup> *The Appendices to the Book of Changes* contains ideas that speak to the vitality found in Chan: "The operations of the cosmos are ever vigorous (*tianxingjian* 天行健)" and "Ceaseless generation is called 'change' (*shengsheng zhiwei yi* 生生之謂易)." Some lines by Jin dynasty calligrapher Wang Xizhi, written before the emergence of the Chan school, aptly sum up the school and its connection with the *Zhuangzi* and the *Book of Changes*: "Although none of the sounds of nature are uniform, I find them all delightful; all are invigorating to me." The three schools of thought are similar or identical in some respects.<sup>122</sup> Of course, this point should not be overdone. Chan is, still, about religious experience. Aside from its sense of the illusory, Chan features emblems and mystical elements that differ from the *Book of Changes* and the *Zhuangzi*. The *Book of Changes* is about robust and ceaseless motion, while the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes the grandeur of nature. Neither rely on the emblematic or mystical.

However, we are concerned here only with their commonality, which is of primary importance. In a word, in all these Chinese schools of thought (Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan), the impetus and final end is not



religious but aesthetic. Chinese philosophical thought does not lead from knowledge and morality to religion but from knowledge and morality to aesthetic appreciation. In an earlier work, I expressed this idea as follows:

The highest realm of life sought by Chinese philosophy is aesthetic appreciation and not religious. . . . Confucius expressed this ideal with the phrase, 'I am with Dian' [In Analects 11.26, Confucius' disciple Dian or Zizhang talked about the pleasure of a spring outing with a number of companions]. In saying, 'Thus do things flow incessantly, day and night!' Confucius demonstrated a profound affirmation of time, life and reality; he did not seek immortality in the next world or in a Heaven, since immortality (in the form of eternity) is found within an ever-changing human world. It is easy to die as a martyr, with the expectation of reward, but difficult to meet one's death unflinchingly. In the former case, a martyr dies with religious fervor; the latter involves facing death with an aesthetic appreciation that it is a return from whence one came; according to the Chinese tradition, this belongs to a higher realm.<sup>123</sup>

This aesthetic realm and the aesthetic attitude toward life are different from cognition and speculative reason, and they also differ from practical achievements, merits and practical reason, and also from an absolute spirit found in a religion and which is detached from the sensory world. The aesthetic stance is of the world yet transcends it, and transcends sensory experience and yet is not detached from it. Its fruits are optimism, enthusiasm, and a delight that identifies with nature but which is not mystical. This is the point at which Confucianism, Zhuangzi, and the Chan school are of one mind.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter placed together Zhuangzi, Neo-Daoism, and Chan, and offered a preliminary assessment of them. On account of the commonalities among them, the three schools constitute an influential force within traditional Chinese thought. What, then, have they contributed to later generations? What role do they play within the cultural-psychological formation of the Chinese nation?

In the past three decades all three schools have been fiercely criticized, and have acquired pejorative labels. Zhuangzi was thought to have exemplified the spirit of Lu Xun's "Ah Q," as the embodiment of deviousness, and offering a philosophy of drifting along through life, or being a fatalist or a pessimist, or even a nihilist. Neo-Daoism has been associated with a dissipated life, based on enjoying comfort and indulging in sensual pleasure. It was called both vulgar and hypocritical. The Chan school allegedly peddled cheap tricks for entering paradise and was thought to

be arbitrary and subjective idealism, mysticism, intuitionism, and so on. Admittedly, all of these criticisms have some basis. With regard to issues of class bias and social function, for example, the negative implications should not be overlooked. In his short story “Resurrecting the Dead” Lu Xun strongly attacked Zhuangzi; while in the story of Ah Q, Lu Xun satirized a Zhuangzi-like mentality of ‘composure’ and ‘detachment’: prior to his execution, Ah Q reflects on how “In this world, it is probably the fate of everybody to be killed at some point.”

Having nothing new to say here, I will not repeat old talking points. However, the question remains: does the thought of Zhuangzi, Neo-Daoism, and the Chan school offer only failings, which must be rooted out and discarded? Has their historical impact been only negative? Some believe this is not the case. Drawing on Lenin’s comment, we might say that, in the history of philosophy, there have been flowers that did not bear fruit. That is, they contain something still worthy of assimilation. But what is it? No one has yet spelt this out with precision.

While Confucianism promotes personal cultivation, ordering of the family, governing the nation, and bringing peace to the world, Zhuangzi and the Chan school are not typical social and political philosophies, but instead focus on personality and outlook. They introduce emptiness, negation, passivity, contentment with present, and other alluring and deceptive means. They appeal directly to the psychological and individual behavior. Furthermore, these two philosophies spread throughout society, through the thought, behavior, and mindset of the literati. Generally, neither Zhuangzi nor the Chan school appeal to the peasants and lower social classes—though the Chan school was known for spreading religion around the lower classes around the time of its appearance. Chan is unlike Japanese Zen Buddhism, however, which entered everyday social life through rituals, including the tea ceremony, and the arts, such as flower arranging. One might say that Zhuangzi and the Chan school had less effect, good or bad, on the cultural-psychological formation of China than did the Confucians. They functioned as a complement to Confucianism, and made their strongest impression in the cultural realm (in literature and art), through the activities of intellectuals. This particular effect was not entirely negative; however, these philosophies tempted literati into becoming detached from reality and caused them to lose the will to fight. Indeed, this pernicious influence on Chinese intellectuals has continued to this day.

On the positive side, however, Zhuangzi and Chan cultivated an aesthetic attitude of detachment from life, refused to comply with corrupt politics or adverse circumstances, and valued intuition, perceptual experience and personal experience. They have also inspired great art and enabled artists to create many exquisite and unusual works with lasting impact and appeal. Some contemporary Western scholars study Chan because it provides inspiration in their opposition to the alienating life

of modern capitalist society, and its mechanization, abstraction, and fascination with standardization. Chan has also helped to free people from enslavement to money and commodities, from intellectual bondage to science and technology, and sensory bondage to carnal pleasure and consumption. Chan has thus enabled people to attain self-understanding, remain afloat, and attain a degree of enlightenment.

In this way, Zhuangzi, Neo-Daoism, and the Chan school mold, cultivate, and enrich people's spiritual lives and frame of mind. They can teach people to forget the concerns of personal success or failure, and free them from fascination with profit and loss by enabling them to transcend vulgar and trivial calculations. They teach people to cherish high aspirations, or live content by harmonizing with fluid and dynamic nature and thereby derive strength and energy. Such philosophies could replace religion in the conventional sense, and provide consolation for the afflictions of life. This explains why Chinese intellectuals did not destroy themselves or convert to religion when suffering great failure or catastrophe. Instead, they largely preserved their lives, became hermits, delighted in natural beauty, and retained their personal integrity and purity.

Another dimension of Zhuangzi and Chan thought that should be more closely studied today is the kind of intuitive thought that both exemplified. Zhuangzi offers philosophy but rarely uses logical argument or formal reasoning to arrive at a conclusion. On the contrary, the text uses analogy and complex imagery to offer a mere indication of the direction in which some truth lies. Chan does likewise, but goes further. This Chinese way of thinking thus differs from thinking which emphasizes analysis, generality and abstraction. Instead, it stresses grasping truth from particular, concrete, and intuitive moments of understanding. The debate between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi by the River Hao and the earlier dialogues from the Chan school all stress creative intuition (*chuangzao de zhi guan* 創造的直觀)—namely, a felt grasp of certain cosmic norms or rules. This mode of thought and cognition is characterized by aesthetic appreciation; it is non-logical and non-conceptual enlightenment. In scientific research, for example, there is sometimes sudden insight or comprehension into objective laws, such as the sudden appearance or manifesting of some kind of natural order. This is precisely the kind of 'truth revealed by beauty' that the study of aesthetics should explore. Several famous physicists have noted that aesthetic sense guides them around abstract symbols: if a choice is to be made between two theories—one more beautiful and the other more in line with experimental data—then the former seems preferable. Such claims are worth investigating. Escaping from rigid conceptual structures and abstractions, inspiration based on vivid sensations, making scientific thinking more artistic, intuitively grasping content that cannot be conveyed by conceptual language—all are worthy of study.

The battles of wit found in Chan dialogues enable escape from unnecessary and restrictive logical frameworks, counter the ossification of

thought and knowledge, and provide inspiration and stimulation. They make people attend to certain truths or possibilities present within apparently paradoxical logic, or what appears to be absurd or impossible given conventional knowledge or science. All of these approaches are in keeping with the prevailing spirit of China, which began with the Confucian emphasis on psychology (including principles deriving from the emotions), and which never treated thinking as merely mechanical reasoning. In other words, recognition, discovery, and understanding of the world involve the whole mind and not merely logic, and special attention should be paid to the unique experiences and insight of the individual (This is also related to the different congenital capacities and acquired experiences of each individual). I believe that this is significant for contemporary scientific thought. Such non-analytical thinking and creative intuition and imagery constitute an important psychological mode that distinguishes humans from computers, and enables humans to make substantial scientific discoveries.

In summary, although Zhuangzi and the Chan school reject the common world and pursue emptiness and nirvana, they are nevertheless interested in affirming human life, living beings, nature and sensory perception. They hold that intuitive comprehension is above logical thinking. This is perhaps the point at which the Chinese tradition differs most from the West (understood either as the Abrahamic separation of body and soul, or as the Greek separation of reason and perception). Perhaps, once the chaff is separated from the wheat, when the Chinese nation makes its contribution to global culture, this will be something to be cherished. Regardless, there should be no rush to affirm or deny it; rather, it should be given due consideration.

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## Notes

1. See Chapter 3 in this volume, on Sunzi, Laozi, and Han Fei.
2. Here, I refer only to the ideas presented in the text *Zhuangzi*, taken as a school. I shall set aside questions of differences, contradictions, and the possible absorption of Confucian and Legalist thought.
3. Some scholars, such as Wang Fuzhi, believed that while the inner chapters were similar to the *Laozi*, they nevertheless constituted a separate school that sought to distance itself from the shortcomings of Laozi, such as his deception. In contrast, the outer chapters were merely an explanation of the *Laozi*. See Wang's, *Zhuangzi jie* 莊子解 [Commentary on the Zhuangzi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2009), 8.150.
4. See, for example, Fukunaga Koji's 福永光司 (1918–2001), *Zhuangzi: Gudai Zhongguo de cunzai zhuyi* 莊子; 古代中國的存在主義 [Zhuangzi: Existentialism in Ancient China].
5. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 9B1002.
6. *Ibid.*, 4B373.

7. Ibid., 4B359.
8. Ibid., 5A433.
9. Ibid., 4B334, 336, 341.
10. Ibid., 9B995.
11. Ibid., 4B341, 4A321.
12. Ibid., 4B350.
13. Ibid., 4A323.
14. Ibid., 9B971.
15. Ibid., 1B56.
16. Ibid., 9B971.
17. Ch. 20, "The Mountain Tree," *Zhuangzi jishi*, 7A668.
18. Ch. 3, "The Primacy of Nourishing Life," *Zhuangzi jishi*, 2A115.
19. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 4C377.
20. Ibid., 2B183.
21. C. J. Arthur, ed., *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 82.
22. I will not address the question here of whether Zhuangzi's thought was concerned with the question of immortality. On this question, see Herrlee Creel's book *What Is Taoism?* (1970). Creel exaggerates the apparent contradiction between immortality and the serious philosophy content of the text, and fails to appreciate that these are unified when approached from the question of the ideal human personality.
23. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3A246–7.
24. Ibid., 7B749, 757, 758.
25. *Daodejing*, Ch. 25.
26. Ibid., Ch. 38.
27. Ibid., Ch. 48.
28. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3A281.
29. Ibid., 1B50.
30. Ibid., 7B741.
31. Ibid., 10B1098.
32. Ibid., 7A668.
33. Ibid., 1A7.
34. Ibid., 1B96.
35. Zhong Tai 鍾泰 (1888–1979), *A History of Chinese Philosophy* 中國哲學史 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1929), 43.
36. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1B79.
37. Ibid., 1B83.
38. Ibid., 1B83.
39. Ibid., 7B731.
40. Ibid., 1B83.
41. Ibid., 3A229.
42. Ibid., 6B590–1.
43. Ibid., Ch. 7, "Sovereign Responses for Ruling Powers," 3B309.
44. Ibid., Ch. 13, "The way of Heaven." See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5B482–3.
45. *Zhuangzi jishi*, Ch. 12, 5A407.
46. Ibid., Ch. 4, 2B155.
47. Ibid., Ch. 5, "Markers of Full Virtuosity," 2C212.
48. Ibid., Ch. 2, 1B111, 112.
49. Ibid., Ch. 3, 2A128.
50. Ibid., Ch. 1, 1A17.
51. See Li Zehou and Liu Gangji 劉綱紀, eds., *Zhongguo Meixueshi* 中國美學史 [A History of Chinese Aesthetics] (Beijing: Chinese Social Science Publishing, 1984), vol. 1. The present discussion includes several points about Zhuangzi made in that book.

52. *Zhuangzi jishi*, Ch. 22, 7B735.
53. *Ibid.*, Ch. 15, “Ingrained Ideas,” 6A537.
54. *Ibid.*, 6B.
55. *Ibid.*, Ch. 5, 2C212.
56. *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, 5A443.
57. *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, 3A230–1.
58. *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, 5B458.
59. Wang Fuzhi, *Zhuangzi jie*, 3.104–5.
60. Li Zehou, *Mei de Licheng* [The Path of Beauty] (Hong Kong: Liwen chubanshe, 1994), 89.
61. An example of such commitment to an independent and authentic self can be found in the Jin era official and Neo-Daoist sympathizer Yin Hao 殷浩 (303–356). After a failed military campaign, he lost his official position and was demoted to commoner, thereby losing ground to his childhood friend and great rival, Jin general Huan Wen. Despite this, Yin Hao insisted that he would continue to trust in and be himself: “When Huan Wen was young, he and Yin Hao were of equal reputation, and they constantly felt a spirit of mutual rivalry. Huan once asked Yin, ‘How do you compare with me?’ Yin replied, ‘I have been keeping company with myself a long time; I would rather just be me.’ Recorded in the *Shishuo Xinyu* [A New Account of Tales of the World], “*Pinjian dijiu*” [Ch. 9, Judgments]. See Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955), *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2007), 617.
62. Lu Xun, “Wei-jin Style, and the Relationship between Medicine and Wine,” in *Eryiji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Publishing, 1973), 80–98.
63. Ruan Ji, “Daren Xiansheng Zhuan” 大人先生傳 [Discourse on the Great Man], *Ruanji ji jiaozhu* 阮籍集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2012), A.165.
64. Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893–1964), “Wei-jin Xuanxue he wenxue lilun” 魏晉玄學與文學理論 [Neo-Taoism and Theories of Literature in the Wei-Jin Period], in *Zhongguo Zhaxueshi Yanjiu* [Studies of the History of Chinese Philosophy] 1 (1981): 38.
65. Wang Bi, *Wangbi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, edited by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 [The Annotated Collected Writings of Wang Bi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1980), 633.
66. *Ibid.*, 624.
67. *Ibid.*, 591.
68. *Ibid.*, 640.
69. Li Zehou, *Mei de licheng* [The Path of Beauty], 93.
70. See the chapter in this volume on the thought of Sunzi, Laozi, and Han Fei.
71. *Zhuangzi jishi*, preface, 3.
72. *Ibid.*, 1B58, note 10.
73. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Xiaoyaoyou” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1A1, note 2.
74. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Tiandi zhu” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5A448, note 3.
75. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Qiushui” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 6B591, note 1.
76. Daoists in the Han dynasty used the Confucian notion of determinate action (*wei* 為) to understand the idea of non-action (*wuwei* 無為), but their usage was significantly different. See the “Qin and Han Dynasty Thought” chapter in the present volume.
77. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Dazongshi” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3A270, note 10.
78. Guo Xiang, annotation on the, “Tiandao” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5B465–6, note 4.

79. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Dazongshi” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3A268, note 1.
80. Guo Xiang, annotation on the “Xiaoyaoyou” chapter, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1A7, note 1.
81. See for example, the writings of D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Carl Jung and Erich Fromm (1900–1980).
82. If comparing the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sutra* with the received version, rather than criticizing the received version as going against the original, it is better to say that it constitutes one possible development of the original text.
83. See, for example, Fan Wenlan’s 范文瀾 (1893–1969), *Tangdai Fujiao* 唐代佛教 [Buddhism in the Tang Period] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1979), 80.
84. 瞿汝稷 (1548–1610), ed., *Zhiyue lu* [Records of Pointing at the Moon] (Chengdu: Bashu Publishing, 2012), “Master Pang,” 9.272.
85. Shi Puji 釋普濟 (fl. 1252), ed., *Wudeng huiyuan* [A Compendium of the Five Lamps] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1984), “Master Xuefeng Yicun,” 7.381.
86. Zecangzhu 曠藏主 (n.d.), ed., *Gu zunsu yulu* [Sayings of Ancient Worthies] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1994), 40.748.
87. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Nanyue Huairang,” 3.126.
88. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Wenyi,” 10.563.
89. *Zhiyue lu*, 2.45, 31.912.
90. *The Platform Sutra*, Section 10, “Final Instructions,” in *Liuzu tanjing jianzhu* 六祖壇經箋注, edited by Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874–1952) (Jinan: Qilu Publishing, 2012), 223.
91. *Wudeng huiyuan*, 9.522.
92. *Gu zunsu yulu*, 2.24.
93. *Liuzu Tanjing jianzhu*, 73–4.
94. Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was also interested in this idea of unspeakable reality, repeatedly asserting that language constitutes the limits of our world. “This is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical. . . . Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent. . . . My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*). See *Luoji zhaxue lun* 邏輯哲學論 (Beijing: Shangwu Publishing, 1985), 97.
95. *Zhiyue lu*, “The Monk Yueshan,” 9.279.
96. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Tianran of Qingyuan,” 5.262.
97. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Xuanjian of Deshan,” 7.374.
98. *Wudeng huiyuan*, 7.372.
99. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Zhixian of Xiangyan,” 9.537.
100. *The Platform Sutra*, section 8, “Instantaneous and Gradual Enlightenment.” See *Liuzu tanjing jianzhu*, 196.
101. *Ibid.*, section 7, “Occasion.” See *Liuzu tanjing jianzhu*, 193.
102. *Zhiyue lu*, “Mazu,” 5.136.
103. *Zhiyue lu*, “Yaoshan,” 9.280.
104. *Wudeng huiyuan*, 3.157.
105. *Zhiyue lu*, “Zhaozhou,” 11.327.
106. Zongshao 宗紹, ed., *Wumenguan* 無門關 (Dazhengzang 大正藏 edition), vol. 48, 295b.
107. See Nie Xian 聶先, ed., *Xu Zhiyuelu* 續指月錄 (Xuzangjing 續藏經 edition), vol. 84, no. 1579, juan 7.
108. *Gu zunsu yulu*, 9.144.

109. Juding 居頂, *Xu chuandeng lu* 續傳燈錄 (Dazhengzang edition), vol. 51, no. 2077, 28.663c.
110. *Wudeng huiyuan*, “Master Nanquan Puyuan,” 3.137.
111. In the introduction to D.T. Suzuki’s, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*, William Barrett (1913–1992) writes, “A German friend of Heidegger told me that one day when he visited Heidegger he found him reading one of Suzuki’s books. ‘If I understand this man correctly’ Heidegger remarked, “this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.” See William Barrett, ed., *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 11. This is clearly an exaggeration, however. The classical tranquility of Chan teaching is very different from Heidegger’s modern and aggression conception of action.
112. *Wudeng huiyuan*, 1.10.
113. See *ibid.*, 3.157.
114. *Wudeng huiyuan*, 2.66.
115. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (1910–1973), ed., *Yaoyuanming ji* 陶淵明集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1979), 3.89.
116. Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲 (1638–1717), ed., *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1979), 10.800.
117. This is somewhat related to the idea of non-religious “peak experience” developed by Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) in his 1964 book, *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), although he located its origins in biology.
118. D.T. Suzuki, “The Zen Doctrine of No Mind,” in *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*, 199.
119. Written by Japanese haiku poet Fukuda Chiyo-ni (1703–75). The second line refers to the discovery of a blooming morning glory wrapped around the rope of the bucket, which the author was unwilling to cut with a knife. This led her to instead seek out neighbors to ask for water. See *Chiyo-ni: Woman Haiku Master*, by Patricia Donegan and Yoshie Ishibashi (North Clarenton: Tuttle Publishing, 1998).
120. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–82) is one who moves in this direction. See his *Zhongguo yishu jingshen* 中國藝術精神 [The Chinese Aesthetic Spirit] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2010).
121. Standardizing practices and establishing rules of conduct served to preserve the Chan school, and these seeped into Confucian thought. See, for example, the famous “Pure Rules of Baizhang,” often attributed to Master Baizhang, translated in *Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang*, translated by Thomas Cleary (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978).
122. A line of intellectual development ran from the Chan school to Song Neo-Confucianism. Song Confucians developed the aesthetic aspect of religious and mystical awareness of the Chan school into an aesthetic attitude that applied in morality and ethics. For further detail, see the chapter on Neo-Confucian thought in this volume.
123. Li Zehou, “Chinese Aesthetics and Others” [*Zhongguo meixue ji tita* 中國美學及其它], in *Writings on Aesthetics [Meixue Shulin 美學述林]*, edited by Liu Gangji 劉綱紀 and Wu Yue 吳越 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1983), 27.



## 7 Some Thoughts on Neo-Confucianism

A young Mao Zedong once remarked, “The doctrines of the Song Confucians are similar to those of Kant.” This comment was made while reading Friedrich Paulsen’s (1846–1908) Neo-Kantian work *A System of Ethics* in 1917–18. Indeed, while there are works that compare Zhu Xi with Spinoza (1632–77), Whitehead (1861–1947), and Hegel, I believe that Song-Ming *Lixue* Neo-Confucianism, most closely associated with Zhu Xi, is indeed closer to Kant.<sup>1</sup> It is characterized by its elevation of ethics to the status of ontology and final reality, which produced a new philosophy of the human subject.

Many works in the history of philosophy during the past 30 years have variously and unquestioningly treated Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism as cosmology, epistemology, or social and political thought, but this obscured its most important characteristic. When glossed as epistemology, the development and structure of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism has been summed up by phrases such as ‘investigate things and arrive at knowledge’ (*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知) or ‘the unity of knowledge and action’ (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一). The understanding of it as cosmology or a worldview is constructed from concepts such as *qi* (energy or psychophysical stuff), *li* 理 (patterning, principle or order), *taiji* 太極 (supreme polarity), and *wuji* 無極 (prior to polarity). However, in fact, all of these ideas serve only to establish an ethical subjectivity, and secure its place in a transcendental morality in which the human subject is a partner with the heavens and the Earth (*yu tiandi can* 與天地參).

### From Cosmology to Ethics

Taken in its entirety, Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism can roughly be divided into three periods: founding, maturity, and disintegration. Each of these three periods has its major representative—the famous figures of Zhang Zai, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529).

Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) believed that while Buddhism and Daoism flourished in many areas of life, including the political system, daily conduct, and commonsense thinking, they were not able to challenge

the dominance of Confucian learning and the guidance that it provided.<sup>2</sup> However, they were perennially popular when it came to thought and philosophical theory, especially Buddhism, partly because the Confucian tradition lacked anything like the detailed and precise system of thought provided by Buddhism. From the Six dynasties of the fifth and six centuries to Han Yu in the Tang period, Confucianism provided an external critique of Buddhism on questions of societal relevance and practical benefit. It was not until the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians that Confucianism absorbed and adapted Buddhist and Daoist ideas, and offered direct criticism at the level of theory and philosophy. This absorption, reworking, and subsequent criticism largely involved taking the cosmological and epistemological theories of Buddhism and Daoism, and using them to generate new ideas and areas of debate that revitalized the Kong-Meng tradition of Confucianism.

The Buddhist monk Dao Xuan once wrote in the great Buddhist commentary the *Guanghong Mingji* that, “Buddhist teachings treat life as illusory and thus ignore the body to benefit all things; Daoist teachings take one’s own self at the true reality, and so offer the means to nourish life.”<sup>3</sup> Generally, Buddhism and Daoism treat the life and death of the individual mind and body as a main focus for theory, and build a theoretical system upon them. To promote its teachings, Buddhism discusses the impermanence or emptiness of everything, the illusory nature of reality, and extensively discusses cosmology, a worldview, and epistemology. It has given rise to all manner of detailed philosophical thought, such as the Yogācāra school in India, and Huayan and Chan Buddhism in China. Daoism, in contrast, is comparatively simple, but since it discusses elixirs of immortality, long life, and meditation so it must address issues in cosmology and possible representations of the world. These two features of Buddhism and Daoism (personal cultivation and the interest in cosmology and epistemology) provided the foundations from which Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism constructed its ethics.

Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–73) has long been honored as the father of Song Confucianism.<sup>4</sup> His ‘Diagram of the Supreme Polarity’ (*taiji tushuo* 太極圖說) preserved and expressed Daoist cosmological forms; however, his cosmology notably included the belief that, while the sage is established through Confucian values of hitting the mark, propriety, humaneness, righteousness, he also resides in tranquility. This was the highest standard for humanity.<sup>5</sup> In his text *Tongshu* [Explaining the Book of Changes], Zhou made central the Confucian concept of integrity or complete integration (*cheng* 誠). This suggests that Zhou began to integrate the Confucian requirements for a practical ethics with Daoist cosmological forms, which was the first time that a bridge had been created between cosmology and the ethical rules governing human life. Among the ideas put forward by Zhou were being without desire (*wuyu* 無慾), emphasizing tranquility (*zhujing* 主靜), and reflection that leads to sagely

wisdom (*si yue rui* 思曰睿). These included an epistemology (reflection) and a methodology (tranquility), and thus made a connection between ontology (initially, one rooted in naturalism), cosmology (one rooted in a representation of the world), a theory of human nature, an epistemology and then, finally, an ethics (which returned to ontology). This was also a move from quietude and tranquility (the limitless, the fundamental ground) to becoming aware and registering in perception (through the operations of yinyang, five-phase theory and the supreme polarity), to reflection (knowledge and acquaintance), finally arriving at a kind of pure and supreme goodness (ethics). Such was the order internal to this system. Wang Fuzhi remarked, “It was with Zhou Dunyi in the Song that the thread of the sagely way was made clear. It began with the supreme ultimate and yinyang theory, and is the complete human way of transformation.”<sup>6</sup> This quote well captures the theoretical transition from cosmological perspective to ethics, and recognizes Zhou as the start of Song Neo-Confucianism.

Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–77) recognized, even more clearly than Zhou Dunyi, the importance of cosmological representations of time and space through diagrams. It was also he who stated that,

To see things through things is (human) nature; to see things through the self is feeling. Nature is just and clear but feelings are lop-sided and obscure.<sup>7</sup>

What is meant by ‘Observing things,’ is not observing with the eyes, nor observing with the mind-heart, but rather observing them in terms of patterning or principle. This is nothing in the world that does not possess such patterning or principle.<sup>8</sup>

This is a demand to connect the patterning or principle inherent in all things with the human mind and human nature, which collectively form a unity. These are opposed to the sensuous realm represented by the self, feeling and the eyes. This finally brought Zhou’s mathematical representation of the cosmos into the realm of an ethical concern with the nature of the mind.

Zhou Dunyi and Shao Yong were, however, merely the pioneers, and it was Zhang Zai who established the real foundations of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. Zhang put forth several of the foundational propositions and principles of this approach, laid out in his “Western Inscription” and other works. Zhang Zai’s *Zhengmeng* 正蒙 [Correcting Youthful Ignorance], a work compiled by his disciples, is a very clear account of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism’s systematic transition from cosmology to ethics.

Twentieth-century historian Fan Wenlan wrote, “The Song school swapped the *Book of Changes* for Buddhist philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> Zhou Dunyi, Shao Yong, Zhang Zai, the Cheng Brothers, and Zhu Xi all emphasized the

*Book of Changes*. The Buddhists had raised questions of truth and falsity regarding the reality of the world, of motion and stillness, of substance and emptiness, of the possibility of human knowledge, and regarding determinism. Wanting to oppose the Buddhists and discuss these issues, the only Confucian classic that provided resources in these areas was the *Book of Changes*. It was filled with the spirit of pre-Qin rationality, and was a powerful weapon for countering Buddhist and Daoist theory.<sup>10</sup> It was used to oppose claims that existence was illusionary, and to oppose denials of the reality of the perceived world, and the quests for nirvana or long life. Since it was necessary to affirm the traditional order in everyday life, then it was necessary to affirm the self intrinsic to the perceptual experiences of that everyday world, and so it was necessary to affirm and discuss the reality of this world's existence, as well as its reasonableness and necessity. Neo-Confucian idealists such as the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–93), and Wang Yangming—in contrast to Buddhist philosophy—never dismissed but regularly affirmed people's perceptual existence, and the existence and value of the felt environment and its objects (i.e., the real world). Zhang Zai was the first to openly and directly criticize Buddhist and Daoist theory, and establish a basis for Song Neo-Confucianism. The development of a monistic materialistic cosmology based on *qi* (energy or psycho-physical matter), which was used to engage with and dispute Buddhist and Daoist thought, was an obvious step in this direction. Zhang Zai's materialism treated *qi* as ultimate reality, and used it to explain the natural formation of all things, as well their transformations, movement and stillness, forming and dispersing, and life and death. Zhang Zai criticized the idealism that had persisted, from primitive folk superstitions (positing ghosts and spirits) to Buddhist and Daoist theory:

Since it is known that that the Great Emptiness is not a complete absence but rather consists of *qi*, then existence and non-existence, the hidden and the manifest, the strikingly noumenal and the transforming, human nature and destiny are all of the one same kind, not two. Looking intently at formation and dispersion, arriving and departing, form and formlessness, we can make inferences from their origins, which are rooted in the changes.<sup>11</sup>

Zhang Zai's monistic *qi* theory featured dialectical thinking about movement, transformation, development, and opposition. His cosmology featured series of discussions of various phenomena and issues, which served to oppose idealist Buddhist and Daoist ideas such as "Everything is illusory" or "Existence is born from non-existence." The work shimmers with vitality and boldness of vision. But since it has been discussed widely in recent work in the history of philosophy, I will not elaborate further here.

What is important is that cosmology was merely a starting point in Zhang Zai's thought and all of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians. The Song, Ming, and Qing eras saw great compilations such as the *Jinsilu Jizhu* [Collected Annotations on Reflections on Things at Hand], the *Xingli daquan* 性理大全 [The Great Collection of Neo-Confucianism], and the *Xingli jingyi* 性理精義 [The Essentials of Neo-Confucianism] and, once this approach began, there was an extensive discussion of a cosmology constructed around ideas such as *li* (patterning, principle, or order), *qi*, *wuji*, and *taiji*. Yet even this was only a prelude that led to the main issue. This was the reconstruction of the *dao* of Confucius and Mencius, whose central pillar was ordered ethical human relationships (*lunchang* 倫常). Zhang Zai and the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians used cosmology to empower themselves, to establish a theory of human nature that was suited to the ordered human relationships of late traditional society.<sup>12</sup> This is the real issue. Thus, *tian* and the human were unified by understanding 'tian' as cosmos, and through an ethical account of the person.

The *Zhongyong* notes, "What *tian* has conferred is called nature; according with nature is called the way; the cultivating of the way is called instruction,"<sup>13</sup> while the *Daxue* proclaims, "The way of the Great Learning resides in highlighting illustrious virtue, renewing (or loving) the people and residing in the highest excellence."<sup>14</sup> The *Zhongyong* and the *Daxue* were texts more representative of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism than the *Book of Changes*. Theories of human nature, which had been neglected for over a thousand years, were once more being discussed as passionately as they were during the pre-Qin era. The reason for these two phenomena was that theories of human nature were the key that connected *tian* with humanity, and facilitated the transition from cosmology to ethics. It was not cosmology or epistemology that was the core of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, but theories of human nature. Thus, while both discussed the intersection of *tian* and humanity (*tianren zhiji* 天人之際), the approach of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians was different to that of Dong Zhongshu and the Han Confucians. Dong's idea that the heavens and human mutually respond (*tianren ganying* 天人感應) involved the feedback capacity of an organic system (see the chapter in this volume on Qin and Han thought), but the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian idea of the unity of the cosmos and the human was a study in the nature of the conscious mind. The former is a genuine cosmology while the latter is not. In the former, ethics is subordinate to cosmology, whereas in the Neo-Confucian account cosmology is subordinate to ethics. The Song Neo-Confucians' examination of the nature of the conscious mind (*xinxing zhi xue* 心性之學) linked to the cosmic way above, while connecting to ordered human relationships below, and this served as an attack on Buddhism and Daoism. It argued that the Buddhist pursuit of Nirvana

and the Daoist quest for longevity were contrary to human nature and the heavenly way (*tiandao* 天道):

The Buddhists have a doctrine of leaving the world and removing themselves from it . . . withdrawing from the world means no longer honoring the august heavens nor treading on this scared earth. Yet they still drink and eat, and continue to live under the heavens and to step on the earth.<sup>15</sup>

Though they seek nirvana, Buddhists are unable to abandon the body; though they deem everything to be empty, they must still clothe themselves and eat. They still strive to preserve the material existence that sustains their inner sensual world, preserving body, life, and environment. Is this not a contradiction? The Song Confucians' study of the nature of the mind was in effect this kind of commonsense critique. However, because it was connected with a cosmology, the criticism reached a level that transcended the commonsensical, as seen in their account of the interconnection of the heavens and the human. Humans must eat and clothe themselves, they must live under the heavens and walk on the earth, so it is necessary to affirm in theory that *tian* and the human form a sensuous and material existence that is both rational and real. Further, the theory recognizes that this existence arises in the context of ceaseless movement, transformation, birth and death (this is the cosmological aspect). At the same time, human activity such as eating and clothing, also involves a certain purposefulness, and follows certain norms and ordered processes. It is thus necessary, at the level of theory, to actively seek, explore and explain such universal norms, order and purpose (the epistemological aspect). This is to seek, in the limited, sensual realm of ordered human relationship and things, the limitless, rational, and fundamental, which transcend the finite, the sensual, and the phenomenal. For the Neo-Confucians, this kind of regularity, order, and purpose were fundamental, and could command and govern nature and the sensual and concrete human world. In this way, they gradually extracted regularity, order, and purpose from the physical world and regarded them as the rulers and controllers of all entities.

This way of thinking had been seen before in the history of Chinese and Western philosophy. However, what was distinctive about Zhang Zai and the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians was how their theory brought to the fore an account of human nature. They consciously transformed the already fixed social order, standards, and rules of the late imperial system into definitive cosmological laws.

Zhang Zai wrote, "When sea water condenses it forms ice, and when it disperses it becomes wisp-like spray. But the character of the ice and the nature of the foam, their forming and disappearing, are not controlled by

the sea”; “In life there is that which comes before and that which comes after, and so there is natural sequence (*tianxu* 天序). The large and small, and high and low, mutually complement and mutually constitute each other; this is called natural order. The living things of the world also have their sequences and the settled shape of things also involves order. Know the sequence and then definitively rectify them, know the order and then act with ritual propriety.”<sup>16</sup> Here, the more abstract ‘sequence,’ ‘order,’ and ‘nature’ must be distinguished from concrete matter (the sea, living things, large and small, high and low, etc.) since they are more important, fundamental, and conclusive; they are what must be known. For Zhang Zai, *qi* is used to describe the realm of material existence, and the various rules and order found therein. In discussing natural phenomena that have not been clearly distinguished, then the material and the law-like are treated as an integrated whole that do not need to be differentiated.<sup>17</sup> However, this changes as soon as human nature is mentioned: “Only through fully developing one’s nature can one know that one gains nothing in life and has nothing to mourn in death.”<sup>18</sup> “When one knows that death is not an end, one can speak of human nature.”<sup>19</sup> For Zhang Zai, human life and death are merely the accumulation or dispersion of *qi*; when a person dies, *qi* disperses. However, human nature is not like this. Although it is of humans, it nevertheless transcends human life and death, and the dispersing and accumulation of *qi*, and possesses a-temporal existence and value.

This nature—transcending particular, finite, and perceptible reality—is the universal law of all the things of the cosmos. It is from this perspective that Zhang Zai first mentions the difference between ‘the nature of Heaven and Earth’ and ‘*qi*-based nature.’ This became one of the foundational themes of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. ‘The nature of Heaven and Earth’ meant a universally necessary and eternal order and law, which united the heavens and Earth through a shared nature. ‘*Qi*-based nature’ is the various desires and capacities that derive from limited and particular sensible experience. Human nature is thus made up of these two very different ‘natures,’ which differ in terms of origin, function, and properties. The former exists within the latter and is the master and ruler of it. Furthermore, it is this hierarchical ordering that makes a person human being rather than a mere animal. Only in this way can people transcend the limited sensory experiences of their material existence and put themselves in the place of others, and this gives rise to sayings such as “Honor my elders and the elders of others, care for my young and the young of others” so that “the people and I are of the same family and I am united with all things.” In this way, the human subject attains shared worldly virtues, forms one body with all things, and arrives at an ‘immortal’ metaphysical realm. Thus, “One’s nature is not one’s private possession but shares its source with all things and events”; “With bodily form, there arises *qi*-based nature. If one skillfully overturns it, then one

can reside in the nature of Heaven and Earth. Thus, the cultivated person (*junzi* 君子) denies that *qi*-based nature is his true nature.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the aim is to seek the rational, pre-experiential heavenly nature from within the sensible and experiential *qi*-based nature. This is the meaning of *tianming* (cosmically ordained fate) and *tianli* (cosmic patterning or order). The first of these links to the human desire derived from *qi*-based dispositions: “Those seeking to understand the human must know the heavenly. Only when one’s nature is fully developed can one’s fate (*ming* 命) be fulfilled”; “Quiescence and unity are the original state of *qi*; as desire, *qi* is manifest as aggression and rapaciousness. The reaction of the mouth and the stomach when eating and drinking, and the nose and tongue when smelling and tasting, are all examples of this kind of aggressive and rapacious nature.”<sup>21</sup>

Zhang Zai sought to ‘follow the ordered patterning decreed by one’s nature’ (*xingming* 性命) or ‘fulfill the heavenly order’ (*tianli* 天理), rather than ‘eliminating order and fulfilling desires’; he wrote, “Do not allow sensual desires to burden the mind, the small to injure the great, or the derivative to harm the fundamental.”<sup>22</sup> This amounted to the demand to effectively eliminate human desires.

Kant held that a priori categories order the material provided by perceptual experience. The formal order of Zhang Zai’s thought appears similar to Kant’s but the details are quite different. Song-Ming Neo-Confucians held that a priori heavenly patterning or order, i.e., the nature of the heavens and Earth, was to govern empirically rooted desire and *qi*-based nature, thereby ensuring ethical conduct. Kant’s account featured an outward-orientated epistemology, which seeks as much sensory experience as possible in order to form universal and law-like scientific knowledge. The Neo-Confucians, however, developed an inward-focused ethics, which sought to eliminate sensual desire as far as possible, so as to instigate ‘universally necessary’ ethical conduct.

Kant’s a priori categories (such as causation, etc.) were derived from the mathematics and natural science of the time (Newtonian physics), while the a priori categories of the Neo-Confucians (pattern, the way, etc.) came from the social order of the time. Kant clearly distinguished epistemology and ethics, sought to prevent mutual interference between them and to the independent value of both; the Neo-Confucians, however, mixed the two, intertwining them such that their relation was unclear. In fact, for the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, epistemology was entirely subservient to ethics.

Thus, it would be misleading to claim that Zhang Zai’s ideas of ‘knowledge through the senses’ (*jianwen zhizhi* 見聞之知) and ‘knowledge acquired through excellence in one’s nature’ (*dexing suozhi* 德性所知) translate directly into the concepts of knowledge acquired through the senses and knowledge acquired by reason. His ‘knowledge through the senses’ is indeed knowledge that derives from sensory experience;



however, knowledge that derives from the excellence in one's nature does not originate from the senses, does not need them, and must liberate itself from them.<sup>23</sup> This kind of knowledge involves a kind of nonrational 'great or enlarged mind.' The 'knowing' of the 'that which is known through excellence in one's nature' is not rational knowledge of external things or the external world. Rather, it is a kind of ethics based on 'the unity of the Heavens and the human,' which involves viewing the world such that there is nothing that is not oneself.<sup>24</sup> But this ethics is also a transcendental ethics of a spiritual realm, wherein all perceptual knowledge, and even the process of 'exhausting the spirit to know the transformations,' allow the self to embody the *dao*, and enable the subjective self to become one with the cosmos—but through ethics and not epistemology. The ethical subject thus attains this ultimate realm or state that is ethical and yet transcends ordinary ethics and morality. Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription* posited such a realm, and this became a guiding idea integral to Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism.

Historically, the Cheng brothers have been lauded alongside Zhang Zai and yet, with regard to theory and logic, the Cheng brothers merely developed the foundations created by Zhang Zai, modifying some of the basic categories. Zhang Zai offered numerous accounts of the natural transformation of *qi*, and to some extent this obscured distinctive ethical and ontological ideas found in his *Western Inscription*. The role of the Cheng brothers (especially the younger Cheng) was to remove this obscurity and make the ethical ontology clearer. However, as a result, Zhang Zai's various scientific writings and studies of external phenomena, the subjective world and practical society were criticized as excessive and lacking a sense of moderation.<sup>25</sup> Both Zhang Zai and the Cheng brothers both sought to clarify and realize this ethical ontology,<sup>26</sup> and it became a crucial focus in subsequent theoretical developments. We thus find, "In my studies, although I received some education, the patterning and ordering of the cosmos is something that I grasped by myself";<sup>27</sup> "The ordering of the cosmos was not created by [sage-king] Yao, nor did it perish with [tyrant] Jie. . . . How can it be said to exist or perish, increase or diminish? Originally, it lacked nothing and its myriad orders and patterns were complete";<sup>28</sup> "With all things, when they are dissolved, their *qi* dissipates and does not return to its original order."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, from this historical moment through to Zhu Xi, ordered patterning (*li*) was above *qi*, and persists even when *qi* dissipates. In this way, the Cheng brothers made many of Zhang Zai's concepts theoretically consistent, and offered effective and systematic distinctions between them. These included cosmic or heavenly order, human desire, cosmos or heavenly nature, *qi*-based nature, and knowledge arrived at through excellent nature, and knowledge acquired through the senses (*jianwen zhizhi*). In addition, concepts such as *dao*, *qi*, *xingshang* (transcending form), and *xingxia* (shape or form) were made theoretically plausible

and systematically distinguished. The so-called eternal, limitless, universal, and necessary order or patterning (*li*) replaced the more materialistic *qi* or psycho-physical energy, and thereby became an ontological reality that never increased or diminished and lacked nothing. The cosmos—destiny—nature—mind: all are linked by the ordered patterning of *li*. “Nature just is ordered patterning,” “That which is in the cosmos is subject to destiny; matters of justice or righteous are governed by *li*, the human realm is subject to nature, the body is governed by the mind: all of these are of a unity.”<sup>30</sup> Thus to call this strand of Neo-Confucianism the School of Principle or School of Ordered Patterning (*Lixue* 理學) is entirely appropriate.

However, because *li* was favored and *qi* relatively disparaged, and *tian* understood as *tianli* or simply *li*, so the rules of philosophical dialectic became detached from their material basis, and increasingly lost their original practicality and richness. They became part of a dogmatic framework that was arid and abstract. Zhang Zai’s various diagrams of the world and his dialectical approach, so vivid and impressive, lost their power or disappeared when taken up by the Cheng brothers. Shorn of realistic depictions of human life, nature, and events, what remained became simplified and largely empty arguments dealing with *li*—even though their logic and systematic nature rendered them clearer than Zhang Zai’s original work. Zhu Xi, drawing on the ideas of Zhang Zai and Zhou Dunyi, was finally able to make these ideas deeper and less schematic than the Cheng brothers.

Epistemology followed a similar path. Since the phenomena-rich nature of *qi* was neglected, then fulfilling ordered patterning (*qiongli* 窮理) was understood in increasingly narrow ways, in order to grasp the universality and necessity of *li*. “Fulfilling ordered patterning, completing nature and arriving at what is destined to be—these are but a single thing.”<sup>31</sup> All of the Neo-Confucian practices, such as the investigation of things, the extension of knowing, and the fulfillment of order of principle were all sought understanding of things and events; that is, their sole purpose was to arrive at a thorough understanding of the ethical ontology described previously. Yet this thorough understanding was, in fact, practice—ethical practice or conduct. This ethical ontology, governed by the concept of *li*, was all-constraining, and suppressed or replaced people’s desires and striving for scientific understanding of the objective world.

Importantly, during the Northern Song period, Chinese technology and science had reached unprecedented heights, and sought to discover regularities among all manner of objective phenomena. Scholars during the Song dynasty were distinguished by their emphasis on *Li*—and this applied to all fields, including philosophy, politics, poetry, and art. As Song literatus Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) drily remarked, “Mountains, stones, bamboo, trees, waves of water or wisps of cloud: though they lacked consistent form, they had consistent *li*.”<sup>32</sup> This shows that, in seeking the

constant *li* behind changing appearances, *li* had already become a common currency in the thought of the time. Thus, those who theorized *li* did not lack interest in science, as could be seen from the content of Zhang Zai's system or from Zhu Xi's account of the investigation of things.<sup>33</sup>

However, despite such large amounts of scientific data, and much scientific and cosmological thought, there was no move toward verification in the natural sciences. Instead, there was a focus on inward-looking ethics and the nature of the mind. Why was this? What were the historical reasons for the move from cosmology toward a logical structure grounded in ethics? This is question worthy of investigation, but one I cannot explore in detail here. Superficially, however, this is closely related to political struggles and social tensions that dated from the middle of the Northern Song dynasty, including the many protracted struggles for reform. Social problems and the destitute state of the common people would have been absolutely central in the minds of intellectuals at the time. In ancient China, from early clan society to feudal times, primitive humanistic feelings derived from the bonds of kinship constituted an influential tradition—and were mainly expressed as Confucian teachings about humaneness. Unlike the early system of the Six dynasties, when the rule of a few powerful families was characterized by personal connection and status, feudal society from the mid-Tang onwards featured more people who had achieved some economic independence and social standing. As a result, on the one hand, the tradition had wider relevance with individuals coming to possess greater strength and worth; on the other hand, there was a pyramid-like imperial power structure with an extensive secular landowner class at its base. Compared to earlier feudal society, this produced more economic and social constraints, including powerful families and social groups, which required strict control of both society and the individual, through the establishment of the 'three bonds and five cardinal human relationships' (*sangang wuchang* 三綱五常), and through 'clarity regarding the foundations of human relations' (*ming ren-lun zhi ben* 明人倫之本).<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, in Han Yu's thought we find both "fraternity is humaneness" and "the ruler issues commands . . . and the people provide grains and cloth, make goods and engage in trade to serve their superiors,"<sup>35</sup> while Zhang Zai declared, "Love must love broadly, achievement is not something achieved alone,"<sup>36</sup> but also, "To institute the well-field system of agriculture without corporal punishment is like being able to care and educate but not being able to command."<sup>37</sup> It is precisely these two approaches to society that the Neo-Confucians tried to derive from their lofty philosophical realms of cosmology and epistemology. They wanted as much fraternity as possible among the landlord class but also as many distinctions as possible according to traditional social orders and ranks, which were understood in terms of intrinsic or necessary rules. Emphasizing consanguineal ties, defending the clan system, valuing personal bonds, calling for the extension of oneself to others, honoring the old, caring for the young, clarifying social status, ranks

and classes: all these served to adapt people's minds to the clan and kinship system and the appropriate moral emotions. This, in turn, reduced suffering from political and economic inequalities and oppression, and served to preserve the feudal system indefinitely.

In order to study Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, and the long-lasting impact of its theorizing upon history, I believe it is first necessary to determine its general characteristics, its inherent structure, the pattern of its development, and its historical foundations. This has greater significance than using some ossified formula to deconstruct and eviscerate this phenomenon.

### The Establishment of a Rational Ontology and Its Contradictions

Arguably, Zhang Zai's theoretical transition from ontology to ethics showed some awareness of its implications. Zhu Xi's theoretical system also began with ontology; however, it explicitly pursued an ethical goal—indeed, everything was ordered around this objective. Zhang Zai moved from the external to the internal, while Zhu Xi was the opposite. Superficially, Zhu Xi appeared to use the patterning or principle (*li* 理 or *taiji* 太極) that connects all things and is instantiated in the self and, through this “*li* patterning—*qi* energy” framework, meticulously explored a series of philosophical categories such as abstract and concrete forms, the way and its components, movement and stillness, the limitless and the supreme polarity. His studies were thus extremely broad in scope, covering the myriad things, and his logic was rigorous.<sup>38</sup> As a result, he has been compared to Hegel. However, I believe that we must not be distracted by appearances and the rich and splendid façade of Zhu Xi's system, but rather focus on the core issue. Specifically, the foundational core of Zhu Xi's wide-ranging system can be captured by the following formula:

Ought (the human social world and ordered human relationships) =  
Necessity (cosmological law)

Zhu Xi's comprehensive *li*-based worldview was derived from this formula. The laws, rules and order that all phenomena of the world must follow (i.e., necessity), and that people must (i.e., ought to) honor and obey, are the principles or patterning that constitute the cosmos (*tianli*). While existing as one with the things and events of the world, *li* is prior to and higher than worldly phenomena. *Li* forms the ontological ground of their existence:

Before the Heavens and the Earth came into existence there was first this order or patterning (*li*).<sup>39</sup>

In the cosmos there is only one principle (*li*). The Heavens instantiating it makes them the Heavens. It is what makes the Earth into the

Earth. Among all the things that arise between the Heavens and the Earth, each has its own *li* (order or principles) and takes its nature (*xing*) from it. Its extension is the three bonds and its fabric is the five cardinal virtues. The flow of this ordered patterning (*li*) encompasses everything and there is nowhere it is not.<sup>40</sup>

Nature (*xing*) is principle or ordered pattern (*li*). Within the mind, it is called ‘nature’; with regard to things and events it is called ‘principle or ordered pattern’ (*li*).<sup>41</sup>

*Li* (indicating ‘necessity’) transcends and yet dominates the heavens, the Earth, people, things and events, but is also the moral ought of the ordinary social world. These two dimensions are equivalent and mutually interchangeable:

The principle or patterned order of the Heavens (*tianli*) flows and reaches everywhere. Summer departs and winter arrives, rivers flow and mountains rise, there is affection between fathers and sons, and righteousness between rulers and ministers; all of this is *li*.<sup>42</sup>

All things have their polarity or range (*ji* 極): this is the greatest polarity of the patterned order of the *dao*. Jiang Yuanjin asked if the humaneness of the ruler and the gravity of the ministers were all polarities. The Master replied: These are the polarities of individual things and events. The patterned order of the Heavens and Earth and all things is the supreme polarity. Originally the supreme polarity lacked this name, and was merely a manifestation of virtue.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, evidently this cosmological reality, constituted by ordered patterning and the supreme polarity, is social and ethical. For the individual, it forms a ‘categorical imperative,’ to use the Kantian term, which must be obeyed and implemented:

What is fated resembles what is ordered, while nature is principle or patterned order. The cosmos features yin-yang and the five phases, which create all things while psycho-physical energy produces determinate forms, and principle or order are similarly instantiated in them, just like fate or a command. Thus, when people or things are created, each receives its own endowed order or principle in the form of the five constant virtues; this is known as nature.<sup>44</sup>

When humans and things arise, they all partake in the ordered patterning of the Heavens and the Earth, forming their nature, while the *qi* of the Heavens and Earth gives them shape. They differ only in that humans are able to rectify their form and *qi*, and so are able to perfect their nature.<sup>45</sup>

What is decreed by the heavens is nature. This is what Zhang Zai meant by “the nature of Heaven and Earth,” and “the nature mandated

by the Heavens” and “righteous and principled nature.”<sup>46</sup> Such nature is an a priori and necessary constraint or standard for the individual. What makes humans different from things is their ‘rectification of both form (*xing*) and psycho-physical energy,’ such that they are able to realize their ‘righteousness and principled nature’ and so perfect their nature. Cosmology thus turns out to be a theory of human nature: the world of patterned order turns out to be nature and what is decreed. This refers to human relationships, morality, and norms of conduct derived from the categorical imperative, i.e., from the principled and patterned order of the cosmos. This has nothing to do with utility, happiness, or the delight of the senses. When a man sees a young child about to fall into a well, he does not save it for gain or social esteem but because it is imperative to act in this way. It is a categorical imperative that is rational and which transcends the sensible and experiential, and humans cannot go against it. It is only when it contrasts or conflicts with individual experiences of joy, happiness or benefit, that the force of this categorical imperative and the nobility of ethical human relations finally appear; this shows that this categorical imperative is a rational foundation of immense strength, which far surpasses the phenomenal world of ordinary experience. This explains Zhu Xi’s sharp distinctions between form and function, nature and emotion, stillness and the dynamic, the not yet aroused and the aroused; his system featured an obvious dualism, within which the rational foundation commanded, ordered and directed. In fact, this is characteristic of all Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. It emphasized the difference between rightness and profit, fulfilling the heavenly order and extinguishing human desire, and emphasized that dying of hunger was a minor matter while being disloyal was a grave one. Even those progressive thinkers of the seventeenth century, Huang Zongxi and Wang Fuzhi, opposed giving in to the temptations of desire and personal profit and believed that “the difference between the cultivated person and the petty person, and between humans and beasts, lies solely in the distinction between profit and righteousness.”<sup>47</sup> This demonstrated the consistency of the basic Neo-Confucian outlook. The distinctions between righteousness and profit, between humans and beasts, all make abundantly clear that ordered human relationships and rational nature have different origins and differ fundamentally from sensuous human desire.

Zhu Xi’s claim that *li* (principle or ordered pattern) is one but its manifestations are many is intended to show that moral conduct possesses a law-like universality. He also seeks to prove that moral conduct, as a response to concrete material human experience, still exhibits a concomitant a priori rationality that is universally valid. Such validity is not based on or validated by experience or fact, but arises from a priori rationality (i.e., heavenly order or principle):

The myriad things all instantiate this principled order, and it has a single source. But since they occupy different positions, the functioning

of the principle is not the same. When functioning through the sovereign, it is humaneness; when through the minister, it is reverence; in the son it is filial piety, and, in the father, it is loving kindness. All things have this principled order but differ in their manifestations. There is thus only one patterned order that flows throughout.<sup>48</sup>

“*Li* (principle or ordered pattern) is one but its manifestations are many” is comparable to “the moon is reflected in myriad rivers” or “the moon in the Heavens, though only one, is distributed among the myriad rivers and can be observed in different places.”<sup>49</sup> In these references, Zhu Xi was talking not about the common features of the cosmos and nature, but was demonstrating the universal law-like quality of morality—albeit by raising such law to the status of metaphysical cosmology.

Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism stressed that such universal law was realized not through thought but through practice, and that it also required a high degree of self-awareness. In a certain sense, following Kant’s distinction, this was the pursuit of ethical autonomy and the opposing of heteronomy. The categorical imperative serves as an active striving for self-realization, in contrast to an external divine order and, clearly, has little connection to external material gain or happiness. Zhu Xi placed knowledge before action and opposed blind or spontaneous attempts to act morally, because he wanted to establish autonomy and demand self-awareness: “When righteousness and principle are not understood, how can they be practiced?”<sup>50</sup> “When reason is clearly present then one must be filial when serving one’s parents, obedient when serving one’s elder brother, and sincere in dealings with friends.”<sup>51</sup>

The necessity here that must be acted upon is the treasured ‘categorical imperative’ (i.e., the cosmic principles or ordered patterns). The phrase ‘when reason is clearly present’ refers to the self-awareness associated with the categorical imperative or cosmic order. Zhu Xi’s terms ‘the investigation of things,’ ‘the extension of knowledge,’ and ‘fulfilling principle or order’ were part of an epistemology that sought this self-awareness:

The investigation of things aims to grasp thoroughly the principled order of everything; the extension of knowledge means that there is nothing my mind does not know. The investigation of things aims at the specific and minute, discrete avenues of learning, while the extension of knowledge aims at the general and comprehensive.<sup>52</sup>

This is similar to Cheng Yi’s doctrine that the reason for ‘investigating one thing today and another tomorrow’ was to accumulate knowledge to the point where “one day suddenly everything is seen in a clear light.” This grasp of the underlying ethical ontology and how it permeates conduct marks self-enlightenment and complete integration with the wider cosmos.

This emphasis on autonomy meant that Neo-Confucians highly valued 'being conscientious when alone' (*shendu* 慎獨) and concerned 'whether each thought conformed with nature.' They resisted being influenced or controlled by the external environment, profit, concepts, or other factors.

Only when these things have been accomplished could an ethical sensibility be established, an ethical sensibility whose excellence was in harmony with the heavens and the Earth and which formed one body with all things. This is what Zhang Zai has written of in his *Western Inscription*: "What fills the Heavens and Earth is my body and what commands the Heavens and Earth is my nature"; "In life I willingly serve and in death I am at peace."<sup>53</sup> This subjectivity transcended concrete moral demands and reached the level of the final reality or the ontology base of existence. This is why Neo-Confucianism is an ontology of an ethical subjectivity. This ontology demands that the subject see the sublime among the ordinary, attain the highest insight, and practice the Doctrine of the Mean. In everyday life and practice, this means discovering the universal imperative in ethical rules and recognizing their heightened status. Compared to the epistemology and ontology of Buddhism and Daoism, which focus on the individual and seek nirvana or long life, the Neo-Confucian approach has greater force and appeal.

Thus, the ethics of the Neo-Confucians, represented by Zhu Xi, amounted to an ethical ontology, a non-utilitarian categorical imperative, universal law, and the autonomy of the will. In this, their morality was indeed similar to Kant's. However, a fundamental difference with Kant remains. Let us set aside differences in historical eras and class backgrounds (one medieval and imperial, the other early modern and bourgeois) that resulted in some theoretical differences (e.g., the Neo-Confucians lack Kant's stipulations about freedom and humanity as an end), since there was a more interesting difference. As Feng Youlan pointed out, Kant spoke only about duty, while the Neo-Confucians spoke also about humaneness.<sup>54</sup> Kant sharply distinguished between reason and knowledge, the noumenal and the phenomenal, with practical reason (i.e., ethical conduct) just one manifestation of the categorical imperative and duty; it had no connection to the feelings, or to ideas derived from the sensible world, or to notions of causality, time, and space. This ensured its transcendental status. Chinese practical reason was not like this, however, since it has never separated the noumenal from the phenomenal, but rather seeks the noumenal from among phenomena. In both the ordinary and transcendental worlds, Chinese practical reason consistently seeks the unification of the cosmos and the human, and forming one body with all things: 'form and function have but one source' (*tiyong yiyuan* 體用一源). Kant's categorical imperative is a pure form of the a priori that cannot be explained and has no cause (otherwise it would dissolve into the law-governed causality of the phenomenal world). But Neo-Confucianism's claim that 'the decrees of the Heavens



are called nature' is closely related to the sensible existence of humans and their feelings. It is not merely pure form but has a basis that appeals to the social and psychological.

As inheritors of the tradition of Confucius and Mencius, the Neo-Confucians clearly based their 'duty' and 'categorical imperative' on a conception of Confucian humaneness infused with a degree of human sympathy. Kant did not depart from the traditional Western notion of original sin, and had a dim view of human nature, but the Neo-Confucians followed Confucius and Mencius in stressing that human nature is good, and their guiding principles merged psychology and ethics. The *Analects* reads, "If you are comfortable with it, then do it" (17.23), and the Mencius spoke of how every human has the beginnings of a heart of sympathy. The initially lofty and august 'heavenly decrees and human nature,' as well the moral law and ordered human relationships, all ultimately rested on a psychological and emotional foundation replete with sensitivity and physicality. This further reinforced the Neo-Confucians' ethical ontology, confirmed the whole of their cosmology and worldview, and brought with it a humanized and vibrant quality. The strong affirmation of humaneness and a heart of compassion were analogically connected to the affirmation of the growth and development of a perceptible natural world. As a result, for the Neo-Confucians, the sensible natural world and the noumenal realm of rational ethical relations were not only not separated but in fact intermingled and formed a unity. The cosmos and the human not only had a rational dimension but also an affective or emotional one. This was captured in two popular stories in the Neo-Confucian tradition.

Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐 (1050–1103), one of the Cheng brothers' best students, used the analogy of the peach seed and the apricot seed to explain humaneness,<sup>55</sup> with the fruits' seeds signifying life and growth. On a related note, Zhou Dunyi refrained from weeding his courtyard in order to observe the intentions of the heavens: "The myriad things watch in quietude, and all find repose/The four seasons arise and flourish, as do people";<sup>56</sup> "In idleness, I come to recognize the features of the spring breeze; a myriad purples and reds show that it is still spring."<sup>57</sup> These are well-known verses from Neo-Confucian poetry that sought to reveal human obligations through the life and vitality of the natural world. This was characteristic of the Neo-Confucians and explained why they valued the *Book of Changes* and the *Zhongyong* so highly. At the same time, they also absorbed ideas from Zhuangzi and the Chan Buddhist school. Thus, while the Neo-Confucians claimed to revere Confucius and Mencius, they actually gave a new kind of interpretation to Confucius' emotional declaration in *Analects* 11.26—his identification with Zengzi's most heartfelt desire to bath in the Yi River and then stroll home singing with friends. They also went beyond the subjectivity of Mencius' moral personality, and made that subjectivity into something sacred.

The Neo-Confucians also liked to talk of the pleasures of Confucius and Yan Hui as belonging to life's highest realm, a spiritual realm without fear of hardship and filled with life and vitality. This teleologically orientated spiritual realm is ethical and yet transcends ethics, and is quasi-aesthetic and yet transcends aesthetics. Kant's teleology can be expressed as the idea that nature, though created in humans as representation, arguably constitutes an objective teleology, with a more subjective purposefulness being confined to the realm of the aesthetic. Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, however, used the subjective ontology of ideas such as "the unity of the cosmos and the human, the myriad things form one body" to characterize the transcendent ethical ontological realm that humans could inhabit. This is the highest realm of existence. In its outward form, this ontological reality is close to an aesthetic state of mind, and to non-utilitarian aesthetic delight in which the distinction between subject and object dissolves.

This, however, led to the great contradiction in the Neo-Confucian system, and particular in Zhu Xi's thought. Since the ontological and phenomenal worlds are not separate, experience or feelings can seep into the realm of ontology or fundamental reality (as in the preceding case of Confucius and Yan Hui, residing in delight). In this way, the sensuous acquires an important position. Further, since the sensible existence of humans and the world is recognized and affirmed, so the theory of human nature must recognize sensual human desires and needs. Since the highest excellence of the heavens and Earth is 'life,' so the demands or intentions arising from the growth of perceptible nature, which includes natural laws governing sensual desires, is to be viewed as good. Since ordered pattern or principle must be manifested in *qi*, it is difficult to distinguish between heavenly order or principle and human desire. 'Evil' cannot have the forceful status assigned to original sin in Western thought. It is simply the opposite of 'good'—where these refer simply to harmony between the cosmos and the collective, or to diminution or destruction of living vitality. So-called evil here cannot have a status comparable to 'good,' but can have only a derivative meaning. There is no primordial opposition between good and evil, and so it is difficult to fix precisely how to distinguish them. This is why Zhu Xi repeatedly declared, "The distance between heavenly principle or order and human desires is only the width of a hair";<sup>58</sup> "When hungry, one desires to eat, when thirsty one desires to drink. How could there be no such desires?";<sup>59</sup> "Though they are human desires, there is also heavenly principle or order in them."<sup>60</sup>

This shows that the rational ontology (heavenly patterning) and sensible phenomena (human desire) are not opposed to each other. However, the social demands of the ruling class led to the Neo-Confucians treating the ruling order and its codes of conduct—that is, the laws of a particular and transient period of time, the imperial system—as universally necessary and omnipresent heavenly principles or the decree of nature. This

led to the repressing or undermining people's natural sensuous desires. Asceticism and classism were treated as cosmic principles of order and humans' decreed nature. "Different affection towards various kin, and different levels of respect for different classes of worthy men, these are all matters of heavenly principle."<sup>61</sup> "What are the heavenly principles? Are not humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom and sincerity heavenly principles? Are relations between ruler and minister, father and son, older and younger brother, husband and wife and between friends, not also heavenly principle?"<sup>62</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, Zhu Xi affirms in purely theoretical terms the existence and development of a sensual nature, and he does not introduce a distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. But, at the same time, Zhu Xi seeks to contain, repress or even deny the requirements of humanity's sensual nature, and seeks a clear distinction between the ethical-ontological realm and the phenomenal world. This jarring contradiction, an unstable mixture, lay at the core of the Neo-Confucian theory of human nature in which the mind unifies nature and feelings.

This is the theory, put forth by Zhang Zai and modified by Zhu Xi, that the mind integrates nature and feeling. It divides the mind into two aspects, nature and feeling, such that nature is the patterning order intrinsic to the mind, and the heavenly is the origin of such order. Nature is thus heavenly principle or order and originates in the noumenal realm. This is what is referred to in Zhu Xi's notion of 'not yet aroused' and is referred to as the 'mind that belongs to the way' (*daoxin* 道心). It is made manifest in the traditional norms governing human relationships—humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and sincerity—which are taken to be purely rational. At the same time, the human mind also involves feeling, which belongs to the category of 'having been aroused' by the sensible world. Its distinctive contents are affective-laden ideas and psychological states such as sympathy, good and bad, yielding and deference, and a sense of right and wrong. It also includes elements relating to perception. The distinction between nature and feeling corresponds to the aforementioned distinction between 'the nature mandated by the Heavens' and 'qi-based nature.' Just as principle or order cannot be separated from psycho-physical energy, so the mind that belongs to the way cannot be separated from the human mind, but rather controls it. This dualistic idea of mind makes the aforementioned contradiction in Neo-Confucian thought even more acute.

In Zhu Xi's early work, nature was understood as 'not yet aroused' and the mind was 'already aroused,' and this meant that mind and nature were still separate. Nature could not completely penetrate and infuse the mind, and was an external demand or command. It was later that Zhu Xi came to think that the mind ought to include what has not yet been aroused and the already aroused, or both the mind belonging to the way and the human mind, such that they "include both form and function, pervade the hidden and the apparent and penetrate the dynamic and the

still.”<sup>63</sup> This meant that the nature implicit in the cosmic order was part of the mind that was inseparable from the physical body. Thus, while the mind can be divided into two (the mind that belongs to the way and the human mind) these are united as one. In short, the rational and the sensible, the social and the natural, the noumenal and the phenomenal, all merge completely in the same single mind:

Nature is the patterning of the mind, feelings are the driving motives of the mind; the mind is the master that orders nature and feeling. . . .

The mind is like water, nature is like still water, feelings are like flowing water, and desire are like waves on the water.

What is decreed is like imperial ordinances and commands, nature is like the carrying out of affairs, feelings are like practical measures and the mind is the person.<sup>64</sup>

The spirit of this mind, when it is conscious of patterning or principle, is the mind that belongs to the way (*daoxin*); when it is focused on desire it is the human mind. The human mind emerges from the configuration of *qi*, and the mind that is of the way is grounded in nature and what is mandated by the cosmos. In the human mind, one should also recognize the mind that is of the *dao*.<sup>65</sup>

For Zhu Xi, the human mind and the mind of the *dao* (*daoxin*) were fundamentally the same mind, but there was the division of heavenly principles and human desires. Recognizing only the mind of the *dao* leads to Buddhist or Daoist thinking,<sup>66</sup> since the human mind exists only in so far as the human body exists. The mind contains both good and bad, but the mind that is of the *dao* is only good, and so a person should follow this as it is present within the human mind. If desires for such things as food, drink, men or women are appropriate then the human mind becomes the mind of the *dao*. The latter limits the human mind, ensuring that such desires emerge appropriately. Evidently, the mind of the *dao* (which includes nature, is not aroused (*weifa*), and is pure heavenly order or principle) controls, regulates and commands the human mind (which consists of feelings, what is already aroused and human desires). The ‘*dao* mind’ also seeks to unify the two minds while remaining inseparable from the human mind. On the one hand, the association of the ‘human mind’ with sensual natural desire, and with the physical existence of the body brings risk, since this could lead to excess, selfishness and the indulging of desire, and the creation of ‘evil.’ However, conversely, the mind of the *dao* must still rely upon the human mind and its connection to material reality. Only then can it exist and fulfill its function. Without this physical basis, notions such as the mind of the *dao*, nature and heavenly mandate would be empty and meaningless. “Nature is simply ordered patterning; without cosmic *qi* and Earth-bound physicality, it (*li*) has no place to reside.”<sup>67</sup> Dismissing cosmic *qi* and Earth-bound physicality, the human

mind, and the configuration of *qi* would amount to a Buddhist-style dismissal of the physical world and the sensual nature of humanity. Accordingly, achieving a stable and fitting balance between these two extremes was a problem that greatly concerned Zhu Xi and the Neo-Confucians. Zhu Xi's approach was concisely expressed as, "The human mind is precarious while the way of the *dao* is subtle. Be meticulous and single-minded and sincerely hold fast to the mean." Principle and desire, nature and feeling, the mind of the *dao* and the human mind, ethics and nature: these originated from very different and mutually opposed worlds (the noumenal world and the phenomenal world), and seeking the unification and merger of these is exceedingly difficult.

The foundational Neo-Confucian category of humanness, for example, is understood in terms of nature, principle, and the mind of the *dao*; yet at the same time, it also has sensible elements and content, such as natural growth and development. The same could be said about other concepts, such as the cosmos or the mind: they are rational yet also sensible, transcended the natural yet also natural, entailed a priori reason yet are also empirical, and are both traditional morality and cosmic order. The fundamental reality is dualistic.

This contradiction threatens to undermine the entire Neo-Confucian project. Perhaps, hidden by Zhu Xi's grand cosmological and epistemological system, it is not very obvious. The claim that mind governs nature and feeling, and recognition of both the mind of the way and the human mind, did not occupy a very prominent place in that system; as a result, the contradiction was submerged beneath the strong emphasis on the investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, the limitless, and the supreme polarity. However, once mind became foundational for Ming Neo-Confucians (those from the School of Mind), and became more central to the system than patterning or principle, this contradiction inevitably emerged and became problematic. In the end, it caused the disintegration of the Neo-Confucian theoretical framework.

### **Mind (*Xin*) as Transcendence and Sensibility**

Wang Yangming was a key figure in the evolution of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism after Zhang Zai and Zhu Xi. Zhang Zai founded the School of Principle, Zhu Xi was the great synthesizer, and Wang caused it to disintegrate. This was not the intention of any individual, however; historical forces and the due process of logic were responsible. One might say that the core category of Zhang Zai's thought—*qi* or psycho-physical energy—marked a logical progression, a shift from cosmology toward ethics, and that this was the start of the School of Principle. And one might say that the core category of Zhu Xi's work—principle or patterned order—marked the maturing and most exquisite form of the school. If so, then Wang's central idea—mind—marked the final stage of

the school, and also suggested some modern tendencies. Each had their followers and adherents, and formed three different approaches within Neo-Confucian thought.

Historians of philosophy generally take the source of Wang Yangming's theory to be Cheng Yi or Lu Xiangshan, and that seems correct. Unlike his younger brother, Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85) did not make a sharp distinction between the way (which was beyond form) and *yin* and *yang* (which were within form), but regarded them as the same thing: "To the cosmos, life is simply the way, and to follow the way is goodness." Cheng Hao believed that clean water and dirty water were both water and that flowing water is goodness, life, nature, and *dao*: "Life is called nature, nature is *qi*, *qi* is nature, and life is called nature."<sup>68</sup> In this regard, for Cheng Hao, the way, *yin-yang*, principle, *qi*, nature, life, cosmically ordained nature and *qi*-based nature still lacked rigid distinctions. As a result, the this-world rationality of perceptible nature became more prominent, and the ethical order and categories developed by the older Cheng brother often conveyed an appeal to the senses. In contrast to the younger Cheng, Cheng Hao did not insist on separating an abstract, a priori and transcendent principle, way or higher form from sensual nature and on granting priority to the former. Compared with the logical analysis and theory construction of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, Cheng Hao's system mixed the perceptual and the rational, and appeared simple and rudimentary.<sup>69</sup>

Yet it also retained the strengths of an appeal to sensibility and immediacy, which were rendered abstract and inert by later moves toward logical categorizing. It is thus closer to the ultimate realm that the Neo-Confucians sought, wherein the cosmos and the human form a unity. This was the teleologically ordered spiritual realm in which, as mentioned earlier, Confucius and Yan Hui resided in pleasure.

Lu Xiangshan continued the work of Cheng Hao, and went against Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. He believed that *yin* and *yang* were *dao*, and advocated that the *dao* and individual objects formed a unified whole. He opposed adding the logical 'limitless' (*wuji*) above the this-worldly notion of supreme polarity (*taiji*), and thus also rejected the categorical distinction between cosmic principle or patterning and human desires, and between the mind of the *dao* and the human mind:

To speak of cosmic principle and human desire is not to exhaust the debate. If the cosmos is about principle or patterning, and humanity is desire, then the cosmos and the human are not the same. [. . .] It is not right to say that the human mind just is human desire, and that the mind of the *dao* is cosmic principle. Mind is one. How could people have two minds?<sup>70</sup>

Unlike Zhu Xi's view that nature is principle, Lu emphasized that "Mind is principle"; "There is no principle outside the mind"; "All things

gather in that small area [the mind], and issue forth from it to fill the cosmos, so there is nothing that is not principle.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Lu writes, “The structure of the mind is vast, if I can fully develop my mind than it will be the same as the cosmos.”<sup>72</sup> When the mind is the structure that connects all things with the heavens and the Earth then, unlike a world of pure principle or pattern, it will naturally involve more embodied sensuality. Here, mind, more so than principle, is about sensual nature and empirical experience. When the nature of the mind is understood like this, it is no surprise that Zhu Xi compared Lu Xiangshan to Mencius’ opponent and critic, Gaozi.

Lu Xiangshan advanced Cheng Hao’s theory, consciously developing and defending Cheng Hao’s grasp of intuition. In tandem with a cosmology based on ‘mind is principle,’ he developed an intuitionist epistemology. Since all knowledge, all investigating of things and extending knowledge, seeks to arrive at a sudden and penetrating understanding, one which grasps ethical reality, then why not directly seek insight into the nature of the mind? Why expend such effort investigating external things day after day? When all the problems have been removed from the mind, then the truth will naturally shine forth. “Following the spontaneity of the mind” means that one can spontaneously realize and enact the truth in ordered human relationships and be united with the fundamental order:

The way fills the cosmos and is never hidden. [. . .] In humans we speak of benevolence and righteousness, and these are the fundamental mind of humanity.<sup>73</sup>

If I gather my mental energies, make myself my master, then all things are complete in me, and what could be lacking? When I should be sympathetic, then I am spontaneously sympathy and when I should be ashamed, I am spontaneously ashamed.<sup>74</sup>

Wang Yangming systematized, tightened and ordered some of the key points in Lu Xiangshan’s system. For example, Lu did not discuss practice and effort (*gongfu* 工夫), which suggested that the fundamental reality of the *dao* could not be acquired by proactively seeking them. Wang Yangming emphasized practice and effort, believing that these were the fundamentals; this upholding the importance of personal cultivation as a core Neo-Confucian position. Wang also promoted the unity of knowledge and conduct (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一). To know was to act and action was never separated from knowing. “Knowledge is the beginning of action, action is the completion of knowledge.”<sup>75</sup> ‘Knowledge’ here was not the same as Zhu Xi’s idea of investigating things and extending knowledge, which was a subjective conception of knowledge. Rather it was a pure awareness of a moral consciousness. Wang finally brought all of these ideas together in a single guiding slogan: ‘Extend innate knowing’ (*zhi*

*liangzhi* 致良知)—which referred to recovering, extending and practicing the innate capacity for knowing:

Does the principle of loyalty and filial piety exist in my ruler and my parents? Is it in my own mind? If it is in my own mind, then it is simply a matter of fulfilling the principle inherent in my mind.<sup>76</sup>

If it is really rooted in my parents' physical presence, then after my parents die, will my mind then lack any principle of filial piety?<sup>77</sup>

The human mind is cosmically vast and encompasses everything. Originally, there is but a single cosmos and it is due to the obstructions arising from personal desires that the fundamental structure of the cosmos is obscured. Nowadays, if we focus on fully developing our innate knowing, then the obstructions can be completely removed and the original structure will once more return, in its cosmic vastness.<sup>78</sup>

The investigation of things resembles Mencius's claim that only a great man can rectify the ruler's mind. They involve removing from the mind what is mistaken, thereby restoring the original structure.<sup>79</sup>

Lu and Wang, like other Neo-Confucians, wanted to establish an ontology based on an ethical subjectivity, which sought to make clear cosmic principles and remove human desire. The difference was that the Cheng brothers and Zhu viewed principle as fundamental and emphasized transcendental a priori categories. Lu and Wang, however, regarded the mind as foundational, and frequently connected it with sensual embodiment. Thus, the contradiction mentioned earlier, which was hidden in Zhu Xi and the School of Principle, loomed large in the work of Wang and the School of Mind. I once wrote:

In Wang Yangming's philosophy, 'mind' is divided into the mind of the *dao* (cosmic principle) and the human mind (human desire). The mind of the *dao* opposes the human mind and yet has to rely on the human mind for its existence. Herein lies the inescapable contradiction that contains within it the fragmentation of the entire system of thought. The mind of the *dao* must pass through the knowledge, intention and awareness of the human mind in order to manifest itself, while innate knowing follows spontaneity. Thus, knowledge, intention and awareness constitute the psychological accoutrement to the human body and are no longer purely principles of logic. This inevitably leads to the kind of materialism expressed in the phrases 'the cosmic principle is in human desire' and 'principle resides in *qi*.'<sup>80</sup>

This kind of rupture was first made manifested in the insistence that 'the mind of the *dao*' and the 'human mind' could not be separated, and neither could 'innate knowing' and 'clear sightedness.' These were



often mixed together, treated as a unity or even as identical. Although, in abstraction, Wang elevated them to the level of the a priori—transcending the physical body and matter—they were still not equivalent to principle but remained connected to the body and matter. In this way, the rational and the sensible frequently merged or were so close as to be indistinguishable. Going yet further, the rule of reason gradually transformed into the rule of personal sensibility:

What is called your mind is that which can see, hear, speak and move. This is nature and it instantiates cosmic order or principle.<sup>81</sup>

Innate knowing is just the mind distinguishing right from wrong; to distinguish right from wrong is to affirm or negate; doing so fulfills one's duty about right and wrong; distinguishing right from wrong fulfills one's duty towards all things and all the transformations.<sup>82</sup>

Innate knowing is the point at which cosmic principle is enlightened.<sup>83</sup>

This is only one enlightenment . . . my enlightenment is the controller of the cosmic spirit. Separated from the Heavens, Earth, gods, spirits and all things, there can be no enlightenment. In this way a unified *qi* circulates.<sup>84</sup>

The capacity to see, hear, speak, move, perceive, and to gain insight are all qualities of people's sensible nature. They are psychological rather than purely rational and have an empirical rather than a priori quality. More importantly, within Neo-Confucianism, such material things gradually came to constitute the basis of nature and principle. In contrast, the logical notion of principle, which had been understood as dominant and controlling, became an extension and by-product of the mind and feeling. In this way, the order: 'from principle and nature to mind' was reversed, to become: 'from mind to principle.' The move from nature to feeling was also transformed into a derivation from feeling to nature. "Strengthen the sympathetic mind and there will be supreme humaneness that addresses everything, this comes from practice that realizes principle."<sup>85</sup> It was not humaneness (or, in Zhu Xi's terminology, principle and nature) that determined and supported the sympathetic mind ('nature' for Zhu Xi); rather, humaneness and the realizing of principle were derivations and enlargements of the sympathetic mind. Since the mind is principle, it cannot be separated from the physical body or, more precisely, it depends on the body for its existence. As Wang puts it, "There is no mind without body and no body without mind; but when we refer to what it is that extends in space, we say 'body' and when we refer to a governing function, we say 'mind.'"<sup>86</sup> The mind of the *dao* and the human mind cannot be separated, and neither can the mind and the body. In this way, principle and cosmic principle were increasingly mixed together with the sensual body and became part of the commonsensical world.

From the perspective of ontology and epistemology, the evolution from Zhang Zai to Zhu Xi and then to Wang Yangming was a move from materialism (grounded in *qi*) to objective idealism (grounded in principle or cosmic order), and then to subjective idealism (Wang's conception of mind). Many historians of philosophy today agree that this was a kind of ongoing deterioration, a gradual regression. However, if we look at Neo-Confucianism in its entirety, we see a move from nature to ethics to psychology, which corresponded with the formation, maturing, and disintegration of Neo-Confucianism; and this was a necessary step on the path toward modernity.

Wang Yangming's famous "Four Line Teaching" (*Sijujiao* 四句教) reads:

Having neither good nor bad is the basic structure of the mind; having both good and bad is the activity of the will; distinguishing between good and bad is the result of conscientious knowing (*liangzhi* 良知); and doing good and shunning bad consists in the investigation of things.<sup>87</sup>

He also wrote, "The master of the body is the mind. What issues from the mind is the will, the root of the will is knowing, and when there is knowing then there are phenomena (*wu* 物)."<sup>88</sup> Although this attempts to treat mind as a super-real, morally transcendent ontological realm, it entails a prominent psychological nature, rather than Zhu Xi's notion of logical principle. Wang's school focused its inquiries on body, mind, knowing and will, and these cannot be separated from the subjective mindset and intention attached to the biological body. Originally, Wang aimed to turn psychology into ethics so as to instill the dominant imperial order directly into the minds of the people. However, the effects were quite the opposite, since his notion of innate knowing functioned as a kind of good will or a moral consciousness, and was infused with sensual and emotional aspects. His disciples, from Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541) to Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583), either made thoughtlessness (*wunian* 無念) the main aim and stressed the 'spontaneity of the unrestrained mind,' capable of conscientious knowing, or they made joy the key and stressed that joy is the ultimate foundation of the mind: "the human mind is naturally joyful, but we restrain it with our own desires [. . .] 'Joy' means to find joy in studying this, and learning involves studying this joy."<sup>89</sup> They thus developed the School of Mind based on a concern with sensible experience. The 'spontaneity of the unrestrained mind' and 'joy' do not refer solely to sensual enjoyment, perceptual pleasure or natural desire, since they also touch upon a certain spiritual satisfaction and a moral realm. However, they are linked to the perceptual, directly or indirectly, through the noumenal realm that

transcends good and evil. This meant they became ever more detached from pure moral commands (cosmic or heavenly principle). Thus, the view emerged that restraining desires is not the embodiment of humanness. Wang Yangming's school increasingly denied the need for external standards to artificially control the mind and suppress desires—in other words, they denied the need for abstract, a priori rational concepts to govern the mind:

He said that the everyday practices of people are the way [. . .] and pointed to those that had no need of artificial ordering to prove this. His listeners understood.

Cosmic principle or patterning is the principle that exists spontaneously; if you wish to revise it, it becomes human desire.<sup>90</sup>

The preceding shows that Wang Yangming's doctrine that 'the mind is principle' became increasingly based on an account of perception, and it gradually shifted to an acceptance of psychology as ethics. Logical norms increasingly became psychological needs. The meaning of *li* in his declaration that 'the mind is *li*' evolved from external cosmic principle or order into inner human nature, feelings and even desires. This is precisely what Zhu Xi was concerned about when he wrote, "Explicit talk of perception as knowledge, will regrettably lead some to think of desire as a form of principle."<sup>91</sup> This is similar to the naturalistic theory of human nature found in modern bourgeois theorizing: 'human nature' is simply a person's natural passions, needs, and desires. This approach is found in all of Wang's followers, in both the Taizhou 泰州 and Jishan 戴山 schools, as the following views illustrate. Taizhou School founder Wang Gen, for example, spoke of 'love' (*ai* 愛), while Wang Gen's student Yan Shannong 顏山農 (1504–96) claimed that, "just follow one's nature and accept pure spontaneity; this can be called the way . . . if a scholar first studies reason, customary knowledge and norms, this might obstruct the way."<sup>92</sup> Similarly, He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–79) stated that "nature means taste, sensuality, music and comfort; all these are nature."<sup>93</sup> The founder of the Jishan School, Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645) wrote, "The mind of the *dao* is the original human mind; the nature of righteousness and principle is the fundamental nature of *qi*-based nature."<sup>94</sup> Contra Wang's later view, this expressed the idea of a fundamental structure of the mind that consisted of the highest good and no evil, and which would dispel all thought of desire. But by the time of Liu's student Chen Que 陳確 (1604–77), things had changed. Chen writes,

Originally cosmic principles or order were not in the human mind, but were found in human desires. When human desires are appropriate to the situation then this equates with cosmic principle. Without human desires, one cannot speak of any cosmic principle or order.<sup>95</sup>

Though employing different ideas, the two schools arrived at similar viewpoints.

Late Ming intellectual Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) focused on the ‘child-like mind’ and spoke of personal concerns (*si*) and benefit (*li*): “Personal concerns are the human mind. Humans must have personal concerns and only then is the mind manifested. Without them, there is no mind”; “It cannot be right not to seek benefit. . . . If we do not assess achievements, then can the way be made clear?”<sup>96</sup> This is almost diametrically opposed to the well-established Neo-Confucian demand that actions conform to moral rightness and not aim at benefit, that they manifest the way and do not involve calculation of outcomes. Li Zhi not only approved of benefit, personal affairs and the self, but also claimed that they are integral to righteousness, the way, fairness (*gong* 公) and community (*qun* 群). From here it is but a short step to Dai Zhen’s position that: “Being fond of wealth and women is desire; sharing what is desired with the people is principle”; “What the sages of antiquity meant by humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom is not found outside of desires, and is not separate from the *qi* of the blood and the knowing of the mind.”<sup>97</sup> This is also very close to Kang Youwei’s claim that, “‘Principle’ is the principle of humanity”;<sup>98</sup> “We are born with desire, it is the nature of the cosmos! [. . .] Our mouths desire fine food and we desire to live in fine mansions”; “The way of human life is thus to eliminate hardship and seek joy; there is no other way.”<sup>99</sup> It is not a coincidence that pioneers such as Li Zhi and Kang Youwei, who laid the groundwork for modern naturalistic theories of desire, openly admired Wang Yangming or had direct connections with this school.

The trajectory of this line of theory is astonishing. It evolved from psycho-physical *qi* to principle or patterned order; from principle to mind and then from mind to desires. It started by emphasizing a distinction between cosmic principle and human desires, and between righteousness or principle-based nature and *qi*-based nature, and then ended with the claims that principle is desire and that desire is nature. First there was an inward-looking ethics that was founded on an outward-looking cosmology, which eventually reverted to psychology, causing the entire Neo-Confucian intellectual order to collapse. Afterwards, human relations and moral obligations were once again founded on practical life, as well as the individual’s desires, interests, happiness and pleasures, which were understood as having a physical and mental foundation. The traditional theories of cosmic principle and human nature thus moved in a circle, and seemingly returned to the positions that Zhang Zai and Zhu Xi opposed. In truth, however, great progress was made and many spiritual riches and interesting ideas were bequeathed to humankind.

The logic of this intellectual development had its basis in history. Why did Lu Xiangshan’s School of Mind become dormant within a hundred years of its start, while Wang Yangming quickly earned a substantial

following and exerted such influence in China?<sup>100</sup> Why were so many people fascinated by Li Zhi, even though he was imprisoned and his works burnt? Surely, these facts were related to the great changes in the economy, politics, culture, society, and thought that took place from the middle of the Ming dynasty onward. And there is surely some relation to the first shoots of capitalism that emerged during this period.<sup>101</sup>

Aside from the move toward a modern, naturalistic conception of human nature, another feature of the Wang Yangming school was its emphasis on subjective practice (moral conduct), which involved the unity of knowing and action: "Knowing that is true and sincere is action; action that is self-conscious and discriminating is knowing." This reduces all morality to the self-conscious behavior of the individual. Knowing is necessarily an action; conscientious knowing invariably involves action and self-conscious action is a form of knowing. Thus, the true existence of humans resides in such innate appreciation of conduct, and only in such conduct can humans attain their most fundamental existence. Wang's well-known comment about mountain flowers flourishing and withering according to this conscious mind has often been criticized in a manner similar to criticisms of George Berkeley's philosophy. However, in fact, epistemology has no place in Wang's theory of the unity of knowing and practice and can even, in a certain sense, be said to have been eliminated. The extension of conscientious knowing is not knowledge but an ethical, practical intuition. Thus, the appropriate phrase is not "To be is to be perceived," nor "I think, therefore I am," but rather, "I act, therefore I am." Human existence is confirmed, affirmed and extended through the self-aware extension of conscientious knowing in the conduct of ordered human relationships. As Huang Zongxi wrote, "The mind has no foundational structure; when practice reaches its peak, then mind acquires foundational structure."<sup>102</sup> Due to their resistance to the idea that knowledge was sought as objective knowledge or was divorced from action, many of Wang's followers were increasingly explicit in their criticisms or rejections of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, and the ideal of living respectfully and preserving tranquility. Their approach to everyday life was active, and they were more ready to participate and intervene. Wang's followers in the Taizhou school lectured and shared their views widely, even going so far as to act flamboyantly or ostentatiously in public so as to promote their strongly held views about the masses, human life, and society. Such was the effect of Wang's thought, and a sense of subjective struggle became the defining characteristic of the school.

From the beginning, starting with Lu Xiangshan, there was a strong emphasis on being one's own master, on self-reliance and self-respect, and the need to entertain doubt and oppose blind obedience. This was captured in the popular phrase, "The Six Classics are merely my footnotes," and the tendency became more pronounced with Wang and his followers. 'Conscientious knowing' was the most fundamental reality, and was not

reliant on anything external; the highest authority was oneself, not the classic texts or a deity. Some version of this can be found in Wang Gen's call to create destiny (*zao ming* 造命) or change destiny (*yi ming* 易命), and in Liu Zonghou's emphasis on commanding the will (*zhu yi* 主意).

This aspect of the Wang Yangming school is clearly related to the emphasis on an autonomous ethical will, and to the aforementioned participation in real-life affairs and political struggle. This contentious spirit and independently minded approach to life yield impressive ideas and important moments. These included, as representatives of the Taizhou school, He Xinyin's and Li Zhi's battles with political superiors, and the populism and political thought of Liu Zongzhou and Huang Zongxi. In addition, the importance of the individual ethical subject in this approach was highlighted in a further way. This was in the strengthening of the individual sense of historical responsibility and moral self-awareness, and this became the guiding spirit and key theme of the entire approach.

The preceding discussion shows how Wang's philosophy moved the understanding of 'principle' toward a pure mind, such that the mind should transcend the actual world to become independent, and form the fundamental ground of the cosmos. As noted earlier, this view has two aspects. The first was the modern naturalistic account of human nature, which denied that humans have 'two minds' and eliminated the crucial distinction between 'righteousness and principled nature' and '*qi*-based nature.' The second aspect stressed subjectivity and the power of the will, and influenced many idealistic thinkers in later generations, including Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, a young Mao Zedong, and Guo Moruo. All used it as a spiritual aide in the struggle against old society and its customs. In terms of theory, the first aspect of Wang's thought appears to be more important; yet, it was never well-developed. A modern Chinese notion of a naturalistic human nature never developed, with the exception of its appearance in the literature of the May Fourth Movement. This was the unfinished project of an era of enlightenment.

Thus, the second aspect—that of seeking individual moral perfection, training the will and a spirit of striving—became the most influential. Notably, the young Mao Zedong's comments noted at the start of this chapter—on Paulsen's *A System of Ethics*—were made on the eve of the May Fourth Movement and made clear the intention to combine the two aspects. Mao affirmed that egotistical desire could enlarge and refine an individual's subjective consciousness, and promote moral cultivation and personal autonomy. The spirit expressed in slogans like "I am the universe" and "Struggle day and night" could be harnessed for participation in everyday life. However, this marriage of approaches was not sustainable. Sensual pleasures and freedom were not straightforwardly affirmed or theorized in depth. Instead, the subjective ethical consciousness and willful demands give rise to practical success during long years of hard revolutionary and military struggle.

In summary, I have argued that we should not view Wang Yangming's thought through the lens of disputes between the Lu-Wang and Cheng-Zhu schools, and internal factionalism. Rather, we should assess its place within Neo-Confucianism by looking at the entire course of history. This reveals the logical conclusion of Neo-Confucianism. Although Wang personally advocated 'eliminating the troubles within the mind,' thereby strengthening the imperial order, his doctrines actually led to a liberation of thought. After the middle of the Ming era, his work became the basis of romantic humanism, both in literature and other fields.<sup>103</sup>

The dialectic path of a theory ultimately depends on societal development. The Cheng-Zhu school, responding in turn to Wang's thought, also underwent an evolution. Several scholars greatly admired Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, or were highly critical of Lu Xiangshan and Wang, including Wang's contemporary Luo Qinchun 羅欽順 (1465–1547) and, later, Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474–1544); later still came Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–71), Wang Fuzhi, Gu Yanwu, Lu Shiyi 陸世儀 (1611–72) and Li Erqu 李二曲 (1627–1705). Although they lacked the liberated intellect of Wang Yangming and his more modern and enlightened ideas, they nevertheless tended to recognize an objectively real material world by shifting their emphasis from principle to *qi*. Most explicitly promoted or were sympathetic to a monistic metaphysics, based on *qi*, and they either explicitly or tacitly took Zhang Zai as their template. Luo Qinchun and Wang Tianxiang did so, while Wang Fuzhi was even more explicit in his return to Zhang Zai's ideas. Fang Yizhi was a naturalistic philosopher well-known for his focus on *qi*. All of these thinkers turned away from the Cheng-Zhu tradition and began to attend to external reality and objective matter, and not merely for the purposes of establishing an ethical foundation. Epistemology also regained its independence and was no longer the handmaiden of ethics. As a result, the complexity, precision and scientific nature of their thinking surpassed the followers of Wang Yangming. If Dai Zhen inherited the Wang Yangming tradition of thought, and was a pioneer in the intellectual emancipation that led to a naturalistic theory of human nature, then Fang Yizhi and Wang Fuzhi inherited the Zhu Xi tradition and pioneered scientific thinking 300 years ago.<sup>104</sup>

### *A Twofold Legacy*

What did Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism bequeath to us? This is a daunting question and here I can only sketch a few responses. First, for the several hundred years during which Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism held sway it clearly caused great harm to many people. It led to many disasters and difficulties, as the following lines make clear:

The respected criticize the vulgar on account of principle, the elderly use principle to accuse the young, and the noble criticize the lowly on

issues of principle. Though this is mistaken, it is commonplace. The vulgar, the young and the lowly all contest such judgments by appeal to *li*. Though they have their reasons, they are described as being contrarian. Once superiors criticize those below through appeal to principle, then those below are criminals and all the people accuse them. When people die according to the law, some will pity them, but when they die due to principle, who will pity them?<sup>105</sup>

‘Principle’ is what cruel officials call ‘law.’ They use the law to kill the people, and later Confucians used principle to kill people. Increasingly, they discarded law and talked of principle; this meant death without hope of being saved.<sup>106</sup>

The vulgar conduct of common scholars consisted in acting on and quoting the Confucian ethical code (teachings about ritual and Song-Ming Confucianism), and it was revered as the Mandate of Heaven, which none dare challenge. It was held in awe like a state’s constitution that none dare question. . . . Those above used it to control those below, who could only respect it. Thus, for the past several thousand years the cruelties and harm of the three bonds and five cardinal relationships of Confucianism has produced suffering.

With this code in force people keep quiet and dare not speak; their minds are fettered and they dare not begin to think.<sup>107</sup>

I revisit these well-known quotes here because they are personal expressions of freedom and also striking applications of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, particularly Zhu Xi, during the authors’ own times. Furthermore, although these people excelled in theory and even action (including, for example, Liu Zongzhou), a brief read through their many discussions of real-life events (such as Liu’s *Renpu Leiji* [*Record of Human Endeavors*]) makes shockingly clear how ignorant and cruel these Neo-Confucians were as they clung to outmoded ideas. Almost without exception they support strict class divisions and asceticism, leading to the widespread oppression of the people and the upholding of traditional era taboos. Sayings such as, “Starving to death is a trivial concern but loss of chastity is of a profound matter,” have brought incalculable grief to many women. Stone arches commemorating chaste women can still be found today, and tell of endless sorrow during lonely nights. Similarly, how many men who strove for progress and reform have been crushed, labeled as offenders against the Confucian code?

Dai Zhen and Tan Sitong’s heartfelt condemnations capture the harm Neo-Confucianism has brought to Chinese society and the nation during its recent past. Since the 1898 Reform Movement, the struggles of people such as Tan Sitong, Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885–1905), Song Shu 宋恕 (1862–1910), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), Wu Yu 吳虞 (1872–1949), Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005), and Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910–96) have all won fame and love from the people for their political writings or



fiction. These include, for example, Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*, Ba Jin's *Family* and Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm*. Filled with the spirit of fervent resistance, their success was the arguably result of their opposition to Neo-Confucian doctrines.

Even today, this centuries-old specter still haunts China. Often disguised, it sometimes appears under the banner of Marxism (in slogans such as "Struggle against the slightest thought of self-interest" or "Let revolution burst forth from the depths of the soul"). It is therefore unsurprising that, since the country's liberation, Neo-Confucianism has been dismissed. Some might argue that even today we should sustain the criticism and rejection. Does this mean, then, that Neo-Confucianism and its long history belong on the rubbish dump of intellectual history? Does this mean that several hundred years of Neo-Confucian thought constituted a mistaken step? Or did it bequeath something of value to humanity, once it is extracted from its feudal context? It is difficult to answer such questions satisfactorily. Practical interests typically trump theoretical considerations, and the great harm caused by Neo-Confucianism has obscured its theoretical accomplishments and distinctive characteristics. However, taking the perspective of all of humanity or an entire nation, things look a little different.

Humanity has, of course, created and developed a material civilization, advancing from primitive stone and pottery to the spacecraft of today; it has also created, built up and developed an inner spiritual civilization. In addition to our mental lives giving rise to material objects, human activity has also affected the basic structures of our conscious life and thought. Human psychology or inner life differs from that of animals in that human nature includes socialized psychological formations, which are founded on the physiological mechanisms found in animals. Such cultural and psychological formations distinguish humans from animals, and are the foundation of human nature. Analyzing and investigating these formations is an important task for contemporary philosophy.

Such formations consist of at least three parts: the structure provided by intelligent thought, the formation of the will, and an aesthetic sensibility. Science, morality and art are, respectively, the material expressions of these, made manifest in the physical perceptible world. These formations are historically situated, since their characteristics and function are determined by society, historical era and social class. However, they are also the product of an ongoing process of inner change, sedimentation, and agglomeration, and in this respect they have a consistent, stable, and enduring aspect. The particular manifestations and particular content changes over time, as things evolve or disappear. But the deeper underlying forms or structures undergo a process of sedimentation and so endure; and these give rise to human subjectivity and the structures that produce human experience. The much-discussed issues of inherited moralities and the transmission of culture are related to this question of formation and underlying structure.

All culture and morality is historically situated, its content varying with the particular society, historical era and social class. For example, primitive society was different from feudal society, which was different from capitalism. Each has its own conception of epistemology, moral standards and aesthetic taste, and these evolve. But within such ongoing change there is also accumulation, stability and consistency, and, in contrast to animals, this process gives rise to the distinctive psychological structures and capacities of humans. This is to be understood psychologically, but is founded on a biological base, and is in fact the melding of the biological and the social. As a result, this formation possesses something like the universality found in the sensual and perceptible world; it is something social rather than biological.

For example, both humans and animals sacrifice themselves for the sake of the group. In animals, this is a matter of instinct. In humans, however, this is self-conscious and willful behavior. It is a function of the rational will, which governs and controls such activity in the sensible realm; it is thus an illustration of the authority of the will. The rational will expressed in this perceptible, sensible form is the essence of humanity and constitutes the dignity of human nature—as this is revealed in the confrontation with sensual and natural desires, such as joy, happiness and the desire for survival. Thus, humanity's subjective will and moral conduct are not the result of natural desires, but are rooted in the capacity of the rational to govern the sensual and perceptual. In this regard, the achievements of Kant and the Neo-Confucians clearly outstrip the French materialists and more naturalistic theories of human nature. In everyday speech, phrases such as 'being weak-willed' or 'moral decay' indicate precisely a loss of this rational control, and the yielding to (or interference by) natural desires. This gives rise to phenomena such as clinging to life and fearing death, pursuing an excessively comfortable life, or abandoning oneself to pleasure. Although the moral demands of different societies and times are different, and even sometimes conflicting, nevertheless they exhibit common demands and historical continuity, since they are founded upon the structure of the human will and the capacities integral to such a subject.

In the case of China, the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian's moral teachings and Liu Shaoqi's 劉少奇 (1898–1969) "How to Be a Good Communist" are completely different; however, in how they establish the subject's will and sense of moral responsibility, they do have something in common. Can Liu's text really be said to have inherited nothing from the nation's traditions? Does Neo-Confucianism really have nothing to do with the Chinese nation's high regard for moral courage and character, and the determination to control feelings through reason, self-restraint, and the establishment of personal volition as part of human subjectivity? Decent people in traditional times, as well as revolutionaries facing harsh punishment, all found solace in Neo-Confucianism; in his youth, Mao Zedong

studied Neo-Confucianism with his teacher Yang Changji and spoke approvingly of late Qing Neo-Confucian Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872).<sup>108</sup> In particular, Mao studied the ideas of Yan Yuan, who emphasized action and practical experience.<sup>109</sup> Mao thus studied self-improvement, conditioning of the will, and the importance attached to spiritual values and moral achievements. Could all of this really have had no influence upon Mao's later work and ideology?

View in this way, the Neo-Confucians analyzed and promoted the establishment of the will and self-cultivation, and thus were consistent with the tradition ideals of 'sageliness within, kingliness without' (內聖外王) and 'governing so as to bring peace to the world' (治國平天下). They thereby raised to the level of ontology issues concerning moral autonomy, the nature of the will, social responsibility, a sense of historical mission, and the priority of humans over nature. These produced an unprecedented and awe-inspiring ethical subjectivity. In the history of ideas globally, perhaps only Kant's ethics compares to this achievement. The well-known inscription on Kant's tomb reads: "The starry Heavens above me and the moral law within me fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and the more steadily we reflect upon them." This might be compared with Zhang Zai's maxim, "To set one's mind on the Heavens and cast one's lot with the common people, to reestablish the lost teachings of past sages, and to generate peace for all times." Both express the greatness of this idea of a human subjectivity constituted by a rational and ethical reality. The characteristics of the human and of human nature are not given by heaven or nature. They are humanity's own construction. This is true for humanity as a whole and for the individual. In the case of the former, it happens through history, and in the latter through education, broadly conceived, where the will is formed largely through practical activity, physical activity, and moral education.

As mentioned earlier, there is some difference between Kant and the Neo-Confucians, however. Kant's moral law has a greater sense of externally derived awe or force, while Neo-Confucian ethics retains a greater sense of human feeling.<sup>110</sup> For Kant, there is a division between the noumenal and the phenomenal, the moral realm and the natural world. But for the Neo-Confucians, feelings and principle harmonize, the human and the cosmos form a unity and, in assisting the transformations and nourishing processes, one can become a co-participant with the heavens and the Earth. This is not a rational social contract that disregards feelings, nor a purely emotional religious fervor that disregards rational knowledge. However, is this Neo-Confucian striving for the harmony of feeling and principle, the unity of the cosmic and the human, which thereby distinguishes the animal from the fundamental structure of human nature, of any value today? This question arises in the context of a capitalist world in which people are spiritually empty, moral values

are bankrupt, and an individualism that is indistinguishable from animal life has emerged. Grasping the achievements and global significance of Neo-Confucian theory requires further study.

### *Additional Thoughts*

Since writing this chapter, I have realized more could be said on this topic. Here I offer a few tentative thoughts in advance of a more thorough undertaking.

This chapter originally compared the Neo-Confucians and Kant, and sought to do the following:

- i. Show that Song-Ming Neo-Confucians treated ethics as foundational ontology. Their aim and the grounds of their theorizing were an ethics that could confirm the necessity and universality of the traditional morality of their times. However, they were fundamentally different from Kant in approach, in that they followed the traditional Chinese idea of the unity of the cosmos and the human. Kant made a categorical distinction between phenomena and noumena and believed that ethics had no relation to nature. However, the Neo-Confucians emphasized that form and function were not separate, and believed that ethical processes (*rendao* 人道) were to be found in cosmic regularities. Thus, the chapter aimed not only to show similarities between Chinese and Western thought but also to expose differences.
- ii. This chapter also used the words of the young Mao Zedong to highlight the influence of both Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics and Kantian philosophy on prominent intellectuals in China's recent past. It looked at the important practical effects that such moralism and objectification of the will had on modern China; it also considered how such ideas easily took root in a nation of small-scale agrarian producers and then, as society modernized, caused significant harm.<sup>111</sup> This shows that the theories of Kant and the Neo-Confucians are entirely separate but can be brought into dialogue.

Zhu Xi established a strict order based on principle or patterning, which would be used to order and direct the cosmos and human life. He equated and thereby conflated the 'ought' of morality with the 'necessity' of reason, a view encapsulated in his slogan that "Principle is one but its manifestations are many." Zhu Xi's teacher, Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163), questioned Zhu about the idea of multiple manifestations, and denied that there was a single principle. The distinction between the Neo-Confucians and Buddhist teachings resided in exactly this issue. Neo-Confucianism emphasized that the one principle or patterned order had myriad manifestations, and that the myriad manifestations constituted a single principle or order. A unified cosmic patterning or principle was manifest in every

apparently distinct human relationship; the multiple kinds of traditional ordered human relationship also collectively manifested a single order or principle. Hence this notion of principle or order was not a unitary existence or a mechanical law; rather it was an organic whole that comprised multiple different instances, and also undergirded the intricate hierarchical order of China's traditional society. This idea not only includes the simple Buddhist notion of 'a single moon reflected in many rivers'; and it is also different from Kant's notion of a formal universal law. Instead, 'a single principle or order but with many manifestations' is meant to establish a concrete, practical universal law. Neo-Confucianism attempted to link such law with the objective regularities of the universe and nature (through concepts such as principle, *qi*, the limitless, and the supreme polarity), and thereby affirm its permanence and relevance to life.

In general, Neo-Confucianism was concerned with the universal and necessary within the diversity of the ordered human relationships prominent during an era of traditional hierarchies. This meant that the Neo-Confucian doctrine that "Anyone can become a Yao or a Shun" was not equivalent to the Buddhist mantra that "Anyone can become a Buddha." In the eyes of the Buddha, everyone is equal, but for Yao and Shun, the human world is marked by different degrees of refinement or coarseness, and distinctions between more intimate and more distant. Neo-Confucianism sought to defend a this-worldly form of rulership constituted by relationships of ruler and minister, and father and son. It did not seek to deny such relationships for the sake of an egalitarian Buddhist world detached from such reality. Producing an organic philosophical structure that supported a traditional society characterized by the dictum 'one principle but many manifestations' was complicated, involving more complexity than Buddhist philosophy could accommodate. Zhu Xi eventually produced an all-encompassing, self-contained and vast system, and in doing so became a sacred figure of orthodox Confucianism and its social code. Over time, the traditional dynastic system ebbed and flowed, but did not collapse. Thus, we must not look at pure theory alone, but consider also the concrete social foundations that lie beneath it.

Following from the preceding point, the struggle between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan, and Zhu's opposition to Hu Hong 胡宏 (1102–61), appeared meaningful and reasonable.<sup>112</sup> Namely, as the social context already discussed made clear, Zhu Xi had to emphasize the objectivity of principle in order to uphold its universality and applicability to the various realms in everyday life (i.e., in all manner of traditional ordered human relationships). This is why Zhu Xi emphasized the distinctions between nature, feeling, principle, *qi*, and other concepts. This kind of objective principle was not something that was immediately present to individual conscience or the individual spirit, and nor was it the same as the individual mind. Rather, it relied upon something external to the individual, an absolute authority than could command the individual—this

was the essence of cosmic principle, and the individual must unconditionally submit to it.

Accordingly, Zhu Xi put forth the opposing dualities of the cosmic and the human, and principle and desire, and their implied conflict and tension. Within such conflict, Zhu sought to articulate a subject characterized by practical rationality, and an individual will structured by such principle that could command and direct the senses.

Zhu stressed the tension between principle and reason—"As cosmic principle is instantiated so human desire disappears, and as desire is triumphant so cosmic principle is lost"<sup>113</sup>—and the difficulties of according with such principle, because he wanted to emphasize conscious awareness of particular and objective cosmic principles, which thereby constituted moral conscience. 'Cosmic principle' thus functioned as universal law, and the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge became the necessary means to attaining this moral conscience, which thus depended upon knowledge of the everyday world.

Here, we can see how Zhu Xi's ethics was connected to an epistemology. Knowledge of the principles or order of the things of the external world was the means to an awareness of foundational ethical principles. Zhu Xi's philosophical system was thus far richer and more practical than those of Lu Xiangshan, Hu Wufeng, Xie Liangzuo, and others, and its logical structure and analysis more refined. For example, Hu Wufeng conflated, without sufficient analysis, principle and desire, the cosmic and the human, and nature and feeling; while Cheng Hao's and Lu Xiangshan's accounts of the unity of the cosmic and the human involved a simple commonsense claim that humaneness, the cosmic, the mind and principle were all equivalent. Such a putative unification lacked careful analysis of the conflict between the cosmic and the human, principle and desire. In truth, it was a rather crude and primitive striving for wholeness or harmony. A truly complex harmony or unity between the cosmos and the human is the outcome of such tragic and intense tussle. Although Zhu Xi did not attain such theoretical heights, he nevertheless was greatly aware of the oppositional nature of principle and desire. As this chapter has pointed out, his theoretical achievements surpass those of Cheng Hao, Lu Xiangshan, Xie Liangzuo, Hu Wufeng and others.

My views contrast sharply with those of Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–95). Mou believed that Zhu Xi did not represent the orthodox line of Confucianism, since he believed the Wang Yangming and Hu Wufeng schools were more representative of classical Confucianism; however, he did not explain how the supposedly 'unorthodox' school of Zhu Xi came to be transmitted through the centuries as the orthodox view. He was merely offering conjecture. Put simply, Mou believed that Zhu Xi's understanding of principle was that it existed but had no substantial presence, or that it had a presence but no practical effects, since it was a static intellectual abstraction. Although it was transcendent, it was not

internal or efficacious; morality thus became heterodox, resting in something beyond the human. Zhu Xi moved from the external to the internal; from the investigation of things to ‘rectify the mind and make the will sincere.’ This meant that ethics became epistemology and lost its foundational position.

Mou Zongsan believed that Lu and Wang (as well as Hu and Xie), and not Zhu Xi, were the true successors to Confucius and Mencius, since they emphasized the unity of principle and *qi*, nature and feeling, and the cosmic and the human. Mind, the cosmos and ordered principle were equivalent. On this view, the nature of moral reality was not based on external, transcendent and discovered principles, but was immediately found in individual being, within the mind itself. It did not start from external control based on external principle, but rather moved from the inner innate sense of goodness out into the world. Thus, ‘the investigation of things’ was not about knowledge but was about an immediate ethical awareness; this was what it meant to rectify the mind and make the will sincere. Only in this way could moral autonomy arise. It was transcendent and inner; it was both presence and existence, knowing and action, and it was the ground of reality.

Zhu Xi held that humaneness was an aspect of the mind, the virtuous effects of love, and that humanness and the mind were distinct. But, on Mou’s reading, humaneness simply was the mind, it was love, while the mind and love simply were humaneness. ‘Mind’ rather than ‘principle’ conveyed the greater sense of vitality and activity. For Mou, this was the kind of intellectual intuition that Kant said belonged only to God. Under the effects of such intuition, reality and appearance, purpose and causality, combined as one; such was the moral metaphysics that the School of Mind propagated. ‘Mind’ here is thus individual moral consciousness, and is the universal grounds of existence. It was not an individual’s pure perceptual experience, but it was what the individual could directly experience and grasp. In their explanation of Xie Liangzuo’s idea that awareness was to guide humaneness, Mou Zongsan and his students argued that this ‘awareness’ was not perception, but a kind of moral truth that was encountered in sensitivity to discomfort or suffering—a kind of awareness or sensitivity that resisted indifference and entailed empathy. This was also Wang Yangming’s notion of innate goodness or innate capacity, or awareness springing from amoral instincts.

Mou’s admiration for Lu and Wang belonged to the most recent generation of the New Confucians, and he was partly reflecting the earlier generation, including Feng Youlan, who admired Zhu and the Cheng brothers.<sup>114</sup> Mou’s study of Song-Ming Neo-Confucian discussions of the nature of the mind was more advanced than previous generations. He made clear the differences between the School of Principle and the School of Mind, and was not content with Cheng-Zhu school’s idea that reason could control and direct the feelings. Instead, Mou sought to establish

a moral metaphysics whose grounds lay within the individual.<sup>115</sup> In the same way that Feng Youlan's "New Rational Philosophy" (*xinlixue* 新理學) was related to the new realist movement, so Mou's new school of mind was clearly related to modern existentialism.

There is a problem, however. A moral metaphysics based on individual being must develop in two directions. This was part of Wang Yangming's own doctrine. It is true that the school of mind emphasizes that 'mind' is not perception, nor sensation, but is the transcendent mind of a pure moral metaphysics; however, the school consistently uses the ideas of constant arising or creation, being unable to endure the suffering of others, and empathy to describe and explain this 'mind' (this also applies to Mou Zongsan). But can these features or descriptions really contain no feelings or sense-based experience? This idea of mind is claimed to be beyond psychology or sensation, and so mysterious and transcendent, but what can an inability to bear suffering, empathy, etc., be based upon if it is not sensation and the psychological? Since Confucius, Confucianism has been characterized precisely as being founded upon feelings and psychological principles. Wang Yangming's suggestion that a key phrase in the *Daxue* text should be read as 'affection for the people' (*qin min* 親民), instead of Zhu Xi's gloss of 'reinvigorate the people' (*xin min* 新民) is a clear example of such affectivity. But this means that this moral metaphysics does in fact, include affective elements and content. The lines of thought that emerge from this kind of moral metaphysics have, due to social changes, largely moved toward naturalistic theories of human nature. This was an important claim developed in this chapter.

As Liu Zongzhou, a follower of Wang Yangming, noted, this approach toward the mind divided Confucian scholars into 'zealots' who understood it in terms of emotional knowing, and those who emphasized purity or detachment and were mired in the empty and obscure.<sup>116</sup> The former approach is found in Taizhou school figures such as Li Zhi. They gradually came to view the grounds of morality in terms of feelings and desire, which eventually led to the view that human desire was cosmic principle, and seemingly selfish motives in fact equated with the common good. The idea of a moral metaphysics that transcended experience was absent from this account. The latter view, found in the Long Xi school, held that the mind was empty and directed toward external phenomena. It emphasized that the mind was neither good nor bad, something similar to the mind of the Buddha; it was thus a departure from Confucian ethics and a move toward Chan Buddhism. Liu Zhongzhou opposed this school and was particularly concerned to rectify the 'dangerous' doctrine of a transcendental morality based on 'a mind that consists of no good and no evil.' Liu stressed diligently rectifying the intentions, and discovering and removing all manner of evil thoughts. He understood the mind in terms of intentions and held thought to be the most fundamental good. Thus,



the moral character of the self-aware subject became a question of seeking and cultivating a good consciousness. And for this it was necessary to deal with any evil intentions or dispositions, whether conscious or unconscious.<sup>117</sup> Liu believed that the body as a whole was sinful and advocated such things as being mindful of one's person when alone, quiet sitting, the distinction between the reverential and licentious, and the differences between the human and the bestial. We might say that the Taizhou and Longxi positions tended toward naturalistic view of human nature, or even a kind of permissiveness, which fitted with the trends of the particular era. If so, then Liu Zhongzhou brought the School of Mind back to the foundational demand for sincere and moralized intentions. This was a shift from principle to mind, and from mind to intention which, as it developed, became narrower and more inward-looking to the point that it became a quasi-religious asceticism. It lost all meaningful outward-regarding content and became a dry religious dogma without the capacity for growth.<sup>118</sup> In truth, seeking the highest good and an ever-purer consciousness make the problem of human desire more acute. It is thus not surprise that Liu's famous student, Chen Que, put forth a view that suggests a naturalistic theory of human nature.

In summary, Wang Yangming's school of thought, though claimed by Mou Zongsan as orthodoxy, never progressed. This applies to all the resultant lines of thought (the Longxi, Taizhou and Jishan schools). Either these schools moved toward naturalistic theories of human nature or toward a religious asceticism. These were two different responses from within the same historical era. By the end of the Ming dynasty, the liberation of desire was at its most popular, and there was a hugely important move to oppose asceticism, as exemplified in texts such as Zhou Anshi's 周安世 *Taishang Ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 [The Treatise of the Most Exalted One on Retribution] and Yuan Liaofan's 袁了凡 (1533–1606) moral teachings. This can be considered a footnote to the aforementioned two trends that emerged from the Wang's school.

Although Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism was not a religion, it is clear that it proceeded via the cultivation of the mind, and sought a state of harmony between the cosmos and the human, thereby enabling the individual to find repose and purpose in the world. It thus served a broadly religious function. Liu Zongzhou's demand to be fully mindful of one's errors is a clear illustration of this. Neo-Confucianism dealt with the a priori and the acquired, the not-yet-aroused (*weifa* 未發) and the already-aroused (*yifa* 已發), balance and harmony, etc., and thus was directly connected to the religious aspects of Chan Buddhism and its quest to know the 'original appearance'—i.e., reality unconditioned by human construction. Since the School of Mind emphasized that mind was principle, that intrinsic knowing of the good was the most fundamental structure or reality, and that this ontology was inseparable from phenomena, it was thus both dynamic and still, and yet also transcended both. It was

both emptiness and feeling, and yet transcended emptiness and feeling; and it was both the not-yet-aroused and the already-aroused, while also transcending both. This was the context in which Wang produced the first line of this famous “Four Line Teaching”: “Having neither good nor evil is the basic structure of the mind.” This refers to that mysterious experience of transcending movement and stillness, emptiness and feeling, arousal and pre-arousal, and it is also captured by Wang’s comments that, “Tacitly one recognizes it, though it cannot be put into words,” and “though the ears do not hear and the eyes do not see, yet still something is gained through hearing and seeing,” “Without sound or scent one is mindful of intrinsic knowing—this is the Heavens and Earth, and all of history.” The Confucians had a notion of the soundless and scentless, but in Wang Yangming this had become ‘without good or evil’; the former transcends the senses, but the latter transcends morality and ethics and raises questions such as whether Wang should be considered Confucian or Chan Buddhist, and whether his notion of fundamental reality should be understood as ethics or religion.

In fact, Wang elevated Confucian teachings from philosophy to religious metaphysics. Within the mystical religious experience that Wang amplified, what was most fundamental transcended good and bad, and was identical with the cosmos. Thus, conscientious knowing equated with the cosmos, and possessed a limitless universality. The Wang school took Mencius’ claim that “the myriad things are all present in me” and, by making use of the Chan Buddhist idea that each individual was Buddha, elevated it to a level of unprecedented metaphysical significance. If one was to say that the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi established a kind of religiosity that involved using the external regulations of cosmic principle to regulate the human mind, then the Lu-Wang school arrived as similar characteristic and function by starting from the inner experience of intrinsically knowing the good. This latter school emphasized the existence implicit in immediate mindful experience, and viewed this as ultimate reality; as a result, some overseas scholars today make a direct comparison between the school and the philosophy of existentialism.

Still, although resembling a religion or performing a religious function, Wang’s internalist conception of Confucianism is not a religion. Wang’s own pronouncements about being ‘neither good nor evil’ are ambiguous and vague, and not well-developed. The key point, which this chapter sought to highlight, is that Wang still values sensible experience and continues the original Confucian tradition’s valuing of pleasure or joy. Wang wrote:

Joy is the most fundamental part of the mind. Though it is distinct from joy deriving from the seven emotions, it is not external to those pleasures. Although the sages and worthies are particularly inclined towards joy, the common people also share in the same joy.<sup>119</sup>

This was different to Zhu Xi, who separated the cosmic and the human, nature and feeling, advocated sobriety, and propagated self-cultivation in the Zengzi tradition. This also differed from Liu Zongzhou's emphasis on the highest good as being the fundamental ground of the mind, and the subsequent focus on rectifying intentions by reflecting on error. In the case of Wang Yangming, the tendency to emphasize sensation was, aside from being implicated in a naturalistic theory of human nature, close to the mystical experience of the Chan school; however, it could also be understood as a restoration of a transcendent aesthetic sensibility. The highest realm sought by the School of Principle and the School of Mind, expressed in the idea of Confucius and Yan Hui residing in delight, could be understood as ethico-religious in nature, or as ethico-aesthetic, or as a restoration of a purely aesthetic sensibility. The *Analects* passage 9.17 notes, "The Master was on the riverbank and declared, 'Isn't life's passing like this—never stopping day or night!'" Similarly, 11.26 reads,

Zengxi said, "At the end of spring, with the spring clothes already finished, I would like to bathe in the Yi River with a handful of young men and children, to revel in the cool breezes at the Altar for Rain, and then to return home singing." The Master sighed deeply and declared, "I'm with Zengzi."

Zhu Xi was dissatisfied with Zengzi's answer, but Wang Yangming praised him, noting that despite Zengzi's exuberance, his words aroused the reader's emotions. The Wang school often adopted a tone that was Chan-like, suggesting an aesthetic fit between humans and nature that transcended ethical concerns. The roots of this attitude did not transcend time and space, but were firmly within their endless ebb and flow, and required a grasp of the present moment and the cherishing of it. Such an approach had no need of final authoritative judgments that transcended time, space and worldly affairs; as a result, it captured the pleasures of partnering with the heavens and Earth (*yu tiandi can* 與天地參) in the here and now of worldly affairs. This chapter has shown how such an approach formed a spiritual realm that was ethical and yet transcended ethics, quasi-aesthetic and yet transcended the teleology of aesthetic judgment. As a result, this approach was also all-encompassing, free, and joyful. This kind of joy is, as mentioned earlier, not identical with the pleasures of the emotions, but nor it is external to them. It is a felt joy that is rational and ethical, which accrues and builds among the pleasures of the emotions. If the mysterious, religious, and ethical trappings and elements are stripped away and its 'original appearance' uncovered, then it is an aesthetic delight that unifies common causes and shared norms.

This kind of aesthetic delight is not something easily attained, however; it cannot be attained simply by rectifying the mind and making the intentions sincere or maintaining stillness and holding to reverence

(*shoujing chijing* 守靜持敬), as the School of Mind and School of Principle supposed. Attempting to attain the state of ‘Confucius and Yan Hui residing in delight’ by using these means would likely result only in a pseudo-religious experience. This kind of vaguely religious experience has, in Chinese society and culture, typically involved a passive, quietistic kind of delight, which lacks the great psychological impact and stimulation that comes from tragic and challenging experiences and their resultant mindset. To find a form of joy that encompasses such experiences and attitudes, the part of the tradition that deals with struggle in the external world and practical life must be developed, as expressed in Xunzi’s comment “control the cosmic fates and make use of them” or the *Yizhuan* idea that “the operations of the cosmos are ever vigorous, so the cultivated person works ceaselessly without respite.” Such sentiment must be raised to the same rarified ontology as that found in Song-Mind Neo-Confucianism. Actual existence arises in the here and now of the human world—but could this ‘here and now’ only truly be found in empty inward reflection? Does the Chinese philosophical tradition stop at the moral metaphysics of the School of Mind and the School of Principle? No! We must return to the difficulties and practical struggles of human life, and to history and practical psychology. Only when a practical and historically informed psyche has been articulated can there be appreciation of a truly profound ‘here and now.’ Accordingly, in the next chapter I will discuss the Chinese tradition of engagement in practical human affairs and statecraft.

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## Notes

1. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), in his *Ming Ruxue An* 明儒學案 [Cases of Ming Dynasty Confucian Scholars] writes, “It is said that Ming literati writings and deeds were inferior to those that preceded them, but that the works that preceded them were inferior to *Lixue* Neo-Confucianism.” See *Mingru xuean* (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2008), introduction, 14. Here, the term ‘*Lixue*’ [Neo-Confucianism] refers to both the School of Principle (*Lixue* 理學), represented by Zhu Xi, and to the School of Mind (*Xinxue* 心學), of which Wang Yangming is the most famous exponent.
2. See Chen’s review of volume two of Feng Youlan’s, “History of Chinese Philosophy” [*Zhongguo Zhhexueshi xiace* 中國哲學史下冊], in *Jinmingguan congkao erbian* [Writings on Jinmingguan] (Beijing: Sanlian Publishing, 2001), vol. 2, 283.
3. Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), ed., *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Dazhengzang edition), “Erjiao Lun” [Discourse on the Two Teachings], vol. 52, no. 2103, 8.139a.
4. This was a view popularized by Zhu Xi as part of the idea of an orthodox lineage of *dao* (*daotong* 道統), and does not entirely fit with historical reality or the history of thought. The formation of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism needs a new account, but that cannot be provided here.

5. Tuotuo 脱脱 (1314–1356) et al., *Shishi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1985), 427.12712.
6. Wang Fuzhi, *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu* 張子正蒙注 [Notes on Zhang Zai's Zhengmeng] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1975), Introduction, 2.
7. *Shaoyong ji* 邵雍集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2010), *Guanwu Waipian* [Observing Things], 152.
8. *Ibid.*, 49.
9. *Fan Wenlan lishi lunwen xuanji* 范文瀾歷史論文選集 [Selected Historical Essays of Fan Wenlan] (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1979), 325.
10. For more on this idea, see Chapter 3 of Li Zehou's, *The Path of Beauty*.
11. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Taihe” Ch. 1.8.
12. It is not important here whether the cosmology was materialistic, as in the case of Zhang Zai, or idealistic, in the case of the Cheng brothers.
13. *Zhong Yong* 中庸 [Doctrine of the Mean], 1.
14. *Daxue* 大學 [Great Learning], 1.
15. *Chengshi yishu* 程氏遺書 (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2010), 18.249.
16. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Dongwu” section, 3.85, 86.
17. Although ‘spirit’ (*shen* 神) is sometimes used to denote the function of *qi*, there is a distinction to be made. For example, “Something that is dispersed but of which an image or idea can be formed, is ‘*qi*’; something that is illustrative and close but which cannot be formed as an idea is ‘spirit’” or hence phrases such as “That part of the cosmos (*tian*) that cannot be fathomed is called ‘spirit’” etc. This, however, was never fully explored by Zhang Zai. See *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, 1.2, 2.52.
18. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Chengming” section, 3.98.
19. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Taihe” section, 1.8.
20. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Chengming,” 3.93, 107–9.
21. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, 3.100, 103–4.
22. *Ibid.*, 3.104.
23. *Ibid.*, “Daxin” and “Chengming” sections, 4.123, 3.115.
24. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, “Daxin” section, 4.121.
25. See for example, *Chengshi yishu*, 18.251.
26. The elder Cheng understood it in terms of direct intuition and immediate grasp, while the young Cheng sought to grasp it through accumulated knowledge of the patterning or order (*li*) of things and events.
27. See the citation from *Song-Yuan Xue'an*, 24.919.
28. *Chengshi Yishu*, 2A48.
29. *Ibid.*, 15.206.
30. *Ibid.*, 18.260.
31. *Ibid.*, 18.246.
32. *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1986), 11.367.
33. See also, for example, Cheng Yi's well-known discussion of the relation between temperature and the growth of Chinese leeks, and Zhu Xi's many discussions of natural phenomena.
34. Notably, during the Han dynasty, filial piety (*xiao*) was of paramount importance, but by the time of the Song dynasty, loyalty (*zhong*) to the ruler was more prominent.
35. *Han Yu wenji huijiao jianzhu* 韓愈文集彙校箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2010), 1.1, 3.
36. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, 3.97.
37. *Zhang Zai ji* 張載集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1978), “Yueling Tong” section, 296.

38. Wing-Tsit Chan 陳榮捷 (1901–94) expands on these points in his book *Zhuxue lunji* 朱學論集 [Studies on Zhu Xi] (Taipei: Xuesheng Publishing, 1988). He points out, for example, that Zhu Xi was dissatisfied with Cheng Yi's account of the *Yizhuan* (*Great Treatise on the Book of Changes*), believing it to be somewhat vacuous in its failure to address human affairs. Such comments suggest that, in Zhu Xi's thought, the cosmology was merely surface-level posturing and his work was primarily about ethics. Thus, it is quite different from Hegel's thought.
39. *Zhuzi yulei*, 1.1.
40. *Hui'an xiansheng Zhuwengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 (Sibu congkan), 70.5a.
41. *Zhuzi yulei*, 5.82.
42. *Ibid.*, 40.1033.
43. *Ibid.*, 94.2375.
44. Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* [Commentaries on the Four Books] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1983), "Zhongyong" section, 17.
45. *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, "Mencius" section, 8.293.
46. Zhang Zai, *Zhang Zai ji* 張載集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978).
47. Wang Fuzhi, *Du Tongjian lun* 讀通鑑論 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1975), 18.532.
48. *Zhuzi Yulei*, 18.398.
49. *Ibid.*, 94.2409.
50. *Ibid.*, 9.152.
51. *Ibid.*, 9.152–3.
52. *Ibid.*, 15.291.
53. *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu*, 9.315; *Songshi*, 427.12725.
54. Feng Youlan, "Xin yuanren" 新原人, in *Sansongtang quanji* 三松堂全集 (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin Publishing, 2000), vol. 4, 546–7.
55. Translator's footnote: the Chinese character for 'kernel' (*ren* 仁) is also the character used for the Confucian virtue of humaneness (*ren* 仁), thus amplifying the effect of the analogy.
56. Cheng Hao, "Chunri oucheng" 春日偶成. See *Ercheng ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2004), 3.482.
57. Zhu Xi, "Chun ri" 春日.
58. *Zhuzi Yulei*, 13.224.
59. *Ibid.*, 94.2414.
60. *Ibid.*, 13.224.
61. *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, "Zhongyong" section 28.
62. "Da Wu Dounan" 答吳斗南, in *Hui'an xiansheng Zhuwengong wenji*, 59.25b.
63. *Zhuzi Yulei*, 13.224.
64. *Zhuzi Yulei*, 5.89, 93, 82.
65. *Ibid.*, 62.1487–8.
66. *Ibid.*, section 62.1488.
67. *Ibid.*, 4.66.
68. Cheng, Hao & Cheng, Yi. *Er Cheng yishu* 二程遺書 [Remnant books of the Cheng Brothers] 2a; 29.
69. Note Wang Guowei's comment that, "Cheng Hao's theory of human nature is the weakest of the Neo-Confucians." *Jing'an wenji*, "Lunxing," 7b.
70. *Lu Jiuyuan Ji* 陸九淵集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1980), 34.395–6.
71. *Ibid.*, 34.423.
72. *Ibid.*, 35.444.
73. *Ibid.*, 1.9, "Letter to Zhao Jian."

74. *Ibid.*, 35.455–6.
75. *Wang Wenchenggong Quanshu* 王文成公全書 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2015), 1.41.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, 2.55.
78. *Ibid.*, 3.119.
79. *Ibid.*, 1.7–8.
80. Li Zehou, *Kang Youwei Tan Sitong Sixiang Yanjiu* 康有為譚嗣同思想研究 [Studies in the Thought of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing, 1958), 89.
81. Here the sensible dimension of the mind is still governed by the rational aspect. See *Wang wenchenggong quanshu*, 1.45.
82. 'Right and wrong' equate to 'good' and 'evil' but the latter are closer to the sensible realm than are the former pair. See *Wang wenchenggong quanshu*, 3.137.
83. *Wang wenchenggong quanshu*, 2.89.
84. *Ibid.*, 3.154.
85. *Ibid.*, 1.42.
86. *Ibid.*, 3.113.
87. *Ibid.*, 3.145.
88. *Ibid.*, 1.7.
89. *Wang Longxi xian sheng quan ji* 王龍溪先生全集: 20 juan. Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1970.
90. Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xue'an* (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2008), 32.710, 715.
91. *Hui'an xiansheng Zhuwengong wenji*, "Ren Shuo" 仁說, 67.23a.
92. *Mingru xue'an*, 32.703.
93. *He Xinyin Ji* 何心隱集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1960), 2.40.
94. *Mingru xue'an*, 62.1523.
95. *Chen Que Ji* 陳確集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1979), 461–8.
96. *Zhongguo Zhhexueshi jiaoxue ziliao xuanji* 中國哲學史教學資料選輯 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1982), *Cang Shu* 藏書, section 32, vol. 2, 244.
97. Dai Zhen, *Mengzi Ziyi Shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1982), 184, B.29.
98. *Kangzi Neiwai pian* 康子內外篇 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1988), 29.
99. *Datongshu* 大同書 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2012), 41–2, 5.
100. Huang Zongxi, *Song-Yuan xue'an* [Records of Song and Yuan Confucians], 58.1920.
101. For further discussion, see Chapter 10 of *The Path of Beauty*.
102. *Mingru xue'an*, Preface.
103. See also *The Path of Beauty*, Chapter 10.
104. Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhhexue shi* [A History of Chinese Philosophy] 中國哲學史 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1961), 990–1009.
105. *Mengzi iyi shuzheng*, A.10.
106. *Ibid.*, 174.
107. *Tan Sitong Quanji* 譚嗣同全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1998), "Renxue," 299.
108. For example, Southern Song scholar-official Wen Tianxiang's 文天祥 classic "Song of Righteousness" [*Zheng Qi ge* 正氣歌] was arguably Neo-Confucian in nature.
109. See the chapter on Mozi in this volume. Despite its somewhat unorthodox character, Yan Yuan's thought—like that of Wang Fuzhi—can still be considered as Neo-Confucian.
110. Such human feeling has been central to the Confucian tradition ever since Confucius and Mencius. The first line of the *Analects* includes the phrases,

“Is it not pleasant . . . it is not delightful . . .,” and thus moral cultivation is always linked psychologically to pleasure. In the twentieth century, the return of thinkers such as Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming to Confucianism, from Buddhism, indicates the power of this tradition. Liang suggests that ‘delight’ was the main reason for his return to Confucian values. See his “Zishu zaonian sixiang zhi zaizhuan zaibian” 自述早年思想之再轉再變, [“My Account of Changes Undergone during My Early Years”], *Zhongguo zhexue* [Chinese Philosophy] 1 (1979): 330–41. The trajectory of Zhang Binglin’s intellectual development was similar. See his “Daohan Weiyan” 荊漢 [Master Zhang’s Subtle Words], in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Publishing, 2015), 70–1. It is significant that these thinkers, while developing through a confrontation with the modern world, remained immersed in Chinese philosophy, moving from Confucianism to Buddhism and then back to Confucianism. This hints at a new direction for Chinese philosophy.

111. See the chapter on Mozi in this volume.
112. Hu Hong, “Zhiyan” [Understanding Words], in *Hu Hong Ji* 胡宏集 [The Collected Works of Hu Hong] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1987), 1–48.
113. *Zhuzi yulei*, 13.224.
114. The modern New Confucians can be split into four generations, though based on theoretical differences rather than simply age. The four eras are represented by Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming, Feng Youlan, and Mou Zongsan.
115. See, for example, Mou’s, *Xinti yu Xingtì* 心體與性體 [The Structure of Mind and of Nature] and *Xianxiang yu Wuzishen* 現象與物自身 [The Phenomenal and the Thing-in-Itself].
116. *Mingru xue’an*, 62.1575.
117. Liu writes, “I once wandered into a garden at night by mistake. Hungry, I ate someone’s pears. The next day, I was filled with remorse, and determined to understand my mind and what had caused this. To this end, I refrained from eating for three days.” See Liu, *Renpu lei* 人譜類記 [Human Schemata] (Siku quanshu edition), B.5a.
118. Liu’s *Human Schemata* is filled with written admonitions, including: not to destroy waste paper with written characters on it, not to eat beef or dog, not to shoot flying birds, to respect deities, not to watch theatre, and not to use gaudy language. In truth, this is a descent into perversion.
119. *Chuanxilu*, in *Wang wenchenggong quanshu*, 2.86.



## 8 Engagement in Practical Affairs and Statecraft

### ‘Sageliness Within’ and ‘Kingliness Without’

Confucianism has occupied a dominant position in Chinese traditional thought, because it blended religious and political elements together from the very beginning. This led to mutually opposed categories or concepts, such as cultivating oneself versus governing and pacifying the world, rectifying thoughts and making intentions sincere versus ordering the household and governing the state, and ‘sageliness within’ (*neisheng* 內聖) versus ‘kingliness without’ (*waiwang* 外王).<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Confucius, these thoughts were still unified and not yet understood in terms of such contrasts. This was because the early primitive traditions featured hierarchical authority grounded in the moral norms and established customs of clan leaders who were religious shamans. Explicit rules, whether written or unwritten, were of secondary concern. Accordingly, we find such thinking as, “If a person is upright then they can act without orders; however, if a person is not upright then, even if orders are issued, they will not be followed.”<sup>2</sup> This was the source of the traditional Confucian belief in, “A ruler and not a system of rulership.”<sup>3</sup> There was a close connection between the ‘sageliness within’ possessed by leaders and noblemen, and the exhibiting of ‘kingliness without’; it was a connection that ensured the order and survival of the tribal group.

As I argued earlier, inward-directed self-cultivation and external rulership (of clan and state) are clearly combined in Confucian thought. From the ritual demands of the Shang and Zhou, which were tinged with religious ethics, to the self-awareness of an individuated, psychologized humaneness (*ren*) in the Spring and Autumn period, this connection has a firm historical foundation. Both aimed at serving states organized around clan-based systems.

Zi Gong said, “What about the person who is broadly generous with the people and is able to help the multitude—is this what we could call humaneness?” The Master said, “Why stop at humaneness? This

is certainly a sage. Even a Yao or a Shun would find such a task daunting.”<sup>4</sup>

In Confucius’ thought, the public achievements of the sage were rooted in the inner experiences of humaneness. But humaneness was only a prerequisite for becoming a sage. Although Confucius repeatedly criticized Guan Zhong for overstepping the mark regarding ritual propriety, he was moved to declare that Guan Zhong enabled his duke, Duke Huan, to become “leader of the traditional lords, uniting and bringing order to the empire. Even today the people still benefit from his largesse. If there were no Guan Zhong, we would likely be wearing our hair loose and folding our robes to the left.”<sup>5</sup> This positive evaluation was based on substantial public achievement (which preserved and extended the alliances of the feudal clans on the central plains). Such achievement became the third element in Confucius’ doctrine of humaneness, after clan ritual and the psychological aspect of humaneness. But it also gave rise to an important paradox. On the one hand, Guan Zhong did not understand ritual propriety, and would not sacrifice himself for his ruler. According to the old way of doing things, Guan Zhong would thus be considered ‘inhumane.’ However, when Confucius’ students repeatedly raised this issue, Confucius answered that he was in accordance with the requirement of humaneness.

This paradox is never satisfactorily resolved in the *Analects* because it reflected a cold historical reality. During the rapid social change of the Spring and Autumn period, the old progression from inner sageliness to outward kingliness—which relied on respect for ritual and ethical models to govern the state—was no longer effective. People did not need to understand ritual propriety or to embrace the ideal of humaneness in order to achieve great and beneficial things.

What is particularly interesting is that during the Warring States—a time with little shame when warfare and annexation were rife, and when humaneness and righteousness (*yi*) were out of favour—Mencius’ attitude toward Guan Zhong was very different to that of Confucius.<sup>6</sup> Mencius strongly condemned Guan Zhong, claiming that his hegemonic actions were against the way: “[Zengzi said of Guan Zhong] . . . how low, after all, was what he accomplished—how is it that you liken me to him?”<sup>7</sup> “There were none of the disciples of Zhong Ni [Confucius] who spoke about the affairs of Kings Huan and Wen.”<sup>8</sup>

At a time when the clan-based states had completely collapsed, Mencius’ comments reflected his attempts to stem a raging tide, which led him to emphasize even more strongly the Confucian upholding of clan traditions and the need to first cultivate the person and then govern the state, to know ritual and be mindful of humaneness, and only then to speak of governing the state and bringing peace to the empire. The core of the problem was thus the issue of ‘sageliness within.’ Mencius’ theory

of human nature being good, his account of nurturing *qi* or vital energies, and his account of human government, all suggest that inner moral qualities are the grounds of this approach. Only when one has a heart-mind that cannot bear the suffering of others can one enact government that cannot bear the suffering of others—only then is the true way of the ruler and human government established. Thus, from Confucius to Mencius, Confucians granted priority to the ideal of inner sageliness, and as the idea gained fuller articulation it became divorced from the ideal of outward kingliness.

Later, the terms ‘sageliness within’ and ‘kingliness without’ became opposed. The Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, self-proclaimed followers of Mencius, illustrated this. They unilaterally developed ‘sageliness within’ such that it could or even should be separated from ‘kingliness without’ as it possessed its own value and significance. Notably, although external social achievements occupied only a derivative position in Mencius, they were still important. Mencius himself had great practical and social aspirations and talked of “delighting with the empire, feeling sorrow with the empire”<sup>9</sup> and had concrete ideas about human government and the kingly way.<sup>10</sup> However, after the Song Neo-Confucians, the inner dimension gradually became dominant and even the only object of theorizing.

This can be summarized as three features. First, the inner realm became the ‘root’ and the outer was the ‘branch.’ Since the inner was always prior to the outer, it was necessary to “rectify the heart mind and make intentions sincere”<sup>11</sup> before there could be talk of governing. Second, the outward would automatically follow from the inner: as long as the heart-mind and intentions were ordered, then good governance and peace and stability for the people would naturally follow. The outward, i.e., governing the empire and pacifying the people, was the direct extension of the inner, i.e., cultivating one’s person and rectifying the heart mind. This led to the development of a third feature of this viewpoint: it was a mistake to start by talking about the external; sageliness within was sufficient to act as a sage. ‘Learning’ (*weixue* 為學) was equivalent to ‘cultivating one’s person’ (*xiushen* 修身), which meant the nurturing of inner dispositions. Nurturing inner states thus become all-important, the so-called learning for oneself (*weiji zhixue* 為己之學) first described in *Analects* 14.24. As Zhu Xi stated in his commentary to *Analects* 1.4, “Only Zengzi’s approach to learning was focused on the inner aspect of the heart-mind, and so was passed down without corruption. This can be seen in Zi Si and Mencius.”<sup>12</sup>

This view is expressed clearly by the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming. It is true that they pursued practical achievements: the younger Cheng brother, Cheng Yi, was extremely active in the political arena and leader of a political faction; Zhu Xi frequently discussed government and paid attention to current affairs; and Wang Yang-ming could boast many

impressive achievements. However, their theorizing was rooted solely in the doctrine of inner sageliness. Cheng Yi's political involvement had no obviously logical connection with his account of moralized 'heavenly patterning' (*tianli*). Indeed, Neo-Confucian texts such as the *Zhuzi Yulei*, *Jinsiju*, and Wang Shouren's *Chuanxilu*, all clearly show that the learning and service they promoted involved inner cultivation. Very little of it explored practical affairs and government. It is therefore no surprise that Cheng Yi once stated that, "the way of all learning is to rectify the heart-mind and nourish one's nature. In achieving such uprightness and sincerity, one is a sage."<sup>13</sup> Zhu Xi remarked,

What cultivated people (*junzi*) learn or do not learn, and whether their learning is appropriate or not, is a matter of the smallest margins. . . . Investigating things and attaining knowledge were the essence of Yao and Shun. Rectifying the heart-minds and making sincere the intentions accord with the control exercised by Yao and Shun. From antiquity, the sages have passed on their knowledge through generations, and this can be seen in those who put it into practice. This is all there is to it.<sup>14</sup>

Since the Cheng-Zhu "School of Principle" was like this, there is even less cause to discuss the "Heart-mind School" doctrine of Wang Yang-ming, in which the heart-mind governed and was the root of all things.

To summarize, the rectifying of the heart-mind and sincerity of intentions was the root and source of all outward or external achievements. To achieve this was the highest accomplishment; to lack it was to lose everything. This doctrine of inner sageliness became a quasi-religious form of personal cultivation and mode of experience, where the meaning of life lay in the pursuit of inner perfection and transcendence. With regard to the emperor and inner sageliness, there were cases such as Cheng Yi personally advising the young Song emperor Zhezong not to deviate from the orthodoxy, and to embody *tian* while loving humaneness. Regrettably, this was merely risible pedantry. With regard to practical government and social efficacy, the doctrine of inner sageliness increasingly became an empty doctrine, detached from practical affairs. After the idealist "School of Principle" branch of Neo-Confucianism became the orthodox school during the Ming and Qing eras, it became common, notes Qing thinker Yan Yuan, to: "In normal times do nothing except talk about the human condition, and when facing danger or death, merely pass on a report to the ruler."<sup>15</sup> This became the defining attitude of the *Lixue* Neo-Confucians. A loathing of social success, detachment from reality, lofty talk of nature and principle, and satisfaction with confinement to the world of spiritual cultivation meant that as soon as a difficulty arose (such as foreign aggression), their hands were tied. Lacking organized response, they could only offer the sacrifice of their lives as an evidence

of their constant efforts at cultivation. This was expressed well in Yan Yuan's mournful statement:

When I read the Record of the Martyrs of Jiashen and came to the lines "I am ashamed to lack even half a plan for the present distress, but I have this body to offer in return for my ruler's grace," I could not but weep. Then I read Yin Tun's 尹焯 (1071–1142) memorial address to Cheng Yi: "We can be said to have been faithful to our teacher but not of any benefit to the world." Thereupon, I put the book down and sighed mournfully. For a long time, I was sickened by the fate of people.<sup>16</sup>

Modern scholars investigating the bureaucratic government of China have also pointed out that, after the Song, moral demands overwhelmed everything else. There was little or no interest in administrative skill or political accomplishment. Instead, the standard for assessing and promoting a bureaucrat was his moral character, including exemplary loyalty, filial, modesty, and incorrigibility. As a result, the traditional bureaucratic system was increasingly isolated, inward-looking and decaying, and lost what little administrative efficacy it once had. This was a consequence of the ideology of the *Lixue* Confucian tradition.<sup>17</sup> That this happened was not a matter of chance, just as *Lixue* Confucianism's elevation of the ideal of 'sageliness within' was not an accident.

As I have repeatedly mentioned, from the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn period, the tradition of clan government continued without interruption, with the collective fate of a group often decided by the personal qualities of a clan's leaders. Under such conditions, the moral was inseparable from the political. This was the secret history of early Confucianism and the Confucian and Mencian way. However, from the Han and Tang dynasties to the early part of the Northern Song, whether it was the imperial order based on Dong Zhongshu's cosmological system, or the Tang dynasty's official creed blending Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, all upheld a close connection between personal integrity and administrative standards, morality and rulership. In truth, these were never truly unified, but nor was that necessary. The Han dynasty featured many heroic yet harsh officials who could boast of great achievements but who did not meet the ideal standard of inner sageliness. In the Tang era, there were great and famous ministers who ensured a strong country, either through financial strength or treachery. Even in the middle and late Tang there were figures such as Li Bi 李泌 (722–789), Liu Yan 刘晏 (d. 780), and Yang Yan 杨炎 (727–781), who were all famed for their achievements. Their success did not reside in personal cultivation, nor did they hold to a doctrine of inner sageliness. For this reason, later Neo-Confucians viewed them as heterodox or arbitrary, and criticized figures

such as Li Bi. By the Song dynasty, however, it is clear that there had been a significant change. Zhu Xi notes,

Our nation's forefathers in the early Song Dynasty revered ritual propriety and rightness, respected the classics and the arts, and wished to return to the time of the Two Emperors and Three Dynasties, valuing these above the men of letters from the Tang Dynasty. This was not clearly articulated, however. But with the Cheng Brothers this thinking was made explicit.<sup>18</sup>

However, in reality, not only did Zhu Xi's era lack the great achievements of the Tang dynasty, but the kind of ministers like those famous during the Tang were few and far between. Fan Zhongyan flourished briefly, but Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–86) was not successful. In the Ming dynasty there was Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–82), but he was labeled a Legalist by the Confucians, and there was seemingly no one of repute during the Qing dynasty.

This was also a result of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism's above mentioned "revere ritual propriety and rightness, respect the classics and the arts, and wish to return to the time of the Two Emperors and Three Dynasties," which involved the use of inner sageliness to regulate outward kingliness, and relying on the rectification of the mind and sincerity in intentions to govern the state and bring peace. But why was Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism like this? One fundamental reason that, starting in the Northern Song period, power in China coalesced in the hands of autocratic rulers to an unprecedented degree, and there was no further power that could control it. The capacity of regional power to restrain central authority, present during the Tang period, was gone. Meanwhile, in the world of thought, Dong Zhongshu's doctrine that the cosmos and humanity stood in a mutually responsive relationship (*tianren ganying*) had long been forgotten.

The continuing hegemony of the all-powerful bureaucracy and the supremely authoritative emperor became a significant problem. Wang Anshi attempted to deal with domestic and foreign troubles by advocating reform but failed, and as the imperial throne was passed on, it was accompanied by continuous changes in government policy (struggles between reformists and reactionaries continued through several eras). After these, a more considered approach to government finally emerged, known as 'rectifying the heart-mind of the ruler' (正君心). This gradually became the ruling ideology in the later years of the Southern Song and through the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. This was not surprising, given that there was no notion of a personal God or common faith to limit the power of the earthly ruler. In the absence of alternatives, the classical Confucian doctrine of 'Rectify the heart-mind, make sincere the intentions, cultivate the self, order the household' was elevated to a position

of unprecedented influence. The social order of traditional society and its bureaucratic system was thereby strengthened. On the one hand, the demand to investigate flaws in the ruler's mindset, and to rectify them and, thereby ordering the royal court, was a means to restricting the ruler's power, and was taken as the foundations of the *dao* of government; at the same time, 'understand the cosmic patterning, extinguish human desires' (*Ming tianli mie renyu* 明天理灭人欲) was a way to guide the common people, and secure deference to the government.

Song-Ming Confucianism absorbed Buddhist teachings that flourished during the Tang era, making religion once again the social code governing everyday life and human relationships. In addition, Song-Ming Confucianism also gave that social code and human relationships a sacred quality as a result of its quasi-religious ontology, and established a distinctive Chinese system of rulership in which politics and religion were integrated. The original political content of the early Confucian doctrine of 'kingliness without' was aimed at concrete ends, such as saving the people from flooding or from thirst and hunger. However, it also bestowed a quasi-religious quality upon the idea of 'sageliness within,' which involved treating people with the upmost care, informing them of how to follow the way and how to become sages. Since all outward kingliness was for the sake of inner sageliness, the former became of secondary importance. This was a reaction against the Buddhist idea of saving souls from torment, but rather than pointing to another realm it was grounded in this world.

Song-Ming Confucianism thus came to serve a quasi-religious function, and might be described as a kind of moral theology. If we say that, in early Confucianism, the root of morality was the political then, in Song-Ming Confucianism, politics followed morality. It was a morality with a religious quality that transcended morality and everything including the authority of the ruler was, in theory, subservient to it. As a result, debates about the nature of the human mind were of greater importance than plans for governing the empire. Sages and men of virtue enjoyed higher status than meritorious deeds in the everyday world. The extent of the influence of this approach was such that even the selection of civil servants was based not on political accomplishment but on personal morality. Sham morality and fake interest in studying the Confucian way were rife, while social institutions, cloaked in such extreme hypocrisy, fell into decay. Such were the results of the Song-Ming Confucians demand for "sageliness within."<sup>19</sup>

As there is an orthodoxy so there must be a reaction. As Song Confucianism first started to gain popularity, so there was a counter intellectual current that opposed it and promoted efficiency. This was the famous school of Chen Liang 陳亮 (1143–94) and Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223).

Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181) and Lu Jiuyuan—these four gentlemen all discussed human nature and fate and avoided talk of efficiency. Each upheld the doctrines of his

teacher, and would not cede ground. Chen Liang rose to prominence alongside them and he alone did not follow along. Chen suggested that the talk of nature and fate was lofty and remote; Zi Gong never inquired into them and Confucius rarely spoke of them. He did not discuss it with his followers and remained uninterested.<sup>20</sup>

Chen Liang's teachings are things that people of today do not discuss. Master Zhu did not agree with Chen Liang, but could not dissuade him.<sup>21</sup>

Intellectual historians have already launched many discussions about the disputes between Zhu Xi and Chen. Here I will focus on only one issue and treat it as indicative of the whole situation.

Zhu Xi wrote,

Investigating the difference between cosmic principle and human desire . . . if this is clearly understood, then it naturally follows that one would descend into the common world to seek benefit and to make plans. However, nowadays, people do not even know how to look after one's mind and body, and yet speak about the way of being a king, treating the affairs of the world as matters of technique and worthy of much discussion. Is this not a mistake?<sup>22</sup>

I hope you are willing to consider my ideas, and discard your ideas of treating rightness and benefit as equals, and the appeal to both kings and hegemonies, and instead act to contain agitation and limit desire, and move towards the good while correcting mistakes—this will be a pure form of Confucianism, one of self-regulation.<sup>23</sup>

Chen replied,

Once these doctrines of *dao*, efficacy, human nature and fate became popular, scholars became reluctant to talk about literature and good conduct, and they spoke of exerting themselves to understand human nature. Those with an official position, were reluctant to speak about government and issue legal verdicts, and they spoke of studying the way and caring for people. They mutually deceived and bullied each other, destroying all possible benefit to the empire, such that all duties were neglected.<sup>24</sup>

Confucian scholars of today believe that those who would study to rectify their minds and make sincere their intentions all end up insensitive and blind to the sufferings of others. They overlook the hatred of the ruler, and simply bow their heads, cup their hands and discuss human nature and fate. Do they not know what are human nature and fate?<sup>25</sup>

The difference between the two is obvious and there is no need for elaboration. In Zhu Xi's view, the successful 'Three dynasties' did not focus on practical benefit and so, from the Qin and Han eras onwards,



there were problems. This was convenient for Zhu Xi's view, since the contrast might also be explained by the differences between earlier traditional clan society (i.e., the Three dynasties period) and later class-based society. Regardless, following his analysis, Zhu Xi sought to transform politics into morality, transforming administration, penal codes and judicial matters into issues of personal cultivation, and thereby returning to the Three dynasties model. However, from the point of view of history, this was to get things backwards, and was also impractical. Thus, although the philosophy of the *Lixue* Confucians was ingenious, it failed to accord with reality. Later on, opponent of the Cheng-Zhu School, Li Zhi, once wryly remarked:

I believe that he (Zhu Xi) must have some ulterior motive or hidden plan, which can somehow reverse the fortunes of the Song Dynasty, delivering it from humiliation, saving it from danger and transforming its weakness into strength. This is apparently a time to act boldly on just a little learning. However, I have heard of no great plan, and talk to insiders suggests that only the state of one's inner nature matters—is this so urgent in the current climate? Similarly, the authentic sagely doctrine of rectifying the heart-mind and making intentions sincere was only intended as a means of inner self-cultivation, and paid no need to great matters of national security and the barbarians. So why say that 'rectify the heart-mind and make intentions sincere' are important?<sup>26</sup>

Li Zhi's ironic tone may be overdone but, in general, both Zhu Xi and most dyed-in-the-wool Confucians of later generations also stuck to this template: they talked with vigor about human nature and the heart-mind, with the upmost insight, but when practical governance was introduced, discussion became extremely superficial.

Ye Shi and Chen Liang simultaneously and vigorously opposed Cheng-Zhu Confucianism:

The people of old were wise in speaking first and acting later, and in this way built up their virtue. But in recent times there is the doctrine of attaining the right frame of mind and developing one's nature, while the importance of what one sees and hears is diminished, restricted and lacking in fullness. This is a blight on virtue.<sup>27</sup>

Those who follow the way today, all proceed from the inner and use it to govern the external, but there is often discontinuity.<sup>28</sup>

Ye Shi was also disapproving of the Orthodox tradition prized by the *Lixue* advocates, which they traced back to Zengzi, Zisi and Mencius. For example, for Zhu Xi and the *Lixue* school, Zengzi represented the orthodox transmission of Confucius' teachings. As Zhu Xi wrote in his

preface to the *Doctrine of the Mean*, “Only the teachings of Yan Hui and Zengzi upheld the orthodox teachings of Confucius.”<sup>29</sup> But according to Ye Shi, “The teachings of Zengzi treated the body as the root . . . abandoning or distorting the great way, and this cannot be described as upholding Confucius’ aims”;<sup>30</sup> “In speaking of what Confucius transmitted to Zengzi, and what Zengzi transmitted to Zisi, there must surely be errors”;<sup>31</sup> “Zengzi’s learning was not equal to that of Zi Gong”;<sup>32</sup> “In general, following Zi Gong leads to basic insight, but following Zengzi leads to great confusion.”<sup>33</sup>

Later scholars talked only of the different interpretations of the *Analects*’ “One Thread” passage (4.15), but Ye Shi was clearly inclined to emphasize public benefit and oppose Zengzi’s line of pure inward reflection.<sup>34</sup> In the orthodox Confucian tradition, everyday life ought to involve being constantly mindful of personal cultivation. A popular story that captured this stance was that of Confucian scholar Cheng Mingdao, who saw a tree and thought of building a bridge, and immediately felt guilty for thinking in such an expedient manner.

However, for Chen or Ye it was precisely the opposite. The Six Classics should be considered in terms of their practical effect and usefulness. Chen argued that if the sage emperor Yu had no accomplishments, then he could not have established the grounds of human prosperity, and if the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* were not useful, then they could not have given rise to the virtues. Similarly, Ye argued that if talk of rightness brought no benefit, then it was useless and empty talk. Clearly, ‘sage-liness within’ and ‘kingliness without’ gave rise to two schools, those of the *Lixue* Confucians, including the Cheng-Zhu school, and that of Chen and Ye, and these tended to be mutually opposed. The former featured lofty philosophy but added little to the affairs of the world, and gave rise to a quasi-religious practice of personal cultivation. At most, it made possible ‘setting oneself in the world and fixing one’s destiny’ (*anshen liming* 安身立命), but rarely could it bring order to the empire. The second approach, however, took such material benefit as key. Chen Liang declared that he would like to “combine all the metals to forge a great vessel, which will declare that the Heavens and Earth will never change and that humanity will reproduce and grow without cessation.”<sup>35</sup> In terms of developing a philosophy, however, he never achieved this, and his work lacked a deep theoretical grounding. It was only able to unwittingly continue the empirical tradition that traced back to Xunzi, which reshaped public conduct and dispelled blind superstition. There was, however, no advance in philosophical theory. Chen continued to talk of ‘heavenly patterning and human desire’ and Ye discussed the Song *Lixue* Confucian idea of ‘The heart-mind of the *dao* is the heart mind of the people’ (*renxin daoxin* 人心道心). They were not able to escape from the grip of orthodox *Lixue* Confucian philosophy; all that they could do was deny that discourse about the human heart-mind was the root of

Confucian learning. Although they were not *Lixue* Confucians, they were still Confucian.

### Government by Character Versus Government by Law

As noted earlier, the thinkers of the School of Principle Confucians regarded Yan Hui, Zengzi and Mencius as the orthodox view, while figures such as Zi Gong, Zi Lu, and Xunzi remained outside this lineage. Their criterion for such a distinction was the presence of the ideal of ‘sageliness within’ or whether or not this was viewed as the root of Confucian thought. If a person deviated even slightly from this standard then, even if his achievements were substantial, he would be criticized for being a follower of Shen Buhai, Han Fei or, generally, a Legalist. In this regard, according to Zhu Xi’s theory, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) was an obvious exception. Although Zhu admired Zhuge Liang and praised him lavishly, he believed, “Although Zhuge Liang’s natural talent was wonderful and his temperament admirable, his doctrines were impure”; “Riven with coarseness . . . his masters were Shen Buhai and Han Fei.”<sup>36</sup> Such was the obtuse and detailed moral metaphysics of ‘School of Principle’ Confucianism. Zhuge Liang’s era lacked philosophical discourse on the nature of the heart-mind. Most of the intact works from the late Han, by thinkers such as Zhong Changtong 仲長統 (180–220) or Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–217), discussed practical affairs. So, to claim that Zhuge Liang emerged from the Shen-Han school is not too far off the mark. However, later *Lixue* advocates often immediately denounced as Legalist any Confucian who showed an interest in leaving their mark on the world through great achievements. At the very least, they were labeled as heretics, which was hardly fair. For example, before Wang Anshi served in government, there was no dispute with him and his reputation was excellent. However, as soon as he embarked on political reform—although he followed Mencius, valued Zhou ritual practices, and issued the “New Commentary on the Three Classics” (*Sanjing Xinyi* 三經新義)—he too was labeled a ‘Legalist’ in later generations. Others, including Liu Zongyuan and Zhang Juzheng, suffered the same fate. Thus, Confucian orthodoxy was limited to Yan Hui, Zengzi, Mencius, the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, Lu Xiangshan, and Wang Yangming—those who did not discuss this-worldly achievements but remained ‘pure Confucians.’

As a result, a troubling tendency emerged. The integrity of ‘sageliness within’ could only be upheld by those Confucian scholars who were out of office; if relied upon in the service of policy or administration, then flaws would emerge in it. Even today, some scholars maintain that *Lixue* Confucianism was, in essence, flawless but that when it was applied in the political arena it was corrupted. One might say that the canonical scripture was right, but the faithful were reading it wrongly; the teachings of the Cheng-Zhu-Lu-Wang schools were fine, but the mediocre

Confucian scribes at court somehow corrupted them when putting them into practice. According to this view, the various misdeeds were not to be blamed on these Neo-Confucians, but on the feudal court or its vulgar Confucian servants.

There was some truth to this view, as it was normal for there to be a great disparity between pure theory and the resulting policies supposedly based on that theory. But is it really possible to claim that the practice and the theory were really so different? *Lixue* Confucianism was forcefully promoted over several hundred years throughout the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, so it is really possible to claim that the theory and its practical effects are two distinct things? As previously described, after the revival of Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism, there was a tendency toward vacuous discussions of nature (*xing*) and patterning or principle (*li*), which not only swelled the numbers of scholars but also influenced politics as a whole. In response, and mirroring how people had earlier criticized the empty doctrines of the Wei and Jin periods, many argued that the mistakes of He An and Wang Gong were comparable to those of the evil emperors of antiquity, Jie and Zhou. After the collapse of the Ming dynasty, many orthodox Confucians, scholars from Gu Yanwu to Yan Yuan, bitterly opposed this empty talk about the nature of the heart-mind. Some cursed the Wang school, others criticized the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. This was no small matter. Gu Yanwu wrote:

Confucius said little about nature (*xing*), fate (*ming*) or the divine (*tian*), but the gentlemen of today speak frequently of them. But Confucius and Mencius frequently spoke about taking or leaving office, accepting or declining official responsibility, and the question of striving for and accepting positions, while the gentlemen of today say little about these.<sup>37</sup>

Xie Liangzuo [the Cheng brothers' student] . . . states that only Zengzi's teaching focused on the inward dimensions of the heart-mind and thus was transmitted without flaw. Now, that the heart-mind should possess the myriad patterns or principles and form the basis for response to all things, that the heart-mind should be rectified, and desires rectified in order to then rule the state and bring peace to the empire—as for this, the early Confucians had no dedicated doctrine regarded the inner heart-mind.<sup>38</sup>

Who knew that today critical philosophical debates would surpass those of earlier eras? In the past, philosophical debate was directed towards the Daoists, but today it is about Confucius and Mencius. They have not attained the essence [of these earlier doctrines], and merely inherit the coarse details, and do not investigate the root but merely speak of its branches. They do not discuss the culture of the six arts nor investigate the doctrines of the ancient kings and do find purpose in contemporary affairs. For example, they do not inquire

into all that Confucius said about ethics and politics, and speak of one continuous thread while claiming there is nothing more to be said. They replace practical study of personal cultivation and rulership with empty talk about understanding the heart-mind and seeing into human nature. Their peers are indolent and affairs are in disarray, their underlings are dissolute and the four corners of the empire in chaos. The ancestral homeland is imperiled, and the ancestral temples derelict.<sup>39</sup>

Is this not the same tone, reasoning, and recommendation that we saw 500 years earlier with Chen Liang and Ye Shi? Except that Gu Yanwu's judgment had the benefits of the lessons from yet another painful dynastic collapse. Consequently, this critical outlook became a powerful influence on thinking during that era. This outlook was grounded in history and informed the modern era, and was thus a hugely important element of the Chinese mindset and culture.<sup>40</sup>

Gu Yanwu championed experiential learning, respect for clan lineage and knowledge of imperial records, and took the ruling and pacifying of the empire as a matter of personal responsibility. His conviction that "Whether the empire flounders or flourishes is the responsibility of every man," and his many targeted campaigns and written works, appear as great examples of the Confucian teaching of 'kingliness without.' Gu was a paradigmatic follower of Confucius and Mencius and a giant of Confucian learning. What he championed was a line of Confucian thinking that runs from Xunzi and Dong Zhongshu through Wang Tong 王通 (584–617), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and through Chen Liang and Ye Shi.

Gu's work shows that it is not historically accurate to simply regard the Confucius-Mencius-Cheng-Zhu or Confucius-Mencius-Lu-Wang lineage as the main stream or 'orthodox tradition' of Confucianism. What Cheng-Zhu-Lu-Wang developed and represented was only one side of Confucian thought. The vital force of Confucianism did not reside solely in its highly self-conscious moral reasoning; another dimension was its outwardly directed character, which faced up to reality and reformed the world around. This was the dimension represented by Xunzi's illustrious proposition, "control the propensities of nature and make use of them" (*zhi tianming er yongzhi* 制天命而用之).<sup>41</sup> It absorbed the empiricism and expediency of the Mohists, Legalists, and Yin-Yang school into the Confucian system, and placed great weight on practical accomplishment. As already noted, even figures such as Zhu Xi could not completely deny this approach. After all, Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism was not Buddhism or a religion and did not reject the value of human life; it had to offer some account of governing the state and pacifying the empire. It was just that they gave only the slightest weight to this concern. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, if Confucianism was nothing more than Zisi and

Mencius, then perhaps long ago it would have become religious superstition inclined to mysticism. Moreover, it would not have shaped Chinese consciousness from the Han dynasty onwards.

Similarly, if this notion of 'kingliness without' had not persisted to some degree after the Han era, constraining the excesses of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism's ideal of 'sageliness within,' then the modern and even contemporary determination to revive the nation would not have emerged. Neo-Confucianism achieved great success in developing a pure philosophical system and cultivating moral self-consciousness; however, with regard to practical social progress and the reform of the political system, it functioned either conservatively or, at worse, was reactionary. The pernicious influence of transforming the political into a morality that emphasized ethical principles is clear even today, even if it appears in new guises.

As mentioned earlier, it is significant that Neo-Confucianism regarded itself as constituting an orthodox position and treated other views as heterodox. Confucians who either sought worldly effectiveness outside of their philosophical framework or who simply opposed Neo-Confucian views were often branded as Legalists. In fact, however, historical reality suggests that Legalist thought was being continuously and incrementally absorbed by the Confucians from the pre-Qin and Western Han periods onwards. A truly independent Legalist school had long since ceased to exist, and Legalist ideas such as an unambiguous system of rewards and punishments, a concern with benefit or use, and an emphasis on military matters, had already become elements of Confucianism. Consequently, from the Song period onwards, what those thinkers and politicians who valued practical benefit and championed reform—the so-called Legalists—were dealing with were not so much 'Legalist' ideas as the new historical issue of moving toward modernity.

This historical issue was expressed in the demand that a modern enlightenment movement should constrain the power of the ruler, and even in the democratic idea that a monarchy could be abolished. This was most evident in thinkers appearing around the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasties, such as Huang Zongxi and Tang Zhen 唐甄 (1630–1704). In terms of theory, this meant a demand to separate a morality based on the will (and ethical motivation) from a morality based on obligation (and practical outcomes), to separate value judgments from factual judgments. Accordingly, economics, politics, and sociology separated from religion and ethics and became independent, and even became matters of science. Social phenomena and human relations were no longer matter of religious faith or a morality of good and evil; they were now sustained and managed as practical questions of benefit and loss and of relevance and effect in everyday life. This accorded with the contemporary demand in China to separate politics (as political administration) from education (in the social code of ordered hierarchical relationships). Huang Zongxi

should be seen as a pivotal figure in the history of Chinese thought who embodied this demand. His late Qing text, *Waiting for the Dawn* (*Mingyi Daifang Lu*), was distributed in secret by Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong, and others. At the same time, however, it was suppressed by Zhang Binglin. Both responses were indicative of the times. Huang Zongxi, in the style of the Chinese intellectual tradition and in response to specific historical circumstances, insightfully expressed modern democratic ideas. These were not ideas imported directly from the West, but were Confucian ideas developed under the banner of governance during the Three Great dynasties of antiquity. Although, Huang himself was a Neo-Confucian loyal to the Wang Yangming school, he nevertheless put forth a new way of thinking.

That the ruler's power might be excessive and require restraint was an important topic from the Song dynasty onward. Song-Ming Confucianism hoped that the motivations and desires of the ruler could be restrained and controlled from within. During the late Ming and early Qing periods, however, popular thought moved toward seeking external constraints. This included Gu Yanwu's idea of using regional power to restrict the center. In contrast to Gu, Huang's great insight was to directly address the question theoretically and put forward carefully thought-out proposals.

Huang proposed that the ruler should be in the hands of the people. This was also an idea of the early Confucians but Huang offered a contemporary articulation. He believed that the ruler-minister relationship was different to the father-son relationship. The later was a blood tie, while the former bond was based on common cause. The father-son involved a natural order of senior and junior, but the ruler-minister relationship did not. Huang wrote of how governing the empire was like hauling a log, a common task undertaken by both ruler and minister.<sup>42</sup> The responsibility of the minister was thus to the empire and not to the ruler; it was to the people and not to a single family. Whether the empire was well-ordered or in chaos did not depend on the success or failure of a single family, but on the fears and joys of myriad people.<sup>43</sup> Overseeing the emperor became the greatest responsibility.<sup>44</sup> This was different from the Song-Ming *Lixue* position, which viewed the hierarchical order of ruler-minister and father-son as identical, but it also departed from original Confucian doctrine, which regarded consanguineal clan ties as the foundations of the nation, and which were expanded from father and son to include ruler and minister (as captured by the *Analects* 17.9: "close at hand serving your father, away at court serving your lord"). Huang bitterly criticized the fact that rulers after the Zhou dynasty would treat the empire as their own families' affairs, and that the ordinances issued were the laws of one family rather than those of an empire. Huang thus advocated far-reaching reform and the establishment of a genuine legal system. He wrote that, "Debaters say there is a ruler but no system for

ruling, but I say there should be a system for ruling and only then a ruler.<sup>45</sup> This was a great breakthrough intellectually, since it reversed the traditional view, held from the time of the classical Confucian sages through to the Song-Ming Confucians, that there was a ruler but no legal system for ruling. Huang returned to the ancient standard—that during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties there had been a system for rulership.

What was the system of law that Huang wished to establish? Two very important items therein were establishing a prime minister (*zhixiang* 置相) and a political assembly (*xuexiao* 學校). The former had responsibilities similar to the head of a cabinet in modern times. Huang noted that the original idea of a ruler was one who governed the empire, but that the empire cannot be governed by just a single person; it must be governed by dispatching officials, who shared in the authority of the ruler.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the emperor did not occupy a lofty and distant position; instead, the relation of the emperor to the high officials was comparable to the relation between high officials and ministers, and all were on a similar level. As a result, the idea of a ‘prime minister’ was simply that of a person who took general responsibility for political affairs. According to Huang, in the past, transmission of power was not through heirs but through those of virtue. The position of the emperor was viewed in a manner similar to the retention of officials and ministers. Later, the authority of the emperor was passed on through heirs but that of the prime minister was not. The heirs of the emperor were not all virtuous, so emphasizing that the position of prime minister should be passed on to the virtuous so as to be sufficient to make up for any deficiencies. In this way, the institutions of the emperor could transmit virtue to subsequent generations.<sup>47</sup> Capable and virtuous prime ministers could regulate emperors who inherited power but were not virtuous. Emperors could not monopolize power and create an authoritarian system.

Huang’s idea of a political forum or *xuexiao*—the term ‘*xuexiao*’ means school in modern Chinese—was similar to a modern political assembly. Huang claimed that it was necessary that all the talented men in the empire must be part of a political assembly and this is the reason for establishing them:

What the emperor deems right or wrong is not necessarily so; eventually, the emperor will no longer dare to unilaterally declare things rights or wrong, and this will be done publicly through the assembly.<sup>48</sup>

During the Eastern Han, there were thousands of people at the Imperial Academy; they spoke frankly and discussed things deeply, remaining unperturbed by great power and, as a result, officials and ministers sought to avoid rebuke. Imperial Scholars in the Song Dynasty would directly submit their complaints to the emperor, boldly alerting him of problems; they appealed to emperor to restore the general Li Gang to his original position after wrongful dismissal.



The customs of the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties have been handed down, such things as these are most similar to the present plan.<sup>49</sup>

At the Imperial Academy a prominent Confucian scholar was selected to oversee rituals, in an office similar in importance to that of a prime minister. The emperor came to visit the Imperial Academy, accompanied by the prime minister and the six ministers. When this man of high office spoke the emperor and his followers all lined up to listen. If there was a problem with governance then this highest office would speak out, with impunity.<sup>50</sup>

Is this similar to the modern idea of democracy? In fact, such democratic thinking that can be traced back to the clan traditions of early Confucianism, but is here expressed as a response to the practical demands of the day. Gu Yanwu once praised Huang Zongxi's *Waiting for the Dawn*, writing, "The problems of the ancient kings could yet re-emerge, and the glories of the Three Dynasties also could gradually be restored."<sup>51</sup> Gu himself once believed, "If there order in the empire, then the common people will not dissent; but if politics and educations are not perfect, then the people should dissent."<sup>52</sup> A text from the same era, Tang Zhen's (1630–1704) *Qian Shu* 潛書 [Book that Awaits Discovery] more strongly denounced the rulers. Though not as sophisticated as Huang's account, the direction of thought was the same.

Thus, this way of thinking, typified by Huang, could be understood as offering a modernized notion of Legalism. Unlike the Confucian tradition, they clearly advocated the principle of having a system of government first and then finding a ruler. They began to craft an entire system of thought, from a theory of the ruler-minister relation to the system itself. This was clearly not a case of simply propagating worn-out Confucian clichés about government, but was a new voice responding to the needs of the times:

Viewed from the standpoint of today, this talk looks both common and superficial, but 267 years ago, it was a brave and ground-breaking approach. . . . In the era of Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, championing the people's rights and common interests, involves copying those texts, printing multiple copies and secretly distributing them, so that thinking in the late Qing era with be transformed and energized.<sup>53</sup>

It was no surprise that Huang Zongxi inspired the modern pro-democracy movement that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.

Huang responded to the excesses of the ruler's power. Due to the foolish conduct of the emperor and the threat to the empire, Huang had abandoned the ideals of rectifying the mind and examining the heart for failings, as demanded by the Neo-Confucians, and hoped to find security in the establishment of a more practical system. This might be glossed

as a case of a follower of the ideal of inner sageliness repurposing those ideas to dealing with new demands; however, it was precisely the earlier tradition of valuing practical achievement that led thinkers like Huang to emerge from Neo-Confucianism. From the middle of the Ming era onwards, both the Zhu and Wang schools showed a tendency to move toward the practical world and practical teachings.

A mood that paralleled interest in scientific verification had emerged. Aside from the developing logic of the school itself, there was a prosperous capital city, diversification in the professions, the appearance of new scientific theories (featuring works by Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 [1562–1633], Li Shizhen 李時珍 [1518–93], Song Yingxing 宋應星 [1587–1666], Fang Yizhi, and others), and a romantic movement in literature. All of these pointed to great change in social structure, and the atmosphere and thinking of the time, and possibly explain the internal developments within the School of Principle. In addition to Huang Zongxi, other thinkers held this view that commercial activity was as important as agricultural, and the favoring of agriculture over commerce that had endured since the Han dynasty was called into question.

From this it can be seen that the questions of government by system versus government by character, outward kingliness and inner sageliness, practical social concern versus inner cultivation, and whether politics and ethics were separate or unified, were of great importance to the era. They marked a dividing line between the ancient and the modern eras. This is, I believe, the real significance of these two contrasting lines of thought that appeared during the transition from the Ming to the Qing eras.

As the chapter on Neo-Confucianism noted, the contribution of Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism was the creation of a self-aware individualized moral subject. As Theodore DeBary notes, this was ‘Neo-Confucianism’s ethical individualism.’<sup>54</sup> Cheng Yi’s poem “To be rich and honored but not wanton, to be poor and lowly but reside in joy, a man who achieve this is great indeed” sums up the heroism that attached to Song-Ming Confucianism. Many Neo-Confucians adopting these ideas of morality as a faith, and were remained unbowed in the face of worldly trials and threats. Figures such as Wang Yangming and Liu Zongzhou amply displayed the glory of this kind of ethical personality. However, the majority were not like that and were treated with disdain for their sham study of the way. For those authentic followers of the way, their individual morality offered an example to the ethics of later generations, but they made no other important contributions to later ages. Their philosophy focusing on the heart-mind and human nature was detached from practical affairs and made no contribution to the people’s welfare. During the late Qing period, when the rulers began to prompt Western learning, Neo-Confucians such as Wo Ren 倭仁 (1804–1871, the teacher of Qing official Zeng Guofan) resisted strongly, with frequent mentions of the way of Confucius and Mencius. Famed Qing statesman Gao Yixin 高訢 (1833–1898), better

known as Prince Kung, was forced to acknowledge that while Wo Ren had a formidable reputation as a scholar of Neo-Confucianism, he made no contribution to worldly reality.<sup>55</sup> Focusing only on the cultivation of an ethical nature, based only on the School of Mind and the School of Principle, and unable to strengthen the nation or deal with the Western powers—even the members of a corrupt ruling class were aware of such failings.

Since China had not passed through the historical phases of capitalism, the progressive thought that arose from the middle of the Ming dynasty onwards lacked a stable social base. As a result, the brief ray of hope provided by modern political thinkers such as Huang Zongxi was quickly submerged in a tide of faux classicism that arose during the Qing era. Even during the revolutionary period and the interest in democracy, brave thinkers such as Zhang Binglin still met with censure and contempt. Under pressure from imperial government and the class of small-scale agricultural producers, the development of modern democratic thought faced challenges. The history of modern Chinese thought continually reaffirmed this.

I therefore disagree with the assessment of some foreign scholars that there was an individualistic liberal tradition among Chinese intellectuals, and which can be traced back Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, and which helped inspire and establish it.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the opposite is true. Neo-Confucianism was not enlightened but rather an opaque doctrine about quasi-religious morality. Accordingly, the supposed individualism and liberalism of Chinese intellectuals never separated from the quasi-religious ethical system of the traditional era, based on ordered social relationships. They were unable to secure the independence that would have come with economic liberalization and the division of labor, and so were left to jostle within a peculiarly Chinese social form that merged government and education, following the narrow path of study in order to attain official position. They were forced to depend upon the emperor and official bureaucracy for political authority, which led to a struggle for power and favor and mutual deception and attempts to out-manuever each other. In a tradition that idealized the heroic figures of ancient clan-based society, the highest ideals of Chinese intellectuals were to serve the emperor, to supplement authority and to be models to those in power. It was figures such as the Duke of Zhou and the famous minister Zhu Geliang, and not the ruler, who occupied the highest position in their minds. Aside from those who retreated from the world and occupied themselves with Zen or Daoism, or the most courageous who committed themselves to rural uprisings, there were few who in thought or deed challenged this ethical-political system, in which ruling and education were merged. Most were content to submit to the power of the court and the hierarchically ordered social roles and relationships, and thereby secure a position in government or social reward. Political patronage and being worldly wise

when dealing with human relationships were of the utmost importance, and the modern sense of the independence of the individual personality was consistently absent. This was the individual fate of the Chinese intellectual, and it was a tragedy, informed by history, of which they were all too aware. These intellectuals were unable to liberate themselves from traditional society.

As a result, the theoretical accomplishments of the Chinese literati were often limited to providing footnotes and new readings for the classics, or borrowing the names of the sages in order to put forward their own suggestions. Wang Anshi sought reform by publishing *A New Reading of Three Classics* (*Sanjing Xinyi* 三經新義), while Dai Zhen's attack on the Lixue tradition had to proceed via a text such as *A Study of Character Meaning in the Mencius* (*Mengzi iyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證). What is most noteworthy about this method of producing commentaries on the classics is that it was yet another example of how the arousing of consciousness about Chinese history was integral to the move toward modernity.

### The Study of the Classics and the Study of History

Minority groups held political power during the Qing dynasty, and implemented a series of economic, political, and cultural policies that were isolationist, reactionary, and benighted. As a result, the practical spirit of 'kingliness without' prevalent in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties was forced to take refuge in textual studies of the classics. Nevertheless, the 'Simple Learning' that became popular at the time of the Qing Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing, also gave rise to an interest in empiricism. This same interest was eventually mis-categorized by Hu Shi as a modern scientific method. This was a mistake. I believe that, unlike India, China has had a tradition of valuing history, and this is a distinctively Chinese 'scientific' mindset. It is related to the secular and experiential practical rationality of China. Every dynasty valued the production of historical records and the writing of history, which was a means to accumulating experience. This was also true of the Ming and Qing dynasties, when several great figures wrote many historical works. Ming scholar Huang Zongxi wrote an intellectual history of *Lixue* Confucianism during the Song, Yuan, and Ming eras. The *Siku tiyao* 四庫提要 (Summary of the Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature) describes Gu Yanwu as follows, "He investigated everything from beginning to end, sought corroboration, and then recorded everything in writing. The evidence provided was thus thorough and the conflicts minimal."<sup>57</sup> Phrases like 'Investigate everything from beginning to end' and 'penetrating to the source' convey the importance of observation and investigation that begin from history, an example of which is Gu's *Rizhilu* (*Record of Daily Reflections*). However, the person who made a genuine effort to raise

history to the level of philosophy or to use a philosophical system to discuss history was Wang Fuzhi.

Neither Gu Yanwu nor Huang Zongxi had their own philosophical system, but Wang did. He became the last great synthesizer of the Chinese tradition. On the one hand, he summarized Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism. Wang offered detailed and incisive discussions of the metaphysics of *li* and *qi* and the nature of the heart-mind. He also criticized the doctrines of Wang Yangming, reformulated Cheng-Zhu philosophy and developed the materialistic *qi* theory of Zhang Zai elevating it to the status of orthodoxy. At the same time, he upheld the long-standing Chinese tradition of being conscious of history, and articulated it as a philosophical system that would not change with the human will. These achievements meant that Wang Fuzhi's theoretical system secured the harmonious integration of sageliness within and kingliness without, something the Confucian tradition had long sought.

I mentioned how Wang Fuzhi emphasized that the *dao* was found in the things of the empirical world, and that the patterns and laws of the world resided in *qi* and that metaphysics was to be grounded in the concrete forms of the world:

To say that there is something beyond form is not to say that there is no form . . . though only the sage can act in response to this form. But this is acting from what is within form not what is beyond it [. . .] The way of the cultivated person is simply to make full use of the concrete things of this world.<sup>58</sup>

Without the practical things of this world there would be no way [. . .] In ancient times there was the way of not bowing and yielding to each other, while the way of Tang and Yu involved no warfare. The Han and the Tang dynasties did not have the same way as today, and the way of today is different from the way of other times in many ways [. . .] Thus, the ancient sages could only administer the things of this world, they could not administer the way. Governing the things of this world is what is meant by 'the way.'<sup>59</sup>

The way, as well as patterns, rules, order, and measures, all must have their ground in actual material objects, and no inquiry can depart from such concrete entities. This kind of approach starts from an investigation with the heart-mind and then turns to action in the external world, and was referred to as 'respecting virtuous nature' or 'daily studies of the way.' As explained earlier, it was a trend that appeared after Ming Zhongye and across the Cheng-Zhu schools. What was distinctive about Wang Fuzhi in this regard, however, was his decisive return to history as foundation. The ideas of 'sageliness within and kingliness without' and 'a ruler versus a system of governing' were both incorporated into Wang Fuzhi's understanding of history.

In his ideas Wang still remained part of orthodox *Lixue* Confucianism, and his politics conformed with the traditional landowner class. He was dismissive of the common people who were not familiar with ritual and etiquette, and Wang despised people like Li Zhi and stream of contemporary thought that sought to liberate individuals. However, in the course of criticizing the history of each Chinese dynasty, Wang identified an ethics, epistemology and a set of human motivations to good or evil that were independent of people, and which became objective norms. These norms did not apply merely to questions of profit or loss, good or bad, in one particular time and place but indicate necessary trends whose influence extended for a prolonged period. Wang believed that society was developing, but he also differed from Confucius' love of the so-called Three dynasties and their recommendations to return to the ancients. Furthermore, Wang emphasized that 'patterning' (*li*) and 'cosmos' (*tian*) should be approached through the idea of 'propensity' (*ming*) or 'force of circumstance' (*shi* 勢). This understanding of cosmos and patterning was extracted from the ethical gloss applied to 'heavenly patterning' (*tianli*) by traditional *Lixue* Confucians, and was closer to the modern idea of the existence of comprehensive objective laws of history. Wang wrote of how following along with the necessity implicit in the force of circumstance was the meaning of *li* (patterning) and that the naturalness of such patterning was the meaning of *tian* (cosmos). The cultivated person who accorded with patterning would be skilled at responding to the cosmos or world, since people could not maintain for long any struggle against it. Wang writes, "*Tian* is simply *li*. *Li* is simply the following along with the force of circumstances."<sup>60</sup>

Thus, moral right and wrong and inner motivation should no longer be treated as the measure of things; instead there existed a kind of unfathomable external objective law:

The first emperor of Qin made the empire into his private concern, removing the feudal lords and installing provincial rulers, and making his private interests central to public conduct. Appearing to belong to the spirits, whether his actions were for public or private benefit was beyond comprehension.<sup>61</sup>

Relying on short-time assessment of cost and benefit will bring harm to the empire. Looking from the past to the present, there are many things that are beneficial to broadening the way of the sages. *Tian* connects the past and the present in a pure and perfect way [. . .] If the time is not yet ripe, it is impossible to do something before its time. When the *qi* vital energy is manifested as motion, then there is no need to issue orders to the officials or to force the people. What is lost will be taken as a kind of gain, and wrong-doing will be taken as achievement, such things surely will be beyond reckoning.<sup>62</sup>

This differs from the views of Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86) and Zhu Xi. It can be considered an unprecedented theoretical achievement in Chinese historical consciousness and philosophical theorizing. This is because it started to reveal the great conflict between history and ethics. “Not issuing orders to ministers and imposing intolerable burden on the common people”<sup>63</sup> suggests that a short-term disaster could become a great achievement, and ‘evil’ and not ‘good’ provided the necessary motivation. The progress of history and achievements over several generations far surpassed people’s inner ethical concerns, such as their subjective desires, motivations, aims, conduct, and profit. Such historical progress constituted a kind of general objective law that surpassed and overcame everything subjective and personal, such as the ideal of sages and worthy ministers.

As result, when confronted by this historicism, the traditional ethics that had treated sages and worthy ministers as an ideal came to appear perverse, vacuous, and outmoded. On the theoretical level, this was a departure from the Confucian tradition that used ethical values to judge history. The ethical was no longer the most secure foundation of reality; only history could be the true ‘*dao*’ or order. The study of history, and the development of historical consciousness, thus become the norm, replacing the study of the classics and their moral teachings. This was clearly similar to Huang Zongxi’s political theory, which held that there are laws for ruling but no ruler, and which also made clear this gradual move away from the mainstream Confucian views of that era.

To summarize, Han Confucian ethics was part of a cosmology; society and politics, the historical system and the ethical order were all completely subsumed within this homeostatic cosmological system. Although there were alternative sources of morality, including morality that was determined by external factors such as the five phases, nevertheless ethics, history, politics, and society were mutually connected in a single comprehensive system. By the time of the Song dynasty, this cosmological order had collapsed and the various philosophical schools all had their own ideals and practical strategies for governing. However, these strategies were superficial and routine, and were unable to provide a meaningful theoretical alternative to the ethics that was derived from this cosmological perspective. The achievement of the Song thinkers was limited to the doctrine of the sagely inner nature: this connected cosmology with ethics and an abstract metaphysics of self-regulating morality. However, because this metaphysics lacked any deeper theoretical connection to ‘kingliness without,’ this individual pursuit of a certain inner nature tended to be little more than a transcendental quasi-religious path. This brought with it harmful social effects, and draw fierce criticism from intellectuals, from Chen and Ye to later thinkers like Gu Yanwu and Wang Fuzhi.

Despite this, neither Chen nor Ye, nor anyone else (including Wang Fuzhi) could establish a philosophical system that could supersede Song-Ming *Lixue*. Their accounts of ‘sageliness within’ could not match

the subtlety and depth of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, and they did not really offer philosophical conceptions of 'kingliness without.' Only Wang Fuzhi offered the beginnings of a philosophical account of history, based on the objective 'force of circumstance.' Wang also tried to bring together ethics and cosmology. However, he did not succeed in this regard, since he was unable to integrate ethics and cosmology with his conception of history. He started to become aware that history and ethics were not entirely consistent, but he never fully appreciated or explored this epic conflict. He still emphasized a moral metaphysics based on the distinction between heavenly order and human desire and between the cultivated person and the petty person. His conception of history remained trapped within the framework of traditional ethics. Although he was referred by overseas scholars as 'one of the least-Chinese like of Chinese thinkers,'<sup>64</sup> he was nevertheless unable, unlike Hegel, to bring ethics under the remit of history and allow the historical process to subsume everything. Since he lacked the background of Christianity, he could not produce a God-like conception of the Absolute, which ordered everything. He followed the Chinese tradition, and sought the integration of humanity and the cosmos. Since this integration could not happen under the five-phase cosmology of Dong Zhongshu, nor through the inward-directed "humaneness is the heart-mind of Heaven" ethics of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, it was necessary to return to the practical events of real history. However, Wang Fuzhi was clearly not capable of doing this. He was bound up in the ideas of heaven, patterning, time, and the force of circumstances, and was unable to find a new theoretical path. He could not escape from the theoretical framework of *Lixue*, and was even less able to transcend Confucian barriers. On the contrary, he consciously and explicitly defended and upheld them. At that time, China did not possess the basis for a modern society and, unlike the West, could not combine natural science with the development of society. The West slowly and resolutely extracted itself from the constraints of Medieval theology, and through Descartes (1596–1650) and Kant developed a remarkable modern philosophy. Wang Fuzhi could not escape the persistent traditional focus on ethics in Chinese philosophy; ultimately, he could not develop a new conception of 'heavenly order' (a moral metaphysics) that was founded on the force of circumstance (objective historical rules or trends). Achieving this, and realizing the ideal of a unity between humanity and heaven in the context of the real world and the long flow of history, was only possible with the founding of a modern industrialized society. Of course, this was not something that Wang Fuzhi could have envisioned. He took traditional Chinese philosophy as far as it could go.

There is less need to discuss those figures less influential than Wang, such as Yan Yuan or Dai Zhen (Yan Yuan was discussed in the earlier essay on Mozi). Yet they were significant for their attacks on Cheng-Zhu



and Lu-Wang Confucianism. Dai Zhen, although regarded as an important figure by textual scholars, declared that his greatest mission in life was a textual study of the Mencius, and that “Exhausting myself to investigate the six kinds of Chinese character and the nine forms of the *Book of Changes* is like mistaking the sedan carriers for the honored person inside the sedan chair.”<sup>65</sup> Although, for Dai, all textual scholarship was no more than being a sedan carrier, and he had to do it in order to survive, it did not imprison his thinking. His thought conveyed immense dissatisfaction with Song-Ming *Lixue*. This kind of righteous indignation became, from the middle of the Ming dynasty onward, the form of protest found in the vanguard of social thought. Along with other thinkers from roughly the same period, such as Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (ca. 1715–ca. 1763), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–98) and the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, this indignation was one of the brightest stars of the dark period during the eighteenth century, standing in contrast to *Lixue* Confucianism.

There are already many works discussing Dai Zhen and it is not necessary to reprise them here. I wish only to point out that Dai Zhen’s opposition to *Lixue* featured a muddling together of ethics and epistemology. *Lixue* was a theory of the nature of the human heart-mind based on a moral metaphysics. The reason why it sought to describe the patterning or ordering of *qi* energy, the nature of the heart-mind, the supreme polarity, and so forth, was because they were already rooted in traditional ethics. The cosmology and epistemology of *Lixue* were all mainly deployed in the service of a moral metaphysics. His discussions of how virtue was the product of learning (*Xueqi xin zhi* 血氣心知) did, in fact, provide an interpretation of Song-Ming *Lixue*’s ethics based on a theory of the heart-mind, by providing it with an epistemology foundation. Dai Zhen’s interpretation illustrated how innate moral virtue could only be realized through empirical learning and cultivation. In effect, this was an inversion of the Song-Ming *Lixue* promotion of the knowledge integral to virtue and their downplaying of the knowledge that comes from more practical learning. This led Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) to declare that Dai Zhen offered a continuation of Xunzi’s ‘human nature is flawed’ doctrine,<sup>66</sup> while contemporary historian Yu Yingshi believes that Dai promoted intellectualism.<sup>67</sup> However, Dai’s aim was to oppose asceticism and he stressed the naturalness and reasonableness of passion and desire. This led Feng Youlan to view Dai as prioritizing emotion.<sup>68</sup>

I believe Dai’s distinctive characteristic lies in how he manifests the transition during those centuries from ethics toward epistemology. The substance concerned ethics (opposition to *Lixue*’s asceticism), while the arguments focused on epistemology. In fact, his thought took the ideas of thinkers since the Ming era, such as Li Zhi, which emphasized emotion and desire, and placed them within a framework of philosophical epistemology. However, because Dai used epistemology to discuss ethics, he conflated the two and was unable to offer clear positions. Furthermore, he greatly reduced the

philosophical implications of the metaphysics that underpinned this ethics, and in terms of profundity he was the opposite of Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming—i.e., simplistic and crude. Western epistemology is usually developed through a mutual connection with natural science, and the recent revival of epistemology in China is similarly based on this. However, Dai's epistemology lacked a basis in natural science, and had no conscious connection with his textual studies. As a result, his epistemology was unable to yield scientifically valid results and was mainly significant as a reflection of the fierce opposition to the moral metaphysics of Song-Ming *Lixue*, and reflected the demand at the time for the prevailing modes of thought to move in the direction of modernity.

Within Chinese culture, the humanities are highly developed, and the historical evolution of such thinking generally manifested itself in the move from study of the classics to the study of history; a focus on historical consciousness replaced obscure discussions of abstract theories of the human heart-mind. Wang Fuzhi's conception of history was little known and remained obscure for a long time. However, both the New Texts school of interpretation—which found great meaning in subtle phrases, drawing allegorical connections to current affairs—and the Old Texts school interpretation—which included Zhang Xuecheng's 章學誠 (1738–1801) famous proposal to treat the Six Classics as history—used different methods to express the same trend. This was first captured by Gu Yanwu's suggestion that the study of the classics was the study of history. In new circumstances, both schools continued and developed the ancient tradition of a historical consciousness that runs through Chinese philosophy.

The new texts school of interpretation in late Qing, which was eventually represented by Kang Youwei, still held to the historical concept of 'three ages'—the descent into chaos in antiquity, the move toward stability, and the restoration of order. I have discussed this at length in my book *A History of Modern Chinese Thought* and so will not repeat myself here. Here I will make only a few brief remarks about this idea that the Six Classics (including the Book of Music) were all histories. As is well known, Wang Yangming and others had already put forward this idea, but it was Qing-era scholar Zhang Xuecheng who connected it with notions of practical efficacy, to critiques of *Lixue* Confucianism, and to the aforementioned 'kingliness without':

The study of the heavenly and the human, of nature and fate cannot be undertaken through empty words alone. [. . .] Confucian scholars seek esteem for virtuous character but regard empty arguments about righteousness and principle as a kind of success. This is why the Song *Lixue* Confucian doctrines were mocked. [. . .] In their studies of the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou, they recognized the histories but did not recognize them as classics, and so their studies

became detached from human affairs. Later scholars valued the study of the classics, precisely because they were the history of the three dynasties. Recent Confucians discuss the classics as if there was a realm of reasoning and principle that lies outside human affairs. The Eastern Zhejiang school hold that to speak of nature and fate it is necessary to study history, and this is what makes the school's doctrines distinctive.<sup>69</sup>

What makes the study of the histories part of practical human affairs is certainly not that they are filled with empty words. Rather, as with the Six Classics, their teachings can be traced to Confucius. The achievements of the early Confucians were clearest in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, because this fit well with the affairs of people at that time. Later works abandon the present and discuss the past, abandon human affairs and talk about Heaven and nature, and I cannot grasp their meaning. If scholars do not grasp the significance of the classics, then they cannot discuss the study of history.<sup>70</sup>

The meaning here is quite clear. The Six Classics are all history, and to study the classics is to study history. This idea stands in opposition to empty talk about human nature, principle and the study of 'sageliness within.' Dai Zhen opposed *Lixue* from the perspective of epistemology, while Zhang Xuecheng opposed it through the study of history. Zhang consciously upheld the ideas of Song thinkers Chen Liang and Ye Shi, and treated the Six Classics as classics because they were historical records of the ancient system of regulations and administrative affairs. Even the *Book of Changes*, which was revered by Song-Ming *Lixue* as a sacred text about cosmology and moral metaphysics, was interpreted as a classic about governance and developing law. It was "rooted in people's livelihoods and was useful to them," and "the sages did not produce a book focused on their inner thoughts and detached from practical affairs, claiming that this could illuminate the way."<sup>71</sup>

Accordingly, what the Six Classics and Confucius passed down to posterity was not understood as a doctrine about human nature and the heart-mind but was a record of concrete historical experience. Was this not an expression of the shift from a quasi-religious moral metaphysics to a modern practical historical consciousness? Wang Fuzhi, in philosophy, and Zhang Xuecheng, in history, both put forward this same proposal.

For Zhang, the authentic study of history was not merely a matter of recording facts, or of collecting and compiling data and comparing events; it involved seeking rules. Gu Yanwu remarked "Understanding the transitions between the past and the present is a matter of grasping the reasons therein," while Zhang put it even more succinctly,

The compiling, ordering and comparing are known as the writing of history; referencing, supplementing, searching and discussion are the

methods of historical textual study, but they are not the actual study of history.<sup>72</sup>

All writing should be thorough and penetrating, and commentaries written without bias are wise. Wisdom is matter of storing up the past, and penetrating it is a matter of knowledge. Commentaries should record the past so as not to forget, while one's own writing should inspire future generations.<sup>73</sup>

The recording of events is done for the sake of knowledge, and not merely for accumulating records or keeping accounts. The aim is to acquire law-like knowledge that permits predictions of the future, serves reality and is helpful in human affairs. For Zhang Xuecheng, historians take what is hazy or neglected and are able to unify it in their minds.<sup>74</sup> Scholars of history thus need an aptitude for making independent judgments.

Zhang's works *Studies in Literature and History* (*Wenshi Tongyi* 文史通義) and *On Bibliography Studies* (*Jiaochou Tongyi* 校讎通義) contain various errors, including some factual ones.<sup>75</sup> However, their value and influence were not diminished by this, and they are still appreciated by scholars at home and abroad. The work expresses a new spirit in Chinese society and culture—a move toward modernity—and adds historically grounded arguments to the ideas of practical statecraft and remaining close to people's livelihoods. It was Zhang's richly creative historical theorizing rather than his specific arguments, studies or materials, that earned him a prominent place in the history of thought. In this respect, Zhang represents the extending and boarding of the 'kingliness without' approach associated with figures such as Chen Liang, Ye Shi, Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi, and Wang Fuzhi.

It is the line of thought associated with these thinkers, and not Song-Ming *Lixue*, that most directly connects with developments in contemporary Chinese thought. From Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841) and Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) to Liang Qichao and Zhang Binglin, and many others, all were influenced by the idea of 'practical statecraft.' They stressed reality, history and experience, and advocated reform, transformation and revolution. Whether it was Gong's notion of respecting history, Wei's account of the teacher, Liang's 'new study of history' or Zhang's idea of the essence of a national culture, all can be seen as the continuation of the Chinese tradition under the particular circumstances of modernity. They vigorously pushed aside the obscure debates about the nature of the human heart-mind and confronted reality in order to provide assistance to the nation in time of danger. Tan Sitong expressed this point very clearly in a letter to fellow reformer Tang Caichang:

In the past, I took Wei Lu (Liu Renxi 劉人熙, 1844–1919) as my teacher, and threw myself into studying human nature and understanding the nature of the Heavens. At the time, I ridiculed the Yongjia School and the shallowness of these doctrines, and set them aside. Later, when

confronting the troubles of the age, I came to fully understand that such Confucian teachings could not be used to resist present day threats, and that such empty talk could not prevent disorder. At this point I started to have doubts about my teacher's instructions. Concerned about the country being imperiled and the people impoverished, the Confucian scholars of East Zhejiang rose to meet the challenges. They paid no attention to those near-sighted Confucian scholars, who expressed empty views about morality, human nature and fate that are of no use to people, and were instead determined to promote a practicality that benefited all. I believe that this will protect us from the barbarians in the North, while also ending incompetent government. If one wants to implement the way, then doesn't the earlier approach during the Song dynasty, of appeasement for the sake of security, appear toothless? Looking at the situation today, if political reform is not forthcoming then we will surely follow in the footsteps of the Song Dynasty. It is thus that I send this letter with my deepest admiration, to show that we are of one mind.<sup>76</sup>

This is the truth about the history of ideas.

## Notes

1. See Benjamin Schwartz's (1916–1999), "Some Polarities in Confucian Thought," in *Confucianism in Action*, edited by David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1959), 50–62.
2. *Analects*, 13.6.
3. A line from the *Xunzi* chapter, "The Way of the Lord." See *Xunzi jijie*, 8.230.
4. *Analects*, 6.30.
5. *Ibid.*, 14.17.
6. On this, see F. W. Mote (1922–2005), *The Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: Knopf, 1971).
7. *Mencius*, 2A1.
8. *Ibid.*, 1A7.
9. 樂以天下優以天下. *Mencius* 1B4.
10. *Ibid.*, 1B11.
11. 正心诚意. *Liji* 礼记, [Book of Rites], "Daxue" section 大学 [Great Learning]
12. Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* [Annotated Study of the Four Books] "Analects" section, 1.48.
13. *Ercheng Ji*, "Yanzi suohao hexue lun" 顏子所好何學論 [On Yan Hui's Doctrine], 8.577.
14. Zhu Xi, "Renniu yingzhao fengshi" 壬午應詔封事 [Response to the Emperor's Order in the Renwu Year], *Hui'an xiansheng zhuwengong wenji*, 11.3b.
15. Yan Yuan, *Yan Yuan ji* 顏元集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1987).
16. *Ibid.*, 62. The first part refers to a couplet written by Ming official Shi Bangyao 施邦曜 (1585–1644), who killed himself after the fall of Beijing. Yin Tun was a former disciple of Cheng Yi, who was writing about his hesitation in accepting the emperor's offer to serve as a court tutor. See Jiu-Sung Yang's, *Body, Ritual and Identity: A New Interpretation of the Early Qing Confucian Yan Yuan* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2016), 78–9.

17. See C. K. Yang's, "Some Characteristics of Chinese Bureaucratic Behavior," in *Confucianism in Action*, edited by David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1959).
18. *Zhuzi yulei*, 129.3085.
19. Yuan Mei said, "Song Confucians took the renunciation of desire as the most difficult thing to achieve, and used to hang a portrait of their deceased mother and father to keep themselves on guard . . . When I read this, it made me feel sick." See Yuan, *Duwai yuyan* 牘外餘言 (Congshu jicheng xubian edition), 16a. Many similar examples can be found.
20. *Songyuan xue'an*, "Longchuan xue'an" [Records of Chen Liang], 56.1850.
21. Ye Shi, "Longchuan wenji xu" 龍川文集序 [Preface to the Collected Works of Chen Liang], in *Chen Liang Ji* 陳亮集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1987), 531.
22. Zhu Xi, "Da Lü Ziyue" 答呂子約 [Reply to Lü Zuqian], in *Hui'an xiansheng zhuwengong wenji*, 47.33b.
23. Zhu Xi, "Da Chen Tongfu" 答陳同甫 [Reply to Chen Liang], *Hui'an xiansheng zhuwengong wenji*, 36.20b-21a.
24. Chen Liang, "Song Wu Yucheng Yungan xu" 送吳允成運幹序 [Preface to Seeing off Wu Yuncheng], in *Chen Liang ji*, 24.271.
25. Chen Liang, "Shang Xiaozong Huangdi diyishu" 上孝宗皇帝第一書 [First Presentation to Emperor Xiaozong], in *Chen Liang ji*, 1.9.
26. Li Zhi, "Zhao Ruyu" 趙汝愚, in *Li Zhi wenji* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000), vol. 3, 693-4.
27. *Song-Yuan xue'an*, "Shuixin Xue'an" 水心學案 [Records of Ye Shi], 55.1802.
28. *Song-Yuan xue'an*, 55.1803.
29. *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 15.
30. *Songyuan xue'an*, 54.1746.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Ye Shi, "Liren" [Dwellings of the Worthy], in *Xixue jiyuan xumu* 習學記言序目 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1977), 13.179.
33. *Ibid.*, "Yan Hui," in *Xixue jiyuan xumu*, 13.193.
34. Views like those of Ye Shi have been rejected by contemporary New Confucians. For example, Mou Zongsan writes, "Thus one who neglected Confucius and stands in opposition to his tradition was Ye Shi. . . . His foolishness is extreme. . . . I find it difficult to read his work." See Mou, *Xinti yu xingtì* 心體與性體 [Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature] (Taipei: Taiwan Zhengzhong Publishing, 1973), 225.
35. Chen Liang, "Yu Zhuyuanhui Mishu" 與朱元晦秘書 [Letter to Zhu Xi], in *Chen Liang Ji*, 28.346-7.
36. *Zhuzi yulei*, 136.3235-6.
37. Gu Yanwu, "Yuyouren lunxue shu" 與友人論學書 [Discussing Learning with Friends], in *Gu Tinglin Shiuwenji* 顧亭林詩文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1983), 3.40-1.
38. Gu Yanyu, "Neidian" 內典 [On Buddhist Texts], in *Rizhilu jishi*, 18.14b-15a.
39. Gu Yanyu, "Fuzi yan xing yu tiandao" 夫子言性與天道 [The Master on Nature and the heavenly Way], in *Rizhilu jishi*, 7.6b.
40. As early as the Southern Song period, scholar Zhou Mi 周密 (1232-98) wrote, "Those in charge of financial matters and tax were involved in the exploitation of the common people; those high officers in charge of the national borders were uncouth and vulgar; those who studied and were men of letters merely pursuing a pleasurable hobby, and those concerned with politics were merely common minor officials. Today, however, such people only read the Zhu Xi's, *Annotated Four Books* and *Reflections on things at Hand* (*Jinsilu*), Zhou Dunyi's, *Penetrating the Book of Changes* (*Tongshu*) and accounts of

the Yin-yang Diagram (*Taijitu*), Zhang Zai's Eastern and Western Incriptions (*Dong Xi ming*), and other such recorded sayings. In doing so, they deceive themselves that they could, through study, rectify the heart-mind, cultivate the person, order the family, govern the state and pacify the empire. [. . .] For the sake of reputation and for reward, when sitting for their exams, they must include many quotes from these texts in order to become high officials. [. . .] But examining their conduct, it is found inconsistent with their words, and generally far removed from human affairs. Looking forward, this will surely bring inestimably great trouble to the empire, comparable to the troubles that arose with similar philosophical debates about obtuse teachings (*xuanxue*) during the Wei-Jin periods. [. . .] The corrupt Southern Song official Jia Sidao liked to make use of these people who pursued empty doctrines, elevating them to high posts, while claiming he respected Song-Ming Lixue Daoxue. However, they lacked substantial learning and their minds were not ordered, and they were used by Jia as a means to avoid being held back in his plans. Thus, there were many things that they did not understand, and they endangered themselves and the nation." See Zhou, "Daoxue" 道学 chapter, in *Guixin zashi* 癸辛雜識 [Assorted Reflections from the Guixing Year] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1988), 169–70.

This was the practical effect of such devotion to 'inner sageliness' and was the first time it produced such harmful historical results. The second time came with the mournful critiques of Gu Yanwu and Yan Yuan. This should cause proponents of Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism to reflect deeply.

41. See Ch. 4 of this volume.
42. Huang Zongxi, "Yuan chen," in *Mingyi daifanglu* 明夷待訪錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1981), 4.
43. *Mingyi daifanglu*, 4.
44. Huang Zongxi, "Zhixiang" 置相, in *Mingyi daifanglu*, 8.
45. Huang Zongxi, "Yuanfa" 原法, in *Mingyi daifanglu*, 6.
46. *Mingyi daifanglu*, 7.
47. *Ibid.*, 8.
48. *Ibid.*, 10.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
51. *Gu Tinglin Shiwenji*, 238.
52. *Rizhilu jishi*, 19.4b.
53. Liang Qichao, *Qingdai xueshu gailun* 清代學術概論 [A Summary of Qing-era Scholarship] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji publishing, 2005), 15.
54. Theodore De Bary (1919–2017), *The Liberal Tradition in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1983).
55. Wenqing 文慶 et al., *Chouban yiwu shimo: Tongzhi chao* 籌辦夷務始末:同治朝 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2008), 2019–22.
56. See De Bary, *Principle and Practicality: Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
57. Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1965), 119.1029.
58. Wang Fuzhi, *Zhouyi waizhuan* 周易外傳 [Further Commentary on the Zhouyi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1977), 5.203–4.
59. *Zhouyi waizhuan*, 5.203.
60. Wang Fuzhi, "Zhe Zong" [On Emperor Zhezong], in *Song lun*, 7.134, 136.
61. Wang Fuzhi, *Du tongjian lun* 讀通鑒論 [Comments on the Comprehensive Mirror] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1975), 1.2.
62. *Du tongjian lun*, 3.60–1.
63. *Ibid.*

64. Derk Bodde, *Essays on Chinese Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 251.
65. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), “Preface” to *Dai Dongyuan Ji* [Collection of Dai Zhen’s Essays], in *Dai Zhen wenji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1980), 2.
66. Qian Mu, *Zhongguo jin sanbainian xueshu sixiang shi* 中國近三百年學術思想史 [Chinese Thought over the Past 300 Years] (Shanghai: Shangwu Publishing, 1937), vol. 2.
67. Yu Yingshi, *Lun Dai Zhen yu Zhang Xuecheng* 論戴震與章學誠 [Discussion Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng] (Hong Kong: Longmen Publishing, 1976).
68. Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo Xuezheshi*, vol. 2.
69. Zhang Xuecheng, “Zhedong xueshu” [The Doctrines of Eastern Zhejiang], in *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1985), 5.523–4.
70. *Ibid.*, 5.524.
71. *Ibid.*, 1.2.
72. *Ibid.*, 5.524.
73. *Ibid.*, 1.49.
74. *Ibid.*, 5.470.
75. Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955) wrote, “When investigating and annotating texts he often made errors, and his reading of texts was superficial.” See “Shu Zhang Shizai yishuhou [Postscript to Zhang Xuecheng’s Posthumous Works],” in *Yu Jiayi lunxue zazhu* 余嘉錫論學雜著 [Assorted Writings on Ethics] (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1963), 615–25.
76. Tan Sitong, “Zhi Tang Fochen” 致唐佛塵 [Letter to Tang Caichang],” in *Zhongguo Zhixue* [Chinese Philosophy], vol. 4, 425.



## 9 Some Thoughts on Chinese Wisdom

### The Question of Historical Eras

The articles on traditional Chinese thought in this volume were originally published separately over several years, but are published together here; in what follows, I offer a few thoughts about what connects them.

The first issue concerns areas of research. I support a pluralistic approach to the history of Chinese thought and the history of philosophy. Many works have already been published in these areas both home and abroad, and their number is only likely to increase. A salubrious development therein is the shift from general historical surveys to a focus on particular topics, such as intellectual trends, schools of thought, historical figures or specific problems. I have always argued that studies in Chinese history or intellectual and literary histories should, as far as possible, undertake detailed and specialized research. Only when many specific topics have been fully researched can more accurate and scientific general histories be produced. Given the country's large population, there are comparatively many people working on the history of Chinese thought, compared to overseas scholars or compared to those who work on the history of Western thought, so it is reasonable that each follow his or her own research interests. There is no need for multiple people all saying the same thing and flooding the market with general histories of China. For many years, there was an imbalance between general overviews of Chinese thought and specific studies, and this needs correction. Studies in the history of philosophy and the history of thought should become more diverse.

I must apologize at this point, since this present work also belongs to the category of general history. That said, within this field, general histories can become more diverse, and use all possible perspectives and methods to explore the history of Chinese philosophy and thought. Consequently, their topics, approaches and aims can all be very different. For example, some histories of philosophy excel in their gathering and ordering of material, while others excel in their interpretations and perspicacious insight. There can be intellectual histories written by historians

who stress textual studies, and histories by philosophers that stress argumentation. With the latter, research proceeds by exploring the tension between idealism and materialism, or by following the evolution of forms of knowledge. I dare not claim that this present essay is a work in the history of philosophy, but a history of philosophy ought to reflect the historical progress of self-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> This being so, consciousness of the folk psychological formations that are manifest in Chinese culture and thought is a valid topic for philosophy and the history of philosophy. The topic that I have focused on is an explanation of the Chinese nation's cultural-psychological formation through an overview of ancient Chinese thought. I believe that this issue is worth investigating and is connected at the level of both theory and practice to so-called spiritual civilization. In summary, I support the idea of letting a hundred flowers bloom and believe that there are different ways of reaching the same place. These various approaches are united in their use of historical idealism and in explaining history scientifically, as Marx did, and discovering objective rules therein.<sup>2</sup> This is of assistance to the present time and can help people to proactively make history.<sup>3</sup>

The American scholar of Chinese intellectual history, Joseph Levenson (1920–69), once compared the history of ideas to a museum. He claimed that it has lost its practical relevance and value, and was significant only as a source of enjoyment for people. Levenson characterized the thinking of modern Chinese intellectuals as being conflicted between an acceptance of Western learning at the level of the intellect and a sensibility that was still orientated toward tradition. However, another intellectual historian, Benjamin Schwartz, argued that the history of ideas is not like a museum but a library. He believed that the things of the past that have been preserved might be used as reference material. I believe that the history of ideas is neither a museum nor a library. The history of ideas should investigate how culture and traditions are sedimented in people's psychological formations; it should also investigate the connection between classical thought and the formation and shaping of the characteristics of the Chinese nation (as a people and as an ethnic group)—namely, the cultural-psychological formation and the resultant way of thinking. I believe that what is manifested in literature, art, thought, customs, ideology, and cultural phenomena are expressions of a nation's soul. They are the concretization and crystallization of it, and of a nation's wisdom.

I use the word 'wisdom' (*zhìhuì* 智慧) here not only to indicate the ability to think or a mode of the intellect. For this characteristic is not merely intellectual, but also refers to all internal psychological structures and mental powers. These include elements of ethics and aesthetics such as ethical consciousness, one's attitude toward life, and the capacity for intuition. The characteristic feature of Chinese thought is how intelligence consists in an amalgamation of intellect and all these elements. Wisdom is an accumulated inner life and acculturation that

enables people to advance their lives. It can be robustly transmitted, is consistently useful, and is self-contained; it exerts influence directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, and controls and even dictates the way people are today. Such control extends to form and content, moral standards and conceptions of truth, and also patterns of thought and aesthetic taste. We should become aware of all possible elements, scientifically investigate them, and understand the strengths and weaknesses they offer in adjusting to contemporary life—and thus which aspects of them should be embraced and which rejected. Simply stated, I believe that developing and advancing the people's wisdom in this sense is an important matter.

Neither psychological formations nor accumulated national 'wisdom' exist a priori, transcending time, space and causality, and remaining unchanged. They are the product of a long history. We are facing a century in which technological and social structures will undergo great changes. Thus, how to lucidly transform and remake our cultural-psychological formation, disposing of historical mis-steps and adjusting to a new century, is an epoch-defining question and one to which Chinese philosophy today must attend. This essay marks only the beginning, by laying out the problem. This is what the first chapter in this volume, "Reevaluating Confucius," sought to do, by introducing the concept of the cultural-psychological formation.

Since I have focused on a theme that captured a broad array of ideas and phenomena, I could choose only a few of the most representative and influential figures and intellectual trends. I have omitted schools or ideas of secondary importance. This includes, for example, the pre-Qin Logicians or School of Names and other famous or important thinkers. Furthermore, among those figures and intellectual movements that I have discussed, I have set aside areas not pertinent to my topic. Of course, I have paid even less attention to the realm of textual studies—the biographies of these people, the origin and development of historical texts, the authenticity of editions, etc. In a word, this book offers only a rough critical sketch. As Sunzi wrote, "If he sends reinforcements everywhere, he will be weak everywhere."<sup>4</sup> It was never my intention to offer a complete account; rather, I hope that, by ignoring some issues, my main theme will be more striking, specifically those intellectual traditions that were most instrumental to creating the Chinese cultural-psychological formation. At the same time, I wanted to focus on areas ignored by others, and to ignore those areas that others have focused on, thereby avoiding repetition. It is clear from the table of contents that I have focused on Confucius and Mozi, Mencius and Xunzi, Laozi and Hanfezi, the *Book of Changes* and Dong Zhongshu, Zhuangzi and the Chan tradition, and the doctrine of sageliness within (Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism) and kingliness without (the importance of human affairs and statecraft). I have not discussed the dispute between idealism and materialism found

in many works, and I do not agree with treating Kong-Meng-Cheng-Zhu or Kong-Meng-Lu-Wang lines of intellectual transmission as the orthodoxy (as many scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan do). I believe that both views are too parochial, and cannot adequately explain the traditions of Chinese thought, the characteristics of the Chinese people, or the cultural-psychological formation.

When researching the characteristics of the Chinese people or the cultural-psychological formation, many approaches might be adopted. It is important, however, to begin from the standpoint of society, economics and politics, and understand the foundations. For example, consider the superficially generic idea of 'humanism' (*rendao zhuyi* 人道主義). In fact, it is manifested differently in different eras. Ancient humanism (that of Confucius and Mencius) is very different from modern humanism (seen since the European Renaissance), and the differences stem from different social bases. In the former humanism, primitive clan traditions form the foundation and emphasize harmonious relationships between people and mutual assistance. But in the latter, the dramatic rise of capitalism provides the context and it emphasizes individual liberation, and personal independence and freedom. There is a progression from social and economic foundations, through politics and religion as an intermediate stage, which arrives at sublimation or the elevation of intellectual theory and philosophical viewpoints. These in turn play a role in influencing peoples' behavior and activities. I believe that historical materialism offers a profound insight here. Although research into such foundations is not within my present remit, and I have moved from idea to idea to investigate the history of thought itself, I nevertheless believe that this point should be emphasized. Since a specialized investigation into the social history that is the source of an intellectual tradition is not possible, it is even more important to articulate and be aware of this issue. In what follows I will focus on it in more detail.

### **The Foundation of Kinship Ties**

The emergence and development of any ethnic grouping, nation, or national cultural-psychological formation, or the formation and continuation of any intellectual tradition, all have their source in the reality of material existence. The major social foundation of early China's intellectual tradition was, I believe, the hierarchical clan kinship tradition, and the powerful and enduring customs that it bequeathed. It greatly influenced Chinese society and its modes of thought. The Chinese Neolithic era, whose foundation was agriculture, was long-lasting and the organizations and structures of clan society which emerged from it become entrenched. This led to the early emergence of a civilization, built on this foundation, during a time when blood ties and relational bonds were stable and strong. They were not weakened by maritime culture (as in

the case of Greece), or itinerant shepherding or other factors. Although class-based society emerged and there was evolution through various economic and political systems, hierarchical clan bonds remained the defining feature, and there was little change to a social life founded upon the productivity of small agricultural households. The customs and habitual ways of thinking of ancient clan society were preserved, and became an enduring cultural form and psychological force.

Even today, in China's many villages, it is still possible to see multiple clan names gathered in one place, with clear distinctions between older and younger generations. Consider the names used for delimiting different kinds of relationship: in Chinese there are many fine-grained distinctions for different relationships, which are absent in the West. Consider also eating habits. Food in the West is consumed from separate plates, with each person eating their own portion, while in China people share food and this is a requirement of ritual propriety. Clearly, in everyday life care was taken to align names with social reality and these blood and kinship ties provided the basis for a hierarchical order based on respect for age and its authority over the young, and provided a long-lasting and firm foundation for social customs. At the end of the twentieth century, modern life lived in a global context means that many such old traditions have been discarded and Chinese villages have also started to change. However, the pace of reform of such ideas, including views on issues such as love and sex, has not been so rapid; even less needs to be said about traditional society before the Opium Wars.

When this point is fully understood, then it is easier to understand why Confucianism occupied such an important place in Chinese society and in the history of Chinese thought, why Confucian learning and Confucianism became bywords for Chinese culture, and why Confucius was seen as the founder of a religion comparable to Christianity and Buddhism. The vestiges of Confucianism can be seen in everywhere in Chinese culture and in its ways of thinking. If we understand this then it will be easy to understand why Confucianism and Confucius spoke of 'humaneness' (*ren*), why he understood it as the emotion-psychological grounding of the love of father and son, and why it became the defining feature of Confucianism (integral to its worldview, ontology, and ethics). If we understand this, then it will be easy to understand why, from Confucius to Gu Yanwu, Confucianism has spoken of returning to the ancients, returning to traditional life, and has spoken of the rule of the three ancient dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou. This interest in the government of the Three dynasties was different from later attempts to create a forward-looking utopia. Confucius dreamt of the Duke of Zhou and the Confucian desire to return to the Three dynasties featured a backward-looking historical element, which was the golden era of clan-based society in which male heads of household exercised control.<sup>5</sup> This is why the present work has focused on the role of Confucius and the Confucians

in the Chinese tradition. It is not because I particularly like the Confucians, for that is irrelevant. Rather, it is because of the key role played by Confucianism in the formation of the Chinese cultural-psychological formation, a role that has its source in practical social life. The reason why I pay careful attention to Mozi, Laozi, and Zhuangzi is directly connected to this social life. They reflected, from different perspectives, various elements and problems within the primitive clan traditions, and had considerable influence in later generations. Later Chinese thought was largely the transformation and development of the foundation constituted by the three schools of Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism. These encompassed Mencius' radical humanism and inner sagely character; Zhuangzi's protest against supposed 'civilization' and his opposition to alienation; the way of 'kingliness without' and historically informed consciousness in Xunzi and the Commentaries to the *Book of Changes*; the ancient schools of dialectic that were grounded in applied military and political struggles; the ontology based on *yin-yang* five-phase theory; the moral metaphysics and study of principle or pattern (*lixue* 理學) of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians; and the practical and applied theory of those opposed to the *Lixue* Confucians. All have their root in this long flow of history, and exerted the most profound influence in traditional Chinese thought.

The claim that Confucianism is the heart and the representative of Chinese culture is not new; the challenge is to explain how this is so. Any explanation will reflect the historical perspective and the practical attitude of the one doing the explaining. From China's recent past until today, there have been fierce debates and disagreements on this matter. Conservatives often seek to protect our nation's traditions by claiming that they are preserving the *dao* of Confucius, and seek to hold out against the challenges of the times. Progressives, on the other hand, seek to revive the nation and reform culture by first attacking Confucius and rejecting Confucianism. However, regardless of grouping or affiliation, none have really bothered to carefully research the origins, form or content of the Confucian school and its doctrines; they have not objectively analyzed Confucianism's main elements, its strengths and weaknesses or its future direction. Stated another way, there is a lack of self-reflective questioning regarding the shortcomings of the folk tradition.

Consider the following example. A folk custom that still has great influence today within the Confucian tradition is that of venerating the aged and respecting elders.<sup>6</sup> This is not merely a question of ritual form, but is a cultural phenomenon and a mode of thought and feeling. On the one hand, in a future society, this custom can serve to create more intimate human relationships, and so should be accepted and preserved. However, this kind of tradition values experience while undervaluing innovation; it also emphasizes longevity and seniority while inhibiting the more junior generations. These elements are great obstacles to social progress,

improvements in living standards and the revitalizing of thought, and so should be rejected. Thus, the complex and urgent problem facing us, which requires further research, is how to eliminate Confucian influence on social structure and patterns of thinking (currently, this should be the major focus), while selectively affirming and preserving its psychological and emotional aspects. Traditions are extremely complex and good and bad can exist together within them. Today, analyzing and deconstructing them, and obtaining a clear self-awareness, is more important than liking or loathing, or the simplistic stances of conservatives or their opponents. The Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius preserved many fine elements of the clan traditions, such as humanism and a populist spirit, but it also preserved many backward things. These include a lack of concern with practical outcomes (*Analects* 16.1), a reluctance to talk of profit or benefit (*Mencius* 1A1), an excessive degree of attachment to parents (*Analects* 4.19), and nepotism (*Analects* 13.18).

This kind of evenhanded analysis is much-needed, as it is for the other classical schools and thinkers including Mozi, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. Clan society was around for a long time before class-based society, and some of its valuable features and emphasis on personal virtue were lost with the advent of the latter.<sup>7</sup> What Confucius and Mencius had advocated deteriorated into an early form of feudalism, a class system that distinguished between the rulers and the ruled, laborers and intelligentsia, the ignorant and sages, and this was an early manifestation of a society involving small-scale prosperity (*xiao kang* 小康). At the same time, however, this system also preserved many positive features of the earlier clan-based society, including the ideas of broadly loving the multitudes and regarding the ruler as of least importance.<sup>8</sup> The strength of Kong-Meng Confucian thought largely lay in how it preserved the humanistic and populist qualities of clan-based society. This was very different from the mature Legalist thought of the later imperial system, which explicitly propagated exploitation and oppression, as well as practical benefit and militaristic approaches. However, the weakness of Kong-Meng thought was also found therein. It neglected practical benefit and stressed abstract ethical concerns. This, even to the present day, has been an obstacle to reforming social structure and social consciousness. The popular interest in control through political mechanisms and the settling of political scores in the modern era was arguably a reaction against this traditional rejection of profit or benefit of the kind found, for example, in *Mencius* (1A1). Thus, it is worth celebrating the fact that, under the pressures of commodity production and market values, small-scale agricultural production has started to transform, and kinship foundations and various traditional ideas have been meaningfully challenged for the first time. In addition, personal independence, innovation, and progress have all gradually received greater recognition, while changes in technology and social structure brought changes in culture and psychology. Among the many issues that a history of philosophy must carefully explore are how to fully

appreciate this latter change, and how to address the conflicts and complementarity between old and new models, thoughts and values. Finally, there is the question of what sort of relationship exists between tradition and the future. The same questions should also be asked of both Confucian and Mencian thought. We should not blindly worship Confucius, but nor should we dismiss him and confine him to the rubbish dump of history.

### **Pragmatic Reasoning**

If we say that kinship ties are the foundation of traditional Chinese thought, then pragmatic reasoning describes the distinctive character of traditional Chinese thought. All of the pre-Qin schools of thought strove to address the great social changes taking place at that time. They sought rational means to liberate themselves from the Shang and Zhou culture of shamanism, but, unlike the Greeks, they did not go down the path of leisurely and abstract debate. Nor did they lapse into a desire to abandon or escape from the human world, as was the case in India. Instead, they persevered with a practical exploration of the world of human affairs and morality.<sup>9</sup> Kinship or clan ties were the bonds that held society together, and they made the issue of human relationships unusually prominent, in both social ethics and practical human affairs, and they occupied a prominent place in reflection. In addition, the long history of practicality and empiricism integral to small agricultural production was another major reason why pragmatic reasoning was so well entrenched in the society.

Chinese pragmatic reasoning was formed and developed over time through the mutual interplay of many aspects of Chinese culture, science and art. In ancient China, it was often said that a school of thought originated in a government office, and this appears to be correct. Chinese practical rationality had a particularly close relationship with the four great Chinese cultural practices—military affairs, farming, medicine, and art. Dedicated texts dealing with military matters emerged at a very early date, Chinese medicine is effective even today, while Chinese farming involved meticulous and intensive cultivation and Chinese art had a distinctive character. All are important phenomena in the history of global culture. They are, however, distinct from fields such as astronomy, arithmetic, manufacturing, and alchemy. Military matters, farming, medicine, and art all involved a significant practical dimension, which had a broad social relevance and touched upon matters of life and death. They thus had a direct connection with the survival of the Chinese people.

Consequently, in these essays I have repeatedly pointed out the connection of Laozi to military matters, of Xunzi and the Book of Changes to agriculture, of yin-yang and Five-Phase Theory to medicine, and of Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism to art (and especially artistic skill). Since little research has been conducted in this area, these accounts might be somewhat speculative. However, I believe that there is a clear connection



between the Chinese philosophical attitude of pragmatic rationality and the practical character of Chinese science and culture.

From the standpoint of philosophy, although ancient Chinese dialectical thinking was rich and highly mature, it was a dialectic that dealt with human life and was not a method that could be applied with analytical precision. Because it emphasized social stability, human relationships and harmony, it was a dialectical method based on complementarity rather than negation. Its key feature lay in revealing how opposing categories mutually supplement, penetrate and move each other, enabling things and systems to attain a dynamic balance and relative stability. It does not emphasize the struggle between, and subsequent completion or destruction, of ideas or events, or suggest that they cannot be mutually inclusive.

Ancient China had the distinction between materialism and idealism, which is found in Mencius and Xunzi or in Wang Yangming and Wang Fuzhi; however, because the distinction between subjective and objective, self and other, did not occupy an important position in ancient Chinese philosophy, the struggle between materialism and idealism lacked the significance that it had in modern Western epistemology. Furthermore, *qi* (energy), *shen* (spirit), *dao* (way), and *li* (order or patterning) were not just part of Chinese philosophy, but *concepts that were fundamental to the whole of Chinese culture*. Sometimes it is very difficult to determine whether they indicate the physical or the immaterial. *Qi* can be the material of living things but can also refer to immaterial vitality or life force.<sup>10</sup> *Shen*, *li*, and *dao* all appear to be immaterial, but can have a material effect or possess law-like regularity.

China also has epistemology, though this is subsumed under ethics. It mainly emphasizes awareness of ethical responsibility, as shown in comments ranging from Confucius' worry about whether Prime Minister Yiwen did enough to be called humane (*ren*) (5.19) to Song-Ming Lixue Confucianism's ideal of 'the investigation of things and extension of knowledge' (*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知).

In general, China's pragmatic reasoning has some of the tendencies associated with materialism. The most important is probably the special fascination with history. The development of a historical consciousness is a distinctive feature of Chinese pragmatic rationality. It values a far-sighted and systematic perspective, objectively investigating and measuring up things and events, while being less interested in short-term questions of profit and loss, victory and defeat. This makes it different from other forms of pragmatism. All of the pre-Qin schools, including the Confucians, Mohists, Laozi, and Han Fei, featured this historical consciousness, although they expressed it in different ways. By the time of Xunzi and the *Yizhuan* (*Commentaries on the Book of Changes*), this historical consciousness had been elevated to a worldview that covered all of history and the human and natural worlds. A philosophy of nature and a philosophy of history were forged into a single enterprise, which unified

history, epistemology, ethics and a dialectical method. This became a rationality grounded in the historical (the experiential) and the affective (human relations), and thus a definitive feature of Chinese philosophy and culture. In this way, emotions did not depart from the realm of human relationships and find Dionysian release, and the intellect generally did not depart from the empirical world and soar off on flights of fancy. Precisely because of these features, Chinese philosophy and culture typically lacked precise logical inference and abstract theoretical inquiry. Greater satisfaction was found in vague and generalized thinking that addressed situations in their entirety, intuitively grasping things, and which pursued truth and insight without logic, purely abstract thought, or formal analysis. The Mohists' and the Logicians' interest in abstract distinctions never fully developed and, after ideologies were unified and synthesized during the Han dynasty, pragmatic reasoning as a mode of thought was not easily displaced. During the Tang dynasty, the religious philosophy of the consciousness-only school of Buddhism—which strongly emphasized intellectual distinctions—was imported from India and promoted for a time by the royal court, but this, too, did not endure for long.

The tradition of Chinese pragmatic reasoning impeded the development of fine-grained rational discrimination, but also excluded the spread of irrationalism. Grounded in Confucian thought, it established a character—a style of thinking—which gave the Chinese people a moderate outlook that was sober and calm but also warm. It was not wild or obscurantist, it valued discernment, placed less value on logic and more on experience, and was fond of history. Its aim was serving the needs of everyday life and maintaining a harmonious and stable organic system in the here-and-now, and it valued human relationships and other connections, opposed taking risks and placed little weight on innovation.

These many features meant that the nation's science, culture, way of thinking and modes of behavior have certain strengths and weaknesses. With regard to adjusting to the rapid changes in modern life and scientific advance, they have struggled. Today, while preserving the high points of Chinese culture, Chinese practical and pragmatic rationality must take a great leap forward. We must investigate that profound power associated with Germany's tradition of abstract reasoning, and the clear-minded wisdom of British and American traditions of empiricism, and we must pay attention to the melancholic and profoundly transcendental approach of the Russian people. Chinese *pragmatic reasoning must reestablish itself at a higher level*, and this is a great and difficult task. It will be a long and historic journey.

### **A Culture Characterized by Sensitivity to Delight**

In China, this pragmatic reasoning was not simply a mode of thought or its content; it also constituted a tradition that provided a conception of human life and a lived conviction or faith. These two aspects cannot

be separated. Chinese mythology tells of how the people that Nuwa created were also differentiated into noble and base, as if a person's fate was determined by cosmic forces. In the West, however, the Bible states that after God made humans they betrayed him, were expelled from the Garden of Eden, and then struggled against fate. In general, histories of thought describe Western culture as a 'culture pervaded by guilt' (*zuigan wenhua* 罪感文化). This involves awareness of original sin, and the struggle to atone for that sin. This requires conquering nature and reforming oneself to attain grace and a return to God's embrace. In the Bible, the Old Testament describes the battle between Jehovah and Satan—and this is in fact a conflict that takes place in the mind rather than the real world. The transcendence sought here is an internal purification of the soul. This Hebrew outlook was moderated somewhat by the absorption of the more this-worldly outlook of the Greeks (as seen in the New Testament); however, the direct relationship of the individual with God remained more important than all worldly relationships (including mother and father).<sup>11</sup> In this division of body and soul, peoples' sufferings were key to purifying the mind, ascending into heaven, and securing ecstatic union with God. These were the vital ingredients of a Western culture pervaded by awareness of human sin, in which the individual was fundamental. People entrusted the meaning of their lives and their faith in everyday life to God, to a spiritual pleasure that transcended this Earthly world. This pleasure was often gained only through the suffering of the body in the Earthly realm. This is a characteristic of Christianity and many other religions. The following is taken from a newspaper, and while the exact details might be hazy, it nevertheless captures the use of self-punishment in the pursuit of transcendent religious spirituality:

Reuters reported that in Malaysia several Hindu devotees gathered in the mouth of the mist-enshrouded Batu Caves near Kuala Lumpur to celebrate Thaipusam (a festival of repentance). They used sharp needles to pierce their tongues, or nails the width of a hand to pierce their cheeks, and would then make music and sing eulogies to their family and friends. They used needles, chains and sharp implements to 'punish' themselves and express to the spirits their remorse and sincerity. In the course of the activity, devotees fainted and collapsed to the ground.

This, it should be said, refers to a rather crude religion, one less spiritually refined than Christianity. The latter views suffering as the bitter fruit of original sin, and only through it can there be a kind of atonement, a perceiving of God's call, and a return to God. Suffering became a way of salvation that involved entering into the sacred and leaving behind the commonplace. The Jesus of the cross, bleeding after being nailed to it,

became the object of worship. But such an image is rarely found in the Chinese cultural tradition and is even incompatible with it.<sup>12</sup>

The preceding merely describes the denigration of the body; there is also the torment of the soul. An example of this is the trials of the soul found in Dostoevsky's novels. These all involve extremes of suffering that lead to a person attaining a higher spiritual level. This kind of religious mentality has been very important in Western culture. According to Weber's famous theory, the puritanical Protestant faith, with its spirit of industry, thrift and accumulation, gave rise to capitalism. This is not strictly true, but it does express the Western religious mentality of disciplining the self and a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of God, and this was a significant driving force in Western history.

Although China has always had all manner of religions, it did not have that form of elevated religious consciousness. China's pragmatic reasoning meant that people rarely sought an idealized spiritual 'Heaven.' With regard to the fantasy of becoming an immortal or the offerings to gods and Buddha in China, these were merely practical ways of seeking or sustaining happiness and joy in everyday life. The melancholic nature of human life is often expressed in literary phrases such as "Like the morning dew, the days pass so quickly";<sup>13</sup> "Before his life has its measure, it is already over."<sup>14</sup> Such sentiments are firmly grounded in the here and now, and the realities of human life. Heidegger wrote that only when a person becomes conscious of moving toward death can they grasp the meaning of the present; through the cessation of the present, he sought to find the meaning of existence. But in fact, as with the entire Western tradition, he also assumed the presence of a creator God that transcended the human realm.

In contrast, Confucius said, "Not knowing about life how can we know about death; not knowing how to deal with human affairs how can we know about the affairs of ghosts?" (11.11). This meant that the significance of death was to be found in life; only when the value of life was understood can the meaning of death be known. The significance of life and death were entirely contained within human relations and the relationships among 'you,' 'I,' and 'others.' These relationships are fundamental; they are reality; they are truth. "A person cannot flock together with birds and beasts. If I don't associate with the followers of men then with whom am I to associate?" (18.6). Becoming conscious of belonging to the human race, it was within this human framework that we attain a true sense of the present. Here, underlying structure and the observable are unified and inseparable, unlike the view depends upon a relationship between God and the human world. In the Confucian account, there is no need of a transcendental God, nor a transcendental ontology. As Zhang Binglin noted in his criticisms of Kang Youwei's efforts to establish of a Confucian religion, "The nation's people have a steady nature; attention is focused on matters of governing and daily life, and they give their

service in the world of work; their effort is focused solely on the living, and language stops at what is beyond experience";<sup>15</sup> and also 'form and application are inseparable' (*tiyong buer* 體用不二).<sup>16</sup> This latter idea is another way of stating the key idea of Chinese philosophy, 'the unity of the cosmic and the human.'

This is different from the Indian idea that space and time are infinite but people insignificant. In Chinese thought, the cosmic (*tian*) is not great and humans are not small, and underlying structure is not above practical application. 'Dao' simply is the ethics of everyday relationships and, as noted earlier, 'the world of work'; that is, structure and the way (*dao*) simply are everyday roles and relationships, and the practices integral to industry, commerce and agriculture. The pursuit of the transcendent, the a priori, the ineffable and of metaphysics are not detached from everyday life and human interaction ordered by roles and relationships. Metaphysics, morality, the ineffable, and transcendence are all in this present life and in human relationships. 'The unity of the cosmic and the human' and 'structure and practical application are inseparable' both seek the limitless within the limited, and recognize that reality is the locus of the transcendent, and that the structure or form of the way is derived from the human world.<sup>17</sup>

All schools of Chinese philosophy, including the Confucians, Mohists, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and even Chan Buddhism, highly value a sensuous consciousness and life as it naturally arises. In Confucian thought this is already very familiar. Zhuangzi's *dao* appears indifferent and yet has passion, seeking to "treats things as things, yet not be made a thing by them" (*wuwu erbu wuyuwu* 物物而不物於物);<sup>18</sup> Mohists value reproduction or procreation; Chan talks of enlightenment as the everyday practices of 'carrying water and chopping firewood'; and the popular folk saying holds that "While the green mountain remains, there will be firewood to burn," meaning where there is life there is hope. Each adopts a different way to affirm and express attachment to biological life, to social life, human existence, felt experience and the world. They demand a positive and energetic response to life, and that such activity preserve harmony within human relations and between humans and nature (the latter includes both the external environment as well as the inner dimensions of the body and feelings). As a result, unrestrained desires or attempts to eliminate desire are opposed, and happiness and a spiritual equanimity within the realities of everyday life are sought.<sup>19</sup> This is also expressed in the classical Confucian term *zhongyong* or 'hitting the mark in the everyday' and it became an important idea in the tradition.

This approach lacked the limitless striving of a Faust, and instead sought to attain the limitless from within the finite. Similarly, it did not involve the transcendence through suffering found in Dostoyevsky; instead, transcendence was found within the pleasures of human life. This kind of transcendence was ethical but also went beyond the ethical. It was about

knowledge, but also about faith. It was a melding together of knowledge and feeling, and a unifying of faith, emotion and direct acquaintance. It expressed the idea that form and application are inseparable, and body and spirit unified. This transcendence involved rational elements while also preserving the sensuousness of an aesthetic consciousness. This contrasts with a religious outlook, in which reason and the sensuous are separate, structure (the divine order) and application (the phenomenal world) are divided, and soul and body mutually opposed. Appreciation of the beautiful, and not religion, became the highest standard in Chinese philosophical thought. This aesthetic appreciation was sedimented (*jidian* 積澱) or imbued with a rational sensibility, which was its defining characteristic.

The distinctive characteristic of the Confucian mindset, which originates with Confucius, was that it took psychologized emotional principles (*xinli de qinggan yuanze* 心理的情感原則) as the foundation of ethics, a worldview and even of a cosmology. It emphasized that humaneness (*ren*) was the heart of the cosmos (*tian*). The heavens, the Earth, and the universe, along with human society, were encapsulated in the harmonious relationships of the affect-bound human community. The way of humans (*rendao*) was also the way of the cosmos (*tiandao*). Nature and order became subsumed under this expansion of the psychological (i.e., feeling). As a result, there was no longer any need for a religion based on an anthropomorphic creator God, nor was it necessary to transcend the sensible realm of space and time and seek an immortal soul. The immortal or enduring are entirely within this sensuous world. Doesn't the natural world exist in perpetuity? Aren't people (as endless generations of humanity) also similarly eternal? This is what is captured by phrases such as "the great power of the Heavens and the Earth is known as 'creation' (*sheng* 生),"<sup>20</sup> and "ceaseless creation is known as 'change.'"<sup>21</sup> Aren't the triad of the heavens, Earth and humans in accord with this single standard (that of *dao* or the way) and thereby full of vitality and life? This is the meaning of terms like humaneness (*ren* 仁), cosmos (*tian* 天), patterning or principle (*li* 理), heart-mind (*xin* 心), spirit (*shen* 神), the sage (*sheng* 聖) and unity (*yi* 一). The nature of Chinese philosophy is that it seeks the roots of the ethical, an understanding of the rational and a spirit of transcendence within the sensuous world, everyday life and human attachment. The inseparability of underlying structure and overt application, the unity of the divine and the human, the integration of feelings and reason, and isomorphic relations between subject and object: these constitute the traditional outlook of China and the so-called wisdom of China. As already noted, this kind of wisdom was manifest in a style of thinking and an intellectual approach that prized the intuitive grasp and experiencing of an indistinct whole more than analytical rigor and logic.<sup>22</sup> Generally speaking, this kind of wisdom was aesthetic in nature.

Western culture was described as a 'culture pervaded by guilt' and, consequently, Chinese culture was often summarized in contrastive

terms, as a ‘culture pervaded by shame’<sup>23</sup> or ‘a mindset of anxious concern’ (*youbuan yishi* 憂患意識).<sup>24</sup> However, I think that such terms are merely a reaction to the idea of a ‘guilt culture,’ and that a more appropriate term is ‘a culture characterized by sensitivity to delight’ (*legan wenhua* 樂感文化). The first passage in the *Analects* notes, “To study and then apply it at the appropriate time, is this not a joy? To have a friend visit from afar, is this not delightful?” Furthermore, Confucius is repeatedly portrayed in terms such as, “Confucius is driven by such eagerness to teach and learn that he forgets to eat, he enjoys himself so much that he forgets to worry, and does not even realize that old age is on its way” (7.19), and “To eat coarse food, drink plain water, and use one’s bent arm as a pillow—there is pleasure to be found in these things” (7.16). This outlook is not only a Confucian creed—it has already become the shared consciousness or even sub-consciousness of the Chinese people, a kind of cultural-psychological formation or national character trait. As I noted in the chapter on Han and Qin era thought, “The Chinese people are rarely thorough-going pessimists, and are always ready to optimistically look to the future.”<sup>25</sup>

In Chinese philosophy, delight or pleasure (*le*) possesses a foundational significance; it is the fruit and the manifestation of ‘the unity of *tian* and the human.’ Here, *tian* means ceaseless creation, or the operations of the firmament (*tianxingjian* 天行健). The accord of humans with this ‘heavenly’ way (*tiandao*) is what the Mencius and the *Doctrine of the Mean* refer to as ‘complete integration’ (*cheng* 誠): “Complete integration is the way of *tian*. The attainment of complete integration is the way of humans” (*Doctrine of the Mean*, 22); “There is no greater delight than to reflect and become conscious of one’s complete integration” (*Mencius* 7A4). This is what Zhang Zai later spoke of as “grounding one’s heart-mind in the Heavens and the Earth,” bestowing a sense of purposiveness upon the cosmos and the natural world where these had previously been and without direction.<sup>26</sup> The highest realm here is the unity of the cosmos and the human, grasped as a subjective psychological experience. In this realm “all things are complete in me” (*Mencius*) and “When humans are able to attain full integration, then their natures are complete and the spirit-like is attained” (Zhang Zai). Humans and the natural world are fully integrated, which means that peoples’ natures are complete and the heavenly known, and the spirit-like is prominent and produces transformation; and all this means that the most enjoyable (*zuida kuai* 最大快樂) human life is secured.

Clearly, this conception of the ultimate is not religious but is based on aesthetic sensibility (*shenmei* 審美).<sup>27</sup> This is arguably the locus of difference between Western guilt-based culture and China’s culture, characterized as a culture orientated toward delight and which starts from the integration of the embodied mind and the natural world. That Lu Xun ultimately came to dislike Dostoevsky was not a simple matter of chance, and we must follow Lu Xun here. He emphatically opposed the ideas of

a national or cultural essence, criticized Ah-Q and demanded a remaking of Chinese culture, while rejecting the deterministic idea of a national spirit or soul. Lu Xun's persistent attacks on tradition represented a spirit of optimism that sought to develop a new path for the nation. "Daily renewal is an abundance of virtue";<sup>28</sup> "Renewal everyday, and yet more renewal" (*ririxin, yourixin* 日日新, 又日新).<sup>29</sup> The problem for modern times is that this optimism must avoid subsiding into a tepid evolutionary or deterministic theory; instead, as Lu Xun did, it must absorb foreign influences and develop a deep sense of historical tragedy and of the fate of humanity. Only then will there be a form of this powerful optimism that is suited to the demands of the contemporary world.

The kind of 'delight' sought by a culture characterized by sensitivity to delight and pleasure is not the natural product of animalistic nature, but is something cultivated and acquired. It is the highest realm of human life, and as an effect of education, and so the Confucians, including Mencius and Xunzi, all emphasized learning and education. Some, like Mencius, took this to be the discovery of an a priori goodness, while others, like Xunzi, took it to be a matter of conquering human's problematic nature. The kind of sculpted human character sought by them involved the integration of humaneness and wisdom, emotion and reason, in a principled manner. In effect, this was another step in the evolution of the Confucian practice of humaneness into a philosophy of education. On one level, this was the perfection of inner character through cultivation and conditioning. On another level, since this approach affirmed the world of human affairs, it also focused on learning about the external world and practical affairs. "I am good at cultivating my flood-like *qi*"<sup>30</sup> or "broadly benefitting the people and assisting all":<sup>31</sup> the complete personality, and the establishment of individual subjectivity involves both inner and outer dimensions. This is what is referred to in the phrase, 'sageliness within, kingliness without' (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王).

Mencius, the *Zhongyong* and Song-Ming *Lixue* Confucianism are contributions to the cultivation of 'sageliness within' and inner character, while Xunzi, the Book of Changes, Dong Zhongshu and the later doctrine of focusing on worldly affairs and practical usefulness (*jingshi zhiyong* 經世致用) contributed to the personality capable of 'kingliness without.' Contemporary Neo-Confucianism has neglected or dismissed this latter dimension, and is thus at odds with the history of ideas or the development of the national character. I have repeatedly emphasized Xunzi and Qing historian Zhang Xuecheng in order to make this point about the contemporary Neo-Confucians clear.

Another reason why Confucian thought became a mainstay of the Chinese tradition, and why China has consistently grown by absorbing other cultures, lies in the capaciousness of this delight-based outlook (*leguan* 樂觀), which inheres in many aspects of early Confucianism. This capaciousness allowed it to absorb other philosophical schools and offer a stable framework in the realms of practical order and spiritual life. Since



this kind of stable symbiotic system responded to the surrounding environment, traditional Chinese thought has manifested a desire to ‘seek unity.’ Phrases such as ‘permeate and unify’ (*tonger tongzhi* 通而同之) and “In seeking great unity, small differences will exist”<sup>32</sup> indicate that the school sustained and strengthened itself through unity. This was typically done by using the familiar to explain and connect with new and foreign matter. By absorbing an opponent’s ideas and thereby making their original usage obscure, new ideas were thus assimilated. Qin-Han and Tang-Song appropriations of *dao*, *fa* (law or model) and *yin-yang* are the most striking examples of this. Similarly, the incorporation of Zhuangzi’s ideas in the creation of Chan Buddhism was a masterstroke. Other illustrations of this phenomena included the popular folk idea that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism formed a single tradition, that practicing the three as separate religions did not involve a contradiction, and that all three could be housed in the same sites or temples. China has no history of religious conflict; on the contrary, different schools have sought commonality and have become shared traditions. Thus, Confucianism absorbed Mohism, Legalism, and the Yin-Yang school and their approaches to the external world, and it assimilated Zhuangzi and the Chan school and so enriched its inward-directed philosophy. As a result, that part of the Confucian doctrine of humaneness (*renxue* 仁學) that addressed applied practice (including society and culture) and psychology was solidified and broadened (though it still evolved organically over time). This became a notable feature of Chinese wisdom. This arguably typifies a culture that grew organically through assimilation.<sup>33</sup>

In broad terms, Chinese traditional thought has passed through five stages. In the pre-Qin era, it was mainly concerned with political theory and social philosophy. Confucians, Mohists, Daoists, and Legalists all sought to understand the social causes of the upheavals of the time, and to cure social ills. In the Qin and Han periods, Chinese thought became cosmology. In the Wei-Jin period, metaphysics dominated. Song and Ming thought focused on studies of human nature and mind. Finally, coming to the modern period, we find the epistemology of Tan Sitong, Zhang Binglin and Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925). Although each of the five stages has its idiosyncrasies, the fundamental spirit of pragmatic reasoning is a constant throughout, expressed by ideas such as ‘sageliness within and kingliness without’ or “Confucianism and Daoism mutually complement each other.” Sun Yat-sen did put forth the doctrine of ‘knowledge is difficult, action is easy’ (*zhinan, xingyi* 知難行易), and thereby introduced an empiricism that threatened to break free from the tradition of pragmatic reasoning, but this was never fully developed.

Only after Marxism arrived in China did Chinese traditional thinking start to change rapidly. But why did first intellectuals and then great numbers of people quickly come to passionately believe in Marxism? Obviously, the major reason was the urgent historical task of opposing the emperor and feudalism to save the nation. After experiencing repeated setbacks and failures, progressive intellectuals were ready to accept this

hugely idealistic and optimistic vision for meaningful change; Marxism was also a theory that brought with it a suitable spirit of striving and strict principles of organization. The practical quality of Marxism fitted well with what was required for the Chinese people to save the nation. But did the national characteristics, the cultural essence and the pragmatic reasoning that formed the Chinese tradition also play a role in facilitating the acceptance of Marxism?<sup>34</sup> Emphasizing practice, enriched by an awareness of history and eschewing religious faith in favor of political ideals, a clear-minded rational attitude was also filled with affection for human relations: does this traditional outlook and cultural-psychological formation lead the Chinese people to more readily accept Marxism in temperament, thought and action?

In the past, many have said that Marxism does not suit the Chinese national character, but the facts suggest otherwise. Marxism not only helped guide an epoch-making rural military campaign (the Communist revolution), and thereby took root throughout Chinese society; in doing so, it was also given Chinese characteristics and merged with the actual struggles and ways of thinking of Chinese society. This was seen in many areas: in Mao's military government strategizing, in Liu Shaoqi's theories of personal cultivation, and in Deng Xiaoping's 鄧小平 (1904–97) emphasis on both material and cultural civilization. Thus, when Marxism is compared to other approaches such as Neo-realism, analytic philosophy or existentialism, it is arguably more acceptable to the Chinese people. This suggests that the Sinicization of Marxism within the evolution of the Chinese tradition was not an aberration or coincidence, but rather a requirement of history. At the same time, overly intellectualized philosophical approaches (including analytical philosophy) or those promoting an excessive individualism (such as existentialism), are quite alien to the psychology and cultural traditions of the Chinese people. The Chinese can absorb many reasonable features from these approaches (such as the careful analysis of language, the capacity for abstract thought, and the spirit of individual independence). However, it is doubtful whether they will assimilate the Chinese; instead the Chinese will absorb and modify such thinking.

Thus, taking the perspective of the history of Chinese thought, there is no need for great anxiety when confronting the modernization of China, and many foreign schools of thought, such as existentialism, will sweep across the whole of China. That said, we must welcome them as a nation with confidence, with courage and wisdom, and dare to absorb foreign culture and assimilate it into our own.

### ***'Tianren Heyi': The Unity of the Cosmos and Humanity***

We must repeat once more: Chinese traditional thought has some significant shortcomings, and pragmatic reasoning faces some stern challenges. These challenges primarily come from the pace of social change and development. The household-based small agricultural production and

clan ties that have endured since the Neolithic age have been declared obsolete, and modernization demands that these old and closed ways, with their pernicious influence on conduct and lifestyles, be swept aside. Advanced natural science demands the abandonment of ways of thinking that are based only on common-sense experience. Aside from the changes in social order and lifestyle brought by economic development, and which have led to conflict and reform in traditional thought and practice, the contradictions and reappraisals brought about by culture itself are also increasingly apparent. Among these, the increased importance of individuals and of their uniqueness, and the increased complexity and richness of human psychology, mean that the original ideas such as ‘sageliness within and kingliness without’ and ‘Confucianism and Daoism complement each other’ are found wanting, able to satisfy only primitive needs. They are no longer able to address what is happening in real life or in the transcendental realm of the spirit. Once lacking in independence, the Chinese people now have new expectations regarding personal character.

A certain historical era has ended. This was one constrained by classic ideas of harmony, tranquility and relative stability, which avoided risk, negation and calamity, and lacked the kind of individual character that marks true maturity. The challenges to the traditional Chinese sensibility come from multiple directions. There is the drive toward freedom and indulgence, based on the theories of Freud and others, as well as the opposing mystical religious trend to return to God, and there is the quest to escape the group and move alone, taking on the great spiritual burden of being an authentic individual.<sup>35</sup> Where are traditional Chinese thought and its psychological formation heading? Will they be preserved or abandoned? What future course will they take? As I have maintained throughout this work, this is a problem that requires much thought today.

Debates about how Chinese society and culture can escape from its predicament have continued for a hundred years, since the end of the Qing dynasty. ‘A Chinese base with Western application’ (*Zhongti xiyong* 中體西用) and ‘complete Westernization’ (*Quanpan xihua* 全盤西化) describe two of the most representative and influential responses. Officials at the end of the Qing who advocated ‘a Chinese base with Western application’ sought to adopt only modern science and technology while rejecting the Western values and political and economic systems that were closely bound up with them. These proved difficult to separate, and the movement was not successful. In later times, the strongly pro-China ‘Chinese culture on its own terms’ (*Zhongguo wenhua benwei* 中國文化本位) argument was less influential. Those who called for complete Westernization, like Hu Shi and Wu Zhihui 吳稚暉 (1865–1953), wanted to completely abandon all the existing traditions that made up Chinese culture and psychology. Everything was to be modeled on the West. This too, however, floundered and failed to produce results. In Taiwan, Yin Haiguang 殷海光 (1919–69) continued to advocate for this, but without success.

In truth, the advance of China's modernization already required fundamental changes in the economic, political and cultural realms, but also the upholding of those elements of the tradition that are rational and full of vitality. Without this second condition, the project of reform cannot succeed; but without such reform then the tradition will become like a prison. In fact, this is simply what is meant by today's discussions of 'Marxism with Chinese characteristics' and 'the way of Socialism with Chinese characteristics.' If it is necessary to talk of China and the West, then this approach might be described as 'Western form with Chinese application' (*xiti zhongyong* 西體中用). 'Western form' is simply modernization, or Marxism, and this is the basic structure of social existence and consciousness. Although, all this comes from the West, it is the shared direction of development for all humanity and the world. The 'Chinese application' refers to how Marxism-led modernization must accord with Chinese reality, and only then can it be successfully implemented (Chinese reality here includes traditional Chinese forms of thought and consciousness). Since both 'structure' and 'application' must be seamlessly integrated, then how to fully absorb and adopt the reasonable elements of foreign culture, to enrich and reform our own, becomes a pressing practical problem.

To say this is to largely offer a cliché since nothing new is being said. But it remains a formidable and historic task, which requires we make all manner of sustained and focused efforts. In turns of theory, all manner of ideas and propositions must be thoroughly researched from every angle. Among these, the problem that this work has sought to explore is as follows: how to adjust and reform the cultural and psychological formation expressed in traditional Chinese thought, so that it can survive and develop. I have sought to describe and dissect in detail some features of traditional Chinese thought, in so far as the latter takes Confucianism as its core. This includes the psychological formation described previously, as well as the foundation of kinship ties, pragmatic rationality, the mutual complementarity of Confucianism and Daoism, a culture orientation toward delight or joy, and the unity of humanity and *tian* (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).

The issue of 'the unity of humanity and *tian*' is a very complex one. The phrase has a long history, which can be traced back to its source. Since around the rise of farming during the Neolithic period it has been closely connected to the way that humans survive and develop by according with the cycle of the four seasons, and the lay of the land and water.<sup>36</sup> A true system of kinship-based governance had not yet been established at that time, and nor was there yet widespread submission by the people to absolute religious authority or authoritarian kings. Under the primitive clan social system, economic and political structures and the kin-based patriarchal structure ensured that, internally, the clans and tribes maintained natural and harmonious relations (*renhe*, 'people in harmony,'

constituted a primitive form of humanism and democracy). There two factors provided to a greater or lesser extent the historical foundation for the idea of ‘the Unity of humanity and *tian*’ (that is, the harmonious relationship involving the accord of people with nature, and the individual with the collective whole). In the Chinese language, from the ancient past until the present, ‘*tian*’ has typically been used to indicate both fate or some controlling force and nature—both of these meanings have always been present. In ancient times, the two were mixed together and no distinction was made. As a result, in China, the relationship between ‘*tian*’ and the ‘human’ has had a vague and indeterminate quality; it was not like an anthropomorphic deity who was an absolute ruler, and nor was it like a natural resource that could be conquered and remade. Thus, ‘*tian*’ was not a sacred god, worshipped by humans, nor was it an opponent that ‘humans’ could conquer and transform.<sup>37</sup> Thus ‘the unity of humanity and *tian*’ included the capacity of humans to respond to and accord with the laws of nature, while also indicating humans passive accord with and reverence for the controlling forces and fate.

The idea of the unity of *tian* and humanity matured during the pre-Qin period. It is discussed several times in the *Zuo Zhuan*, and Confucius, Mencius, Laozi and Zhuangzi all address the idea from different viewpoints and in different ways. Whether positive or negative, they all stress that humans and *tian* must mutually reckon with each other, and remain unified, harmonious and integrated. It is noteworthy that this recognition happened at exactly at the same time as a rise of rationalism and a decline in religious faith. Clearly, this maturing idea of the unity of *tian* and humans absorbed from primitive religious the mutual recognition of *tian* and humans but also abandoned its mystical and irrational aspects. At the same time, this emerging account did not entirely dispel the sense of *tian* as master or as fate, but only weakened it substantially, while the sense of nature became more prominent.<sup>38</sup>

The unity of *tian* and humanity played a central role in the thought of Dong Zhongshu and other Han dynasty thinkers. This was captured in their representation of the universe as an organic whole, which involved a mutual stimulus and response (*ganying* 感應) feedback-like relationship between *tian* and humanity. The significance of the structure of this cosmology lay in the fact that only if humans accorded with (were aware of and followed) this representation could they obtain freedom in life, and ensure the preservation, transformation and development (or circulation) of both individual and society. This understanding of the unity between *tian* and humans valued the integration and accord of the actions of state and individual with nature and society.

We might say that Han Confucians idea of unity of *tian* and humans established a cosmological model within which human behavior was free. On this account, ‘*tian*’ has the meaning of *qi*—it is nature and the living quality of the body. If this is so, then Song Confucianism’s version of the

unity of *tian* and humans established the ideal of an inner ethical human freedom; and here, '*tian*' mainly has the meaning of *li*—that is, spirit or conscious human life. Thus, the former account offers a cosmology and a naturalistic ontology, while the latter is an ethics and a moral metaphysics. The former 'unity of *tian* and humanity' is realized in the world of action: 'ceaseless arising' (*shengshengbuyi* 生生不已) here indicates the existence and (cyclical) transformation of this sensual world. The latter 'unity of *tian* and humanity' is the moral realm of the psyche—here 'ceaseless arising' is an affirmation of the feelings arising in the psyche that are directed toward the whole world. In fact, this is merely a projection of subjective consciousness; but, in fact, this projection is raised to the level of a moral metaphysics, in which ethics is a kind of natural responsiveness and harmonization between ontology and cosmology. This gave the idea of the unity between *tian* and humans a philosophical dimension that it had not had before, albeit one that was idealistic. The sensory and practical dimension of the unity of *tian* and humanity and the concrete historicity were neglected and even eliminated. Importantly, whether in Han or Song Confucian thought, and whether *tian* was understood as *qi* and nature or as *li* and spirit, and although the original senses of master and fate were never entirely lost, still this meaning was greatly diminished. Han Confucian yin-yang and five-phase cosmology and Song Confucian metaphysics with its psychologized theories of *li* (order/patterning) and *qi* (energy/psycho-physical matter), both prevented *tian* from being understood in terms of anthropomorphized religion. Han Confucianism did so in the external realm, while Song Confucianism operated internally.

If the idea of the unity of *tian* and humanity is to be preserved today, it must give us some ways of understanding and developing the idea of 'Western structures with Chinese application' (*Xiti Zhongyong*). It cannot simply be based on the version of this idea grounded in small-scale agricultural production, which stressed according with the natural world and fatalism—this applied to both the Han Confucian and Song Confucian articulations of the idea. Similarly, the idea of *tian* as a master or commander and as fate must be eliminated from both of these accounts; they should be replaced by an account that is based on Marx's idea of the humanization of nature. Marxism originates in the West. In Western modernity, heaven and humans are distinct and mutually opposed, and one of the major themes of society and culture is human's struggle with and conquest of nature. This is particularly clear in the way in which Western epistemology is fascinated by the relationship between subject and object. This approach in epistemology is a historically rooted reflection of the industrial revolution and contemporary Western civilization. In contrast to agricultural society and its close accord with nature, the Western approach uses science and technology to transform nature and create new things.<sup>39</sup> However, it was at precisely this time that some intellectuals, with Marx perhaps the greatest and earliest among them, recognized

that at the same time as conquering and controlling nature, recognized that humans and nature mutually influenced each other—they mutually transformed each other and were mutually dependent. External nature (the natural world) and internal nature (people's existence as biological bodies and the concomitant psychology and sensation, needs and abilities) had, during the long course of history, been humanized or socialized. Mutual interaction and influence arose in many ways, including subject and object, rationality and emotion, group and individual, natural order or pattern (which was socially ground) and human desire (grounded in nature). This phenomenon is simply the issue of sedimentation—of history settling into a psychological form. It is founded on modern heavy industry's conquest and remaking of nature and the subsequent creation of a new and objectified view of nature, and humans' relation to it. This relationship no longer the one that arose in the early stages of the modern industrial revival, in which nature was conquered and degraded and the ecosystem harmed. Rather, it is a relationship found in the post-industrial period and in an advanced material civilization, in which nature has recovered and the ecosystem protected. Humans and nature no longer stand in a relationship of conflict and mutual opposition, but one of harmony and integration. Humans are a part of nature. They are nature's shining light and its liberated masters; they provide its order and are its culmination. This is the issue that today's developed post-industrial societies must face, and which developing national must quickly begin to investigate. And this is precisely the issue of 'the unity of *tian* and humans'—an old term that possesses modern meaning. Clearly, the term can only be fully explained when it is approached from the historical viewpoint found in practical Marxist philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

Lu Xun said that reading Chinese texts could make one sink into a stupor. I think that aesthetic appreciation, which in Chinese traditional thought constitutes the highest human realm, also has similar shortcomings. It lacks sufficient tension, tragedy and a sense of the sublime. Within it, everything melds into a kind of detached and quiet transcendence. The understanding of 'the unity of the cosmos (*tian*) and humanity' that I have laid out here is rooted in material and social practices; it is a modern gloss of '*tianren heyi*' in which human life and its ideals are understood in terms of aesthetic appreciation. Today the question is how to move from quietude to action, and how to absorb Western notions of sublimity and tragedy, such that these can dispel quietude and stimulate an inner motivational drive. Only when this issue is approached from within the Marxist idea of humanized nature can there be an adequate answer. This means introducing beauty and aesthetic appreciation to technology and production, and to general life and work, so that the former are no longer confined solely to an inner realm of mental quietude. Instead, they become practical and material forces driving history, and the rhythm and form of contemporary society. Only from this base of

concrete material practice can the traditional Chinese idea of the unity of the cosmos and humans be reformulated and adopted to embody the ideal of human partnership with the heavens and the Earth, one which nourishes and supports change and transformation. In this way, a close and harmonious relationship between humans and nature (understood here as surrounding habitat and living conditions) can be realized. At the same time, the nature of humanity itself (the internal nature of biological desires) becomes infused with and accrues rationality. External and inner nature are both ‘humanized’ (*renhua* 人化) and become two new mutually linked responsive systems. This represents a new world, a new humanity and a new conception of beauty. This is how I understand the idea of the humanization of nature, or ‘the unity of *tian* and humans.’

## Notes

1. See “Meixue de duixiang yu fanwei” [The Object and Scope of Aesthetics], in *Li Zehou zhaxue meixue wenxuan* [A Selection of Li Zehou’s Work in Philosophy and Aesthetics] (Changsha: Hunan People’s Press, 1985), 185–223.
2. I disagree with Karl Popper’s (1902–1994) claim that history has no discoverable objective rules, and agree with Collingwood’s (1889–1943) claim that all histories of ideas exaggerate the extent to which ideas can, by themselves, determine events.
3. See my *Zhongguo jindai sixiang shilun* [A History of Modern Chinese Thought] (Beijing: Renmin People’s Publishing, 1979), 488.
4. *Art of War*, Ch. 6, “Weak Points and Strong Points,” trans., Ames 1993, 91.
5. Such historically orientated yearning in Chinese history is still widely discussed today, and I am not able to offer new insight into it here. However, the Duke of Zhou’s notion of establishing a system of music and ritual conduct was historically significant for how it standardized and perfected the system of patrilineal household authority. In this regard, Wang Guowei’s argument in his study of the Shang and Zhou (*Yin Zhou Zhidulun*) remains worthy of attention. The Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods that followed the Three dynasties were a time of dramatic change, during which this Zhou institution collapsed, and only then could there be an era of mature class-based society. For more on this, see Chapter 1 in this volume, on reevaluating Confucius, and chapter 3 on Laozi and Hanfeizi.
6. See Chapter 1, “Reevaluating Confucius,” in this volume. This tradition stems from primitive people’s valuing of experience, which old people possess. Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921), for example, prized knowledge and refinement, while thinking little of new expressions or novel viewpoints. See *Yan Fu ji* 嚴復集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1986), vol. 1, 3. Even today, the academic world in China still shows traces of this.
7. Engels wrote, “How wonderful was the pure and unadulterated clan-based way of organizing society. There was no army, no military police or police force, no nobles, kings or regional officials, and no prisons or litigation. Everything was orderly . . . There were no poor or destitute because both the household-based economy, organized along socialist lines, and the tribe recognized duties towards the old, the sick and the victims of war. Everyone was equal and free, including women . . . When the white people met Indians [indigenous people] who were not yet corrupted, they all approved of their self-respect, sense of fairness, resolve and courage . . .”



... The base concern with profit—vulgar greed, crude passion, base material desire, the selfish striping of public assets—revealed a new and cultured class society. The most vulgar methods—thrift, violence, deception and betrayal—led the old and classless clan system to destruction. Within a few hundred years, this society became one in which a small number of people enhanced their prospects through the sacrifice and exploitation of the great majority of people.” See *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 4, 91–2. It should be noted that this refers to life within the clan. Outside of the clans and tribes, there was often savage conflict and oppression. “In places without clear conditions for maintaining peace, there was conflicts both within and between tribes, and this was often brutal, something in which no other animal could compare to humanity.” See *Complete Works of Marx and Engels* (Beijing: Renmin Publishing, 1972), vol. 21, 112. The primitive Confucian idea that those who were not kin were of a different mind expresses the same distinction. See the *Zuozhuan*, Cheng 4.

8. See *Mencius*, 7B14.
9. Due to this difference, I will at times use the term ‘practical rationality’ (*shijian lixing* 實踐理性), instead of pragmatic reasoning (*shiyong lixing* 實用理性), when emphasizing how ethical practice is a kind of conduct that involves self-conscious moral acts. Translator’s note: the author often uses ‘practical rationality’ to refer to the concept of practical rationality developed by Kant, particularly the idea of a moral will conditioned to resolutely follow the dictates of reason and the categorical imperative.
10. For example, twentieth-century scholar Wing-Tsit Chan glosses *qi* as ‘material force,’ while F.W. Mote uses ‘vital spirit’ and ‘matter-energy.’
11. Yan Fu wrote, “The Chinese reason by relying on the heavens, while Western people rely on human initiative”; and “China prioritizes the three cardinal human bonds (father-son, ruler-minister and older brother-younger brother) while Westerners view equality as the highest glory.” See *Yan Fu Ji*, vol. 1, 3. No doubt this indicates the differences between Western culture and China, but these differences are rooted in the origins of the Eastern and Western traditions. Since [in the West] atonement for sins is emphasized, so human effort and human struggle matter; since there is a God, so humans await a final and fair judgment.
12. Just as ‘evil’ did not originally have an important role in Chinese philosophy, the same was true of sin and suffering. ‘*Tiandao*’ or the way of the cosmos was about the creativity of life—‘good’ and ‘bad’ were defined in relation to this, and were derivative and subordinate. The fundamental circumstances of human existence were good and not ‘evil’ or ‘sinful.’ Also, the idea that the *dao* or way was everywhere (even in human excrement, as Zhuangzi reminds us) meant that there was no place for sin and evil. Thus, the yin-yang polarity in Chinese philosophy did not refer to the struggle between the two poles of darkness and light, good and bad, or God and demons. It referred to mutual interdependence and interconnectedness, as many of the essays in this volume make clear.
13. Taken from “Short Song,” a poem by Eastern Han warlord and poet Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220). See *Cao Cao Ji* 曹操集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2013), 5.
14. Lines from Tang poet Li Shangyin’s 李商隱 (ca. 813-ca. 858) poem “Mawei” 馬嵬 about Emperor Xuanzong. See Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇, and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠, *Li Shangyin shige jijie* 李商隱詩歌集解 (Beijing: zhonghua Publishing, 2004), 336.
15. Zhang Binglin, “Bo jianli Kongjiao yi” 駁建立孔教義 [Refutation of the Establishment of a Confucian Religion], in *Taiyan wenlu chubian* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin Publishing, 2014), 200.

16. The 'tiyong buer' referred to here is distinct from Xiong Shili's notion of *tiyong buer* as the inseparability of consciousness and matter. Here, the term does not refer to epistemological problem of the relationship between the material and the mental.
17. Heidegger (1889–1976) accords with the Western tradition in his anti-humanistic bias and sought a transcendental essence that involved a non-anthropocentric God. Sartre (1905–1980) does not pursue such a reality, but allows himself to fall into a realm of pure subjectivism that means his system is more impoverished than Heidegger's. Admittedly, the later Heidegger talks of 'joy' moving from a sense of abandonment to a sense of home. But, for Heidegger, despite his apparent atheism, this 'home' remains under the shadow of a God.
18. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 7A.668.
19. Many religions, including those Indian religions discussed by Marx, oppose desires in a way that mortifies the self, or are hedonistic religions that indulge the pleasures and human appetites. Some Buddhist schools also fit this pattern.
20. *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 8.349b.
21. *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.319a.
22. See the chapter on Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism in this volume.
23. See, for example, Herbert Fingarette's work.
24. To use Xu Fuguan's term.
25. See Chapter 5 in this volume, "Qin and Han Dynasty Thought."
26. According to Kant's, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Zong Baihua 宗白華 (1897–1986) and Wei Zhuomin 韋卓民 (1888–1976) (Beijing: Shangwu Publishing, 1964), purposiveness in nature originates in acculturated and moral human agents; similarly, as the "Liyun" [Conveyance of Rites] chapter of the *Book of Rites* notes, "Humans are the heart (xin) of Heaven and Earth." See *Liji Zhengyi*, 22.814a. Both express an objective viewpoint. However, if only the objective viewpoint is considered, then we have religious theism.
27. The aesthetic realm consists of three aspects: the sense or perception of beauty, pleasant feelings or satisfaction, and an aesthetic intuition or spirit. Here the notion of an aesthetic spirit should be understood in terms of intellectual cognition. See my various writings on aesthetics.
28. A phrase first seen in the "Great Treatise Commentary [*Xici*]" in the *Book of Changes*. See *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.319a.
29. *The Great Learning (Daxue)*, section 6.
30. *Mencius*, 2A2.
31. A phrase in *Analects*, 6.30.
32. In addition to the Song-Ming Lixue Confucians, Song essayist Su Zhe also attempted to unify Confucianism and Buddhism. He used the *Zhongyong* to explain Buddhist doctrine: "The so-called idea of thinking neither good nor bad thoughts (but being of no mind), is the point before the emotions are aroused. "Middle" (*Zhong* 中 is another name for Buddha nature, and harmony (*he* 和) is a general term for the six perfections applied in the myriad dimensions of conduct. Attaining the mark and harmony gives rise to the myriad things of the heavens and the Earth, and this is surely Buddhist doctrine"; "The ancient sages centered their heart-minds and cultivated the path, not bring harm to the ordinary dharma" (in *Laozi Jie* [Explaining the Laozi], vol. 4). See *Laozi jie* (Congshu jicheng edition), 4.64. Tang literatus Liu Zongyuan provides a further example. Just as Han Yu believed that Confucius made us of Mozi and vice versa, so Liu Zongyuan believed that the teachings of Confucius could be used to pursue unity and to absorb and integrate initially alien material. These many examples clearly show that kind of Chinese wisdom and national characteristic that can be summed up

- as “penetrating and thereby unifying” (*tong'er tongzhi*). See *Liu Zongyuan ji jiaozhu* 柳宗元集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 2013), 25.1657. It is true that Confucius declared, “To become proficient in some heterodox doctrine will bring something but harm” (2.16), Mencius dismissed the doctrines of Yang and Mo, Han Yu attacked Buddhist teachings and Wang Fuzhi rebuked the idealism of Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Shouren; nevertheless, these reflected temporary social disputes and not the larger picture. The capacity of Han and Tang culture to absorb foreign elements serves to underline this point.
33. For further discussion, see the chapter on Qin and Han thought in this volume.
  34. Since 1949 many famous scholars and intellectuals have, at some point, criticized China’s own philosophical traditions. These figures—including Jin Yue-lin 金岳林 (1895–1984), Feng Yulan, Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 (1897–1986) and Tang Yongtong—all came to accept Marxism. Although the extent to which they understood Marxism is debatable, their level of commitment was not. But arguably, their support for Marxism stemmed from their approval of the revolutionary achievements of the Communist party, which secured independence for the country and freed it from foreign oppression. And, arguably, this kind of change in mindset, which starts with humanism (political success) and then moves to the level of philosophy or doctrine, is itself the traditional Chinese way of thinking. Thus, whether self-consciously or not, even these intellectuals arguably embodied the Chinese tradition.
  35. The modern idea that God is dead (according to Nietzsche, 1844–1900) has given rise to the profound aloneness of the individual, and so to Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power,’ Heidegger’s ‘Dasein,’ and Sartre’s ‘Freedom.’
  36. See, for example, the “timeliness of nature” (*tianshi*) and “the advantages inherent in the land” (*dili*) in *Mencius*, 2B10.
  37. Notably, during this time we do find human anger directed at *tian*. This is seen, for example, in the *Book of Odes*: “Great and vast are the heavens (*tian*)! How is it that you have contracted your virtue, sending down death and famine, destroying all throughout the empire?” (*Maoshi*, 194); “The great heavens, arrayed in angry terrors; the heavens are indeed sending down ruin, afflicting us with famine, so that the people are all wandering lost.” (*Maoshi*, 265); “Look at that rugged and stony field; Luxuriantly rises in it the springing grain! The heavens move and shake me, as if they could not overcome me” (*Maoshi*, 192). All of these passages indicate anger at ‘*tian*’ for sending down natural disasters, and indicate the mixing of nature and a supreme power. This is similar to the phenomenon of resentment and grief as responses to natural disasters that is found in later generations and even today.
  38. Joseph Needham and Derk Bodde both stress that a key feature of Chinese thought is the absence of a creator. See Joseph Needham’s, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 2; and Derk Bodde’s, *Essays on Chinese Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). This is largely the result of the mutual control and interaction of the two aspects of *tian*. Consequently, this outlook had not completely extracted itself from an anthropocentric view of nature, nor did it view nature in terms of natural laws that were independent of humans.
  39. See Li Zehou, *A Critique of Critical Philosophy*.
  40. *Ibid.*

# Afterword

I have some bad habits. For example, in recent years when writing essays, I have been a little absent-minded. Sometimes I am thinking about the next project rather than putting all my energies into the writing. While editing my collection *A History of Modern Chinese Thought*, I was thinking of my next work *The Path of Beauty*. And when writing that book, I was thinking of this present one. And while writing this one, I am thinking of something else. . . . Thus, each work has been disposed of in a hurry, written, edited, submitted, and finished in haste. After the books were published, I have always been rather dissatisfied. The arguments are insufficient, the research contains gaps, and the writing is not polished. There are even some sentences that are not entirely grammatically sound. Regardless, I do not want to revisit them. That would mean falling into the comical cycle of writing, being dissatisfied, rewriting, and being dissatisfied again.

Related to this is another habit found in my works of recent years—writing things in outline form. From the essays for *A History of Modern Chinese Thought*, to *The Path of Beauty* and this book, all relied on broad and rough frameworks. Particularly with the latter two books, several thousand years and hundreds of thousands of words were dealt with cursorily. Moreover, they were neither textually well-researched nor organized around a specific topic; they did not draw on rare or special texts, and lacked ample quotations to support my arguments and a rich array of materials. This might make certain experts shake their heads and sigh in despair. However, this is a deliberate move, one that I am happy with. I remember that each day, when I entered the library archives, there was almost always an unusual feeling: lament and a frustrating sense of loss. No matter how extensively one reads, one can never read all books, and there are already so many, so why did I need to add another to that total? Is life about writing books until one is old and decrepit? What sort of books should I be writing?

These kinds of naïve feelings and questions have been a tough challenge for me. It was only after straying into the field and feeling useless as a scholar that I started to write. There are so many things to write

about in China, however, and so many important problems and classical texts in need of research, and so many uncharted territories, that I was unsure of what to do or what to write. In the 1950s I once thought about taking 20 years to write a book about the history of thought in the Ming and Qing dynasties; I also thought about drawing upon ancient history in a study of the *Book of Rites*, and of compiling the life story of the poet Ruan Ji while undertaking textual criticism. I also wanted to delve deeply in the period of reform in modern China, from Hundred Days Reform movement of 1898 to the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. Or I could have devoted a life to Immanuel Kant. Beyond these, aesthetics also has many appealing topics. As for the present book, it discusses Confucianism in depth, yet my interests are perhaps more toward Daoism and Chan Buddhism. The book is an overview, yet I wanted to conduct detailed analysis of some of the issues, such as the development of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. I often think that if I just picked one of the preceding topics and worked on it for many years, drawing on my existing strengths, then I should be able to produce one or two 'genuine' scholarly works. Yet, I am gradually growing old and still have not done this.

In conversation with two young journalists, I happened to mention that I don't write books that could have been written 50 years ago or in 50 years time. This was published by the journalists. Each has his own ideas and these need not be similar. I love reading those greatly useful expert texts that have lasting value and I envy the detailed textual work of some scholars, which becomes the definitive 'truth,' or brings together a set of canonical texts and provides timeless quotations. It is said that this is 'true scholarship.' These are supposedly works of real value that can be passed on to later generations. However, I find it difficult to produce such timeless work; that storehouse of venerable texts rises up before me, seemingly mocking me. This has led me to abandon myself to my limitations and self-consciously choose to write the kind of unwieldy texts that I do—I refer to my shallow works as 'heresy.' I have elsewhere introduced this approach with the argument that "in works of creative thinking, seeing the forest is more important than seeing the tree."<sup>1</sup> I only hope that this unpolished volume is a text that 'sees the forest' and can inspire and guide an impassioned generation of young people. Regarding both the academic world and non-academic circles, I hold to what I said five years ago, and hope that these belong to the next generation.<sup>2</sup> They will break with the old and establish something new, realizing their ambitions and innovating on all fronts. If I can be a pioneer on their behalf, doing what I can, then what else could be more worthwhile? If the works I produce receive support and acclaim from many young comrades and some older scholars, then I will be delighted.

This book seeks to make sense of two different opinions held by the young university students with whom I have contact. The first opinion is the desire, among students, to completely dismantle tradition and fully

embrace Western culture in order to reform the nation. The second is the hope that among this destruction there can also be preservation and continuity. The former believes that the latter are blocking the path to modernization; the latter believe that China must have an eye on post-modernity—and the spiritual problems facing the hyper-modern societies of Europe and America. I have not participated in this debate. I remain a follower of the theory that social structure determines social consciousness, and that advancing Chinese society first requires a remaking of the base, the development of productive forces and technology, and the reform of all relevant economic and political bodies. Guiding ideology must first be carefully coordinated with such change. At the same time, it is important to take a long-term view, and think about things from the perspective of all humanity and the future of the world. Regarding the first position, the Chinese nation is truly ancient and bears the heavy burden of history on its shoulders, even to the point where it is difficult to move, and progress and reform are not easy. I remember it was Lu Xun who said, “Even moving a mere table requires the shedding of blood.” In terms of ideas and concepts, we have fallen behind the May Fourth movement in some ways, and eliminating the aftereffects of the peasant-led revolutions will take unprecedented courage and self-reflection. Accordingly, this book opposes quasi-religious moralism and lays bare the elements of Confucian, Daoist and Mohist thought that derive from agricultural production. In this regard, I am building on the work of my earlier book, *A History of Modern Chinese Thought*.

As for the latter view, compared to ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, India, or the Maya, Chinese civilization has endured for a long time, becoming this great entity that extends through time and space and with few equals. The cultural forms that arose as a result of such historical traditions still contain valuable psychological formations and other distinctive qualities. Furthermore, the valiant struggles of worthy men over the past one hundred years and today in China is connected to this traditional culture. This work thus retains a high estimation of the morality and aesthetics bequeathed to us through the process of rational accumulation and sedimentation. In fact, this relates to the paradoxical relationship between historicism and moralism. In this regard, I am sometimes reminded of the tension between Rousseau (1712–78) and the European Enlightenment, between romanticism and rationalism; between Kant and Hegel; between Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Turgenev (1818–1883); between the ambitious Peter the Great and the sincere and fearless souls seen in the oil painting *The Morning of the Streets’ Execution*; and today between positivism and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979). At its core, history advances through tragic conflicts like these. This is truly a profound matter.

One of the aims of this book has been to approach these kinds of problems (there is not just one problem here) from the standpoint of the

history of Chinese thought, and to encourage my young colleagues to become engaged and investigate them. Has this aim been realized? I don't know. Have the many problems been explained clearly? I don't know. Probably not. So what can be done? This is a discussion for later. In the meantime, this shall serve as the book's epilogue.

### Notes

1. Li Zehou, *Zou woziji de lu* 走我自己的路 (Beijing: SDX Joint, 1986), 37.
2. *Ibid.*, 7–13.

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