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Changing Along with the World: Adaptive Agency in Early China

Valmisa Oviedo, Mercedes

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CHANGING ALONG WITH THE WORLD:

ADAPTIVE AGENCY IN EARLY CHINA

Mercedes Valmisa Oviedo

A DISSERTATION
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OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Adviser: Willard Peterson

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Abstract

One of the major philosophical problems in Early China was the relationship between the person and the world, and in particular, how to act in relation to the world. This dissertation addresses the problem of agency in Early China, and pursues three main guiding questions: how to act efficaciously in different situations, how to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability in ordinary life, and how to achieve control and freedom.

I offer a critical and systematic analysis of an extraordinary model of successful action that I call "adaptive agency" or "adaptation" (*yin* 因). As opposed to other models of action attested in early texts, such as the prescriptive and the forceful, the adaptive agent necessitates great capacity of situational awareness, reflection, flexibility, and creativity in order to produce responses *ad hoc*: strategies of action designed for specific, non-permanent, and non-generalizable life problems. This model for choosing an action as an adjusted response to a specific situation guarantees the agent a higher success rate in his actions, let these be in political, military, professional, medical, religious, ethical or ordinary life contexts.

This dissertation is both born from a new methodological orientation and a contribution toward establishing it, by means of exemplifying how we can build meaningful critical theories in Early Chinese philosophy and intellectual history without using the obsolete hermeneutical categories of school of thought, book and author. I trace tensions and similarities in the Early Chinese approach to the problem of agency cross-textually, using a large range of textual materials and research methods. The philosophical proposal of adaptive agency is particularly suitable to this kind of methodological project, for it consistently appears across a wide variety of texts, authors, and intellectual orientations throughout the Early Chinese period, and therefore could not be studied by using the traditional hermeneutical categories.

To Sergio and Emma.

“For those who believe in God, most of the big questions are answered. But for those of us who can’t readily accept the God formula, the big answers don’t remain stone-written. We adjust to new conditions and discoveries. We are pliable. Love need not be a command nor faith a dictum. I am my own god. We are here to unlearn the teachings of the church, state, and our educational system. We are here to drink beer. We are here to kill war. We are here to laugh at the odds and live our lives so well that Death will tremble to take us.”

Charles Bukowski, 1988

Acknowledgements

After years exclusively dedicated to academic writing, drafting these few lines of acknowledgement with a personal tone feels exhilarating, especially as they contribute toward a certain feeling of accomplishment. But, at the same time, there is something daunting to it, for it makes me realize how small and inadequate my words are to account for all the help, support, and inspiration that have made possible this journey. To all of you on these pages, and many who are not on them, I hope that my actions during all these years have sufficiently demonstrated that you are cherished, yet here I leave a few small but heartfelt words.

I am extremely grateful to my adviser, Willard Peterson, for his mentorship and guidance throughout the six years of my doctoral program. Prof. Peterson has been a fundamental pillar in my formation as a scholar, and a crucial intellectual influence. The ideas found in this dissertation would be much poorer and more conservative without his timely input and insights. Not less importantly, he has been a fatherly figure and a continuing source of inspiration, support, and emotional wellbeing to whom I will always be indebted. Prof. Peterson's extraordinary capacity of critical empathy toward other people's thoughts, interests, weaknesses and strengths makes him the ideal mentor, and a living exemplar of the adaptive sage that fills the pages of this dissertation. It is only with sorrow that I part ways with him.

Thank you also to my informal adviser, Martin Kern, for persuading me to come to Princeton while stealing my cigarettes in Oxford, and for teaching me everything I did not know about Early China. Martin's intellectual influence will accompany me the rest of my career, as also will his pointed criticism, his overt confidence, his sense of humor, and our shared love for good food, strong drinks, and spirited conversation. Thank you for answering my endless questions about academia, always replying to my emails within two seconds, and encouraging

and supporting me in my ambitious organizational endeavors. Above all, thank you for your friendship.

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The academic activities and workshops that I have organized at Princeton, and which have aided to the development of ideas in this dissertation, would not have been possible without the funding and resources from a number of centers and programs: the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in the Humanities; the Graduate School, the East Asian Studies Program, the Program in the Ancient World, the Humanities Council, the Center for Collaborative History, and the Departments of Comparative Literature and Classics.

I began to think about the idea of adaptation during my years as a Master's student in the Philosophy Department at National Taiwan University back in 2010. From those days, I am grateful to my M.A. thesis adviser, best *Zhuangzi* teacher, and instrumental actor in my academic

career, Wim De Reu. I would also like to thank my teachers Tsai Yaoming, Masayuki Sato, Du Baorui, and Wang Xiaobo, and my fellow students at NTU, who always treated me as an equal. From even earlier times in Spain, I remain grateful to César Moreno, my first philosophical inspiration, and a master of thinking out loud and conceptual synesthesia; and to Taciana Fisac, who knew how to point me in the right direction.

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My mother taught me to be free, strong and independent, to live life to its fullest without fear or regret, to work hard for what I wanted, to be flexible when things didn't go as expected, and creative in imagining new paths. My father taught me the power that words have to shape both thought and reality, that one is never too young to think and discuss critically, and that one is never too old to keep learning and changing along with the world. I owe them everything.

The idea of writing about adaptive agency began in conversations with Sergio in a small restaurant in front of our apartment in Tonghuajie. He always saw its potential, and urged me to transform it into a best seller, but I wanted to do a Ph.D.… Sergio, there is no way to thank you enough for your unbreakable belief in me, friendship, continuing love and support, even when it meant to move around the globe with me, and for always being ready for a new adventure, including raising our daughter Emma. Emma, sweetest creature, your hugs and laugh make my day every day.

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INTRODUCTION

CHANGING ALONG WITH THE WORLD

ON ADAPTATION

This dissertation explores an extraordinary model of successful action envisioned by Early Chinese thinkers: a strategy of action that allowed the agent to achieve his goals in a most efficacious manner, which I have termed "adaptive agency," or "adaptation." Adaptation was a response to a larger philosophical problem, the problem of how humans should act in relation to the world, including the material, psychological, spacio-temporal, sociocultural and historical aspects of each specific situation, but also living and non-living beings, other human actors, and the environment. In other words, adaptation addressed the problem of agency.

Early Chinese thinkers were particularly concerned with agency: how to act efficaciously in different situations? How much control do humans have over the course of events, over their own lives, and over the outcomes of their actions? How to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability in ordinary life? And, in general, how to successfully relate to the larger context, the environment, and other people? In relation to these questions, which were all important questions for Early Chinese thinkers and I believe remain fundamental questions today, this dissertation explores different models of action, and it is the first systematic study of the model of adaptive agency in Early China.

What is "adaptive agency"? Readers who learned Classical Chinese with a textbook will surely remember the amusing instance of philosophical prose that closes this passage from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子:

上古之世，人民少而禽獸眾，人民不勝禽獸蟲蛇，有聖人作，搆木為**巢**以避群害，而民悅之，使王天下，號曰有**巢**氏。

民食果蓏蚌蛤，腥臊惡臭而傷害腹胃，民多疾病，有聖人作，鑽燧取火以化腥臊，而民說之，使王天下，號之曰燧人氏。

中古之世，天下大水，而鯀、禹決瀆。

近古之世，桀、紂暴亂，而湯、武征伐。

今有搆木鑽燧於夏后氏之世者，必為鯀、禹笑矣。有決瀆於殷、周之世者，必為湯、武笑矣。然則今有美堯、舜、湯、武、禹之道於當今之世者，必為新聖笑矣。是以聖人不期脩古，不法常可，論世之事，因為之備。

宋人有耕田者，田中有株，兔走，觸株折頸而死，因釋其耒而守株，冀復得兔，兔不可復得，而身為宋國笑。今欲以先王之政，治當世之民，皆守株之類也。[1]

In the age of high antiquity, there were few human beings and lots of birds and beasts. Human beings could not cope with the birds, beasts, insects, and serpents. A sage rose and made nests by joining pieces of wood together to protect the humans from harm. The people rejoiced at his doings, and made him king of All under Heaven, calling him the Nest Builder.

[In those days] the people ate fruits, seeds, mussels, and clams; flesh they ate went putrid and sent forth foul smells that harmed their stomachs and digestive organs. People were often sick. A sage rose and by drilling wood made fire to transform (cook) the putrid meat. The people were pleased at his doings, and made him king of All under Heaven, calling him the Wood-Drill Fire Maker.

In the age of middle antiquity, there were great floods in All under Heaven, and Gun and Yu opened channels for drainage.

In more recent antiquity, Jie and Zhou caused revolts and chaos, and Tang and Wu took corrective action against them.

Now suppose there had been someone who joined the pieces of wood or drilled wood to make fire in the age of the Xiahou clan (Xia dynasty). He would certainly have been ridiculed by Gun and Yu. Suppose that there had been someone who opened drainage channels in the times of the Yin and the Zhou. He would certainly have been ridiculed by Tang and Yu. That being so, suppose now that there are those who, in the present age, praise the ways of Yao, Shun, Tang and Yu. They should certainly be ridiculed by new sages.

Therefore, sages neither seek to emulate the ancients nor attempt to establish a fixed standard of what should be constantly considered acceptable. They examine the affairs of their age, and *adapt* to them in creating appropriate measures.

[1] Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Han Feizi jishi* 韓非子集釋 19: 1040.

> Among the people of Song there was a farmer, and in the middle of his field there stood a tree trunk. Once a hare that was running around ran into the trunk, breaking its neck and dying. Based on this happening, the farmer cast aside his plough and kept guard at the trunk, hoping he would obtain another hare. But he never obtained another hare, and he became the laughing stock of the state of Song. Now suppose someone wished to use the political measures of the Former Kings to govern the people of the present age. That would be equivalent to keeping guard at a tree trunk.

Simply put, the idea is that there are no standards or fixed methods to follow that can guarantee success in all times and contexts. Measures, or modes of action, must respond to the specificities of a given situation and be constantly adapted to ever-changing circumstances. There is no room for inflexible and prescriptive guidelines for behavior: the world changes and, proponents of adaptive agency will claim, humans must change along with the world. Therefore, the sage ruler does not decide his actions according to what has become customary (稱俗而行), but rather adapts his public affairs to the times and context in which he lives (故事因於世).[2] The *Han Feizi* chapter continues to illustrate and prove this point with more anecdotes, a point that crystallizes in the expressions "different times require different actions" (世異則事異) and "different actions require different measures" (事異則備變).[3]

All in all, this passage reflects the advocacy for the practice of "adaptation" in Early China. Although the passage clearly inserts adaptation in a political context, the closing parable of the hare invites us to think that adaptive agency was not only a strategy designed for rulers. Everyone, even ordinary people dealing with ordinary circumstances in their daily life, could make use of adaptive modes of acting to see their goals fulfilled. Adaptation takes three different forms in early texts: it is a model for efficacious action (as in the *Han Feizi* example), a strategy to cope with the uncertainty derived from an unknown and uncontrollable fate, and a pattern of

[2] *Han Feizi jishi* 19: 1041.

[3] *Han Feizi jishi* 19: 1042.

thinking about the relationship between the person and the world. Altogether, Early Chinese discourses of adaptation shaped an exceptional philosophy of action that asked the person to constantly adjust to varying circumstances in order to better respond to the manifold different situations humans must confront in a lifetime, including during and after the transformations of death.

The idea of changing along with the times, or changing along with the world, which scholars often relate to Legalist and Daoist political philosophy, was a bigger issue in Early China than we have previously thought.[4] Adaptive agency was not the prerogative of any school of thought or group of experts. It appears in texts of all sorts of ideological affiliations, associated with different goals and purposes, and inserted in different kinds of contexts of validity, such as the political, the military, the religious, the ethical, and the soteriological.

In tracing different proposals of adaptive agency, their figurations and representations in Early China, and their different goals, in this study I work across a multiplicity of texts. I have found proponents of adaptation in texts of the most diverse epistemic backgrounds and intellectual affiliation: in Master (*zi* 子) texts, which are considered to be properly "philosophical" in the tradition, but also in the political, military, historical, mantic, and medical literature. In a text like *Zhuangzi* 莊子, considered "Daoist," but also associated with persuaders, diviners, and military commanders, with Confucius 孔子 and Confucian culture heroes such as

[4] The scholarship has understood the topic of changing along with the times in merely political terms. For instance, Mark Edward Lewis has argued that the idea of adapting to historical change was part of a larger justification for dynastic succession. (Lewis, "Les Rites Comme Trame de l'Histoire," 1994: 29-39. Martin Kern, in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in 2000, argues that the notion of changing with the world was related to ritual and political practice in the early empire. (Kern, "'Changing with the Times': the 'Confucian' Career of a 'Legalist' Dogma in Western Han Ritualism," presented at the panel "Genre Politics: Historical Categorizations in Warring States and Han China" on March 10, 2000).

King Wu 武王, and even with the first founders of the empire, such as the Liu Bang 劉邦 (Emperor Gaozu 高祖) portrayed in the *Shiji* 史記 (Scribal Records, 1st century B.C.E.).

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY[5]

Early Chinese thinkers did not make the disciplinary differences that we make today. In received texts as well as in manuscripts, we see that quotes from the *Shi* 詩, *Shu* 書 and *Yi* 易, that is to say, from compilations of songs, documents and divination material,[6] were frequently introduced in philosophical arguments, not as an appendage, but as a fundamental part of the argument. Changes in literary form and style were also part of the construction of philosophical meaning in early texts. Therefore, in this study I do not isolate the "philosophical texts" or "Masters texts" from the rest of materials only because I endeavor to study a philosophical idea and practice. I treat all materials that deal with the notion and practice of adaptation as equally legitimate sources for my inquiry.

In the same vein, I use received as well as found materials. Precisely thanks to the study of found manuscripts, we are persuaded today that most of the pre-imperial texts were composed by different hands over long periods of time, that many of them were composites of pre-existing materials, that they did not have a stable or closed form until much later in history, and that the

[5] This section is partly based on my paper "The 'Sinological Challenge' to Chinese Philosophy: A Response from a Post-Disciplinary Perspective," accepted for publication in Chinese by the journal of the Research Centre for Chinese Philosophy and Culture at Chinese University of Hong Kong, *Zhongguo zhexue yu wenhua* 中國哲學與文化, forthcoming 2017.

[6] The *Shi, Shu* and *Yi* had a complicated textual history before becoming the classics *Shijing* 詩經, *Shujing* 書經 or *Shangshu* 尚書, and *Yijing* 易經 in the forms we can see them today. That is why I speak of "compilations of songs, documents and divination material" when referring to their form of circulation during the Warring States and Early Han periods.

book-author format in which we see them today misleads us in presupposing for them a certain linearity, unity, identity and coherence.[7] Therefore, I do not treat texts compiled under a single title as inherently sharing an intellectual identity and coherence by virtue of their purported authorship, nor as opposed to other texts that happened to be handed down to us in a different compilation. In other words, I reject the notions of "author," "book," and "school of thought" as hermeneutical principles for the early period.[8] Instead of philosophizing at the level of the book (always associated with an author and/or a school of thought), I philosophize at the level of the unit of argument. The units of coherent meaning and argument do not need to extend to an entire book compilation. They do not even need to extend to a complete chapter of the transmitted book. The unit of argument may go as long as a chapter or as short as a passage, or extend through

[7] Many are the scholars who have demonstrated, especially through the study of excavated manuscripts, that pre-imperial texts typically go back to compilation by different hands over long periods of time, and that many works are composites of pre-existing materials. Texts surviving often did not have a stable or closed form until much later, and the book-and-chapter format they have today is misleading in that it invites the presumption of an undue degree of linearity, unity, identity, and coherence. In this regard, see Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, *Gushu tongli* 古書通例, 1985. Michael Nylan and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China," 2003: 59-99. Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Legalism, Daoism, et cetera," 2003: 129-56. Michael Nylan, "Toward an Archaeology of Writing: Text, Ritual, and the Culture of Public Display in the Classical Period," 2005: 3-49. William Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," 2005: 50-78. Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 2006. Matthias Richter, *The Embodied Text*, 2013.

[8] Other scholars who have approached Early Chinese philosophy not from the notion of the book-author, but from the exploration of cross-textual philosophical themes and problems, include: Willard Peterson, "Squares and Circles: Mapping the History of Chinese Thought." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 47-60. Albert Galvany, "Discussing Usefulness: Trees as Metaphors in the *Zhuangzi*," 2009: 71-97. Most of the work of Chris Fraser, available here: http://cjfraser.net/publications/, and the work of Lisa Raphals. Some scholars have directly addressed the problem of classification by means of authors and school of thought, and proposed alternative classification paradigms, such as by theme and expertise (Mark Edward Lewis, "Warring States: Political History," 1999: 587-744. Donald Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," 1999: 813-84), or differentiating between theoretical and performative texts (Yu, Bol, Owen, and Peterson, eds., *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, 2000).

several passages. We may also find these units compiled in different books that have not been historically attributed to the same author.[9]

Of course, interpretation of any kind requires a context. Philosophical analysis, in particular, requires some kind of context in order to interpret passages, concepts, arguments, and ideas. If completely out of context words could mean anything, or nothing. The means of contextualization that most scholars of Chinese philosophy entertain today, whether they are aware of it or not, consists in a classification imposed on texts downwardly. Downward classification uses Aristotle's method of logical division, starting with larger categories and finding subcategories within them that ramify downwardly. It is nothing else than the typical family tree.[10] Applying this model to Chinese textuality, we first find divisions between fields of knowledge such as history, literature, divination, military, medicine, and philosophy. Within the category of "philosophy," the divisions are to be first made between schools of thought (Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, Mohism, etc), then between different authors within those schools of thought (i.e. Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Zisi for "Confucianism"), and finally between different books attributed to each of the different authors.

These categories are very familiar to all of us. Indeed, they seem to have a long history, as we first find names such as *daojia* 道家 and *mojia* 墨家 in the *Hanshu* "Yiwenzhi" 漢書藝文

[9] See Li Ling 李零, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流, 2004. Boltz, 2005. Fischer, "Authentication Studies Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," 2008-2009: 1-43.

[10] This kind of downward classification has also been used by manuscript scholars and textual historians interested in finding an original text (Ur text). Today, the *stemma codicum* model, just like downward-oriented taxonomy, has been mostly abandoned, especially after Martin Kern's seminal essay "Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China," 2002: 143-181. See also Enno Giele, "Using Early Manuscripts as Historical Source Materials," 2003: 409-438.

誌 (1st century C.E.). However, the similarity is superficial. As several scholars have convincingly demonstrated, these old means of classification that emerged from the needs of the Han imperial library had a very different meaning during the Han period.[11] The categories that later became different "schools of thought" were used in Early China for pure bibliographical purposes of classification, which should not lead us to assume that they had an ontological value. Downward classification of Early Chinese texts, as useful as it remains for bibliographical purposes (think for example of the widely used online database ctext.org), has become a burden to philosophical analyses, as it has led scholars to presuppose a certain ontological value to these purely classificatory and bibliographical categories.[12]

In biology and taxonomy, Linnaeus' system of downward classification was questioned in the last decades of the 18th century and finally abandoned at the beginning of the 19th century in favor of upward classification, which started by acknowledging the empirical evidence of relatedness among species. Applied to textuality, upward or empirical classification consists in studying the features of formulations in their own context by paying attention to the divisions that these call upon, rather than starting from a set of fixed distinctions and then fitting the extant materials into them.[13] Classifying Chinese texts upwardly implies starting over with new classifications every time we deal with a different philosophical problem, and sorting out the

[11] See, for instance, Nylan and Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, and Smith, 2003.

[12] Donald Sturgeon's "Chinese Text Project" is a database of Chinese texts (divided into pre-Qin and Han, and post-Han texts. Early texts are classified according to the six schools of thought, or by epistemic categories such as mathematics, history or classics): http://ctext.org.

[13] Robert Bagley, *Max Loehr and the Study of Chinese Bronzes: Style and Classification in the History of Art*, 2008. Darwin, in turn, upgraded upward classification to a more complex system to classify living beings by taking into account both genealogy and degree of similarity/difference. See Ernst Mayr, *This is Biology: The Science of the Living World*, 1997: 135-138.

categories that apply to that particular problem as it is reflected in Early Chinese texts themselves. This implies a more intricate web of relationships with no fixed directionality that allows for different items and groups to interact in dynamic, plural and nonpermanent ways. This web would operate with as many parameters as the scholar wants to look for, and would illuminate different sets of connections depending on what the scholar is interested in at each moment. Upward classification allows for infinite different connections among Early Chinese texts. The divisions we may create will not be imposed on the texts according to some previous assumptions we have about Chinese philosophy, but will grow out of the process of research, as we approach Early Chinese texts with an open mind and let ourselves be surprised by our findings.

Once all arbitrary categories retrospectively imposed in Early Chinese textuality –such as those of "Master texts" as opposed to non-philosophical texts, "Confucian" as opposed to "Daoist" texts, or texts written by Zhuangzi as opposed to texts written by Mengzi—have been eliminated, we find in front of us the wide domain of all formulations, which is now open to establish new relations, connections and regularities. The new, upward context is created by noticing different kinds of relationships between units of argument, in terms of ideological consonance and conceptual similarity, as well as comparable argumentative strategies, philosophical problems, imagery, textual goals and functions, formal structure and use of language.

In this study, I find context and source of meaningful exegesis not in the pre-established and fixed categories of book and author, but in more fluid textual, literary, conceptual, philosophical and historical connections. I look for coherence among textual ideas within one or several texts, no matter whether these ideas appear in a single chapter or across chapters; in a

single book or across books attributed to different authors and schools of thought. In sum, I let the philosophical proposals and problems, concepts, images, and ways of literary argumentation themselves sustain coherence and a context for comparing similarities and differences between formulations, and to thereby create philosophical systems beyond the connections that the traditional mode of downward classification incline us to make.

This dissertation is both born from this methodological orientation and a contribution toward establishing it, by means of exemplifying how we can do Early Chinese philosophy today and build meaningful philosophical theories without using the already obsolete, traditional hermeneutical framework. The philosophical proposal of adaptive agency is particularly suitable to this kind of methodological project, for it appears across texts, authors, and intellectual orientations throughout the Early Chinese period, and therefore could not be studied by using the traditional model. In this way, the study of adaptive agency helps us break free from long-held assumptions and categories, and revitalize the study of Early Chinese philosophy. In terms of content, this dissertation aims to fill a blank in the study of the Early Chinese philosophy of action and, specifically, the proposal of adaptive agency. In terms of methodological approach, it aims to illustrate a new way of doing Chinese philosophy.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1. Locating Adaptation

The first chapter identifies and locates the idea of "adaptation" within the wide textual horizon of Early Chinese texts. It deals with three problems. (1) The idea of adaptation is stable, but not always well delimited, conceptualized and defined, which is one of the reasons why it

remains understudied. (2) The idea of adaptation often appears without a term attributed to it, what we call "articulation without coinage." (3) The idea of adaptation needs to be demarcated from other, similar notions that are also pervasive in the Early Chinese intellectual discourses and in the scholarly studies of the same. This chapter analyzes the patterns of textual behavior of the constellation of words that convey the idea of adaptation, as well as the concepts, images and metaphors with which it appears related in multiples texts and across time, by resorting to semantic fields and metaphor schemas. I engage with the most recent scholarship in an effort to clear the confusion between adaptability and better-studied notions such as flexibility, conformity, reliance, and spontaneity.

Chapter 2. Three Models of Military Action

This chapter takes advantage of the extensive and varied Early Chinese military literature (including treatises on the philosophy of war, military anecdotes, histories, biographies, pedagogic and persuasion speeches, and battle divination records) to analyze different models of agency in Early China. Adaptive agency rises as the most widespread and popular model of military agency in Early China, as opposed to less successful models such as the prescriptive (inflexibly following rules, rituals and guidelines regardless of the context) and the forceful (imposing one's arbitrary preferences by the use of force and constraint). In the military context, adaptive agency is considered a means to enhance the agent's control over a situation. At the same time, in its military use, adaptive agency has purely instrumental goals, without moral concerns: it is a strategy to achieve one's goals in the most efficacious way. The three models of agency will keep coming back throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 3. The Reification of Fate

The preoccupation with control became paramount among Early Chinese thinkers due to a prevalent pattern of thinking that construed a dichotomy between the subject and an external, limiting and opposing reality that potentially thwarted his ability to act, or to control the outcomes of his action. In this pattern of thinking, this chapter argues, the notion of fate, understood as everything that seemingly happens without human intervention and remains out of human control, becomes reified as an external object that opposes the subject and determines his destiny, causing feelings of alienation, powerlessness, incertitude and existential incompetence, and thereby posing the relationship between the person and the world as inherently problematic. This chapter examines the process of reification of fate that takes place in Early Chinese philosophy and the problematic consequences that it had for early thinkers through two case-studies in received (*Mengzi* 孟子) and found (*The Way of Tang and Yu* 唐虞之道) texts.

Chapter 4. Coping with Uncertainty

Chapter 4 assumes the problematic consequences of the reification of fate examined in the previous chapter and introduces different proposals that were conceived as solutions to cope with uncertainty, fate and everything that lies beyond human control in Early China. The proposals are classified into non-philosophical (those that rely on the use of mantic methods such as calendars and diviners) and philosophical (those that do not involve external mediation and require psychological work and reflection on the part of the subject, as seen in texts as diverse as *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and the manuscripts *Failure and Success Depend on Opportunity* 窮達以時 and *Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* 皇帝四經). This chapter presents adaptive agency as one of the most important philosophical proposals to take control over one's life when facing

situations out of human control. Adaptation here is not intended as an instrumental means to achieve goals but has a broader moral purpose of ameliorating the conditions of living.

Chapter 5. Finding Adaptive Freedom

The final chapter shows that some Early Chinese thinkers reacted to the prevalent pattern of understanding the relationship between the person and the world in reifying terms, and proposed an alternative pattern of thinking about this relationship. The "adaptive pattern" of thinking dissolved the problems created by a reified notion of fate by reintroducing fate within the agent's field of action. According to these thinkers, fate is not an external and limiting object that opposes and overpowers the subject, but an integral part of her: the grounds for the agent's existence and capacity of action. The adaptive pattern of thinking had ethical, behavioral, psychological and soteriological consequences. Most importantly, it led to Adaptive Freedom: a state of limitlessness, joy and non-disruption that resulted from the respectful, non-coercive and interconnected relation between agent and context. I argue that freedom in Early China was not conceptualized as an "opportunity," but rather as an "exercise" and a practice: freedom required that the agent takes control over contextual constraints and thereby realizes his purposes. I end with some reflections on the value of Chinese philosophy not only as a content-providing source for existing theories but, more importantly, as a resource to rectify existing theories and design new ones.

CHAPTER 1

LOCATING ADAPTATION

OVERVIEW

The word "adaptation" might draw the contemporary reader's mind to Darwin's theory of evolution. *On the Origin of Species* (1859) postulated evolution as a process by which organisms' physical or behavioral traits changed over time. Changes that allow an organism to better fit its environment will maximize its survival capacity, and help it have more offspring, which is the reason why evolution is known as a process of natural selection of the fittest or better adapted.

The natural sciences have developed the concept of adaptation to explain a large variety of processes, procedures and phenomena. In 2005, visual perception theorists Wade and Verstraten complained that the term "adaptation" had been used to refer to such disparate phenomena in the natural sciences that questioning whether a single term could encompass them all seemed necessary.[14] However, the concept's complexity and flexibility has proven to be an asset rather than a liability, ensuring its fruitful applicability to the study of different fields. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of adaptation has traveled back and forth between the natural and the social sciences. One of the most prominent fields of application of the concept of adaptation today is climate change. Normative adaptive measures in climate change politics are described as ways to reduce vulnerability and promote successful action and

[14] Nicholas J. Wade and Frans A. J. Verstraten, "Accommodating the Past: A Selective History of Adaptation," 2005: 83-102. See especially p. 85.

effective decision-making under risks and uncertainties.[15] In the social sciences, the concept of adaptation has also been applied to military theory, where "adaptive war" is a technical term for military planning that takes into consideration the fluctuating actions of the enemy and the unstable nature of the conflict;[16] and even to informatics and programming, where an IT agent becomes an "adaptive agent" when it is capable of responding to its environment and other agents autonomously.[17]

Yet there is a fundamental difference between the biological concept of adaptation, which is descriptive, and the concept of adaptation in fields beyond the natural sciences, which has become normative. The biological concept of adaptation involves a dynamic yet "blind" evolutionary process of natural selection that enhances resilience and contributes to survival. In qualifying the process as blind, Richard Hawkins wanted to emphasize the lack of an intentional, designing and purposive consciousness behind adaptive changes.[18] In contrast, the normative concept of adaptation entails human agency and purposiveness. In the social sciences, adaptation

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[15] See, for instance, the work of Xianfu Lu, who leads the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's projects on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change. Specifically, see her 2009 "Report on the technical workshop on integrating practices, tools and systems for climate risk assessment and management and disaster risk reduction strategies into national policies and programmes," in http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/sbsta/eng/05.pdf.

[16] American strategists have entertained the notion of adaptive war since the Cold War, during which it was brought into Western military culture through the influence of the Early Chinese *Art of War* (*Sunzi* 孫子). The 21st century concept of adaptive war involves not only adaptive planning, but adaptation at all levels and at each step of the conflict process: key in planning, it is also crucial during and throughout campaigns. See Lieutenant Colonel Brian Dickerson, "Adaptability: A New Principle of War," 2003: 187-226.

[17] Object Management Group, "Agent Technology, Green Paper," version 1.0 (2000), p. 10. Homepage: http://www.objs.com/agent/index.html

[18] Hawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*, 1986. In particular, Hawkins was refuting the theologian William Paley's theory that complexity in the living world was impossible without a designing God, what Paley called "the watchmaker."

has become an intentional, planned and thoughtful strategy that involves anticipation of tendencies of development and adjusted responses to effective management.

My usage of the term adaptation to refer to a philosophy of action and a mode of understanding and interacting with the world in Early China involves the normative concept. Briefly defined, adaptation is the process through which the agent purposively adjusts himself to the context in order to deal with an upcoming situation in the most efficacious way possible. This definition, of course, opens a great many questions. What is an agent? What does it mean to adjust? And how do we understand efficacy?

An agent is one who acts. I understand *acting* as performing an activity and producing an influence or an effect. In this way, not only the individual person can be an agent, but also collectivities, social groups and communities (in a concerted effort to achieve something, which is known as "shared agency"[19]), institutions and corporations (through the agency of human representatives, which is called "social agentivity"[20]), animals and other non-human living beings, and even objects can be agents.[21] In this study, I focus on human intentional and individual agency, although chapter 3, "The Reification of Fate," includes reflections on non-subjective agency, such as the agency of Heaven and the agency of fate.

[19] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/shared-agency/

[20] See Robinson, "A Theory of Social Agentivity and its Integration into the Descriptive Ontology for Linguistic and Cognitive Engineering," 2011: 62-86.

[21] There is currently a boom of post-humanistic studies on non-human agency who aim at providing a non-human perspective to the development of humanities and sciences. See, for instance, Chris Pearson, "Beyond 'resistance': rethinking nonhuman agency for a 'more-than-human' world," 2015: 709-725; Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger eds., *Animals and Agency. An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, 2009; and the oeuvre of Bruno Latour, especially *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 2005.

In my preliminary definition of adaptation, the agent *adjusts* to his context, meaning that he (she, it) decides his course of action in accordance with the situation in which he is involved. The situation, the agent's context, becomes the only parameter through which to judge the best course of action given certain intended goal. This model for choosing an action as an adjusted, fitted, or adapted response to a specific situation contrasts with other models of action that take something other than the context as parameters to decide what to do, such as the prescriptive model (based on conformity to pre-established, non-negotiable, fixed guidelines for action), and the forceful model (based on the agent's arbitrary preferences and desires). We will discuss and contrast these three models of agency in Early Chinese philosophy throughout this dissertation, but chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," takes them as their main focus.

Finally, my definition includes the reasons why an agent may act adaptively, which is achieving one's goals with a maximum degree of efficacy. Efficacy is performing a function in the best possible manner, and it often implies the sense of a satisfactory use of resources and competencies. As a descriptor of successful action, efficacy depends on what is intended to be achieved, and hence it will be defined differently depending on the agent's goals. In Early Chinese philosophy, we find adaptive agency associated with different kinds of goals: instrumental (such as winning a battle, or getting someone to work on your behalf), moral (living a better life), ethical (respectful and non-conflictive interaction with the environment and other people), and soteriological (finding mental peace and freedom). The efficacy of the action will be judged on whether the agent achieves his goals in a successful manner in each case, despite some people may find that these goals are not always commensurable. The Early Chinese texts that advocate for adaptive agency argue that adaptation produces the best response possible for an

agent of particular features and conditions, in a specific situation, given certain goals. It is in this way that I qualify adaptive action as efficacious and successful action.

Overall, the adaptive person is a situational, contextual, reflective, and flexible agent capable of designing strategies *ad hoc*: transient courses of action for specific, non-permanent and non-generalizable life problems.

Adaptation	Noun	The intentional process of changing something to suit a new condition. A normative model of agency and a philosophy of life in Early China.
Adaptability	Noun	The capacity to adapt.
Adapt	Transitive verb: adapt *x* to x	"Adapt one's speech to the audience."
Adapt	Intransitive verb: adapt to x	"Adapt to the new times."
Adaptive	Adjective	Suited to adapt. Descriptive of an attitude or a mode of behavior, as in "adaptive performance," "adaptive response," "adaptive warfare," "adaptive freedom."

This chapter is dedicated to locating "adaptation": finding the Early Chinese philosophy of adaptation in our texts by means of pursuing several relevant words that were used to convey the meaning of adaptation, and their patterns of textual behavior, but also by pursuing the images, metaphors, themes, and concepts with which the idea of adaptation was associated in early texts. Before we can engage in the systematic study of the philosophy of adaptation as a model of agency in Early China, we need to commit ourselves to several previous tasks: pay attention to the patterns that allow us to identify the idea of adaptation in our early sources; demarcate discourses of adaptation from other, similar and also important discourses that appear in Early

Chinese philosophy or in the modern scholarly study of the same; explore the problems that we encounter in doing so; and, finally, describe the solutions we can image to overcome these problems.

A CONSTELLATION OF WORDS

To study the phenomenon of adaptation in Early China, we need to differentiate adaptation as a word, as an idea, as a concept, and as a philosophical practice: a model of agency. There is not one but a cluster of Chinese words that convey the idea of adaptation. This idea of adaptation is stable but not always well delimited and defined, which is one of the reasons why it remains understudied. Only when the idea of adaptation is conceptualized, it enjoys a one-to-one relationship with a single word, *yin* 因. In most cases, adaptation was not conceptualized nor were the words employed to convey it openly defined. But adaptation as a philosophical practice is beyond any single graph and concept. Regardless whether the idea of adaptation is conceptualized or whether the Chinese terms that in occasions convey it get defined or not, they are all nothing but vehicles to express a pattern of agency in Early China. It is this pattern that interests me.

However, before we can discuss the adaptive pattern of agency in Early China, which will be the subject of study of the rest of the chapters in this dissertation, we need to first analyze other kinds of patterns. I am referring to the patterns visible in the textual behavior of the constellation of words that convey the idea of adaptation. In this first section, I analyze how these words behave in the texts that make use of them, the ideas with which they appear related, and their different connotations.

Here is the constellation of words that can convey the meaning of adaptation in Early Chinese texts: *yin* 因, *cong* 從, *bian* 便, *shun* 順, *sui* 隨 and *xun* 循. Of these words, the most representative is *yin* 因, not only because it is the most frequently used but also because it is the most semantically broad term, hence it subsumes the connotations of all the other terms when they are used to convey the idea of adaptation. Some of these connotations include the related notions of "going along," "modeling oneself after," "acting in accordance," or "taking advantage." Let me show you different cases in which the words from the cluster are used to convey the idea of adaptation, either reinforcing the meaning of *yin* in a passage, or working alone.

Let us begin with the verb *cong* 從. In the context of a discussion about wicked ministers who would do anything to get the ruler's favor and become influential at court, chapter "Jianjie shichen" 姦劫弑臣 of the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 reads:

主有所善，臣從而譽之；主有所憎，臣因而毀之.[22]

If the ruler approves of someone/something, the ministers will *follow* [adapt] and praise it. If the ruler dislikes someone/something, the ministers will *adapt* to it and destroy it.

The parallel structure of this sentence makes it clear the interchangeability between *yin* 因 and *cong* 從. The sentence is constructed out of two parallel phrases, the first choosing the verb *cong* (to follow) and the second replacing it by the verb *yin* (to adapt). In both phrases, *cong* and *yin* point to the fact that the ministers will take the ruler's likes and dislikes respectively as a model for their own actions, and will go along with them, whatever they are, to seek the ruler's favor. The verbs *yin* and *cong* are synonymous when *cong* has the meaning of "going along with" or "model oneself after," but not in other cases (i.e. in cases when *cong* means "come next after,"

[22] *Han Feizi jishi* 14: 245.

"as a result," or "obey"). The word choice endows the literary expression of this passage with lexical richness and adds nuances to its meaning, without introducing a new idea different from that of the deployment of adaptive agency on the part of the wicked ministers.

Another example of the verb *cong* acting with the meaning of adaptation, but this time alone, appears in the popular *Zhuangzi* story of the skilled swimmer, who explains his behavior in the water with the following words:

與齊**俱**入，與汩偕出，**從**水之道而不為私焉。[23]

I enter [the water] together with its whirls, and come up again with the next whirl in the opposite direction. I *follow* [adapt to] the way of water and do not act independently from its course.

The swimmer achieves such a perfect performance in the water by adapting to the course of water as he moves along with its whirls, instead of forcing his way against the water currents. Here *cong* acts alone in the sentence, yet its conveyance of adaptive agency is clear from the context, especially as it is opposed to a contrary model of behavior that implies acting independently from one's context (*wei si* 為私), or even in opposition to it.

Let us now see this passage from *Huainanzi* 淮南子 "Yuan dao" 原道, a text that we will analyze in detail in the last chapter of this dissertation.[24]

各生所急,	Each [thing] produces what it urgently needs
以備燥濕；	in order to fit aridity or dampness.
各**因**所處,	Each *adapts* to its location,
以禦寒暑；	in order to protect against cold and heat.
並得其宜,	All things obtain what is suitable to them,
物**便**其所。	things all *adjust* to their niches.

[23] Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 19: 163.

[24] See Chapter 5, "Finding Adaptive Freedom," which contains a detailed analysis of "Yuan dao" as a text representative of the adaptive pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world.

由此觀之，　　From this perspective,
萬物固以自然，　the ten thousand things are inherently so of themselves,
聖人又何事焉？[25]　so why the sage should have any thing to do?

According to this passage, everything has the capacity to adapt to its location by developing the fittest mechanisms to survive. Both verbs, *yin* 因 and *bian* 便, convey the idea of changing oneself in order to better suit and accommodate one's environments, and therefore have a higher life success rate. In this case, *bian* highlights the basic meaning of *yin* as "adjusting," in detriment of other connotations of *yin* such as "modeling oneself after."

In the following passage from *Wenzi* 文子 "Dao yuan" 道原 the verb *xun* 循 works in parallel with *yin*:

老子曰：執道以御民者，事來而循之，物動而因之；萬物之化無不應也，百事之變無不耦也。[26]

Laozi said: "Those who hold fast to the *dao* in guiding the people *comply* with [adapt to] affairs as they come, and *adapt* to things as they move. There is no transformation of things to which they cannot respond; there is no change in the hundred affairs that they cannot match.

Much as in the swimmer anecdote, in the passage above, *xun* emphasizes the complying aspect of adaptive agency. The adaptive agent does not act arbitrarily or out of his own will, but in compliance with the situation he is dealing with. In relation to this, it is interesting to notice that, although none of the *Laozi* 老子 texts that we have contain the word *yin* or any other of the cluster with a close meaning to adaptation, the Heshang gong 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi* ostensibly interprets a multitude of passages from the perspective of the philosophy of adaptation. Noticeably, the commentary often explains *Laozi*'s *wuwei* 無為 mode of action as *yinxun* 因循,

[25] Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻裂集解 1: 17-19.

[26] Du Daojian 杜道堅, *Wenzi zuanyi* 文子纘義 1: 2b.

adaptive agency. See, for instance, the gloss for the final line of *Laozi* 3: "Acting in the non-action mode is not to fabricate and initiate arbitrary courses of action, but to move adaptively and compliantly [with the situation]" 為無為，不造作，動因循.[27]

The verb *xun* can also work alone with the meaning of adaptation, as it does in this passage from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子:

聖人之生也天行，其死也物化；靜而與陰同德，動而與陽同波；不為福先，不為禍始；感而後應，迫而後動，不得已而後起。去知與故，循天之理，故無天災，無物累，無人非，無鬼責。[28]

The life of the sage belongs to the proceedings of Heaven, and his death belongs to the transformation of things. When he is still, he shares in potency with *yin*, and when he moves, he shares with *yang* in expansion. He does not take the initiative to produce fortune, nor does he initiates misfortune. He responds after being stirred, and moves after being compelled. He rises the only course of action that applies to the situation. He discards wisdom and precedent, and *adapts* to the patterns of Heaven. Therefore, he suffers no calamity from Heaven, no encumbrances from things, no blame from humans, and no reproof from spirits.

This passage contains a series of interesting associations between adaptive agency and other notions that will keep coming up throughout this study, such as the notions of "not taking the initiative" (*bu xian* 不先) but rather "following after" (*er hou* 而後), and the notion of abandoning our conventional knowledge about the world, together with the prejudices it sustains, in order to become more attuned to phenomena as they appear, and hence being capable of adapting one's actions to the way in which the world really manifests itself, as opposed to how our conventional wisdom assumes it should.

The verb *shun* 順 fully replaces *yin* in conveying the idea of adaptation in the following passage from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋:

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[27] *Zhengtong daozang* 正統道藏, *Daode zhenjing jizhu* 道德真經集註, vol. 21, p. 617b.

[28] *Zhuangzi jijie* 15: 133.

先王先**順**民心，故功名成。夫以德得民心以立大功名者，上世多有之矣。失民心而立功名者，未之曾有也。[29]

The Former Kings prioritized *adapting* to the people's hearts, and therefore their achievements and fame were accomplished. In early times, there were many who used virtuous power to obtain the hearts of the people, thereby establishing their great achievements and fame. There has never been a case where one lost people's hearts yet established achievements and fame.

In this passage, the use of the verb *shun* 順 highlights the connotation of "being in accord with" the people's hearts when governing them. Adapting to people's hearts (*yin minxin* 因民心) is an important *topos* in Early Chinese political philosophy, as we will see in the next chapter.[30] The verb *shun* also translates as "adapting" in this passage from *Huainanzi* "Lan ming" 覽冥:

夫鉗且、大丙不施轡銜，而以善禦聞於天下。伏戲、女媧不設法度，而以至德遺於後世。何則？至**虛**無純一，而不嚼喋苛事也。《周書》曰：「掩雉不得，**更順**其風。」[31]

Now, how is it that Qian Qie and Da Bing did not use reins or bits, yet were able to achieve a reputation for charioteering throughout the world? And that Fuxi and Nüwa did not set up standards and measures yet were able to transmit utmost virtue to later generations? They achieved emptiness, nothingness, purity, and unity, and they did not dabble in petty matters. The Documents say: "If you try to catch cock pheasants and do not get any, change [your methods] in *adaptation to* their habits."

The last sentence contains the verbs *geng* 更 and *shun* 順, which could be literally translated as "change" and "being in accord," but which together in this passage express the process of adapting. The verb *geng* emphasizes that the hunter must change something in his hunting techniques. The verb *shun*, in turn, reminds us that the change cannot be arbitrary, but must be done in accordance to the object the hunter is dealing with: the pheasant. By adapting his hunting techniques to the pheasants' habits, the hunter may succeed. From the textual context we know

[29] Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 9.9.2: 478.

[30] See chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," especially the sections "The Adaptive versus the Forceful Model of Agency," and "Adaptive Measures in the Zhou Conquest."

[31] *Huainan honglie jijie* 6: 10a.

that the proverb is clearly making a political point, but what is more interesting to notice at this point is its connection with the self-cultivational concepts of emptiness, nothingness, purity, and unity (*xuwu chunyi* **虛**無純一). The first pair points to epistemological fasting and axiological equanimity, which in many early texts are presented as two of the main prerequisites to carry out the practice of adaptation. A person full of prejudices and pre-established ideas about how things should be will find it impossible to flexibly change along with circumstances. The second pair points to the idea of not isolating oneself from the world, or positioning oneself in relation of opposition to external things. A person who alienates himself from the rest of the phenomena will find it difficult to construct engaged, contextual and situational responses. As we will see in more detail below, it is usually the case that the words in the cluster, when expressing the idea of adaptation, appear in close relationship with other words that intensify its meaning, and with other ideas that are conceived of as conditions for achieving adaptability.

Another word that is often used to reinforce the meaning of *yin* as adaptation is *sui* 隨, as seen in the following passage from *Guanzi* 管子 "Zheng shi" 正世:

故古之所謂明君者，非一君也，其設賞有薄有厚，其立禁有輕有重，跡行不必同，非故相反也，皆**隨**時而變，**因**俗而動。[32]

Those who we call the discerning rulers of antiquity were more than one single ruler. The rewards they implemented might be meager or substantial, the prohibitions they established might be light or severe, and the traces they left behind were not necessarily the same, yet for anyone of them it not was a case of deliberately trying to be different. All of them *changed along* with [adapted to] the times, and took action *adapting* to the prevailing customs.

Ancient kings are often praised in early texts for their adaptability: their capacity to choose the course of action that better fits their times, situation and context, as opposed to following inflexible prescriptions or acting arbitrarily and willfully. Going along with different times and

[32] Li Mian **李勉**, *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 管子今注今譯 47: 759.

customs, as well as being aware of the right timing to initiate an action, are important themes that will reappear in this study in relation to adaptive agency.

Whereas all of the words in the cluster (*yin* 因, *cong* 從, *bian* 便, *shun* 順, *sui* 隨 and *xun* 循) are often used in early texts to convey the meaning of adaptation, that is not always necessarily the case. Therefore, we must discern the cases in which these words are used with the meaning of adaptation from other possible meanings. In order to do so, we must identify the patterns of behavior that these words exhibit in Early Chinese texts when they convey the idea of adaptation, and how they behave differently from the cases in which they do not convey it. I will discuss these behavioral patterns in later sections of this chapter. For now, let me show you one case in which the decision on how to read the verb *shun* requires reflection, a passage from *Mengzi* 孟子 "Gongsun Chou B" 公孫丑下:

> 得道者多助，失道者寡助。寡助之至，親戚畔之；多助之至，天下順之。[33]
>
> He who finds the *dao* (moral course of action) has many to assist him. He who loses the *dao* has few to assist him. When the situation in which few assist reaches its extreme, his own relatives betray him. When the situation in which many assist him reaches its extreme, everyone under heaven adapts to/accords to/submits to him.

Is this passage discussing a case of adaptation? I believe that all textual clues indicate a negative answer. First of all, there are no ideas or words in the larger passage that could imply a connection with the idea of adaptation. Unlike in the passages discussed above, such as the one from *Huainanzi* "Lan ming," *shun* 順 here does not present a relationship with any kind of self-cultivation or epistemological practice that would train the agent to act adaptively. On the contrary, the people's *shun*ing seems to be a reflex act and direct consequence of the ruler's

[33] Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokanji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, *Mengzi zhushu fu jiaokanji* 孟子注疏附校勘記*:* 72a.

moral performance, for which the ruled people need to exercise no conscious effort. This does not fit the pattern in which early texts present the idea of adaptation, which is often associated with creative answers to specific situations. Moreover, the only term related to *shun* by means of parallelism in this passage is *pan* 畔 (a loan for *pan* 叛, "betray"). This drives us to reading *shun* as *pan*'s direct opposite, "being obedient or loyal." In conclusion, according to the passage, the ruler who follows a moral course of action can expect the reward of having the people *submit to* his commands and *abide by* his rule (as opposed to *adapt* to him), as well as support him in case of external interference. It is indeed a common idea in Early China, well developed in the *Mengzi*, that morality by itself subdues the people, so there is no need to take military action. We will further discuss this notion of moral conquest, and how it differs from the practice of adaptation, in chapter 2.[34]

Let this counterexample help illustrate the difficulty we face in translating, and, more importantly, understanding each single passage, for we cannot assume the given meaning of any particular term. Our final reading must be a result of the careful analysis of the textual behavior of our keywords in each specific passage and its larger context.

YIN AS A DEFINED CONCEPT

"Adaptation" is a way to describe the consistent semantic meaning that the cluster of words presented above had in early texts, and which was primarily represented by the term *yin* 因. In most cases the term *yin* was not explicitly conceptualized or defined. Yet we have a

[34] See Chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," especially the section "Adaptive Measures in the Zhou Conquest."

handful of instances that define *yin*, providing the term with an explication of its rules of use and fields of validity, and thereby developing it as a concept.

The very nature of Early Chinese textuality makes impossible the task of thinking chronologically and in a linear manner about how the concept of adaptation has evolved from one period and text to the next. For this reason, in this section I rather explore the different fields of knowledge and discourses in which *yin* was used as a concept, the associated features that have been attached to the concept of adaptation, and the different contexts explicitly imagined for its applicability, without implying any diachronic development. Much as in the rest of my study, I will not see the materials from a traditional intellectual history point of view, namely, situating them into a linear discourse of successive events, since this is not even possible for most early texts. My purpose is rather to analyze the potential connections between the different usages of adaptation as a concept, and the reasons that could have led certain Early Chinese thinkers to the desire to fixate and ensure the meaning of adaptation as a concept.

All of the conceptualized uses of the idea of adaptation in our textual record appear in the grammatical form "[*x*] *yezhe* 也者," which is a nominalizer and topic marker, as well as a common way to conceptualize a word for which a definition follows. The definition provided after the form "[x] *yezhe*" will often counter with a prevailing notion of the same concept in an attempt to redefine it according to the author's ideology. For this reason, the grammatical form "[x] *yezhe*" is often used in philosophical disquisitions and debates. It is not surprising that the most disputed philosophical concepts in Early China, such as the *dao* 道, the virtues (*de* 德, *li* 禮, *ren* 仁) and the ideal figures (*junzi* 君子, *shengren* 聖人) are those that enjoy a larger number of (re)definitions in the grammatical form "[x] *yezhe.*"

The definitions of conceptualized terms provide explanations of important concepts that not everyone understands, or at least not everyone understands in the specific way that is being advocated in the definition. Much as with the Later Mohists' definitions of key terms, we must understand the task of defining or explaining key words and the creation of concepts not only as aims to organize and clarify semantic tools of discourse but also as a desire to advocate understanding certain concepts in certain ways.[35] These *new* ways that are expounded by means of definitions and explanations can become technical meanings that do not exclude the usage of the word with a different meaning in a non-technical context, but also new interpretations that do exclude alternative readings. In the case of the definitions of *yin* that we will see below, the passages in question are attempting to conceptualize and thus take hold of an elastic and fluctuant notion widespread in Early Chinese literature but which is not often accounted for in a conceptual way. At the same time, these definitions link the concept of adaptation with certain themes and purposes, hence consciously or unconsciously excluding and opposing others.

In the following I present different instances of conceptualizations of *yin* followed by a definition. These definitions show some of the most important features of the philosophical idea and practice of adaptation as it is discussed in the Early Chinese literature. Overall, the definitions of *yin* as a concept inform us of *what* is adaptation, *how* to adapt, and *why* an agent should act adaptively.

Let us begin with a broad definition of *yin* in *Guanzi* 管子"Xin shu I" 心術上 (Art of the Mind I). "Xin shu I" consists on a series of seventeen rhymed statements followed by explanations (with the explanation for statement 15 missing) on the general theme of governing,

[35] On the Later Mohist definitions of important terms, see A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*, 1978.

both one's own mind and body, and the state, through non-coercing action (*wuwei* 無為). The definitions of *yin* appear in the explanations to statements 11, 15, 18, and 19. I begin with the explanation to statement 18.[36]

[Explanation 18] 其應非所設也，其動非所取也，此言因也，因也者，舍己而以物為法者也。感而後應，非所設也，緣理而動，非所取也。[37]

"His response is not what he has pre-established" and "his action is not what he has arbitrarily chosen": these speak of adaptation. *Adaptation is to abandon oneself and take things as the standard*.[38] He is stimulated and then responds: it is not out of preconceptions. He adheres to the pattern of things when making a move: it is not what he himself (arbitrarily) chooses.

This passage gives a broad definition of adaptation as "abandoning oneself and taking things as the standard for action." According to this definition, to adapt is not to take oneself as a guide for action, but to instead take something else (what one is responding to in a particular situation) as a standard of how to act. Self-abandonment here does not imply not to care about one's interests or lose one's sense of self, but, as explicated in the passage, not to act based on one's preconceptions about things, nor out of one's own arbitrary desires. Apart from providing a definition of adaptation, the passage also emphasizes the means through which an agent can act adaptively in response to a specific situation (the "how to"). To develop an adaptive response, the agent needs to study the context and situation in which he is involved, and therefore must do away with both pre-established, inflexible courses of action and arbitrary personal preferences.[39]

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[36] For a discussion of the *Guanzi* compilation, see Rickett, *Guanzi. Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China,* vols. I and II, 1998. An introduction to structure, main themes, authorship and dating of the "Xin shu I" chapter is on vol. 2, pages 65-70.

[37] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 36: 637.

[38] In most cases, when the term that is being conceptualized and defined can act as a verb, it keeps its verbal abstract form of "the action of x," rather than being personalized as "those who x." This is also the case with *yin.* I believe that we must keep it as a nominalized action "adapting," or "adaptation," rather than rendering it "those who adapt."

[39] This is, of course, tricky. One could always say that the agent's desire or preference is to act according to someone else's desires; therefore, he is acting according to his own desires whereas

Thus being, the passage separates adaptation as a conceptualized model of agency from what we will call "prescriptive" and "forceful" models of agency, to which we will come back later in the second chapter.[40]

This passage does not suggest a context for when adaptive agency is applicable. It is a broad definition of what adaptation is and how it can be achieved, in principle applicable to any field, situation and context. The next passage that I want to examine, also from *Guanzi* "Xin shu I," further develops the "how to" of adaptive agency within a similarly unspecified and broad context.

[Explanation 11]「莫（真）人」，言至也；「不宜（俄）」，言應也。應也者，非吾所設，故能無宜（俄）也。

「不顧（側）」，言因也。因也者，非吾所顧（側），故無顧（側）也。[41]

The "true person" speaks of accomplishment. "Unprejudiced" speaks of responsiveness. Responsiveness is not to act out of one's own preconceptions, therefore it is to be able to act without prejudice.

"Unbiased" speaks of adaptation. *Adaptation is not to take one's own side, so one is unbiased.*

Here we find definitions of "responsiveness" and "adaptation," which are two related concepts in Early Chinese texts. According to the passage, to be fully responsive it is necessary not to act out of one's preconceptions. Therefore, being responsive is related to being unprejudiced. In the same vein, to be adaptive it is necessary not to take one's own side. Therefore, adaptation is related to being unbiased. Being unbiased reinforces the meaning of adaptation as "not taking

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acting according to someone else's desires. That is perfectly fine as long as we acknowledge that this agent takes someone else's desires as the standard of his actions in a particular situation. Therefore, the sense of self-abandonment conveyed in the passage remains.

[40] Chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," analyzes and compares the adaptive, prescriptive and forceful models of action in Early China by making use of the military literature.

[41] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 36: 637. Emendations: 莫 to 真, see Rickett vol. 2, 1998: 78. 宜 to 俄, and 顧 to 側, see Zhao Shouzheng 趙守正, *Guanzi zhushi* 管子注釋, 1982.

oneself as the standard" that we have seen in the previous passage, so that one can embrace a plurality of phenomena. Being unprejudiced and being unbiased are prerequisites for becoming responsive and adaptive, respectively. Given the common context of discussion, and the conceptual links between responsiveness and adaptability throughout Early Chinese texts, we could say that both being unprejudiced and unbiased are prerequisites for developing an "adaptive response."

Chapter "Yinxun" 因循 ("Adaptation") from the *Shenzi* 愼子 gives us a narrow definition in which adapting means "adapting to persons' dispositions" (*yin ren qing* 因人情) and is addressed at the ruler in a political context. The *Shenzi* has been reconstructed as a compilation of recovered fragments that scholars have attributed to Shen Dao 愼到, an early figure who makes brief appearances in received texts such as the *Zhuangzi,* the *Xunzi* and the *Han Feizi* advocating for politico-philosophical views such as the relevance of situational advantage (*shi* 勢), and discarding fixed patterns of knowledge and the self (棄知去己).[42]

"Adapting to persons' dispositions" is a recurrent theme in Early Chinese political philosophy, remarkably in the *Han Feizi*, whose chapter "Eight Canons" ("Ba jing" 八經) begins with the strong statement that (the ruler), "to put the world in order, must adapt to others' dispositions" 凡治天下，必因人情.[43] What is exceptional about the *Shenzi* fragment that I discuss below is that it presents the philosophical *topos* of "adapting to persons' dispositions" as a definition of the concept of adaptation, thus accomplishing a double function: on one hand, the

[42] See *Han Feizi jishi* 40: 886, and *Zhuangzi jijie* 33: 292-294. For a complete study of the *Shenzi* fragments and the political philosophy of Shen Dao, see Thompson, *The Shen Tzu Fragments*. 1979. More recently, Harris, *The Shenzi Fragments*, 2016.

[43] *Han Feizi jishi* 48: 996. On the ideological connections between the *Han Feizi* and the political philosophy of the *Shendao* fragments, see Harris, 2016: 83-93.

topos of "adapting to persons' dispositions" gains power by appearing linked to an important concept; on the other hand, the otherwise loose and wide concept of adaptation becomes conveniently narrowed down to a single type of adaptive action with a limited object. I quote the fragment in full.

天道因則大，化則細。[44]因也者，因人之情也。人莫不自為也，化而使之為我，則莫可得而用矣。是故先王見不受祿者不臣，祿不厚者，不與入難。人不得其所以自為也，則上不取用焉。故用人之自為，不用人之為我，則莫不可得而用矣。此之謂因。[45]

The way of Heaven is such that those who adapt are great, and those who transform are insignificant. *Adaptation means to adapt to the dispositions of people*. Humans all act for themselves. If I [attempt to] transform them and make them act for me, I will not be able to obtain and employ any of them. For this reason, the Former Kings did not employ as ministers those who would not accept a salary, and they did not undertake difficult projects together with those whose salary was not large enough. If people do not obtain what they need to act for themselves, those in power will not be able to make any use of them. Therefore, if you use what persons need to act for themselves, and do not use what make persons act for your own sake, there is nothing that you cannot obtain and employ. This is called adaptation.

Human disposition (*ren zhi qing* 人之情) is assumed to be selfish: people find incentives for action when the action can revert positively on their own welfare. When working for the ruler, officers must also find some recompense for themselves. If the ruler, or someone in power, does not understand and respect this basic human disposition, he will be unable to find trustful and successful employees. Adaptation is here to adjust one's methods to people's dispositions understood in these selfish terms, instead of trying to transform them (*hua* 化). This passage agrees with the broad definitions that we have seen in the two "Xin shu I" passages of adaptation as taking something else, not oneself, as the standard for how to act. Yet it narrows the object of

[44] These lines have a parallel in *Huainanzi* (*Huainan honglie jijie* 20: 5a) "Tai zu" chapter, which elaborates on the *topos* of adapting to people's dispositions, adding the slogan that "those who adapt have no enemy under Heaven." I will have more to say about this idea in Chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action." For a discussion of the ideological consonances between the *Shendao* fragments and the *Huainanzi*, specifically on the topic of how politicians can make good use of human resources, see Harris, 2016: 96-101.

[45] *Shenzi* 愼子 "Yinxun," p. 3.

the action of adapting to "people's dispositions," speaking to a strictly political context. At the same time, this passage gives us the reason why an agent might want to behave adaptively: adaptation allows the agent to make good use of all resources at hand. In the context of the example, by behaving adaptively, a ruler would be able to make use of his human resources and employ them fruitfully in the governance of the state. We will further discuss a similar strategic use of adaptive agency in a political context later in this chapter.

Another narrow definition of *yin* appears in "Xin shu I," which locates adaptation also in a political context, but in relation to naming theories:

[Explanation 15] 「物固有形，形固有名」。此言（名）不得過實，實不得延名。姑（詁）形以形，以形務名，督言正名。故曰「聖人」。

不言之言，應也。應也者，以其為之人者也。執其名，務其所以成，之應之道也。**無為之道因也，因也者，無益無損也。以其形，因為之名，此因之術也**。名者，聖人之所以紀萬物也。[46]

"Things have inherent forms; forms have inherent names." This means that the name must not exceed the entity, and that the entity must not transcend its name. He explains forms in terms of forms and uses the form of something to find its nomenclature. He rectifies names in the light of this theory. Therefore, the statement calls him "a sage."

The theory of not having a theory lies in responsiveness. Responsiveness is to use the point of view of the person who performs the action (to which he responds). To take hold of his nomenclature, and pay attention to how he must complete himself, this is the way to be responsive. *The way of non-coercive action is adaptation. Adaptation is neither add nor subtract anything (from things). To take their form and in accordance to it give them a name, this is the art of adaptation (when applied to naming).* Nomenclature is the way by which the sage marks the ten thousand kinds of things.

This passage proposes a non-conventionalist theory of names, which we could also denominate a theory of "adaptive naming." In general, correlative theories of naming such as the one we briefly see here but also in other chapters of the *Guanzi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋

[46] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 36: 637. Emendations: addition of 名 before 不, see Wang Niansun. 姑 to 詁, see Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Guanzi jijiao* 管子集校, in *Guo Moruo Wenji* 郭 沫 若 文 集, 16: 224-266.

繁露 and the work of Xu Gan 徐幹, are non-conventionalist or non-arbitrary insofar they emphasize that entities inherently possess appropriate names, which are discernible through examining the entity's form.[47] The political relevance of this theory lies in the assumption that, to apprehend reality, one needs to first discern the proper name of each entity, and only by using the right names for each thing will order in the world prevail.

Although, in other early texts, the expression *buyan zhi yan* 不言之言 refers to using language in a different way from the ordinary one, a way in which the meanings and the limits of expression are not previously fixed, this passage calls for an understanding of *yan* as theory. The "theory of not having a theory" to which this sentence refers is that expounded above: the theory of applying names according to realities, instead of conventionally imposing a previously fixed nomenclature into things. This theory of naming "does not have a theory" in the sense that names are given according to realities, i.e. adapting to the forms and features of each object, so there are no fixed guidelines for naming.

What interests us from this passage is the usage of adaptation as a specific model, among others, of agency, here applied to the political task of naming things. Adaptation is defined as *wuwei* 無為, a term often translated as "non-action," but which implies a non-coercive, non-forceful and non-imposing way of acting. The sage, in his "marking" (*ji* 紀) phenomena to put the world into order, does not impose conventional names over things, but rather names entities in accordance with their own inherent features –what we could call a model of "adaptive naming."

[47] See Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, 1994, especially the chapter on "Emergence of Correlative Theories of Naming," pp. 85-95.

The next passage, again from "Xin shu I," reinforces the connection between non-coercing action (*wuwei*) and adaptation (*yin*) by means of opposing *yin* to coercive action (*wei* 為).

[Explanation 19] 「過在自用，罪在變化」，自用則不**虛**，不**虛**則仵於物矣。變化則為生，為生則亂矣。**故道貴因，因者，因其能者，言所用也**。[48]

"Mistakes reside in relying on one's own opinion. Faults reside in altering and transforming [other things and persons]." If you rely in your own opinions, you will not be empty. If you are not empty, you will conflict with things. If you alter and transform [other things and persons], this will generate coercive action, and when coercive action arises, then there will be chaos. *Therefore, the most valuable in the way [of the ruler][49] is adaptation. Adaptation means adapting to [other persons'] capabilities when stating how they are to be employed.*

This passage presents a strong argument for the ruler not to be self-centered, but to take his officers and other persons into account. The passage connects different ideas that we have been previously seen, situates adaptation in a political context, defines it as the way of the ruler, and offers a brief account of the relationship between political positions and their respective tasks (*xing ming* 刑名), the Early Chinese theory of "matching name and deed," often associated with Han Feizi and Shen Buhai 申不害.[50] Much as names are not conventionally imposed but given according to the entities' features, political charges and professional positions will only be distributed according to the capabilities of the person. The ruler must not randomly give positions or duties out of his own will (he cannot rely on his opinion), and he must not force his

[48] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 36: 637.

[49] There are two reasons to interpret *dao* 道 here as the way of the ruler. First, Explanation 19 contains a few more lines I have not quoted where it discusses the way of the gentleman, often a political figure (*junzi* 君子). Second, he who decides positions and responsibilities based on capabilities must be the ruler.

[50] See Makeham, 1994: 67-68. Makeham traces the first *xing ming* theory to the chancellor and political philosopher Shen Buhai (4th century B.C.E.), part of whose thought is purportedly preserved in the *Shenzi* 申子 fragments.

subjects to take on tasks for which they are not prepared (he cannot alter and transform). Only thus will order and peace of the state be guaranteed. This theory is attributed to Shen Buhai in the *Han Feizi*, in a passage that succinctly states that Shen Buhai's "method" (*shu* 術) consisted in examining the ability of the ministers and conferring office by adapting to each candidate's capabilities and responsibilities.[51]

Using this method not only ensures that human resources are properly employed, it also gives the ruler an effective way of both task distribution and fitness assessment of his ministers' performance in which he gains full control without employing forceful and coercive action (*wei* 為). [52] Indeed, the "Yin shu I" passage reinforces the relationship between adaptive action and the *wuwei* mode of action by contrasting *wei* and *yin*. The *wei* mode of action is said to create conflict. Its opposite in this passage is *yin*, adaptation, used with the purpose of avoiding chaos, conflict, and opposition, which is one of the most important fruits of using adaptation as a strategy for successful action in Early Chinese texts.[53] This definition of the concept of adaptation provides us with a reason why an agent may want to act adaptively.

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[51] *Han Feizi jishi* 43: 906.

[52] In *Name and Actuality*, Makeham examines different interpretations of the meaning of the *xing ming* theory in the light of different texts and modern scholars. He strongly interprets *xing ming* as political theory of accountability: assessing performance according to self-decreed charge. See Makeham 1994, specially his chapter 4, pp. 67-83. In this way, he translates *xun* and *yin* as "responsiveness through accommodation," and understands them as technical terms referring to "the skill or technique of making one's mind like a tabula rasa, noncommittally taking note of all the details of a man's claims and then objectively comparing his achievements with the wording of the original claim" (Makeham, 1994: 69). While I agree with this interpretation, I believe that certain texts, such as the "Xin shu I" passage at hand, and the *Han Feizi* passages that I discuss later in this chapter, give us a meaning of *yin* as an activity previous to the fitness assessment, that is, the distribution of tasks by adapting to people's capacities.

[53] This is the case of the "Gui yin" 貴因 ("Valuing Adaptation") chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, which conceptualizes adaptation in its title and provides a series of interesting illustrations of

The last instance of a conceptualized use of *yin* in Early Chinese texts provides further insight into the goals of behaving adaptively. Let us look at a passage from "Jue sheng" 決勝 ("Decisive Victory") chapter of *Lüshi Chunqiu*:

凡兵，貴其因也。因也者，因敵之險以為己固，因敵之謀以為己事。能審因而加勝，則不可窮矣。勝不可窮之謂神，神則能不可勝也。夫兵，貴不可勝。不可勝在己，可勝在彼。聖人必在己者，不必在彼者，故執不可勝之術以遇不勝之敵，若此則兵無失矣。[54]

In general, the military values its adaptability. *Adaptation is to adapt to what can endanger the enemy in order to transform it into strengths for oneself, and to adapt to the enemy's strategies in order to make them serve one's purposes*. It is the ability to investigate [that to which] one can adapt and thereby add victories, with the result that [the possibilities for victory] cannot be exhausted. When [the possibilities for] victory cannot be exhausted, it is called "numinous." The numinous has the capacity of being unconquerable. In the military, being unconquerable is the most valuable. Being unconquerable lies with oneself, while being conquerable lies with the enemy. The sage must rely on himself, he must not rely on others (the enemy). Therefore, he holds the technique of being unconquerable to face a conquerable enemy. If things are done this way, one's army will have no defeats.

This passage locates adaptation in a different context than the previous ones: the military. In this scenario, it is the commander who needs to behave adaptively in order to secure his victory, by adjusting his army's strategies and plans to the enemy's situation and the larger context. Depending on the kind of enemy the commander faces, he will deploy a different strategy. Noticeably, and despite the change of context from the court to the battlefield, the definition of military adaptive agency shares with the previous ones the same basic structure. But what is more interesting about this passage is that, like the previous one, it emphasizes the advantages of acting adaptively. In this definition, we learn that through adaptation one can make the most of any given situation, even when this situation appears not to be favorable, to the extent that the agent can transform an adverse situation in one's favor. Adaptation is shown to be a strategy for

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adaptive behavior featuring the military figure of King Wu. I analyze "Gui yin" in full in my second chapter, "Three Models of Military Action."

[54] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 8.8.4: 452.

succeeding at achieving the agent's purposes by carefully studying and responding to the surrounding context and circumstances, a theme that we will see reappearing throughout this dissertation.

The definitions of adaptation as a concept in these passages, even when locating adaptation in different contexts, repeat the same basic structure of "adjusting to things when dealing with things." The definition of *yin* as a concept is stable no matter to which field of knowledge or practice it is applied, or who is supposed to perform the adaptive action. I close this section with a graph that highlights the common framework of the definitions of *yin* as a concept, and the specific themes and features that each individual passage adds to this framework.

	What	How	Why	Related themes
YSI 18	Abandon oneself. Take things as the standard.	Eliminate pre-established courses of action and prejudices.		Act in response to things.
YSI 11	Not to take one's side.	Being unbiased.		Responsiveness. Contrast with other models of agency.
Shenzi	Adapt to people's dispositions.	Use what motivates people.	Employ human resources.	Contrast with forceful alterations. Way of Heaven.
YSI 15	Not to add or subtract anything from things.	Give names according to forms.	Order the world.	*Wuwei.* The sage. Naming theories.
YSI 19	Adapt to people's capabilities.	Not relying on one's opinions.	Avoid conflict and chaos.	*Yin* vs. *wei.* *Ming-shi* political theory.

LSCQ	Adapt to the enemy's weaknesses and strategies.	Investigate what we can make use of.	Becoming unconquerable. Turn situations into one's favor.	Military theory. Numinosity. Relying on what is within one's control.

YIN WITHOUT ADAPTATION

Given the complexity and semantic richness of the word *yin* when conveying the idea of adaptation, it can subsume and replace all the other words that overlap with some of its nuances. It is not the case the other way around. None of the other words belonging to the cluster can stand for all the connotations that *yin* conveys in Early Chinese texts. This is the reason why (together with the simple fact that *yin* is used in most cases) *yin* is to be understood as the most representative Early Chinese word to express the idea of adaptation. In some instances, like the ones shown in the previous section, *yin* is even conceptualized and defined.

Yet the word *yin* does not always convey the philosophical idea of adaptation. In the same way that the other words of the cluster present usages different from the philosophical notion of adaptation (we have seen the example of *shun* meaning voluntary submission), there are numerous cases of the adverbial usage of *yin*, some cases of *yin* as a noun, as well as verbal usages of *yin* that do not stand for "adapting." Before we can proceed to the more rewarding task of studying the philosophical import of the idea of adaptation in Early China, it is fundamental to identify the cases in which *yin* acts as a conjunctive adverb and the cases in which *yin* acts as a noun or a verb with a different meaning. These usages of *yin* reveal more than we would initially imagine. Without properly standing for "adaptation," they are etymologically related to the meaning of *yin* as adaptation in a philosophical sense.

Let us begin with the nominal use of *yin.* The simplest meaning of *yin* is that of a straw mat. This is attested in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, which defines *yin* as a "layered mat to carry on a carriage" (車重席).[55] When standing for "mat," *yin* 因 can also be written in the form *yin* 茵, like in the example below:

且富人則車輿衣纂錦，馬飾傅旄象，帷幕茵席，綺繡絛組…[56]

Moreover, those who are rich have carriages clothed in silk and brocade, horses ornamented with yak-tail and ivory. [They have] curtains and canopies, *mats* and cushions, woven silks and embroideries, ribbons and belts…

Because of the graphic components of the written form, the word *yin* has been interpreted as a person leaning on a mat, with the derived metaphorical meaning of leaning on something, or taking something as the basis. This is what has driven the team behind Thesaurus Linguae Sericae (TLS) to define *yin* in the following way: "What an animate or inanimate agent bases himself on in order to develop or act, and the image is that of leaning on it."[57] TLS illustrates this definition of *yin* with textual examples from the early Buddhist corpus, where *yin* is paired with *guo* (*yinguo* 因果) establishing a logical relationship of cause-effect, generally understood as the law that brings about *karma* (*ye* 業).

However interesting this Buddhist connection might be, we already find in earlier texts, dating from a time before the arrival of Buddhism in China, a nominal meaning of *yin* as the basis on which an agent can lean to develop strategies of action. Let us look at this passage from the *Sunzi*:

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[55] See Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, *juan* 2.

[56] *Huainan honglie jijie* 11: 21b.

[57] TLS is a historical and comparative encyclopedia of Chinese conceptual schemas, edited by Christoph Harbsmeier and Jiang Shaoyu. See http://tls.uni-hd.de. Search for "yin" 因, under the synonym group of "cause."

行火必有因，煙火必素具。發火有時，起火有日。時者，天之燥也。日者，月在箕壁翼軫也。凡此四宿者，風起之日也。[58]

To execute a fire attack, we must *have* [*a series of*] *bases*. (First) inflammable materials must be readily available. (Second) There are appropriate seasons to ignite fire, and appropriate days to raise fire. The appropriate season is when the air is dry. The appropriate days are those when the moon is passing through the constellations of the Winnowing Basket, the Wall, the Wings, or the Chariot Platform.[59]

There are two kinds of bases on which to deploy adaptive strategies: availability of materiel and appropriate timing. The passage goes on to explain how the commander must be ready to vary his fire attack strategy by *adapting* to the five kinds of possible developments that are susceptible to happening with fire (凡火攻，必因五火之變而應之), such as fire breaking out inside the enemy's camp.[60]

The "Jun shou" chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* presents a similar use of the compound "*you yin*" 有因 as a basis on which to deploy adaptive agency. In the passage below we see that the noun "*yin*" of the "*you yin*" compound transforms into a verb in the two sentences that follow, then holding the full meaning of *adapting*:

凡姦邪險陂之人，必有因也。何因哉？因主之為。人主好以己為，則守職者舍職而阿主之為矣。阿主之為，有過則主無以責之，則人主日侵而人臣日得. [61]

In general, men who are wicked or corrupt need to *have a basis* [*upon which to act adaptively*]. To what do they *adapt*? They *adapt* to the actions of the ruler. If the ruler of men enjoys carrying out activities himself, those who (should be) taking care of duties refuse their duties and simply agree with what the rulers does. By agreeing with the ruler's actions, when

[58] For the military classics, I use Liu Yin's 劉隱 edition, *Yingyin mingben wujing qishu zhijie* 景印明本五經七書直接. *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 孫武子直接 2: 76.

[59] I follow Roger Ames' translation of the constellations' names. See Ames, *Sun Tzu: The Art of Warfare,* 1993: 165. In footnote 218, Ames explains, with Needham, that these are four of the twenty-eight segments along the celestial equator called "lunar mansions." See Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, vol. 4, 1970: 229-283.

[60] *Sun Wuzi jijie* 2: 76.

[61] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.5.2: 1050. We will talk more about this political philosophy later in this chapter.

there is a failure the ruler has no one to make responsible for it, with the result that the ruler of men gets more damaged every day and the ministers achieve more every day.

Another nominal usage of *yin* as "basis upon which to rely" appears in the second of the "Fei ming" 非命 ("Refuting fate") chapters of the *Mozi*. The author of the chapter establishes three standards, models or tests (*fa* 法) to prove or refute the validity of an assertion, such as "fate exists." The first of the three standards, also the weakest one, is perceptual experience:

若以百姓為愚不肖，耳目之情不足因而為法，然則胡不嘗考之諸侯之傳言流語乎.[62]

If the common people are considered stupid and worthless, and their senses of hearing and sight are not a sufficiently reliable *basis* to act as a standard, then why not inquire into the transmitted statements and oral records of the feudal lords [as a second type of standard]?

The author of "Refuting fate" anticipates the criticism from his opponents, who want to prove the existence of fate, and concedes that common people's perception of reality must not be considered a sufficiently reliable basis and a standard for judgment. That said, he moves on to the second test: examining the records from ancient figures.

Let us now move on to the adverbial use of *yin*. One may think that the adverbial use of *yin* lacks philosophical relevance. Yet the adverbial use of *yin*, without fully conveying the meaning of adaptation as we see it in the verbal forms, is related to the meaning of adaptation.

The role of a conjunction is to connect clauses. When an adverb is used to connect clauses (a conjunctive adverb), the connection is meant to express an idea. The most common and well-studied conjunctive adverb in Early Chinese texts is *gu* 故, often translated as a loose

[62] Sun Yiran 孫詒讓, *Mozi xiangu* 墨子閒詁 9.36: 248. In his study of Later Mohist Logic, Angus C. Graham identified a nominal use of *yin* in the *Mozi* as a technical term meaning "criterion," apparently in the sense of the basis upon which to decide on a judgment. See Graham, 1978: 214-216, and 346. The word *yin* appears there as one more term on a list of important terms to be defined. The lack of context, and the sparsity of the language makes it highly complicated to understand. Although I have reasons to believe that Graham's interpretation is problematic, I have decided not to discuss that nominal usage of *yin* in this section.

"therefore," but which expresses the idea of "based on the preceding clause," "accepting the preceding as true," or "taking x as a precedent." The adverbial form *yin* was also very common in Early Chinese texts, used to nuance the connection between two clauses with a special meaning. When taking on the function of a conjunctive adverb, *yin* implies causation and temporality, and may be translated into the following forms: "and thereupon," "and thereby," "accordingly," "on that basis," or "on that criterion." The special meaning that *yin* adds is that of acting, or reacting, in accordance with "the contextually determined state of affairs."[63] Which is to say, the relationship that *yin* establishes between two clauses is not merely causal and temporal. There is something else going on: a sense of "accommodation to given conditions."[64] Let us look at some examples.

臣恐陛下淫非之辯而聽其盜心，因不詳察事情。[65]

I fear that your Majesty will indulge in [Han] Fei's disquisitions and listen to his thievish intentions, *and thereupon* (leaning on Han Fei's thievish intentions) will not carefully examine the true conditions of the matters at hand.

沛公起如廁，因招樊噲出。[66]

Pei Gong got up to enter the lavatory, *and thereupon* (on that occasion) he asked Kuai to go with him.

殷契，母曰簡狄，有娀氏之女，為帝嚳次妃。三人行浴，見玄鳥墮其卵，簡狄取吞之，因孕生契。[67]

The mother of Qi of Yin was Jian Di, one of the daughters of Yousong and secondary wife of Emperor Ku. Jian Di and her two sisters were walking together to take a bath, when she saw a dark bird drop its egg. Jian Di picked it up and swallowed it, *and thereby* (by means of the previous situation) she became pregnant and gave birth to Qi.

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[63] TLS search for "yin" 因, under the synonym group of "then."

[64] TLS search for "yin" 因, under the synonym group of "cause."

[65] *Han Feizi jishi* 2: 38.

[66] *Sima Qian* 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 7: 313.

[67] *Shiji* 3: 91.

In the first example, the implication is that the king will be influenced by Han Fei's intentions and act accordingly. In the second example, the implication is that Pei Gong was using the occasion of going to the lavatory to invite Kuai to go with him to a less public space where they could speak in private. In both cases, the conjunctive adverb *yin* is used to express the idea that the agent reacted in accordance with the given state of affairs. The third example, about Jian Di's getting pregnant, speaks of a situation (the pregnancy) that rises by means of a previous situation (swallowing an egg). Let us look at two more examples.

世俗之人，多尊古而賤今，故為道者必托之于神農、**黃**帝而後能入說。亂世暗主，高遠其所從來，因而貴之。[68]

Most ordinary people revere the ancient and despise the current. Therefore, those who create ways [of living and thinking] must attribute them to [figures such as] Sheng Nong or Huangdi, and only then can they publicly present their theories. Blind monarchs from chaotic times, [believing that those theories] have origins that go back to high antiquity, esteem them *on that basis*.

魯君之嬖人死，魯君為之誄，魯人因說而用之。子墨子聞之曰：誄者，道死人之志也，今因說而用之，是猶以來[貓]首從服也。[69]

One of the favorite concubines of the Lord of Lu died, and the Lord of Lu had an eulogy written for her. The Lord of Lu, by *being pleased with it* (by this criterion), employed the writer. Zi Mozi heard of it and remarked: "an eulogy narrates the ambitions of the dead person. To employ a man *for being pleased with* his eulogy (by that criterion) is like making the wild cat ride a carriage.

In the first example, the implication is that monarchs esteem the theories presented to them only as long as they believe these theories to have origins in high antiquity. In the second example, the implication is that the ruler is going with what pleases him, and not using the correct criterion for employing someone. In both cases, the conjunctive adverb *yin* is used to express cause, and specifically the criterion that satisfies completion of the previous clause, but with the added sense of the agent's accommodation to a previous given condition.

[68] *Huainan honglie jijie* 19: 653.

[69] *Mozi xiangu* 13.49: 432.

Let us now look at the meanings of *yin* as a verb. As a verb, when *yin* does not stand for "adapt," it may mean "draw from/carried on with," "rely," "make use of," and, in some especial cases, "conform":

子曰：殷因於夏禮，所損益，可知也；周因於殷禮，所損益，可知也；其或繼周者，雖百世可知也。[70]

The Master said: "The Yin *drew from* the rituals of the Xia. What they eliminated or added to them may be known. The Zhou *drew from* the rituals of the Yin. What they eliminated or added to them may be known. Some other may inherit from the Zhou, and though a hundred ages may pass, [what they will have eliminated or added] may be known."

今人固與禽獸麋鹿、蜚鳥、貞蟲異者也，今之禽獸麋鹿、蜚鳥、貞蟲，因其羽毛以為衣裘，因其蹄蹏以為褌屨，因其水草以為飲食 […] 今人與此異者也，賴其力者生，不賴其力者不生。[71]

Now, humans are inherently different from animals such as beasts, birds and insects. Beasts, birds and insects *rely on* their feathers and fur as means for clothing, *rely on* their hoofs and claws as means for footwear, and *rely on* their water and grass as means for drink and food (…) Now humans differ from this: those who rely on their [working] force will live, those who do not rely on their [working] force will not live.

亂主自智也，而不因聖人之慮，矜奮自功，而不因眾人之力.[72]

The chaotic ruler considers himself wise, therefore does not *make use of* the considerations of the sage; he boasts about his own success, and does not *avail himself of* the strengths of the many people (that he has available).

A particularly interesting case is the technical use of *yin* as a verb in calendrical texts, where it must be translated as "conforming." Early Chinese calendrical texts take the form of seasonal almanacs that prescribe the proper activities for the ruler month by month, and warns of the ill consequences should governmental activities proper to one season be carried out in another. The most well known textual type within the Early Chinese calendrical literature is the "Monthly Ordinances," which takes the English denomination from the *Yueling* 月令 chapter of the *Liji* 禮

[70] *Shisan jing zhushu, Lunyü* 論語 2: 19b.

[71] *Mozi xiangu* 8.32: 232.

[72] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 64: 945.

記,[73] but that is also found in other texts such as the *Guanzi* 管子 "You guan" 幼官[74] and the *Shize xun* 時則訓 ("Teaching on Seasonal Rules") chapter of *Huainanzi* 淮南子, ranging in date from Warring States to early Han times.[75] In the transmitted calendrical literature, *yin* 因 acts as a technical verb that reinforces or replaces the verb *shun* 順 with the meaning of "conforming" (to seasonal prescriptions) in opposition to its technical antonym *ni* 逆, "to act against," "to transgress," as we see in this passage from *Liji* "Monthly Ordinances":

凡舉大事，毋逆大數，必順其時，慎因其類.[76]

In general, when commencing great undertakings, there should be no transgression of the great numerical calculations; [actions] must accord with their corresponding seasons, and should carefully *conform* to their categories.

Another example of this technical use of *yin* in calendrical literature appears in *Guanzi* "Qing zhong ji" 輕重己,[77] where *yin* fully replaces *shun* with the meaning of "conforming":

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[73] The *Yueling* from *Liji* also appears named *Shi'er ji* 十二記 ("Twelve Seasonal Records") in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, and "Yue ling jie" 月令解 in the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書.

[74] For an explanation of the title and the correlation in this calendric text between the four seasons of the year and the five elements, see Rickett, *Guanzi* I, 1985: 150-152. See also Hu Jiacong 胡家聰, "*Guanzi* 'Youguan pian' xinkao," 1981.

[75] Other transmitted instances of "Monthly Ordinances" are: *Guanzi* "Four Seasons" ("Si shi" 四時), *Five Phases* (*Wuxing* 五行), "Record on the Irrelevant and the Important" ("Qingzhong ji" 輕重己). And *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 "Explanation on the Seasonal Teachings" ("Shi xun jie" 時訓解) and "Explanation on Weekly and Monthly Activities" ("Zhou yue jie" 周月解). For short introductions to all these texts, see Rickett, 1985: 148-69. On the "Zhou yue" chapter, see Huang Peirong **黃**沛榮, *Zhou shu Zhouyue pian zhucheng de shidao ji youguan sanzheng wenti de yanjiu* 周書周月篇著成的時代及有關三正問題的研究, 1972.

[76] *Shi san jing zhu shu, Yue ling*, p. 327a. With a parallel in *Lushi Chunqiu* 8.8.1: 422 of almost exact wording, and another parallel in *Yi Zhoushu*, "Yueling jie," which adds a phrase at the end (凡举事，无逆天数，必顺其时，乃因其类，行之是令).

[77] An explanation of the title in Rickett, 1985, vol. 2, p. 338-339. "Qing zhong" was an economic policy based on the fluctuant value of goods and commodities in the market. The method recommended to aquire things when they were in great supply (and hence cheap), and to sell them when they were in great demand (and expensive).

清神生心，心生規，規生矩，矩生方，方生正，正生**曆**，**曆**生四時，四時生萬物，聖人因而理之，道徧矣。[78]

The pure spirit gave rise to the heart-mind, the mind gave rise to the compass, the compass gave rise to the square, the square gave rise to correctness, correctness gave rise to the calendar, the calendar gave rise to the four seasons, and the four seasons gave rise to the ten thousand kinds of things. The sage sets things in order *conforming* to this, so the *dao* prevails.

In both examples, the ruler/sage conforms to pre-established and prescribed normative guidelines when taking action. In these cases, *yin* does not mean "adaptation," which implies contextual, flexible and creative behavior, but exactly the opposite: to abide by prescribed, inflexible and preset rules. In Early China, conforming and adapting were both conceived of as strategies to deal with uncertainty and unpredictability in ordinary life. I will have more to say about the difference between these two modes of action in chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty."

Ni is used as "contrariety," "opposition," and "transgression" throughout different Early Chinese texts such as the *Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Guanzi*, or the *Mengzi*, to name just a few. In its most abstract meaning, it refers to being contrary to the natural order and the social one when this is understood as a reflection of the former. The first of the "Cannon and Law" (*Jingfa* 經法) chapters in *The Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi sijing* **黃**帝四經), four philosophical treatises excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆, defines *ni* as untimely: acting in transgression of the proper natural times to take action and, therefore, producing harm:

生必動，動有害，曰不時，曰時而[][79]。動有事，事有害，曰**逆**，曰不稱，不知所為用。[80]

Life requires action; in action, there is harm: this refers to not acting at the proper season [being timely], to… In action, there are human affairs involved. In affairs, there is harm: this refers to *opposition* [being contrary], to lack of balance, and to ignorance of what to use them for.

[78] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 85: 1243.

[79] The character is corrupted.

[80] The critical edition I use is Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi* **黃**帝四經今註今譯, 1995 (hereafter, *Huangdi*). *Huangdi*, p. 495.

Another of the *Jingfa* chapters in *Huangdi sijing* offers a catalogue of six ways of being compliant (*shun* 順) and six ways of being contrary (*ni* 逆) relevant to the ruling of the state.[81] When taking on its technical meaning and replacing *shun*, the verb *yin* is also to be understood as the opposite of *ni*.

Interestingly, *yin* carries its technical meaning of conforming not only in the calendrical literature, but also in philosophico-political texts that build their theoretical systems on the basis of calendrical knowledge. This is the case of the following passage from "Qing zhong II" 輕重乙 a text whose economic policies are strongly based on the seasonal system of the calendars:

桓公曰：「寡人欲毋殺一士，毋頓一戟而辟方都二，為之有道乎？」管子對曰：「涇水十二空，汶淵洙疾滿三之於，乃請以令使九月種麥，日至日穫，則時雨未下而利農事矣。」

桓公曰諾，令以九月種麥，日至而穫，量其艾，一收之積，中方都二，故此所謂善因天時，辯於地利，而辟方都之道也。[82]

Duke Huan said: "I wish to create two large reservoirs without having a single officer killed or a single halberd blunted. Is there a way to do this? Guanzi replied: "You should control small tributary streams in accordance with the rise and fall of the terrain, and then the Wen, the Si, the Zhu, and the Yan will all triple their flow. When this has been accomplished, I suggest that you issue orders directing that winter wheat be planted in the ninth month to be harvested at the time of the summer solstice. In this way, the increased flow from these rivers will be helpful for agriculture during the period before the summer rains arrive."

Duke Huan agreed, and issued orders that winter wheat was to be planted in the ninth month and harvested at the time of the summer solstice. The amount received from one harvest was equal to having had two large reservoirs. Therefore, this was said to be a way to create the equivalent of two large reservoirs by excelling at *conforming* to Heaven's seasons and analyzing the benefits of Earth.[83]

[81] *Huangdi*, p. 138.

[82] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 81: 1166.

[83] This translation closely follows Ricketts' in *Guanzi*, Vol. II, p. 473.

It is interesting to notice that *yin* is pervasively used in the "Qing zhong" chapters with the meanings of relying and taking advantage, and it is only when a particular passage deals with issues of calendrical relevance that *yin* takes on the technical meaning of conforming. The same happens in *The Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor*, where the word *yin* is often used with the meaning of adaptation except for those instances where the texts present philosophical theories based on calendrical knowledge.[84] The first of the four silk treatises, *Canon and Law* (*Jingfa* 經法), is addressed at a ruler whose political success lies in carefully conforming to the pre-established and larger natural order, the cyclical movements of the seasons:

天有死生之時，國有死生之正。因天之生也以養生，謂之文；因天之殺也以伐死，謂之武：文武并行，則天下從矣。[85]

Heaven has seasons for life and death. States have policies for life and death. To *conform* to Heaven's season for life to nourish the living is called civil. To *conform* to Heaven's season for killing to attack the dying is called martial. When both civil and martial jointly are carried out, all under Heaven will follow and obey.

Here, too, *yin* replaces *shun* in its meaning of conformity with seasonal rules. While chapter 4 of this dissertation offers a detailed analysis of calendrico-philosophical texts, and the technical differences between conforming and adapting, I want to bring these examples to the discussion here, though briefly, to alert the reader to the semantic complexity that the word *yin* had in Early Chinese texts, which generates the difficult task that the readers interested in pinpointing its precise meaning in different textual and intellectual contexts must confront.

[84] These philosophical theories might even be understood as an extension of calendrical knowledge, as I argue in chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty," section on "The philosophical turn of conformity." There I analyze the calendar-based political philosophy found in *Huangdi sijing* along with likeminded passages from *Huainanzi* "Quan yan" where *yin* is also used with its technical meaning.

[85] "Junzheng" 君正 chapter in *Huangdi*, p. 492.

ADAPTATION WITHOUT *YIN*

To complicate the panorama, what I identify as adaptive agency is also discussed in Early Chinese texts without using a specific word for it. This happens especially when we are dealing with texts of literary character, anecdotes and dialogues, rather than with texts that are written in the form of philosophical treatises or theoretical reflections. We can talk in these cases, following Li Chenyang, of "articulation without coinage," that is, when we find a clear notion of an idea x without a term or concept that directly expresses it.[86]

Take as example the fable about the uses of the uncommonly big calabash in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. Huizi 惠子, convinced that the use of a calabash should be that of a drinking vessel, considers the enormous calabash he has been awarded unfit for that purpose, and breaks it into smaller pieces, finding that the broken pieces cannot hold liquid properly either. In other words, Huizi clings to his preconceived idea of what an ordinary calabash is for, and tries to impose this idea on his extraordinary calabash, eventually destroying it and eliminating all possibility of potential use. This is Zhuangzi's response to Huizi's conflict:

今子有五石之瓠，何不慮以為大樽而浮乎江湖，而憂其瓠落無所容？則夫子猶有蓬之心也夫！[87]

Now you, Sir, had a calabash large enough to hold five piculs. Why did you not think of using it as a large vessel to float over rivers and lakes, instead of being sorrowed that it would not hold any liquids? Your heart, my master, would seem to be covered by weeds!

A priori, a calabash, as a natural object, does not have any inherent use. Usefulness is an idea that humans endow onto things; therefore, what constitutes usefulness is susceptible to change. In John Searle's words, "Human beings have the capacity to impose functions on objects which… cannot perform the function solely in virtue of their physical structure, but only in

[86] Li Chenyang, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom," 2014: 907.

[87] *Zhuangzi jijie* 1: 7.

virtue of a certain form of the collective acceptance of the objects as having a certain sort of status."[88] Objects and their status-function are linked together by social agreement, which is to say that the function does not belong to the object, but to human perspective.

Use not being inherent to things, the smartest move in Huizi's circumstances lies probably in not clinging to the use that social agreement has linked to an object when this particular object seems unfitting for it. It is in this way that the character of Zhuangzi in the story proposes to adapt to the features of the object in order to determine its potential use, rather than forcing change into the extraordinary object so that it can perform the use established by social conventions. The newly conceived use, such as making a boat out of the big calabash, will be like the fortuitous encounter between necessity and possibility: a negotiation between the features an object shows, and the purpose we can imagine for them. Alan Fox has seen this encounter as a sort of fit (*shi* 適), the result of acting in the *wuwei* 無為 mode of action, which he interprets as adaptive action. In his words, "This childlike (though not emotionally childish) sense of wonder, this ability to see diverse, perhaps infinite, possibilities in things, is an aspect of *wuwei*, in that it only becomes possible once we overcome our insistence on having the world conform to our own preferences. Instead of obstinately and vainly persisting against the tide of inevitability, which will only wear us out, Zhuangzi's ideal person adapts and conforms, reflectively and reflexively, operating in an effortless, responsive, unobtrusive fashion, by finding the fit (*shi* 適)."[89]

[88] Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology. Reflections on Free Will, Language, and Political Power*, 2007: 87. The most obvious example of "status function" is money.

[89] Alan Fox, "Reflex and Reflectivity in the *Zhuangzi*," 2003: 211.

The passage qualifies Huizi's heart as blocked, literally "full of weed" (蓬之心). The notion of a "blocked heart" or a "heart full of weed" is comparable to the notions of a "completed heart" (*chengxin* 成心)[90] and a "mechanical heart" (*jixin* 機心)[91] that also appear in the *Zhuangzi*. The "completed heart" is full of fixed patterns learned from society and personal experience. These patterns may be useful in numerous occasions, but they not always illuminate the best course of action, for they do not allow the agent to make contextual and situational responses. The "mechanical heart," in turn, judges the world only in terms of what can bring immediate benefit, reducing reality to instrumental utility, and thereby losing contact with the multitude of interconnected phenomena that would be affected by one's decisions. These "hearts" or attitudes are fixated in a partial point and blocked from achieve a more comprehensive view.

Connecting the calabash anecdote with the larger context of the "Xiao yao you" 逍遙遊 ("Free and Easy Wandering") chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, we understand that Huizi, with his heart full of weed, is meant as an example of "small knowledge" (*xiao zhi* 小知). Small knowledge refers to an epistemological attitude that consists in taking partial and biased information as an absolute and correct standard for judgment. "Great knowledge" (*da zhi* 大知), on the contrary, not only refers to having a wider perspective on things, but also to realizing that any perspective is necessarily partial and biased. The difference between small and great knowledge is therefore not so much of accumulating more information (although that may help find a wider perspective), but of epistemological approach.

[90] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 13.

[91] *Zhuangzi jijie* 12: 106.

In the anecdote of the calabash, Huizi represents the person of "small knowledge" who holds a partial view yet considers it absolute: the blindness of following conventional norms without reflecting on how well they fit our individual context and goals. Huizi is unable to image a purpose that fits his calabash, but he is also unable to put the calabash to the use that society dictates, and eventually destroys its entire potential. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, represents great knowledge: the capacity to put things in perspective. By paying attention to the features of the calabash, Zhuangzi is able to overcome social standards and open his mind to the new and useful possibilities the calabash inspires. Zhuangzi proposes to get rid of preconceived uses for things and instead adapt to the features of the object at hand in order to find its most fitting applicability. While the passage contrasts two different models of thinking and behaving, one inflexible and prescriptive, the other flexible and situational, none of the words in the cluster is used in this story, yet its message clearly articulates and advocates for behaving adaptively.

The same phenomenon of "articulation without coinage" occurs in the following dialogue between Confucius and an unknown interlocutor:

人或問孔子曰：「顏回何如人也？」曰：「仁人也。丘弗如也。」「子貢何如人也？」曰：「辯人也。丘弗如也。」「子路何如人也？」曰：「勇人也。丘弗如也。」賓曰：「三人皆賢夫子，而為夫子役。何也？」孔子曰：「丘能仁且忍，辯且訥，勇且怯。以三子之能，易丘一道，丘弗為也。」孔子知所施之也。[92]

Someone asked Confucius: "What kind of person is Yan Hui?" Confucius replied: "A humane person. Qiu [Confucius] does not equal him." "What kind of person is Zigong?" Confucius replied: "An argumentative person. Qiu does not equal him." "What kind of person is Zilu?" Confucius replied: "A courageous person. Qiu does not equal him." The guest said: "The three are more worthy than you, Master, yet they act as your disciples, why?" Confucius said: "Qiu can be humane and severe, argumentative and stammering, courageous and cowardly. If Qiu could trade the capacities of these three students for Qiu's single *dao*, Qiu wouldn't do it." Confucius knew how to apply [these capacities].

[92] *Huainan honglie jijie* 18: 20b.

Despite the simplicity of the language of the dialogue and the fable, this text presents two unexpected turns, unexpected because they are counterintuitive for readers familiar with Early Chinese philosophy and the way in which philosophical anecdotes usually develop.

The first unexpected turn happens in the dialogue between Confucius and the unknown interlocutor. The dialogue regards concepts that we know are Confucian virtues (humanity, wisdom, courage). In each case, Confucius declares to be less advanced than his disciples in the cultivation and performance of a particular virtue. But what Confucius seems to be lacking turns into his advantage. The narrator of this exemplary dialogue establishes a difference between having certain valuable abilities and knowing how to apply them properly to different circumstances. While Yan Hui is more humane than Confucius, he is always humane, even in circumstances that would require from him to be severe. Zigong, in the same vein, is more courageous than Confucius, but Confucius knows how to be courageous when the situation requires the display of this virtue, and how to behave cowardly when that would be a more appropriate attitude. Confucius describes his *dao* as an adaptive one (even though he does not use a specific term for it): he can act differently according to different circumstances. Notice, too, that Confucius' *dao* is unitary (*yi* 一), despite involving a number of different behaviors. His model of agency and behavior is not defined by the numerous virtues he can display, but by his capacity to display them adaptively. In other words, while his disciples have cultivated discrete *abilities* (*neng* 能), he has obtained a *method* (*dao* 道) to put these abilities to good use.

In this way, the virtues that are often cherished in Early Chinese texts, especially in the philosophy associated with Confucius and his followers, do not appear here as inherently good and useful in the abstract. They are only good and useful when properly applied to a context that

requires them. In some situations, these virtues can become harmful, and even lead to death, which leads us to the next unexpected turn.

The text follows with a fable to help the reader grasp the meaning of Confucius' adaptive *dao.* In the fable, Niu Que of Qin 秦牛缺 is attacked and robbed of everything by bandits while crossing the mountains, yet he does not seem unhappy. Disturbed, the bandits inquire into his unusual behavior. Niu Que explains that what the bandits have taken away from him are simple external things of no importance: the bandits have left intact both his physical and moral integrity. As it happens in many other anecdotes in the Early Chinese literature, when the bandits realize that Niu Que is a sage, we expect them to bow in awe, regret their crime and ask for forgiveness. Yet the anecdote betrays our expectations. The bandits go back to kill him, fearing that in case he ever reached a counseling position at court, Niu Que would prosecute them as criminals. The anecdote concludes with the following teaching:

此能以知知矣，而未能以知不知也。能勇於敢，而未能勇於不敢也。凡有道者，應卒而不乏，遭難而能免，故天下貴之。今知所以自行也，而未知所以為人行也。其所論未之究者也。人能由昭昭於冥冥，則幾於道矣。時曰：「人亦有言，無哲不愚。」此之謂也。[93]

This shows that one may act wisely with the wise, but should not act wisely with the unwise. One can be brave with the courageous, but should not be brave with the cowardly. Those who have the *dao* respond without cease to all situations yet are never lacking. When encountering difficulty, they are able to avoid it. Therefore, All under Heaven esteems them. In this case, [Niu Que] understood how to act out of his own accord, but he did not yet understand how to act according to other people. The theory he used was not penetrating enough. When people can start from clarity and reach obscurity, they are close to the *dao.* An ode says: "People have a saying: no wise man is not also a foul." This is the meaning of it.

Acting wise and courageous with the wrong audience may do a disservice, like in the case of Niu Que. Sages like Confucius know how to adapt to their audience, and how to employ their virtues and capacities according to circumstances. This extraordinary instance of philosophical prose

[93] *Huainan honglie jijie* 18: 21a.

uses a standard structure for telling a story and betrays the conventional ending to offer a new message. A message that is against using fixed guidelines of action to respond to ever-changing reality, and in favor of creating different strategies of action as adapted responses to each specific situation.

The two unexpected turns in the story challenge what we believe we know about Early Chinese philosophy, and about Confucian philosophy in particular. They tell us that we should be careful to ascribe absolute value to anything, even to the most cherished virtues. In this way, they also tell us about a *dao* different from the ritual one based on prescriptive guidelines: the adaptive model of agency, which enjoyed great presence in Early Chinese philosophy. This is another example of how Early Chinese texts, especially dialogues, anecdotes and fables, argue for the importance of adaptation without using any specific term for it.

WHAT IS NOT ADAPTATION

A further problem that the study of the notion of adaptation poses is demarcating it from other, similar notions that also are pervasive in the Early Chinese intellectual discourses or in the scholarly study of the same. On one hand, reflecting on the general lack of definition and conceptualization of the philosophical idea of adaptation in early texts, modern scholarship has often interpreted the words in the cluster, and especially the most representative word, *yin* 因, loosely and inconsistently, which has prevented scholars from seeing that adaptation was a well-established and stable philosophical notion in Early China used to advocate for a model of agency. On the other hand, adaptation has often been confounded with other important philosophical notions of the early period, such as conformity and spontaneity. Mixing up and conflating these philosophical discourses has prevented modern scholarship from distinguishing

the different courses of action that Early Chinese thinkers created in response to different life problems, such as the problem of successfully interacting with the larger context, and the problem of coping with an uncertain future.

I will demarcate the Early Chinese discourse of adaptation from other philosophical discourses that were also prevalent in Early China throughout the entire dissertation. In this section, I briefly introduce to the reader the difference between adaptation and the other ideas with which it has been more often confounded in recent scholarship: flexibility, reliance, conformity, and spontaneity.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the capacity to be easily modified and a willingness to change. While flexibility is a pre-condition for adaptability, adaptability also necessitates of other features beyond flexibility, and hence cannot be reduced to it. The adaptive agent is flexible (can and is willing to modify his behavior, thinking, attitude or course of action easily and promptly), but he is also situational, namely reflective of the context and situation to which he responds; creative in the kind of response that better fits that context and situation; innovative in his use of means and resources at hand; and tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty, as he does not endorse a rigid view of what things are and how they should behave. In this way, qualifying an agent as flexible falls short of the Early Chinese model of agency represented by the notion of adaptation.

Passages that should be understood in the light of the adaptive model of agency are often downplayed with the notion of flexibility in modern scholarship. For instance, in his entry on *Zhuangzi* for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Chad Hansen qualifies Zhuang Zhou's teaching to Huishi in the story of the unconventionally big calabash as "open-minded

flexibility."[94] According to Hansen, Huishi would not be flexible, for he is "tied to conventional thinking about how to use giant gourds."[95] This reading downplays what the character of Zhuangzi is advocating for in this fable. Of course, Zhuangzi would like Huishi to be more flexible and open-minded, but that is not the end of the story. He would also like Huishi to behave situationally and contextually, so that he can become more creative in imagining uses for the giant calabash that, despite not being dictated by social norms, better fit the object he is dealing with. He would like Huishi to be more innovative in his use of resources, so that he can enjoy his giant calabash in unprecedented ways. And he would like Huishi to design a mode of interaction with his calabash that does not do violence to it, and that is respectful of the object's inherent qualities and features. In other words, Zhuangzi is teaching Huishi how to be an adaptive agent, and not simply a flexible agent.

In a similar manner, the word *yin*, when meaning adaptation, is often translated as a vague "according to," which comes to convey a sense of flexibility. This is the case of Roger Ames's translation of this important passage of *Sunzi*'s *Art of Warfare* 孫子兵法:

夫兵形象水，水之形，避高而趨下：兵之形，避實而擊**虛**；水因地而制流，兵因敵而制勝。故兵無常勢，水無常形；能因敵變化而取勝，謂之神。[96]

The positioning of troops can be likened to water: Just as the flow of water avoids high grounds and rushes to the lowest points, so on the path to victory avoid the enemy's strong points and strike where he is weak. As water varies its flow *according to* (*yin*) the fall of the land, so an army varies its method of gaining victory *according to* (*yin*) the enemy. Thus an army does not

[94] See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry of Zhuangzi by Chad Hansen, published December 17, 2014 (accessed February 2, 2017): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/

[95] Idem.

[96] *Sun Wuzi zhijie*, 2:12. I discuss this *Sunzi* passage in chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action."

have fixed strategic advantages or an invariable position. To be able to take the victory by varying one's position *according to* (*yin*) the enemy's is called being inscrutable.[97]

Understanding *yin* as being flexible, and loosely translating it as "according to," does not help us identify the military strategy that the text puts forward. It also prevents us from realizing that adaptation was an important model of military agency. This passage, and the Early Chinese adaptive model of military agency through which we should contextualize and interpret it, will be the subject of analysis in my second chapter.

Relying

The word *yin* is often translated as "reliance." Although, as I have shown in the discussion above, the verb *yin* should be understood as "relying" in some cases,[98] it is important to emphasize the difference between relying on something and adapting to something in order to more accurately translate and understand certain key passages. To rely on something means to be dependent on something or to put one's trust into something. The object on which one relies is a foothold that is taken as a given, something that will not simply disappear or betray us. Adapting, on the other hand, is not merely relying on the existence and support of something, but using its specific features as a parameter to design a suitable and adjusted course of action.

In the next section, we will see a case of political philosophy in which the behavior of the ruler should be understood as adapting to his inferiors' capacities, and not merely relying on them, which is how it has been largely understood in the literature.[99] Here I present a different example, also from a political context, but that addresses the minister's capacity of rhetorical adaptation, namely changing the discourse according to the audience in order to succeed in

[97] Ames, 1993: 127.

[98] See section *Yin without Adaptation* in this chapter.

[99] It is the discussion of the *Han Feizi*, in the next section, "How to Solve these Problems."

persuasion. It is an extract from “Shun shui” 順說 chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, translated by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel. The title of the chapter can be translated as “Successful Persuasions,” but, also, as “Adaptive Persuasions.”

惠盎見宋康王。康王蹀足謦欬，疾言曰：「寡人之所說者勇有力，而無為仁義者。客將何以教寡人？」惠盎對曰：「臣有道於此，使人雖勇，刺之不入；雖有力，擊之弗中。大王獨無意邪？」王曰：「善！此寡人所欲聞也。」惠盎曰：「夫刺之不入，擊之不中，此猶辱也。臣有道於此，使人雖有勇弗敢刺，雖有力不敢擊。大王獨無意邪？」王曰：「善！此寡人之所欲知也。」惠盎曰：「夫不敢刺、不敢擊，非無其志也。臣有道於此，使人本無其志也。大王獨無意邪？」王曰：「善！此寡人之所願也。」惠盎曰：「夫無其志也，未有愛利之心也。臣有道於此，使天下丈夫女子莫不驩然皆欲愛利之，此其賢於勇有力也，居四累之上。大王獨無意邪？」王曰：「此寡人之所欲得。」惠盎對曰：「孔、墨是也。孔丘、墨翟，無地為君，無官為長，天下丈夫女子莫不延頸舉踵而願安利之。今大王，萬乘之主也，誠有其志，則四境之內皆得其利矣，其賢於孔、墨也遠矣。」宋王無以應。惠盎趨而出。宋王謂左右曰：「辨矣。客之以說服寡人也。」宋王，俗主也，而心猶可服，因矣。因則貧賤可以勝富貴矣，小弱可以制彊大矣。

Hui Ang had an audience with King Kang of Song. King Kang stamped his foot, coughed, and said fiercely, “Brave men with strength please this Unworthy One, not men who discuss humanity and morality. What does my guest intend to teach me?”

“Suppose,” replied Hui Ang, “I knew the Dao that would cause men, however brave, to fail to penetrate the flesh when they stab and, however strong, to fail to hit when they strike; would the Great King have no interest in that?”

“Excellent!” said the king. “That is something I want to learn about.”

“But even if the man fails to enter when he penetrates and fails to hit when he strikes, you would still be humiliated,” said Hui Ang. “Suppose your servant knew the Dao that would make a brave man dare not stab you or a strong man dare not hit you. Would the Great King have no interest in that?”

“Excellent!” said the king. “That is something I want to know about.”

“But just because he does not dare stab you or does not dare strike you does not mean he lacks the will to do so,” said Hui Ang. “Suppose your servant knew the Dao that could make a man fundamentally lack any such will. Would the Great King have no interest in that?”

“Excellent!” said the king. “That is what I hope for.”

“He who lacks any such will may not yet have a mind to love or benefit others,” said Hui Ang. “Suppose your servant knew the Dao that caused all the men and women of the world joyously to desire to love and benefit others. This would surely be the fourth rank worthier than being brave or strong. Would the Great King have no interest in that?”

“This is what I desire to obtain,” said the king.

"The teachings of Confucius and Mo Di are exactly this," replied Hui Ang. "Confucius and Mo Di were lords of no territory and supervised no offices, yet all the men and women of the world stretched their necks and stood on tiptoes hoping to be comforted and benefited by them. Now, the Great King is the ruler of ten thousand chariots. If he genuinely had the same goal as Confucius and Mo Di, then all within the four borders would enjoy his benefits, and he would be far worthier than either of them."

The king of Song was at a loss to reply. Hui Ang left with courteous haste. The king of Song said to his courtiers, "What discrimination! The way my guest tamed me with his persuasion!"

The king of Song was a vulgar ruler and so the way his heart could be tamed by Hui Ang is an instance of the technique of "relying." By employing the technique of "relying," the poor and lowly can vanquish the rich and noble, and the small and weak can control the strong and big.[100]

I have kept Knoblock's and Riegel's translation intact to show how their translation of *yin* 因 as "relying" does not convey the full significance of the passage. Hui Ang's success in persuading King Kang lies in his understanding of the king's likes and dislikes, namely his personal interests, which are manifested at the beginning of the dialogue, and adjusting his discourse accordingly. The conflict is the following: Hui Ang is interested in introducing his king to the moral teachings of Confucius and Mozi, but the king makes it manifest that he does not want to hear anything about issues of morality (*ren yi* 仁義). The persuader needs to find a way in which the moralist teachings sound attractive to the king. Notice that Hui Ang does not try to change the king's preferences or impose moral dispositions onto him. The persuader rather makes his moral discourse amenable for a person without moral dispositions.

By translating *yin* as "relying," we would be missing the most important teaching of the persuader, as condensed in the narrator's final judgment. The persuader's success does not lie on counting on the king's preferences; he succeeds because, counting on the king's preferences, he can adjust his discourse to them, making his words suitable for his audience. I therefore propose

[100] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.5: 905-906. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 2000: 357-8.

that we translate the last paragraph of the passage as follows: "The king of Song was a vulgar ruler, and if his heart could be persuaded it was by *adapting* (to it). By *adapting*, the poor and lowly can vanquish the rich and noble, and the small and weak can control the strong and big."

If Hui Ang were talking with someone else, he would have constructed his speech in a different way. It is by adapting to the psychological make-up of his target that a good persuader succeeds. This is just a representation of the practice of rhetorical adaptation among many others we can find in early texts that discuss persuasion, such as *Han Feizi* "Shui nan" 說難 ("Difficulties of Persuasion"), and *Huainanzi* "Shui shan" 說山 ("Mountain of Persuasions"), and "Shui lin" 說林 ("Forest of Persuasions") chapters. Rhetorical adaptability is also exemplified in Confucius' way of discussing things differently with different disciples, namely adapting to the needs of each of his students, and in the Buddhist concept of *upaya* 方便 or "skillful means," by which a Bodhisattva changes his teaching of the *dharma* depending on the audience, and one of the most important notions in Mahayana Buddhism.[101]

Conforming

Adaptation is a model of acting that can be differentiated from other prominent ways of acting in Early China. One of the most prominent among these models, acknowledged by both ancient and modern scholars, is that of conforming to calendrical and cosmic rules (such as the seasonal regulations prescribed in texts such as the "Monthly Ordinances"[102]) to ensure a proper

[101] Notice that the literal translation of *upaya* 方便 (read *fangbian* in Modern Chinese), is "adjusted to the square," where square stands for a metaphorical place or perspective. The meaning of *fangbian* in today's Mandarin is "convenient," namely fitting well a person's needs, activities and plans.

[102] We have talked about the *Yueling*-type texts earlier in this chapter, and we will talk more about them in chapter 4.

way of action in dealing with the future. In this sense, the person accommodates his actions to some larger pattern and abides by the stable rules derived from it. The study of Early Chinese arts of divination and the behaviors these facilitate, such as conformity and compliance with guidelines derived from mantic methods like the calendar or the *Yi* 易, has become popular topics among scholars of Early China in recent years. The University of Erlangen-Nuremberg has established a multi-year research project that concentrates scholars on the topic of "Fate, Freedom, and Prognostication," and which produces an important number of publications every year. Prominent examples of current scholarship in this issue are Lisa Raphals' last book, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece,* published in October 2013, and David Pankenier's *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven*, which appeared in 2015.

Adaptation can be easily confused with conformity and compliance, insofar these modes of action have in common that they require a certain sense of self-abandonment. As much is implied in the definition of the concept of adaptation (*yin* 因) in *Guanzi* 管子 "Xin shu shang" 心術上 that we have read above: "*Adaptation is to abandon oneself and take things as the standard*. He is moved and then responds: it is not out of preconceptions. He adheres to the inherent order of things when making a move: it is not what he himself arbitrarily chooses." To respond adaptively, the agent cannot move according to his own arbitrary desires.

Both adapting and abiding by rules imply taking something external as the standard for deciding one's actions. Take for instance the ruler who follows cyclical norms of behavior, such as those enumerated in "Yueling" 月令 (Monthly Ordinances) and "Shize" 時則 (Seasonal Regulations). The ruler takes these rules, and not himself, as his norm for conventionalized behavior. These rules repeat every year in response to the cyclical changes they address; the ruler

does not need to invent them: they have been created for him to follow. Similarly, the minister who abides by his ruler's commands is a passive recipient of commands who cannot freely create his own response, a mere echo to explicit exigencies.

Although they share this important feature, adaptive agency is very different from simply conforming to preset guidelines, complying with rules or abiding by commands. In contrast to conforming and abiding by rules, where the person merely does as he is told, adaptation entails the construction of an active and creative response toward each new situation in which the agent is involved, often violating the handbook of proper behavior and challenging any authority beyond that of the momentum of a given situation.

Yet adaptation is often confounded with conformity to calendric and cosmic rules in modern scholarship. An example of it is the seminal study by Wang Xiaobo 王曉波 of Legalism and Huang-Lao thought. Throughout the book, Wang offers a general definition of *yin* as "acting according to objective patterns/laws" (根據客觀規律).[103] This definition describes perfectly the technical meaning of *yin* in calendric texts and philosophical texts that base their system on calendrical knowledge, as we have seen above, where *yin* holds a technical meaning of "conforming" to cosmic cyclical patterns. Nevertheless, Wang uses this general definition of *yin* to explain the meaning of the concept in texts like *Zhuangzi*, *Guanzi*, *Han Feizi*, and the Wang Bi commentary to the *Laozi.* In Wang's mind, all of these philosophers would have in common

[103] See, for instance, p. 37, 63, 75, and 178, among many other instances, of Wang's *Dao yu fa: fajia sixiang he huanglao zhexue jiexi* 道與法: 法家思想和**黃**老哲學解析, 2007. He also defines *yin* in this way in his article "Dao sheng fa: *Huangdi sijing* de daofa sixiang he zhexue" 道生法**黃**帝四經的道法思想和哲學, 2006: 75-114. The definition of *yin* as conforming to objective patterns is, I insist, perfectly fine to describe conformity in the *Huangdi* texts that take calendric knowledge as basis for developing a political philosophy, but should not be understood as a standard description of the phenomenon of *yin*ing (adapting) in Early China.

that they react against a subjectivist trend and advocate for an objectivist turn, emphasizing the advantages of conforming to objective patterns to bring peace and order back to the world, a message Wang envisions contained in the phrase *yin ziran* 因自然.[104] In assimilating the rich variety of Early Chinese expressions of *yin* as having one meaning, Wang confounds the technical meaning of *yin* as conforming with the meaning of *yin* as adapting, which is a completely different mode of interacting with the world, thereby neglecting the full range of implications of this important concept.

In chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty," I show that adaptive performance, precisely the opposite course of action derived from hemerology and divination, was at least as relevant a proposal for coping with the future in Early China, and set a series of distinctions between the proposal of conformity and the proposal of adaptation. Adaptation is about reading each specific situation and deciding by oneself the course of action that would suit the situation best. In this regard, it is entirely the opposite of following pre-established set of rules and objective guidelines for behavior.

Spontaneity

Another important category that has been used for understanding certain areas of Early Chinese thought, and which has become particularly popular in the last few years, is "spontaneity." Scholars have argued that the ideal person or the sage, especially in texts considered Daoist, acts spontaneously, namely without external mediation, and out of an incontrollable impulse, yet keeping in accordance (or in the flow) with the principles of the *dao* or Heaven. Spontaneity has become a commonplace in the scholarly study of Daoism, to the

[104] Wang, 2007: 75.

extent that there is hardly a textbook in Chinese philosophy or religion that does not associate being Daoist with being spontaneous.

Whereas the connection between Daoism and spontaneity has been pushed in Chinese scholarship by Daoist specialists such as Chen Guying 陳鼓應 and Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢,[105] A. C. Graham can take credit for initiating this trend in Anglo-Saxon scholarship,[106] followed by other Western scholars such as Edward Slingerland, Philip Ivanhoe, Chris Fraser, Livia Kohn, and Brian Bruya, to mention some representative and influential examples.[107] In recent years, spontaneity has been combined with psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's idea of *flow*.[108] In the state of flow (a mental state of full involvement and full immersion in the performance of an activity, characterized by concentration, effortlessness and enjoyment), the person performs an activity in an autotelic mode, namely for the sake of the activity itself rather than for external purpose, and

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[105] Liu Xiaogan, *Zhuangzi zhexue ji qi yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變, 1988. Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi zhexue* 莊子哲學, 1993.

[106] Graham, *The Disputers of the Tao*, 1989. Also, Graham, *Reason and Spontaneity: A New Solution to the Problem of Fact and Value*, 1985; and his article "Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of 'Is' and 'Ought,'" 1983: 3-23.

[107] Slingerland has interpreted non-constricting action (wuwei 無為) as spontaneous action, in Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China, 2003. He has recently published a new book: Trying not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity, 2014. Ivanhoe distinguishes between tutored and untutored spontaneity, which he attributes to Confucians and Daoists respectively, in "The Values of Spontaneity," 2010: 183-207. Fraser discusses spontaneity in several articles: "*Zhuangzi, Xunzi,* and the Paradoxical Nature of Education," 2006: 529–42. "Wú-wéi, the Background, and Intentionality," 2008: 63–92. "Psychological Emptiness in the *Zhuangzi*," 2008: 123–47. And "Heart-Fasting, Forgetting, and Using the Heart Like a Mirror: Applied Emptiness in the *Zhuangzi*," 2014: 197-221. Livia Kohn often discusses spontaneity with regard to Daoist philosophy and religion. See, among others, her Living Authentically: Daoist Contributions to Modern Psychology, 2012, and Zhuangzi: Text and Context, 2014. Bruya has worked toward rehabilitating the value of the concept of spontaneity in "The Rehabilitation of Spontaneity: a new approach in Philosophy of Action," 2010: 207-250.

[108] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 1990. And many other works after.

acts spontaneously, for her movements do not require previous reflection or mediation of any intermediary thoughts or activities.

In principle, being spontaneous means acting out of oneself (self-caused action) without previous thought or external mediation.[109] In the Early Chinese intellectual discourse, adaptability, in turn, is a learned and cultivated capacity far from spontaneous, effortless and autotelic action. Adaptability requires both previous reflection and external mediation: reflection on the nature of reality and the possibilities of human action within a given context, and mediation of the situation and circumstances towards which one will react in the more suitable way possible. The adaptive person is not a spontaneous agent, but a contextual, situational, reflective and creative agent that designs strategies *ad hoc* to achieve a purpose. There is nothing spontaneous in the successful responses of the adaptive person, which are rather the fruit of cultivated capacity to adapt to each new situation.

Yet recently scholars have redefined Daoist spontaneity in a way that admits mediation and cultivation. Kohn, for instance, refers to "skillful spontaneity," namely perfecting human capacities through cultivation of skills and systematic training, so that they can replicate the natural spontaneity of the non-human world.[110] Skillful spontaneity would also necessitate two more prerequisites: first, the agent's immersion in his context, going along with things as they are given, and following natural tendencies;[111] and second, the agent must get rid of his own personal concerns, emotions and views so that these do not impede the flow with the larger

[109] For spontaneity as self-caused action, see Bruya, 2010.

[110] Kohn, 2014: 210, but referring to Billeter, *Leçons sur le Tchouang Tseu*, 2010: 9, and Eno, "Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy," 1996: 141.

[111] Kohn, 2014: 210.

context.[112] Spontaneity so defined, admitting effort, mediation and cultivation, the differences between spontaneity and adaptability begin to blur.

Nevertheless, fundamental differences remain. First, spontaneity has been associated with absence of thinking and reflection. A spontaneous action is an unexamined response that cannot be put into words, and which, as Graham says, "would be undermined by analyzing and choosing."[113] Adaptability, in turn, requires getting rid of fixed patterns of thinking, evaluating and feeling that may obstruct a suitable and adjusted response to a given situation, but not of thinking, evaluating and feeling *per se*. To respond adaptively, each occasion must be evaluated by a reflective agent, which carefully considers all factors involved before committing to a course of action. The response is, therefore, pondered, examined and mediated. As opposed to spontaneous action, adaptation is a purposive and intentional model of agency where the agent knows very well what he is doing, how he is doing it, and why he is doing it. In contrast, spontaneous figures are often described as not knowing what they do or how they do it, but just *doing* in a perfectly successful way.[114]

Second, skilled spontaneity (achieved through practice) is the result of maximizing and bringing out inherent natural capacities by training in skills. In Graham's words, "the inherent

[112] Kohn, 2014: 210.

[113] Graham, 1989: 186.

[114] See, for instance, Graham's depictions of the skilled figures in the *Zhuangzi*. Graham, 1989: 187-8. They often allude to the impossibility to put into words the perfected knack that they have learned, and which allows them to act spontaneously, without thinking how they do it. What Graham describes is the process of acquiring a skill as a second nature, or what John Searle calls background abilities: "(The Background abilities) are functionally equivalent to the previous system of rules – needed to the development of these abilities – without actually containing any representations or internalization of those rules." Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 1995: 142.

capacity of a thing to perform its specific functions successfully."[115] A person who deploys spontaneity in playing piano or swimming has an inherent capacity to perform these activities, *and* acquired the necessary skills to cultivate them as a second nature. Yet the person who has perfected the art of playing piano to the point of looking spontaneous does not necessarily swim with perfect spontaneity. Adaptability, on the other hand, as a model of agency or a method of action, does not rely on any specific skill. Adaptation is an open-ended and transferable method whose key precisely lies in being applicable to all kinds of situations. Also, as a method, adaptation can be explained. As we have seen in several examples in this chapter, the adaptive agents, or the narrators of the fables that convey the notion of adaptation, often let us know how they do it.

Finally, spontaneous behavior is autotelic behavior, namely, it has a purpose in and by itself, rather than in something external.[116] The adaptive agent, in contrast, has an external purpose: he does not adapt to a situation for the sake of adapting itself, but with the goal of finding the most efficacious course of action possible. As we have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, acting efficaciously will be defined differently depending on the goals that the agent sets for himself, but in all situations adaptability is believed to create the best course of action to achieve the agent's goals. Adaptability is a purposive and intentional model of agency to achieve something.

Following Graham, recent scholarship has continued favoring spontaneity as a category through which to explore Early Chinese philosophy and make contributions to contemporary Western philosophy. Much as the exploration of spontaneous action is promising for all

[115] Graham, 1989: 188.

[116] The word autotelic comes from the Greek, *autotelēs* from αὐτός *autos*, "self" and τέλος *telos*, "goal."

humanists and scholars interested in ancient and contemporary philosophy, the scholarly emphasis on spontaneity has hindered the analysis of the philosophy of adaptation as a distinctive and discrete pattern of agency in Early China, for spontaneity and adaptability have often been conflated together. I will give you one example.

One of the texts that has been more often used to speak of spontaneity is the *Zhuangzi*, and, within the *Zhuangzi*, the stories of skills are the preferred materials, with the story of Cook Ding (庖丁解牛) leading the list. Let me use this story as an example of how the emphasis on spontaneity as a category to understand "Daoist" philosophy has clouded our understanding of adaptive agency.

庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然嚮然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於桑林之舞，乃中經首之會。

文惠君曰："譆！善哉！技蓋至此乎？"

庖丁釋刀對曰："臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見無非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，道大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軱乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者無厚，以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謋然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。"

文惠君曰："善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。"[117]

Cook Ding was cutting an ox into pieces for Lord Wenhui. With each touch of his hand, inclination of his shoulder, step of his feet, thrust of his knee, *xuuu, xiang*! He rhythmically glided his knife with a *huoo,* and none of his moves was out of tune. He could harmonize with the Dance of the Mulberry Grove, to then meet the rhythm of the tune *jingshou.*[118]

"Oh! This is excellent!" said Lord Wen Hui. "Isn't this (the image of) skill reaching its perfection?"

Cook Ding left the knife and replied: "What your servant is good at is the *dao*, which is more advanced than any technique. When I began to cut oxen, all I could see was "ox." After

[117] *Zhuangzji jijie* 3: 28-29.

[118] The Dance of the Mulberry Grove and the tune *jingshou* are musical pieces of demi-divine character. According to mythology, the first was composed by King Tang 湯 of the Shang dynasty, and the second, by Emperor Yao 堯.

three years, I would not see the entire ox any more. And now I meet the ox with my spirit, and do not use his eyes to see. Analytical knowing based on sensory organs is stopped, and going for based on the spirit is allowed to proceed: according to its Heavenly patterns, slipping through the big crevices, leading through the big cavities, adapting to what is inherently so. I never touch the smallest ligaments or tendons, much less the big bones! A fine cook changes his knife once a year –because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month –because he slashes. Up to today, my knife has already nineteen years on it, and the number of oxen it has cut into pieces amounts to more than one thousand, yet its blade is as sharp as one fresh off the grindstone. Between ligaments there is space, and the knife's blade has no thickness. If you use what has no thickness to introduce yourself into that space… what immensity! There is even space enough for the blade to roam freely. This is why after nineteen years my knife's blade still looks as sharp as one fresh off the grindstone. However, when I reach a complicated spot and see that there will be difficulty in the execution, I am as careful as if I was scared, I fix my gaze and slow down my movements. I move my knife with extreme subtlety and… *huo*, it's cut off! If falls like a piece of earth to the ground. I stand there holding the knife, looking around without making a move and fully satisfied, until I clean up my knife and store it away."

Lord Wen Hui said: "This is excellent! Listening to the words of Cook Ding I have obtained a lesson about nurturing life!"

Lord Wen Hui gives us the key to interpret the story: it is a metaphor about cultivating one's life. To learn how to interact with the world, the cook warns us, the person needs something more than skill or dexterity, he needs a method (*dao* 道). This method does not come upon humans spontaneously. It requires both knowledge and practice, that is, it has epistemological and behavioral components. At the epistemological level, the person must understand that the world, and all things in it, have an inherent structure (*guran* 固然), which is necessary and inevitable (symbolized in the story by bones, tendons and other hard parts of the ox). Learning to see this structure also involves learning to guide oneself between its openings, to move freely in the space that remains open between fixed pillars, instead of bumping into them. At the behavioral level lies stopping any fighting with the structure and adapting (*yin* 因) to it, so that it stops being an obstacle and becomes the conditions of possibility for the agent to act upon.

Cook Ding offers two reasons to explain his success (notice that he *knows* his method and can explain it): "Between ligaments there is space" (彼節者有間) and "the knife's blade has no

thickness" (刀刃者無厚). The first reason corresponds with the epistemological awareness of inherent structures. The second corresponds to the praxis developed from this awareness: the blade's lack of thickness is a metaphor for the cook's flexibility, whose actions have not been fixated beforehand but are adaptive.

The knives of mediocre cooks wear down quickly because of the constant confrontation with the hard parts of the ox. Cook Ding himself admits that, at the beginning, he used to alienate the ox as an object of confrontation. This attitude is parallel to what other texts term as *youwei* 有為, an imposing mode of acting by constraining and disturbing the object. When Cook Ding abandons the ordinary mode of human perception to interact with the ox (he stops "seeing it with his eyes"), he also stops reifying it, and learns to understand its structure and adapt to it.[119] This non-confrontational mode of action is in other texts termed *wuwei* 無為, a type of action different from the ordinary in which the agent looks at the world and interacts with it without "thickness," or a pre-established pattern.[120]

The story suggests two things. First, that the ordinary spontaneous, immediate and unexamined way of human interaction with the world, which we have conceptualized as a sort of *youwei*, is not good enough. It implies confrontation and exhaustion, and does not allow the

[119] We will have more to say about this story regarding the process of de-reification in chapter 5, "Finding Adaptive Freedom."

[120] The terms *youwei* and *wuwei* do not appear in Cook Ding story. However, the similitude between the two different attitudes for dissecting the ox and the two modes of behavior in other *Zhuangzi* passages allows us to establish a parallelism. *Youwei* is described in chapter "Zai You" 在宥 of the *Zhuangzi* as "the way of humans" (*ren dao* 人道) –that of effort and constriction, whereas *wuwei* would be "the way of Heaven" (*tian dao* 天道) –that of easiness and flexibility. See *Zhuangzi jijie* 11: 98. One of the ideal figures in the *Zhuangzi* is described as the one able to understand and practice simultaneously the ways of humans and Heaven. See *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58. For a reflection on the sense of *wuwei* as adaptive action, see Fox 2003.

agent to achieve his goals efficaciously. Second, there is a better way of acting, conceptualized as *wuwei*, that implies overcoming the spontaneous manner in which humans interact with the world: it is the adaptive method, namely reflecting on how things are, and adjusting one's actions to the inherent features of each thing one is dealing with, as opposed to confronting them or forcing them to change. The axiological message of the story lies with adaptation, not with spontaneity.

Even if we understood spontaneity as the result of training in skills, the axiological message of the story could not be reduced to acting spontaneously. Cook Ding's success does not lie in the unreflective and effortless character of his actions (the skilled spontaneity of his actions learned as a second nature), but on the adaptive character of this actions. His moves are perfect because they adapt to the features of the ox, and, taking this as a metaphor for life, Cook Ding interacts with the world by letting the given structure of each specific situation advise on what would be his best choice of actions.

A similar case is the following story of Confucius talking with a hunchback cicada catcher.

仲尼適楚，出於林中，見痀僂者承蜩，猶掇之也。
仲尼曰："子巧乎？有道邪？"
曰："我有道也。五六月累丸，二而不墜，則失者錙銖；累三而不墜，則失者十一；累五而不墜，猶掇之也。吾處身也若厥株拘，吾執臂也若槁木之枝，雖天地之大，萬物之多，而唯蜩翼之知。吾不反不側，不以萬物易蜩之翼，何為而不得！"
孔子顧謂弟子曰："用志不分，乃凝於神，其痀僂丈人之謂乎！"[121]

Zhongni (Confucius) was on his way to Chu when he traversed a forest and saw a hunchback catching cicadas with a sticky rod, as easily as if he was catching them with his own hands.
Zhongni said: You are skilled! Is there a method to do this?"

[121] *Zhuangzi jijie* 19: 158.

(The hunchback) replied: I do have a method. For five or six months I practices with two pellets until they never fell down, and then the percentage of cicadas I would lose was very small. Then I practiced with three pellets until they never fell down, with the result that I would only lose one cicada in ten. When I practiced with ten pellets and none of them fell down, it was as easy as catching [the cicadas] with my own hands. I put my body like a rigid and stiff trunk, and I keep my arm out as if it was the branch of a withered tree. No matter how great Heaven and Earth may be, or how numerous the ten thousand kinds of things, for I am only aware of cicada wings. I do not turn around or bend to the sides, and I do not let any of the ten thousand kinds of things to take the place of the cicada wings. How can I not succeed?

Confucius turned to his disciples and said: "Use your undivided intent, and concentrate the spirit –this must be a saying about our hunchback gentleman, isn't it?"

Once again, we find in the interlocutor's final intervention the interpretive key of the story. The hunchback's success lies in learning how to keep his intent undivided, achieving a level of concentration in the activity he is performing that the rest of things cannot interfere. In Cook Ding's case, we saw how after years of practice he learned to see the ox not with his eyes but with his spirit. Abandoning ordinary perception meant to stop making artificial and arbitrary distinctions between subjects and objects, and to stop imposing human judgments onto things. We find something similar in this story. The training process that the hunchback goes through consists in abandoning the view of the cicada as an opponent, or an object of confrontation, and introducing himself in the cicada's world. The hunchback becomes one more element in the cicada's world, a harmless tree on which the insect can safely rest. As he himself explains, he would not let anything distract him from this mission. The only parameters that dictated his actions were the cicada wings –the cicada wings became the measure of his world. As he is transformed into a tree, the cicada trustingly alights in the branch that is the hunchback's arm, not fearing being caught.

By means of adapting to the cicada's world, and of abandoning all sorts of ideas external to this world (other perspectives, such as the human perspective), the hunchback acquires a

maximum degree of efficacy. We find here again that the axiological message of the story is not about being spontaneous, but about being adaptive as a method of successful agency.[122]

The cases of flexibility, reliance, conformity, and spontaneity have served as examples of how the Early Chinese model of adaptive action has become confounded with or assimilated within other philosophical concepts. Disassociating adaptation from other, apparently similar, notions is an important task if we are to appreciate adaptation as a distinctive model of agency in Early China and carry out a systematic study of it.

HOW TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS

Semantic Fields

I therefore need to face a triple problematic: on one hand, the generalized lack of conceptualization of the notion of adaptation (with a few important exceptions), which is conveyed through a constellation of different words; on the other hand, the possibility of the idea of adaptation appearing without using a specific word to convey it; and, probably as a result of both, the generalized confusion between discourses of adaptation and other kinds of philosophical discourses in Early China.

Lisa Raphals's work on *metis* in Early China and Greece is illuminating in how to study an idea that is mainly not conceptualized in texts.[123] Raphals, in continuity with Foucault, suggests that we can use "archaeological" methods. One of her archaeological proposals is to

[122] I have made similar arguments in my article "La Espontaneidad no es un Valor en el *Zhuangzi*," published in 2016 in a collective volume about Daoism in Spanish by UNAM, Mexico.

[123] Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece,* 1992.

search how an idea is associated with a semantic field (words, concepts, images, themes) over long periods of time and in different texts. Applying this method to the case of adaptation, we see that, in Early Chinese texts, the idea of the adaptive agent is related to the following notions, which I classify into three different categories (note that the Chinese terms I include are only illustrative and do not exhaust the intended semantic field):

Epistemological conditions. Among the epistemological conditions that the person needs to cultivate in order to develop an adaptive behavior, the following are recurrent in early texts: abandoning a self-centered perspective (*she ji* 舍己, *wu ji* 無己); emptying one's mind of prejudices, preset patterns, and preferences (*xu* **虛**); becoming equanimous and neutral in order to embrace every single thing (*qi* 齊, *wu hao'e* 無好惡); being formless, namely not clinging to a particular physical or mental state (*wu xing* 無形).

Mode of action. The adaptive mode of action is often qualified as *wuwei* 無為, that is, the not forceful and not imposing way of acting that allows things and affairs to unfold naturally or out-of themselves (*ziran* 自然), and responds to them according to their different features. The adaptive mode of action is often contrasted with two other models of agency in Early China: the prescriptive model, which consists on following pre-established and inflexible guidelines no matter the context, and the forceful model, which is also non-contextual and non-situational, but based on the agent's own arbitrary will and desires (*si* 私 and *zhuan* 專). Both the prescriptive and the forceful model of action are conveyed in the term *wei* 為, for they both are non-contextual, assertive, imposing, and interfering.

Results. The results of acting adaptively include: higher rate of success and efficacy in the agent's undertakings (*gong* 功, *wu buwei* 無不為); improved capacity to develop timely

responses (*shi* 時); becoming highly responsive (*ying* 應) and all-embracing (*pu* 普) to all kinds of phenomena; avoiding opposition, conflict, chaos and harm (*wu di* 無敵, *zhi* 治, *bu shang* 不傷); and the capacity to turn any sort of situation into one's advantage.

The consistent presence of this broad semantic field, which will keep appearing throughout this study, allows me to see adaptation as a permanent feature of the Early Chinese world of texts through different topics and times, applied to different domains, from military strategy to soteriology, politics and ethics. The semantic field also facilitates the task of tracing the boundaries of the discourses of adaptation, as opposed to other discourses with which it has often been mixed up in modern scholarship.

As means of illustration of the way in which the semantic field for adaptation plays out in the early literature, and the way in which we can use it to determine whether a text is discussing the philosophical practice of adaptation or something different, I present a brief discussion of "Yang quan" 楊權 ("Wielding Power") and "Zhu dao" 主道 ("The Way of the Ruler") chapters of the *Han Feizi* 韓非子, two political texts that speak to one another as they address the way of the ruler. In this example, the word *yin* has usually been understood and translated as "relying" or a vague "according to." Attention to the extended notions that appear associated with the political philosophy expressed in this chapter, and, in particular, with the specific model of governance proposed, helps us decide in favor of translating *yin* as "adapting."

"Yang quan" and "Zhu dao" chapters of the *Han Feizi* argue in favor of absolute and monist monarchy. The ruler must hold absolute power, as the representative in human society of

the cosmic but also central power of the *dao*.[124] These chapters teach the ruler how to become such an absolute sovereign, especially regarding his relationship to his subordinates and his deployment of policies, and to avoid everything that can weaken the power of the state and compromise the status of the monarch.

Let us see first how can the ruler achieve and secure his power. "Yang quan" chapter begins by stating that the ruler must hold a central position (*zhongyang* 中央) through which to manage the state (the four directions: *si fang* 四方) through non-imposing, non-constricting, adaptive action (*wuwei* 無為).[125] The ruler's absolute power originates from his capacity to understand how things are, and act according to their specific features, not attempting to alter them (*bian* 變, *yi* 易).[126] In this model of action, there is an intimate connection between knowing and acting, where logical priority is given to knowing: only by truly understanding the source of things can the ruler base his actions on them.[127] To understand how things truly are, the ruler needs to let them self-develop without interfering, let them fully display their capacities and abilities without guidance, for any sort of interference or guidance would disrupt the process, which would prevent the results from being accurate. The *wuwei* of the ruler consists in letting things be what they are without concealing any of their features, and once he has grasped them, adapt to their specific capacities to carry out different state affairs.

[124] For an analysis of these chapters in terms of monism, centralism and absolute power, see Romain Graziani, "Monarch and Minister: The Problematic Partnership in the Building of Absolute Monarchy in the *Han Feizi*," 2015: 151-180.

[125] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 121.

[126] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 121.

[127] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67.

This leads to a slightly paradoxical exposition of the *wuwei* of the ruler: "He orders names (positions) to self-denominate; he orders affairs to self-settle."[128] The ruler does not need to command his subordinates what to do at every moment (content of the position), not even which position to take (title of the position), for those who are capable do everything by themselves without being commanded; the subordinates will create their own positions and their own forms of action. As a result, the ruler does not engage directly in any affair (*wu shi* 無事)[129]:

夫物者有所宜，材者有所施，各處其宜，故上下無為。使雞司夜，令狸執鼠皆用其能，上乃無事。[130]

Things all have their fitting purposes, and skills all have their applications. If each one of them occupies its proper place, the one above does not act forcefully on those below. He sets the cock to take charge of the night, and orders the weasel to catch mice. When they all employ their own capacities, the one above is unoccupied.

The ruler does not forcefully and arbitrarily impose orders and tasks on his subordinates. He first studies his ministers' natural capacities and learned skills, distributing tasks accordingly, or rather, allowing the ministers to determine their own tasks themselves. In this way, the state is well governed and the ruler makes no violence over his people. His people will carry out their tasks as naturally and successfully as weasels catch mice.[131]

因而任之，使自事之。因而予之，彼將自舉之。正與處之，使皆自定之。[132]

[The ruler] adapts to people's talents when appointing them to certain tasks, allowing them to employ themselves. He adapts to people's skills when endowing them with duties, so

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[128] 令名自命也，令事自定也．*Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67. Note that these lines can also be translated as follows: "In his ordering names, these denominate themselves; in his ordering affairs, these settle themselves." The paradoxical way of expressing the idea seems more congruent with the general tone of the *wuwei* of the ruler in this chapter.

[129] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67.

[130] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 121.

[131] This is the same theory that we have seen in one of the *Guanzi* "Xin shu I" definitions of the concept of adaptation. See the section "Adaptation as a Concept" in this chapter.

[132] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 121.

that they take charge by themselves. He places everyone where it is right for them, causing everyone to self-determine.

By making his subordinates responsible of the state affairs, the ruler can avail himself of their achievements, while blaming failures only on them. Moreover, adapting to other people's talents not only guarantees a well-ordered, secure and effective system of governance; it also endows the ruler with an advantage that secures his position as an all-powerful sovereign:

群臣守職，百官有常，因能而使之，是謂習常。故曰：寂乎其無位而處，漻乎莫得其所。明君無為於上，群臣竦懼乎下。明君之道，使智者盡其慮，而君因以斷事，故君不窮於智；賢者敕其材，君因而任之，故君不窮於能；有功則君有其賢，有過則臣任其罪，故君不窮於名。是故不賢而為賢者師，不智而為智者正。臣有其勞，君有其成功，此之謂賢主之經也。[133]

When the corpus of ministers take care of their duties and the different kinds of officials have regular (work routines), and they are employed *in adaptation to* their capacities, this is called "exercising regularity." Therefore, it is said (of the ruler): "Quiet, he does not occupy a fixed position; silent, no one reaches his place." When the discerning ruler practices *wuwei* above, the various ministers tremble in fear below. The way of the discerning ruler consists of causing that the wise make the utmost use of their calibrations so that the ruler *adapts to* these calibrations when deciding matters, with the result that the ruler is never lacking in wisdom. (It consists of causing that) the talented reorganize their abilities so that the ruler *adapts to* these abilities when employing them, with the result that the ruler is never lacking in capacities. (It consists of causing that) if there are achievements, the ruler gets acknowledged for his success; (and that) if there are failures, the ministers assume the fault, with the result that the ruler is never lacking in reputation. Taking this as precedent, without being talented, (the ruler) acts as the teacher of the talented and, without being wise, he acts as the standard of the wise. When the ministers have their laborious work and the ruler has his successful achievements, this is called the "essential principle" of the talented ruler.

The ruler uses adaptation to the capacities of his subordinates as an instrumental strategy to get affairs successfully done without effort, and to avoid bad repercussions for his reputation when things go wrong. Given that he does not get involved in direct action, the most valuable skill in this model of rulership is the ruler's capacity to differentiate and recognize in others cleverness and ineptness, fortune and misery, ability and inability, in order to be able to employ them

[133] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67.

appropriately.[134] Adaptation is here a tool that exempts the ruler from his own limitations and those of others, and that takes responsibility for failure away from the central monarch, making him independent from the ups and down of governmental affairs.

Why should we understand the ruler's action as *adapting* and not merely *relying*? Reliance is trusting dependence: entrusting someone with a task and depending on it for one's success. For instance, a baby relies on her parents to thrive and survive, and a historical town relies on tourism for its economy. While it is true that the ruler of these *Han Feizi* chapters depends on his ministers' accomplishments to succeed, he is doing more than depositing trust on them. The ruler of the *Han Feizi* is being open-minded and flexible, reflective and accommodating. He does not have a pre-established organization chart where officers are inflexibly assigned tasks. Instead, he allows the people to determine their own roles according to their own abilities and potential contributions. The standard that regulates the distribution of tasks is not arbitrary, nor is it responding to pre-established principles separate from people's own capacities. Rather than imposing, the ruler responds. All this suggests that the ruler's mode of action is more complex and studied than mere reliance: it is an adaptive model of agency.

The semantic field that appears in these chapters reinforces this claim. In the "Yang quan" chapter, the ruler's governing the state is compared to the *dao*'s governing the universe.[135] Much as the *dao*, the ruler is said to be empty (*xu* 虛).[136] Emptiness in this context stands for empty of prejudices and pre-established ideas, discarding standardized knowledge and fixed

[134] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67.

[135] 是故明君貴獨道之容. *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.

[136] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 123.

plans (*zhi* 智 and *qiao* 巧).[137] Also like the *dao*, the ruler must not hold a self-centered perspective, and therefore he avoids acting according to his own arbitrary desires (*yong ji* 用己),[138] for, the text argues, the ruler's biggest problems originate from agreeing with his own biased and limited starting points (*tong qi duan* 同其端).[139] For this reason, the ruler must be equanimous and neutral in his evaluation of the people, and show no preference for any particular kind of abilities (*quxi qu'e* 去喜去惡), as they are all useful to the state.[140] He responds adaptively and timely (*yin* 因, *shi* 時) to different kinds of situations.[141] In this way, the ruler's function in the state becomes like the *dao*'s function in the universe: pervasive and all-embracing (*hongda* 弘大, *puzhi* 普至) yet formless (*wuxing* 無形), he can nurture and put to good use all sorts of different phenomena.[142] Finally, although the ruler governs over a myriad things, he, like the *dao*, remains central and unified (*yi* 一).[143]

All these themes (equanimity, emptiness, formlessness, responsiveness, timeliness, not being biased, arbitrary or forceful) belong to the semantic field of adaptive agency as we see it consistently appear throughout the Early Chinese literature. Reading *yin* as "relying" or a vague "according to," which seems an inconsequential connector, prevents us from seeing that these texts propose a unique model of agency that was frequently advocated in early texts, and therefore leads us to miss an important issue in Early Chinese philosophy.

[137] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.
[138] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.
[139] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.
[140] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 123.
[141] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.
[142] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.
[143] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 122.

Let us now turn to the ways in which the ruler can avoid trends and situations likely to weaken his position. According to these political texts, the major challenge that a ruler faces is his ministers' dishonesty and thirst for usurping power.[144] In order to prevent ministers from taking advantage of certain critical information that the ruler may display, the ruler must become hermetic, opaque, and unfathomable. If the ruler is open about his psychological and emotional make-up, his plans and strategies, as well as his preferences, the ministers will disguise themselves so as to apparently fit what they perceive the ruler to want from them:

君無見其所欲，君見其所欲，臣自將雕琢；君無見其意，君見其意，臣將自表異。故曰：去好去惡，臣乃見素，去舊去智，臣乃自備。[145]

The ruler should never show his desires. If the ruler shows his desires, his ministers will polish and trim themselves. The ruler should never show his thoughts. If the ruler shows his thoughts, his ministers will accordingly change the expression of their opinions. Therefore, it is said: eliminate likes and dislikes, and the ministers will show their true colors. Eliminate conventions and wisdom, and the ministers will fend for themselves.

Much as the ruler can adapt to his ministers' capacities in employing them, ministers can adapt to the desires and opinions of the ruler in their displayed behavior: "If the ruler is argumentative, clever and fond of initiating tasks, his inferiors will *adapt* their talents to this" 辯惠好生，下因其材.[146] This is a common theme in the early political literature that appears in other chapters of the *Han Feizi* but also in the larger political literature.[147] As we have mentioned above,

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[144] As expressed in the image of ministers as tigers. *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 123.

[145] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 67.

[146] *Han Feizi jishi* 8: 121.

[147] This tendency of the ministers is clearly expressed in the "Jianjie shichen" 姦劫弑臣 chapter of the *Han Feizi*:凡姦臣皆欲順人主之心以取親幸之勢者也。是以主有所善，臣從而譽之；主有所憎，臣因而毀之. In general, wicked ministers all wish to *adapt* to the heart of the ruler in order to obtain the strategic position as his close favorite. Therefore, if the ruler approves of someone/something the ministers will *adapt to* this and praise it; if the ruler dislikes someone/something the ministers will *adapt to* this and destroy it. *Han Feizi jishi* 14: 245. And also in the "Jun shou" chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* that we have seen above in this chapter: 凡

adaptation can be used as a strategy of action for all sorts of purposes, including instrumental and unethical purposes such as using and deceiving people, and illegitimately seizing power. As long as it helps the agent succeed in achieving his goals, no matter what these are, it will be deemed an efficacious model of action.

To avoid the ministers' manipulative traps, the ruler situates himself in an unreachable position of secrecy, invisibility, and unfathomability, where he can perceive others' intentions, plans, capacities and preferences whereas his own remain hidden. The inaccessibility and hermeticism of the ruler in this ideal of government "from the shadows"[148] is emphasized through images of an unfathomable (*bu ke ce* 不可測, *bu neng de* 不能得) and numinous (*shen* 神) position of darkness (*an* 闇), from which the ruler is invisible (*bu jian* 不見) and incomprehensible (*buzhi* 不知). Other images include those of closing one's door (*bi* 閉), hiding traces (*ji* 跡) and concealing motivations (*duan?* 端), which convey the idea that the ministers cannot get to the source of the ruler's power, and hence find no basis to develop adaptive strategies (*you yin* 有因) to manipulate the ruler.[149] As Graziani remarks, "In turning the sovereign into this strange creature, lacking all determination and all capacities, Han Fei kills two birds with one stone: he not only manages to impose the idea of a being immune to the temptations, partiality, and desires that obscure and enfeeble ordinary sovereigns but also renders

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姦邪險陂之人，必有因也。何因哉？因主之為. In general, men who are wicked or corrupt need to *have a basis* [*upon which to act adaptively*]. To what do they *adapt*? They *adapt* to the actions of the ruler. (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 17.5.2: 1050).

[148] The ideal of government that I call "from the shadows" is not unique to the *Han Feizi*, but is rather quite extended in early Chinese political philosophy. It also counts with detractors, such as the *Xunzi*, a text that promotes openness and clarity in government.

[149] *Han Feizi jishi* 5: 68-69, and 8: 122-123.

the sovereign immune to the plotting, machinations, and calculations of his ministers and dignitaries."[150]

We find in these passages that the adaptive capacity of rulers and ministers is mutually exclusive: for the ruler to engage in successful adaptation to his ministers' capacities (*yin neng* 因能), adjusting his use of each person to that person's set of skills, he needs to make it impossible for the ministers to adapt to his own desires and opinions; in turn, for the ministers to adapt to their ruler's desires and opinions, they need the ruler not to know their true capacities and thoughts, making impossible for the ruler to adapt to them. This mutual impermeability also marks the separation of the way of the ruler (*zhu dao* 主道) and the way of the minister (*chen dao* 臣道) in this particular political philosophy: rulers and ministers walk parallel paths that never cross.[151] Interestingly, adaptive performance is a tool for both political roles to succeed, although the success of the one entails the failure of the other. The same holds true of two military contenders. Each will strive to adapt his tactics to the enemy's conditions (the enemy's weaknesses and strengths, physical and psychological state, military culture, and so on), while

[150] Graziani, 2015: 163. Yuri Pines says something similar in *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era*, 2009: 105.

[151] Chapter "Chen dao" 臣道 of the *Xunzi* takes the opposite point of view. While the advising voice of *Han Feizi* "Zhu dao" claimed that the ruler should strive to make himself inaccessible in order to avoid his ministers to modify their attitude according to his desires and opinions, the voice of "Chen dao" explains to ministers how to take advantage of their ruler's joys and fears in order to persuade him to change. What would seem two completely opposite political philosophies at first sight becomes nothing else than a difference in perspective. "Zhu dao," the way of the ruler, discussed the means to protect the ruler from wicked ministers: how to adapt to ministers' capacities at the same time that one prevents them from being able to adapt and go along with the ruler's desires and thoughts. In turn, "Chen dao," the way of the minister, is concerned with how should a good minister act at the service of a tyrannical ruler. One of the main concerns in this chapter is how to change a bad ruler's mind in face of the take of decisions that imperil the state, the answer being through adaptation to the ruler's joys and fears, preoccupations and angers. See Li Disheng 李滌生, *Xunzi jishi* 荀子集釋 13: 295.

attempting to prevent the enemy from adapting to his.[152] This parallelism in political and military methods should not surprise us. As we will see in the next chapter, military and political strategy are often conflated in early writings, the roles of the ruler and the commander finding themselves in similar situations (facing similar challenges) and therefore recurring to the same strategies to gain control. In particular, Albert Galvany has noted that the *Han Feizi*'s political deliberations stand out for fully embracing the logic of military confrontation and military strategizing.[153]

Semantic fields help us see adaptation as a stable idea through texts of different affiliations and time periods. This stability does not presume immutability. Each text and author may use the idea of adaptation on their own way, and for their own ideological or practical purposes. Yet the fact that there is a commonality in the means of conveying and using the idea of adaptation, and the fact that the latter is often association with analogous themes, expressed through similar patterns, and put in relation with the same semantic fields, suggest that the idea of adaptation was stable enough for different thinkers to make use of it as they saw fit, as it happened with notions that have enjoyed more popularity in the study of Early Chinese philosophy, such as the notions of *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義, or the very notion of *dao* 道. Much as these prominent and better studied philosophical concepts, adaptation was an idea stable enough to appear across authors, texts and time periods in Early China, yet open enough to admit different usages, applications and interpretations.

[152] On this topic, see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[153] Galvany, "The Court as a Battlefield: The Art of War and the Art of Politics in the *Han Feizi*," 2017: 1-24.

Metaphor Schemas

Apart from semantic fields, we can search for metaphor schemas. The notion of metaphor schemas was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980 and applied ever since to the study of multiple fields by a variety of scholars.[154] Opposed to the traditional idea of metaphor as a rhetorical addition superfluous to the communication of the message, Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive approach to metaphor suggests that conceptual metaphors are one of our primary tools to think and reason, hence belong to thought and not to language. Especially when thinking about abstracts, the abstract field is helped by basic metaphors derived from shared physical, intellectual and social experiences. In Early Chinese texts, adaptive performance is sometimes expressed through two images: the center of the circle, and the still water mirror. Let me show some examples of how these two metaphor schemas function in early texts.

One metaphor schema used in early texts to explain how the adaptive agent acts is the image of the circle. From the privileged location of the center, the adaptive agent reaches the infinite points comprising a circle while remaining at the exact same distance from each of them. The circle image is used to suggest that the adaptive person adapts inexhaustibly to all perspectives and uses them whenever fitting while remaining safe and disentangled from them all. Given that adaptation is not always conceptualized or explicitly defined in early texts, these metaphor schemas are helpful to define the ways in which the notion of adaptive agency was conceived and used. A brief discussion of the metaphor of the circle in the *Zhuangzi* follows.

[154] Georfe Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 1980. In the field of Early China, Edward Slingerland was the first to use the notion of metaphor schemas as a methodology to the study of Early Chinese texts (Slingerland, 2003). Other scholars who have adopted a similar methodology are Wim De Reu, Albert Galvany and Lynne Hong.

The "Qiwulun" chapter ("Discourse on Equalizing Things") is considered the most philosophically complex chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, and it is one of the Early Chinese texts that has received more attention by scholars. I will limit my discussion to the aspects that the metaphor of the circle illuminates regarding adaptive agency. The first passage that I discuss speaks of perspectivism, and the theory of co-dependent origination of the opposites (*fangsheng zhi shuo* 方生之說), which are at the basis of the sage's epistemological awareness and subsequent decision to act adaptively:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。

是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。[155]

Among things, there is none that cannot be seen from "that" position, and none that cannot also be seen from "this" position. From "that" position, ["this" position] cannot be seen. Depending from which position you approach something, you will know an aspect or another of it. Therefore, it is said: "that" position comes from "this" position, and "this" position also exists because of "that" position. ["this" and "that" is what we call co-dependent origination. Although that is the case, as things live they die, and as they die, they come to life again; things that are possible are also impossible, and being impossible, possible they become; having reasons to affirm is having reasons to deny, and those reasons to deny mean that there are reasons to affirm.

Therefore, the sage does not proceed from this (vicious circle of co-dependence), but gets illumination from Heaven so that his affirming "this" is adaptive. His "this" is now a "that," and his "that" is then a "this." His "that" includes something to affirm and something to deny, and his "this" also includes something to affirm and to deny. So, in fact, does he still have a "that" and "this"? Or does he not have a "that" and "this" any more? When "this" and "that" do not find themselves as opposite positions, this is called the axis of the *dao*. The axis obtains the position of the center of the circle, and uses it to respond without limits. His affirming also responds without limits, and his denying also responds without limits. Therefore, it is said: "There is nothing like using clarity."

[155] *Zhuangzi jiijie* 2: 14-15.

The first half of this passage speaks of perspectivism, the theory that knowing is always a partial exercise limited by the perspective from which we approach an object. Facing the same phenomenon, different perspectives will lead to different conclusions, whether these are of an ethical, intellectual, or scientific nature. Positions such as "this" and "that" (including value judgments) do not belong to things, but to human perspective, and they all have grounds on which to be formulated, therefore they can be said to coexist. At the same time, different positions only gain meaning when understood in opposition to one another: without the position that defends something as correct there would not exist the possibility of a position that denies it as incorrect, and the other way around. This is what the passage terms "co-dependent origination."

If different positions justify different judgments, and they are all potentially possible, it follows that there is no absolute reality, but just perspectives and contextual, relative, non-permanent truth. Nevertheless, the passage continues, most people favor a given position, cling to one partial perspective, and establish a fixed judgment over phenomena within a single frame of reference that they take for absolute. Taking their own partial and limited perspective as the only and absolute truth, they enter a game of rhetoric and disputation (*bian* 辯) that leads nowhere but to a vicious circle: as one denies, the other affirms, and this affirmation gives way to a new negation, which will create the opportunity for a new affirmation, and so on.

In the second part of the passage we learn that the sage does not allow perspectivism to degenerate into an action-defeating relativism that would impede him from making choices and acting. Just as ordinary people, the sage also affirms (*shi* 是), that is, takes positions, makes judgments, and chooses courses of action. But the sage escapes from the vicious circle of endless

disputation by affirming and negating in a way different from ordinary people's: his affirming is said to be "adaptive" (*yinshi* 因是).

What does it mean that the sage takes positions adaptively? Analyzing the metaphor of the circle will helps us answer this question. The sage is said to position himself at the center of a circle, also called the "axis of the *dao*" (*dao shu* 道樞), where different positions do not find themselves as opposite, and from which he can respond endlessly. Wim de Reu offers the following insights regarding the implications of the circle metaphor:

"First, a circle is positioned around a centre. The centre is that by which a circle exists. Second, a circle can be made to rotate (…) the centre is the sole point on a rotating disc that does not shift position. Together with its axis, which is either connected or slid through it, the centre provides stability and keeps the rotation of the disc smooth and steady. Hence the importance of establishing the centre. Third, a circle is a continuum. It does not have an absolute beginning or end. The absence of any absolute marking, however, means that any point on a circle can be regarded as both beginning and end. Its special configuration entails that beginning and end are not mutually exclusive."[156]

Points in a circle are not mutually exclusive. Instead of understanding different positions as binary opposites ("this" versus "that," "right" versus "wrong") of which only one can prevail, situating positions in a circle helps us see them as non-excluding and coexisting. Given these non-mutually exclusive and coexisting positions, how does the centered sage interact with them? The metaphor of the circle requires some further analysis. First, the center of the circle is at the exact same distance from every single point that can be traced on it. From the center, the sage

[156] De Reu, "How to Throw a Pot: The Centrality of the Potter's Wheel in the Zhuangzi," 2010: 43-66. For the citation, see p. 43.

has equal access to every single position, being able to make use of them all. Namely, the sage finds equally easy to adopt one or the other position, since from the center all of them are equally accessible to him. Second, the number of points that can be traced is infinite –a quality the sage parallels with his limitless capacity of response (*wu qiong* 無窮). Third, as Wang Bi remarks in his commentary to this passage, the center of the circle is empty (*kong* 空), for what we are translating as circle was probably a jade ring.[157] The feature of emptiness speaks of the epistemological neutrality of the sage, who does not show preferences for any individual perspective or value judgment. The sage has equal access to every single perspective from which to judge phenomena, and can respond to them all with neutrality and without being influenced by them in turn. Finally, the center is nothing but one more point of the space endorsed by the circle, but it enjoys a privileged position. This suggests that the difference between the sage and ordinary people (who cling to partial perspectives as if they were absolute) is not one of nature, but of epistemological perspective.

The special epistemological perspective of the sage is termed in the passage "illuminated by Heaven," and "finding clarity." The light, clarity and discernment images seem to refer in this context to the realization that all positions are valid yet not allowing this realization to lead to an action-impeding relativism. The sage can take one position each time –the most fitting according to the situation— yet keeping the flexibility to change positions, perspectives and judgments

[157] Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, 1961: 68.

when it becomes necessary given particular situational conditions. The passage qualifies this attitude as adaptive (*yin*).[158]

The story of the monkey keeper, which follows in the same chapter, helps us clarify what this adaptive attitude means and how if functions. Conventionally, positions such as "this" and "that" are considered to be mutually exclusive. However, as the monkey keeper demonstrates, from the epistemological location of the center of the circle one realizes that there are no opposites *per se*, but useful and coexisting approaches applicable to different situations. The story of the monkey keeper is an illustration of the person with discernment or clarity (*ming* 明), who is located at the center of the circle, and can take different positions (affirm *this* or *that*) depending of the situation:

狙公賦芧，曰："朝三而暮四"。眾狙皆怒。曰："然則朝四而暮三"。眾狙皆悅。名實未虧，而喜怒為用，亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非，而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行。[159]

The monkey keeper was handing out nuts, saying: "Three in the morning and four in the evening." The monkeys were all furious. The monkey keeper said: "If so, then four in the morning and three in the evening." The monkeys were all delighted. There was no discrepancy in what he originally claimed he would do (*ming* 名), and what he eventually did (*shi* 實), but joy and anger were put to use [in the monkey keeper's decisions], which is also a case of affirming adaptively. Thus, the sage harmonizes with things by means of affirming and negating, and rests on the heavenly potter's wheel. This is what is called "walking both [paths]."

Each of the choices that the monkey keeper offers the monkeys represents a limited, partial, inflexible, excluding, and absolute position: either three/four or four/three. The monkeys can only agree with one of these positions, passionately rejecting its opposite. The monkey keeper also takes a position each time, but he is flexible and open to change his "affirming" any time it is necessary, according to the monkey's preferences. Interestingly, the attitude of the monkey

[158] Commenting on this passage, Fox says something similar when he remarks that the *Zhuangzi* is not entirely relativistic nor entirely absolutistic, for it proposes to advance ethical stances that accommodate the particular constraints of each situation. See Fox, 2003, p. 211.

[159] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 16.

keeper is also termed *yinshi* 因是, the adaptive affirming. As Harold Roth has remarked, in *Zhuangzi* "Qiwulun" there is a *weishi* mode of action that implies adherence to fixed viewpoints, and an alternative *yinshi* mode, which is adaptive: "one lets the unique circumstances of the situation determine one's understanding and approach to it."[160]

According to Roth, the *yinshi* mode involves complete freedom from attachment to oneself and one's commitments, a freedom to act spontaneously as the situation demands.[161] While *yinshi,* the adaptive affirming, certainly entails liberation from standardized and slaving patterns of thinking and acting, the passage highlights another consequence of this flexible and adaptive attitude: the monkey keeper can harmonize his social relations by means of using his affirmations and negations adaptively (*hezhi yi shifei* 和之以是非). Notice that the choices that the keeper offers the monkeys do not differ in the number of nuts. Monkeys are to receive seven nuts per day. Yet the means of distribution are variable and can be negotiated. In this way, without fundamentally changing reality, he fosters peaceful relations and preserves his own safety.[162]

Returning to the metaphor of the circle, from his location at the center the monkey keeper has a unique perspective from which to view all the possible positions, and to design means to reconcile them. He recognizes the partial knowledge of the monkeys (*xiao zhi* 小知) and works with it from a larger perspective (*da zhi* 大知). This is called in the passage to "walk both paths

[160] See Roth, "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the "Qiwulun" Chapter of *Zhuangzi*," 1983: 202. This chapter was republished in 2010 in *Experimental Essays on the Zhuangzi,* Victor H. Mair ed., pp. 195-211.

[161] Roth, 1983: 202.

[162] Wim De Reu has argued that the purpose of harmonizing and using goblet words is self-preservation and living out one's years in De Reu, "Coexistence and Writing in the Zhuangzi: The Case of Goblet Words," forthcoming.

at the same time" (*liang xing* 两行). While most scholars interpret *liang xing* as being flexible (offering now 3/4, then 4/3), we may also consider the possibility that it refers to being able to use the two types of knowledge at the same time. In this way, the adaptive agent, represented by the monkey keeper, would transcend both essentialism (as he can appreciate things from different perspectives) and relativism (as he can take decisions). The sage so described is said to dwell on the heavenly potter's wheel (*tianjun* 天鈞), also translated as Heaven the equalizer, a symbolic location similar to the axis of the *dao* and the center of the circle.[163]

Another important metaphor schema used in Early Chinese texts to illustrate the idea of adaptation is the still water mirror. The first chapter of the *Huainanzi*, a text to which we will return in the last chapter of this study, contrasts the *wei* 為 or coercing mode of interaction with the adaptive mode (*yin* 因), and explains how the adaptive agent relates to the world through the image of a water mirror reflecting shapes:

是故天下之事，不可為也，因其自然而推之；萬物之變，不可究也，秉其要歸之趣。夫鏡水之與形接也，不設智故，而方圓曲直弗能逃也。[164]

Therefore, the affairs of the world cannot be deliberately acted upon. You must draw them out by adapting to what is so of itself. The alterations of the ten thousand kinds of things cannot be exhausted. You must grasp their essential destination and accompany them there. The way in which the water mirror interacts with shapes is not by wisdom and precedent, and yet the square, round, crooked and straight cannot escape from it.

As we can see from the metaphor of the water mirror, the adaptive agent does not impose fixed views and value judgments onto things, but reflects them all equally. By eliminating prejudices and standardized modes of action ("wisdom" and "precedent"), the agent can appropriately

[163] As we can also see in *Zhuangzi jijie* 27: 246. reference. On this issue, see De Reu, forthcoming, and De Reu, 2010.

[164] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 3b.

respond to every single phenomenon, just like the mirror reflects every single type of shape that approaches it.

"Dati" 大體 chapter from the *Shenzi* 申子 (a reconstructed text associated with Shen Buhai 申不害, to be distinguished from the *Shenzi* 慎子, which is associated with Shen Dao 慎到), also uses the metaphor of the water mirror to speak of the way of adaptation:

鏡設精，無為而美惡自備；衡設平，無為而輕重自得。凡因之道，身與公無事，無事而天下自極也。[165]

When a (water) mirror is set clear, it does not impose any action yet the attractive and unattractive are established of themselves. When the scale is set even, it does not impose any action yet the light and the heavy are obtained of themselves. In general, in the way of adaptation, the private and the public do not intervene in (the world's) affairs, yet All under Heaven thrives of itself.

The model of adaptive agency is here related to the notions of *wuwei* 無為 and *wushi* 無事, both terms referring to the agent's non-imposing, non-coercing and non-interfering ways of acting. The images of the water mirror and the scale help the reader understand how adaptive agency works: the water mirror and the scale do not act upon things, but rather let things manifest what they are by themselves. Yet both the mirror and the scale must first be set in a specific way, for stirred water and an unbalanced scale cannot properly accomplish their function. These easily graspable images are used as metaphors to speak of something rather more abstract: the way of governance of the world. The implications of the image give us important information about the "way of adaptation" (因之道): it is not achieved spontaneously and without intentional purpose,

[165] *Quan shanggu sandai wen* 全上古三代文, *Shenzi* 申子"Dati," p. 33a. The *Shenzi* is reconstructed from several fragments found in the Tang period encyclopedias *Qunshu Zhiyao* 群書治要, compiled in 631, and *Yilin* 意林, compiled around 786. See Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*: *A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, 1974.

but requires on the contrary the conscious and active cultivation of a particular attitude. As we will see below, it requires a particular way of "using one's mind."

Apart from providing information on the ways in which adaptation works, we can use the metaphor schema of the water mirror to help us identify discussions of adaptive agency when the words from the cluster are absent. This is the case of the *Zhuangzi* chapter "Ying diwang" 應帝王 ("Responding to Emperors and Kings"), a chapter that responds to the fundamental question on politics –what is the best approach to rule the world—by dismissing the possibility of providing a single answer. Let us first look at the passage where the water metaphor occurs:

無為名尸，無為謀府，無為事任，無為知主。體盡無窮，而遊無朕，盡其所受於天，而無見得，亦**虛**而已。至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷。[166]

Do not be an impersonator of fame. Do not be a storehouse of schemes. Do not be an officer of affairs. Do not be the master of knowledge. Embody to the fullest what has no limits, and wander in the absence of self. Exhaust what is received from Heaven, but do not treat it as a possession –just remain empty, that's all. The perfected person employs his heart-mind as a mirror: it does not have plans or anticipate, just responds without retaining. Therefore, he (like the mirror) can successfully deal with things without harming them.

Just like the other water metaphors that we have read, this passage points out the features of situational responsiveness and lack of pre-fixated views. But it also adds a new feature that has not been discussed above: as the water reflects all sorts of different things (or the adaptive person responds to all kinds of circumstances without distinction), it does not store or cling to any of them (the person remains empty). New interactions with things will not create a new fixed standard with which to judge or deal with the next phenomenon that arises. As the agent judges each interaction on its own terms, no judgment becomes an opportunity to create a fixed standard to judge the next interaction.

[166] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 75.

The perfected person, a name for the ideal figure who has attained a great level of self-cultivation, is said to "use his mind" (用心) in a way that resembles a mirror.[167] The phrase "use the mind" in Early Chinese texts conveys the meaning of adopting an attitude, representing purposiveness and effort.[168] The adaptive agent (the perfected person in this passage) is not different from ordinary people because he has special natural endowments. The difference lies in his consciously chosen and cultivated attitude, his active effort to *use* his mind like a mirror, an effort accessible to everyone.

This passage also raises an important point about the results of "using the mind" like a mirror: such an attitude allows the agent to successfully deal with things without harming them. This point is better developed in the fable that follows in the same chapter:

南海之帝為儵，北海之帝為忽，中央之帝為渾沌。儵與忽時相與遇於渾沌之地，渾沌待之甚善。儵與忽謀報渾沌之德，曰：「人皆有七竅，以視聽食息，此獨無有，嘗試鑿之。」日鑿一竅，七日而渾沌死。[169]

The emperor of the Southern Sea was Swift, the emperor of the Northern Sea was Sudden, and the emperor of the Centre was Chaos. Swift and Sudden would often meet in the territory of Chaos, who treated them very well. Swift and Sudden schemed together how to return Chaos' kindness, and decided: "Humans all have seven orifices for the purpose of seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing, while only this poor one has none. Let us try and dig them for him." Accordingly, they dug one orifice in Chaos every day. At the end of seven days Chaos died.

[167] The word *xin* literally means heart as a physical organ, yet the heart is the organ for thinking in Early Chinese philosophy, what the brain means for us today. For this reason, unless dealing with texts of medical character, *xin* is better understood as the mind. In order to keep the original meaning of *xin* as heart, yet including its implications for conscious reflective activities, some scholars translate it as the "heart-mind."

[168] In the *Zhuangzi* compilation, the expression appears five times in total: *Zhuangzi jijie* 5: 47 (其用心也，獨若之何), 7: 75 (用心若鏡), 13: 117 (天王之用心何如), 21: 183 (子的用心獨奈何), and 22: 188 (其用心不勞，其應物無方). See also *Xunzi jishi* 1: 7 (用心一也). And *Lunyü* 17: 158b (飽食終日，無所用心，難矣哉).

[169] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 75.

This well-known fable, which closes the "Inner Chapters" of the *Zhuangzi*, contains many relevant layers of interpretation.[170] Scholars have discussed the symbolic meaning of each character, and particularly the character of Chaos (*hundun* 渾沌), which represents the original cosmic state of being before things came into order in what we would call an ordered cosmos. In that way, Chaos represents a radical departure from human-centered values and standards. The death of Chaos is the end of the original existential oneness, at a cosmic and personal level, and the beginning of the human age of distinctions, judgments and classifications.

But Chaos also represents potentiality, timelessness and formlessness, and for that reason, pure adaptability: not being tied up by a burdening past (which is the burden of tradition, conventional wisdom, and knowledge), it has the capacity to mutate and become anything. On the other hand, Swift and Sudden represent impulsive, non-reflective and non-adaptive modes of action (the opposite of *wuwei* 無為) based in prejudices, pre-conceptions, and fixed standards and values. Notice that Swift and Sudden "scheme" (*mou* 謀) together on how to repay Chaos' kindness. It must not be a coincidence that the same verb is used with negative connotations in the previous passage of the chapter when it recommended "not to be a storehouse of schemes."[171] Swift and Sudden do not have bad intentions, but they move according to what the author of this

[170] Traditionally, scholars have considered the "Inner Chapters" (*nei pian* 內篇) to be written by a historical person called Zhuang Zhou, whereas the rest of the book chapters have been associated with different schools of similar philosophical inclinations to the *Zhuangist.* The "Inner Chapters" are also considered the most coherent and consistent in philosophical views and literary style of the entire corpus. Although most scholars of Chinese philosophy still entertain this view, there have been voices raising reasonable doubts, such as Esther Klein. See Klein, "Were There 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States," 2011: 299-369. Carine Defoort has recently published an article on the role of emotions in the production of scholarship that takes as example the case of the controversy between Esther Klein and Liu Xiaogan. See Defoort, "Mental Fasting in the Study of Chinese Philosophy: Liu Xiaogan versus Esther Klein," 2016: 9-23.

[171] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 75.

chapter considers an erroneous model of thinking and acting. They base their judgments on conventional viewpoints that do not necessarily apply to the situation they are dealing with. In this case, they clearly judge Chaos' welfare wrongly, by establishing as their standard the goodness of humans, as opposed to the goodness of the pre-human (also post-human) perspective.[172]

Although Swift and Sudden have good intentions, they are imposing onto Chaos standards of good that they believe to be right for humans, but which turn out to be deadly for Chaos. Namely, in their interaction with Chaos, they do not allow Chaos' features to dictate how they should treat him, but adhere to external standards, with the result that their well-intentioned but forceful action results in violence and eventually death. It is also worth noting that the intervention that Chaos' friends exercise on him consists in providing him with sensory orifices to distinctly perceive a variety of phenomena. Chaos is originally whole, probably referring, as we have signaled before, to the initial cosmic state of affairs before the ten thousand kinds of things became differentiated and discrete.

Beyond the cosmic image, the wholeness of Chaos may also be understood to represent a state or use of the mind in which everything is judged as equal and received with equanimity. In this way, Chaos would effortlessly use his mind as a mirror in the sense that we have been exploring in this section. Yet when Chaos is forced into the human way of discrete perception and judgment, he cannot but stop existing as *chaos* and become something else. What he

[172] The *Zhuangzi* contains many illustrations of the relativity of values. Think, for instance, of the parable of the bird feasted with banquets, ceremonial music, and rituals while kept prisoner in a cage. Despite a profusion of human hospitality, the bird cannot avoid getting depressed and dying. See *Zhuangzi jijie* 18: 152-153.

becomes (a human, maybe) will need to consciously cultivate the capacity to use his mind as a mirror, since for humans it is not a given but an ideal to achieve.

The metaphor of the water mirror as a specific attitude and way to use one's mind, that is, the adaptive mode of interaction with the world, helps us create connections between the different anecdotes, dialogues and fables that compose the seventh chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. As Zyporin has remarked, in this chapter "questions about how to rule the world are answered repeatedly with recourse to the non-knowing state of the mind –with no fixed position and no programmatic ideals of its own (…)."[173] Furthermore, all the sections in the "Ying diwang" chapter speak in one way or another to the issue of developing an adaptive attitude to interact with the world, especially when it comes to activities with the power to harm or benefit a large mass of beings, such as governance.

The second section of chapter seven of the *Zhuangzi*, for instance, compares the forceful imposition of the ruler's own values, views and standards over his people (以己出經式義度) with "forcing a mosquito to carry a mountain on its back" (使蚉負山).[174] The sage, on the contrary, does not rule through standards that are external to things (*zhi wai* 治外). He employs people according to their own features and capacities.[175] Another prominent example in the chapter is the anecdote of Huzi's encounter with the shaman Ji Xian, who can divine people's fate with exactitude just by looking at them.[176] Huzi being able to control which part of himself becomes visible to Ji Xian, the latter foretells different fates based on each of their different

[173] Brook Zyporin, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference. Coherence in Early Chinese Thought. Prolegomena to the Study of Li*, 2012: 187.

[174] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 70.

[175] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 70-71.

[176] *Zhuangzi jijie* 7: 72-75. Huzi is Lieizi's master and a person from the state of *Zheng.*

encounters. In their last encounter, Huzi shows nothing but the emptiness proper to the beginnings of time (the times of *hundun*), so Ji Xian cannot figure any representation and leaves terrified. Huzi's lack of a fixed form, his capacity to change, and his access to the state of emptiness all speak of an adaptive way to control body and mind that contrasts with Ji Xian's limited and mechanical technology of divination by physiognomy.[177]

Overall, the seventh chapter of the *Zhuangzi* responds to claims of authority by means of the formless, chaotic, flexible, changing, and adaptive. The metaphor schema of the water mirror helps us establish connections between the different anecdotes and determine their message: they all discuss ways in which you can *use your mind* and create an adaptive approach to acting and interacting with the world that is different from the conventional one.

IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I have identified and located the idea of "adaptation" within the wide textual horizon of Early Chinese texts. I have dealt with different problems. First, the idea of adaptation is stable, but not always well delimited, defined and conceptualized. In this regard, this chapter has analyzed the patterns of textual behavior of the constellation of words that convey the idea of adaptation, and has shown an array of different cases: cases in which different words from the cluster were all used with the meaning of adaptation, and cases in which they had a different meaning; cases in which *yin*, the main word of the cluster, was used as a defined concept; cases in which *yin*, on the contrary, meant something different from adaptation, that is, cases of "*yin* without adaptation"; alternatively, cases in which the idea of adaptation could be

[177] Michael Puett has analyzed the anecdote of Ji Xian's encounter with Liezi's mater Huzi in relation to the *Zhuangzi*'s critique to ritual specialists in "Nothing can Overcome Heaven: The Notion of Spirit in the *Zhuangzi*," 2003: 248-262.

conveyed without using a particular word for it, namely "adaptation without *yin*," or "articulation without coinage." Then, we have also dealt with the problem of the confusion of discourses of adaptation and other kinds of philosophical discourses in Early China. This chapter has engaged the most recent scholarship in an effort to clear the confusion between adaptability and better-studied notions such as spontaneity, flexibility, conformity, and reliance.

Both semantic fields and metaphor schemas have helped us find thematic and philosophical patterns associated with the notion of adaptation, giving it a stable structure throughout its use in multiple texts and across time, and providing useful information for the contemporary exegesis and reconstruction of the phenomenon of adaptation in Early China. The purpose of beginning my dissertation with such menial work has been to plant the philological and literary basis over which I will establish my research. As I wrote at the beginning of the chapter, my main interest lies with the identification and systematic analysis of an extraordinary model of agency in Early China that I have denominated "adaptation." It is this model of successful action that I analyze and explicate the rest of this study.

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To better identify adaptation as a specific model of agency, we need to inscribe it within a larger discourse of agency in Early China, and contrast it with other proposals and models of action. The next chapter, "Three Models of Military Action," takes advantage of the extensive and varied Early Chinese military literature (including treatises on the philosophy of war, military anecdotes, histories, pedagogic and persuasion speeches, and battle divination records) to analyze different models of agency in Early China. Adaptive agency rises as the most widespread and popular model of military agency, as opposed to less successful models such as the prescriptive and the forceful. In the military context, adaptive agency is considered a means

to enhance the agent's control over a situation. At the same time, in its military use, adaptive agency has purely instrumental goals, without moral concerns: it is a strategy to achieve one's goals in the most efficacious way possible.

CHAPTER 2

THREE MODELS OF MILITARY ACTION

OVERVIEW

When we hear the term "models of military action," we might think of "ways of warfare," even the specifically "Chinese" way of warfare as opposed to a "Western" one. Ever since the publication of *Chinese Ways in Warfare* edited by Kierman and Fairbank in 1974, the long lived, orientalist assumption that the Chinese are pacifists whereas the Westerners are bellicose, and that the Chinese theory of war focuses on indirect action, deception and cunning whereas the Western way is direct, straightforward, and forceful, has only solidified in our field, Early China, which has yet to pay more careful attention to its rich corpus of military materials. A second traditional approach to classifying Chinese ways of warfare consists of making a dividing line between Confucian pacifism and the classic military texts' militarism –an irreconcilable opposition between *wen* 文 (the civil) and *wu* 武 (the martial). Confucianism and the spirit of letters would have dominated eastern Zhou society and cultural ideology, with attention to the realm of the military given only to condemn martial activities.

Recent studies have challenged these notions, most prominently, Robin McNeal's *Conquer and Govern* and the volume edited by Albert Galvany and Romain Graziani, "War in Perspective."[178] With regard to the first assumption, these studies explain how military theory

[178] McNeal, *Conquer and Govern,* 2012. In particular, see Graziani and Galvany's "War in Perspective: History and Military Culture in China," 2014, introduction (pp. 5-20), and Peter Lorge and David Graff's chapters in that volume (pp. 21-46 and 47-64).

previously came to replace military history in the minds of many scholars. In consequence, "war on paper" was confounded with the Chinese military historical reality. If it is true that the corpus of Early Chinese military texts that became classic (*jing* 經) advocates for devious and deceptive means to achieve a victory even without fighting (i.e. *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法), that is not representative of the way in which Chinese actors have historically behaved in military matters.[179] As for the second assumption, recent studies have shown that the boundaries between Confucianism and other ideologies were not so clear in the early period. Early Chinese philosophy was plural and heterogeneous, not monopolized by a single school of thought.[180] In particular, the realms of *wen* and *wu* were intermingled at least since Western Zhou, as the evidence from the bronze inscriptions from the period suggests. Neither the civil nor the martial enjoyed priority over the other when it came to the sociopolitical landscape.[181]

What I mean by "models of military action" is similar yet different from those "ways in warfare:" similar in that I also attempt a way of classification;[182] different in that I will not oppose essentialist notions of China and the West, nor similarly essentialist notions of Chinese schools of thought. My models intend not to reflect purist and transcendent ways of action. They are a description of all possible solutions that I have found to the problem of successful military action in our extant textual materials from Early China. There are certain attitudes that can be

[179] See Galvany & Graziani, 2014: 21-46.

[180] See footnote 6 for references.

[181] McNeal, 2012; and Galvany & Graziani, 2014: 99-128 (Jean Levi's chapter, "Morale de la Stratégie, Stratégie de la Morale: le débat chinois sur la guerre juste.")

[182] Van Els studies classifications of motives for launching an attack found in Early Chinese texts, not ways of doing warfare as I do in this chapter. As van Els found out, the only motive that all authors accept as legitimate is warfare in search of bringing a corrupt and oppressive government to justice: righteous warfare (*yi bing* 義兵). See van Els, "Righteous, Furious or Arrogant? On Classifications of Warfare in Early Chinese Texts," 2013. We will have more to say about the rhetoric use of righteous warfare in this section.

better understood under the rubric of a particular model of agency. Sometimes I have done the work of assembling these attitudes together and endowing them with a name. Other times, I have found the attitudes conceptualized as a military model of action in the texts themselves.

In this chapter on military thought I go beyond the "seven military classics" (*wujing qishu* 武經七書): *Taigong Liutao* 太公六韜, *Sima fa* 司馬法, *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法, *Wuzi* 吳子, *Wei Liaozi* 尉繚子, *Huang Shigong sanlüe* **黃**石公三略, and *Tang Taizong Li Weigong wendui* 唐太宗李衛公問對.[183] I include any relevant discussions of warfare in other Early China texts. As such, I have taken my examples from the *Shiji*'s 史記 account of an armed conflict and from the numerous *Zuozhuan* 左傳 battlefield anecdotes as much as I have from military texts classified as "art of war" (*bingfa* 兵法). This is necessary because of the nature of our transmitted texts in general, and that of the military classics in particular. Much as most of the other Warring States texts that have been transmitted to us through the editorial hands of succeeding dynasties (the *Mengzi* 孟子 or the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, to name a couple), the texts that we refer as the seven military classics are summaries, compilations and editions of earlier materials only later on presented under the name of a single person by means of which the master as an author-figure was created. Therefore we today encounter the *Sunzi* as the work of Sun Wu 孫武, or the *Wuzi* as the work of Wu Qi 吳起, when most likely both of them are compilations of materials that corresponded to particular military traditions, not to a single author.

[183] See Li Guisheng 李桂生, *Zhuzi wenhua yu xian Qin bingjia* 諸子文化與先秦兵家, 2009, for a general introduction to military writing as a genre and each military text within the social context of "masters" in Early China. For an English language introduction and translation of the military classics, see Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, 1993.

We find proof of this in the excavated texts of military character. They contain more practical, technical and dialogical material –in general, more "how to"—than their transmitted counterparts. The transmitted *Sunzi* is rightly considered a truly theoretical work on the philosophy of war. In contrast, the Yinqueshan 銀雀山 manuscript of *Sunzi bingfa* also contains dialogues and historical anecdotes, suggesting that the work was originally composed of abstract discussions as well as narrative materials, yet the latter did not survive.[184] The found *Sunzi* includes a second text lost in transmission, the *Sun Bin bingfa* 孫臏兵法. In the same military tradition of the Sun clan of Qi 齊, the art of war of *Sun Bin* contains more technical discussions, practical illustrations and narratives than the transmitted *Sunzi*. [185] The "Yiwenzhi" lists the *Sun Bin* as a "military text" (*bing shu* 兵書) in 89 chapters (*pian* 篇). Only fragments of 16 chapters have been found. In turn, the *Sunzi* was supposed to contain 82 chapters according to the "Yiwenzhi," of which only 13 have been transmitted, and 5 found. The imperial catalogues from antiquity are therefore also proof that our current versions of the texts have been cut down from larger collections.

It has been argued that the philosophical stylization of the warfare manuals is an imperial phenomenon, a later-day rationalization of the Warring States military practical and technical materials, and the assimilation of the same to a larger philosophical and cosmological schema.[186] However, if we see the term "bingfa" as a genre rather than as a title, and we acknowledge that both the ancient *Sunzi* and the *Sun Bin* originally had more heterogeneous materials than are visible today, we can think of the military texts in terms of complex, manifold traditions in the

[184] See D. C. Lau & Roger Ames, *Sun Bin, The Art of Warfare*, 2003: 22-23; McNeal, 2012: 34-35.

[185] Lau & Ames, 2003: 40-41.

[186] McNeal, 2012: 18-19.

art of war. The military compendia would have reunited composite materials within a particular tradition of military affairs, and as such they would all have had a more philosophical, abstract and theoretical approach as well as practical, illustrative, and technical discussions. Already by Warring States times there had been an abstract theorization of war, which would go together with the more practical instruction on techniques and tactics. The excavated military texts not only show that most of the "how-to" that must have existed during the pre-imperial period is lost. They also demonstrate that the philosophical discussions and the use of abstract concepts to theorize warfare are a pre-imperial phenomenon. The *Sun Bin*, with its use of philosophical terminology close to the *Sunzi*, is a privileged example of it.[187]

We are dealing with materials that were alive and in use for several centuries. Some of them remain alive today, with new uses still being found. (Think of the 20th century entrepreneurial and business readings of the *Sunzi*). It is hence difficult to speak of a particular audience to which these texts would have been addressed. The uses and audiences of the military texts changed over time. During Warring States, they probably addressed warfare at both practical and theoretical levels, and therefore spoke to both the commanders and people involved in the business of war from the distance, namely politicians, rhetoricians, strategists, rulers and ministers. Indeed, in the Warring States period, war, politics, moral and ritual were not separate fields of inquiry; they were discussed together, and the findings and trends in the one influenced and fed back on the others. Texts like the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, where we find the figure of the

[187] Lau & Ames, 2003: 23-24.

political strategist Su Qin 蘇秦 studying for years a warfare treatise, the *Six Secret Teachings* (*Liu tao* 六韜), only to apply it to diplomatic matters, suggest this.[188]

Since we are dealing today with stylized summaries that reflect upon warfare from a philosophical point of view, and which are missing for the most part the narrative, anecdotal and dialogical illustrations that accompanied philosophical discussions when these materials were in use during the pre-imperial period, we have access only to those categories that the philosophers of war of the time privileged. As it happens, by Warring States' times, theoreticians privileged the adaptive model of warfare, which is the only one that was conceptualized, taught and passed on. Adaptive Warfare is a must-be in all of the military classics. They do not allow for any other model of military action than the adaptive model. I doubt that among the materials that were rejected or left behind during the Han and subsequent editorial processes of the military classics we could find rationalizations and philosophical defenses of other models of warfare. Although I cannot but make an argument by absence, the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 chapters that were not manipulated or homogenized by editorial hands show the same representation of adaptation and the same positions as the other military texts. The same is true of found manuscripts. This suggests that the idea of adaptation was firmly engrained in the military discussions of Warring States.

Nevertheless, had more of the narrative, anecdotal and dialogical materials been preserved in the military compendia, we would probably find some sort of mention of models of military action other than the adaptive. We do so in other early texts, also later-day compilations, which contain materials related to warfare or even technical military discussions. To find

[188] Liu Xiang *jilu* 劉向集**錄**, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 12: 427-442.

alternative models of military action it is thus necessary to look beyond the military texts. Indeed, historical and pedagogical anecdotes portray two other models of military action without philosophical conceptualization: the forceful model and the prescriptive model. In the following pages, I discuss the features of these three models of military agency in Early China and the contrast between them, focusing on the specific application of the philosophy of adaptation to military matters.

A CIVIL WAR TO REMEMBER

Liu Bang and Xiang Yu: Two Ways of Warfare

Shiji 史記 8, "Annals of Emperor Gaozu" ("Gaozu benji" 高祖本紀), narrates the succession of events that enabled Liu Bang 劉邦 to become Gaozu, first emperor of the Han 漢 dynasty. The timeline of warfare events expands from the early years of the revolt against the Qin 秦 dynasty, through the Chu-Han contention 楚漢戰爭 (interregnum between Qin and Han dynasties), to the aftermath of the Battle of Gaixia 垓下. The Qin was in decline after only a few years of central government. In 209 B.C.E., Chen She 陳**涉** and Wu Guang 吳廣, two commanders from the state of Chu 楚, led an uprising to overthrow the son of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, second-generation Qin emperor 秦二世. This first uprising triggered a chain of rebellions and insurgencies that ended in the surrender of Ziying's 子嬰, third-generation, the last Qin emperor, to Liu Bang in 206 B.C.E. The end of the Qin dynasty gave way to a period of constant

wars known as the Chu-Han contention, with Liu Bang and Xiang Yu 項羽 as the main military actors. This period lasted until Liu Bang's establishment of the Han dynasty in 202 B.C.E.[189]

Modern scholars do not usually study the *Shiji*'s historical account of the confrontation between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu as an example of real battlefield decisions. Indeed, we cannot know for sure if any of the events narrated in this chapter happened in real life during the late 3rd century B.C.E. Yet this is the way in which Sima Qian 司馬遷 (understood as the purported author of this chapter) wanted his readers to remember the events. It is in this sense of history as how the past is remembered and hence has the power to influence the present that I will consider this chapter a historical narrative. I will look at it from the point of view of how commanders in the field faced warlike situations. The inspiration comes not only from the way in which the narrative unfolds, which opposes two different ways of deploying armed confrontation in the battlefield, but also from the Grand Archivist's (*taishi gong* 太史公) judgment on *Shiji* 7, "Annals of Xiang Yu" ("Xiang Yu benji" 項羽本紀). In his last few words, the Grand Archivist judges Liu Bang's victory and Xiang Yu's final defeat as a question of employing the army (*yong bing* 用兵). In terms of battlefield decisions, Liu Bang and Xiang Yu made radically different choices at each stage of the four-year Chu-Han contention, which significantly modified their "balance of power" and "situational advantage" (what early military texts termed *quan* 權 and *shi* 勢, respectively), as well as their enemy's. Each one of these two sets of choices is better understood within a particular model of warfare. I will denominate these two models Adaptive Warfare (Liu Bang's) and Forceful Warfare (Xiang Yu's).

[189] For the background to the rebellions, see Michael Loewe & Denis Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China* Vol. 1, 1986: 81-85 ("The collapse of Ch'in). And for a complete and detailed account of the contention, see p. 110-119 ("Civil war and the victory of Liu Pang").

The forceful model puts the emphasis in the use of force and technology for the sake of winning every single battle. Winning or losing becomes a question of military power. The *Wei Liaozi* defines victory through sheer use of force in the following way: "Destroying armies and slaying generals, mounting barbicans and firing crossbows, overwhelming the populace and seizing territory, returning only after being successful, this is victory through force (*li sheng* 力勝)" 破軍殺將，乘闉發機，潰眾奪地，成功乃返，此力勝也.[190] Throughout the *Shiji*'s narrative, Xiang Yu exerts himself to impose his military superiority over the other states and his main enemy, the Han commander Liu Bang. He builds external connections with other states as allies but never seeks the support of the conquered people; he isolates the state of Han and weakens other competing states by dividing them, making sure they cannot overpower him; he gets rid of potential rebellions right upfront in search of immediate advantage and short-term benefit. The forceful approach teaches a commander that by growing ever stronger, controlling ever-increasing territory and winning as many battles as possible he will eventually win the war. Xiang Yu was mainly concerned with keeping his own advantage and benefit, thinking exclusively about his individuality as separate from the context. This might seem a straightforward path to victory. And, indeed, Xiang Yu claims that in more than seventy confrontations he has never experienced a loss. Therefore, he concludes, the difficulties he has faced in the confrontation with Han must have been the work of Heaven, and not the consequence of his military malpractice:

[190] *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 尉繚子直接 7: 16. I use Sawyer's translation of the passage in *The Seven Military Classics,* p. 247. This portrayal contrasts with achieving victory through *dao* 道, which according to the chapter's description comes close to employing methods of Adaptive Warfare. It also contrasts with victory through *wei* 威, the commander's awe-inspiring qualities exemplified in military discipline, regulations and punishments.

吾起兵至今八歲矣，身七十餘戰，所當者破，所擊者服，未嘗敗北，遂霸有天下。然今卒困於此, 此天之亡我，非戰之罪也.[191]

"It has been eight years since I first raised my army, during which I have personally fought more than seventy battles. Those whom I faced were destroyed, those whom I attacked, submitted. I have never suffered a defeat, to the extent that I became the *ba* (hegemonic ruler) of All under Heaven. Yet I have now suddenly found myself in this problematic situation. This is because Heaven wishes to destroy me, and not because I have committed any mistakes in my military practice."

Xiang Yu invokes divine determinism so that he does not need to acknowledge his own responsibility for the outcome and be held accountable for the final defeat. At the same time, and despite blatant failure, he does not remove his support from this particular military praxis that represents the forceful model of warfare.

Liu Bang, on the contrary, employed the army in a way representative of the adaptive model. This is the model we find theorized and conceptualized in all of the seven military classics of Early China. Rather than seeking victory through a maximum use of force, the military texts advise the commander to exert a minimum use of force.[192] To the extent that the art of warfare (*bingfa* 兵法) considers winning without fighting the ideal outcome, as illustrated in the well-known statement from the *Sunzi*: "To subdue the enemy troops without engaging in battle is the pinnacle of efficacy" 不戰而屈人之兵， 善之善者也.[193] The Early Chinese art of warfare also focuses on winning while facing superior military forces. *Shiji* 8 mentions several times, and for a reason, that Xiang Yu's troops were militarily superior and outnumbered Liu Bang's. The practicality of the teaching on how to win over a stronger force in real war situations should not make us forget the counterintuitive philosophical supporting idea behind this thinking: what is too strong will eventually break, and the weak can vanquish the strong. No early text has

[191] *Shiji* 7: 334.

[192] William Mott & Kim Jae Chang, *The Philosophy of Chinese Military Culture*, 2006: 57.

[193] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 23.

embraced this idea more glaringly than the *Laozi* 老子, which has several statements warning against the misleading superiority of strength. Among them, *Laozi* 76 is the most complete example:

人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。萬物草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。是以兵強則不勝，木強則共。強大處下，柔弱處上。[194]

Birth finds a person soft and delicate; death, firm and strong. The ten thousand kinds of things, such as trees and plants, are also soft and fragile at their birth; at their death, dry and withered. Thus, it is that firmness and strength follow death, whereas softness and delicacy follow birth. This is to say that a strong army does not win, and a strong tree will be public [and thereby cut down]. The strong and great find their place below, whereas the soft and delicate find their place above.

Both accomplishments –winning without fighting, and winning in spite of starting from an apparently weaker position— become possible by developing an adaptive approach to warfare, according to the military classics. The weaker one draws power from the particular conditions, circumstances, and natural and human resources that are available at the time. Liu Bang did not care that Xiang Yu was building a larger force than his, or that he kept winning battles while he himself was being blocked and becoming isolated. In due time, he proclaimed his war against Xiang Yu a "just war" 義兵, drawing popular support.[195] Rather than imposing his will on the

[194] Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, p. 185. Many other early sources emphasize the unexpected strength of the weak. Among them, *Huainanzi* provides the following insight: 強勝不若己者，至於與同則格，柔勝出於己者，其力不可度. "Strength triumphs over a strength that does not compare to your own. In meeting with a strength equal to your own, you will be resisted. Weakness triumphs over a strength that exceeds yours, because its force is immeasurable." (*Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 3b).

[195] *Shiji* 8: 376. Other motives to initiate a war seen in early texts but not justified in the eyes of philosophers and theorists of warfare include: profit (*li* 利), anger (*fen* 忿), and fame (*ming* 名). In texts like *Wenzi* 文子 a reactive attack (*ying* 應) once your state has been invaded by enemy forces can also be justified. See van Els 2013: 13-40.

The beginning of *Huainanzi* "An Overview of the Military" (*Bing lüe* 兵略) gives a thorough justification of the existence of the military and the legitimate use of it. On just war literature, see

spot by use of force, Liu Bang created strategies and tactics that helped him gain increasing advantage in the long term. These strategies did not lead to immediate and straightforward benefits; they were indirect, circuitous and to some extent counterintuitive. Yet they produced favorable conditions and built the popular support that ultimately led him to victory. How these strategies fit the Adaptive Warfare model will be the subject of the discussion in this section.

Writing the Story

Hou Hanshu 30a reads: "When Sima Qian arranged [accounts of] emperors and kings he called them 'annals.' [When he arranged accounts of] lords and marquises who had inherited their lands, then he called it 'hereditary households.' [When he arranged accounts of] exceptional and outstanding officers and gentlemen, he called them 'arrayed traditions'" 司馬遷序帝王則曰本紀,公侯傳國則曰世家,卿士特起則曰列傳.[196]

Exactly as the *Hou Hanshu*'s judgment indicates, the rhetorical features of the *Shiji* genre "annals" (*benji* 本紀) are similar to those of the "hereditary households" (*shijia* 世家) and the "arrayed traditions" (*liezhuan* 列傳), differing in the social role of the persons who are subjects of the accounts.[197] The most obvious difference between *benji* and *liezhuan* is that the first deals with kings and emperors (including an unsuccessful candidate to the throne: Xiang Yu), whereas the second makes non-royal important people the subject. They all describe the events that are considered illuminating for the historical memory of the described person. That is to say, they are not exhaustive biographies in the sense of recounting every single important event in

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also Lewis, "The Just War in Early China," 2006, and David Graff, "The Chinese Concept of Righteous War," 2010.

[196] Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 ed., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, "Ban Biao liezhuan" 班彪列傳: 1327.

[197] The structure of the annals of Xiang Yu and Gaozu are particularly similar to that of the biographies. See Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records* vol. 2, 2002: 94.

someone's life. Rather, they are constructed accounts of exemplary feats that build the image of a persona as we should remember him (they are all men with the exception of Empress Dowager Lü 呂太后[198]).

The annals are a genre with a history. Indeed, this form of narrative comes from ancient times, and it can be understood as an evolved titulary in that it takes what would constitute a list of epithets and titles and fleshes them out, creating a narrative around them and linking them as a story, a story that only illuminates what is exemplary of the person's character and what should be remembered with regard to the particular topic in question. Clearly, the events that should be remembered differ from a king to a scholar to a military figure. But in all cases they are used to construct ideal and exemplary (or anti-exemplary) personas. The beginning paragraphs of both annals in *Shiji* 7 and 8 are a description of the intrinsic qualities of the characters used to reveal their essence. The moral and physical description coincides in time with the character's childhood and early youth. Looking at the formal structure of these chapters, it is easy to conclude that *Shiji* 8 sets the background for the creation of a hero around the figure of Liu Bang. The beginning of *Shiji* 7 would in contrast provide us with the description of an anti-hero. Let us look into each of the brief starting narratives and its contrast, since they will give us clues about how this traditional textual pattern makes us, the readers, perceive Liu Bang and Xiang Yu.

Liu Bang was born with special physical features: prominent nose (*long zhun* 隆準) and dragon-like face (*long yan* 龍顏), characteristics of those born to be emperors; beautiful whiskers (*mei xubi* 美須髯), and seventy two moles (*qishi'er heizi* 七十二黑子, a symbolic number

[198] *Shiji* 9: 395 and onwards.

related to the five phases).[199] More importantly, he was born out of dragon semen.[200] Some women could even see a dragon when he was sleeping.[201] Apart from representing the emperor, the dragon is the symbol for adaptability par excellence in Early China.[202] As for Liu Bang's moral character (*wei ren* 為人), he had awe-inspiring features, and was trustworthy, affectionate, and a good natural leader.[203] In turn, Xiang Yu's early narrative is very different from that of Liu Bang. He is portrayed as failing at the several activities he undertook as a child. He first failed at the art of writing, then at swordsmanship. Reacting to the fury of his uncle and tutor Xiang Liang 項梁, he said he would like to learn not the art of killing an individual, but the art of attacking a thousand enemies. Xiang Yu was a failure at concentrating in a single activity, but he did not lack ambition. His uncle made him study the art of warfare, which pleased him yet he again failed at studying it in depth.[204] Far from Liu Bang's attractiveness (*mei* 美), Xiang Yu was tall and strong, and spirited in character (*cai qi* 才氣), so he inspired fear. This contrasts with Liu Bang's natural capacity for inspiring awe and respect. If Liu Bang is described as benevolent and caring (*ren ai* 仁愛), Xiang Yu is described as violent and terrible, not afraid of using violence, and temperamental.

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[199] See *Shiji zhengyi* 史記正義 commentary, *Shiji* 8: 342.

[200] Liu Bang's mother was inseminated by a dragon (見蛟龍於其上), shortly after which she got pregnant and gave birth to Gaozu (已而有身， 遂產高祖). *Shiji* 8: 341.

[201] *Shiji* 8: 341.

[202] Many instances of the representational power of dragons appear in the *Zhouyi* 周易. See Jean-Pierre Diény, *Le Symbolisme du Dragon dans la Chine Antique*, 1987. And John Hay's chapter in *The Power of Culture*, "The Persistent Dragon," 1994: 119-150.

[203] *Shiji* 8: 342.

[204] *Shiji* 7: 295-6.

After the early life portrayals of the moral and physical features of Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, which augur the kind of persona they each will become, the annals give way to the events that marked their life and career, and by which they should be remembered. In this case, the relevant events belong to the frame of the Chu-Han contention, which made Liu Bang the victorious first Han emperor and of Xiang Yu the vanquished. The identifying features of both personages remain and become more developed throughout the narrative. The single key aspect that derives from Liu Bang's early trace of character is his capacity to attract followers and supporters.[205] The opposite is true of Xiang Yu, who given his cruel, violent and temperamental character repels the people and even the trust of his superiors.[206]

Accordingly, in the Annals of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, Sima Qian would have followed this traditional literary pattern evolved from the early titulary literature to establish the antithetical personas of a moral hero, the victor and new emperor Gaozu, and an immoral anti-hero, the vanquished Xiang Yu. The epithetical descriptions and the events narrated would have served to eliminate ambiguity and construct easily identifiable, opposed characters. An example

[205] Some of the expressions for "support" are the following: "All of his followers increased their owe of him daily" 諸從者日益畏之; "Some of the young men of Pei heard about this, and many desired to attach themselves to him" 沛中子弟或聞之, 多欲附者矣; "Liu Ji's [Liu Bang] masses already numbered almost a hundred men" 劉季之眾已數十百人矣; "Two or three thousands of the young men of Pei (were gathered)" 沛子弟二三千人. *Shiji* 8: 347-8.

[206] Some of the expressions for "violence" are the following: "Xiang Yu, as a person, is fierce and crafty. When Xiang Yu attacked Xiang Cheng, he left no one of any kind alive in there. He buried them all, and there was not a single place he passed that wasn't completely annihilated" 項羽為人彊悍猾賊, 項羽嘗攻襄城，襄城無遺類，皆阬之，諸所過無不殘滅. *Shiji* 8: 356. In the conquest of Xiang Cheng, Xiang Yu butchered everyone without mercy, a reason why King Huai of Chu did not allow him to go down the Pass. The king preferred to send a man of righteousness (*yi* 義) to enter the Pass and talk to the Qin peoples who, having suffered the Qin emperor's cruelty enough, would at this point be easy to turn against him. The elders recommended the governor of Pei for this task, namely Liu Bang. This is Liu Bang's second victory, and Xiang Yu's first failure.

of this standard reading of the Annals of Liu Bang and Xiang Yu is Michael Loewe's account of the civil war in *The Cambridge History of China*.[207] In the following I will show that Sima Qian goes beyond this personal and moralized characterization. His judgment in *Shiji* 7 betrays the traditional formal pattern exposed above and suggests that he was not opposing personas but models of agency. In the archivist's own reading of the warfare events, Liu Bang did not win because of his good, moral behavior, but rather because of his good strategizing based on a particular model of military action that I call the Adaptive Model. Xiang Yu, in turn, lost all his chances for victory because of his stubborn adherence to a failed model of action, the Forceful Model.

Adaptability versus Force

Throughout *Shiji* 8, Liu Bang deploys an adaptive attitude in making battlefield and political decisions. But speaking of adaptation begs the question: to what does he adapt? Liu Bang adapts, above all, to the hearts of the people.[208] The first and foremost expression of it manifests in the merciful treatment with which he addresses the newly conquered people of Qin. In his first speech of the narrative, Liu Bang abolishes the former cruel laws of Qin, and establishes a new one simply consisting of punishing anyone who steals or hurts another, something everyone can agree with. He also rejects the goods and food that are offered to his soldiers.[209] With these actions, Liu Bang shows himself not as a conqueror, but as a savior: "My reason to come is to save your people from harm, not to invade and oppress you more –do not

[207] Loewe, 1986: 110-119.

[208] "Adapting to people's hearts" (*yin min xin* 因民心) is an important theme in political discussions. The section below, "Adaptive Measures in the Zhou Conquest," includes a discussion on this topic.

[209] Liu Bang rejects titles three times throughout the narrative, also a gesture of adapting to the hearts of the people.

fear!" 凡吾所以來，為父老除害，非有所侵暴，無恐.[210] He is a savior who understands and cares about his people's needs and who would not dare to take advantage of them. The people of Qin react overjoyed about their new leader. At that moment, reads the text, "they just feared that the Duke of Pei (Liu Bang) would not become the king of the Qin" 唯恐沛公不為秦王.[211]

With these simple adaptive gestures, Liu Bang gains the Qin people's hearts as he comes to take possession of the throne. In contrast, Xiang Yu is portrayed as killing people all over the place. When he conquers a territory, he does not attempt to win over the hearts of the people, but prefers to exterminate them because they are potential threats of insurrection and betrayal. All this is the opposite to Liu Bang, who would not even take prisoners or food from the conquered people. Xiang Yu is recorded to have burned the city and palaces of Qin, and to have killed everyone who stood in his way.[212] While Xiang Yu destroys, Liu Bang builds. As king of Han, Liu Bang builds river roads to transport grain, sets up new altars to keep up the ritual activities, and returns former Qin royal hunting parks, lakes and palaces to the now Han people so that they have fields for farming.[213]

But the conquered people's hearts are not the only things to which Liu Bang adapts in his strategic advancement. One of the most important pieces of advice that Liu Bang takes throughout the narrative comes from his advisor Zhang Liang 張良. Han Xin 韓信 had defeated Qi 齊, and requested he be made temporary king of the newly conquered territory. Liu Bang's

[210] *Shiji* 8: 364.

[211] *Shiji* 8: 364.

[212] Such is the case of the taking of Xian Yang 咸陽, in *Shiji* 8: 365. He also kills everyone in many other military actions, such as the taking of Xiang Cheng, *Shiji* 8: 356.

[213] See *Shiji* 8: 369, 370, and 372. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* describes King Wu's building, supportive and adaptive attitude in his conquest of the Shang in a similar way. See Lin Pinshi 林品石, *Lüshi Chunqiu jinzhu jinyi* 呂氏春秋今註今譯, 15.1, "Shenda," 15.2b–3b.

first reaction was to attack Han Xin in order to restrain his quest for his own power, but before taking any action he hears out Zhang Liang's advice: "It is better to adapt [to his heart] and establish him [as a king], so that he will defend [the territory] out of his own interest" 不如因而立之，使自為守.[214] Note that this piece of advice has adaptability as the key. But note also that Liu Bang is acting adaptively when following this, or for that matter any, piece of advice.

Shiji 8 contains many instances of Liu Bang taking advice from his officers. Being able to take advice is indeed part of Liu Bang's adaptability. That he can take advice implies that he is able to change his mind, modify his plans, proceed according to the changing balance of power, and adjust according to what other people consider beneficial at different moments. Liu Bang is portrayed as flexible and open to suggestions. This is precisely what made him great: being able to use the resources around him. In contrast, Xiang Yu makes important decisions on his own, rarely counting on his officers' advice.[215] By the end of the chapter, Liu Bang, already Gaozu, asks his generals why is it so that he won the world whereas Xiang Yu lost it. Although the generals' response focuses on Xiang Yu's individualism and lack of concern for the sharing the

[214] *Shiji* 8: 376. Other examples of taking advice in *Shiji* 8: 364 ("The Duke of Pei approved his plan, and followed it" 沛公然其計，從之), 373 ("The King of Han followed his plan" 漢王從其計) and 374 ("The King of Han listened to his plan" 漢王聽其計).

[215] Only once this is mentioned (*Shiji* 8: 364). *Shiji* 7 portrays Xiang Yu as violent and cruel as *Shiji* 8 does, and it is not short of examples in which Xiang Yu should have heard his advisors' suggestions out, but he did not. For instance, his rejection of Fan Zeng's 范增 advice gives great advantage to Liu Bang. Immediately after, he dislikes the offered advice so much that he boils the bold counselor alive (*Shiji* 7: 314-5). This shows Xiang Yu's impulsive behavior and his inability to appreciate wisdom in others. However, *Shiji* 7 also contains several instances in which Xiang Yu follows advice. For instance, Fan Zeng's counsel on attacking Liu Bang immediately (*Shiji* 7: 311). Or his uncle Xiang Bo's 項伯 (*Shiji* 7:312). In one instance, Xiang Yu precisely hears the advice not to butcher everyone in order to gain the hearts of the people (*Shiji* 7: 329). Overall, *Shiji* 7 presents a more flexible, more thoughtful and better strategist Xiang Yu than *Shiji* 8. Remember that the narratives and portrayals do not need to be consistent.

benefits (*tong li* 同利),[216] they also mention his jealousy of those of worth and ability, and his suspicion of those of wisdom. This is the point to which Gaozu will confer most relevance when reflecting on his own victory. The major resource at hand for any general or politician is the intelligence of the able supporters and capable people around:

夫運籌策帷帳之中，決勝於千里之外，吾不如子房。鎮國家，撫百姓，給餽饟，不絕糧道，吾不如蕭何。連百萬之軍，戰必勝，攻必取，吾不如韓信。此三者，皆人傑也，吾能用之，此吾所以取天下也。項羽有一范增而不能用，此其所以為我擒也 .[217]

When it comes to sitting within the army tents and planning strategies that will assure us a decisive victory a thousand miles away, I am no match for Zi Fang (Zhang Liang). When it comes to bringing to calm the ruling family and soothing the people, to providing rations for the troops and avoiding that the roads of supply are cut off, I am no match for Xiao He. In connecting an army of a million men in a way that we win every battle and succeed in every attack, I am no match for Han Xin. These three are all outstanding men. The fact that I was able to make use of them is how I gained possession of All under Heaven. Xiang Yu had his one Fan Zeng, but he was unable to make use him. This is how he ended as my prisoner.

Being able to acknowledge the capacities of others and rely on them is key for a leader, but it requires both flexibility and adaptability, which Xiang Yu most conspicuously lacked, according to *Shiji* 8. A direct consequence of Liu Bang's adaptive policies is that the people supported him on their own accord, and submitted to him out of awe and respect. Liu Bang attracts followers by virtue of his demeanor, and becomes the legitimate Son of Heaven in the eyes of the people much before he has militarily won the empire.[218] On the contrary, Xiang Yu can only enjoy

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[216] *Shiji* 8: 381.

[217] *Shiji* 8: 381. In this case, thanks to Zhang Liang's wise intervention, and as a consequence of Liu Bang's flexible and adaptive attitude, Han Xin would later agree to mediate with Xiang Yu for a peace treaty, saving Liu Bang's parents and wife from Xiang Yu's confinement.

[218] "There was no one who would not submit to him" 無不下者. *Shiji* 8: 360. According to the *Mengzi*, this is exactly what happens when a true sage appears, both Heaven and humans cannot but rejoice and accept him (*Mengzi* 5A). As for the people perceiving Liu Bang as the Son of Heaven, and the alert this causes in Xiang Yu, there is a better description in *Shiji* 7: 311: [Fan Zeng speaking to Xiang Yu] "I have commanded to observe [Liu Bang's] *qi*, and it looks like dragons and tigers, in five colors: this is the *qi* of the Son of Heaven. Strike him immediately and do not miss!" 吾令人望其氣，皆為龍虎，成五采，此天子氣也。急擊勿失.

submission out of fear, which proves not to last as long as voluntary submission out of awe. A good example of how easily those who submitted to Xiang Yu out of fear turned their backs to him is what happened after Xiang Yu killed Yi di 義帝, the Righteous Emperor of Qin. Since Xiang Yu never established connections of trust, and simply used the people for his own sake, the officers and ministers under his command revolted against him as soon as they were given an opportunity.[219] Let us study the events surrounding the death of Yi di more carefully, since they entail a turning point in the course of the narrative that ends with Gaozu establishing the Han Empire. These events are also the most important illustration of the Adaptive versus Forceful model of military action.

Anticipating rebellion and desiring to expand his control over the territory, Xiang Yu commanded the exile of Yi di and his subsequent murder. He thereafter crowned himself King of Qi, expecting the Qin people to forget their former ruler soon after his disappearance. Xiang Yu did not realize how much honor the people gave to their legitimate ruler. Whereas he achieved an immediate benefit –eliminating an obstacle for winning more power and territory—his action did not work in a constructive way on the long term: he ended up losing most of his supporters, and with them his imbalance of power. Xiang Yu did not understand the hearts of the people, or if he did, he did not adapt to them. This is an illustration of forceful behavior in a real war situation.

In contrast, when Liu Bang heard about the brutal slaying of Yi di, he immediately recognized the opportunity to create his own advantage out of this situation. Liu Bang held a public funeral ceremony for Yi di and a period of mourning that lasted three days. Then, he announced his march to the east to attack the murderer of the Rightful Emperor, and asked the different peoples to join his campaign, receiving a huge response. In his speech, Liu Bang

[219] *Shiji* 8: 368.

emphasized the legitimacy of Yi di, and the great act of betrayal that his murder implied. In particular, he accused Xiang Yu of being *da ni* 大逆, greatly contrary to the people's hearts, and *wu dao* 無道, depleted of the proper way. [220]

From the battlefield, and to his own soldiers, Liu Bang's behavior may have seemed illogical. The commander interrupted his campaign to hold a funeral for a foreign ruler and former enemy, halting all military actions for three whole days. He was also irregular in seeking new allies during an active campaign.[221] Yet with these unexpected actions Liu Bang obtained the popular support and the situational advantage that he needed to win the war. Liu Bang's war suddenly became a just war (*yi bing* 義兵) in punishment for regicide against Xiang Yu. As rectifier of former wrongs, he became the new legitimate successor to the throne. This is a clear example of adaptive behavior in real war. Xiang Yu had greater military forces and many victories under his belt, but he created an impasse for himself because, lacking adaptability, he had exiled the people's king and crowned himself in turn.

At the ravine of Guang Wu 廣武, Xiang Yu challenged Liu Bang to a one-to-one confrontation. Liu Bang's proud response is given in direct speech, and it includes an enumeration of the ten wrongs that would make Xiang Yu eventually fail. The tenth wrong repeats the notion of *dani wudao*, being contrary and lacking principles, which encompasses them all. Liu Bang's judgment on Xiang Yu is similar to that of the Great Archivist at the end of *Shiji* 7. Yet the latter made the more explicit argument that Xiang Yu not only did not respect the way and principles of the people around him, but also that that was because he held a wrong approach to warfare –namely the forceful approach:

[220] *Shiji* 8: 370.

[221] Mott and Kim, 2006: 52-4.

及羽背關懷楚，放逐義帝而自立，怨王侯叛己，難矣。自矜功伐，奮其私智而不師古，謂霸王之業，欲以力征經營天下，五年卒亡其國，身死東城，尚不覺寤而不自責，過矣。乃引「天亡我，非用兵之罪也」，豈不謬哉！[222]

(…) But when he went so far as to turn his back on the Pass and return to his native Chu, banishing the Righteous Emperor and establishing himself up in his place, it was hardly surprising that the feudal lords betrayed him. He boasted and exposed his own achievements. He strove to maintain his partial opinions, and did model himself on the ancients. He declared he was carrying out the tasks of a *ba* (hegemonic ruler), hoping to run All under Heaven by means of forceful attacks. Yet within five years he was dead and his state lost. He met death at Dongcheng, but even at that time he did not came to understand nor blame himself [for what had happened], what a mistake! He declared: "It is Heaven which has destroyed me, and no fault of mine in the use of the army!" Was he not indeed deluded?

We have at hand a question of realpolitik: why one person wins while the other is defeated. The Great Archivist makes it clear in his judgment that he is not approaching the issue from a moral point of view. The problem is not whether the commanders behaved morally, as the Confucian traditional reading would have it, but whether they were successful in their military methods. Liu Bang's behavior seeming to have a moral component is only because acting that way brings him the adherence and support he needs to win. Liu Bang is not a moral actor, but a strategic and adaptive one, in contrast with Xiang Yu, who appears self-centered and ignorant of the larger consequences of his actions.

The *Shiji* annals are largely understood as biographical depictions of important rulers. Although *Shiji* 7 and 8 follow a traditional literary pattern that seems to contrast antithetical personalities, the development of the narrative and the Great Archivist's final judgment suggest that the author of these annals was not opposing moral characters based on good and bad moral actions. He goes beyond the personal to present and evaluate two different models of military agency. It is the message of the annals that Liu Bang's success was not due to his righteous

[222] *Shiji* 7: 339.

behavior or to his moral superiority, but rather to his good strategizing according to the Adaptive model of action.

WHO ADAPTS?

Military Discipline

According to the Grand Archivist's judgment, Xiang Yu's problem was not his lack of virtue or his dubious morality, but his approach to the use of the army. He adhered to a non-adaptive model of warfare which we have denominated forceful. As represented in the seven military classics, military discipline is also non-adaptive. Discipline, which is at the basis of efficient troops' performance, requires a clear chain of command and obedience to authority; thorough training, tirelessly repeating the same actions in order to encounter the same consequences; rectification of behavior through punishments and rewards; trust, rigidity and, above all, knowing always what to expect. The issue of discipline is pervasive in the *Sunzi*. In order to have well-commanded, obedient troops who will not hesitate to risk their lives for the sake of the commander and the state, good training and clear issuance of orders are fundamental. On the top of good training and clear orders the commander must add satisfying material and mental conditions (soldiers must be as well fed as motivated) in order to get the most of his army. But the basis on which the troops are formed is a rigid, inflexible and unconditional discipline.

The biography of Sunzi in the *Shiji* begins with a short story that illustrates this point.[223] Helu 闔廬, the king of Wu 吳, reads Sun Wu's *Art of War* in thirteen chapters, and finding it compelling he asks to have it tested in real life. Interestingly, we find here awareness of the

[223] *Shiji* 65: 2161-2.

discrepancy between theory and practice. Although the book of *Sunzi*, and, we surmise, its philosophy of war, fascinated the king of Wu, he wanted to see how the theory translated into real action.[224] Agreeing to give a small demonstration, Sunzi divided the palace women into right and left armies, led by the king's two favorite concubines.[225] He instructed them in basic military methods, including the drum commands and the application of punishments, and trained them by giving repeated orders. However, when he made the drum sound to the army of the right the women did not obey the command and laughed. At this point, Sunzi states that it must be his own fault for not giving clear orders or not having established a strong enough sense of discipline. Therefore, he instructs the two armies again, and this time he makes the drum of the left sound. The women laughed again. Now, Sunzi said, the orders being clear, and the sense of discipline having been established, the fault lies not with the commander but with the soldiers.

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[224] The Yinqueshan military texts contain a different version of this encounter between Helu and Sunzi. In the manuscript version the beginning of the anecdote is quite different. The king has not read Sunzi's work in thirteen chapters, but rather initiates the conversation about war because, admittedly, he is fond of it (*hao* 好). Sunzi gets a little angry and tells the king that he is not to discuss warfare in such a frivolous way. The king apologizes, explaining that he does not know "the way" (*dao* 道). In the *Shiji* version, reading the theoretical treatise is what attracts the king's interest towards Sunzi, the great commander, but he still needs to see the practical side of the theory. In the manuscript, on the other hand, it is not about the king putting the theory into practice, but rather that the king cannot understand a word of the oral explanations that Sunzi offers him and needs to see what they mean with real action. See Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozubian 孫子兵法銀雀山漢墓竹簡整理小組編, *Sunzi bingfa*, 1976: 106. Ames translated this dialogue in *Sun Tzu, The Art of Warfare*, 1993: 190-196. The *Annals of Wu and Yue* 吳越春秋 also contain a version of this anecdote. One of the differences in the latter is that, like in the manuscript, the king does not read Sunzi's chapters but listens to oral explanations of them by Master Sun himself (Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, ed. *Wu Yue Chunqiu* 吳越春秋 1.4: 91-95). For a further analysis of the story in all three sources, see Jens Petersen, "What is in a Name? On the Sources Concerning Sun Wu," 1992: 1-31.

[225] The Yinqueshan version explains why Sunzi takes the palace ladies for his demonstration. Sunzi tells the king that, for the sake of the test, anyone would do. Namely, he does not need real soldiers. The king wants to challenge him, so he asks the test to be done with women, traditionally ignorant of military matters. Yinqueshan hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozubian, *Sunzi bingfa*, 1976: 106.

Thereupon, he commands the two team leaders to be beheaded. The king tries to stop him and save his two favorite concubines from death, but Sunzi insists. He has been given full authority over the army, hence the right to disregard his king's wishes in the martial arena. He also finds it necessary to carry through his initial punishment, both as a means to control the rest of the group, and as an example that the commander's word is to be trusted (and feared).[226] The commander and his army, though acting under political order as an instrument to achieve larger and, some would argue, higher political goals, must enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. If the objectives of the war are to be accomplished, the commander must remain the ultimate judge of military actions by a self-regulated and self-controlled body. Indeed, for the commander to be in control and for the ruler not to interfere stands in the *Sunzi* as one of the five points for a military campaign to achieve victory (將能而君不御者勝).[227]

Sunzi's beheading procedure is analogous to Roman decimation, a process where troops that had committed a collective offense were divided into groups of ten to have one of each group randomly chosen for execution by stoning or clubbing. Both procedures addressed the problem of discipline from the point of view of the need to punish a large group of capital offenders while still needing to keep most of them alive. However, while in decimation the terrible fate of a few was left to fortune, in the Sunzi stories it is through punishing the high ranks that the lower ranks learn exemplary behavior and are made obedient.[228] Military methods

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[226] "Authority/awesomeness lies in not making changes" 威在於不變, reads the *Wei Liaozi* "Shi'er ling." *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 7: 34.

[227] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 27. Earlier in the same chapter, "Planning the Attack" ("Mou gong" 謀攻), the ways in which the ruler can ruin a military campaign are listed, all of them related to uncalled-for interference.

[228] In the Yinqueshan version of the story the appointed "commanders" of the two battalions are not the king's favorite ladies, as in the *Shiji*'s, but two officials. In any case, it is the leaders who are punished for the behavior of the group. A similar exemplary story regarding Sunzi's

in the *Sunzi*, as much as in the other military classics from Early China, begin by enforcing obedience and compliance by any means. After his brutal demonstration of power and control, Sunzi guarantees the king that his troops are ready to perform no matter the conditions. And indeed, the *Shiji* narrative confirms, the state of Wu eventually inflicted a great defeat over Chu.[229] The Yinqueshan manuscript containing the parallel anecdote misses many strips, leaving unfortunate gaps of information. Despite this and the discontinuities with the received story, both versions point at the same teaching: discipline in the army is to be obtained through clear issuance of orders and inflexible application of punishments with no room for compassion or exceptions of any kind.

A different method of enforcing military discipline that does not involve violence is that of Wu Qi, whose biography follows Sun Wu's in the *Shiji* as the other great commander and military theorist of the times. Wu Qi's way to deploy the discipline of the army, namely to make the troops commit to his commands, was to eliminate hierarchies in ordinary life and behave as one more among his soldiers. The commander slept, ate and marched in the same way as his soldiers. He enjoyed no special treatment to the extent that he shared the same labors and suffered the same miseries as his troops. With these measures that enhanced the sense of equality and trust, Wu Qi "won the hearts of his soldiers" (*de shi xin* 得士心),[230] achieving complete

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disciplinary methods appears in *Shiji* 64, "Sima Rangju liezhuan" 司馬穰苴列傳. Petersen notices that the point of these and other similar stories is how to "set an example" (*yi xun* 以徇) in order to achieve discipline. See Petersen, 1992: 8-10.

[229] *Shiji* 65: 2162.

[230] *Shiji* 65: 2166.

allegiance. Wu Qi is indeed famous for being capable of "making the troops willing to die happily" (*shi shizu le si* 使士卒樂死):[231]

卒有病疽者，起為吮之。卒母聞而哭之。人曰：「子卒也，而將軍自吮其疽，何哭為？」母曰：「非然也。往年吳公吮其父，其父戰不旋踵，遂死於敵。吳公今又吮其子，妾不知其死所矣。是以哭之。」[232]

Once when one of his soldiers had a blister, [Wu] Qi personally sucked out the pus for him. The soldier's mother heard about it and cried. Someone told her: "Your son is an ordinary soldier, and the commander himself sucked his blister. What is there to cry about?" The mother replied: "That is not it. In years past Lord Wu[233] sucked his father's blister. His father went to war without hesitating and subsequently died at the hands of the enemy. Now Lord Wu again sucks my son's blister, so I do not know where he will die. For this reason, I cry."

A great advocate of the use of punishments and rewards, Wu Qi favored trust and credibility above all as a way to discipline and motivate his soldiers. The anecdote above illustrates the great impact of his method over the soldier's response.

The Tension Between Rigid Obedience and Adaptation

The *Shiji* and the Yinqueshan stories portray Sunzi as a commander who forces military discipline onto the troops by fear and force, and who remains inflexible in order to gain respect and set an example. This image, together with the preoccupation with discipline that permeates the *Sunzi*, dramatically contrasts with the latter's teachings on philosophy of war, which value flexibility and adaptability above all. As Petersen remarked: "Sun Wu's one-sided reliance on intimidation as means of disciplining the palace ladies is not typical of the more sophisticated view taken in a text that is generally held to be representative of the entire Chinese tradition of

[231] *Shiji* 65: 2167.

[232] *Shiji* 65: 2166. The contrast in *Shiji* 65 between the disciplinary way of Sunzi and the way of Wuzi is notable. Sawyer examines other examples of Wu Qi's enforcement of his soldiers' sense of trust and discipline from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子. Sawyer, 1993: 196-8.

[233] The word *gong* 公 is here an honorific term designing "lord," not an actual title (i.e. "duke").

the art of war."[234] An illustration of the *Sunzi*'s philosophy of military adaptation, which is representative of Warring States philosophy of war as it has been transmitted to us, appears in the *Sunzi*'s first chapter, "Laying Plans" ("Shi ji" 始計):

勢者，因利而制權也。

Achieve situational advantage[235] by means of adapting to what is of advantage and controlling the balance of power.[236]

兵者，詭道也。故能而示之不能，用而示之不用，近而示之遠，遠而示之近。利而誘之，亂而取之，實而備之，強而避之，怒而撓之，卑而驕之，佚而勞之，親而離之。攻其無備，出其不意。此兵家之勝，不可先傳也。[237]

The military is the way of deception. Therefore, when able we must display inability; when employing [forces] we must display inactivity; when near we must seem far away; when far away we must seem near. Show your profits to lure the enemy; feign disorder to catch him. If they have strengths (*shi* 實),[238] prepare for them; if they are too strong, avoid them; if they are angry, disturb them; if they are vulgar, make them feel arrogant; if they are rested, exert them; if they are close and friendly, separate them. Attack where he is unprepared; take him by surprise. These are the ways of victory for military strategists. They cannot be transmitted beforehand.

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[234] Petersen, 1992: 12.

[235] My translation of *shi* 勢 as "situational advantage" acknowledges that *shi*, both in military as in non-military texts, usually entails an advantage that is gained from placing oneself in a particular, strategic position, but I also wish to emphasize that this position is situation-dependent: temporary, relative, and always susceptible to oscillation. For a summary of the different ways in which the complex notion of *shi* has been translated into English language in the past century, see Sawyer, 1993: 429, n. 37. Roger Ames has explored the different connotations of the term in military and political literature, arguing that *shi* was originally coined as a military term and only later adopted by non-military thinkers. See Ames, *The Art of Rulership*, 1994: 65-107. As could be expected, the Chinese literature on *shi* is very extensive. I find Lu Ruirong's 盧瑞容 discussion of *shi* within the theoretical framework of "relationality" (*xiangdui guanxi* 相對關係) instructive. See Lu Ruirong, "Zhongguo gudai bingjia *shi* gainian xitan" 中國古代兵家「勢」概念析探, 1996; Lu Ruirong, *Zhongguo gudai "xiangdui guanxi" siwei tantao* 中國古代「相對關係」思維探討, 2004.

[236] The term *quan* 權 has received much attention from scholars of Early Chinese military and political literature. Because of its meaning of "weighing" and its relation to the fluctuations of power and the means to secure it, I follow Sawyer in translating it as "balance of power."

[237] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 7-12.

[238] The pair "substantial-vacuous" (*shi* 實–*xu* 虛) often appears in the *Sunzi* with the meaning of strong versus weak points or of a strong, prepared, and efficacious military, as opposed to the weak, unprepared and disorganized military.

This passage is often quoted to illustrate the centrality of deception in Ancient Chinese military arts. I would like to direct our attention instead to the idea of adaptation. Indeed, deceiving is only one half of the equation for achieving situational advantage (*shi* 勢). As the passage states, for the commander to use the situation to his advantage, he needs to first identify what can be beneficial in each situation. For this purpose he needs to observe the enemy and let him display his features. That is to say, the adaptive commander should wait for the enemy to make the first move and show his peculiarities, such as formation, and strong and weak points, and, only then, move after him. This guarantees that the commander's action be an adaptive and, hence, accurate response to the arising situation. Waiting for the first move to be made and a new situation to arise provides the follower with a situational advantage that allows him the time to deliberate and the necessary information to calculate the most accurate response. Creating a situational advantage with respect to the enemy is part of the preliminary plans for engaging in warfare. Hence, the first step in laying plans is studying one's enemy and acting accordingly. At the same time, the commander needs to prevent the enemy from preparing an adaptive response to his army's circumstances. Here is where deception is needed: as a way to preempt the enemy from creating his own adjusted plan. Each military contender will strive to adapt his tactics to the enemy's circumstance, while attempting to prevent the enemy from adapting to his.[239]

As it happens, discipline is one of the pillars of military practice, but it is opposed to adaptation. The one requiring rigidity and repetition, and the second flexibility and ever-new

[239] Albert Galvany's 2015 article, "Signs, Clues, and Traces: Anticipation in Ancient Chinese Political and Military Texts," explores this phenomenon in the area of achieving information and deciphering clues. In p. 31, Galvany refers to "the dialectic relationship between the will to know and the obligation to hide oneself." See also Li Guisheng, 2009: 296-7. Li argues that the most basic means to enact the *dao* of deception is adaptability: know your enemy but do not let him know truly you (only deceptively, by showing a false form), and establish your strategies and tricks according to the enemy's true form, and not according to your own will.

courses of action, they seem impossible to resort to simultaneously. An important problem unfolds from the discussion above: the tension between rigid obedience and adaptation. The tension gets resolved when we pay attention to the agents of adaptation. We find that, in every instance, it is the commander who should behave adaptively, and therefore change his course of action according to the unveiling of the circumstances, while the troops are supposed to blindly obey the given commands and see them carried through at any cost. The training is different too in each case: whereas the commander's involves the design of adjustable strategies, the troops, who are not granted volition or independent thought, must obey the commander and respond to his commands as limbs respond to the mind (*xin* 心).[240]

"If the commander does not control his mind, the troops will not move as limbs" 夫將不心制，卒不節動.[241] A different analogy equates the troops to mere arrows that cannot but follow the direction established by the commander-bow.[242] Overall, these images convey the idea that the army must be limited to translating into action the military strategy designed by the commander. Therefore, the troops need no capacity for adaptation, but only discipline to mimetically perform the commander's orders. This means that military discipline and adaptability are fully integrated in Early Chinese military thought. The textual structure of the *Wei Liaozi* is a pertinent example of the latter. The *Wei Liaozi*'s first twelve chapters have a philosophical character, centering on issues of strategy, and involving adaptability. The last twelve focus instead on questions of organization and discipline, hence involving rigidity and

[240] *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 7:24.

[241] *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 7:24.

[242] Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozubian, *Sun Bin bingfa*, 1976: 67. For an interesting summary of the different ways in which early military texts portray the relationship between the commander and the army, see Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 1989: 104-114.

harshness. In order for the commander's adaptive strategies to deploy smoothly, he needs to previously enforce a sense of authority in his troops. Adaptability and rigid discipline are not opposed in the military discourse but merely directed at different roles.

Now we can see that the problem with the performance of Xiang Yu's army lay in the commander himself who behaved non-adaptively. The next section presents a case study of the adaptive model of action from one of the most famous military leaders in Early China, and explains how it is different from moralized accounts of warfare.

ADAPTIVE MEASURES IN THE ZHOU CONQUEST

Portrayals of King Wu

Several early portrayals of King Wu show a military leader who does not hesitate to employ cunning, strategies, deception and even straightforward violence to dominate his enemy. "Capture of the World" ("Shifu" 世俘 chapter of the *Lost Book of Zhou* 逸周書), for instance, records a King Wu who is not certain about the support of his father King Wen, and whose violent acts of aggression, such as cutting the enemy's ears and decapitating the Shang king Zhou, would receive wholehearted condemnation by the later literature.[243] Indeed, this chapter has been at the heart of traditional scholars' arguments when deploring the *Lost Book of Zhou* and doubting its authenticity.[244]

[243] Michael Puett, *To Become a God*, 2004: 62.

[244] McNeal 2012: 82-91. He speaks of "the moralist prejudice against the text." Ironically, as McNeal remarks, traditional scholars find themselves in agreement with modern scholarship in their dating of the *Lost Book of Zhou* texts. Given that they could not be work of the sages who established the Zhou, they must have been written by Warring States authors.

Shiji 32 ("Qi Tai gong shijia" 齊太公世家), represents the Tai gong 太公, the political and military advisor to Kings Wen and Wu who purportedly enabled the Zhou conquest, as an adaptive figure. Having obtained the government of all under Heaven thanks to his strategic thinking, King Wu enffeofed Tai gong with the state of Qi. The first thing that the Tai gong did when he reached his state was "to rectify the government by adapting to their customs" (修政因其俗), among other economic and administrative measures, with the result that "the people turned their allegiance to Qi, and Qi became a great state."[245] Following the Tai gong's methods, King Wu was able to develop an adaptive approach to the war against the Shang army, which ultimately gave him the victory. Among others, the Tai gong advises King Wu to adapt to the varying forms of Heaven and earth, the different capabilities of his underlings, and the enemy's likes and dislikes in order to achieve advantage.[246] The Tai gong's *Six Secret Teachings* is another important early source that presents us with a martial and strategist King Wu. Although the *Six Secret Teachings* proposed many "civil" (*wen* 文) measures in order to achieve the successful administration of the new conquered states, it also supported all "martial" (*wu* 武)

[245] *Shiji* 32: 1480. See Sawyer, 1993: 30. The "Admonishment to Kang" 康誥 chapter of the Book of Documents (*Shangshu* 尚書) presents a similar approach to the administration of newly conquered territories. As a piece of cautionary advise, the admonishment's premise is to advise Prince Kang 康叔 in governing over the newly-conquered Yin people, now under Zhou jurisdiction, and warn him about the dangers of not doing it correctly. Prince Kang is continuously exhorted to abandon his personal judgment, his preferences and desires –even his heart— in order to embrace and follow a larger concept of law. What the speaker (Duke of Zhou or King Wu) requires from Prince Kang is that he accommodate his governance, and more specifically the administration of punishments, to the Yin penal law, as a strategic way to find compliance within the Yin people and make it easier for them to accept the new government – reducing as a result the possibilities of rebellion. See *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Shangshu*, "Kanggao" 康誥, pp. 200-206. In both cases we find adaptive administrators that know that, in order to gain the hearts and trust of the people, they need to make the rules in accordance to their customs.

[246] *Liu tao zhijie* 六韜直接, 9: 50.

means necessary to ensure winning a battle, including deception, bribes, spies, and the use of all sorts of weapons.

This is precisely the image of King Wu that could not endure later in moralized accounts of history. And certainly the "martial" measures of the *Six Secret Teachings* have been neglected in favor of the "civil" ones, most historians preferring the idealized version of winning battles by displaying virtuous conduct rather than by being strategically smart and by shedding blood. [247] The later moralized view of history downplayed the image of King Wu as a martial figure who used strategies and cunning to win his battles, instead of only moral power (*de* 德). King Wu would have filially followed the task initiated by his father, and would have achieved its completion –with the overthrow of the cruel Shang and for the sake of the people— with the support of Heaven. His success would be due only to his own virtue and the universal moral legitimacy of his impersonal odyssey. The *Mengzi* 孟子 contains the first extant rejection of the martial account of the Zhou conquest and the role in it of its hero King Wu, as well as the idealized replacement of the narrative that would continue to be favored in centuries to come. In *Mengzi* 7B/3, Mengzi is attributed the claim that he cannot trust the *Book of Documents*, for it contains unreliable information. Referring to the chapter "Completion of War" (*Wucheng* 武成) of the *Documents,* where it says that the land of Mu 牧 was so sanguinary that "the flow of blood floated pestles" 血流漂杵,[248] Mengzi wonders how an encounter between the most and the least benevolent of men could result in battle at all, for "the benevolent has no enemy under Heaven"

[247] See Sawyer, 1993: 31-36. Sawyer also discusses how the *Six Secret Teachings* has been considered a Tang forgery because of its "despicable policies." The Han manuscript destroyed these claims, situating the text at least pre-Han.

[248] *Shisan jing zhushu, Shangshu*, "Wucheng" 162b.

仁人無敵於天下.[249] The underlying idea is that the righteous one submits people without fighting.[250]

Later, the *Shiji* presents a King Wu who achieves his victory against the Shang because of his compliance with cosmic cycles. By harmonizing with natural calendric patterns, King Wu's task falls into place effortlessly and without violence.[251] Certainly, an image of King Wu as violent killer would contradict the imperial ideology of the Mandate of Heaven. In the words of Jean Levi: "The theme of King Wu's victorious campaign over countless legions of Yin people without encountering any opposition, because he has previously conquered the heart of his enemies by virtue of his goodness, overlaps with that of the Mandate of Heaven. King Wu's resounding victory turns him into a sovereign predestined by Heaven, and the combat against the tyrant takes the air of an ordeal."[252]

All these moralized images of the role of King Wu in the Zhou conquest are representative of what we could call Moral Conquest, or conquest by virtue. Moral Conquest is a

[249] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 7B: 249a.

[250] One of the few early scholars to have doubted the idealized and moralized version of history is Wang Chong 王充. He criticizes Mengzi's reading of the "Wucheng" chapter of the *Documents*. See Huang Hui 黃暉 ed. *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 7.14b-16a.

[251] *Shiji* 25: 1239-40. See Lewis, 1989: 130-43, on the Han search for cosmic patterns to sanction human violence.

[252] "Le thème de la campagne victorieuse du roi Wu qui vainc les légions innombrables des Yin sans coup férir, parce qu'il a préalablement conquis par sa bonté les cœurs des ennemis, vient se surimposer à celui du mandat céleste. La victoire éclatante du roi Wu en fait un souverain prédestiné par le Ciel, et le combat contre le tyran prend les colorations d'une ordalie." Jean Levi's chapter in Galvany & Graziani, 2014: 123-4. On just war in Early China, see also McNeal, 2012: 43-8, and his entire chapter on "Righteous Warfare." He speaks of the invention of the "archetypical enemy" and how notions of just and legitimate war served the purpose during the 4th century BC of integrating the martial into the sphere of *wen*, civilization, given that they could not cast it completely away. That is why the war heroes, i.e. King Wu, are represented as liberators and saviors more interested in ending war and incorporating the territories to a peaceful and harmonious state than in victory by itself and in enjoying the spoils and the honor.

pacifist approach to political mobilization where the rightful and legitimate leader obtains the victory without engaging in deadly armed confrontation. Any fighting is incidental or unnecessary. It is then a non-martial, non-military approach to action.

Valuing Adaptation[253]

"Valuing Adaptation" ("Gui yin" 貴因 chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋) also portrays King Wu as a smart martial figure and sophisticated strategist. Much as Liu Bang in *Shiji* 8, who turned everyone into followers (*wu bu xiazhe* 無不下者) by adapting to their hearts, the King Wu of "Valuing Adaptation" is able to eliminate all opposition by means of adaptation. There we find one of those rare stories that break with the traditional narrative of Moral Warfare in which King Wu accepts his father's receipt of the Mandate of Heaven and conquers the territory by means of his moral virtue. Nevertheless, the later imperial heritage still influences our reading of texts, as it has been the case with "Valuing Adaptation," a chapter repeatedly read in a way that moralizes King Wu's behavior.

In this section, I show that this chapter of *Lüshi Chunqiu* makes use of pre-existent and well-known stories about King Wu and the Zhou conquest with a very particular purpose: to illustrate the importance of adaptation. The author/editor of this passage frames traditional narratives in a new way, making them be illustrations of adaptive behavior and featuring the old hero King Wu to gain authority for his arguments. The author of "Valuing Adaptation" also

[253] I presented this section at the national meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in 2016, in a panel called "Revisiting Old Heroes, or Non-Traditional Readings of Traditional Figures." I would like to thank Esther Klein, who acted as a discussant, for her insightful comments, as well as the rest of the panel participants, Paul Nicholas Vogt, Rens Krijgsman, Oliver Weingarten, and Matthias Richter, and the audience, for their valuable feedback.

added the Early Chinese word for "adaptation" par excellence, *yin* 因, everywhere including the title of the chapters and the King Wu stories (except for the third one, as we will see below).

The phrase of the title, *gui yin* 貴因, does not appear in many early texts. The most common formulas in the structure "*Value* (verb) + object" were *gui de* 貴德 (value virtue), *gui ren* 貴仁 (value humanity), *gui sheng* 貴生 (value life) and *gui dao* 貴道 (value the *dao*). The form "貴 x 而賤 y" (value x and despise y) has the most occurrences. The *Guanzi* "Art of the Mind, Part I" ("Xin shu shang" 心術上) is the only occurrence of the phrase "value adaptation" (*gui yin* 貴因) we find in received early texts apart from the title of the "Gui yin" chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu.*[254] The phrase "*gui yin*" does not appear in any of the manuscripts we have up to today either.[255] The author of "Valuing Adaptation" is taking a common phrasal structure, "*Value* (verb) + object," and replacing the words that often serve as objects (*dao,* life, humanity, virtue) with "adaptation." This way, introducing the word *yin* in the title and the King Wu stories, the author wanted to make sure that the old stories fitted his new narrative frame and that he produced a consistent reading. Of course, the latter did not happen. In the following, I offer my reading of "Valuing Adaptation," putting the emphasis on highlighting the Adaptive model of warfare that the chapter proposes, which has often been missed in favor of the pervasive moralized approach. I divide the chapter into sections, for which I have created subtitles.

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[254] "Juesheng" 決勝 chapter of *Lüshi Chunqiu* contains the phrase "gui qi yin" 貴其因. I discuss the passage where the phrase appears in the "Implications" section of this chapter.

[255] Later on, with variations in form and meaning, we see the formula in the *Hanshu* "Treatise on food and commodities" 食貨志上, the *Shuoyuan* 說苑, and once again and closer in meaning to "Valuing Adaptation" in the Heshang Gong 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi*, which dates, at the earliest, from the 3rd century AD. See *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 2008: 619-620; and *Daoism Handbook*, 2000: 11-12.

I. Theoretical Introduction

The first section of "Valuing Adaptation" is not a King Wu story but an introduction to the entire chapter. It is a formulation in which both important and common people use adaptation in different situations. Apart from serving as a theoretical presentation for understanding the following Zhou conquest anecdotes, this section introduces key notions that give us interpretive clues for reading the rest of the chapter.

三代所寶莫如因，因則無敵。

There is nothing that the three dynasties treasured more than adaptation. When there is adaptation, there is no opposition.[256]

禹通三江、五湖，決伊闕，溝迴陸，注之東海，因水之力（勢） 也。

舜一徙成邑，再徙成都，三徙成國，而堯授之禪位，因人之心也。

湯、武以千乘制夏、商，因民之欲也。

Yu connected the three rivers and the five lakes, dredged the Yique, channeled the Huilu, and made the water flow into the Eastern Sea. (All this) by adapting to the propensity of water.

Shun first moved and completed a city, then moved again and completed a capital, and the third time he moved, he completed the state. And then Yao gave him the position he had received. (When he did so) he was adapting to the hearts of the elite.

Tang and Wu used only one thousand chariots to bring the Xia and Shang, respectively, under control. (They did so) by adapting to the needs of the people.[257]

如秦者立而至，有車也；適越者坐而至，有舟也。秦、越，遠塗也，竫立安坐而至者，因其械也。[258]

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[256] *Di* 敵 can mean "opposition, enemy", but also "mate, pair" (*pi* 匹), so the sentence could also read: "If there is adaptation, there is no match," meaning that those who adapt are unmatched. Then the explanatory second sentence would just point out that the three generations (of sage kings) treasured adaptation because that would make them the best. However, the following lines explaining that the sage kings achieved their goals without finding obstacles by virtue of their adaptive behavior indicate that *di* should be read as opposition.

[257] I make the difference between *ren* 人, "participants in society, full human beings who count (unlike slaves or children), people potentially appointable," and *min* 民, "conglomeration, not individuated commoners, the mass of people." In using *ren* and *min*, the text proposes a gradation of people. Whereas the elite have opinions, sentiments and views of their own (their hearts), the common people have needs and urgencies to be addressed.

[258] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 925-6.

> Someone's arriving in Qin standing is because there are chariots; someone's arriving in Yue sitting down is because there are boats. Qin and Yue are distant journeys. Arriving there standing up or safely sitting is adapting to their modes of transport.[259]

In every instance, the sage kings of antiquity adapt to that with which they have to deal, but which they could not control, and which would become an obstacle to the accomplishment of their goals. Yu was dealing with geographical configurations such as lakes and rivers, hence it was water that he needed to adapt to. His strategy was to first know water, follow up its tendency, and thereby succeed in channeling it and putting it to his favor. Yao was dealing with government and succession, so he needed to know the elite's hearts and act according to them in order to succeed in choosing the right person for the throne. Finally, Tang and Wu were dealing with warfare under unfavorable starting conditions.[260] Therefore they needed to act in response to the needs of the common people, who have the choice to militarily support or oppose the new aspiring leader. The rhetoric of this passage is such that ideal rulers understood which should be their main objects of adaptation, and that their adaptation to them was fully successful.

This passage shows that there are different phenomena susceptible of becoming the subjects and objects of adaptation. First, not only rulers and sages adapt to accomplish great and heroic tasks, but everyone should behave adaptive in their ordinary lives too. We could say that adaptation adapts to people's role: ordinary people do not have to adapt to the commoners' needs, for example, since that is not their role or position in society, yet they need to pay attention to

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[259] *ji* 械 is an apparatus, means, tool. I choose to translate it according to what it actually means in this context, a mode of transport.

[260] One thousand chariots are only a few, not enough to conquer a territory, but Tang and Wu did. They had no force but they had adaptation as their main asset. This is a use of rhetoric by means of warfare images. See Shaughnessy's article about chariots in warfare, addressing the issue when fighting with chariots became important in the Zhou conquest: "Historical Perspectives on the Introduction to the Chariot in China," 1998.

their circumstances to succeed in ordinary actions. Second, the passage opens up a typology of objects of adaptation. Beyond natural things, which have tendencies or propensities, we find the elite, who have political preferences and opinions, and the peasants, who have urgent needs. Everything one is dealing with at any given time may become an object of adaptation for the ordinary person. The boat and chariot example speaks to adapting to the local environment: in the north, where there are fewer water ways, one travels by road; in the south, where there are fewer roads, one should rather travel by water.

Finally, this introductory passage relates water, hearts, and needs in the earlier illustrations with "tools" (*ji* 械) or technical modes for people to achieve their goals. Adaptation is presented as a tool that enables you to have no opposition: *yin ze wu di* 因則無敵. The formula "if there is adaptation, then there is no opposition" that appears in the first line holds the most important idea of the chapter. All of the following King Wu stories are illustrations of this main idea, and the closing paragraph goes back to it. It is a big theme in other early texts as well, and an important formula for the Early Chinese idea of adaptation. We will return to it at the end of the section. For now, let us just say that it is the key for the non-moralistic reading of this chapter. This instrumental approach, where adaptation becomes a *means* to achieve goals (use the right tools in order to achieve different goals), rules out a purely moralistic interpretation.

II. First King Wu Story: King Wu's Strategic Timing

In this first story about the Zhou conquest, King Wu awaits the right timing to engage in battle with the Shang king. Which are the conditions that make the right timing "right"? Let us read the story below.

武王使人候殷，反報岐周曰：「殷其亂矣。」武王曰：「其亂焉至？」對曰：「讒慝勝良。」武王曰：「尚未也。」又復往，反報曰：「其亂加矣。」武王曰：「焉至？」

對曰：「賢者出走矣。」武王曰：「尚未也。」又往，反報曰：「其亂甚矣。」武王曰：「焉至？」對曰：「百姓不敢誹怨矣。」武王曰：「嘻！」遽告太公.

太公對曰：「讒慝勝良，命曰戮；賢者出走，命曰崩；百姓不敢誹怨，命曰刑勝。其亂至矣，不可以駕矣。」

故選車三百，虎賁三千，朝要甲子之期，而紂為禽，則武王固知其無與為敵也。因其所用，何敵之有矣？[261]

King Wu sent a man to spy on the Yin.[262] At his return he reported to Qi Zhou and said: "The Yin are in disorder." King Wu asked: "To what extent are they in disorder?" The man answered: "Slanderers and evildoers have won over the good." King Wu said: "It's not time yet."

The spy returned to Yin and when he came back he reported: "Their disorder has increased." King Wu asked: "To what extent?" The other replied: "The worthy are fleeing away." King Wu said: "It's not time yet."

The spy went there again and at his return he reported: "Their disorder is extreme." King Wu asked: "To what extent?" The other replied: "The hundred clans dare not complain or express resentment." King Wu said: "Ah!" and hurried to inform the Tai gong.

The Tai gong told him: "When slanderers and evildoers win over the good, it is called slaughter. When the worthy flee, it is called collapse. When the hundred clans do not dare to complain or express resentment, it is called the victory of punishments. Their disorder is at the maximum and cannot increase further."

So [King Wu] selected three hundred chariots and three thousand brave and strong men. In the appointed time of dawn of the day *jiazi*, he made Zhou (Zhou Xin, the last Shang king) his captive. For King Wu knew with certainty that he would not have any opposition at all. He adapted to what could be of use for him, so how could there be opposition?

This story shows juicy details of how King Wu conquered the Shang. Whereas it cannot be denied that King Wu appears as a clever strategist who does not hesitate to use spies, the purposes of his strategy of awaiting the right timing to attack remain open to interpretation.

[261] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 926.

[262] Do not confound the Yin 殷 people and the Yin court, i.e. the Shang 商 people and court, with the Chinese word for adaptation, *yin* 因. They sound the same in Modern Chinese, but they were not related in Old Chinese. Baxter and Sagart phonetically reconstruct 殷 as *ʔəə[r] and 因 as *ʔi[n]. See Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese reconstruction, version 1.1 (20 September 2014): http://ocbaxtersagart.lsait.lsa.umich.edu/BaxterSagartOCbyMandarinMC2014-09-20.pdf.

Interpretation 1: Moral Conquest. He knew that the Shang were not doing well, but he did not rush into battle until he made sure that the Shang king deserved to be overthrown. He waited until the situation proved unsustainable, namely when people really needed to be saved. Moreover, if King Wu had acted earlier in order to save even more people he could have not saved anyone at all, because perhaps he would have not won the war at that premature stage. Thus, adapting to the people's urgencies and needs, as it was said in the opening paragraph, he knew that he would succeed. Since he was interceding in favor of the people, he had the moral right to victory. This interpretation is pervasive in Chinese commentaries of the chapter. An instance is Lin Pinshi's 林品石, which reduces adaptation to adaptation to the people's needs, the basis of the sage kings' moral behavior, and equates the message of this chapter with *Mengzi*'s advocacy for a humane government.[263]

Interpretation 2: Instrumental Adaptation. King Wu not only adapts to the people's needs here, but also, and more importantly, to the hearts of the elite (*bai xing* 百姓), to the timing, and basically to anything which would be useful (*yin qi suo yong* 因其所用). In order to adapt, one needs to understand the particular situation, and what is necessary to bring off the desired results. In this context, the *bai xing* are the *ren* 人, the people who count. The third time that his spy returns with news from the Shang, King Wu knows that the elite will no longer be willing to stand up for their king, hence he will not have opposition. That is why he did not need more than three hundred chariots to win this battle. In other words, King Wu did not wait to engage in battle because he thought that the Yin king did not deserve to be engaged before, according to the just war theories of the times, but because he would have an easier time once the elite were so intimidated by their king that they had lost all trust and desire to fight for him. Indeed, as the

[263] Lin Pinshi, 2011: 448.

final lines in the passage clearly state, King Wu had the foreknowledge that facing the enemy at this point would be an easy task, since, in theory, not having opposition is the result of practicing adaption. Directly related to the theoretical introduction to the chapter "Valuing Adaptation," this anecdote is a clear illustration of adapting so one does not find opposition.

III. Second King Wu Story: King Wu and the Enemy Spy

In this second Zhou conquest story, King Wu behaves in a mysterious and counter-intuitive way towards an enemy spy and his own soldiers. Eventually, he achieves the victory. But how exactly does this happen? As before, there are two possible answers to the question.

武王至鮪水。殷使膠鬲候周師，武王見之。膠鬲曰：「西伯將何之？無欺我也。」武王曰：「不子欺，將之殷也。」膠鬲曰：「竭至？」武王曰：「將以甲子至殷郊，子以是報矣。」膠鬲行。

天雨，日夜不休，武王疾行不輟。軍師皆諫曰：「卒病，請休之。」武王曰：「吾已令膠鬲以甲子之期報其主矣。今甲子不至，是令膠鬲不信也。膠鬲不信也，其主必殺之。吾疾行以救膠鬲之死也。」

武王果以甲子至殷郊。殷已先陳矣。至殷，因戰，大克之。此武王之義也。人為人之所欲，己為人之所惡，先陳何益？

適令武王不耕而穫。[264]

King Wu arrived at the Wei River. The Yin had sent Jiao Ge to spy on the Zhou army. King Wu gave him an audience. Jiao Ge asked: "What does the Earl of the West plan to do? Do not deceive me." King Wu replied: "I will not deceive you. I plan to go to Yin." Jiao Ge said: "When will you arrive?" King Wu said: "I plan to arrive to the suburbs of Yin on the day *jiazi*. You may report this." Jiao Ge left.

It was raining without stop day and night, but King Wu marched quickly, not resting. All his generals admonished him: "The soldiers are worn out, please let them rest." King Wu said: "I have already commanded Jiao Ge to report to his ruler that we will arrive of the appointed day of *jiazi*. If we do not arrive there in *jiazi*, then Jiao Ge will not be trusted. If he is not trusted, his ruler will kill him. We are in a rush march to save Jiao Ge from death."

As expected, King Wu arrived to the Yin suburbs in *jiazi*. The Yin were already in military formation. [King Wu's army] arrived to Yin, adaptively fought the war, and greatly defeated the Yin. This is King Wu's sense of duty. Other people do whatever they want to do,

[264] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 926-7.

but King Wu did what other people would not want to do. Being so, what is the advantage in forming in advance?

The enemy let King Wu collect the harvest without having cultivated the soil first.

The key to interpreting this passage lies in the following two ambiguous sentences: 人為人之所欲，己為人之所惡. Ambiguous because of the excessive use of indexicals such as *ren* 人 and *ji* 己, the referents for which we cannot know for sure. Hence, depending on how one translates these sentences gives a different meaning to the entire story. Or perhaps, depending on how you read the story, you will choose to translate those sentences in one way or another.

Interpretation 1: Moral Conquest. The moralizing reading translates the first *ren* 人 as "King Wu," the second and third *ren* 人 pronouns as "other people," and *ji* 己 as "King Zhou," in the following way: "King Wu does what other people need, but the Yin [king] does what other people hate." In this reading, King Wu is responding to the people's desires or needs, and therefore, according to the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven, he will win no matter what he himself and his enemy do. Heaven is seen as a moral and all-powerful entity that acts in benign support of the people, as well as of those who fight in the people's favor. Given that King Wu is righteous and his is a just war against the evildoers, he does not need to resort to trickeries or deception in order to achieve his victory, to the extent that he can even give advantage to his enemy and concern himself with the welfare of the Yin spy. This interpretation is on the line of thinking of the idealized vision of dynastic succession that was so pervasive in Imperial China, and which we have inherited.[265]

[265] See for instance Wang Liqi 王利器, *Lüshi Chunqiu zhushu* 呂氏春秋注疏, 2002: 1762. Indeed, other stories in *Lüshi Chunqiu* present such an image of King Wu. See for instance 15.1 "Shenda," where King Wu is made Son of Heaven because of his virtuous behavior towards the conquered.

This popular and pervasive reading finds support in sources like *Mengzi*, which collects one of the first Early Chinese moralized views of history.

孟子曰：桀紂之失天下也，失其民也；失其民者，失其心也。得天下有道：得其民，斯得天下矣；得其民有道：得其心，斯得民矣；得其心有道：所欲與之聚之，所惡勿施爾也。

Mencius said: "The reason why Jie and Zhou lost All under Heaven is that they lost their people. To lose the people means to lose their hearts. There is a way to get All under Heaven: get the people, and All under Heaven 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 need, and not carry out what they hate."

民之歸仁也，猶水之就下、獸之走壙也。故為淵敺魚者，獺也；為叢敺爵者，鸇也；為湯武敺民者，桀與紂也。[266]

"The people turn to a benevolent rule as water flows downwards, and as wild beasts walk towards the wilderness. Accordingly, the otter aids the deep waters driving the fish into them, and the hawk aids the thickets driving the little birds to them. So did Jie and Zhou, who drove the people to Tang and Wu."

This passage directly alludes to the issue of what people like or need (*yu* 欲), and what people hate (*e* 惡), which is a *topos* in descriptions of Moral Conquest. Doing what the people need is the basis for an aspiring ruler to gain their hearts and hence their support for his reign, Mengzi advises in this famous passage, which counts Kings Wu and Zhou as illustrations of the opposite moral behaviors. I say moral because the next paragraph makes it clear that behaving in such a way as to provide the people with what they need is the feature of a benevolent ruler. For such a moral personality, getting control over the realm is an easy task. Mengzi seems to be saying that they just need to wait and see how the people run away from their current, inhumane ruler in hopeful search of the new leader's beneficence.

The same *topos* appears in *Xunzi* 荀子, with the advantage that the speaker explains what it is exactly that people like and hate:

[266] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 7B: 132a.

夫桀紂何失？而湯武何得也？曰：是無它故焉，桀紂者善為人所惡也，而湯武者善為人所好也。人之所惡何也？曰：汙漫、爭奪、貪利是也。人之所好者何也？曰：禮義、辭讓、忠信是也。[267]

Why did Jie and Zhou lose [the realm], and why did Tang and Wu obtain it? I say: there is no more than one reason. Jie and Zhou were good at doing what people hate, whereas Tang and Wu were good at doing what people like. What do people hate? They hate the impure and excessive, the contending and forceful, and the corrupt and greedy. What do people like? Ritual propriety and righteousness, humility and modesty, as well as honesty and faithfulness.

Note the strength with which Xunzi claims that "there is no more than one reason."[268] The following *Xunzi* passage goes further in the same direction:

故湯之放桀也，非其逐之鳴條之時也；武王之誅紂也，非以甲子之朝而後勝之也，皆前行素脩也，所謂仁義之兵也。[269]

Tang's expulsion of Jie was not a consequence of the occasion of the Battle of Mingtiao, nor was King Wu's execution of Zhou [Xin] an after effect of the triumph at the dawning of the *jiazi* day. Rather it was because of their earlier conduct and their habitual cultivation. This is what I meant by humane and just armies.

The latter *Xunzi* passage forbids the idea that strategy and opportunity, let alone sheer military force, played any kind of role in King Wu's (or King Tang's) victory. It is not what the kings did at the battlefield what gained them a victory, but their previous behavior, their personal and moral cultivation, the non martial aspects of their lives. Whatever King Tang did at Mingtiao and King Wu did at Muye were completely unrelated with the fact that they achieved sovereignty. Texts like these, proponents of a moral approach to conquest, are the source for the moralizing interpretation of the stories in "Valuing Adaptation," which indeed find rightful support here.

Nevertheless, this reading is not appropriate for the King Wu conquest stories of "Valuing Adaptation." The author of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* chapter uses the well-known stories in

[267] *Xunzi jishi* 16: 347.

[268] This is a common rhetoric phrase in the *Xunzi*, with 17 occurrences. Apart from the *Xunzi*, it only appears in the *Huainanzi* and the *Hou Hanshu*.

[269] *Xunzi jishi* 15: 330.

the standardized rhetoric of Moral Conquest, to the extent that he keeps the same common topics such as doing what people like or dislike as linked to the idea of winning or losing a battle. But he uses the old narrative in a different way to announce the importance of behaving adaptively as a strategy to succeed in warlike actions. In this particular story, which I have called "King Wu and the spy," he introduces the concept of *yin zhan* 因戰, Adaptive Warfare. By means of this concept, the entire narrative acquires a different meaning. King Wu behaves in what seems to be a decent, honest and humane way, but not out of moral preoccupation. His is a strategic adaptive thinking, as I show in my interpretation below.

Interpretation 2: Instrumental Adaptation. In the first story of King Wu, adaptation involves being patient and waiting. In the second story, it involves his rushing and advancing non-stop. Overall, the chapter shows that adaptation can be done in different ways. Behaving adaptively means precisely not acting in a patterned, predictable way every time. There is no constant rule about how to do things, so one needs to keep studying each situation individually to see which course of action fits it best. In this case, King Wu turns around the supposedly bad situation of encountering an enemy spy, and makes something good out of it, reverting the power from the spy to himself. He lets the Yin think that they are in control, given that King Wu has revealed vital information, but actually he is the one in control. How so?

Many early sources attest to the negative image of King Zhou and his reign that was transmitted in literature generation after generation. One of the most graphic accounts is found one of the bamboo manuscripts from the Shanghai Museum collection, the *Rongcheng shi* 容成氏.[270] In this text, King Zhou of Yin is represented as an unfaithful and arbitrary man moved by

[270] The title, which we can translate as "Mister Rongcheng," is taken from the characters written on the back of slip 53 of the manuscript. Although purchased in the Hong Kong antique market,

passions and caprice, who does not follow the path of the Former Kings, who entertains himself with cruel games and who is excessively given to intoxication. The picture presents a dissolute King Zhou that cannot be trusted to govern.[271]

Received accounts of the late Yin king, always linked to the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven in a discourse that legitimizes conquest as long as it is done under the frame of a just war against a corrupt enemy, speak of a lewd and drunken King Zhou of uncontrollable behavior and unregretful madness. This representation is made very explicit in the "Admonishment about Wine" ("Jiugao" 酒誥), found in the *Book of Documents*. In particular, throughout the *Book of Documents* but especially in the genre of *gao* 誥 (announcements, admonishments), we find the idea that the new Zhou governors must look at themselves in the mirror of Shang, as the Shang looked at themselves in the mirror of Xia, in order to understand their previous mistakes and not repeat them. Only then they will be able to maintain the Mandate of Heaven. The famous inscription on the Western Zhou bronze vessel Da Yu *ding* 大宇鼎 shows the king's concern about losing the appointment as a premise to his desire to follow the Ancients' path (as opposed to acting out of one's own desires and passions). In the Da Yu *ding* inscription, the king's anguish is expressed through the establishment of a precedent of loss of the appointment,

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hence of unknown archaeological origin, the texts in the Shanghai Museum collection are dated to the Guodian manuscripts (before 300 BCE) based on material and intellectual similarities. For the *Rongcheng shi*, see *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, 2001, vol. 2: 91-146 and 247-93. An alternative sequence of bamboo slips is found in Chen Jian 陳劍, "Shangbo jian *Rongchengshi* de zhujian pinhe yu bianlian wenti xiaoyi" 上博簡容成氏的竹簡拼合與編連問題小議, 2002. For an English introduction to the *Rongcheng shi* manuscript, and an analysis of its philosophical ideas with a focus on the notion of abdication, see Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 2015: 181-262. Yuri Pines has also discussed the political and historical implications of the manuscript in "Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy in the *Rong Cheng shi* Manuscript," 2009.

[271] See slips 42/24 in Allan's reconstruction. Allan, 2015: 214.

precisely the last Yin king: "I have heard that the Yin lost the appointment because its greater and lesser lords and the various officials assisting the Yin exceeded in the use of wine and so lost their office. Enough!"[272] According to these sources, one of these great mistakes that led to the end of the two big legendary dynasties before the Zhou dynasty was excessive indulgence in the use of spirits, and an overall lack of honesty, clarity and trustworthiness.

These descriptions suggest that deception was a big issue at the end of the Shang dynasty. At least, later authors read the past in this way. For instance, the *Xunzi* claims of kings Jie and Zhou that "they did away with justice and betrayed the trust [of their subjects], so that in All under Heaven chaos reigned" 棄義倍信而天下亂.[273] In a passage quoted above, Xunzi also mentions that what people like and need from their governors is loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and trustworthiness (*xin* 信) –what Jie and Zhou precisely lacked. Similar statements are found in the "Announcement at Luo" (*Luo gao* 洛誥)[274] and the *Shiji*'s "Annals of Yin" (*Yin benji* 殷本紀).[275] It is in this context that we need to understand the attitude of King Wu with the spy in this story.

First of all, note that the "spy" Jiao Ge does not really behave as a spy. He does not hide, but rather openly asks to meet with King Wu. Jiao Ge comes from the city of Yin, where we can assume that corruption, deception and general madness were common practice at court, to the

[272] *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen* 殷周金文集成釋文, 2001, no. 2837.

[273] *Xunzi jishi* 16: 358.

[274] "I, Tan, with the numerous officers and managers of affairs, will consolidate the achievements of our predecessors, in response to [the hopes of] the people. I will afford an example of sincerity to [future ministers of] Zhou (…)" 予旦以多子越御事篤前人成烈，答其師，作周孚先. *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Shangshu* "Luogao" 229b.

[275] *Shiji* 3: 91, and onwards.

extent that King Zhou is losing the support of his own people. The discussion about deception between Jiao Ge and King Wu alludes to this situation back at Yin. Let me remind you of the conversation:

> Jiao Ge asked: "Where does the Earl of the West plan to go? Do not deceive me."
> King Wu replied: "I will not deceive you. I plan to go to Yin."
> Jiao Ge asked: "When will you arrive?"
> King Wu said: "I plan to arrive to the suburbs of Yin on the day *jiazi*. You may report this."

King Wu makes it clear that his court does not play with lies and deception, unlike the Yin court. King Wu is able to turn a seemingly bad situation (having an enemy obtain information about his advancing plans) into a good one. He realizes that if he arrives on the day he said, the day *jiazi,* he can show that he is a different kind of king, a man of his word. He is adaptive by recognizing that deception is the weakness of the Yin king; and what the Yin people most need and desire is honesty. King Wu adapts to people's expectations and desires. He becomes what he needs to in order to win the support of the Yin people and conquer their realm. That is to say, King Wu does not behave in a trustworthy and humane way (arriving on the day he promised, thereby saving Jiao Ge's life) for moral reasons, but for strategic reasons. This is the same shift from a moral model of action to an adaptive approach that we have previously seen in the annals depiction of Liu Bang's military methods during the civil war.

In my reading, the three *ren* 人 pronouns are literally "people," which includes the Yin leaders and army, whereas *ji* 己, "oneself," refers to King Wu: "Other people do what they want to do" 人為人之所欲 (like getting formed in advance to gain advantage), "King Wu did what other people would hate to do" 己為人之所惡 (like giving vital information to the enemy and rushing in the rain). In order to keep his word, which was a way of adapting to the situation,

King Wu had to do what people hate doing. In this context, keeping his word would make a win, because it would make him gain adherents and eliminate opposition. Remember that Xiang Yu only did what he wanted to do, and he lost his long confrontation against the adaptive Liu Bang. King Wu, instead, did not do what he himself or his own soldiers would want. He uses context, showing a superior understanding of the circumstances that other people cannot see. The story questions if what one likes is actually the best course of action in every situation, and whether the opposite is so for what one dislikes. King Wu distinguishes himself in the way he deals with the situation. The two intriguing phrases suggest that he acts in a different way from what other people would do in the same situation, and that gives him an advantage. A further teaching of this story is therefore that behaving adaptively is not always easy: it must imply doing what other people, and yourself, do not easily want to do.

King Wu's strategy is termed in the story "Adaptive Warfare" (*yin zhan* 因戰). In my reading, *yin zhan* is a keyword that gives meaning to the entire anecdote. Some people would say that it is an incidental *yin* 因, that the editors of the chapter put this story there just because it had the word *yin*, and that it does not really fit with the rest of the chapter. Other people would read *yin* as a logical particle ("and then") instead of as a modifier of the word *zhan* 戰, hence largely devoid of meaning for the interpretation of the story. I think, on the contrary, that we should take this *yin* seriously as a meaningful concept. It expresses King Wu's idea of war as presented in this text. Adaptive Warfare is King Wu's model of military agency. It works at several levels: (1) Rhetorical adaptation to what his own troops needed to hear: when King Wu seems to be dutiful and moral –when he tells his army to keep going and endure suffering to save the enemy spy from death, which in the text is termed *yi* 義—it must be read as a rhetorical means to encourage his army to keep advancing even in hardship. (2) At the psychological level, King Wu is able to

turn what a priori seemed like a disadvantage (facing an enemy spy) into his own advantage, by adapting to the situation. (3) Finally, by adapting his behavior, King Wu meets the Shang people's expectations: he becomes a new leader who can be trusted. King Wu gains full adherence, to the extent that the Yin people would not fight for their own ruler, which is the reason why the anecdote ends with the saying "he collects the harvest without having cultivated the soil first."

IV. Third King Wu story: King Wu and the Elder from Yin

This story is placed in a post-conquest situation. It is the only one that does not contain the word *yin*, or any direct reference to adaptation. Why is this story here and how does it fit the theme of the chapter? Is it an editorial mistake?

武王入殷，聞殷有長者。武王往見之，而問殷之所以亡。

殷長者對曰：「王欲知之，則請以日中為期。」

武王與周公旦明日早要期，則弗得也。武王怪之。

周公曰：「吾已知之矣。此君子也，取不能其主，有以其惡告王，不忍為也。若夫期而不當，言而不信，此殷之所以亡也，已以此告王矣。」[276]

King Wu entered Yin and learned that the Yin had an elder [chief]. King Wu went to see him, and asked him that by which the Yin perished.

The elder replied: "The King wants to understand, so I suggest to make an appointment for noon tomorrow."

King Wu and the Duke of Zhou, Dan, went to the appointment the next day, but they did not get the meeting [the elder didn't show up]. King Wu thought that it was strange.

The Duke of Zhou said: "I already understand it. This person is a gentleman. He decided he cannot bear not to follow his ruler [to death] and yet have to inform the King about his ruler's wrong doings –he cannot bear doing so. By making an appointment and not keeping it, and by giving his word and not standing by his word, this is that by which the Yin perished. This was his way of informing the King about it."

[276] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 927.

The elder from Yin adapts to the difficult circumstances he is facing and finds a solution that will save him face. As the Duke of Zhou explains to King Wu, the elder would be forced to speak against his own king whom he has survived. He feels shame yet needs to oblige with the new king's request. Hence, he decides to give an answer without words.

One may think that this story got in this chapter simply because King Wu appears in it and it is about a post-conquest related issue. The lack of the word *yin*, which appears in the rest of passages in the chapter, is particularly worrying. It might seem that, after all, the other *yin* words were purely random and meaningless. It might seem that the editor threw together materials containing King Wu stories and/or the word *yin* without a further purpose. Much to the contrary, the missing *yin* in this story is strategic and telling of the author's compositional intentions. Just like the elder, who decides not to say a word and show why the Yin lost by means of his behavior, the narrative does not use the word *yin* (adaptation) yet it displays the elder's adaptive attitude, only understandable for the acute reader. Note that even King Wu is unable to understand immediately the behavior of the elder. A higher sage such as the Duke of Zhou is needed to interpret the underlying pattern of his attitude. If the first story showed adaptation as an easy task, and the second story demonstrated that being adaptive could sometimes be a hard thing to do, the third story suggests that adaptation can also be difficult to understand, or to be put into words.

V. Concluding Remarks

As a corollary to the King Wu stories, "Valuing Adaptation" closes with a few brief illustrations and examples of what adaptation is. In these concluding remarks, the chapter repeats the initial idea that "he who adapts finds no opposition" 因者無敵, earlier expressed as "if there is adaptation, then there is no opposition" 因則無敵. The latter appears also in the *Wenzi* and the

Huainanzi, with little variation: "if there is adaptation, there is no opposition in the world" 因則無敵於天下.[277] The formula *wu di yu tianxia* 無敵于天下 or *tianxia wu di* 天下無敵 frequently appears in early texts. Some other of the reasons why these texts argue that one will be without opposition, equal or enemy include being brave and fighting courageously, as in the *Shangjun shu* 商君書;[278] acting in a *wuwei* 無為 manner, as in the *Huainanzi* "Quan yan;"[279] or being humane, for the *Mengzi*. Interestingly, the *Mengzi* has the formally closest formula to the concluding idea of "Valuing Adaptation," but with a meaningful variation in content: *renzhe wudi* 仁者無敵, "the humane has no opposition."[280]

In his chapter for *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, Nivison explains that "Mencius here drops in place a bit of philosophical philology that was current in his time: "virtue" *(de* 德*)* is "getting" *(de* 得*).* As for military success, forget it. To seek domination by force will simply turn the world against you, whereas if you practice a benevolent government, all the world will want you to be their king, and no army will dare to oppose you: "The benevolent one has no enemy" (literally "no equal"; 1A/5, 2A/5, 7B/3)."[281] My own reading of the King Wu stories in "Valuing Adaptation" fully agrees with this explanation, the only but important difference being that "Valuing Adaptation" locates adaptation as the means for preventing opposition to arise, whereas the *Mengzi* proposes humanity. In other words, there is a difference between a Moral Conquest and an Instrumental Adaptation view of successful agency.

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[277] *Wenzi zuanyi* 8: 10a; *Huainan honglie jijie* 20: 5a.

[278] He Lingxu 賀凌**虛**, *Shangjun shu* 商君書 4: 40.

[279] *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 9a.

[280] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 1: 14-2.

[281] Nivison's chapter ("The Classical Philosophical Writings") in the *Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 1999: 772.

Perhaps influenced by "Confucian" moral philosophy, most commentators even today have produced a moralized reading of the formula *yinzhe wu di/yin ze wudi* in "Valuing Adaptation" by means of reducing the broader spectrum of *yin* 因 in this chapter to the sole premise of "adapting to the people's needs" (*yin min zhi yu* 因民之欲). He who adapts is thus he who follows the moral path of responding to the needs of the people and thereby establishes a righteous government.[282] As I have shown, this is not at all what "Valuing Adaptation" is about. The moral approach to history, conquest and human action in general is to be frequently seen in Early Chinese texts. Yet it is not the only one. "Valuing Adaptation," much as many of the military and political texts of the time, emphasizes adaptability as an instrumental tool for successful action, which does not necessarily imply common welfare as a preoccupation. What both approaches, moral and adaptive, have in common is that they both deviate from, and compete against, the forceful model of action.

PRESCRIPTIVE WARFARE

Glory, Valor and Honor

The narrative of the confrontation between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu showed the contrast between two opposed ways of engaging in armed confrontation, the forceful and the adaptive. The forceful model was portrayed as an ineffective way of using the army (*yong bing* 用兵) already in the Warring States period, when the theoretical model of Adaptive Warfare had become a favorite in intellectual discussions of the philosophy of war. Not only do all of the early texts that would later become parts of the military canon advocate for the importance of the

[282] For a clear example of the moralizing reading, see Wang Liqi, 2002: 1768.

commander's adaptability in warfare, we also find examples of the prestige that adaptive measures enjoyed, in contrast to forceful, non-adaptive ones, in the form of anecdotes and dialogues. For instance, in the *Strategies of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), "Su Qin persuades King Ming of Qi" ("Su Qin shui Qi Ming wang" 蘇秦說齊閔王), the political strategist Su Qin persuasively explains to King Min of Qi that there are two ways of using the army. One of them is more situational and context-based, centered on the analysis of circumstances (*shi* 勢) and power balance (*quan* 權), as well as on adaptive measures regarding the enemy and one's own troops. The other one is more forceful, arbitrary and voluntaristic, based on individual likes and dislikes (*hao* 好).[283] As we saw in the previous section, basing one's behavior on one's likes and dislikes is not a feature of acting adaptively. Doing only what one wants to do is a characteristic of the forceful model.

There is yet a third model of military action, which we may call Prescriptive Warfare insofar those adhering to this model abide by fixed and non context-dependent principles such as ritual norms and long-standing customs. The prescriptive model of warfare could be associated with the Chunqiu 春秋 period. Indeed, the notion of ritual permeates the studies of the early Zhou period, and warfare, as a central activity of the state, becomes a privileged part of the ritual arena.[284] In the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, the historiographic narrative that chronicles the state of Lu during the Spring and Autumn period (722-479 BC), and one of the three purported

[283] *Zhanguo ce* 12: 427-442.

[284] See Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought* (2002), and David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past* (2002), both studies of the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* and the notion of *li* 禮, ritual. Also, Lei Haizong 雷海宗, *Zhongguo wenhua yu zhongguo de bing* 中國文化與中國的兵, 2001.

commentaries to the *Annals* 春秋, warfare is often ritualized, ritual propriety (*li* 禮) serving as a standard of rightness in the battlefield and even a guarantee of victory.[285]

In the Chunqiu period, ritual prescriptions were displayed at each one of the different stages of war: before committing to battle, when performing ceremonies at the ancestor temple and awaiting the ancestors' commands with respect to engaging into battle;[286] after receiving a favorable answer that allowed military action, by giving offerings to the spirits in search of their support and beneficence; and by performing divinations with regard to the timing and potential of the enterprise.[287] Apart from spiritual commitments, the commander of the army had to take part in a ceremony where he distributed the arms among his men.[288] Already in the battlefield, ritual turned into unbreakable moral rules which every army must follow, such as not deceiving the enemy and not taking advantage of its weaknesses. The prescriptive model of warfare precisely prohibited the trickeries that would later become the most basic means for achieving strategic victories.[289]

In the *Zuozhuan*, war is a question of honor. The notion of honor is rooted in warfare as a means to enhance power and authority throughout the aristocracy. Indeed, in Chunqiu times all men belonging to the sociopolitical elite, and only they were meant to battle. Therefore, on one

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[285] Schaberg, 2002: 251.

[286] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Zuozhuan* 11: 195a. "The commander of an army receives his commands in the ancestral temple, and the sacrificial flesh at the altar of the land. He should wear the ordinary dress also" 帥 師 者， 受 命 於 廟， 受 脤 於 社， 有 常 服 矣.

[287] Examples of *zhan bu* 占卜, or simply *zhan* 占, divining, are repeatedly found in the *Zuozhuan*.

[288] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Zuozhuan* 4: 79b. 鄭 伯 將 伐 許， 五 月， 甲 辰， 授 兵 于 大 宮. "The earl being about to attack Xu, in the 5th month, on the day Jiachen, he took his weapons of war out of the grand temple to distribute them."

[289] Kierman & Fairbank, *Chinese ways in warfare*, 1974: 27, 30-1, presents a schema of the order of warlike events and ritual activities from pre-battle to post-battle scenarios.

hand, the population capable of becoming soldiers was limited, but on the other hand, the hierarchical and ritual spirit of the elite was transported into the battlefield, together with the notions of glory, valor and honor.[290] By participating in warlike activities, the elite defended their lineage's honor and augmented the glories of their ancestors, a reason why the military was a fundamental part of the ancestral cult.[291] The civil (*wen* 文) and the military (*wu* 武) spheres were intertwined, to the extent that, precisely through ritual, statecraft violence was sanctioned as one more diplomatic activity.[292]

In the words of David Schaberg, "In the military narratives, for which the historiographers of the *Zuozhuan* are famous, they tested ritual propriety under the stress of violence… In their depictions of war and bravado they also suggested that a uniting structure of propriety subsists even between warring armies and forms the basis for peace."[293] Schaberg begins his extensive study of the *Zuozhuan* analyzing the following military anecdote by the river Hong:

冬，十一月，己巳，朔，宋公及楚人戰于泓，宋人既成列。楚人未既濟，司馬曰，彼眾我寡，及其未既濟也，請擊之。公曰，不可，既濟而未成列，又以告，公曰，未可，既陳而後擊之，宋師敗績，公傷股，門官殲焉.[294]

In Winter, on the day *jisi*, the first day of the eleventh month, the duke of Song did battle with the Chu troops by the Hong. When the Song troops had already joined ranks, the Chu troops had not yet finished crossing. The master of horse said, "they are numerous and we are few;

[290] See Jiao Penghang 焦鵬航, "Zuozhuan zhong suojian chunqiushi de zhanzheng" 左傳中所見春秋式的戰爭, 2015: 194.

[291] Lewis, 1989: 36.

[292] Schaberg, 2002: 251; and Lewis, 1989: 36.

[293] Schaberg, 2002: 16.

[294] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Zuozhuan* 15: 247-8. Schaberg, 2002: 1 (Introduction). Schaberg's translation, slightly modified. Note the similarity with the story I have called "King Wu's strategic timeliness." The difference is that, whereas King Wu acted out of strategy, the duke in the *Zuozhuan* anecdote was bounded by ritual rigidity.

allow us to strike them before they have finished crossing." The duke said, "It is not permitted." When they had finished crossing, but had not yet joined ranks, he again reported it. The duke said, "It is not yet permitted." Striking them only after they had made their formation, the Song army was routed. The duke was wounded in the thigh, and his household officers were destroyed.

This anecdote illustrates what we understand as Prescriptive Warfare based on rigid notions of righteousness and honor. Taking advantage of the enemy's weakness and unpreparedness becomes central to later military strategy, when knowing how to seize such opportunities was the sign of a skillful commander. In this case, the rigidity of the duke's behavior gains him a defeat. Yet this is an exception to an adamant rule in the *Zuozhuan* depictions of Chunqiu military affairs: adherence to precepts brings success.[295] As Lewis remarks, "the centrality to warfare of questions of honor is also revealed in the conduct of campaigns. In addition to the numerous rituals… there was a set of strictures that guaranteed the honorable character of the battle and hence assured the glory of the victors."[296] These strictures and precepts are not to be freely changed according to circumstances. Therefore, for those commanders participating in this model of military action, the most valuable behavior to display in the battlefield was a non-adaptive, fully rigorous adherence to pre-established rules and etiquette even under circumstances that desperately demanded a response fitted to events. To the extent that, as in the example above, taking advantage of the enemy's difficulties or deciding to postpone or cancel a battle that had no prospects of victory were considered a weakness and cause of dishonor.

The change from a prescriptive, ritualized and non-situational model of warfare to a more context-dependent, flexible and strategic model (which I have called adaptive) is, in the mind of some scholars, a question of the philosophy of war of the times. According to Lewis, with the Warring States period the elite could not hold the monopoly of sanctioned violence any more.

[295] Schaberg, 2002: 3.

[296] Lewis, 1989: 38.

While in Chunqiu times all soldiers were aristocratic, hence educated in matters of warfare and trained from childhood, the Warring States saw a huge increase of numbers of men coming from different social strata to join the army. This resulted in larger armies of uneducated soldiers who required new methods of training, organization and command. New theories of discipline, strategy and martial behavior inevitably followed, replacing the old ones.[297] These new conditions would have made necessary what we have called adaptive measures.

Lewis argues for this change of philosophy of war from a different perspective too: the ultimate motives of war in different periods. In the Chunqiu period, when warfare served the purposes of honor and spiritual service, it would have been preferable to die fighting than to save one's live by withdrawing or disobeying the moral etiquette (as in the anecdote by the River Hong). In contrast, in the Warring States period the idea prevails of war for the sake of control and order of the state, as well as the overall benefit of the people. Logically, the best commander became the one able to adjust his plans to changing circumstances so that he at any cost could save the people (including his soldiers) from perishing. The reason to launch campaigns being different, the means of carrying them out would have become different too. According to this train of reasoning, the contrast between the prescriptive and the adaptive models would not reflect a personal preference, or a right or wrong way to do warfare –as it was the case with the forceful and adaptive models— but rather a matter of the philosophy of war of the times (Spring and Autumn versus Warring States). In the following, I show how this is not exactly the case.

[297] Lewis, 1989: 51-53.

Coexisting Models of Military Action

The example Lewis uses to portray what he identifies as "the" Chunqiu way of warfare comes from *Zuozhuan,* "Lord Xuan 12." In 597 BC, asked to withdraw in the face of a certain defeat against Chu, the Jin vice-commander Zhizi 彘子 gives the following speech:

彘子曰，不可，晉所以霸，師武臣力也，今失諸侯，不可謂力，有敵而不從，不可謂武，由我失霸，不如死。且成師以出，聞敵彊而退，非夫也。命有軍師，而卒以非夫，唯群子能，我弗為也，以中軍佐濟。[298]

Zhizi (Xian Hu) then said, "We cannot. Jin obtained the hegemonic leadership (*ba* 霸) of the states by the martial prowess of our armies and the strength of our officers. If now we lose hegemony over the lords, we cannot be called strong. If there is an adversary and we do not pursue it, we cannot be called martial. If we were to lose our hegemonic leadership (*ba* 霸), it would be better to die. Moreover, we have already marched out with our armies in array; if we retire now because we hear that the enemy is strong, we are not men. To begin with our ruler's charge to command the army, and to end with our soldiers not being men— you all may play that part, but I will not do so." Upon this with [the portion of] the army of the center [under his command], he crossed the Ji River.

Zhizi's speech focuses on conceptions of glory, valor and honor. Despite the impossibility of winning over the Chu army, they are compelled to go into battle. Dying is a better option than suddenly changing plans and escaping in face of the enemy. In Zhizi's view of armed conflicts, the commander has to carry out the initial plan no matter what, without modification. This is an example of prescriptive, anti-adaptive warfare, moved by external principles of duty and honor.

Zhizi's war ethos calls our attention to Prescriptive Warfare: following a code and abiding by certain fixed principles no matter the context and situation. But the picture gets more complicated when we read the episode preceding Zhizi's story, where a different Jin commander argues against the potential confrontation with Chu. Here it is what he has to say:

[298] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan,* Xuan gong, 391-2.

隨武子曰：善，會聞用師觀釁而動。德，刑，政，事，典禮，不易，不可敵也，不為是征。楚軍討鄭，怒其貳而哀其卑，叛而伐之，服而舍之，德刑成矣，伐叛，刑也，柔服，德也，二者立矣。

Wuzi of Sui (Shi Hui) said: "I approve. I have learned that the way to use the army is to undertake military enterprises only when there is perceivable affront. [A potential enemy who demonstrates] virtue, just punishments, ordered government, right regulation of different affairs, and the statutes and rules of his state, all without changing, is not to be contended with; he is not one against whom we conduct punitive expeditions. When the army of Chu dispatched a punitive force against Zheng, there was anger because of its double dealing, and compassion when the earl humbled himself. When [Zheng] revolted from him, [the viscount] attacked it. When [Zheng] submitted, he forgave it. His virtue and just punishments were established. Attacking the traitor made for just punishment; gentle dealing with submission made for virtue. Both these things were established."

昔歲入陳，今茲入鄭，民不罷勞，君無怨讟，政有經矣…

"Last year Chu entered the capital of Chen, and this year it entered that of Zheng. But its people are not fatigued and toiled, and its rulers have not been complained against or slandered. This shows that its government is regular." (…)

德立刑行，政成事時，典從禮順，若之何敵之，見可而進，知難而退，軍之善政也，兼弱攻昧，武之善經也，子姑整軍而經武乎，猶有弱而昧者，何必楚。[299]

"Why should we contend with a state which manifests established virtue, carries out just punishments, perfects its government, undertakes affairs in a timely fashion, follows its statutes, and abides by ritual propriety? *To advance when you see advance is possible, and withdraw in face of difficulties, is the effective way of administering an army*. To annex weak states, and attack those that are blind, is an effective principle of the military. Do you for the time being rectify your army accordingly, and follow that principle of the military? There are still weak and blind states, why must you deal with Chu?"

Wuzi of Sui recommended that Zhizi should hold to the principles of war (attack only what needs correction), while following the adaptive model of warfare, which in this presentation is entangled with two separable ideas: just war and utility in army affairs. Certainly, Wuzi manages to incorporate in his discourse both an ethic of principles (deontology) and an ethic of consequences (consequentialism). First, he argues that a just war cannot be fought against a just state. In his view, Chu has demonstrated it is fulfilling all requirements to rightly govern its people, including ritual propriety and administrative justice, both proven by satisfied people.

[299] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan* 23: 389-91.

Hence it is undeserving of an attack. From the deontological point of view, an attack on a just and legitimate state represents a wrong action by itself, no matter the profit or the larger consequences of the attack. Second, he argues that, even if they wanted to transgress the ideal of just war and attack Chu, it could hardly lead to a positive result, given that it is a strong state which they could not likely defeat. An attack on Chu would only result in endangering and harming the Jin people and state. From the consequentialist point of view, an action is only justified when it brings about a greatest balance of goods over harms –which would not be the case with an attack on Chu.[300]

In the anecdote above, Wuzi closes his argumentative speech with a statement that betrays his recognition of an adaptive view of warfare: "To advance when you see advance is possible, and withdraw in face of difficulties, is *the* effective way of administering an army." This statement echoes with the *Wei Liaozi*'s: "Rising the army should not be a question of anger.

[300] The utilitarian notion of benefit was not foreign to military deliberations during the Chunqiu period. Yuri Pines has discussed how benefit (*li* 利) gradually became a goal for commanders, eventually replacing ritual as an external criterion for military action (Pines, 2002: 200 and onwards). Indeed, the story of the river Hong continues with the Song minister Zi Yu condemning the duke's unconditional and irresponsible adherence to ritual norms without weighing the gains and losses (*Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan zhushu* 15: 248b: 三軍以利用也 "The three armies are used according to what is beneficial."). The idea of acting in favor of what is more beneficial, as opposed to following a ritual code, would gain force when understood as a moral principle: the army must represent and defend the interests of the state and its subjects. An analogous process takes place during the Warring States when devious means become moralized in the sense that they are now seen as necessary to avoid a greater number of martial confrontations and their subsequent death, chaos and impoverishment. Deceit, trickeries and not straightforward strategizing –namely what previously had been seen as immoral, dishonorable, and coward behavior not proper to the warrior— become the most moral and "civil" means insofar they are fundamental to protect the people from further harm. For the latter, see Rand's dissertation, "The Role of Military Thought in Early Chinese Intellectual History," 1977: 123; Jean Levi, in Galvany & Graziani, 2014: 116. The *Liu tao* also classifies these means as civil instead of martial.

If victory is foreseeable, then rise it. If it is not, then stop it" 兵起，非可以忿也. 見勝則興，不見勝則止.[301] Plans can, and should, be altered according to circumstances.

This suggests that, although it might not have enjoyed the same privileged theoretical status that characterized it later during the Warring States and Han periods, the adaptive model of military action already existed in the imaginations of those who depicted the Spring and Autumn period. Even in Chunqiu times, when ritualized prescriptions permeated all state activities, the Adaptive Warfare model was a valid choice. The difference between the prescriptive and the adaptive models of military action is not a result of the different times, with the adaptive (strategic, changing, deceptive) model replacing the prescriptive model, as has been suggested by previous authors. It is rather a difference of approach to military action regardless "the times."

What about Prescriptive Warfare? Was it still an option during Warring States and early Han times? The *Wei Liaozi* notoriously rejects the mantic practices that were in vogue among commanders in its time: divination by tortoise shell, calendars of auspicious and inauspicious days, interpretation of omens, and observation of the celestial bodies.[302] We relate these practices to the prescriptive practice of war, insofar they imply going along with pre-established, inflexible criteria that allows for no deviations. Against knowledge gained by divination, cosmic observation and interpretation of omens, some military texts such as *Sunzi* opposed intelligence: the use of spies, who provided actual information, and the analysis of the enemy's psychology

[301] *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 7: 6.

[302] See, for instance, *Wei Liaozi zhijie* 7: 41: "Commanders of the present generation investigate 'singular days' and 'empty mornings,' divine about Xian Chi, accord with tortoise shell auguries, look for the auspicious and inauspicious, and observe the changes of the planets, constellations, winds and clouds, with the desire of attaining victory and establishing their success. I consider this very difficult" 今世將考孤**虛**，占咸池，合龜兆，視吉凶，觀星辰風雲之變, 欲以成勝立功，臣以為難.

and strategic situation. The latter methods of intelligence provided the means for an adaptive approach to the deployment of forces. Nevertheless, these adaptive methods coexisted in Early Chinese military literature with prescriptive and ritualized methods of warfare. Consider for instance the following passage from *Wuzi* 吳子, "Planning for the State" ("Tu guo" 圖國):

是以有道之主，將用其民，先和而造大事。不敢信其私謀，必告於祖廟，啟於元龜，參之天時，吉乃後舉。

For this reason, when a ruler who has comprehended the way is about to employ his people, he will first bring them into harmony, and only thereafter embark on great affairs. He will not dare rely on his personal plans, and must necessarily announce them formally in the ancestral temple, divine their prospects by the great tortoise shell, and seek their confirmation in Heaven and the seasons. Only if they are all auspicious will he raise the army.

民知君之愛其命，惜其死，若此之至，而與之臨難，則士以盡死為榮，退生為辱矣.[303]

The people know that the ruler values their lives and is sorrowed by their deaths, so when such circumstances arise and they must confront danger with him, the officers will take dying while advancing as an honor, and staying alive by retreating as a humiliation.

Conspicuously, in the *Sima fa* we find this sense of prescribed norms, ritual and honor together with the advocacy for adaptive practices in the battlefield. Before engaging in battle, and to ensure that it was a just war, worthy kings would announce their plans to Heaven and other celestial bodies, pray to the gods and offer sacrifices to the Former Kings.[304] The adaptive practices, in contrast, include discerning the weak points in the enemy and adjusting the attack according to one's own strong points; observing the enemy, the terrain and the overall conditions and raising an adjusted plan accordingly; acting on the emotions and abilities that the enemy displays; and not repeating previous tactics for new situations. [305] The *Sima fa* considers war a

[303] *Wuzi zhijie* 吳子直接 3: 5-6.

[304] *Sima fa zhijie* 司馬法直接 4: 10-11.

[305] See, for instance, *Sima fa zhijie* 3: 31 ("[the army] only after seeing the enemy's [dispositions] should it move" 視敵而舉); 3: 32 ("Use what they desire, and effect what they are

complex phenomenon, which needs to be addressed in its entirety: from cosmological, geographical, spiritual and human limitations to particular strategic considerations. Therefore, at the same time that it is necessary for a commander to comply with both heavenly and earthly factors –hence the use of the prescriptive approach— it is also fundamental that he produces single, adjusted plans for each single battle –making room for the use of the adaptive approach.

The foregoing discussion indicates that all three models of military action, forceful, prescriptive and adaptive, coexisted in Early China (from early Eastern Zhou to Han). Moreover, the prescriptive and adaptive models were not always considered mutually exclusive. Each of the military models of action might have enjoyed greater or lesser favor in the theoretical and narrative accounts that have been handed down to us. Yet our sources attest their coexistence and changing popularity in different narratives.

IMPLICATIONS

There are three models of military action in Early Chinese literature. Although the forceful and prescriptive models of warfare are repeatedly attested in sources from different periods, intellectualized and theoretical accounts of warfare tend to show a preference for the adaptive model. Preferring adaptability to forceful models of behavior, fixed guidelines and ritual inflexibility is a central feature of the philosophy of war as it has been transmitted from Warring States onwards.

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capable of" 用其所欲，行其所能); 4: 51 ("Do not repeat your previous tactics" 無復先術). See also Li Guisheng's discussion, 2009: 194-5.

At the center of these discourses on military agency we find an ongoing concern with control. Not always made explicit, it is brought to our attention in this passage from *Sunzi*:

> 因形而措勝于眾，眾不能知. 人皆知我所以勝之形，而莫知吾所以制勝之形.[306]
>
> Victory is produced for the group[307] by one's adapting to [the enemy's] military disposition, and the group is unable to understand [how this was done]. Everyone understands the dispositions out of which we attain victory, but no one understands how *I control* the dispositions enabling us to attain victory.

The *Sunzi* establishes a crucial difference between "attaining victory" (*sheng* 勝) by adapting to dispositions, and "*controlling* the dispositions that enable us to attain victory" (*zhi sheng zhi xing* 制勝之形). It is the latter which nobody but the skilled commander understands. The army attains victory as a collective body through visible configurations and battle work. However, it is the commander, as a sole individual, who controls the circumstances for victory. How so? Cao Cao's 曹操 commentary on this line gives us a clue. He paraphrases the *Sunzi* by adding the information that I mark in italics: "No one understands how *I adapt to the enemy's dispositions* to control victory" 莫知吾所以因敵形制勝也.[308] According to Cao Cao and later commentators, adapting to the enemy's dispositions is the key how-to of the commander to achieve control. The Ming scholar Liu Yin 刘寅, editor of *Wujing qishu zhijie* 五經七書直接, comments: "No one understand how I adapt to the enemy to control the dispositions enabling to attain victory" 莫知吾所以因敵制勝之形.[309] Other commentators, such as Chen Hao 陳皞 and Zhang Yu 張預, reinforce this reading: "Although others understand the efficiency with which we attain victory

[306] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 2:11.

[307] "Group" (*zhong* 眾), in this context, means the cadre of military officers in the field and at court.

[308] Cao Cao's is the first commentary to the *Sunzi*. See *Sunzi shi jia zhu* 孫子十家注, 1991: 222-223.

[309] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 2:11.

over the enemy, they cannot understand how I adapt to the dispositions enabling to defeat the enemy" 人但知我勝敵之善，不能知我因敵之敗形;[310] "The appearance of establishing a victory, everyone understands this, but none of them fathoms [how] I adapt to the dispositions of the enemy in order to control this victory" 立勝之透，人皆知之，但莫測吾因敵形而制此勝也.[311]

The commentators' insight is not baseless. Indeed, the *Sunzi* continues: "[The commander] does not repeat the same tactics that once gained him a victory, but responds endlessly to the myriad of circumstances" 故其戰勝不復，而應形於無窮.[312] Through adapting his performance to the existing situational context, the commander also is able to control, to a certain extent, the circumstances so that they become more advantageous and, eventually, play out in his favor.

Another text that makes a direct and explicit connection between adaptability and control, with the underlying logic that behaving in an adaptive way is a powerful tool to take control over what seems beyond it, is "Adaptive Persuasions" ("Shun shui" 順說) in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*. Below is the concluding sentence of a successful, and adaptive, persuasion of Hui Ang to King Kang of Song:

> 因則貧賤可以勝富貴矣，小弱可以制彊大矣。[313]
>
> By adapting, the poor and lowly can vanquish the rich and noble, and the small and weak can *control* the strong and big.

[310] *Sunzi shi jia zhu*, p. 223.

[311] *Sunzi shi jia zhu*, p. 223.

[312] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 2:12.

[313] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3: 906. I have discussed this passage in chapter 1.

Those in disadvantaged positions, let these be social, political, physical or contextual, may feel that they do not have control over their own situation, depending to a great extent on what those in relative higher positions want to make of their lives. As counterintuitive as it may seem, this passage advises that it is not by behaving in an imposing, forceful manner that will help the lowly and weak regain control. In the case of the example above, the low position is that of a persuader against the king he serves. The persuader cannot even attempt to impose his point of view; that would not bring but failure or even death. His strategy is to adapt his discourse to what the king wants to hear, and in doing so indirectly lead the king to reach the conclusions the persuader desires, thereby gaining control over him.

In this chapter, we have seen different answers to the concern with an agent's control in military agency. How to take control over a powerful enemy and the upcoming, unexpected situations? Imposing oneself, and attempting to force the enemy to behave in a particular way that would increase our own advantage? Or simply abiding by ritual or customary precepts and leaving the final outcome on the hands of the spirits? (1) Unlike the forceful model, by which one will attempt to coerce the enemy by overpowering it with sheer force, the adaptive model enhances the study of the qualities of each situation in order to adjust to them, which (in theory) leads to efficacious results. (2) Unlike the prescriptive model, which prohibited taking advantage of the enemy's weaknesses, the adaptive model focuses on finding –even more, creating— all sorts of opportunities for success. (3) And unlike both the forceful and the prescriptive agents, the adaptive agent will concentrate on modifying or adjusting himself instead of the enemy or the situation, and will take full responsibility for the outcomes of his actions.

(1) Adaptive *versus* Forceful Agency

The following extract from a manual on strategies for warfare, *The Three Strategies of Huang Shigong*, concisely expresses the relationship between the experience of an impermanent and, hence, unpredictable world, and adaptation as the most effective way to engage in action for those whose actions have grave consequences over large masses of people, namely the ruler and the military commander. This text also establishes a significant connection between the practice of adaptation and the notion of "following after." "Following after," as opposed to initiating the first move, which is typical of the Forceful model, is one of the most conspicuous notions associated with adaptation throughout Early Chinese literature, and it stands for a particular philosophy of action:

端末未見，人莫能知。天地神明；與物推移。變動無常，因敵轉化。不為事先，動而輒隨。故能圖制無疆，扶成天威，康正八極，密定九夷。如此謀者，為帝王師.[314]

When neither the beginning nor end is yet visible, no one is able to understand them. Heaven and Earth are numinous and luminous, and together with things they move and shift. Always in change and movement, without constancy, so [the commander] adjusts and transforms [himself and his plans] adapting to the enemy's changes. [The commander] should not act first; he should immediately follow after [the enemy's] movement. Thus he will be able to draw endless [strategies to achieve] control, support and complete Heaven's awesomeness, rectify and correct the "eight extremes" [of the world], and gather and settle the "nine tribes." Such a strategist is the commander for kings and emperors.

The inconstancy of the phenomenal world makes it seem unknowable and unpredictable. Unable to be grasped in fixed patterns, it forces the agent to constantly adjust to unexpected movements. This philosophy of action, based on the observation of change in the phenomenal world, is in this passage directly applied to the figure of the military commander. In order to succeed in the battle, the commander is advised to adapt (*yin* 因) –that is, adjust his actions—to the enemy, who, just

[314] *San lüe zhijie* 三略直解 3: 4-5.

as the rest of the worldly phenomena, is in constant flux.[315] To be able to adapt, the commander should not act before knowing how the situation will unfold. He should instead wait for the enemy to make the first move and display his features, and, only then, move after him. This guarantees that the commander's action be an adapted and, hence, appropriate response to the arising situation.

In the forceful model, this tactic of "following after" would be considered defensive, while the contender who acts first would be the one who engages in an offensive move. Insofar as it is defensive, "following after" would imply resistance against a previous attack, as well as a sense of subordination and vulnerability. Yet in Early Chinese philosophy moving after the first action has been initiated is unrelated to notions of defensiveness and resistance. What could *a priori* seem a reactive and weak passivity that lets the other agent always take the initiative is nevertheless considered in Early Chinese philosophical texts a source of "endless responsiveness" (*tu zhi wu jiang* 圖制無疆), and the summit of active, compromised and successful engagement in agency decision-making.

The following extract from *Huainanzi* "Yuandao" 原道 (Originating in the Dao) explains in detail how in this philosophy of action the leading actor is not the one who acts first:[316]

先唱[317]者，窮之路也；後動者，達之原也。[318] 何以知其然也？

[315] For a reflection on the sociopolitic and ethical consequences of a world in flux, see Harro von Senger, "The Idea of Change as Fundament of the Chinese Art of Cunning," 1994.

[316] The philosophy of action of "following after" is intimately related to the *wuwei* 無為 ("non-constrictive action," more commonly known as "non-action") way of acting. In acting non-constrictively, the agent waits for the situation to unfold and the targets towards which the action is directed to show their features, so that he can respond adaptively to them without interfering and thus being noticed as an external influence.

[317] *chang* 唱 understood as *changdao* 倡導, "to initiate," "to propose." He Ning 何寧 comm., *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋, 1998: 50.

Acting first and initiating an action is the road to exhaustion. Moving after [the situation has been initiated] is the source of success. How do we know that this is so?

... 先者難為知，而後者易為攻[319]也。先者上高，則後者攀之；先者逾下，則後者蹶[320]之；先者隤陷，則後者以謀；先者敗績，則後者違之。

... Who acts first with difficulty achieves understanding [of the situation] but who follows after with ease achieves results. When who acts first climbs high, he who follows after can pull him down. When who acts first reaches down, he who follows can step on him. When who acts first falls into a pit, he who follows can take counsel from this. When the defeats of the one who acts first accumulate, he who follows is able to avoid them.

由此觀之，先者則後者之弓矢質的也。猶錞之與刃，刃犯難而錞無患者，何也？以其托於後位也。此俗世庸民之所公見也，而賢知者弗能避也。所謂後者，非謂其底滯而不發，凝結而不流，貴其周於數而合于時也... 是故聖人守清道而抱雌節，因循應變，常後而不先。[321]

Judging from this, who acts first is the target of the bows and arrows of those who follow after. Much as the hilt is to the blade of the sword: the blade suffers the hardships while the hilt remains unharmed. How so? By placing itself in the secondary position. This is something that even ordinary people of the vulgar world can commonly see, yet the worthy and the wise cannot escape [from the contest to be the first].[322] What we call "following after" does not imply being hindered and not developing, being congealed and not flowing, but rather it is to value that [one's actions] embrace proper calculations and comply with right timing … Therefore, sages guard the way of purity and embrace the feminine end, are adaptive and compliant in responding to changes, constantly follow after and do not act first.[323]

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[318] There is a parallel to this line in *Wenzi* 文子, "Dao yuan" 道原 chapter. In a context of efficacious action similar to the passage in the *Huainanzi*, the teaching of Laozi is in this passage directed at the rule of opposite alternation, including the pairs strong-weak, big-small, inside-outside, and surely acting first-following after (*xian-hou* 先後). See Li Dingsheng 李定生, Xu Huijun 徐慧君 eds., *Wenzi jiaoshi* 文子校釋, 2004: 39-40.

[319] *gong* 攻 read as *gong* 功, "to achieve." He Ning, 1998: 51.

[320] *jue* 蹶 read as *zhan* 躔, "step on," following Wang Niansun 王念孫. Xu Kuangyi 許匡一 ed., *Huainanzi quanyi* 淮南子全譯, 1995: 25.

[321] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 10a.We will have much more to say about "Yuan dao" in chapter 5, "Adaptive Freedom"

[322] I add that extra information in brackets to make the sentence intelligible. It is in parts of the passage that I do not quote that it explains that those who think themselves virtuous and knowledgeable enter a competition for being the first at everything, making their intentions blinded and their actions hindered.

[323] The virtues of "following after" are discussed in a similar manner in other early texts, including the *Wenzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi Chunqiu*, *Huangdi sijing* and *Laozi Heshanggong zhangju* 老子河上公章句 (Heshanggong's commentary of Master Lao). In all of them, as well as in

What interests us more from this passage, and the reason to choose it from among many others to illustrate this particular philosophy of action, is its emphasis on the follower as a purposeful, intentional and active agent. The one who follows not only has an advantage with respect to the one who makes the first move. More importantly, following after is not portrayed as a state of inactivity or of passive, unintentional reaction. On the contrary, it is the adapted and timely response of a fully aware agent to an unfolding situation, not necessarily a warlike one. Beyond the area of military action, the forceful ("acting first") and adaptive ("following after") models of warfare turn into opposed and irreconcilable models of action in general.

(2) Adaptive *versus* Prescriptive Agency

In one of the *Sunzi*'s most celebrated passages, the army's behavior is compared with that of water. Much as water avoids heights and takes advantage of the terrain to flow downwards, the army must avoid the strengths (*shi* 實) of his enemy and strike him on his weak points (*xu* 虛). Hence, "water *controls* its flow in adapting to the terrain, and the army *controls* its victory in adapting to the enemy" 水因地而制流，兵因敵而制勝.[324]

An important aspect related to the strategy of adaptation, which the prescriptive model prohibited, is the seizing of opportunities out of the enemy's disadvantage. Although, as Machiavelli said, knowing how to make the best use of an opportunity when offered is indeed of

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Huang Shigong san lüe, acting first is paired with the notion of being hard or strong (*yang* 陽), whereas following after is paired with being soft or weak (*yin* 陰). Similarly, in all these texts, being second, soft and *yin* is qualified as the way of the ruler, while being first, strong and *yang* is viewed as the way of the minister.

[324] *Sun Wuzi zhijie*, 2:12. In the Yinqueshan *Sunzi*, it reads: 水因地而制行. Yinqueshan hanmu zhujian xiaozubian, *Sunzi bingfa*, 1976: 52. It holds the same meaning, *liu* 流 and *xing* 行 both referring to the course of the water currents. See Shuo Xuehan 朔雪寒, *Sunzi bingfa lunzheng* 孫子兵法論正, 2014: 871.

great importance in war,[325] what about creating opportunities out of a given set of conditions, instead of awaiting their fortuitous appearance? The *Sunzi* advises: "In armed conflicts, what is more difficult is to use the circuitous as straight, and adversity as advantage" 軍爭之難者，以迂為直，以患為利.[326]

The adaptive model of military action that draws on control involves the creation of opportunity by means of adapting to the set of given conditions of a particular time, place and circumstance. The good strategist does not limit himself to grasping an obvious opportunity to strike the enemy. He will have the ability to see opportunity where other people cannot see it and even where other people see something negative (such as the enemy's own tactics, aimed at one's defeat). To succeed in military action, one needs to take advantage of *all* circumstances, not only those that, a priori, seem advantageous. This is to say, a capacity to create a window of opportunity in circumstances and events that most people would consider misfortunate.

Along this line of thought is the following dialogue in the chapter "Three Concerns" (San yi" 三疑) of the *Six Secret Teachings*, the military manual with which Tai gong supposedly would have instructed King Wu in the art of war:

武王問太公曰：予欲立功，有三疑：恐力不能攻強，離親，散眾，為之奈何？

太公曰：因之，慎謀，用財。夫攻強，必養之使強，益之使張。太強必折，太張必缺。攻強以強，離親以親，散眾以眾。[327]

King Wu asked the Tai gong: "I want to establish our success [overthrowing the Shang], but I have three concerns: I am afraid that our forces will be insufficient to, first, attack the strong [the Shang], second, make his close supporters within the court to become estranged, and, third, break apart the [Shang] group. What can be done to deal with these concerns?"

[325] "Nothing is of greater importance in time of war than to know how to make the best use of a fair opportunity when it is offered." Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 2001: 202.

[326] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 2: 14.

[327] *Liu tao zhijie* 9: 50.

The Tai gong replied: "Adapt to [the situation], be cautious in planning, and employ your resources. Now, to attack the strong, it is necessary to nurture them to make them become stronger, and increase them to make them more extended. What is too strong will necessarily break, and what is too extended will necessarily have shortcomings. Attack the strong by using their strength; separate those who are close by using those who are close; break apart the people at court by using the people at court."

This is a good example of the *Sunzi*'s idea of "controlling the dispositions that enable to attain victory" (*zhi sheng zhi xing* 制勝之形). King Wu's army is encouraged to employ their resources, understood in a broad way to include all sorts of circumstances, even the enemy's capabilities and advantages, to attain victory. If the prescriptive model of warfare prohibited taking advantage of the enemy's weaknesses or otherwise lose proper honor, the adaptive model encourages the commander to make use even of the enemy's superiorities. Adaptive performance, in this case, is a tool that allows using anything one faces in one's own favor. It is finding opportunity within adversity, using the target to fight the target, not taking advantage only of the opponent's weaknesses, but also of his strengths. Instead of adhering to preconceived ideas of advantage and disadvantage, ready-made plans or a ritual code, the military literature encourages a proactive shaping of surroundings, enemy and circumstances to create opportunities for success.[328] This proactive shaping of the environment can only occur once the agent has gotten rid of conventional ideas of utility and fortune and, consequently, has acquired the ability to react adaptively to presented conditions, whatever these might be. As we will discuss in next chapter, this feature of the Adaptive model of agency is also central to discussions regarding how to deal with ordinary life events and decision-making, and leads to regaining control over one's life.

[328] Along this line of thought, Harro von Senger remarks that change is not only seen as an objective process in Early China (to which one should adapt, I will add), but also as something that can be provoked and manipulated by the person. The person has the ability to change a negative situation into a positive one. That is why he presents change as fundamental to the art of cunning. See von Senger, 1994: 23. We will have more to say about smartly changing reality through adaptation in chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty."

(3) Adaptive *versus* Forceful and Prescriptive Agency

Unlike both the forceful and the prescriptive models, the adaptive model of military action proposes to achieve maximum strength by centering efforts on modifying and making oneself suitable. As we have seen in the *Shiji* narrative of the civil war between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, attempting to force the enemy to be weak and conquerable is not as successful a strategy as making oneself unconquerable by behaving adaptively. How we behave, and how we act, is in our hands, whereas how the enemy behaves lies, to the greater extent, beyond our control. In the same vein, a chapter of the *Sunzi* opens with a statement about how to prepare oneself to be unconquerable:

孫子曰：昔之善戰者，先為不可勝，[329]以待敵之可勝。不可勝在己，可勝在敵。[330]故善戰者，能為不可勝，不能使敵必可勝。故曰：勝可知，而不可為。[331]

Sunzi said: "In antiquity those who excelled in warfare first made themselves unconquerable in order to await [the moment when] the enemy could be conquered. Being unconquerable lies with yourself; being conquerable lies with the enemy. Thus one who excels in warfare is able to make himself unconquerable, but he cannot force the enemy to be necessarily conquerable. Thus it is said: [the possibility of] conquering [the enemy] can be understood, but it cannot be forced [on the enemy]."

This is an open statement against the forceful model of action. One can make oneself unconquerable, but cannot force the enemy to be conquerable; that is out of one's control. This will be precisely why adaptability is advocated. Whereas one can try to have everything under control on one's side, and even though one should learn about the enemy as much as possible,

[329] This line, and the general idea of making oneself unconquerable, has parallels in *Wenzi* "Shang li" 上禮 (*Wenzi zuanyi* 12: 8a); *Huainanzi* "Quan yan" and "Bing lüe" (*Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 5a, and 15: 20a); *Hanshu* "Zhao chong guo xin qin ji chuan" 趙充國辛慶忌傳 (Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 ed., *Hanshu* 漢書 69: 2987); and *Hou Hanshu* "Huang fu song zhu juan liezhuan" 皇甫嵩朱雋列傳 (*Hou Hanshu* 71: 2305).

[330] This line has a parallel in *Lüshi Chunqiu*, which we discuss below in this section (See *Lüshi Chunqiu*, p. 452.).

[331] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 29.

one can never cause the enemy to act in a particular way or to display convenient weaknesses. Therefore, the rule of behavior will not be that of coercion but that of adaptation to what is already there. It is from this perspective that we might understand the lines that follow this *Sunzi* passage in the Yinqueshan *Art of War*:

> 不可勝者，守也；可勝者，攻也。**守則有餘，攻則不足**。[332]
>
> Making oneself unconquerable implies defensive tactics. To make the enemy conquerable implies offensive tactics. Defending gives you an overabundance [of strength]. Attacking gives you insufficiency [of strength].

Interestingly, the transmitted *Sunzi* holds the opposite statement: 守則不足，攻則有餘.[333] Starting with Cao Cao's gloss, it has been mainly understood as "take a defensive posture when [you] have an insufficiency [of strength]," and "launch an attack when [you] have an overabundance [of strength]."[334] Probably influenced by this commonsensical reading, the opposite logic shown in the manuscript statement has not been taken too seriously. Ames, for instance, translates these manuscript's lines: "If one assumes a defensive posture is because [the enemy's strength] is overwhelming. If one launches the attack, it is because [the enemy's strength] is insufficient."[335] The interpretive strategy to keep the same meaning as in the transmitted text, even though in the manuscript we are facing the opposite phrasing, is to replace the missing subject of the subordinates *you yu* 有餘 and *bu zu* 不足. In the transmitted text, we assume that the subject is "I" or "our army," whereas in the manuscript sentence we assume that the subject is "the enemy." We transfer the sufficiency or insufficiency of strength from "our

[332] Yinqueshan hanmu zhujian xiaozubian, *Sunzi bingfa,* 1976: 40.

[333] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 30.

[334] Ever since Cao Cao's gloss: "That I take the defense is because of insufficient strength. That I make an attack is because overabundant strength" 吾所以守者, 力不足也; 所以攻者, 力有余也 (*Sunzi shi jia zhu,* p. 223).

[335] Ames, 1993: 115.

army" to the "enemy's army," so that the meaning of both statements remains the same. Ames' English translation follows the mainstream way to understand this line in Chinese scholarship since the discovery of the Yinqueshan military manuscripts.[336]

If we attempt, nevertheless, to translate the manuscript statement without comparing its opposite in the transmitted text, we come out with a more relevant military teaching from the late Warring States and early Han times. As we saw before, defensiveness comes associated with gathering information for adapting one's strategies to the situational context and the enemy's dispositions, as well as with responding "following after," hence in a more adjusted and appropriate way. This is the basis, the *Sunzi* claims, to make oneself invincible that lies within the commander's control. There is no surprise, then, that taking defensive postures endows the army with more power than launching a blind, forceful and direct attack on an understudied enemy. Moreover, offensive tactics cannot but be a demonstration of insufficient power, given that how vulnerable the enemy is lies beyond the commander's control. That is why I translate the manuscript lines: "A defensive posture gives you an overabundance [of strength]. Attacking gives you insufficiency [of strength]."

Other found and transmitted Han period texts agree with the logic in the bamboo version of the *Sunzi*, which comes close to contemporaneous notions of achieving more power by "following after," and by means of not engaging in forceful and constraining actions. In one of the Han silk manuscripts known as *Huangdi Sijing* 黃帝四經, it reads "Those who defend with a surplus [of strength] cannot be eradicated. Those who attack with an insufficiency [of strength]

[336] A representative view of the approach that Chinese scholarship has taken on this issue is Wu Jiulong 吳九龍, *Sunzi jiaoshi* 孫子校釋, 1991.

will themselves be attacked in turn" 以有餘守，不可拔也；以不足攻，反自伐也.[337] Note that the authors of the Huangdi manuscripts are also advocates of the idea of "always follow after, never act first" (*chang hou er bu xian* 常後而不先).[338] Also from the Han period is the political treatise *Comments of a Recluse* (*Qianfulun* 潛夫論), which reads "All these are [examples of] using extreme strength to attack extreme weakness, and of using the wisest to plot against the biggest of idiots. And still the former cannot subdue the latter. Which is the reason? It is said: attacking is always insufficient, whereas defending gives you lasting overabundance." 此皆以至強攻至弱，以上智圖下愚，而犹不能克者，何也？曰：攻常不足，而守恒有余也.[339] The *Hanshu* contains the same statement even closer in form to the phrase of the bamboo *Sunzi*: "I have heard that in the art of war attacking gives you insufficiency [of strength], while defending gives you overabundance [of strength]" 臣聞兵法攻不足者守有餘.[340] Being invincible lies primarily in one's capacity to control the circumstances to one's favor. It is by modifying his behavior according to what is not under his control, hence behaving in a "defensive" way towards the enemy and the battlefield situation, that the commander can bring things back under his control. This kind of defensive practice does not exclude launching attacks. The latter are necessary to achieve a completely victory (*quan sheng* 全勝).[341] Yet winning relies on oneself, not on how vulnerable you can make the enemy, but on how impenetrable and indestructible you make yourself beforehand.

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[337] *Huangdi*, p. 112. I discuss the *Huangdi sijing* in Chapter 4, "Approaches to Uncertainty and Fate."

[338] *Huangdi*, p. 390.

[339] Wang Fu 王符, *Qian fu lun jian jiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正 5.22: 259.

[340] *Hanshu* 69.39: 2981.

[341] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 31.

Another text that makes an explicit connection between becoming invincible and the way of adaptation is *Lüshi Chunqiu* "Decisive Victory" ("Jue sheng" 決勝), which we discussed in the first chapter.[342] The *Huainanzi* chapter "An Overview of the Military" ("Bing lüe" 兵略) finely summarizes all these ideas and once again emphasizes the connection between adaptability and being able to take control of the victory:

靜以合躁，治以待亂，無形而制有形，無為而應變，雖未能得勝於敵，敵不可得勝之道也。

Use calmness to shut agitation, use order to deal with chaos, be without form to control what has form, act in a non-constrictive way to respond to changes. Though this will not yet make you able to attain victory over the enemy, it is the way to prevent the enemy from attaining victory over you.[343]

敵先我動，則是見其形也；彼躁我靜，則是疲其力也。形見則**勝可制**也，力疲則威可立也。視其所為，因與之化；觀其邪正，以制其命。[344]

The enemy acts first and I move after: it is from this that I can see his form. He is impetuous and I remain calm: it is from this that I can exhaust his force. If his form is visible, then *victory can be controlled*. If his force is exhausted, my power can be established. View his forceful actions,[345] and transform in adapting to them. Observe his deviant and straight practices in order to control his fate.

The summarizing idea that we find in "Overview of the Military" is that defensive tactics do not win by themselves but create the necessary conditions to prevent the enemy from winning. And defensive tactics allow a commander to control the enemy's fate. But what are the so-called defensive tactics? They consist of "waiting," "viewing," "observing," namely, allowing the enemy to act first and expose his behavior so that you can respond adaptively and properly transform according to them.

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[342] See Chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation," section on "*Yin* as a Defined Concept."

[343] Another possible reading of the last sentence is "the enemy will not be able to find a path to attain victory."

[344] *Huainan honglie jijie* 15: 12a.

[345] *Wei* 為 understood as "forceful actions" in this passage because of the contrast with *wuwei* 無為, non-constrictive actions.

To conclude, the adaptive model of warfare proposes full accountability for what one achieves in the battlefield, the outcomes being a direct consequence of one's actions. Unlike the forceful Xiang Yu, who blamed Heaven for his ultimate defeat, and unlike those who performed ritual ceremonies before committing to battle, thereby hoping to achieve the consent and support of the spirits, in the adaptive view of military agency the commander's own ability to deploy a successful adaptive strategy is what counts most. The spiritual and the cosmic worlds do not constitute limits to human agency, but neither do they provide fixed and reliable guidelines for proper and efficacious behavior. An adaptive agent has an achievement-based approach to action. The outcomes of the actions depend to a great extent on how the agent studies the present and his capacity to adjust his response to it.

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The *Sunzi* distinction between "attaining victory" and "*controlling* the circumstances enabling to attain victory" points at a crucial preoccupation in Early China that extends from the realm of the military to all spheres of human agency. How to take control over our own lives and over the course of events? How can we act in such a way that we attain our goals and that we prevent external factors from determining the outcomes of our actions? Agency concerns control, and successful models of instrumental agency will be those that allow the agent to achieve her goals by taking control of actions, means, tools and processes. But what happens when, in the agent's imagination, most of daily phenomena lie beyond human control? What happens when reality is experienced in such a way that imposes its lashes over the person leaving the agent powerless, trivial and insignificant, unable to control his own life? In the next chapter, we explore the prevalent way in which early thinkers conceptualized the notion of *ming*, fate, and

how this notion gave way to a problematic view of the relationship between the person and the world in Early China.

CHAPTER 3

THE REIFICATION OF FATE

OVERVIEW

In the previous chapter I outlined three models of military action in Early China: the forceful, the adaptive and the prescriptive models. These models of military action are representative of more general ways of agency in Early China, guiding human action beyond warfare situations. As we have seen, at the core of these models of agency there was an instrumental concern with control: taking control over one's context and situation in order to attain one's goals. In our discussion of military texts, the agents were faced with situations believed to be susceptible of human control, successful if only the right model of action was practiced. Nevertheless, some of these texts also pointed to the fact that certain aspects of the agent's context and situation inevitably escape the agent's control. Such was the case with the *Sunzi*'s 孫子 observation that the way in which we behave is in our hands, whereas how the enemy behaves lies, to the greater extent, beyond our control. Many of the *Sunzi*'s strategies were aimed at modifying, i.e. controlling, the enemy's conduct to make it more advantageous to one's goals. Yet we must assume that the enemy (at least a smart and well-trained enemy) remains ultimately unpredictable. Therefore, it follows that one cannot force the enemy to become conquerable, but must instead become unconquerable oneself.[346] The acknowledgment that the agent can only fully control his own mind and body led to the need to redirect one's

[346] *Sun Wuzi zhijie* 1: 29. See also Chapter 2 "Three Models of Military Action."

efforts toward adapting oneself, or making oneself suitable, to deal with upcoming situations in the most efficient way.

The preoccupation with the fact that certain things lie beyond the person's control became paramount in Early Chinese society and intellectual thinking. Early Chinese texts make us witnesses of (sometimes implicit) debates about the power, or lack thereof, that humans had over the course of events, over their own lives, and over fate. In the midst of these discourses on the role of the agent in the course of events, the notion of *ming* 命 acquired particular relevance and took a central position. In the Early Chinese intellectual context, we may understand *ming* as everything that happens without human's intervention and remains out of our control. Most early thinkers shared a pattern of thinking about *ming* that established a problematic relationship between the person and the world: a relationship in which the agent was thought to be overpowered by external, objective, imposing, limiting and detrimental forces. In most Early Chinese texts, *ming* was systematically seen as a problem requiring a solution.

In this chapter, I present the most common pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world in Early China. I call it the Reifying Pattern, as it consists on thinking about *ming* 命 in terms of a fate-object, and it implies a reification of fate. When *ming* is understood as a fate-object, it is construed as an external, objective, determining reality that confronts and limits the subject. There is a duality, inner-subject vs. external-object, where the combination of phenomena that configure fate is reified as an external and opposing object. According to the early thinkers involved in the creation and persistence of the reifying pattern of thinking, the determination and limitations that the object of fate imposes on the subject are considered problematic and demand philosophical or psychological resolution. I deal with the analysis of the pattern of thinking *ming* as a fate-object in this chapter, offering an account of the

process of reification of fate and its consequences, theoretical and practical, through cases study of the *Mengzi* 孟子 and the *Tang Yu zhi Dao* 唐虞之道. The next chapter, "Coping with Uncertainty," assumes the problem that *ming* created for early thinkers and introduces different proposals that were conceived as solutions to the problem of fate when it was understood in terms of an external, opposing, objective and limiting object that confronts and overpowers the subject. In that context, we will find adaptive agency as a solution to regain control over situations that seem to be beyond our control.

The analysis of the reification of fate and the prevalent pattern of thinking about *ming* in Early China as a problem requiring a solution, as well as of the proposals conceived as solutions to the problem of *ming* that we will see in next chapter, are necessary contextual steps to understand the radical nature of an alternative pattern of thinking that I will present in my last chapter: the Adaptive Pattern. The Adaptive Pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person, *ming*, the world and everything that seems to lie beyond our control breaks with the problematic nature of *ming*, and dissolves all of the problems that the reifying pattern created. Let us go step by step.

MING AS FATE-OBJECT

Broadly speaking, everything that is beyond our control is called *ming* 命 in Early China. As the *Mengzi* 孟子 defines it, *ming* is "what happens with no one causing it" 莫之致而至者.[347] The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 gives us another encompassing meaning of *ming* as "what cannot be

[347] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 6A: 169b.

avoided" 不可奈何.[348] The *Mengzi*'s definition takes the perspective of the causing agency, whereas the *Zhuangzi*'s evaluates *ming* from the point of view of its repercussion on humans. All in all, both of them point at the phenomena that there are events that happen without our intervention and which remain out of our control. These events constitute the phenomenon of *ming*, an external, objective force that indifferently and persistently affects the subject.

I do not wish to import categories such as fatalism, determinism and free will from the Western philosophical tradition to frame my discussion of *ming*, for three reasons. First, those categories do not find one-to-one Early Chinese counterparts, so they can confuse more than they can clarify. Second, concepts such as fatalism, determinism and free will are charged with different layers of historically accumulated connotations, and at the same time, perhaps for that very reason, they have become too ambiguous and too empty to be useful at all (as Western philosophers recognize with contempt, like Dennett; with embarrassment, like Searle; or with hope, like Honderich).[349] Third, even if we could temporarily disambiguate the categories for the limited use of this study, engaging with the voluminous Western scholarship in the topics of determinism and free will would be an unnecessarily exhausting task. And here I go back to my first reason: Chinese thinkers did not use those categories after all.

The main category that Chinese thinkers used to talk about a realm of external and amoral forces that exercise determining influence over human life was *ming*. The reader must be aware that the word *ming* acquires a variety of different meanings in Early Chinese texts: naming, command, mandate, objective circumstances, determining factors and life span are the most

[348] *Zhuangzi jijie* 4: 38.

[349] See Dennett, *Elbow Room*, 1984; Searle, "Free Will as a Problem in Neurobiology," 2001; Honderich, *On Determinism and Freedom*, 2005.

common.[350] All of these meanings, as diverse as they appear to be, are related in more than one way: philologically, semantically, philosophically and historically. That is to say, we are dealing with a word, *ming*, with different yet related meanings (polysemy), and not with different words that coincidentally happen to share graphic or phonetic features but not semantic roots (homonymy). For an exhaustive review of the phenomenon of *ming* in China, as well as the ramifications and connections between the different meanings of the word *ming*, I would like to direct the reader to the most comprehensive resource in English: Christopher Lupke's *The Magnitude of Ming* (2005), a collection of complementary essays by different experts discussing the etymology, semantics, intellectual history, sociopolitical, legal, cultural, literary, ritual and ethical implications of the concept of *ming* in China from antiquity to the twentieth century.

My discussion of *ming* here does not pretend to be exhaustive, as my only goal is to show how different meanings of *ming* in early texts appear related in *one* particular way. It is my contention that most of the Early Chinese meanings of *ming* hold a sense of prevailing external objective reality (in both aspects of how we are and what happens to us), and all of them can be gathered behind, or connected to, an overarching meaning of *ming* as "fate."

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[350] Fu Sinian 傅斯年 articulated five theories of *ming*, fate, in Early China: *ming ding* 命定 (determinism), *ming zheng* 命正 (moral determinism), *si ming* 俟命 (awaiting fate), *ming yun* 命運 (fatalism), and *fei ming* 非命 (anti-fatalism). See Fu, "Xingming gushun bianzheng" 性命古順辯證, in *Fu Sinian quanji* 傅斯年全集, 1952 (vol. 2): 114. Nylan distinguishes 12 meanings of *ming* in the Han, although many of them can already be seen in the Warring States period: fate or decree, duty, destiny, predestination, causal connections, heaven's will, the inevitable, empirical facts, the created world, life span, objective circumstance, circumstances beyond human control. See Nylan, *The Canon of Supreme Mystery*, 1993: 35. Tang Junyi 唐君毅 associated different attitudes towards *ming* with Chinese schools of thought. Tang, "Xian Qin sixiang zhong de tianming guan" 先秦思想中的天命觀, 1957 (2): 1-2. For a review of the secondary literature that classifies the different meanings and aspects of *ming* in Early China, see Youngsun Back's dissertation, "Handling Fate: the Ru Discourse on Ming," 2013: 8-18.

"Fate" comes from the English *fatum*, which literally means "that which has been spoken" and implies a sentence or command of the gods.[351] In this way, *fatum* is close to the meaning of *tian ming* 天命, the command or mandate of god-Heaven, with the only caveat that the Early Chinese Heaven does not speak. Heaven shows its command through the people's actions and all sorts of natural and cosmic events.[352] Another related sense of *fatum* (and the Greek *moira*) is that of a lot, what is fated to happen, and an allotted life span.[353] As we will see below, we find a similar meaning of *ming* in early texts that points at both descriptive and normative conceptions of life expectancy and life span in Early Chinese texts. Finally, *fatum* also referred in a more abstract way to an external force that shapes events and influences or determines outcomes.[354] It is especially in this more general and abstract sense that I translate *ming* as "fate." That is the overarching meaning of *ming* that I want to emphasize as it serves as connection among all the other particular and concrete meanings. In the following examples, I discuss different meanings of *ming* in Early China as they illustrate the reifying pattern of thinking *ming* as a fate-object: an external, objective, determining reality that confronts and limits the subject, thereby introducing a problem that requires a solution.

[351] Jack Newton Lawson, *The Concept of Fate in Ancient Mesopotamia of the First Millennium*, 1994: 5.

[352] In *Analects* 17:19, Confucius compares himself with quiet Heaven, which orders and nurtures the world without pronouncing a word. "The Master said: Which use has Heaven for words? The four seasons follow its course, and the hundred kinds of things are born. Which use has Heaven for words?" 子曰：天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？*Shisan jing zhushu, Lunyü* 17: 157b.

[353] Lawson, 1994: 5.

[354] Lawson, 1994: 5.

Ming *as Command*

One of the widespread meanings of *ming* in early texts is command, appointment and mandate, both as verbs and nouns, and even as a text type.[355] The reader might be familiar with the notion of *tian ming* 天命, usually translated as the Mandate of Heaven. The ideology of the Mandate of Heaven, which may have already been in existence by the early Western Zhou period (1046-976 B.C.),[356] granted a personified god-Heaven the capacity to morally judge human behavior and consequently bestow its mandate to a virtuous and deserving ruler. This political ideology was used in retrospect to justify conquest and legitimate the victorious ruling house. First applied to the Zhou conquest of the Shang, and repeatedly afterwards, it argued that Heaven shifted its mandate when the virtue of a ruling house decayed, enabling the virtuous conquering power to seemingly effortlessly obtain the throne with the support of Heaven.

However mandated they may have been, Heaven's mandates to the king, much as the parallel case of the king's commands to his subordinates, were all tasks to accept voluntarily. That is to say, *ming* as command or mandate holds no notion of inevitability, yet we may understand a command as being fated in the sense that it belongs to the commanded person by family history, birth, or social and moral condition.[357] For instance, among the inscriptions that

[355] *Ming* 命 is a textual category in the *Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), which we can translate as "charges." Other textual categories include "admonitions" (*gao* 誥), "canons" (*dian* 典) and "oaths" (*shi* 誓).

[356] Some texts inscribed in early Western Zhou ritual bronze vessels suggest that the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven was already at work in this period. I discuss this issue in my paper "Is the Ideology of the Mandate of Heaven Already Present in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions?"

[357] It is in this sense that Solomon distinguishes between determinism and fatalism. Determinism proposes that there is causal necessity inherent to all events, whereas fatalism offers not a causal necessity but a narrative one. In the fatalist view, outcomes attributed to fate would be necessary only within the narrative of a group that shares a common sense of purpose. Solomon, "On Fate and Fatalism," 2003: 437-439.

were cast on ritual bronze vessels during the Western Zhou period, some texts show subordinates accepting the command, mandate or appointment (*ming/ ling* 令)[358] that has been assigned to them by their king, as well as kings accepting Heaven's mandate to rule.[359] In both cases, these political commands involve legitimate delegation of power within a closed elite circle largely defined by family boundaries. In quite a few inscriptions, the voice of the current king claims to participate in the same power inherited from Heaven as the Former Kings 先王 (Wen 文 and Wu 武), recipients of the original mandate at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty.[360] By doing so, the current king puts himself in a position to transmit the mandate to his own subordinates, establishing a lineage of power that extends from Heaven to the chosen appointee. Much as the king belongs to a royal lineage, the appointed officials belong to a family tradition responsible to serve royal members.[361] In this sense, they all share a family fate.

The inscriptions present us with two caveats to the notion of *ming* as an unavoidable and fated command: first, the appointee must be up to the task and accept it; second, it is not a given

[358] The terms *ming* 命 and *ling* 令 are interchangeable in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. See Laurent Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese*, 1999, and William Boltz, "Language and Writing," 1999, for a discussion about the intimate relation between these two terms. There seems to be no apparent reason linked to the choice of one term rather than the other –nor temporal or contextual. In the earliest inscriptions, such as those of the Da Yu *ding* 大盂鼎 and He *zun* 何尊, for instance, we already find both terms *daling* 大令 and *daming* 大命, respectively. However, most texts are consistent in their use: *ling* and *ming* only appear simultaneously used in the *He zun* and in the Shi Ke *xu* 師克盨. For the origins of the graph *ming* and its evolution, see Lin Meiling 林玫玲, *Xian Qin zhexue de minglun sixiang* 先秦哲學的命論思想, 2007: 54-78.

[359] For subordinates accepting appointments, see, for instance, the inscriptions on the Shi Qiang *pan* 史牆盤 and the Lai *pan* 逨盤. The royal inscriptions Wu si Hu *zhong* 五祀**䜌**鐘 and Hu *gui* **䜌**簋 are examples of kings accepting Heaven's command to rule as an extension of the original appointment given to the founding kings Wen 文 and Wu 武.

[360] See for instance, Maogong *ding* 毛公鼎, Da Yu *ding* and Shi Hong *gui*.

[361] This is apparent in both the Shi Qiang *pan* and the Lai *pan* inscriptions.

that, even after having accepted it, the appointee will be able to perform the task. In the bronze texts, these caveats take the form of formal acceptance of the given orders, promises of intentional effective performance, expressions of anxiety in the face of potential failure, as well as pleas for support to the gods and ancestors to be able to fulfill their tasks.[362] The family fate, rather than an unavoidable imposition, is to be understood as an inherited mission in this world. In some situations, an individual is not allotted a particular mission because of his family relations, but because of his extraordinary virtue. These are exceptional individuals who are chosen to do something great: that is their appointment, lot or command. The most famous case is probably that of Emperor Yao 堯 abdicating in favor of a worthy man of humble origins, Shun 舜, instead of his own son, a story narrated in the *Documents* but also in found manuscripts such as the Guodian 郭店 bamboo text that editors have called *The Way of Tang and Yu* (*Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道).[363] In received texts such as the *Documents* and *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) too, it is common to see that the Former Kings' receipt of Heaven's mandate was preceded by demonstration of extraordinary virtue.[364]

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[362]A greater variety of illustrations of the unstable and compromising nature of the command can be found in received texts. For instance, they abound in the *Documents* and the *Odes*. See also Tang Junyi, "The T'ien Ming [Heavenly Ordinance] in Pre-Ch'in China," 1962: 202.

[363] See the "Canon of Yao" and "Canon of Shun" in the *Documents*. We will have more to say about *The Way of Tang and Yu* later in this chapter.

[364] A beautiful illustration of this idea is found in the "Admonishment to Kang," where we read that King Wen "was able to illustrate his virtue and be careful in the use of punishments" (可明德慎罰), among other demonstrations of virtue. King Wen's virtue is a precondition for Heaven to offer him the great appointment. See *Shisan jing zhushu, Shangshu* "Kanggao" 201a. This idea is not so common in the bronze inscriptions as it is in received texts, with a few exceptions. One of the exceptions is the Maogong *ding*, wich reads: 王若曰:父歆!丕显文武,皇天引厌厥德,配我有周,膺受大命. The King spoke to the effect: "Father Yin! Wen and Wu, the Greatly Illustrious! August Heaven was greatly content with their charismatic power. They were worthy of our blessed Zhou, and so they received a/the great appointment." *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen*, 2001, no. 2841.

In all these cases, the appointees endowed with a *ming* can, but should not, do otherwise. The relationship of this kind of ethico-political commands with fate in Early China has therefore a soft and a strong sense. On one hand, it is a soft kind of fate because it is not completely unavoidable, whether the failure to fulfill the charge is due to choice or to malpractice. On the other hand, it is a strong kind of fate because the larger sociopolitical schema demands for the allotted person to follow through with the task that he has been appointed to. Although we do not find in this meaning of *ming* a fatalistic view of human and heavenly relationships, there are social and moral imperatives to act in a certain way: for the mandated king to govern, and for the appointed official to serve his ruler. In this way, the understanding of *ming* as command belongs to the more general pattern of thinking of *ming* as an external imposition of the object of fate.[365]

Ming *as Life*

Ming often takes the meaning of life span in early texts. Understood as life expectancy in a descriptive way, it is interchangeable with the term *tian nian* 天年, the natural number of years that a living being is expected to live according to its species (a tree might be expected to live longer than a person, and a person, longer than a cicada). While certainly *ming* can be a descriptive term signaling the amount of years someone lives, it also acquires in early texts a prescriptive connotation pointing at the amount of years one is allotted to live. For instance, one *Zhuangzi* passage in "Great Ancestral Master" 大宗師 explains that "dying and being born, that is [the works of] *ming*" 死生命也, in the same way that "the constancy in the succession of days and nights is [the works of] Heaven."[366] A different *Zhuangzi* passage in "Metaphorical

[365] See David Schaberg's chapter in Lupke's *Magnitude of Ming*, "Command and the Content of Tradition," 2005: 23-48, for a thorough discussion of *ming* as command.

[366] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58.

Language" 寓言 discusses the idea that life and death might both be ordained (*ming* 命). One of the speakers of the dialogue challenges the conventional view that life happens spontaneously (*wu zi* 無自) whereas death has an external cause (*you zi* 有自) by setting doubts on what we can actually know about these processes.[367] Similarly, in the Han philosopher Wang Chong's 王充 words, *ming* is responsible for "when we are born and die, and whether we are to live long or die early" 死生壽夭.[368] Our *ming* in these usages is not describing our life span but pointing at a normative dimension of our allotted years. This ambiguity permeates the early meaning of *ming* as life in Early China. In the normative sense, our life span would be endowed to us at birth, as a kind of physical individual fate.

However, much as in the meaning of command discussed above, neither *ming* as life span nor as allotted years necessarily imply inevitability. In several texts we learn that the person should protect her life and/or allotted living years from being cut off too early. This implies that even in the case of being fated with a pre-determined life span, the amount of years one actually lives may change. For instance, metaphoric trees in the *Zhuangzi* save themselves from being cut down before their time by being useless to humans. Only those with fine wood will attract the axe.[369] Another cause of premature death related to the dangers of attracting unnecessary attention, a recurrent theme in the *Zhuangzi* and other early texts, is punitive execution. A third common cause to die "early," in this case not involving external intervention, is failing to nurture habits that protect one's health from decaying too quickly. Sleeping the adequate number of hours, eating and drinking in moderation, and covering the body with clothes suitable for the

[367] *Zhuangzi jijie* 27: 248.

[368] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 3: 20.

[369] *Zhuangzi jijie* 4: 45.

season are basic measures everybody can take to live out their years, whether these are simply a matter of life expectancy or a more serious matter of a pre-ordained life span.[370]

We also learn from early texts that, beyond protecting her life span, the person can even choose to try and stretch it on. While some of these strategies to live longer, even to become immortal, are quite feasible and resemble the hygienic habits advised to protect one's life span from being cut off too early, other means are more sophisticated, requiring harmony with the *dao* 道 and the four seasons, cultivation of inner power (*de* 德), vital energy (*qi* 氣) and a complete spirit (*quan shen* 全神), as well as comprehension of *yin yang* 陰陽 shifts.[371] Both scenarios, protecting one's original life span and attempting to extend it, imply that our years of life are susceptible to change.

Yet this understanding of a person's life span is part of the more general view of *ming* as fate-object in that it works as an externally imposed pattern of the world that determines how we are and what we are to do. As in the previous case of *ming* as command, *ming* as life span holds both a soft and a strong sense of fate. In the soft side we find that what is given, in this case one's years of life as a human, is not unchangeable and is not beyond human intervention. Whether it is in the descriptive sense of life expectancy or in the normative sense of allotted years, the individual *ming* can be cut off too early if it is not properly protected and stretched on by resorting to hygienic and alchemic procedures. Yet once again we also find a strong sense of fate

[370] See, for instance, "Xingshi" 形勢 chapter in the *Guanzi*. *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 64: 940.

[371] On these practices, see for instance the *Huangdi neijing* **黃**帝內經. Yang Weijie 楊維傑, *Huangdi neijing suwen yijie* **黃**帝內經素問譯解, 1: 9. Livia Kohn has thoroughly studied Daoist religious and hygienic practices. See, for instance, her *Introducing Daoism*, 2008. On the *Huangdi neijing* and Chinese medicine, see Nathan Sivin, "Huangdi neijing," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 1993: 196-215; and Paul Unschuld, *Huangdi neijing Suwen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery in an Ancient Chinese Medical Text*, 2003.

in the conception of *ming* as life. Many early sources contain a critique of those who neglect their years and allow themselves to die before their time. For instance, *Zhuangzi*'s "Robber Zhi" 盜跖 chapter harshly criticizes legendary figures such as Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊 who lent themselves to starvation on the margins of the world out of political remonstrance. That they thought they were doing the right thing only proves their commitment to a failed system of beliefs, one that does not have nourishment of long life (養壽命) at its center.[372] The *Wenzi* 文子, in turn, includes in a description of the state of affairs during the Yellow Emperor's 黃帝 golden age the ideal situation that "common people would protect their life spans and not die prematurely" 民保命而不夭.[373] All this suggests that there was a strong current of thought in Early China that considered protecting one's life, regardless whether the amount of years is pre-ordained or not, a necessary individual commitment and a moral responsibility.

Like in the case of *ming* as command, our expected or pre-ordained life span is not something that we can decide. It comes to us as a given, posing a problem and requesting a reaction. *Ming* as life span is not an unavoidable fate, but it is regarded either as a detrimental limit (when it is short and we are encouraged to stretch it) or as a responsibility (short or long, we must protect it). In both scenarios, our life span is construed in Early Chinese literature as an objective and external imposition, and as a problem that needs addressing and resolution from the subject, which makes it part of the more general understanding of *ming* as a fate-object.

[372] *Zhuangzi jijie* 29: 263.

[373] *Wenzi zuanyi* 2: 4b.

Ming *as Determining Factors*

In Wang Chong's worldview, the duration of our life is just one of the determining aspects of *ming*. *Ming* also determines other outcomes, such as whether we are to be rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, a success or a failure. It is a complex combination of individual and supra-individual factors which decides the minutiae of one's existence: inborn physical and personal features, social context in which one is located, what one encounters through own efforts, incidents that simply happen, and the general state of affairs of the country, the latter being a transpersonal fate shared by all members of a generation. These competing aspects of *ming* are hierarchical. The clearest example of the hierarchy found in the *Lunheng* 論衡 is the transpersonal *ming* of the state winning over the individual *ming* (國命勝人命):[374] nothing can prevent a strong individual endowed with extraordinary physical features from prematurely dying in war.

With his intricate theory of *ming* as the combination of determining factors of human life, much as with many of the other writings in the *Lunheng*,[375] Wang Chong was opposing the common belief of his time (1st century of the Common Era) in a personified god Heaven that would decree our destinies. The doings of Heaven, he argued, are not purposeful and do not act in accord to laws of moral retribution in terms of punishments and rewards for our behavior. Heaven acts in a *wuwei* 無為 manner: spontaneously and purposelessly. Hence, it is incorrect to blame Heaven for one's outcomes, such as misfortune, and a waste of time to make offerings and issue pleas for Heaven to act on our behalf.

[374] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 6: 45.

[375] The *Lunheng* is commonly understood as the work of Wang Chong. However, it is a compilation of many different writings, many of them surely not written by Wang, which would explain many of the contradictions.

According to Wang Chong, our life is controlled by an interrelated web of competing, determining factors rooted in physical and metaphysical bases. While we can exercise our capacity for purposeful agency in an effort to guide our destinies, the outcomes of our actions and the turn of events are almost never decided by such efforts. It is clear from ordinary experience, the *Lunheng* argues, that rightful actions do not always help the agent have a successful life. There are simply too many factors playing with our luck for our intentional efforts to be able to exercise enough influence. In most occasions, the different potencies at play in a situation are too strong for our contingent actions to be able to override them.

Wang Chong's theory of *ming* offers a clear example of the pattern of thought of *ming* as fate-object in Early China. The different factors that compose *ming* present an effective, objective and external determination over the course of the person's life. Much as the conception of *ming* as command, mandate or appointment, and *ming* as life span, the understanding of *ming* as determining factors assumes a reifying view of the different phenomena involved in life where everything that affects the subject is conceived in terms of external opposition, determination and limitation.

We have seen that the different meanings of *ming* were all related to the overarching notion of *ming* that can be understood as fate: what happens without our intervention, affects us, and cannot/should not be avoided. We explore the process of reification of fate in Early China in detail in the next section.

THE REIFICATION OF FATE

Origins of Ming

Scholars of Mesopotamia point to the experience of livelihood in an agrarian society as a likely scenario for the development of the notion of fate. Relying on natural resources such as water, soil, weather and seasons for sustenance may have made the person aware that there were forces beyond the divine which, like gods but separate from them, had a determining and inescapable influence over their lives.[376] In Early China, these natural workings and patterns that configure the material, spatial and natural context were subsumed under the categories of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi* 天地), while fate was, in general terms, rather associated with sociopolitical and individual events. Heaven and Earth were responsible for the cyclical changes of the four seasons, defined geographical accidents, established cosmic patterns and movements, provided materials means of sustenance, warned through omens, and also threatened (sometimes punished) with floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Fate was in turn responsible for social success and failure, individual health, life and death, and conditions of living in general. The Confucius of "Mountain Tree" 山木 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, to which we will come back later, puts it nicely when he associates Heaven and Earth with scarcity of food and water, as well as extreme heat and cold, leaving *ming* to be responsible for social rank and emolument.[377]

For Early Chinese thinkers, the natural order provided by Heaven and Earth could, to a certain extent, be predicted and tackled by adjusting to it. As we will see in the next chapter, a variety of devices such as calendars and mantic methods were introduced to help humans understand the workings of Heaven and Earth and conform to their natural pattern, thereby

[376] Dietrich, *Death, Fate and the Gods*, 1967: 2.

[377] *Zhuangzi jijie* 20: 173.

putting the natural order to human advantage and preventing it from becoming an impediment to human society's growth, harmony and stability. As distinguished from the workings of Heaven and Earth, *ming* was not something that could be predicted, and definitely not something that could be tackled. It belonged, therefore, to a different category of uncontrollable reality, one that was especially problematic.

The understanding of *ming* as fate-object becomes a pattern of thought in Early China that explains being in the world as something inherently problematic. The fact that there are determining, opposing, reducing, limiting phenomena affecting the control that humans can exercise over their lives is seen as a problem that needs to be addressed and solved. This problem is generally understood in the literature as a tension between nature and humanity, or the problem of the relationship between Heaven and man. For 20th century scholars, the different approaches to the dichotomy between Heaven and the human that we find in early texts became a common way to classify positions and isms in Early Chinese philosophy, as well as a way to identify developments within the intellectual history of the period.[378] For instance, A. C. Graham famously spoke of a metaphysical crisis that would have taken place in the 4th century BCE: the intellectual realization of the separation between Heaven and man, and the doubt whether Heaven is after all on the moral side. He then classified Mencius, Zhuangzi, Mozi and other pre-Qin thinkers according to their approach to the side-effect problem of morality and human nature that had evolved from the split between Heaven and humanity.[379] In a similar manner, Puett classified philosophers according to the position they take with regard to the relationship

[378] Some of the most important representatives are Tang Junyi, 1962; Feng Youlan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1934; A. C. Graham, 1989. Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 2002.

[379] See Graham, 1989: 107-108.

between nature and culture, humanity and divinity (a relationship that could be one of continuity and harmony, or discontinuity and tension), tracing the historical development of the different claims and the debates in which these claims were inserted.[380] Whether one agrees or not with the methodological assumptions behind these scholarly efforts to map Early Chinese philosophy and intellectual history, they identified and analyzed important issues in Early China,[381] among them the problem of what is beyond human control, and the problem of fate.

It is ironic that *ming* would become such a problematic concept because, according to scholars such as Chen Ning 陳寧, the notion of a blind, amoral fate was invented in Early China as a solution to a previous problem: the problem of theodicy created by the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven.[382] Simply put, the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven established Heaven as a moral judge of human action. However, in their daily experience, people could see that the virtuous were not always rewarded. Often times, they even seemed to be penalized. The causal link between moral behavior and success seemed to be broken, which compromised assumptions about the morality and ultimate legitimacy of Heaven. The endangered position of Heaven in this religious conflict is similar to that of the omnipotent Christian god when followers faced the problem of evil. Why would a moral god allow bad things to happen, especially to good people? This problem led in Western traditions to the invention of theodicy: theoretical justifications of a

[380] Puett, 2002.

[381] Common to these 20th century approaches (much less so in 21st century scholarship) are the assumptions that (1) masters texts were authored by the masters that give them name, or disciples within their school of thought; (2) we can date texts and thinkers with enough precision to establish an intellectual line of development within the pre-imperial period.

[382] Chen Ning, "The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China," 1997: 154, 159. Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven,* 1990: 27.

compromised god.[383] In Early China, the invention of the notion of a blind, amoral fate, an impersonal force of its own unrelated to Heaven, was possibly a response to the same problem: blind fate was something to blame for the existence of evil and injustice, so that Heaven could keep its moral integrity intact. Of course, Heaven, like the Christian god, did not get away so easily. The human relationship with Heaven became tense and ambiguous as it came to be assumed by certain people that Heaven was not always moral. We will come back to this tension later in this chapter.

Even if the notion of blind fate started as a solution to a previous problem, it soon became a problem itself. *Ming* conceived as amoral and blind fate established a problematic pattern of thought in Early China. It explained the human condition of existing or being in the world in relation to manifold phenomena as something intrinsically problematic. Humans were believed to exist in opposition to an overpowering force that was blind in direction and external in nature, which lashed them arbitrarily and often in detriment of their aims and expectations. For this pattern of thought to become effective, the reification of fate was necessary.

The Process of Reification

The word "reification" may bring Marxism to the reader's mind. The concept of reification gained currency in Marxist-Hegelian social philosophy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially through Lukács' reinterpretation of Marx's denunciation of the fetishism of

[383] Western theodicy has a long history. The most famous episode in the Western intellectual history of evil is that of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami that flooded and destroyed Lisbon and beyond in 1755. The natural disaster triggered a revision of Leibniz's positive theodicy. The latter argued that, in choosing the best of the possible worlds, God had to allow a minimal necessary amount of evil for the greatest good of the community. Evil was therefore a residual illusion only felt from an individualistic and partial point of view. After the catastrophe, which greatly affected the community, Voltaire and Rousseau each issued their critiques of the generally accepted positive theodicy and let the problem of evil off the leash, which would from there onwards dominate the intellectual discourse in a reinforced fashion.

commodities in the capitalist system.[384] The term originally targeted the "thingification" of social relations. I ask the reader to try and forget about Marx for a minute, and grasp the literal meaning of reification as *turning a conceptual item into a thing*, leaving aside its repercussions and all of its implications with regard to Western modernity and capitalism. In the understanding of *ming* as fate, some Early Chinese thinkers turned fate into an object, which was a process that involved different steps and had several important consequences for the intellectual history of the period. The phenomenon known as reification, here understood broadly and adapted to the Early Chinese context, provides us with a technical vocabulary that proves appropriate and helpful to theorize the pattern of thought of *ming* as fate-object in Early China.

In brief, the process of reification of fate, as found in received and found Early Chinese texts, consists of understanding *ming*-fate as an external object in opposition to the subject that imposes limits on the subject and is often negative and detrimental to his aims and goals. The following traits of the process of reification of fate in Early China can be analyzed separately:

Objectification. In the reifying pattern of thought, fate is made an object that is opposed to the subject. This is clear not only from the philosophical content of early texts, but also from the use of grammar. The words used to convey the notion of an amoral and blind fate, which are *ming* 命 and, in some occasions, *shi* 時 and *shi* 世 ("the times" and "the age" become objectified as the force of fate) never act as subject in Early Chinese prose. On the contrary, they always act as objects. For instance, as we will see later, it is common to read in these texts that *ming* is

[384] Many scholars find the *locus classicus* of the concept of reification to be Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, published in 1923. The word "reification" is found and used in different ways in the work of previous philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger to point out the dehumanizing and alienating tendencies of modernity. After Lukács, 20th century philosophers have often criticized and reinterpreted the concept in a variety of ways. None of these interpretations is particularly relevant for my usage of the concept here.

something to be awaited, or something to be accepted. *Ming* never takes on the role of a subjective agent.[385]

This is even more striking when compared with the use of Heaven in early texts. Heaven shares with fate in being a source of explanation for things that happen to humanity. However, and as opposed to fate, Heaven is often anthropomorphized and made a subject.[386] In early texts, Heaven is portrayed as a full subjective agent when it makes a command or sends down luck and calamity, when it chooses a new political leader or protects the people from an evil one. Not only does Heaven act; when humans relate to Heaven, there are many possible transactions: pleas, prayers, offerings, commands, rewards, punishments, praise, and so on. Which is to say, in the relationship between Heaven and man there is a possibility of intersubjectivity, that is, of exchange, communication and interpretation of meaning. Humans have the capacity to interact with Heaven.

On the contrary, *ming* was not anthropomorphized in Early China. Fate was rendered a blind, deaf and silent object that had determining influence over human life yet did not accept communication and interaction. As opposed to the relationship of humans with gods, which is two-way, transactions are impossible with regard to fate. If fate were made a subject, we would encounter again double directionality and intersubjectivity, as in the case of the communication

[385] In Greek mythology and philosophy, on the contrary, fate soon became personified as the "Fates" or *Moirae,* goddesses with fully intentional and subjective capacity of agency. Lisa Raphals compares the understanding of fate in Greek and Early Chinese philosophy in her article "Languages of Fate." See Raphals, 2005: 70-106.

[386] See Chen Ning, 1997: 158. Wang Chong is one of the first philosophers to criticize the anthropomorphization of Heaven. In his view, Heaven is not an intentional, subjective agent, but a part of the natural order which acts in a spontaneous, non-purposive manner. We will go back to this point in the Implications section.

between humans and Heaven. But this is not the case. Humans are passive with regard to fate: they can only accept it, await it and try to understand it.

Note that "understanding fate" 知命, an important *topos* in the reifying pattern of thinking to which we will come back later, does not involve knowledge of how fate works. Understanding in this context does not imply knowing in a technical way: it is not an attempt to grasp fate's working process, but rather the conviction that fate is beyond human knowledge, and that there is no way to control and overcome it. Understanding fate means to be able to live at peace with fate and to show tolerance toward human ignorance about how it works. It is no surprise that *ming* often is defined in early texts as "that which happens without knowing the means by which it happens" (不知所以然而然者).[387] One of the chapters in the *Zhuangzi* begin by affirming that,

達生之情者，不務生之所無以為；達命之情者，不務知之所無奈何。[388]

Those who have mastered the conditions of life do not strive after what life has no means to do. Those who have mastered the conditions of fate do not strive after what knowledge has no means to change.

Not only fate is beyond the reach of our knowledge. Any kind of human knowledge we may have has no effect over the workings of fate and its outcomes. As one anecdote in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 concerning the figure of Yanzi 晏子, prime minister of the state of Qi 齊 during the Spring and Autumn period and purported author of the *Yanzi Chunqiu* 晏子春秋, tells us, "the wisdom and skills used to do and undo human affairs cannot reach [fate]" 人事智巧以

[387] See this definition of *ming* in *Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi jijie* 19: 163), *Lüshi Chunqiu* (*Lüshi Chunqiu*, 20.8.3: 1347), and *Liezi* (Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, 2.2: 64 and 6.6: 193).

[388] *Zhuangzi jijie* 19: 156.

舉錯者不得與焉.[389] The anecdote qualifies Yanzi as someone who understands fate because he demonstrates accepting that nothing he may know and nothing he may do can get in fate's way. Humans cannot appeal to wisdom or trickery when it comes to fate.

The rupture of any possible relationship between humanity and fate is a consequence of reification. Fate is construed as an opaque object that defies meaning. This opacity turns fate into something dangerous and scary. As hermeneutists know, interpreting (not only texts, but any kind of cultural object) is a way of taming, a way of making something manageable, conformable.[390] In their incapacity to interact with fate, humans do not know how to deal with it. The object of fate cannot be interpreted; it renders meaning impossible. Since humanity is affected by fate, the reification of fate not only makes fate meaningless; it also renders the meaning of human life difficult to interpret, even unbearable.

Externalization. Reification can be defined as "the act (or result of the act) of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man‑produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his life."[391] Taken out of its original context, this definition helps us understand the feature of externalization in the reification process in Early China. Fate is the subject's creation, but when the creation is reified it becomes externalized and hypostasized, which means that it is given independent and abstract reality external to the subject, as if it had

[389] *Lüshi Chunqiu* 20.8.3: 1347.

[390] In her influential 1966 essay, "Against Interpretation," Susan Sontag said that "Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable." (Sontag, 1966, 1.5, p. 8).

[391] Gajo Petrović, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 1983: 411.

always existed out there, as a fact of nature.[392] In other words, the subject creates fate, and endows his creation with a reality that is independent, objective and external to the subject.

The ascription of the final outcomes of our live to an external entity that does not depend on our actions or our wisdom, as we have seen in the previous point, is a result of externalization and hypostasis. The feature of externalization is also explicit in the internal-external/subject-object dichotomy (*nei* 內-*wai* 外, sometimes expressed in terms of *wo* 我-*wai* 外 or *ji* 己–*wai* 外) that many Early Chinese thinkers establish. An example of the dichotomy appears in the following lines of the *Huainanzi*:

夫人之拘于世也，必形系而神泄，故不免於**虛**，使**我**可系羈者，**必其有命在於外**也.[393]

Humans being limited by their generation, their physical form necessarily becomes tied up and their spirit depletes, thus they cannot avoid exhaustion. That I can be bound and harnessed is certainly because my fate is grounded externally to myself.

The "Mountain Tree" chapter in the *Zhuangzi* gives us another illustration of the feature of externalization, as well as an indication of the opposition between what is a result of the works of Heaven and what is a result of fate. In the anecdote, a dignified Confucius 仲尼 explains to his disciple Yan Hui 顏回 that "It is easy to be indifferent to the afflictions of Heaven, but difficult to be indifferent to the benefits of man."[394] Challenging natural situations such as food scarcity and extreme weather conditions are easily understood as the workings of Heaven and Earth, the "afflictions of Heaven," in which humans knowingly play no role. For that reason, it is easy for humans to accept them without major drama. However, when it comes to social success, humans

[392] On this issue, see Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Constructions of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1991: 106.

[393] *Huaina honglie jie* 2: 10b.

[394] *Zhuangzi jijie* 20: 173.

tend to attribute it all to themselves. Confucius argues that, in the same way that natural situations must be attributed to Heaven, satisfying social situations such as attainment of high rank positions and political success also must be attributed to fate, not to human effort. However, this is more difficult to acknowledge, as people have a tendency to congratulate themselves for sociopolitical outcomes:

> 始用四達，爵祿並至而不窮，物之所利乃非己也，吾命有在外者也。[395]
>
> As soon as one is employed [in office], he succeeds in all four directions. Rank and emolument reach him together and without end. But these material profits do not come from oneself: my fate lies externally to me.

In the next section, I analyze in more detail a case of the "inner/outer" dichotomy in the *Mengzi*. In the *Mengzi*, external fate (*wai* 外) is the realm outside the subject (*wo* 我) where "seeking does not contribute to achieving,"[396] that is to say, where the agent has no control whatsoever. In this and other early texts, fate becomes an externalized object that lies outside human interiority and outside human control. Being externalized and acting as an object in opposition to the subject, fate alienates the subject. The subject becomes separated from the external, objective and opaque realm of fate, unable to interact with it. Withdrawn into himself, the subject is alienated from its own creation, which brings us to the third point.

Disengagement and alienation. When fate is reified, the objective, external realm of fate is experienced as overpowering the subject. It seems like there is nothing the subject can do in the face of fate, apart from passively accepting it and stoically awaiting its charge. At the same time that fate becomes an impenetrable, opaque object that cannot be interpreted or approached, the subject may become alienated from the world and from himself, which brings in

[395] *Zhuangzi jijie* 20: 173.

[396] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 7A/3: 229b.

disengagement. The belief in the existence of blind fate had manifold implications for human behavior. It left some people feeling powerless and frustrated: what are we supposed to do in the face of an uncontrollable, uncertain destiny? It could also make people careless and lazy in their undertakings: why would I try if everything depends on fate anyway?

Some Early Chinese thinkers even considered this conception of fate the root of the main ethical and sociopolitical problems of their times, as it is the case of the *Mozi.* The thinkers behind the *Mozi* feared that people would blame everything on fate and would not do anything to ameliorate their lives. They were concerned that if common people took personal failure and success, as well as the country's state of peace and order, or war and chaos, as things beyond their control, they would not find motivation to conduct themselves ethically and to exert efforts to improve their condition.[397] The belief in a reified, externalized notion of fate would cause a state of ontological slavery: a state of resignation in the face of situations and events that are considered inevitable or, as Nietzsche termed it, a "will to hibernation" without revolt.[398] The idea of hibernation suggests the feelings of disengagement and alienation of the person who experiences reality in this way, those for whom fate is a welcome absolution from the requirement to do anything.[399]

For that reason, the authors of the *Mozi* would attempt to liberate the person from the slavery of fate by returning all power to the agent and reestablishing a retributory order. We find

[397] See for instance "Gong Meng" 公孟 chapter. Perkins notices that the Mohists' major concern when attacking the belief of a pre-existing and prescribed fate was to encourage their contemporaries to end war. Perkins, *Heaven and Earth are not Humane,* 2014: 56.

[398] Nietzsche analyzes different kinds of fatalism, among them the same one criticized by the *Mozi*, and denounces the "will to hibernation" of those who have placed their fate externally and in opposition to the subject, feeling relieved and content to do nothing in the face of fate. See Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* 1.6.

[399] Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations,* 2016: 302.

in the *Mozi* a world imbued with laws of causality and moral justice, where everyone gets what they cultivate. According to the *Mozi*, human history and human everyday experience give us evidence enough to prove this theory. From history we can see that virtuous rulers achieved the Mandate of Heaven whereas evil ones lost it. From ordinary experience we can see that those who care for others are cared for in return, while those who hate are hated.[400] The *Mozi* emphasizes that humans have power and control over what happens in their lives, and hence they must take responsibility for their own actions and their repercussions, instead of blaming it all on an uncontrollable fate. The authors of the *Mozi* considered the belief in a reified fate so dangerous that they set up a philosophical program to return all control to the agent.

The implications of the process of reification described above through the features of objectification, externalization and disengagement made fate a problem, a problem that many Early Chinese thinkers were committed to solve. In the next chapter, we will see in detail some of the most important solutions to the problem of alienation, frustration and powerlessness brought about by the reification of fate in Early China. Refuting the existence of fate was the *Mozi*'s denial strategy. Opening a realm of moral autonomy for the subject is the proposal we find in texts such as *Mengzi* and the Guodian 郭店 bamboo text *Qiongda yishi* 窮達以時. Open-mindedly and adaptively accepting the new situations brought in by fate and taking advantage of them as new possibilities to create a good life was the solution proposed in the "dead dialogues" of the *Zhuangzi*.[401]

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[400] See for instance the third of the "Against fate" 非命 chapters, and the "Inclusive Concern" 兼愛 triad. All the examples argue for a causal connection between actions and success or failure. Perkins' *Heaven and Earth are not Humane* includes an interesting discussion on the Mohist argument against a fatalistic fate (Perkins 2014: 57).

[401] See Chapter 4 in this dissertation, "Coping with Uncertainty."

Before we can turn to the solutions to the problem of fate, we need to better understand the problematic as it was envisaged by Early Chinese thinkers. The next section provides an illustrated analysis of the reification of fate as it takes place in two Early Chinese texts that share the pattern of thought of *ming* as a fate-object: the *Mengzi* 孟子 and the Guodian bamboo manuscript *The Way of Tang and Yu* 唐虞之道.

TWO CASE STUDIES OF MING AS FATE-OBJECT: *MENGZI* AND *TANG YU ZHI DAO*

Mengzi

Some early thinkers, such as those behind the *Mengzi*, conceived of *ming* in a reified way. Their philosophies betrayed a pattern of thinking of *ming* in terms of a fate-object, and showed the features of objectification, externalization and alienation that I have discussed in the previous section.

In an article that deals with the conception of *ming* in the *Mengzi* and the *Analects,* Ted Slingerland gives the following definition of *ming*: "…forces that lie in the outer realm –that is, the realm beyond the bounds of proper human endeavor, or the area of life in which 'seeking does not contribute to one's getting it.'"[402] The spatial description of *ming* as the outer area in which "seeking does not contribute to one's getting it" comes from *Mengzi* 7A: 3:

孟子曰：求則得之，舍則失之，是求有益於得也，求在我者也。求之有道，得之有命，是求無益於得也，求在外者也。[403]

[402] Slingerland, "The Conception of *Ming* in Early Confucian Thought," 1996: 568.

[403] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 7A/3: 229b.

Mengzi said: "When seeking, you obtain them; when neglecting, you lose them. This refers to a case in which seeking helps obtaining, because the seeking lies within oneself. The seeking is proper to the moral way, but the obtaining is nevertheless fated. This refers to a case in which seeking does not help obtaining, because the seeking lies outside oneself."

Slingerland's discussion, which closely follows the *Mengzi*'s classification of phenomena into what is within human control and what is not, interests me because of its emphasis on location. According to the *Mengzi,* within our control there is the exercise of our inborn virtues. That is the realm of interiority where "seeking helps obtaining." The gentleman (*junzi* 君子) has the power to examine his interiority (*nei xing* 內省), and correct his moral behavior accordingly. What makes the gentleman, as well as an ordinary person, a proper human subject is the moral potency that lies within, and over which they can achieve control. In *Mengzi*, the four inner virtues constitute the person's subjective interiority: what we really are, or rather, have the potential to become and the power to realize, as distinguished from what comes from outside and remains beyond our control.

仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也…故曰：求則得之，舍則失之。[404]

Humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom are not welded into me from the outside. I have them inherently… Hence it is said: "When seeking, you obtain them; when neglecting, you lose them."

Opposed to the inner moral realm of the four virtues, which lies within our control, we find the outer, incontrollable, inexplicable realm of *ming.* The forces that exert influence in our lives belong to the outer realm, a realm that opposes our interiority and quality of subjects. In its identification with an independent and outer realm where human actions do not necessarily lead to the expected outcomes (where "seeking does not contribute to obtaining it"), *ming* becomes objectified and externalized.

[404] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 6A: 195a.

In the reifying pattern of thinking, *ming* is not only reified as an external object that opposes the subject's interiority and sphere of autonomous behavior, but it is also often construed as a negative, opposing object. The identification of the realm of personal interiority with that of morality by means of the four sprouts of virtue (*si duan* 四端)[405] allows the external realm to be identified with the amoral. In modern Chinese scholarship, this dichotomy is expressed through the notions of how things are (*shiran* 實然, or descriptive reality) and how things should be (*yingran* 應然, or normative reality).[406] External *ming* is the vast descriptive realm of how things are; while the internal moral subject is the comparatively smaller but crucial normative realm of how things could and should be. The external realm is not necessarily immoral, but is often perceived as a detrimental limit, not conducive to the development of the normative pursuit of our inborn sprouts of morality.

Ming versus *Xing*: The Outer and the Inner

In the *Mengzi*, the tension between descriptive and normative reality, as well as between outer and inner realms, is expressed in terms of a dichotomy between *ming* (the external, incontrollable realm of fate) and *xing* 性 (the internal, controllable realm of human nature). The following passages are key to understand the dichotomy between *ming* and *xing*, and how *ming* is construed in a negative way as an external limitation to the person's moral development and fulfilling life.

[405] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2A: 66.

[406] See, for instance, Lao Siguang 勞思光, *Xinbian Zhongguo zhexue shi* 新編中國哲學史, vol. 1, 1984: 197-199. Cheng Zhangyang 陳政揚, "Mengzi yu Zhuangzi minglun yanjiu" 孟子與莊子命論研究 2005: 138.

孟子曰	Mengzi said:
口之於味也	The mouth's tendency towards [good] flavors,
目之於色也	the eye's tendency towards [nice] colors,
耳之於聲也	the ear's tendency towards [pleasant] sounds,
鼻之於臭也	the nose's tendency towards [fragrant] odors,
四肢之於安佚也	the four limbs' tendency towards ease and rest
性也	are all innate physical tendencies.
有命焉	Since fate is involved in [attaining] them,
君子不謂性也	the gentleman does not call them "human nature."
仁之於父子也	The tendency of humanity towards fathers and sons,
義之於君臣也	the tendency of righteousness towards rulers and ministers,
禮之於賓主也	the tendency of ritual propriety towards guests and hosts,
智之於賢者也	the tendency of wisdom towards worthies,
聖人之於天道也	the tendency of the sage towards the way of Heaven
命也	are all [subject to] fate.
有性焉	Since human nature is involved in [sprouting] them,
君子不謂命也[407]	the gentleman does not call them "fate."

Let us first pay attention to the formal features of these passages. We may understand this passage as a level of commentary inserted within the text. The commentator may be alluding to well-known debates about what must be consider inner and what must be considered outer, such as the one recorded in *Mengzi* 6A between Mencius and Gaozi 告子. The purpose of the passage is to explain why it is the case that Mencius (referred here as "the gentleman") provides counterintuitive definitions of what belongs to the realm of "human nature" (*xing* 性) and what belongs to the realm of "fate" (*ming* 命).

The formal features also help us discern the concepts at use. It might be tempting to read the first *xing* 性 as *qing* 情 (emotions, conditions, tendencies), given that it stands for sensorial

[407] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 7B: 253b.

tendencies and motivations such as the eye's attraction towards colors.[408] However, attention to the parallelism between the last three lines of each section clears the temptation out and forces us to read the word as it appears in the transmitted text: *xing* 性. The structure of the three last lines in each section has a negative mirroring effect. In each case, we find a distinction between what common sense would tell us that either human nature or fate is, and what the gentleman tells us they actually are. The reason for the gentleman's redefinition of the concepts of human nature and fate is also provided in these lines:

[Something seems to be] X	[Something seems to be] Y
because of Y	because of X
then not X	then not Y

Sensory desires, what we can translate as "inborn physical tendencies" (the first "*xing*" 性 in the quoted passage), belong by common sense or conventional understanding to human nature. They seem to be part of our inner subjectivity, part of our inner self. However, in order to satisfy these impulses, tendencies and desires –the passage argues— the senses need to seek outside of themselves, which introduces them into the outer realm of *ming*, where "seeking does not help obtaining." This is the reason provided by the text to explain why the gentleman does not consider physical tendencies to be part of human nature, or what we could better call "inborn moral tendencies" (the second use of "*xing*" 性).[409]

Ming is present as a potential obstacle to the fulfillment of inborn sensory desires. As we saw before, what conforms the interiority that makes us human subjects is limited to what can be

[408] Lisa Raphals, for instance, reads it in this way. Raphals, "Debates about Fate in Early China," 2014: 27.

[409] The distinction between the two uses of *xing* has often been noticed. See, for instance, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Yuan shan lun* 圓善論, 1996: 151. Lin Qiping 林啟屏, *Cong gudian dao zhengdian: zhongguo gudai ruxue yishi zhi xingcheng* 從古典到正典：中國古代儒學意識之形成 [Chapter 7 "限制與自由，從窮達以時論起"], 2007: 276. Chen Zhengyang, 2005: 137-8.

achieved by active seeking: what is within our control. Shifting the meaning of *xing* from inborn sensory tendencies and desires, common to all humans but also to other animals, to an inner space of moral tendencies specific to human kind, the gentleman is deciding the parameters that define us as exclusively human. In other words, the gentleman is the one qualified to decide what should be considered part of our human inner selves, and what should not. Those inborn tendencies and desires do not belong to the moral interiority that defines humans, not only because their satisfaction lies beyond our control, but also because they do not contribute towards the development of a moral personality.[410]

Let us now look at the other side of the mirroring parallel. Common sense and conventional understanding inform us that activities that involve the practice of virtuous behavior are subjected to different aspects of fate: luck, timing, and appropriate encounters, among others. Even under the right circumstances, it is never certain that a person who practices the virtues will be reciprocated with an equally correct treatment. Therefore, interpersonal ethical behavior should be thought to belong to the realm of what lies outside of our control, the realm of *ming*. Nevertheless, the gentleman knows that the practice of virtuous conduct is rooted in the inner virtues, which are part of our inviolable interiority. As the quoted passage reads, *xing* is involved in the sprouting of these virtuous tendencies. That is the reason why the gentleman advises that, despite the fact that the practice of morally correct behavior does not always entail a successful outcome for the virtuous person, these activities must be considered a part of *xing* in the sense of what makes us specifically human. In qualifying these activities governed by fate as

[410] See Mou, 1996: 151. And Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi –Xian Qin pian* 中國人性論史—先秦篇, 1999: 167-8.

part of human nature, the gentleman is reclaiming them to the inner realm of what is within our control.

In reading *ming* as an external limitation to our inner selves, I follow scholars such as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, Lin Qiping 林啟屏, Lao Siguang 勞思光 and Liang Tao 梁涛.[411] They all offer slightly different interpretations to this *Mengzi* passage, but generally agree that fate (*ming*) plays the role of objective reality that limits the fulfillment of the subject (*xing*) from the outside. There is a clear dichotomy between *ming* and *xing*, outside and inside, in this *Mengzi* passage. The dichotomy works towards creating a counterintuitive understanding of the realms of *ming* and *xing.* Where ordinary people would assume that inborn sensory desires and tendencies are inherent to the person and part of our nature (*xing*), at the same time that interpersonal moral tendencies and ethical behavior are affected by fate (*ming*), the *Mengzi*'s gentleman rectifies these notions. Keeping the spatial image, he gives improved definitions of the realms of personal interiority and the external effects of fate by redesigning their boundaries.

As we saw earlier in the discussion of *ming* as life span, and we can see from our discussion of the *Mengzi* passage, even matters so intuitively close to our individuality and that we usually construct as intimate, such as our life span, our desires, tendencies, temperament, character and disposition, once they became attributed to *ming*, were reified and construed as external limitations imposed on the subject from the outside. What is the subject then? The subject is reduced to the part of us that can make moral choices and has the power to control those choices: our moral inner self. We can decide how to think, act and react in situations with a moral component, and we have the power to cultivate our virtue. This is the world of human

[411] See Mou, 1996: 151. Lin, 2007: 276. Lao, 1984: 197-199. Liang Tao 梁涛, *Guodian zhujian yu Si Meng xuepai* 郭店竹簡與思孟學派, 2008: 454-455.

interiority that was created against an external world of confronting, limiting and hostile reality.[412] But what exactly constitutes this world of limiting reality, the world of *ming*?

Ming versus Heaven: Two Kinds of Agency

There has been some discussion in modern scholarship about what exactly constitutes the realm of *ming* in the *Mengzi.* As we have seen, Slingerland emphasizes the external quality of *ming*: fate is made of forces that approach the person from the outside, yet fate has no power over the person's moral interiority. But what exactly approaches the person from the outside? In other words, which are these external forces? From the analysis of the dichotomy between *xing* and *ming* we have learned that *ming* is construed in the *Mengzi* as an amoral, detrimental object. In the following, and in order to better understand what is *ming* after all, we will direct our attention to the similarities and differences that we find between *tian* 天 and *ming*, Heaven and fate, in the *Mengzi.*

According to Chen Ning, the forces of *ming* in the *Mengzi* include both Heaven's decisions, which are always moral, and a sort of blind, amoral fate.[413] When *ming* is Heaven's moral commands, it resonates with our own moral interiority (our human nature), and we take on them with pleasure. When, on the contrary, the *ming* we face is the lashes of a blind and amoral destiny, we rather withdraw to ourselves and find autonomy in our moral behavior. In both cases, the person cannot but accept *ming.* Tang Junyi 唐君毅 and Lin Minling 林玟玲 have proposed

[412] Some scholars have expressed this conflict in the *Mengzi* in terms of a difference between *ming* understood as *mingxian* 命限 (external limitations) and *ming* understood as *li ming* 立命 (the fate that one establishes for oneself by following a moral path). See Chen Zhangyang, 2005: 144. We go back to the idea of *li ming* at the end of this section.

[413] Chen Ning, "The Concept of Fate in Mencius," 1997b: 495. And Chen Ning, *Zhongguo gudai mingyunguan de xiandai quanshi* 中國古代命運觀的現代詮釋, 1999: 131-2.

similar arguments. In their view, apart from an undeniable sense of *ming* as external limitation to our power, there is in the *Mengzi* a distinct meaning of *ming* as moral command coming from Heaven. Being in consonance with our moral nature, this moral command does not impose a limit but works as a guide for our ethical behavior.[414] The proponents of this second meaning of *ming* in the *Mengzi* want to reconcile the dichotomy between our inner moral selves (*xing*) and Heaven's external commands (*ming*) that we have previously seen.[415] When *ming* involves a moral command coming from Heaven, it finds resonance in our inner morality to the extent that there is no differentiation between what we are morally predisposed to do (*xing*), and what Heaven requires us to do (*ming*).

Michael Puett, on the other hand, has argued that there is only one meaning of *ming* in the *Mengzi*: Heaven's decisions. Nevertheless, Puett points out, Heaven's decisions need not always be moral. They are often inscrutable and can even be straightforwardly against the moral plan that Heaven itself conceived for humanity in the first place.[416] Puett uses as example *Mengzi* 2B/13, where a tragic Mencius speaks of the cyclical pattern of sagely rulership conceived by Heaven. Every five hundred years a true king has arisen, and during that time, a person that we

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[414] See Tang Junyi, *Zhongguo zhexue lun –daolun pian* 中國哲學原論──導論篇, 1993: 526-527. Lin Meiling, 2007: 228.

[415] Scholars holding the unifying view promote the slogan "*xing ming heyi*" 性命合一. Unfortunately, many of the arguments used to claim that *ming* and *xing* are not in relation of opposition in the *Mengzi* involve going beyond textual evidence in *Mengzi* to find revelatory passages in texts such as *Zhongyong* 中庸 and *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出. See, for instance, Yao Yanqi 姚彥淇, "Mengzi 'xingming duiyang' zhang yiyun zaitan" 孟子「性命對揚」章義蘊再探, 2010: 8. This line of argumentation is based on the assumption that all these texts belong to the same branch of Confucianism coming from Mencius and Zi Sizi 子思子. They supposedly share the same philosophical worldview hence we can use the one in support of the other. A sounder methodology is used by scholars such as Fu Sinian 傅斯年 and, more recently, Chen Zhangyang, who argue for the unifying view based only in textual evidence found in the *Mengzi*. See Fu Sinian, 1952: 355-6; and Chen Zhangyang, 2005.

[416] Puett, "Following the Commands of Heaven," 2005: 50-53. See also pp. 56-57.

could call a sage because of his capacity to bring peace and order to the world has appeared. Mencius complains that it has already been seven hundred years since the first Zhou rulers, and no true king or sage has arisen yet. According to Mencius, he should be the one appointed for this task, yet his projects as royal advisor have all been a failure. This can only be, Mencius complains, because Heaven does not yet wish to bring peace and order to All under Heaven (夫天，未欲平治天下也).[417] Puett concludes that the ambiguity in the term *ming* is not due to it having different meanings, but it is rather a reflection of the ambiguity felt in face of the relationship between the person and Heaven. Heaven created the moral patterns that should govern the person and the world yet, for unknown reasons, it not always worked in favor of those patterns.[418]

I would like to propose a different way of looking at the relationship between *tian* and *ming* in the *Mengzi*. On one hand, I agree with Chen, Tang and Lin that *ming* sometimes refers to commands of Heaven, and insofar they come from Heaven, these commands are moral. This is the case when the word *ming* is short for *tian ming* 天命 ("heaven's mandate" when applied to the sage or the king, and "heaven's commands" when applied to everyone else). For instance, we may understand *ming* as *tian ming* in the following quote from the *Odes* in "Gongsun chou A":

詩云：永言配命，自求多福。[419]

One of the *Odes* says: "Constantly to be in accord with the mandate [of Heaven], and you will bring upon yourself numerous fortunes."

The context of the quote, a discussion on how princes should prepare for a successful government by cultivating virtue, makes it clear that this instance of *ming* must be understood as

[417] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2B: 85a.

[418] Puett, 2005: 59-61.

[419] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 3B: 63.

the moral mandate of Heaven. It is my contention, however, that the meaning of *ming* when it is short for *tian ming* must be distinguished from the meaning of *ming* when it refers to the blind and external force of fate. In the same way that we distinguish the verb *ming* when it stands for "to give an order" (*wang ming* 王命/*jun ming* 君命, *Mengzi*) or "to reply" (*fan ming* 反命 *Mengzi*), we need to differentiate between the moral, Heavenly command, and the amoral forces of fate.

On the other hand, I agree with Puett that in the *Mengzi* Heaven does not always act in the moral or ethical way that it is expected to. However, I must disagree with the idea that there is only one meaning of *ming* in the *Mengzi*, which according to Puett would be Heaven's decisions. As pointed out before, *ming* is a polyvalent word, and it is used in the *Mengzi* as well as in other early texts with a variety of meanings, which include command, order, reply, life, mandate and fate. The ambivalence of *ming* certainly is due to its polysemic character, and to the way in which early authors consciously or unconsciously dealt with its multiplicity of meanings.

In the following I propose to pay attention to several formal and literary aspects of the passages that make reference to Heaven and *ming* in order to clarify the difference between these two important concepts, as well as to better understand the reification of *ming*.

In his study of the *Mengzi* and Confucian ethics, Shun Kwong-loi points out that Heaven, much as *ming*, is credited with things over which we have no power.[420] This is certainly the case in the *Mengzi*. "Liang Hui wang B," for instance, says that a king must do whatever efforts that will ensure his people inherit a better world, but "whether he is able to accomplish it or not, lies

[420] Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 1997: 77-78.

with Heaven" (若夫成功，則天也).[421] In the same chapter, Mencius claims that the fact that a certain king decided not to meet with him was due to Heaven:

樂正子見孟子，曰：克告於君，君為來見也。嬖人有臧倉者沮君，君是以不果來也。曰：行或使之，止或尼之。行止，非人所能也。吾之不遇魯侯，天也。臧氏之子焉能使予不遇哉？[422]

Yue Zheng saw Mencius, and said to him: "I told the prince about you, and he was going to come and meet with you. However, among his favorites there is a Zang Cang, who stopped him, and consequently the prince will not come, although that was originally his purpose. Mencius said: "If [I were supposed to] advance, there would have been someone to favor it (the prince's meeting). If [I were supposed] not to advance, there would be someone to impede it (the prince's meeting). To advance or not to advance is beyond human power. My not encountering the prince of Lu is because of Heaven. How could that son of the Zang family cause me not to encounter (an opportunity)?"

According to this passage, encountering opportunities lies with Heaven. Apart from being a full subjective agent when, for instance, it sends down warnings and punishments in the form of natural calamities, Heaven may also enact his commands through the representative agency of humans. For that reason, it is easy to get confounded and think that humans have the power to enable certain kind of outcomes, such as political failure or success, when actually it is Heaven acting through them. In the case of the anecdote above, Mencius' failure to encounter the right opportunity to advance in his career, the meeting with the prince of Lu, even though seemingly provoked by a persuasive Zang Cang, must be understood as the workings of Heaven through a human representative.

This is an important topic that we will further explore in the implications section of this chapter and in the next chapter. For now, let us only focus on one simple point: Heaven in the *Mengzi* shares with *ming* in being a source of explanation for what we cannot explain and what

[421] *Shisan jing zhu shu, Mengzi* 2B: 46.

[422] *Shisan jing zhu shu, Mengzi* 2B: 48a.

lies beyond our control. Both Heaven and *ming* are a sort of agency that make things happen or not. They are both heteronomous forces, namely external forces that influence the person from the outside and threaten the person's autonomy and self-determination. Nevertheless, and this is the most important point, Heaven is expected to be moral in the *Mengzi*, while *ming* is not.

We find a multiplicity of expressions that attribute morality to Heaven in the *Mengzi*. Some of these expressions are indirect. For instance, "Gongsun Chou A" implies that Heaven is a moral entity by claiming that the king who behaves according to the five moral precepts becomes a minister of Heaven (*tian li* 天吏).[423] In turn, "Gongsun Chou B" uses the notion of the minister of Heaven to claim moral authority over war and conquest: only the minister of Heaven can justly smite another kingdom, in the same way that only a chief criminal judge can justly judge people.[424] Other expressions are more direct. Several chapters directly attribute virtues to Heaven making it be the source of human morality.[425] Finally, several passages show that Heaven has moral character, that it has agency, and that it responds to people's action.[426] In *Mengzi* 4A, Heaven is made a retributive and moral agent that gives the throne to the virtuous ones and enables the defeat of those who lack virtue (ideology of the Mandate of Heaven).[427] A correspondence between human behavior and Heaven's actions is expected. For instance, in *Mengzi* 1B we learn that Heaven will surely send down punitive calamities against a king who

[423] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2A: 65a.

[424] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2B: 80b.

[425] See, among others, *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2A: 66b; 3A: 98b; 6A: 204b.

[426] See, for instance, *Mengzi* 1B: 31-32, and 43a.

[427] *Mengzi* 4A: 124 says that the calamity of a kingdom is not to not be able to protect itself with big walls against enemies, but to be lacking in virtue, because then Heaven will enable its defeat. Along the same lines, *Mengzi* 5A: 168-171 explains that Heaven gave the throne to Shun because, unlike the Shang king, Shun was virtuous.

does not conquer an evil state (不取，必有天殃).[428] This behavior can only be expected when Heaven is considered a moral agent that responds to human action according to an ethical standard.

The fact that Heaven is considered a moral agent, and that it is expected to keep to certain ethical standards, implies that, when Heaven does not act by those standards, humans can feel discontent, angry, frustrated and lost. This is exactly what happens to Mencius in the story that, as shown above, Puett uses to explain that Heaven can be immoral:

孟子去齊。充虞路問曰：夫子若有不豫色然。前日虞聞諸夫子曰：君子不怨天，不尤人。

When Mencius left Qi, on the journey Chong Yu questioned him, saying: "Master, you seem to carry an air of dissatisfaction in your countenance. But formerly I heard you say, 'The gentleman does not complain against Heaven, nor blame men.'"

曰：彼一時，此一時也。五百年必有王者興，其間必有名世者。由周而來，七百有餘歲矣。以其數則過矣，以其時考之則可矣。夫天，未欲平治天下也；如欲平治天下，當今之世，舍我其誰也？吾何為不豫哉？[429]

Mencius said: "That was one time, and this is another.[430] It is a rule that a [sage] king should arise in the course of five hundred years, and that during that time there should be men illustrious in their generation. From the beginning of the Zhou dynasty until now, more than seven hundred years have elapsed. Judging numerically, the date is past. Examining the character of the present time, we should expect the rise of such individuals in it. But Heaven does not yet wish to bring peace and order to All under Heaven. If it wished to bring peace and order to All

[428] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 1B: 222.

[429] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 2B: 85a.

[430] I follow *Mengzi* commentators in their interpretation of this line. Mengzi would be contrasting the time when he said the sentence his disciple Chong Yu attributes to him ("The gentleman does not complain against Heaven, nor blame men"), and the present time in which the conversation takes place, during Mencius' trip to Qi to deal with a chaotic political situation. See Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zheng yi* 孟子正義, vol. 1: 309. Due to the current situation, Mencius cannot help feeling discontentment. The same happens to the Confucius of the *Analects* in several occasions. For instance, when his beloved Yan Yuan 顏淵 died, Confucius cried out "Alas! Heaven has abandoned me, Heaven has abandoned me!" 噫天喪予天喪予 (*Shisan jing zhushu*, *Lunyu* 11: 97a).

under Heaven, in today's world who is there besides me [to do it]? How should I be [otherwise than] dissatisfied?"[431]

The keywords in this dialogue are *bu yu* 不豫, which means to feel discontent, dissatisfied or displeased; and *yuan tian* 怨天, which is to complain or murmur against Heaven. The structure of the story is very simple: in theory one should never complain against Heaven.[432] However, Mencius qualifies, there are circumstances that allow for the person to feel discontent and complain: when Heaven seems to act against ethical principles.

We find a similar anecdote in *Mengzi* 5A. It is parallel to the previous dialogue in vocabulary and structure, with the difference that the object of complain and dissatisfaction is one's parents, instead of Heaven:

萬章問曰：舜往于田，號泣于**旻天**，何為其號泣也？

Wan Zhang asked Mencius, saying: "When Shun went into the fields, he cried out and wept towards compassionate Heaven. Why did he cry out and weep?"

孟子曰：**怨慕**也。

Mencius replied: "He was dissatisfied, and full of earnest desire."

萬章曰：父母愛之，喜而不忘；父母惡之，勞而不怨。然則**舜怨**乎？[433]

Wan Zhang said: "When his parents love him, a son rejoices and forgets them not. When his parents hate him, though they punish him, he does not complain. Was Shun then complaining against his parents?"

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[431] This is a contended passage, as most scholars would not want to accept that Mencius could complain against Heaven. I follow *Mengzi* commentators in their understanding of this last line as an explanation of why Mencius should feel dissatisfied (我所以有不豫，為此也). The logic is that Mencius will stop feeling dissatisfied when Heaven decides that it is a good time to stop chaos and charges Mencius with achieving this task. See *Mengzi zhengyi*, vol. 1: 311.

[432] The phrase "not to complain against Heaven or to grudge against men" (不怨天不尤人) also appears in *Analects* 14.35, where it is attributed to Confucius. Same phrasing in *Lunheng jiaoshi* 30: 457; *Shiji* 17 "Kongzi shijia" 孔子世家, p. 1942; Lu Yuanjun 盧元駿, *Shuoyuan jinzhu jinyi* 說苑今註今譯 14: 475. The *Zhongyong* 中庸 contains the sentence with a variation: 上不怨天，下不尤人. See *Shisan jing zhushu, Zhongyong* 52: 883b. Also with a variation, in *Xunzi jishi* 4: 59: 自知者不怨人，知命者不怨天.

[433] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 5A: 160a.

Then Mengzi proceeds to explain to Wan Zhang how it can be the case that Shun could not help but feel sorrow and express his complaints against his parents. Shun exerted himself in all spheres of life, first to cultivate the fields, then to govern the world. Yet Shun's parents did not consider him worthy of love. No matter how correctly Shun behaved and how successful he became in political matters, he could never achieve his parents' acceptance and support. Mengzi explains that a filial son will always need that his parents are in accord with him (*shun* 順). Despite enjoying the pleasures of beauty, sensuality, riches and honors (好色富貴), as a filial son who feels unappreciated and undeserving of parental love, Shun could not liberate himself from sorrow (*jie you* 解憂) to the end of his days.[434]

The keywords in this story are *yuan mu* 怨慕, dissatisfied and full of earnest desire; *yuan (fumu)* 怨(父母), to complain or murmur (against parents); *you* 憂, sorrow; and *min tian* 旻天, which we can translate as "compassionate Heaven."[435] Note that these words express ideas similar to those we found in the previous story: they point at a dissatisfied person sorrowed by ethical injustice who complains against the source of his unhappiness. The structure also parallels the dialogue where Mencius complains against Heaven: in theory, one should not complain against one's parents, but there are circumstances that allow so. Notably, the fact that one's parents behave in what seems an unloving way towards their filial son. Both stories showcase people that are frustrated, sad and angry against an unsympathetic, unfair superior authority that they respect and love, and of which they would expect an ethical behavior that is missing. The parallel between the two anecdotes becomes even stronger when we realize that

[434] See the rest of the story in *Mengzi* 5A: 160a-161a.

[435] *Shuowen jiezi* reads: "It covers everything below with humanity and compassion, therefore it is called 'compassionate Heaven'" 仁閔覆下，則稱旻天. See *Shuowen jiezi* 8.46.

early texts often qualify Heaven and Earth as the parents of the ten thousand types of things.[436] Heaven takes the role of a father in its relationship with humans. The parallelism between Heaven and a father is clear in the two stories. In the first dialogue, Mencius admits to be discontent and frustrated by Heaven's behavior. In the second, Mencius justifies that Shun could be discontent and sorrowed by his parents' behavior. The people need and expect Heaven's moral guidance, acceptance and support, much as a filial son needs his parent's love and recognition. Note also that the story about Shun's sorrow begins by making reference to his crying towards a compassionate Heaven (旻天). All the opposite of *Laozi*'s famous statement "Heaven and Earth are not humane" (天地不仁),[437] the Heaven of the *Mengzi* is a moral entity which is expected to display humanity and righteousness in its behavior.[438]

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[436] The epithet "Son of Heaven" for the ruling king of course suggests that Heaven acts as a father for the ruler. There are numerous textual examples of the representation of Heaven and Earth as father and mother of the people and all entities (*min* 民/*wanwu* 萬物). In the *Documents*, for instance, it reads "Heaven and Earth are the father and the mother of the ten thousand kinds of things" 惟天地萬物父母 (*Shisan jing zhushu, Shangshu, Zhoushu* 1A: 152b). *Zhuangzi* "Dazongshi" states "There are those who especially regard Heaven as their father, and love it as if it indeed was" 彼特以天為父，而身猶愛之 (*Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58). In the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, in turn, we see that "Sages establish Heaven as a father, and advocate for Earth as a mother" 故聖人立天為父，建地為母 (Lu Dianjie 陸佃解, *Heguanzi* 10: 80). The simple formula "Consider Heaven a father and Earth a mother" 以天為父，以地為母 appears in *Guanzi* "Wuxing" 五行 41: 703; *Huainan honglie jijie* 7: 1b; *Hou Hanshu*, "Huang hou ji shang" 皇后紀上: 408; and "Kui xiao gongsun shu liezhuan" 隗囂公孫述列傳: 516.

[437] *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 185.

[438] In his book named after the famous *Laozi* phrase, "Heaven and Earth are not Humane," Perkins discusses these *Mengzi* passages to explore the issue of "Heaven's role in the world" (p. 122). However, he reaches the opposite conclusion: "…Mengzi has come to equate heaven with fate, *ming*. Heaven simply represents those forces or events in the world that are inexplicable and irresistible" (p. 123; the idea comes up again on p. 127). I agree with Perkins in that both Heaven and fate explain situations that happen without our intervention and outcomes that are unexpected or perceived as undeserved. Yet I do not agree that they are conflated together in the *Mengzi*: I argue that Heaven and fate are two distinctly different kinds of agency, one subjective (Heaven) and the other nonsubjective (fate). I further separate the use of *ming* as a command by

Ming-fate, on the contrary, is not expected to display a moral or ethical behavior. Therefore, the human attitude towards *ming* will be different from the attitude towards Heaven. Fate can also cause all sorts of unethical, undeserved and unfair outcomes, yet there is no point in feeling discontent and anger, and certainly there is no point in complaining. One can be mad at Heaven because Heaven is an intentional, subjective and moral agency. However, one cannot be mad at *ming* because fate is an objective and amoral power: fate is reified as an opaque object that, differently from the personified Heaven, does not admit communication, inter-subjectivity or any sort of interpersonal transactions.

The features of the reifying pattern of thought, where fate is reified as an object, are visible in the semantic field that accompanies *ming* in texts that share this worldview. In the *Mengzi*, *ming* is something to await (*si ming* 俟命), accompany in harmony (*pei ming* 配命), accept (*shun shou* 順受), stand on (*li ming* 立命), understand (*zhi ming* 知命), or simply have (*you ming* 有命).[439] All these verbs that accompany *ming* in the *Mengzi* confirm that *ming* is seen as an external object beyond the subject's control and emphasize its inevitability. At the same time, they imply that the subject must show a particular behavior towards this inevitability. As opposed to the attitude one must have towards Heaven, which allows in certain situations for dissatisfaction and complaint, the correct attitude toward *ming* is one of acceptance and understanding. The emphasis on accepting and understanding also implies that the object in question is not always easy to accept and understand yet we must make the effort. This

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Heaven (*tianming*, with the *tian* implied), and *ming* as blind fate, which Perkins, and many other scholars cited above, considers together. See Perkins, 2014: 122 and onwards.

[439] I only consider the cases where *ming* means fate. When *ming* is used as "command" or "order" in the *Mengzi*, the most common verb is "receive" (*shou* 受), but this is irrelevant to my analysis.

difference in attitude suggests that the authors of the *Mengzi* considered the power of Heaven and the power of fate to be two distinct things.

Standing on *Ming*: A Solution to the Problem of Fate

The fact that, as opposed to Heaven, which accepts communication (and may even be compassionate), fate is a sort of objective, external, opaque force with which humanity cannot negotiate, introduced a problem in the relationship between the person and the world.

As we have seen before in the study of the dichotomy between *ming* and *xing*, the *Mengzi*'s gentleman redefined what belongs to the external realm beyond our control and what belongs to the inner realm of what makes us properly human. This redefinition had two practical consequences. First, reintroducing interpersonal ethical behavior within the realm of what is within our control gave the ordinary person motivation to keep acting correctly, disallowing self-defeating and lazy behavior. Even though the consequences of one's actions could not always be foreseen and remained governed by external fate, one could and should be in control of his own actions and thoughts. At the same time, eliminating inborn sensory desires from the definition of human nature eliminated distractions and helped the person focus on morality as the only thing that matters as a human.

The solution that the *Mengzi* proposed to the problem of fate was to do what is right regardless of the outcomes. In other words, the person should not worry about the workings of *ming* but concentrate only on his virtuous behavior. For instance, in *Mengzi* 5A/8, Mencius explains that "Confucius advanced according to propriety and retired according to righteousness. Whether he obtained [office] or not, he said, was a matter of fate" 孔子進以禮，退以義，得之

不得曰有命.[440] The teaching of this passage, as it faces the problem of a reified, opaque, inhumane, incomprehensible object of fate, is that one should always act in a virtuous way (moral behavior is within human control) and stoically accept the outcomes of one's actions whatever they are (the outcomes belong to the realm of fate, what is beyond human control).[441]

In my view, Confucius' behavior, in the way it is explained by Mencius in the quote above, is an instance of "standing on *ming*" (*li ming* 立命), namely relying on one's fate as it comes and whatever it is. See Mencius' statement below:

孟子曰：殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。[442]

Mencius said: "Not allowing that either a premature death or a long life cause double-mindedness, and cultivating oneself while awaiting [whatever may happen], this is the way to stand on fate."

I follow commentators and modern scholars in translating *er* 貳 as "double-mindedness," what we could understand as a kind of moral doubt. Not having duplicity means not to hesitate to follow the proper moral way even when facing challenging circumstances.[443] The person who does not deviate from morality and continues cultivating himself (*xiu shen* 修身) while awaiting the charges of fate regardless what they bring about is said to "stand on *ming*." I do not follow commentators and most of modern scholars in my understanding of "standing on *ming*," as they reduce the spectrum of fate to that of *tian ming*, Heaven's mandate. For instance, Zhu Xi interprets "standing on *ming*" as cultivating oneself as to complete our heavenly moral endowments and do not harm them through humanly imposed actions (謂全其天之所付，不以

[440] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 5A: 8.

[441] Shun also remarks this point. See Shun, 1997: 79.

[442] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 7A: 228b.

[443] See, for instance, *Mengzi zheng yi* 孟子正義, vol. 2: 878. Shun, 1979: 79-80.

人為害之).[444] Heaven and fate are two different kinds of agency. Heaven imposes on the person its own kind of *ming*, but *ming* is not reduced in the *Mengzi* (or in other early texts) to the workings of Heaven. Shun has proposed that the difference between Heaven and *ming* is that "the former emphasizes the source of things due not to human effort and the latter the outcome of such things."[445] While this is certainly the case in the passages where *ming* is short for *tian ming*, in numerous other occasions *ming* is a force of its own, an independent agency, often responsible for allotting living beings' life span, among other outcomes. When *ming* is reified as the object of fate, it is a nonsubjective, opaque, unreachable agency, as opposed to Heaven, which is a subjective agency. As we have seen above, the *Mengzi* introduces a difference in attitude toward Heaven and *ming* when the latter stands for a reified fate. "Standing on fate" is part of the correct attitude to show toward fate: it is a way of appropriation of one's fate, a way of taking control over one's life by keeping up with the moral path while accepting one's lot without question or regret.

Talking about the *Mengzi* and the *Analects*, Slingerland remarks that "the motivation informing these texts is the desire to change people's views of what is and what is not important, to redirect people's energy and efforts from the external realm to the internal realm of self-cultivation."[446] A second motivation is the psychological function of providing peace to a troubled mind. Since what happens lies beyond our control, and there is nothing we can do about it, it should not trouble us or be cause of concern. As long as the person is sure to be acting correctly in a moral way, she can live at peace with anything that happens in her life, no matter

[444] *Mengzi zhengyi xia,* p. 878.

[445] Shun, 1979: 77.

[446] Slingerland, 1996: 576.

how unfair or dramatic it appears to be. This attitude requires continuous self-reflection and self-rectification: a search of the conditions for a worthy life within oneself. We will have more to say about this "turn inwards" in the next chapter.

To recapitulate, the *Mengzi* has given us a clear illustration of the reifying pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world in Early China. In this pattern, *ming* is hypostasized as something independent and external to the subject; it is reified as an object that opposes or thwarts the subject; acting from the exterior, it entails an amoral limit and a threat to human moral interiority; and it is potentially detrimental to the subject, so it requires human reaction and psychological resolution. In the next section, we see the same features of the reification of fate in a different Early Chinese text, *The Way of Tang and Yu.*

Tang Yu zhi Dao

Once we have extracted the features of the pattern of thought of *ming* as fate-object, it is easier to see this pattern repeatedly appear in early texts, both received and found. There is a phrasal structure that establishes that "those who understand fate do not feel sorrow" (知命者不憂).[447] We see it in the *Wenzi*, with a parallel in *Huainanzi* "Quanyan" 詮言:

道者直己而待命。。。福之至非己之所求，故不伐其功，禍之來非己之所生，故不悔其行。。。故通道者不惑，知命者不憂。[448]

The way consists in straightening oneself and awaiting fate… The arrival of fortune is not because one has sought it, so do not brag about its achievement. The arrival of misfortune is not

[447] See *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 17b and *Wenzi zuanyi* 4: 10a. In the form of *zhiming buyou* 知命不憂, see *Shiji* "Qu Yuan Jia sheng liezhuan" 屈原賈生列傳, p. 2500, and *Hanshu*, "Jia Yi zhuan" 賈誼傳 48.18: 2228. In the *Xici shang* 繫辭上, "rejoices in Heaven and understands fate, therefore has no anxieties" 樂天知命，故不優. See *Shisan jing zhushu, Zhouyi, Xici shang*, 147b.

[448] *Wenzi zuanyi* 4: 9b-10a.

because one has created it, so do not regret its course… Therefore, those who comprehend the way are not confused, and those who understand fate do not worry.

As we have learned from the parallel dialogues in the previous section, one may rightfully feel sorrow in the face of Heaven, but not in the face of fate. What comes from fate is nothing to feel anxious or to complain about, since fate is not an ethical subjective entity. In this regard, the *Liezi* 列子 offers additional insights:

死生自命也，貧窮自時也。怨夭折者，不知命者也；怨貧窮者，不知時者也。當死不懼，在窮不戚，知命安時也.[449]

Death and life spring from fate; poverty and exhaustion spring from the times. Those who complain about premature death are those who do not understand fate. Those who complain against poverty and exhaustion are those who do not understand the times. Not being afraid of death and not being distressed by hardship, that's understanding fate and being content with the times.

"Understanding fate," the person is free from sorrow and distress toward what is beyond her control, therefore can concentrate efforts and energy in improving her moral behavior. This is probably what the Master in one of the *Lunyu*'s 論語 aphorisms meant by describing the gentleman as free from sorrow and fear:

子曰：君子不憂不懼。曰：不憂不懼，斯謂之君子已乎？子曰：內省不疚，夫何憂何懼？[450]

The Master said: "The gentleman has neither anxiety nor fear." [Niu] asked: No anxiety and no fear, is this what makes a gentleman?" The Master replied: "When inner examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?"

"Understanding fate" (*zhi ming* 知命) is a particularly important *topos* in the pattern of thought of *ming* as fate-object. We find this *topos* in many early texts such as *Xunzi, Shuoyuan, Liezi, Wenzi, Huainanzi* and *Lüshi Chunqiu*, to name just a few. The notion of "understanding fate" is normally associated with the reification, externalization and problematization of fate in Early

[449] *Liezi jishi* 6.6: 212.

[450] *Shisan jing zhushu, Lunyü* 12: 106b.

China. I include an example from a manuscript that was found at Guodian in 1993, and which has stirred up much attention. *The Way of Tang and Yu* (*Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道) is a relatively short argumentative text that defends abdication and government by merit, as opposed to hereditary monarchy, as the best political option.[451] What is interesting for me here is how it reflects the reifying pattern of thought of *ming* as fate-object. In *The Way of Tang and Yu* we find the same pattern that we have seen in the *Mengzi*: (1) Dichotomy and relationship of opposition between an inner subject and an external object. (2) Fate presented as a limiting, opposing object. (3) Fate presented as often detrimental to the subject. (4) Therefore, fate presented as a problem.

In the bamboo text, we see a clear differentiation between the inner realm of things that are under the subject's control, such as self-cultivation in the virtues, and the external realm of *ming*, the objective, larger world of events that inevitably happen and affect the subject's life. According to *The Way of Tang and Yu*, the mythical emperor Tang Yao's 唐堯 abdication to Yu Shun 虞舜 was due to numerous factors, which can be divided into two categories. The first category of factors belong to the inner realm of Shun's virtue: he had shown to be humane (*ren* 仁) and sagely (*sheng* 聖), filial (*xiao* 孝) and loyal (*zhong* 忠). Yao knew that these qualities

[451] The manuscript was first published in *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡, 1998: 39-41 and 157-59. For an English analysis of the material features of the manuscript and the intellectual content of *The Way of Tang and Yu*, read Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 2012: 521-564. In *Buried Ideas*, Sarah Allan discusses *The Way of Tang and Yu*, together with other manuscripts from the Warring States period, in terms of their strong advocacy for political abdication. According to Allan, other narratives of abdication are found in the transmitted "Yao dian" 藥典 chapter of the *Documents* 尚書, *Mengzi* 5A "Wan zhang shang" 萬章上, and the "Shang xian" 尚賢 trilogy of the *Mozi*, as well as in the found texts *Rongchengshi* 容成氏, *Zigao* 子羔 and *Bao xun* 保訓. See Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 2015 (different chapters).

would make him a good ruler for All under Heaven ([知其能]為民主也).[452] According to the text, Shun achieved these qualities through self-cultivation. They belong to his inner self, the realm that remains within the subject's control under all circumstances. This is indeed the author's key argument in favor of abdication. Sagely government is based on the premise that the person is able to cultivate a correct moral behavior, and only then he will be prepared to bring order to the world. Hence the throne should only pass to the person who has already accomplished such virtuous merit. In the author's words,

> 必正其身，然後正世，聖道備矣 (*Guodian* 39: 3)[453]
>
> He must correct his own person and only then correct his generation.[454] The way of the sage is thus completed.

The second category of factors involved in the making of a legitimate ruler belongs to the external realm, the one that is outside human control. Heaven and Earth, and the world of numinous beings, are forces alien to the subject; they are objective and necessary, not susceptible to be changed by human agency. They all have determining influence over the course of events. All the elements that jointly play the role of fate, namely Heaven and Earth, natural elements such as mountains and rivers, and ancestors and other numinous beings, are treated as spirits or

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[452] *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, 158. The addition of the three missing characters in brackets [知其能] is unproblematic, as they are supplied by parallelism with the two previous sentences. See Li Ling 李零, *Guodian Chujian jiaoduji* 郭店楚簡校讀記, 2002: 95.

[453] I am referring the reader to the pages that show the slips' photographs, and to the number of the slips where the text I am quoting appears.

[454] The precondition of rectifying oneself through self-cultivation before attempting to govern the world is a common theme in Early Chinese political texts. The *locus classicus* in the *Analects* reads: The Master said: "If a minister rectifies himself, what difficulty will he have in assisting in government? If he cannot rectify himself, how can he rectify others?" 子曰：苟正其身矣，於從政乎何有？不能正其身，如正人何？The same theme appears with similar phrasing in parallel passages in *Shuoyuan jinzhu jinyi* 1: 41 and *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 2: 15.

gods that must receive offerings and religious rituals.[455] Religious rituals have certainly the goal of modifying the gods' interaction with humans, to make them benevolent. Yet they precisely assume that the gods' agency is outside our control, and it does not necessarily fit our interests.[456]

Together with these numinous forces, or precisely made out of a combination of them, we find the supra-notions of fate and time. In the last paragraph of *The Way of Tang and Yu*, the author argues that, even though Yao was born as Son of Heaven, and he had cultivated the virtues, he would not have gained control of All under Heaven had not it been because of the matching forces of fate and time/opportunity:

古者堯生[457]於[458]天子，而有天下，聖以遇命，仁以逢時。[459] 未嘗遇[命而][460]並[461]於大時，神明將[462]從，天地佑之，[463]縱仁聖可與，[464]時弗可及矣。(*Guodian* 40: 14-15)

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[455] *Guodian Chumu zhujian*: 157.

[456] Puett, 1994: 27-28 and 35-36.

[457] *sheng* 生 can be read as "being born" in the royal family with the succeeding king position, as in my translation above, or as *sheng* 升, to raise as Son of Heaven, much as Shun would raise after Yao despite his plebeian origins. As Cook notes, in the received literature there is more evidence for Yao having received the throne through hereditary succession than by abdication. See Cook, 2012: 559, footnote 87. Although it seems open to interpretation in this text, I would suggest that, being *Tang Yu zhi dao* an open and unapologetic statement in favor of abdication, had the author wanted to claim non-royal origins for Yao, he would have done so more explicitly.

[458] Li Ling reads *yu* 於 as *wei* 為. Li Ling, 2002: 98. Also in Li Ling "Guodian Chujian jiaoduji" 郭店楚簡校讀記, 1999.

[459] Zhou Fengwu ends the sentence here, and Cook follows. I agree with this arrangement. See Zhou Fengwu 周鳳五, "Guodian Chumu zhujian 'Tang Yu zhi dao' xinshi" 郭店楚墓竹簡唐虞之道新釋, 1999; and Cook, 2012: 559, footnote 90.

[460] Missing characters. Li Ling supplies them with *xian* 賢 and *sui* 雖. Li Ling 2002: 98. I follow Zhou Fengwu 1999 and Cook 2012 in the choice of characters, but not in their reading.

[461] I follow Li Ling in reading *bing* 並 as *bing* 秉, to grasp. Li Ling, 2002: 98.

[462] The editors rendered this graph as *jun* 均: "all," "equally." Even though the change in meaning is not decisive, I follow Li Ling in reading *jiang* 將. Li Ling 2002: 98.

In antiquity, Yao was born as the Son of Heaven, but the reason why he was in control of All under Heaven was that his sagely virtue encountered [favorable] fate, and his humanity met with [appropriate] times. Had he not yet encountered his fate and grasped the great opportunity, [with the result that] everything numinous and luminous would follow, [and that] Heaven and Earth would assist him, [then] even though his humanity and sagacity were worthy of elevation, the right time could not have been made to arrive.

Similar arguments can be seen in the *Qiongda yishi* 窮達以時, also a bamboo text from Guodian, which argued that historical figures such as Shun and Guan Zhong 管仲 were only able to succeed by virtue of timely and fated encounters.[465] *Ming* is that external and objective reality that one encounters (*yu* 遇), for good or bad. Often it only frustrates the subject's aspirations. Nevertheless, when the course of fate matches the moral qualities of a person, we can expect great outcomes.

But, even though it escapes our control and can act in detriment to our goals, according to *Tang Yu zhi dao, ming* should become an object of our accepting understanding. The bamboo manuscript contains the phrase *zhi ming* 知命, understanding fate, in the following context:

夫古者舜居於草茅之中而不憂，登[466]為天子而不驕。居草茅之中而不憂，知命也。登為天子而不驕，不專[467]也。(*Guodian* 40: 16-17)

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[463] Li Ling punctuates with a comma where other editors have seen a full stop. I follow Li Ling (2002: 98) and Chen Wei 陳偉 (*Guodian zhushu bieshi* 郭店竹書別釋, 2012) to see the entire sentence as a hypothetical conditional: "had he not yet…" (*wei chang* 未嘗), "then, even though…" (*cong* 縱). For a summary of other arrangements and word choices, see Cook 2012, vol. 1: 559 and Allan, 2015: 130.

[464] I follow Li Ling in reading *yu* 與 as *ju* 舉, to elevate. Li Ling 2002: 98.

[465] Next chapter presents an analysis of the *Qiongda yishi*.

[466] This graph has been read as *shen* 身 ("his person") by the original editors, and as *sheng* 升, ("to elevate") by Qiu Xigui and others. I follow Li Ling in reading *deng* 登, with the similar meaning of "climbing up," "rising." Li Ling, 2002: 98. All choices point at the same reading.

[467] I follow Li Ling's reading of this graph as *zhuan* 專, "especial," "unique." Another possible reading is *liu* 流, in the sense of "to give oneself to abandon." See Cook, 2012: 560. I understand

In antiquity, Shun lived in the countryside[468] and this did not make him afflicted. When he became the Son of Heaven, this did not make him arrogant.[469] Living in the countryside without feeling affliction is to understand fate. Becoming the Son of Heaven without turning arrogant is not to feel special.

The precedent that Shun set became a teaching for the contemporaneous generation of politicians:

方在下位，不以匹夫為輕；及其有天下也，不以天下為重。有天下弗能益，無天下弗能損。(*Guodian* 40: 18-19)

When placed in a low position, they must not consider the ordinary person unimportant. And when in possession of All under Heaven, they must not consider [the possession of] All under Heaven as the most important. Possessing All under Heaven does not add anything. Not possessing All under Heaven does not decrease anything.

The author of the *Tang Yu zhi dao* encourages his contemporary politicians to "understand fate" the way Shun did. Even when Shun lived in a low position in the middle of nowhere, the author observes, he had no thirst to become powerful and important. As Sarah Allan notes, "the statement that Shun did not feel resentful even though he lived in a thatched hut [what I have

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*bu zhuan*不專 in the same sense given in other early texts of not acting arbitrarily and tyrannically according to one's own wishes. See, for instance, *Wenzi* 4: 5b (不為始，不專己), and *Qian fu lun* 6.25: 293 (不專任以斷事). If we read the graph as *zhuan* 專, it can also be understood in the sense of "monopolizing" (the throne, or its benefits; see Allan 2015: 93-95) within a family lineage. Namely, the opposite of abdication, as in the opening sentence of the manuscript: "The way of Tang and Yu was to abdicate and not to monopolize" 唐虞之道，禪而不專 (Li Ling 2002: 95).

[468] Other texts, such as the manuscript from the Shanghai Museum Collection *Zigao* 子羔, and the *Zhanguoce* 戰國策, coincide in that Yao found Shun in the middle of the countryside, that is, far away from the court. See Cook, 2012: 560, footnote 102.

[469] The idea of rising to a high position or being morally superior without showing pride is a common theme in early texts. For superiority in terms of moral character, see the *Analects,* which contrasts the superior and inferior person in this way: "The gentleman is poised and not arrogant; the base person is arrogant and not poised" 君子泰而不驕，小人驕而不泰 (*Shisan jing zhushu, Lunyu* 13: 119b). For superiority in terms of position, see *Zhongyong* 中庸 describing the gentleman: "Thus, when occupying a high position he is not arrogant, and in a low position he is not insubordinate" 是故居上不驕，為下不倍 (*Shisan jing zhushu, Zhongyong* 31: 898a). A closer contrast to the one that appears in *Tang Yu zhi dao* is found in *Lüshi chunqiu*: "Acting above as the Son of Heaven he is not arrogant; acting below as a common man he is not depressed"上為天子而不驕，下為匹夫而不憯 (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 1.2: 21).

translated as the "countryside"] implies that before Yao raised him up, he was a man of worth waiting for recognition rather than a simple farmer."[470] Allan interprets Shun's behavior as virtuous. He would be "the epitome of humility."[471] In my understanding, Shun knew that sociopolitical rise was outside of his control, no matter how cultivated and well prepared he could be to be of service to the realm. His lack of emotional response in the face of the unresponsiveness of the world to his moral cultivation shows his realism. It shows that Shun understands *ming.*[472]

Of course, understanding *ming* is a characteristic of the virtuous person and a precondition to become a gentleman,[473] because the fact that one understands *ming* has the implication that the external world of fate cannot impose any limits on inner moral development. Shun would not wish for anything to change; he had no aspirations or desires for his life to become different. He would not show ambition, resentment or regret. Understanding fate has, then, two sides. On one hand, while self-cultivation is in our power and control, the subject has no say on what will happen as a consequence of his moral behavior, because this outcome belongs to the external realm of fate. From this perspective, fate can act as a detrimental limit to human agency, and becomes problematic. On the other hand, when one understands the workings of fate and accepts them, fate cannot do anything against the subject's mind, against

[470] Allan, 2015: 109.

[471] Allan, 2015: 109.

[472] A reader interested in literary and philosophical comparisons will like to know that there are similar lines of argument in the Western tradition. Famously, Petrarch's *Remedies Against Fortuna* reinterpreted the Stoic standpoint towards fate and created a therapeutic manual to learn to cope with Fortuna's capricious lashes. The advice was to develop indifference and distance: to learn to care as little for lucky outcomes as for disastrous ones.

[473] And a precondition to become a "gentleman": 不知命，無以為君子也 (*Shisan jing zhushu, Lunyu* 20: 180a).

his interiority. The subject's moral autonomy remains intact as an untouchable and invulnerable inner realm. This is the proposed solution to the problem of the reification of fate.

IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we have seen that the reifying pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world construes fate as an object. Yet in Early China fate is an object that acts. How can this be the case? Can objects be agents? When we think about agency, we normally think about subjective, human agency. In the standard theory, agency is the capacity to select intentional, goal-directed actions. The agent's mental states and processes cause the intentionality of action that will lead to actually acting.[474] Our conception of agency, insofar it regards distinctively human agency, is permeated with qualities such as intentionality, purpose, volition, reflectivity, empathy and meaning, all of them qualities that, in principle, cannot be ascribed to non-thinking, unconscious objects.

Many have been the critics of the standard theory of agency, which, it has been repeatedly argued, fails to capture the phenomenon of agency in all of its complexity. In particular, the critics have questioned the necessity of the notions of intentionality and causation when we discuss agency, as it seems that entities without intentional capacity can also perform actions. Within this line of thought, Sociologist Bruno Latour has redefined agency to account for non-subjective agents. If we were to suspend the qualities that we associate with humanity and subjectivity, and to reduce agency to its minimal notion, we would find that anything that

[474] On the standard conception and theory of agency, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/, publication of 2015.

modifies a state of affairs is an agent.[475] In his analysis, a minimal notion of agency allows for a wider understanding of what may count as an agent.

Latour has devised a few hermeneutical keys or identification tests to decipher when we may be dealing with an agent in oral or written accounts. First of all, Latour points out, agencies are always presented in accounts doing something. An agency must make a difference; it must produce an effect, a change in the state of affairs. Something that does not produce transformation and makes no difference is not an agency.[476] In Early Chinese accounts, *ming* when understood as fate-object is always presented as doing things, making things happen as well as preventing things from happening. *Ming* has a concrete and visible effect on the lives of humans, which according to Latour's foremost and most fundamental test would qualify it as an agent.

At the same time, Latour continues, accounts of agency are likely to withdraw other possible agencies as illegitimate.[477] We often see this phenomenon in Early Chinese texts, with structures in the form of 非 x 也, y 也 (it is not due to x, it is due to y), or 皆 x 也, 非 y (it is all due to x, not to y). These structures most often oppose the agencies of Heaven and the human, or that of fate and the human. For instance, one of the chapters of the *Zhuangzi* attributes the "ten thousand types of evil" to the agency of Heaven, withdrawing the possibility that those evils could come from humanity: "If this is so yet the ten thousand types of evil arrive, it is all due to Heaven, not to men" 若是而萬惡至者，皆天也，而非人也.[478] Contrasting what lies with

[475] Bruno Latour, 2005: 71.

[476] Latour, 2005: 52-53.

[477] Latour, 2005: 56.

[478] *Zhuangzi jijie* 23: 201.

humans and what lies with fate, the *Liezi* explains that "all of the lives and deaths do not lie with other entities and do not lie with myself: they are all due to fate" 然而生生死死，非物非我，皆命也.[479] The opposite case is found in the *Shuoyuan*, where Confucius identifies three kinds of death that are self-inflicted, and cannot be attributed to fate: "these three (kinds of death) are not due to fate; the person inflicts them on himself" 此三者，非命也，人自取之.[480] All these examples show accounts of both Heaven and fate represented as agents in accounts that identify a source of agency by means of withdrawing the possibility of a different source of agency's responsibility for a certain outcome or event.

As a further test, agencies must have figurations; namely, they must appear fleshed out in accounts, identified with something no matter how vague this identification may be. Against his fellow social scientists, Latour insists that there are many more figures to illustrate agency than anthropomorphic ones.[481] Throughout this chapter we have seen a diversity of accounts of non-human agency figurations, concretely in the forms of Heaven, the times, and a somewhat more vague fate. Finally, according to Latour, agencies have their own accounts of the theory of action where they fit. These theories of action explain how the agency is supposed to act, how it makes things happen or prevents things from happening: how it makes its influence felt.[482] For instance, one may ask whether the agent acts directly or, on the contrary, whether it has a mediator. There are different ways in which we can understand non-human and non-subjective agency in Early Chinese philosophy. If we can agree that fate is construed as an object in the Early Chinese

[479] *Liezi jishi* 6.6: 203.

[480] *Shuoyuan jinzhu jinyi* 17: 7b-8a.

[481] Latour, 2005: 54.

[482] Latour, 2005: 58.

reifying pattern of thinking, and that at the same time it is presented as an agent, it is then time to ask how fate is portrayed to act.

Early Chinese accounts of the agency of fate fail to provide a definite theory of action. Even more, many of these accounts openly claim the impossibility of knowing how fate acts, with the result that we find ourselves at a loss when attempting to identify a theory of action behind fate's non-subjective agency. In this situation, a comparison with the way in which Heaven is portrayed to act in early texts is in order. As opposed to fate, Heaven is portrayed exercising its agency in a variety of ways. First of all, Heaven, as an intentional, subjective and anthropomorphized force, takes direct action when it supports a virtuous leader or when it sends down warnings and calamities in the form of natural phenomena. In the *Mozi* we learn that, as a reward to the ancient sages' efforts to understand Heaven's will (*tian zhi* 天志) and to act according to it,

天之為寒熱也節，四時調，陰陽雨露也時，五穀孰，六畜遂，疾災**戾**疫凶饑則不至。[483]

Heaven made heat and cold temperature be well adjusted, the four seasons harmonious, the *yin yang* and rain and dew, [Heaven] made timely. [As a consequence], the five [kinds of] grains could ripen, and the six [kinds of] domestic animals could mature. Disease, disasters, crime, pestilence, inauspiciousness and famine did not arrive.

That is to say, Heaven is portrayed causing things to happen through its own power. But Heaven can also act through other means. In modern social sciences there are different theories of social agentivity that aim to explain how social and nonphysical entities such as corporations and economic structures can take action, not directly but through the use of human representatives.[484]

[483] *Mozi xiangu* 7.27: 182.

[484] See Robinson, "A Theory of Social Agentivity and its Integration into the Descriptive Ontology for Linguistic and Cognitive Engineering," 2011: 62-86.

Although social objects are not supposed to be able to act in physical ways, they can take action through physical agents, such as the people who work and lead the corporations. In Early Chinese texts, Heaven is also sometimes portrayed as making use of human agents[485] to achieve its goals. One of the anecdotes that we have previously seen in this chapter provides an example of Heaven's social agentivity. As the reader may remember, Mencius' failure to encounter the right opportunity to advance in his career, the meeting with the prince of Lu, even though seemingly provoked by a persuasive Zang Cang who would have spoken to the prince against Mencius, must be understood as the workings of Heaven through a human representative. Zang Cang, or any other person for that matter, Mencius explains, has no power to prevent the rise and fall of opportunities.[486] Only Heaven has the capacity to do so, yet Heaven acts through human agents in whom therefore the responsibility and causation of outcomes is erroneously placed.

Finally, as a third theory of action for Heaven we find the *wuwei* 無為 theory. Some texts describe the actions of Heaven as "non-action," namely non-goal oriented, spontaneous, adaptive and, importantly, non-intentional. This is the case in texts that share a worldview in which Heaven should not be anthropomorphized, but should rather be understood as a natural element. The *Lunheng* offers a well-known refutation of the purported subjective qualities of intentionality and purposiveness of Heaven, and explains that the actions of Heaven happen in a natural, spontaneous way. The "Ziran" chapter responds to common arguments, such as those of the *Mozi*, which claim that Heaven produces goods and means of sustenance for the benefit of

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Some scholars have already suggested something similar. Chen Daqi 陳大齊, referring to the *Mengzi*'s observation that "what is done without no one doing it, is due to Heaven" 莫之為而為者，天也, interprets that Heaven acts through human agency. See Chen, *Mengzi dai jie lu* 孟子待解**錄**, 1981: 94-96. See the discussion in Shun, 1994: 77.

[485] Note that the word "agent" in English also has the meaning of "acting on behalf of another."

[486] *Shisan jing zhu shu, Mengzi* 2B: 48a.

humans (或說以為天生五穀以食人),[487] or that Heaven has intentions, as movement must be preceded by desire (有欲故動).[488] In opposition to these views, the chapter argues that the movement of Heaven is unintentional (*bu yu* 不欲) and spontaneous (*ziran* 自然). Much as the *dao* 道 is repeatedly portrayed to act in early texts, the Heaven of the *Lunheng* acts in a *wuwei* 無為 manner.

But what about *ming*-fate? Could it possibly also act through non-action? To my knowledge, there are no accounts that relate *ming* and *wuwei* in Early China. Does fate act directly, then, or perhaps through human agents? When fate is made responsible for a premature death, is it acting directly to end the appointed person's life? Or, when fate is made responsible for someone's distress and misfortune, is it acting through human agents, which we could call key actors, who would function as fate's puppets to bring a particular situation about? Although we may want to hypothesize that this might be the case, the truth is that our early accounts are far from clear in this respect.

Early texts do not construe a clear relationship between fate, as an agent, and its actions. They are not concerned with how fate acts, or, for that matter, with the theory of action behind fate's agency. What they are concerned about, and what they tirelessly emphasize, is the fact that fate does act and that its actions are widely felt, despite human impossibility to understand how it happens. Fate affects all spheres of life, yet it remains unknowable:

仲尼曰：死生存亡，窮達貧富，賢與不肖，毀譽、饑**渴**、寒暑，是事之變，命之行也；日夜相代乎前，而知不能規乎其始者也。[489]

[487] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 54: 775.

[488] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 54: 776.

[489] *Zhuangzi jijie* 5: 52.

Zhongni said: “Death and life, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and wealth, worthiness and unworthiness, slander and praise, hunger and thirst, cold and heat; these are the transformations of circumstances, the operations of fate. Day and night they replace each other before us, yet our understanding has not capacity to discover their origination.”

The operations of fate (命之行) are felt worldwide, yet their origination remains in the dark for human knowledge. As we have previously noted in this chapter, according to Early Chinese accounts of fate’s agency, the way in which fate acts is mysterious, which makes it difficult if not impossible to understand the theory of action that lies behind. As a consequence of the process of reification, fate became an unknowable and opaque object towards which human knowledge stayed powerless. The qualification of unknowability, to be often seen in early texts, seems to go even further. Not only it is true that the ways in which fate exercises its influence on human life are unknowable, but even more so that, when humans search for a causing agency, and they fail to find out why and how something happened, then they attribute it to fate. An anecdote in the *Zhuangzi* provides a clear illustration of this train of thought. This is the way in which Zisang explains how he reached the conclusion that his situation of extreme poverty could only be caused by fate:

曰：吾思乎使我至此極者而弗得也。父母豈欲吾貧哉？天無私覆，地無私載，天地豈私貧我哉？求其為之者而不得也。然而至此極者，命也夫！[490]

[Zisang] said: “I was thinking about what may have caused me to reach such a extreme situation, and I could not reach a conclusion. How would my parents have wished me to be so poor? Heaven covers all without partiality, and Earth sustains all without partiality; how would have Heaven and Earth made me so poor with such a partiality? I was trying to find out what had done it, and I could not do so. But here I am in this extreme situation: it is no other than fate!”

A second way in which humans recognize the agency of fate, as opposed to other causal agencies, is when they attempt by all means to reach a particular outcome or to attain a certain goal, yet

[490] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 69.

they fail. Then they find as explanation that there is a major force working against their efforts, which they call fate:

孔子遊於匡，宋人圍之數匝，而絃歌不惙。子路入見，曰：何夫子之娛也？孔子曰：來吾語女。我諱窮久矣，而不免，命也.[491]

When Confucius was travelling in Kuang, some people of Song surrounded him several ranks deep, but he kept singing to his lute without being troubled by it. Entering, Zilu saw him and said: "How is it, Master, that you are so amused?" Confucius replied: "Come here, and I will tell you. I have been trying to avoid such strait for a long time, and the fact that I have not been able to escape it shows that it is due to fate."

These two ways of identifying fate as the agent behind inexplicable and inevitable outcomes remind us of the two definitions of *ming* with which we began this chapter. First, from the point of view of the causing agency, we saw that *ming* was what happens with no one causing it. Namely, what happens not as a consequence of human effort, and with unknown cause and means of execution. Just like Zisang observes in the passage above, when an outcome is inexplicable and we cannot ascribe its agency to any other potential agent, the outcome must be attributed to fate. Second, from the point of view of its repercussion in humans, we saw that *ming* was what remained beyond our control, the inevitable. Much as Confucius observes in the passage above, when we put our efforts in achieving a particular goal yet we do not succeed, it shows that the outcome is inevitable and it must be due to fate. The way in which fate acts is described as inexplicable and inevitable, unknowable and inviolable. Which leads us to the conclusion that the theory of action behind fate's agency in Early Chinese philosophy is no other than a theory of inexplicability and inevitability. [492]

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[491] *Zhuangzi jijie* 17: 145.

[492] In his article in defense of fatalism, Solomon explained that "Fate and fatalism can exist without acknowledging any agency. The emphasis is on the narrative where outcomes are doomed necessary, and not in the agency producing them." See Solomon, 2003: 442. His study does not concern Chinese views of fate and fatalism. Speaking specifically for the Early Chinese case, I agree with his general claim in that narratives privilege the necessary character of

This discussion helps us pinpoint which might be the central feature of fate in Early China: fate's unknowability, accompanied by its inevitability, makes it the most uncertain of agencies, the one that produces the deepest sense of helplessness in humans. At the core of the human experience of fate we find mystery, uncertainty and helplessness. Much as any other agent, human or non-human, fate displays its own form of autonomy. No autonomous agent can be fully controlled, and therefore the interaction with autonomous agents generates contingency and uncertainty. In the case of the military, we saw that the commander can never fully predict how the enemy will behave, at the same time that the enemy can never fully predict how the other commander and his army will behave. We called this the issue of "double contingency."[493] The commander applies all sorts of strategies and techniques to predict and manipulate the enemy's behavior, but the enemy's response is ultimately out of the commander's control. However, as contingent as the interaction between two intentional agents might be, in dealing with another subjectivity, as we have seen, there are many possible transactions. There are possibilities of communication, interpretation, persuasion, prediction, anticipation, even manipulation. For instance, as we have seen in the *Mozi*, the ancient sages were able to discern Heaven's will and act according to it, in order to modify Heaven's behavior towards them:

然有所不為天之所欲，而為天之所不欲，則夫天亦且不為人之所欲，而為人之所不欲矣。人之所不欲者何也？曰病疾禍祟也。若已不為天之所欲，而為天之所不欲，是率天下之萬民以從事乎禍祟之中也。故古者聖王明知天鬼之所福，而辟天鬼之所憎，以求興天下之利，而除天下之害。[494]

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outcomes over the means or the agency that make these outcomes happen. However, in Early China fate is thought of as an agent, even though an agent whose theory of action remains unknowable.

[493] The term "double contingency" was first coined by Parson. See Parsons, *The Social System*, 1951.

[494] *Mozi xiangu* 7.27: 182.

> Being so, when [the ruler of a state] does not do what Heaven desires, but does what Heaven does not desire, Heaven in consequence will also not do what humans desire but will do what humans do not desire. What is it that humans do not desire? It is disease, suffering, disasters and calamities. Therefore, not to do what Heaven desires but do what Heaven does not desired is to lead the multitudes in the world to disasters and calamity. Therefore, the ancient sage-kings discerningly understood what Heaven and the spirits would bless and avoided what they would curse in order to raise benefits for the world and to eliminate calamities.

There are no such possible transactions in the face of autonomous, non-subjective agency such as a reified, opaque fate. The fact that the motives or intentions behind fate's actions can never be known (probably because it is a non-intentional form of agency), combined with the fact that the outcomes of fate's agency are ultimately inviolable and inevitable, makes of fate, in the mind of Early Chinese thinkers, the single most overwhelming kind of agency that there is.

The blows of fate made people feel helpless. In Greek, the sense of helplessness and want of means was expressed in the term *amechanía*, literally the lack of *mechané*, the cunning or device humans can use to get out of a situation of existential difficulty.[495] As philosopher and cultural critic Sloterdijk remarks, by lacking *mechané* "human beings are denied just what the Greeks believed made them wholly human, that is, the ability to retaliate against attacks, being equipped with options for action or, as we would say today, being in full control of their agency."[496] In other words, *amechanía* is the situation in which the person is deprived of the most basic sense of existential competence. If we call competence to the possession of the skills, knowledge or capacity required to act effectively in a situation (usually a job in today's language), existential competence is the possession of skills, the *mechané*, to act effectively in life. In the face of fate, both Ancient Greek and Ancient Chinese thinkers felt an inextricable lack of existential competence. The non-subjective agency of a reified fate hit humans out. It left

[495] Sloterdijk, 2016: 266.

[496] Sloterdijk, 2016: 266-267.

them feeling powerless and humbled. The reification of fate made of fate an agent which could not be interpreted, tackled or faced, but which could only be awaited and accepted in the best terms possible.

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In the Early Chinese reifying pattern of thinking, fate created for some an imperative problem that required psychological and philosophical resolution. In order to recover existential competence, and to deal with what seems to be beyond human control, some new *mechané* should be designed. Which solutions did Early Chinese thinkers propose to deal with the problem of a reified fate and the uncertainty that it produced? By which means did they recover their existential competence? With the *Mengzi* and the *Tang Yu zhi dao*, we have pointed at one of the proposed solutions in this chapter. In the next chapter, we dig deeper into this and other solutions, exploring their ramifications and connections with the notions of opportunity, morality and responsibility, and I place adaptability as one of the main approaches to the problem created by the reification of fate.

CHAPTER 4

COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY

OVERVIEW

The previous chapter closed with a problem posed by the process of reification of fate in Early China: faced with a world of objective, external, opposing and limiting reality, how can humans recover their existential competence? In this chapter I will discuss and distinguish different Early Chinese approaches to cope with an uncertain future and deal with ordinary life in Early China. I will locate adaptability among them as one of the strongest yet generally unrecognized proposals on how to cope with uncertainty and a fate, namely what seems beyond our control in the human sphere of activity.

It is important to notice that the proposal of adaptive behavior that I discuss in this chapter moralizes adaptation. In the second chapter, the military texts highlighted a purely instrumental use of adaptability where adaptation was a tool for successful action, and where successful action was understood as sheer efficacy. The agent was described as attempting to achieve certain goals, and adaptation was presented as an expedient means to achieve them. As we have seen, there was room for morality in the instrumental approach to adaptation, but morality was not an issue by itself. Remember that both Liu Bang's and King Wu's focus on adaptability resulted in beneficial consequences for the people. Yet their actions were not guided by considerations of morality. Liu Bang and King Wu were being strategic so as to achieve their goals, and adaptation was the best means to do so.

In this chapter I discuss a moralized version of adaptive behavior. Adaptation is still understood as successful action, but the notion of success comes to be defined differently. The text I use to illustrate moral adaptation is a section in "Great Ancestral Master" 大宗師, a chapter in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. There, adaptation as a successful action is not a mere expedient means, but an action leading to improve our quality of life in this world. Traditionally readers have made moral "Confucian" readings of the figures of King Wu and Liu Bang. However, I have shown in the second chapter that when they act adaptively they do not do so out of morality but out of strategy. Interestingly, and against our expectations, it is in the *Zhuangzi*, traditionally considered a Daoist text, where we find a proposal of moral adaptation. I use the term "moral" to indicate discourses that center on the field of practical reason: deciding how to act in the interest of the individual good and achieving the better possible life. That is, a moral meaning for a discourse on the good life.

I first describe what I classify as non-philosophical approaches to uncertainty and fate, including hemerology and divination. In the second part, I analyze several philosophical approaches, adaptation being among them. All of these proposals work within the reifying pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world in Early China. They deal with the feeling of uncertainty and helplessness that a reified fate produced, and attempt to restore a sense of existential competence. As I discuss the way in which adaptation was used as an epistemological and behavioral tool to gain a sense of competence and control over reality, I will take seriously the other proposals, both philosophical and non-philosophical. This allows me to distinguish discourses of adaptation from other discourses about how to act, to trace the boundaries of the discourses of adaptation, and better define what the proponents of adaptation meant and wanted to achieve. At the same time, this comparative approach avoids the common

error of looking at ideas as widespread and continuous entities, as unproblematic essences representative of particular cultures. I will show that there is more to Early China than accommodation to calendric rules, and will demonstrate the relevance of adaptation in Early Chinese issues related to philosophy of action, and philosophy of life. The analysis of adaptation as a solution to the problem of fate will eventually help us recognize a pattern of thought and action in Early China, which I call the Adaptive Pattern, and which will be the subject of the next and last chapter.

HEMEROLOGY AND DIVINATION

Calendric Knowledge and Social Organization

It is well accepted among scholars of ancient civilizations that calendric knowledge was a fundamental part of the ordering and organization of ancient societies. Time is at the core of human activity, and social systems require the organization of time.[497] Sasha Stern, at the beginning of her extensive cultural and political study of the calendar in the ancient societies of Greece, Rome, Egypt, and the Near East, validates this view: "Without dating and time-keeping devices, it would be close to impossible to coordinate political, economic, religious, and all other social activities; without calendars, society would not be able to function."[498] She interestingly continues: "This is surely correct, but only part of the story. The calendar is far more than a functional, utilitarian device for the organization of social life. As a shared conception of time or of the flow of human and natural events, which it assumes (for example) to be structured and recurrent, the calendar contributes to a certain perception of reality, and hence, to socially shared

[497] Goody, "Time II: Social Organization," 1968: 30.

[498] Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 2012: 1-2.

world views. Calendars have often been invested with ideological meanings that transcend the temporal organization of society and assume sometimes cosmic significance."[499]

A similar statement could be made about the status of calendric knowledge in Early China. In China, much as in other ancient civilizations, the sky was scrutinized in search of patterns and regularities that could be applied to the ordering of society. The seasons became the external representation of the cycles that underlie the order of the cosmos, and the application of this natural order to the organization of daily social life would be used to sanction the legitimacy of human activities in both the public and private spheres.[500] Calendars provided fixed guidelines for behavior. In this sense, they were a means of managing risk and minimizing uncertainty. Lisa Raphals gives a nice analogy to explain how divination (which in her account includes hemerology) provided the person with a useful set of principles of action that, if followed, optimized the efficacy of one's actions: a railway timetable, she says, does not make the train

[499] Stern 2012: 2.

[500] This kind of argument has been explored in McNeal, *Conquer and Govern*, 2012: 30. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, 1969: 336. And Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind*, 1991: 153, among others.

The concepts of "public" and "private" spheres translate the Early Chinese *gong* 公 and *si* 私. The meaning of these words changed over the Western and Eastern Zhou periods. Early Zhou sources such as the odes (*shi* 詩) and the documents (*shu* 書) attest that *gong* and *si* referred to things or people such as "one's family" as opposed to "the royal family." By Warring States they had acquired a strong moral implication: "public/outer circle responsibility" such as following the law, as opposed to "family/inner circle responsibility" such as filiality. Also, "common welfare"/"public interest" as opposed to "one's own benefit"/"private bias." In this sense, *si* came to have a negative connotation of egoism and partiality. See Wang Zhongjiang 王中江, "Zhongguo zhexue zhong de 'gong si zhi bian'" 中國哲學的'公私之辨', 1995. Kam-por Yu, Julia Tao and Philip J. Ivanhoe eds., *Taking Confucian Ethics Seriously*, 2010: 74-81. In the context of the calendar and social organization, I use "public" to refer to the activities carried out by a politician for the collective organization of society, and "private" to refer to the activities of an individual with the more restricted interest of his family or inner circle in mind.

arrive; it does allow one to be on the platform on time.[501] Hemerology is knowledge about how the world works so that we can conform to it. Conforming to it would make our actions more efficacious. Just think of going to the train station at a random time and waiting for the next train to your destination to arrive as opposed to showing up at the tracks right on time for boarding.

Yet in Early China abiding by the order imposed by the movements of the celestial bodies and their earthly influences was not simply a question of functionality or efficacy in human agency. At the public level, it became a question of state ideology that contributed to the arguments around who is a legitimate, deserving and sage ruler. Not only the utility of doing activities in a "timely" manner was embedded in ritual and religious significance that gave consistency and coherence to the ruling institution. In some instances, the ideology was reversed to imply that not rigorously following the calendric rules that reflected the order of nature could bring disorder into nature itself, let alone great chaos and disaster for human society. At the private level too, calendric knowledge established the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of certain times to enact daily activities of all sorts as well as somewhat special events. Transgressing those rules of action did not simply result in lack of efficacy, but could also bring about terrible consequences including death.[502] This suggests that the calendar was more than a useful tool; it was a prescriptive method that set the lines of adequate behavior.

[501] Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*, 2013: 3.

[502] A picturesque example attested on the Kongjiapo daybook is that cutting a mulberry tree on the wrong day could entail the death of one's wife (Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian", 2011: 109). Also, not following the diviner's advice could entail one's own death (Smith, "Zhouyi Interpretation from Accounts in the *Zuozhuan*," 1989: 438).

Calendric Knowledge and Prediction

Calendric knowledge had also a predictive function in ancient societies. In the words of Merlin Donald: "Astronomical knowledge, like writing, was a powerful device of social control; the measurement of time in terms of astronomical cycles was probably the ultimate controlling activity in early agricultural societies, setting dates for planting, harvesting, storage, and distribution of grain for religious observations, as well as a number of cyclical social functions… Quite early in the history of visuographic symbolism, analog devices were invented that served both a measurement and predictive function in representing time."[503] Hemerology was used to measure time and thus arrange human activity according to the natural cycles (which was specially important in agrarian societies), but also to predict what was coming cyclically. Pankenier remarks that keeping track of the time and predicting the future are two sides of the same coin, not easy to separate. Lists of observations were made to keep track of the time. The storage and further analysis of the data contained in these lists in search of regularities would favor the formulation of predictions.[504] The Early Chinese textual type known as "Monthly Ordinances" (see below) not only contains commands on proper seasonal action; it also predicts what will happen if the ruler were or were not to implement the proper ritual ordinances of a given month. Daybooks (*rishu* 日書) fulfilled a similar function when predicting the outcomes of engaging in certain activities at certain times. This explains why Raphals would include hemerology within the category of mantic methods. Calendars and its derived knowledge systems were used to predict the outcomes of future events. They were means to diminish uncertainty, cope with the future and mediate notions of risk.

[503] Donald, 1991: 335.

[504] Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, 2013: 153 (footnote 8). Donald, 1991: 339-340.

Monthly Ordinances

"Monthly Ordinances" is an Early Chinese text type of which we have several transmitted instantiations. It takes the English denomination from the "Yueling" 月令 chapter of the *Liji*, but other texts such as the *Guanzi* "You guan" 幼官, and the *Shize xun* 時則訓 ("Teaching on Seasonal Rules") chapter of *Huainanzi* 淮南子, ranging in date from Warring States to early Han times, also count as instances of the same textual type.[505] "Monthly Ordinances" are almanac-like texts that describe the monthly atmospheric phenomenon in a twelve-month, four-season year, together with correlated phenomena such as numbers, smells, musical notes, and bodily parts. Each month is also associated with both descriptive phenomena in the natural realm, such as winds, position of the celestial bodies and weather, and prescriptive activities in the human realm, such as rituals and warlike operations, prayers and teaching instructions, agricultural cultivation and everyday activities for the ruler, to whom the transmitted versions of this text type are addressed. Activities are detailed as to what kind of clothes the ruler should wear, what kind of vessels he should use and what kind of food he should eat at every particular time of the year. These monthly ordinances with which the ruler needs to comply in order to maintain peace and order under Heaven represent a phenological knowledge[506] that seems to have appeared in early Zhou times at the latest. One of the first records of both the phenological knowledge and calendrical technique in which to base human

[505] For references about these texts, see section "Adaptation Without Yin" in Chapter 1, especially footnotes 73 and 74.

[506] Phenology is the study of the timing of natural events and how they are influenced by seasonal and interannual variations in climate. It is primarily concerned with the dates of the first occurrences of biological events in their annual cycle.

activity is found in the ode "Seventh Month" 七月 of the Airs of Bin 豳風 in the *Shijing* 詩經.[507]

"Seven Month" surveys monthly agricultural activities in the fields according to climatologic conditions and atmospheric changes. "Monthly Ordinances" go a step further, to become a whole system of guiding principles for government policy. The ruler possesses required knowledge about the natural order, and needs to carefully adjust his actions –and the people's actions— to the changing cycles of nature in order to create and maintain social order. More importantly, the ruler's conformity to natural cycles becomes a crucial factor not only for maintaining order in the human realm as a reflection of the natural order, but also for guaranteeing that the natural order itself, which existed even before human life came onto the scene, will remain. As such, the figure of the ruler protects the well functioning of the whole world and becomes legitimated as part of the natural process, a crucial element of the universal order indispensable for its preservation. Here is an example of the disasters that would originate from confusing the activities proper to different months:

仲冬行夏令，則其國乃旱，氛霧冥冥，雷乃發聲。行秋令，則天時雨汁，瓜瓠不成，國有大兵。行春令，則蝗蟲為敗，水泉咸竭，民多疥癘。[508]

If in the second month of winter [the ruler] carried out the summer ordinances, his state would endure droughts, vapors and fogs would make it dim and dusky, and thunder would utter its voice. If [the ruler] carried out the autumn ordinances, the sky would be rainy and slushy, melons and gourds would not mature, and there would be great battles in the state. If [the ruler] carried out the spring ordinances, locusts would spoil and decay [everything], the natural springs of water would all dry up, and many of the people would suffer from scabies and pestilence.

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[507] The ode "Seventh Month" (Mao 154) in the Airs of the State 國風 section of the Book of Poetry 詩經, which is believed to date from Early Western Zhou. See *Shisan jing zhushu, Shijing,* p. 280a. After "Seventh Month," "Little Calendar of Xia" (*Xia xiao zheng* 夏小正) from *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 is considered the earliest calendric text we have, with an approximate date of early Warring States period. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, 1959: 194.

[508] *Shisan jing zhushu, Liji,* "Yueling," 346b.

Note that the royal house's observance of the ritual ordinances proper to each season is meant to preserve the appropriate courses of nature and society. This represents an ecological conception of politics that legitimizes the figure of the ruler as a crucial factor not only for orderly and successful human activity, but also for the preservation of the course of nature itself.[509] Failure to adjust to the natural cycles in the "Monthly Ordinances" does not only have negative consequences in the socio-political sphere. More importantly, it results in a disruption of natural order that entails disgraceful consequences altogether. Namely, once the ruler enters the natural equation as a stabilizing factor, his actions have the power to affect and transform the natural world. The claim that the ruler's actions (ordinances, policies and rituals, but also minor daily undertakings) respond to the necessity of maintaining universal order legitimates the figure of the ruler as inherent to it, with the result that the idea of conformity becomes here part of a rhetorical project of political legitimacy.

Daybooks

It is possible that the genre "Monthly Ordinances" was broader than what it can be assumed from its transmitted instances. In his 2011 dissertation, Ethan Harkness suggested that the last twenty-one slips of the Kongjiapo 孔家坡 daybook (*rishu* 日書) manuscript,[510] under the

[509] McNeal has called this posture the "Naturalistic view." See McNeal, 2003, and *Conquer and Govern*, 2012.

[510] *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu Jiandu* 隨州孔家坡漢墓簡牘, 2006. See also Harkness, 2011: 27 and onwards. Raphals, 2013: 44-46. Harkness' dissertation is the first extensive English language study of the daybooks: their archaeological and intellectual context, manuscript form and production, social use, and underlying cosmology. First sources on daybooks are Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, *Shuihudi Qin jian rishu yanjiu* 睡虎地秦簡日書研究, 1994, and Poo, Mu-chou, "Popular Religion in Pre-Imperial China: Some Observations on the Almanacs of Shui-hu-ti," 1993.

title of *Sui* 歲 (year),[511] contain something similar to the texts in *Liji*, *Lüshi Chunqiu* or *Huainanzi*.[512] It would be analogous to the political context in which the transmitted "Monthly Ordinances" take place, but primarily concerning the spirit world. In *Sui*, a superior spirit urges his underlings to abide by monthly commands in their travels around the year. Much as in the transmitted texts, the atmospheric phenomena that result from these undertakings is in turn used to decide whether the actions were seasonally appropriate or transgressing. *Sui* divides into a treatise of calendric cosmology and a set of monthly ordinances.[513] The final lines of the treatise warn the user, in a way reminding one of the *Yueling*:

結解不當,五穀不成,草木不實, 兵革且作,六畜脊,民多不丰,刑、正 (政)亂。 結解句(苟)當,五穀必成,草木盡實,兵革不作,刑、正(政)盡治。

If the formations and dispersions [of each season][514] do not match up appropriately, the five grains will not mature, the grasses and trees will not produce seed or fruit, armed conflict will arise; the six types of domestic livestock will perish, the people will suffer many

[511] *Sui* is commonly understood as Jupiter in daybooks, yet I agree with Harkness' rendition of *sui* as year in the context of the Kongjiapo manuscript. For a discussion on the different possible meanings of *sui* in this and other similar texts from the period, see Liu Lexian, "Kongjiapo Hanjian *Rishu* 'sui' pian chutan" 孔家坡漢簡《日書》"歲"篇初探 , 2007. Chen Junzhi陳峻志, "Rishu pian zhi dasui yu taisui zhi guanxi" 日書〈歲〉篇之"大歲"與"太歲"之關係, 2007; and Chen Junzhi, "Shui chuangshengguan xia de taisui shushu –shushu guilü zhi tichu ji xianchi wei taisui zhi bianxi"水創生觀下的太歲數術--數術規律之提出及「咸池為太歲」之辨析, 2014.

[512] Another found instance of "Monthly Ordinances" is the Yinqueshan manuscript "Prohibitions" (*Jin* 禁). It is very similar to *Yueling* in that the text visits the four seasons with their associated natural phenomena and instructs the ruler in what he must and must not do. An inattentive ruler is cautioned with a similar list of harms. Another Yinqueshan calendric text, more similar to *Guanzi* "Youguan" in its numeric system, is "Thirty Seasons" (*Sanshi shi* 三十時). For introductions to and translations of these and other calendric and Yin Yang Yinqueshan texts, see Robin Yates, "The Yin Yang Texts from Yinqueshan," 1994.

[513] Harkness, 2011: 165.

[514] Harkness cautions the reader to the lack of consensus with regard to the meaning of the words *jie* 結, *jie* 解 and *jiao* 徼. He translates them as "links" and "divisions," respectively, following Liu Lexian. See Liu Lexian, 2007: 409-414. Thanks to an informal conversation with Guo Jinsong, I understand them as the beginnings and ends of each season together with their associated normative activities.

inauspicious occurrences, and punishments and governance will be in a state of chaos. If the formations and dispersions do match up appropriately, the five grains will necessarily mature, grasses and trees will all produce seed or fruit, armed conflict will not arise, and punishments and governance will all be orderly.[515]

The Kongjiapo "Monthly Ordinances" show regulations for the movements of a deity throughout the year in order to maintain celestial phenomena and their associated human activities in harmony.[516] Acting appropriately in a seasonal and monthly manner will save both the natural and human realms from the calamities described above. As opposed to the transmitted "Monthly Ordinances," which describe the ruler's actions, *Sui* prescribes the actions appropriate for gods for the first nine months, leaving only the last three months of the year addressed to the ruler. Yet, as Harkness remarks, *Sui* does not address a particular deity, which would enable a ruler to follow its seasonal prescriptions as if he was in the role parallel to that of the deity himself, in a symbolic manner.[517]

Daybooks also attest that calendric knowledge was used at the individual/family level beyond the public and political sphere. The context of discovery of the unearthed manuscripts indicates that literate people belonging to different social groups used daybooks and shaped them to their own interests between, at least, the 4th and the 1st centuries BC.[518] The knowledge transmitted in daybook manuscripts was part of the Early Chinese broader culture and not

[515] Harkness's translation (Harkness, 2011: 169).

[516] Harkness, 2011: 188.

[517] Harkness, 2011: 196. Harkness suggests a reason for this difference between the transmitted and the Kongjiapo "Monthly Ordinances" is that the latter have been adapted and modified to fit the contents of the Kongjiapo daybook according to the particular uses with which his owner wanted to endow it.

[518] It seems that daybooks were susceptible of being supplemented with new contents by different users. See Harkness, 2011: 11-12.

restricted to a small number of technical specialists.[519] Tomb occupants of burials containing daybooks ranged from the manager of a weaponry industry and bureaucrats of legal and military expertise to a commoner of relatively high standing, and from secretaries to marquises.[520] The Yinqueshan manuscript "Thirty Seasons" (*Sanshi shi* 三十時) attests to the same phenomenon, its intended users being not the ruler, but lower members of the bureaucracy.[521] As hemerology and other mantic techniques were made accessible to the largest population,[522] individuals began to use almanac texts, calendric tables and daybooks to enhance the success rate of ordinary, daily life activities such as the beginning of a trip, a medical treatment, or a marriage.[523]

Daybooks combined different omen systems such as binary, five-phases, stem and branch, dipper and diagram-based systems according to which they prognosticated the future and established auspicious times for various activities.[524] They contain omens, taboos, ordinances and prescriptions, prognostications, rituals, recipes, cures and spells. These extremely rich texts

[519] Harkness, 2011: 3, and chapter 1.

[520] Harkness, 2011: 24 and 50.

[521] As Yates remarks, "a number of passages [of "Thirty Seasons"] are directed to the attention of Qin 'bailiffs' (*sefu* 嗇夫), in much the same way that the almanac texts excavated at Shuihudi are; it was the bailiffs who would be most concerned with the variety of day-to-day affairs referred to in the prescriptions provided in the text. Yates, 1994: 107.

[522] Harkness, 2011: 197: "Of even greater interest to the study of day books as a genre is a concrete sense that a considerable proportion of the material they contain has roots in elite texts that must have come into the hands of technical specialists and been edited by them for their own purposes. In this sense, we can regard the agricultural sections of Kongjiapo as a kind of "trickle-down" technical literature, and from manuscript evidence, we can see a process of technical arts moving from a court-centered milieu to the private sphere, probably as a result of there being fewer opportunities for specialists with technical skills to find patronage in the chaotic years of the later Warring States period. Texts that once described broad social repercussions of various deities' actions - as reflected in natural phenomena like the wind, rain, and temperature - were subsequently directed to particular applications like agriculture and medicine."

[523] Raphals, 2013: 10.

[524] See the second part of chapter 1 in Harkness, 2011: 50-72, for a quick overview of these omen systems, and his chapter 3 for further explanations.

were witnesses of a widespread, common popular culture in pre-imperial China that speaks to us of the contemporaneous sociocultural constructions of fear, risk, safety, health, fortune and fate, as well as the socially constructed means to cope with them.[525]

Other Forms of Divination

In Early China, there were many forms of divination other than hemerology. The oldest known divination methods are stalkcasting divination, typically linked with the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Change), and plastromancy, applying heat to previously manipulated turtle plastrons to produce a combination of cracks. Both of them involved the interconnection between the natural and human orders and helped people decide among different courses of action in various situations, from propitious hunting days to wedding and funeral arrangements. Both of them required the figure of an expert interpreter, since the signs that resulted from the manipulation of the mantic materials were all but non-apparent to the untrained eye. Unlike the prognostications that could be obtained through a daybook, which were "verifiable" and even "reproducible" by another user,[526] oracle bones and yarrow stalks divination were more flexible in part because of the mediation of the interpreter,[527] in part because they incorporated an element of randomness. More so did dream divination and physiognomy, which could not be contrasted against an

[525] The contents of daybooks are complex, miscellaneous, and even internally inconsistent, which makes our current understanding of them still insufficient and speculative. Many of the mantic statements read more as prescriptions than as divination. It is information about what to do on which day, or which days are better to do certain things. The omens from which this kind of knowledge must have come is largely not extant in the texts. For instance, the prescription about cutting the mulberry tree on a certain day to prevent family members from dying must have come from some kind of taboo regarding the color of the mulberry wood and the wood day, and so on. But we can only speculate. Harkness, 2011: 109.

[526] Harkness, 2011: 51.

[527] The interpreter (who established the meaning of the results obtained through divination) and the diviner (who performs the divination) did not need to be the same person.

objective standard of interpretation and were even less systematic.[528] The latter sought to prognosticate the future rather than providing answers on what to do, yet knowing what is going to happen was just the first step to decide on an appropriate course of action.

As seen in the *Yijing* and the *Zuozhuan,* divination by yarrow stalks provided a sequence of numbers, subsequently interpreted as open (sometimes enigmatic) statements, whose significance and connection with the particular subject under question needed to be particularized by the interpreter. In contrast, divination by turtle may have offered a simple yes-no answer to a straightforward question (*should I attack on the day x or not?*). It is a generally accepted view today that plastromancy did not ask for counsel on how to behave in the future but was rather a religious plea for divine intervention on making things happen in the desired way (*may my attack on the day x be auspicious*).[529] In either case, the mantic use of turtle plastrons, much as other forms of divination, was a means to cope with the future that sought to reduce uncertainty and enhance the possibilities of success.

[528] Raphals, 2013: 142-146. There were many other forms of divination in Early China, such as forms of fate calculation and prognostication by means of astrolabes, mantic texts, stem-branch analysis, communication with ancestors and spirits, analysis of clouds, birdcalls, winds, and so on.

[529] In her *Divination and Prediction,* Raphals takes plastromancy as asking a yes-no question about the future. Shaughnessy's review of her book argues for the view of plastromancy as a plea for the gods to mediate in favor of human will. He points out the grammatical features of the inscriptional texts of the oracle bone that support his view, and which Raphals ignores. Shaughnessy takes his argument to the extreme and extends it as a general characteristic of Chinese divination, even in Warring States and later on. The diviner would make up his mind about his will, and would then ask for the favor and support of the spirits. I think that, while this is true for many cases, the generalization is not useful. Chinese divination is a manifold phenomenon. There were questions trying to prognosticate and searching counsel about the future, besides the religious pleas for something to happen. See Raphals, 2013: 129-131, 179, 181, and Shaughnessy's review in the *Journal of Chinese Studies,* 2015: 319-332.

Conforming versus Adapting

Measuring time and keeping track of patterns and regularities, predicting what is to come, and finding guidelines for action are all related. Hemerology helped one conform his actions to the cyclical order of nature. Other forms of divination, too, established a likely future and helped one to act in conformity with it. In all cases, conforming actions were not only more efficacious but also more responsible –they prevented the order of things from going awry. This kind of *conformity* to cyclical changes (which we could also call macro-changes, or changes that do not change) and future expected situations is different from the Early Chinese idea and practice of *adaptation*. The subtitle of Pankenier's book on Early Chinese astrological and cosmological knowledge is *Conforming Earth to Heaven.* He understands this "conforming" as means to make social activities match natural rhythms (whether these are real or imaginary, I will add). More specifically, it involves a correlation of human activity with celestial phenomena, to the point he argues that "conscious imitation of the celestial patterns is emblematic of the skyward orientation of rulership in China from earliest times."[530] Although conformity is a completely different notion from adaptation, it can be easily confused with it. There are valid reasons for the confusion:

(1) The main word to convey the meaning of adaptation in early texts, *yin* 因, has the technical meaning of "conformity" in calendrical texts, and philosophical texts that base their system on calendrical knowledge.[531]

[530] Pankenier, 2013: 317.

[531] See Chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation," especially the section called "Yin without Adaptation."

(2) Conforming and adapting were both Early Chinese strategies to deal with uncertainty and unpredictability in ordinary life.

(3) Both modes of action require a certain sense of self-abandonment, insofar they imply taking something external as the standard for deciding one's actions. Take for instance the ruler who follows cyclical norms of behavior that we read before. The ruler takes these monthly ordinances, and not his own will, as his norm for conventionalized behavior. In a similar manner, the adaptive agent cannot move according to his own arbitrary desires, but takes the situation he is involved in as parameters for deciding the best course of action.[532]

Although they share this important feature, adaptive agency is very different from conforming to preset guidelines. Let me attempt an outline of the features that separate the *conforming* Pankenier talks about—which lies at the heart of hemerology and divination as quotidian Early Chinese means to cope with the future— from the philosophical *adapting*:

(1) Conforming does not require creative responses from the individual. Users resort to mantic knowledge precisely in search of conventionalized responses to expected situations. Rulers (as in the "Monthly Ordinances") and ordinary people (as in the daybooks) do not need to create a unique path of action when conforming to natural patterns. Calendars, almanacs, daybooks and yarrow stalks, to name a few, provided ready-made, safe guidelines for everyday behavior open for everyone to consult. On the contrary, proposals advocating adaptation always emphasized the uniqueness of the individual response towards the arising situation. The adaptive

[532] I have discussed this common feature in conformity and adaptation in Chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation," in the section "What is Not Adaptation."

agent responded to ever-changing situations with endless creativity, certain that a ready-made answer would not sufficiently satisfy the specificity of the moment.

(2) Second, and directly related to the first point, mantic methods such as daybooks allowed the user to quickly and mechanically determine a proper course of action.[533] Therefore, they offered certain clarity and a mediated sense of security in face of the dark, uncertain future. They were unreflective, thoughtless modes of dealing with daily life. Conformity did not require a particularly reflective agent. On the contrary, adaptive responses required the kind of personal thought and reflection that an impersonal, external and seemingly mechanical technology could not supply.

(3) Finally, responsibility was delegated to the interpreter of the mantic method (e.g. a diviner or an author of a "monthly ordinances"). In conforming to natural patterns as described in mantic methods, the agent did not need to make critical decisions by himself. Therefore, the burden of responsibility for one's actions moved from the agent, and user of mantic methods, to the mediator or interpreter of mantic methods. The adaptive agent, on the contrary, bore full responsibility for the correctness of his analysis of the particular situation in estimating the most appropriate course of action, and consequently for the outcomes that derived from it.[534]

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[533] Raphals, 2012: 179 and 220.

[534] In his essay on *Zhuangzi* 26, De Reu argues that the *Zhuangzi* chapter "External Things" (*Wai wu* 外物) distinguishes between the "divination mode" and the "children mode" of language/emitting utterances about the world. The characteristics of the "divination mode" would include "clear and one-sided judgments; absence of reflection and doubt; impressive yet ultimately self-defeating; associated with masters; deeply ingrained." The "children mode," in turn, is "hesitant and wavering; inclusive; disassociated from masters; open to alternative possibilities" (De Reu, "A Ragbag of Odds and Ends," 2015: 267). These two modes of emitting linguistic judgments about the world are comparable to the distinction between the non-philosophical conforming that goes on in "mantic" approaches to the problem of uncertainty and fate and the philosophical "adapting." De Reu observes that the shortcoming of the divination mode is the removal of doubt. Precisely what the divination mode aims at is its own

Conformity and adaptation were distinct but not mutually exclusive modes of action. As I have pointed out above, conformity is a response to macro changes, or changes that do not change, such as the cyclical movement of the seasons. In some occasions, adaptation can in turn be understood as a response to micro changes, or changes that do change, and hence cannot always be foreknown and controlled. An example of the concerted used of both modes of actions is Han times omenology. Natural "anomalies" such as unexpected shooting stars and earthquakes were interpreted as omens: Heaven's warning against an unruly state of human affairs. An omen gave ministers the opportunity to demand political changes and policy reforms, moving from a conforming model of action to an adaptive one.[535]

THE DIVINER AS AN ADAPTIVE FIGURE

The three points discussed above mark the line between *conforming* in the sense Pankenier ascribes to it and *adapting.* Adaptation, as opposed to mere conformity, involves creative and unique responses, a critical and reflective agent, and full responsibility for one's actions. It is important to differentiate the behavior of users of mantic methods from that of the mediators between the mantic technology and its consulters. Whereas the consulters of divination may look for ready-made, quick and easy answers to lighten the burden of daily life decisions, the interpreters themselves, though acting on behalf on someone else, need to be considered thoughtful agents. The results obtained through mantic methods helped the consulters

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shortcoming, since absence of doubts leads to considering things as inevitable, and therefore taking inflexible paths of action (De Reu, 2015: 262 and onwards). As similar as these two classifications may seem, the author of "External Things" is against patterned modes of action and in favor of flexibility. As we have seen in the first chapter, adaptability cannot be reduced to embracing a flexible attitude.

[535] In Chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," we also saw that the prescriptive and the adaptive models of agency were not mutually exclusive in military affairs.

of divination to *conform* to certain patterns in order to deal with uncertainty and obtain a certain degree of control over their future. But some early sources described the interpreters themselves as behaving in *adaptive* ways.

In her discussion of marketplace diviners, Raphals explains that these diviners took advantage of the people's common need for reassurance and guidance to improve their lives by rechanneling their clients' behavior.[536] A good illustration is the reflection about the diviner's profession by Yan Junping's 嚴君平, diviner and scholar from the 1st century AD.

卜筮者賤業，而可以惠眾人。有邪惡非正之問，則依蓍龜為言利害。與人子言依於孝，與人弟言依於順，與人臣言依於忠，各因勢導之以善，從吾言者，已過半矣。[537]

"Being a diviner is a low occupation, but can be used to benefit many people. If they have questions about what is wicked and not upright, I rely on turtle and milfoil to speak of the difference between benefit and harm. In treating with a son I rely [on turtle and milfoil] to speak of filiality; in treating with a younger brother I rely [on turtle and milfoil] to speak of obedience; in treating with a subject I rely [on turtle and milfoil] to speak of loyalty. Each one of them, adapting to their situation, I lead toward doing good, and more than a half of them follow my words."

Yan Junping uses his humble occupation to influence the way people behave towards doing the good, hence improving society overall. His way of doing this is adapting to the particular situation of each consulter. There is not a single mode of behaving in a morally and ritually correct way. In a highly hierarchical and ritualistic society as early imperial China, what is sanctioned as good behavior strongly depends on social roles. Hence the situation Junping adapts to when he is consulted by different people seems to be, above all, their social role.

Similarly, the *Zuozhuan* accounts of stalk casting show how open to interpretation *Yijing* divination was, and how much these interpretations relied on the particular needs of each

[536] Raphals, 2012: 93.

[537] *Hanshu* 72: 3056. Yan Zun, style name Junping, was a teacher of Yang Xiong 揚雄.

consulter and the overall conflictive situation under question. An accurate reading of the hexagram required inserting the *Yi*'s message into a particular situation. A good interpreter was the one able to match the particular truth statements of the *Yi* with the distinct cases at hand. A bad interpreter would not understand the *Yi* message as flexible guidelines to be adjusted to differing circumstances, but as fixed and closed, general truth. We see the difference between a good and bad interpreter in the case story of Nankuai 南蒯 and Zifu Huibo 子服惠伯.[538] The Lu 魯 minister Nankuai cast stalks with regard to his plans to revolt against his lord. Faced with a hexagram line consisting of four words, "yellow, skirt, primary, auspicious" (**黃**裳元吉),[539] Nankuai combines them into two sets of homologous results: "yellow skirt, primarily auspicious." This interpretation gives him straightforward support towards his rebellion. However, the divination specialist and Lu officer Huibo offers a different reading. He articulates the logic of the sentence as a conditional: "[if] yellow, skirt, primal, [then] auspicious." Huibo goes on to attribute virtues to each of the given conditions, so that yellow, skirt, and primal equate to loyalty, respect, and goodness. He subsequently argues that, since these virtues are not present in Nankuai, the result cannot be read as auspicious.[540] Nankuai disregards Huibo's reading and takes action against Lu, quickly facing defeat and death. As Smith remarks, "where Nankuai sees the *Yi*'s message as true, Huibo sees them as truths. As such, they are problems in deduction, because the truth must be applied to the specific circumstances under consideration."[541] What makes Huibo's interpretation successful as opposed to Nankuai's is that

[538] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Zuozhuan*, "Zhaogong" 昭公 12: 792b. The story is fully translated in Smith, 1989: 438.

[539] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Zuozhuan*, "Zhaogong" 12: 792b.

[540] For a detailed analysis of Huibo's hermeneutic process, read Smith, 1989: 438-441.

[541] Smith, 1989: 440.

it did not take the *Yi*'s statement at face value, but adapted the *Yi*'s abstract message to the actual context to which it was being applied.

Apart from the fact that successful mantic interpretations required adapting the resulting messages of divination to the given circumstances, we witness in the *Zuozhuan*'s records of the uses of the *Yi* that some diviners adopted a more radical adaptability. This radical adaptability consisted in changing the meaning of the results obtained through divination according to the needs or desires of their consulters (the interpreter and consulter sometimes being the same person). The capacity to adapt the *Yi*'s message to particular circumstances is a question of professional expertise that separates the good from the bad interpreter. The more radical adaptability that we see in the *Zuozhuan* examples below, on the other hand, points to the use of divination as expedient means. These diviners did not necessarily believe in the prophetic power of the *Yi*, but did believe in the psychological power of mantic methods. They used the hexagrams as the adaptive agent used circumstances: both hexagrams and circumstances functioned as objective, determining reality which, rather than imposing a particular path of action, presented an opportunity to create the most useful response in each case. The interpreters that we see below were not really consulting the *Yi* in search of instructions but using the client's belief in the mantic system to say what they wanted to say in a persuasive way.[542]

In *Zuozhuan* Xi 15 (645 BC), the Earl of Qin 秦伯 orders a divination regarding his punitive attack on Jin 晉.[543] The hexagram that the diviner encounters is Gu 蠱 ䷑, whose range

[542] Some readers may think that this statement says more about the *Zuozhuan* than about the Yi practice. That might very well be the case. Nevertheless, the Yi practice recreated or reimagined by the author(s) of the *Zuozhuan* is as valid as a representation of the usages of the Yi in Early China as any other.

[543] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan,* "Xi gong" 僖公 15: 230a.

of meanings includes poisoning, pest and parasites, and sorcery and spells.[544] In principle, one ventures to think, this is not a very auspicious finding. Yet the diviner manages to interpret the hexagram in favor of his client (the Earl of Qin, who, we presume, would like to hear that their defeat of the Jin army is likely, if not certain) by resorting to two hermeneutic tricks. First, the diviner conveniently assigns the lower trigram, Wind, to Qin, and the upper one, Mountain, to the enemy. The Qin wind would metaphorically destroy the crops of Jin's mountains. With this trick, the diviner turns a seemingly inauspicious result (death, rotting) into a positive outcome for the Qin consulter. Could this not have been read the other way around? Or, as Kidder Smith remarks, could not we interpret that the enemy's mountains remain unshaken despite the Qin's contentious winds?[545] Sure we could have, but the diviner's consulter, the Earl of Qin, needed reassurance to launch his attack to Jin, and this is exactly what the diviner would offer him, no matter which hexagram he found.

The second hermeneutic trick lies in the way the diviner interprets the lines of a rhymed triplet that seemed to have been linked to Gu at the time. The triplet reads "A thousand chariots thrice dispelled; Of what remains of three dispellings, [You will] capture the male fox" 千乘三去，三去之餘，獲其雄狐.[546] In principle, just by reading these verses, it is not clear to whom those victorious chariots belong: to Qin or to the enemy Jin? Yet the diviner does not hesitate to interpret them in an auspicious way and to encourage the Earl to proceed and attack Jin with the

[544] See *Shuowen jiezi, juan* 14. In *Zuozhuan* "Zhao gong," a physician from Qin explains different meanings of *gu* to the ruler of Jin: delusion (*huo* 惑), delusion that makes you lose your mind, or insanity (*huo yi sanzhi* 惑以喪志), grain rotten with insects that flies away (*gu zhi fei* 穀之飛), instruments plagued with insects (*min chong* 皿蟲), and a *Zhouyi* hexagram name. See *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan,* "Zhao gong" 1: 709b.

[545] Smith, 1989: 430. See also pp. 425, and 458-9 for Smith's arguments in favor of the reliability of the *Zuozhuan* accounts of the *Yi* divination technique.

[546] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan,* "Xi gong" 15: 230a. Smith's translation (Smith, 1989: 427).

promise of a certain victory. The arbitrariness of the interpretation with regard to the ambiguity of the results obtained cannot be overemphasized. The only thing that prevents the interpretation from being random is that it is tailored to the needs of the particular consulter. The diviner adapts the mantic results not only to the larger context so that they become meaningful, but also to his client's purpose, in order to create an encouraging message. By adapting his interpretive answer to the consulter's needs, the diviner is helpful because he builds up "the morale of the Qin with a foreordained victory."[547] The diviner's reading provides as much psychological support as it provides legitimacy to the Qin's military advance. Much as the marketplace diviner in the earlier example, the Earl's diviner's attitude might be described as beneficent inasmuch as he takes advantage of his status and skills to serve and benefit his clients (i.e., to give them exactly what they need).

Beneficence was not always the underlying reason to take advantage of the psychological and legitimizing power of divination. In the *Zuozhuan* account below regarding a potential marital business, several diviners give an auspicious interpretation of the hexagram to please the consulter, who is also their patron; a different, independent diviner offers an opposed reading guided by moral issues; while the smart consulter, in order to find justification to get away with his original plan, claims that the application of the independent diviner's reading is not well adapted to his situation.

齊棠公之妻，東郭偃之姊也，東郭偃臣崔武子。棠公死，偃御武子以弔焉，見棠姜而美之，使偃取之。偃曰：男女辨姓，今君出自丁，臣出自桓，不可。武子筮之，遇困之大過。史皆曰吉，示陳文子，文子曰：夫從風，風隕妻，不可聚也。且其繇曰困于石，據于蒺梨，入于其宮，不見其妻，凶，困于石，往不濟也。據于蒺梨，可恃傷也，入于其宮，不見其妻，凶，無所歸也。崔子曰：嫠也何害，先夫當之矣。遂取之。[548]

[547] Smith, 1989: 430.

[548] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan,* "Xiang gong" 襄公 25: 617b-618a.

The wife of the Commandant of Tang [in the state of] Qi was the elder sister of Dongguo Yan. Dongguo Yan was a minister of Cui Wuzi. The Commandant of Tang died. Yan drove

Wuzi [to her house] to offer condolences about it. [Wuzi] saw Tang Jiang [the widow] and, finding her beautiful, ordered Yan to marry her to him.

Yan said: "Man and woman [should be of] different patriclans. Now, my lord descends from [Duke] Ding and your minister descends from [Duke] Huan. [Because we are both of the Jiang patriclan,] it is not possible."

Wuzi cast stalks about it and met with Kun's Daguo. The Registrars all said "Auspicious." He showed it to Chen Wenzi. Wenzi said: "The man follows wind. The wind brings down the wife. She cannot be married. Moreover its oracle-text says, 'Difficulties in rocks. Holding to caltrop. He enters his palace and does not see his wife. Inauspicious.' 'Difficulties in rocks' –he proceeds but does not get across. 'Holding to caltrop'—that which he relies on wounds. 'He enters his palace and does not see his wife. Inauspicious' –there is nothing to go home to."

Cuizi said: "A widow, what harm? Her previous husband matched it" [i.e., the prognostication applied to him, not Cui]. Thereupon he married her.[549]

This is an intersecting case of a mantic situation where both diviners and consulters participate in the elucidation of the divination results, and where the consulter himself ends up deciding his own destiny. The account does not give us details about the thinking process that led Wuzi's diviners to give an auspicious result, as if the process was irrelevant. Within the logic of the story, what matters is the famous and independent diviner Chen Wenzi's morally correct reasoning, which is guided and influenced by customary morality. On the one hand, Wuzi's diviners are portrayed as simply saying what Wuzi wants to hear: that marrying the recently widowed woman is a good idea. They adapt their interpretation of the hexagram to Wuzi's wishes, in order to please him. We may think that this was a common practice among diviners to butter their patrons up thereby gaining their favor. On the other hand, Wenzi's several appearances in the *Zuozhuan* portray him as a loyal and righteous advisor moved only by ethical considerations.[550] His opposition to Wuzi's marriage stems from the custom of respecting a widower's period

[549] Smith's translation in Smith, 1989: 433. Lewis also translates and comments this story: Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 1999: 247-248.

[550] Smith, 1989: 433.

mourning and other taboos related to female remarriage. With these ethical concerns in mind, he is able to tailor his reading of the hexagram (and in this case we get a detailed description of his reasoning) to fit his own purposes: to discourage Wuzi from taking vows. Wuzi, in turn, uses his knowledge of the divination process to revoke Wenzi's reading and get his way with his wedding plans. He smartly claims that even though the reading is accurate, it does not match his situation but the previous husband's. According to Wuzi, Wenzi's mistake would not be in the interpretation of the mantic results, but in their application.

Not conforming to the morally superior counselor's advice is framed in the *Zuozhuan* narrative as self-destructive: Wenzi's announced tragedies if the moral taboos are broken eventually come true.[551] Smith remarks that "this account is not an argument for the possibility of foreknowledge as much as for the certainty of moral retribution."[552] The question of whether the *Yi* has mantic, prognosticating power is irrelevant in situations like this. What matters is its psychological, legitimizing power, which can only be deployed by an adaptive interpreter. It is in this sense that this account also demonstrates the openness of interpretation of the *Yi* and how some people would use it in their own or their client's favor by adapting the results or their applicability to the larger situation in a convenient manner. In all these cases, the interpreters do not conform, but adapt, which makes them fully thoughtful agents deciding their own or their clients' fates.

In all these cases, the marketplace diviner and the different *Zuozhuan* interpreters, we find a figure capable of interpreting the course of nature through its representation in a symbolic system (turtle, milfoil and the *Yi*), and capable of using this extraordinary capacity as guidelines

[551] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zuozhuan*, "Xiang gong" 27: 646.

[552] Smith, 1989: 434.

to inform the human realm of activity. Contrary to most users and consulters of divination methods, who merely conformed to the rules derived from the mantic technology, their interpreters, including the intersecting figure of Wuzi, were thoughtful agents fully aware that adaptability could improve the conditions of their worlds.

PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS TO DEAL WITH THE UNEXPECTED[553]

Calendric knowledge did not provide useful responses and a sense of security for all kinds of situations. Calendars did not account for unpredictable and sudden (non-cyclical, non-patterned) changes, for turns of destiny such as sudden death, sickness, misfortune, punishment, or disgrace. They were used for things that could be planned or predicted in advance. Other divination methods, such as the *Yi*, responded to vagaries of fate that could not be foreseen, which simply and unexpectedly happened. What all these mantic methods had in common was reliance on an external technology that offered a ready-made solution to one's uncertainty and a reliable path of future action. Like a sick person following the doctor's prescriptions, the consulters of mantic powers conformed their actions to (the diviner's interpretation of) the mantic results, hoping to ensure thereby a more successful response to everyday life events.

When we see the unexpected as a positive and fortunate event, we never wonder how to deal with it: we simply welcome it and rejoice. However, how can and should we react to what we consider disaster or disgrace? As Spinoza puts it in his preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*: "If men were always able to regulate their affairs with sure judgment, or if fortune always smiled upon them, they would not get caught up in any superstition. But since people are

[553] This section was presented at the 9th International Conference in Daoist Studies, organized by Livia Kohn and held at Boston University in May 2014. It is partially reproduced in my article "Beyond our Control? Two Responses to Uncertainty and Fate in Early China," 2015: 1-22.

often reduced to such desperate straits at any solid judgment and as the good things of fortune for which they have a boundless desire are quite uncertain, they fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear."[554] In Early China means other than superstition and mantic methods were developed to cope with incertitude. Philosophical proposals offered different programs for dealing with changes, fate, and the unpredictable. [555]

What I denominate "philosophical proposals" call on the individual to develop a psychological response, as opposed to relying on an instrument, such as the calendar or divination, to restore mental peace and supply tranquility. In philosophically tempered texts such as the ones I present in this section, amelioration of the conditions of living comes from the individual's inner work rather than from an external technology that may provide an illusory sense of control. They also emphasize reflection and self-cultivation, rather than focusing on the establishment of fixed and predictable guidance for conduct. While the mantic approach to uncertainty focuses on predicting what is to come, philosophical proposals help the individual accept not knowing what is to come, and yet being able to respond adequately once the situation arises. Mantic methods give guidelines on how to act, and how to behave, generally suggesting that the agent might undertake a certain path of action. Philosophical proposals, on the other hand, offer insights to help the agent reflect about the situation at hand and decide by himself what to do.

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[554] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 2007: 3.

[555] Broadly speaking, "fate" in early China includes the following two categories: the set of capacities and features that one has by birth, like whether you are born rich or handsome, and what one encounters in life, including social success, punishment, and sickness. Both are considered *wuke naihe* 無可奈何, things that "cannot be avoided." For extended studies, see Lupke, *The Magnitude of Ming,* 2005. I will have more to say about *ming* 命 (fate) in Early China in chapter 5, "Finding Adaptive Freedom."

A category that overlaps both approaches to uncertainty is illness (including childbirth, which is also a medical issue), a common topic of concern in both mantic and philosophical approaches. Yet there are differences in the treatment they make of the topic. The mantic approach to illness regarded its diagnosis and therapeutic remedy. That is to say, they were concerned with how to treat illness in a medical or practical way.[556] Philosophical responses to illness and death, in turn, regarded spiritual or psychological ways of coping and accepting forthcoming events that are beyond our control. The illustration is useful to understand the distinction that I want to establish between mantic and philosophical methods to cope with the future and the uncertainty that it produces. Mantic methods diagnosed a strategic way of action that fitted best according to circumstances, that could most benefit the conforming agent and help him prevent harm. Philosophical proposals, on the other hand, offered new angles to approach the unavoidable for a reflective agent who was not necessarily interested in avoiding harm, but rather in achieving peace of mind about circumstances that could not be prevented any more and retaking control over them. In a nutshell, mantic methods focus on *predicting* what is to come, whereas philosophical proposals focus on *accepting not knowing* what is to come, yet being able to respond adequately once the situation arises.

In the following sections I present three different philosophical answers that co-existed in Early China to deal with the lashes of fortune in ordinary life. The first one works with adaptation as a turn outward, for which I use a section in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 6, "Great Ancestral Master" (*Dazongshi* 大宗師) as textual basis. The second is by means of self-vigilance, often phrased *shen qi du* 慎其獨 (being watchful over oneself), which implies a turn inward. I use the Guodian 郭店 text *Failure and Success Depend on Opportunity* (hereinafter called *Qiongda yishi*

[556] Raphals, 2013: 208-9, 316 and onwards.

窮達以時). In the third proposal, the ritual and thoughtless "conforming" that we have previously seen in mantic methods becomes a philosophical proposal. Examples of the philosophical turn of conforming come from the *Huainanzi* and the excavated *Huangdi sijing* 黃帝四經.

Adaptation, or the Turn Outwards: Zhuangzi *"Great Ancestral Master"*

Presentation of the text

"Great Ancestral Master" is chapter 6 in the *Zhuangzi* compilation. In *Hanshu* 漢書 "Yiwenzhi" 藝文誌 the *Zhuangzi* is recorded to have contained a total of fifty-two chapters, although only thirty three of them have reached us from the received tradition. [557] It is also in the "Yiwenzhi" where the *Zhuangzi* appears for the first time directly under the rubric "Daoist," an ascription that would mark it forever. In the 20th century, scholars have paid increasing attention to the *Zhuangzi*'s ideological contradictions and differences in writing style and literary quality; they have also attempted to match the various hands behind the work with different intellectual groups and/or philosophical trends.[558] Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* is still today, together with the *Laozi*, largely identified as a foundational Daoist text.[559]

In this section I do not deal with the *Zhuangzi* as representative of a Daoist tradition. I analyze a particular passage within "Great Ancestral Master" because it is a clear illustration of adaptation as a response to coping with uncertainty and fate in daily life. Other texts contained in

[557] *Hanshu* 30: 1731.

[558] See Fischer, "The Formation of the *Shizi*," 2007; Fraser, "Review of Xiaogan Liu," 1997; Graham, *Chuang-Tzu, The Inner Chapters*, 2001; Hansen, "Guru or Skeptic," 2003; Klein, 2011; Liu, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, 1994a.

[559] Zhuangzi and Laozi are first associated with each other in the *Shiji*. See Barnwell, "Classical Daoism –Is There Really Such a Thing?" 2012.

the *Zhuangzi* present different proposals, proposals which could be labeled as typically Confucian, as they are to be seen also in texts traditionally classified as Confucian. The *Zhuangzi* is a heterogeneous collection with dissimilar, even contradictory, philosophical, ethical and political points of view.[560]

Philosophical proposal

Some parts of the *Zhuangzi* propose adaptive responsiveness as the best way to deal with changes and situations not under one's control. One needs to purposively adapt to changes of which one has no foreknowledge, moving along with them and making best use of new opportunities. This response appears in the "death dialogues" in *Zhuangzi* 6, "Great Ancestral Master," notably in the conversation between the four masters, who ask the core question, "Who can take nothingness as the head, life as the backbone, and death as the rump-bone? Who understands that life and death, existence and disappearance are one single body? I would become his friend."[561] Their friendship is based on this attitude to life, and they soon confront the unexpected. One of them, Master Yu, falls seriously ill, developing a tumor and getting deformed in a most hideous way. Still, he maintains a positive attitude:

曰：「亡，予何惡！浸假而化予之左臂以為雞，予因以求時夜；浸假而化予之右臂以為彈，予因以求鴞炙；浸假而化予之尻以為輪，以神為馬，予因以乘之，豈更駕哉！[562]

Why should I resent it? If [the maker of things] were to transform my left arm into a rooster, I would adapt [to this change] to keep watch on the night. If he were to transform my right arm into a slingshot, I would adapt [to this change] to shoot down an owl and roast it. If he were to transform my rump-bone into a cartwheel, and my spirit into a horse, I would adapt [to this change] to mount it—why, I would never need another carriage!

[560] I discuss and illustrate this claim in the section "Philosophical proposals escape ideological categorization" below in this chapter.

[561] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 62-63.

[562] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 63.

The text continues with the general conclusion that one should be able to recognize appropriate timing and mentally accommodate to the various changes of body and world without allowing "sorrow or joy to enter" (哀樂不能入).[563] To some readers, Master Yu's enthusiastic speech might seem too extreme, almost like an absurd satire of those who take a carefree attitude towards life. However, this is not the only case in which strange and somewhat radical situations linked to monstrous beings are used in the *Zhuangzi* as a rhetorical means to disrupt the readers' logic, bring them out of their comfort zone and force them to think about things in a different light. We find monstrous trees, monstrous fish-birds like Kun-Peng 鯤鵬, deformed such as Aitai Tuo 哀駘它 or Zhili Shu 支離疏, and crippled like Shen Tujia 申徒嘉.[564] There are also monsters in a psychological sense: ideal figures who think and act "out of the square" (方之外)[565] and sages who have surpassed the ordinary level of human experience, but also the mad, the misfits and the outcasts.[566]

Without doubt, the *Zhuangzi* dedicates much length to narrate stories about exceptional beings. These monstrous characters are brought in to challenge commonly accepted views and values, so that the person can understand phenomena in a broader way. The power of the monstrous lies on its capacity to overturn prejudices and stereotypes, to show the contingency of things as they are conventionally supposed to be. It is therefore a valuable strategy to challenge our horizon of expectations and open up unthought-of possibilities of the field of

[563] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 63.

[564] *Zhuangzi jijie* 4: 41-42 (trees); *Zhuangzi jijie* 1:1 (Kun-Peng); *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 51-53 (Aitai Tuo); *Zhuangzi jijie* 4: 43-44 (Zhili Shu); *Zhuangzi jijie* 5: 48-49 (Shen Tujia);

[565] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 65. On "outside the square" as a means of classifying philosophical positions in Early China, see Peterson, 1988: 47-60.

[566] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 55; 4: 44; 7: 70.

phenomenality.[567] In particular, the story of Master Yu makes use of a monstrous transformation to transmit a key teaching: however big the changes, even if they involve terminal disease (what conventionally is believed to be something bad), we should not fear or hate them but adapt to them and see in them a window of opportunity. In this way, the extreme, radical response of "Monster" Yu to his situation should not be understood as a parody, but as a rhetorical means to challenge and overcome fixed, patterned modes of response and open up new, more creative ways of interacting with the world.

"Great Ancestral Master" proposes a thoughtful and creative personalized response, a mode of action that served as a relevant proposal for coping with fate in Early China. Adaptation is about accepting a particular situation as it occurs—as opposed to its prediction—and deciding for and by oneself the course of action that suits the situation best. In this regard, it is the opposite of following a pre-established set of rules or behavioral guidelines, and thus relates to freedom. Master Yu accordingly describes his attitude as "freeing of the bonds" (*xianjie* 縣解), as opposed to going against Heaven (or fate, the unavoidable) and "being tied to things" (*wu you jiezhi* 物有結之).[568] The adaptive person liberates himself from all the prejudices engrained in conventional morality that qualify certain things, states, or situations as inherently bad and others as inherently good. Able to go along with whatever life, fate, or Heaven bring without making axiological judgments, he breaks the bonds that kept him tied to things "as they are supposed to be," that is to say, to his (and society's) acquired idea of things. Thus, he becomes open to

[567] Moreno, "Break Freak: Fenómeno (Notas para una geneidética: Eidos y monstrum)," 2004:55-75. See also Galvany, "Debates on Mutilation, Bodily Preservation and Ideology in Early China," 2009: 67-91; and "Deformed bodies and heavenly minds in the *Zhuangzi*," forthcoming.

[568] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 63.

changes and does not resent them. On the contrary, he may even see a new situation as an opportunity.

Adapting to life's changes as they come is the only reasonable and efficient response for the author of this passage. This is evident as the story continues, with Master Lai getting sick to the point of death. He says,

夫大塊載我以形，勞我以生，佚我以老， 息我以死。故善吾生者，乃所以善吾死也。今之大冶鑄金，金踊躍曰「我必且為鏌鋣」，大冶必以為不祥之金。[569]

The Great Clod loads me with form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. Therefore, what makes good my life makes good my death. Now, if a great caster was casting metal, and the metal leapt up and said, 'I must be made the [famous sword] Moye,' the great caster must consider it to be inauspicious metal.

Master Lai analogizes the maker of things (Great Clod) as a caster and the non-adaptive person as a rebellious piece of metal. He explains how inadequate and useless any effort would be to go against fate, agreeing with his friends' sentiment that "a thing can ever triumph over Heaven" (物不勝天).[570] Nevertheless, this does not serve to invoke passive acceptance of the conditions of being and the vagaries of fate, nor does it support a resignation to the limits of reality. Partly because of this and similar passages, scholars have labeled the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* deterministic, conformist, and fatalist, seeing it as a philosophy of contentment with destiny rather than liberation.[571] Instead, the story proposes acceptance of whatever comes and adaptation to any situations the world brings, so that nothing becomes a limitation. It shows the unforeseen and unavoidable as conditions of possibility, of new dimensions of being in this world. The reality of how things are and what they become always determines the way we can

[569] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 64.

[570] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 63.

[571] Graham, 1989; Liu, *Liang zhong ziyou de zhuiqiu* 兩種自由的追求, 1994b; Slingerland, 2003.

deal with them. Nevertheless, the goal of the philosophical proposal of adaptation is to understand that this determination can turn into conditions of success in life. Therefore, we should take advantage of those conditions rather than let them become limitations.

Adaptation as going along and accommodating to the timing and features of things requires the realization that we cannot force things to be different, but we are always able to modify our response. Moreover, it requires the acknowledgment that no conditions are *a priori* good or bad. Anything can be good or bad depending on our perspective. In this sense, the text presents an ontological and epistemological approach to reality that leads to a particular philosophy of life. It combines the idea of phenomenal neutrality with epistemological equanimity, for only equanimity gives a person the opportunity to approach phenomena with an unprejudiced mind. The same set of given conditions can bear good, bad, or mediocre fruit, depending on how the person adapts to, takes advantage of, or deals with them. According to many different passages in the *Zhuangzi*, there is no such thing as misfortune or disgrace. All situations are *a priori* axiologically equal. It is up to the individual to turn it into something beneficial.[572] Thus, Master Yu claims that, were the maker of things to transform his left arm into a slingshot, he, far from resenting the change, he would use it to catch owls.

In the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, the persona Zhuangzi tells Huizi 惠子 a parable on making good use of things that illustrates this point. A Song-based family of silk dyers had developed a salve to prevent chapped hands. A stranger heard of this and bought the recipe for a goodly amount of cash, then he went to King Wu and suggested that he use it to improve the performance of his navy. As a result, the navy won a major battle, the kingdom expanded, and the man received a fiefdom. Zhuangzi concludes,

[572] For the *a priori* non-axiological value of things, see, for example, *Zhuangzi jijie* 12: 100.

能不龜手一也，或以封，或不免於洴澼絖，則所用之異也。[573]

The capacity of the remedy to prevent chapped hands was the same in both cases, but in one case it led to a fiefdom, while in the other case they did not go beyond bleaching silk. This is because the different uses they made of it.

The first thing to note here is that it is a stranger who realizes the salve's potential and decides to use it for a different purpose. His mind is more open because he is not accustomed to the accepted use: he is unprejudiced in approaching the conditions of the object he is dealing with. The moral of the story is that the same set of conditions might bear different fruit, depending on the use we make of them. Taking the inevitable as the starting point, we can develop a creative approach to it, taking advantage of conditions, whatever they are, and using them in our favor. This works even when conditions seem to be bad, as in the case of Master Yu's tumor. In his reaction, he demonstrates the ability to turn an apparently unfortunate situation into conditions of possibility for a new kind of life. Adaptation, then, is not passive resignation, but a creative attitude that allows the person to make the most of what is given and to retake control over what seems unassailable.

The friends of the "death dialogues" have a reified notion of fate: for them, fate is something external that happens to the person, and that cannot be foreknown or controlled. Opportunity, success, health, fame—all the things humans tend to pursue—can be taken away, the text argues. Even consistently virtuous behavior does not guarantee a reward. As we will see in the next section, the author of the *Qiongda yishi* proclaimes this a calamity and proposes a self-reflective turn inward in order to overcome it. The "death dialogues" friends' strategy to cope is entirely different: they advocate for embracing fate in its full objectivity and externality and welcoming

[573] *Zhuangzi jijie* 1: 7.

everything that it brings about in a creative way as a means to retake control over one's life; in other words, turning outward.[574]

Self-vigilance, or the Turn Inwards: Qiongda yishi[575]

Presentation of the text

The *Qiongda yishi* was excavated in 1993 in Guodian (Jingmen City, Hubei Province), together with some other seventeen bamboo texts.[576] Some of these texts were already known to us in similar forms from the received tradition, such as the three Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts and the "Black Robes," transmitted as a chapter in the Book of Rites (*Liji* 禮記). Other texts, like *Qiongda yishi* and *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水, were recovered from oblivion with the Guodian excavation. Yet other texts had not been transmitted in the received tradition but were previously known from the early seventies' Mawangdui 馬王堆 excavations, such as *Wuxing* 五行. The

[574] Other passages, e.g., the dialogue between Confucius and Laozi in chapter 14, also propose adaptation as the most efficacious way to react towards destiny. *Zhuangzi jijie* 14: 126-28.

[575] When I chose the phrase "turn inward" as a slogan for this kind of attitude toward the uncontrollable, I was not aware that Michael Ing had qualified a current trend in Confucian ethics with this very nomenclature. I thank Carine Defoort for pointing the similarity out to me. Ing criticizes the scholarly "turn inward" trend for homogenizing early Confucian ethics in a way that makes it impossible for ritual failures and uncontrollable dysfunctions in ritual efficacy to have a productive role in the ethical life of the people who practiced these rituals (See Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism*, 2012: 77 and onwards). I agree with Ing that some early texts show ambiguity regarding the discernability of the preventability or unpreventability of failure. In other words: it is not always clear wether a particular outcome should be considered to be within or beyond human control. I also agree with Ing that this ambiguity became productive for some early thinkers. But whereas Ing is looking at the *Liji* for textual support, I am here looking at *Qiongda yishi*, and have looked at *Mengzi* 7A in the previous chapter. Both of these texts solve the ambiguity in a clear-cut distinction between what can and cannot be prevented, and both of them find solving the ambiguity productive for ethical reasoning and agency: focusing on what is within human control becomes a guiding source of unfailing self-cultivation and moral autonomy.

[576] For the excavation report, see Jingmen Guodian yihao chumu 荊門郭店一號楚墓, 1997. The most recent and complete account of the tomb discovery and goods in English is found in Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 2012: 1-96.

Guodian tombs date from around 300 BC, later half of the Warring States period, the *terminus ante quem* all these texts came into being.

Early manuscripts generally come to us without indication of title, authorship, date, or intellectual affiliation,[577] yet modern scholars have developed efficient ways of inserting them into convenient, pre-established categories. On the basis of parallels with received texts and perceived intellectual affinities, ever since their first publication by the Jingmen City Museum in 1998, they have divided the texts of the Guodian corpus into Daoist and Confucian materials.[578] The wave of studies that followed the publication of the manuscripts continued to employ these rubrics in organizing the texts.[579] Moreover, Li Ling 李零 has associated all Guodian "Confucian" works with Zi Si 子思 (Confucius' grandson), and claimed that they fill the gap in the transmission chronology between Confucius and Mencius; he and others have repeatedly linked the *Qiongda yishi* with this school.[580]

It is my view that manuscripts should remain without ascription. The very notion of schools of thought is of dubious applicability for the pre-imperial and early imperial periods. The composite nature of pre-imperial texts begets textual variation and internal contradictions. More often than not, there was not one mind behind the text, controlling it. If this is true of the received texts, inserted as they are in a tradition that has been constructing their ideological meaning for centuries, how much more cautious should we be enclosing found texts, lost in

[577] See Giele, "Using Early Chinese Manuscripts as Historical Source Materials," 2003; Meyer, "Texts, Textual Communities and Meaning," 2009.

[578] *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, 1998: 1.

[579] Li, "Guodian chujian jiaoduji" 郭店楚簡校讀記, 1999; Li, Guodian chujian jiaoduji 郭店楚簡校讀記, 2002.

[580] Li and Jiang, "Guodian chujian yu Zisizi 郭店楚簡與子思子, 1999.

tradition, into pre-established categories.[581] I do not take the *Qiongda yishi* as representative of Confucianism. Instead, I focus on the ideas the text presents with regard to coping with fate and reducing uncertainty, a philosophical program that we find in texts traditionally labeled Confucian much as in texts traditionally labeled Daoist (like the *Zhuangzi*).[582]

Philosophical proposal

According to the *Qiongda yishi*, when the unexpected happens, we should turn to our inner self, make sure that we are doing the right thing, and disregard the outcome. There are good and bad deeds, as well as good and bad outcomes, but good deeds do not always bring good outcomes. There is an established axiological system but no moral justice. The way to regain control over the lashes of fate is to disregard them, focusing only on correcting what is in our control, that is, our own attitudes, emotions, understanding and actions. This is a similar proposal to what we saw in our analysis of *Mengzi* 孟子 and *Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道 in the previous chapter. The *Qiongda yishi* begins:[583]

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[581] The phrase "lost in tradition" is a nod to Martin Kern's chapter "Lost in Tradition: The *Classic of Poetry* We Did Not Know," 2010. For a further critic, see my chapter in Kohn, 2015: 1-22.

[582] See the section below "Philosophical proposals escape ideological categorization."

[583] There are different arrangements for the *Qiongda yishi*. I follow the order of the manuscript in Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 2012: 53-76. For a reconstruction that follows Chen Jian 陳劍 and Chen Wei's 陳偉 emendations of the editors' original arrangement, see Cook 2012: 451-64. And Chen Jian, "Guodian jian 'Qiongda yishi,' 'Yucong si' de jichu jianxu tiaozheng" 郭店簡"窮達以時"、"語叢四"舨幾處簡序調整, 2004: 316–322; Chen Wei, *Guodian zhushu bieshi* 郭店竹書別釋, 2003. For Meyer's arguments, his arrangement, and criticism of the Chens, see Meyer, "Structure as a Means of Persuasion," 2005. In my translation and understanding of particular characters, I have also consulted the critical editions of Tu 涂 and Liu 劉, *Guodian chujian xianqin rujia shishu jiaoshi* 郭店楚簡先秦儒家佚書校釋, 2001; Liang 梁, "Zhujian 'Qiongda yishi' yu zaoqi rujia tianren guan" 竹簡窮達以時與早期儒家天人觀, 2003; and Li 2002.

There is Heaven and there is humanity, 有天有人
Heaven and humanity each have their lot. 天人有分[584]
By examining the different lots of Heaven and humanity, [585] 察天人之分
we understand the actions we should undertake. 而知所行矣
If there is a human but it is not his appropriate time, 有其人無其世
even if he is accomplished he will not carry out. 雖賢弗行矣
In turn, if there is the appropriate time, 苟有其世
what difficulties can there be? 何難之有哉[586] (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 27:1-2)[587]

[584] In *Liji* 禮記 "Liyun" 禮運, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 glosses *fen* 分 as *zhifen* 職分, "charge, duty," (分猶職也). *Shisan jing zhushu, Liji* 9: 413a. Liang Tao 梁涛 also adopts this reading. I go along with it because it is much richer in meaning than just saying that Heaven and Man are different. The following line in the texts says that knowing that Heaven and Man have different tasks, charges, functions, and which one is proper to each entity are the basis on which to understand the actions one should undertake. That is to say, what kinds of actions belong to Heaven and which to man, so one knows *how to act. Yu cong* 語叢 1 contains a similar saying: "When one understands which actions are proper to Heaven, and which actions are proper to man, then one understands the *dao*, and once one understands the *dao* one understands fate" 知天所為，知人所為，然後知道，知道然後知命 (*Guodian Chumu zhujian*, 1998: 194). See Liang, "Zhujian 'Qiongda yishi' yu zaoqi rujia tianren guan" 竹簡窮 達以時與早期儒家天人觀, 2003: 65.

[585] The separation between Heaven and humans is a common *topos* in early China. For instance, the "Letter to Ren'an" 報任安書 attributed to Sima Qian also emphasizes the need to understand the boundaries between Heaven and humans as the basis of theodicy (*Hanshu* 62: 2735). There are also parallels in *Xunzi*: "He who is discerning in the difference between Heaven and man can be called a perfected person" (*Xunzi jishi* 17: 362), and *Wenzi*: "Laozi said: It is a fact that people of learning can discern the difference between Heaven and man, and understand the roots of order and chaos" (*Wenzi zuanyi* 11: 1a).

[586] Note the parallel to *Xunzi*, "You zuo" 宥坐: "Whether one is worthy or unworthy is a question of ability. Whether one performs or not is a question of man. Whether one encounters (the right time or person) or not is a question of opportunity. Whether one lives or dies is a question of fate. Now, if a man has not met the opportunity, even if he is worthy, will he be able to carry out? In turn, if he encounters the opportunity, which difficulties can there be?" 夫賢、不肖者，材也；為、不為者，人也；遇、不遇者，時也；死生者，命也。今有其人不遇其時，雖賢、其能行乎？苟遇其時，何難之有？(*Xunzi jishi* 28: 648). Since in the *Xunzi* these are Confucius' words towards his disciples, some scholars that sympathize with the "Confucian" reading of the Guodian manuscripts have proposed that the *Qiongda yishi* could be read as Confucius' speech. See Tu and Liu 2001: 26.

[587] I am referring the reader to the pages that show the slips' photographs, and to the number of the slips where the text I am quoting appears.

Heaven and humans are distinct entities with distinct lots or charges. Grasping this basic ontological difference is necessary so we can understand our role and field of activity in this world. The idea of an "appropriate time" relates to that of Heaven as expressed in the parallelism construction of the text. Heaven, understood as fate or the given, what is beyond human control, determines the appropriate time for actions to succeed. The individual must be ready for an appropriate time by cultivating himself and becoming virtuous. However, even for the virtuous ones, the coming of the appropriate time is not certain. Success and failure depend on opportunity, on meeting the appropriate time or person. The text clarifies this in a series of six illustrations. Here are the first two:

> Shun used to plough at Li Mountain, 舜耕於厲山
> and make pottery along the Gu River. 陶埏於河沽[588]
> He was established as Son of Heaven 立而為天子
> due to his encounter with Yao. 遇堯也
> Shao wore shabby clothing and a hemp blanket, 邵[589]繇衣枲蓋

[588] The graph transcribed as *hu* (沽/滸) means waterside. See Li 2002: 87, and Meyer 2012: 272. As Meyer notes, *Shiji* and *Mozi* give Shun as having made pottery on the Banks of the Yellow River. Tu Zongliu prefers to transcribe it as *gu* 沽, the name of a particular river, parallel to Mount Li in the previous line (Tu and Liu 2001, 29). Both options are plausible. Making pottery at the Gu River also would mean on the banks of a river, though not necessarily the Yellow River. For the sake of keeping the potential parallel between geographical accidents' names, and because there is no need to homogenize the story in the *Shiji* and *Mozi* with the one in the Guodian manuscript to the extent of quoting the same river, I opt to follow Tu and translate the graph as the river name, "Gu."

[589] Meyer reads the first two graphs, *shao yao* 邵繇, as the personal name of a mythical personage, much like Shun. Though *shao yao* does not refer to a mythical figure in any extant text, Meyer argues that "the structure of this enumeration of semihistorical stories in the present subcanto is consistent in that a predicate immediately follows the name of the person" (Meyer 2012: 273). Meyer opposes Li Ling's more convincing view that the second graph, *yao* 繇, is a qualifier of *yi* 衣 ("clothing"), instead of part of the name. I have to agree with Li Ling, not because I cannot accept that a name that does not appear in the extant record could show up in a manuscript, but because I believe that the parallelism works better this way. The first paragraph of this section of the manuscript begins with Shun, a single character name, followed by four characters. The second paragraph, the one under question, would begin with a single character name, Shao, plus four characters. Moreover, the following line is also formed by four characters,

in a mourning hat, he covered his head with hemp clothes. 帽絰蒙巾[590]
He was released[591] from the task of building walls[592] 釋板築
and became an assistant to the Son of Heaven 而佐天子
due to his encounter with Wu Ding. [593] 遇武丁也. (*Guodian* 27: 2-4)

All six illustrations share a common structure: they show people standing in low positions whose fate changes by virtue of an encounter. A chance encounter at the right time with the right person is the turning point. As the text later suggests, an encounter is a timely opportunity.[594] As opposed to the *Zhuangzi*, which advocates the creation of opportunity through adapting to circumstances, the virtuous person here does not *create* opportunity, but merely *awaits* it. This

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reinforcing the structure. Thus I translate *yao* as qualifying *yi* in the same way that *zhi* qualifies *gai*, and the resulting sentence also working nicely with the next line.

[590] The four graphs reinforce each other: *wore a mourning hat, covered his head with a hemp cloth.* There are two verbs for wearing a hat and two words for describing the hat. The text becomes redundant to poetically reinforce the poverty of Shao's coverings.

[591] I read *shi* 釋 as *shifang* 釋放, "release."

[592] Literally, *banzhu* 板築 is "boards to build walls." Shao was released from the place where those constructions took place, or from the task of constructing them.

[593] In the received literature, Fu Yue 傅說 is the figure that Wu Ding discovers in the *banzhu* 板築 or wall-building business and whom he hires as assistant. The people who built these walls were isolated (somewhat like slaves) and of humble origins. Note, however, that the *Mengzi* passage narrating the same story has a very different explanation as for why these virtuous men who would end up playing a relevant role in politics started down from a humble and often miserable origin: rather than a question of encountering the right time and the right person (opportunity, as in the *Qiongda yishi*), in the *Mengzi* the reason why Shun and other figures such as Shun Shu Ao or Bai Lixi were miserable before achieving great positions is strategic, a sort of Heavenly training. "When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility upon these men, it is necessary to first make suffer their hearts and intent, labor their muscles and bones, famish their bodies and skin, impoverish them, introduce chaos in their attempts to perform, so that their hearts are moved and their endurance is hardened, and that they can take advantage of their former incompetence" 故天將降大任於是人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，所以動心忍性，曾益其所不能. *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 12B: 223b.

[594] As Cook notes, citing *Lunheng* "Feng yu" 逢遇, "the term *yu* 遇 itself often carries the sense of random fate or unforeseeable circumstances" (Cook 2012: 430). "We do not search it, and it arrives by itself; we do not make it happen and it completes itself. Its name is 'encounter'" 不求自至，不作自成，是名為遇 (*Lunheng jiaoshi* 1: 9).

notion of awaiting opportunity, moreover, resonates with the following passage from the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策:

聖人不能為時，時至而弗失。舜雖賢，不遇堯也，不得為天子。湯、武雖賢，不當桀、紂不王。故以舜、湯、武之賢，不遭時不得帝王。[595]

The sage cannot create opportunity, but when opportunity arrives, he should not miss it. Even though Shun was accomplished, had he not encountered Yao, he would not have become Son of Heaven. Even though Tang and Wu were accomplished, if not for the inappropriateness of Jie and Zhou, they never would have ruled. Therefore, it is the case that the accomplishments of Shun, Tang, and Wu would have not made them emperors and kings, had they not encountered the right opportunity.

The *Qiongda yishi* further emphasizes the lack of correlation between correct moral behavior and high social standing, that is, the rupture of the often assumed causal link between action and consequence.

At first they lay low, 初韜晦[596]
then their names were elevated. 后名揚
This is not because their virtue had increased. 非其德加
Zi Xu started with many merits, 子胥前多功
then he was put to death. 后戮死
This is not because his wisdom had decayed. [597] 非其智衰也

[595] *Zhanguo ce* 5: 171. There is a parallel idea also in *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, which reads: "The sage cannot create the opportunity, but can accommodate his affairs to it. When the affairs are accommodated to the opportunity is when the achievements are greater" 聖人不能為時，而能以事適時。事適於時者其功大 (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 20: 1361).

[596] These two graphs are among the most contested of the whole manuscript. For the reading of the characters, I follow Li Ling's gloss: "without attracting public attention, lying low" 默默無聞的意思 (Li 2002: 88). They were originally transcribed as *tao* 滔 and *hai* 醢 by the Hubei editors. Li Ling transcribes the first as *tao* 韜, "to sheathe." *Tao* 韜 would be derived from *yao* 舀, which in early manuscripts is often confused with the phonetic form for *tao* 韜. The latter he transcribes as *hui* 晦 instead of *hai* 醢, and meaning "obscure." Tu Zongliu and Liu Zuxin both follow the Hubei editors and transcribe the graph as *tao* 滔, "overflow, a torrent." In its borrowed meaning of *ni shui* 泥水 it also carries the meaning of "little value." For a summary of other possible readings, see Meyer 2012: 277.

[597] This characterization of Wu Zixu appears in similar form in the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳. As legend goes, Wu Zixu was very meritorious in the beginning and yet he fell into disgrace, not because his wisdom had periods of flourishing and decaying, but because of the different

The thoroughbred horse feared Mountain Zhang, 驥厄[598]張[599]山
and the black-mottled grey horse halted at the Thorns of Shao. 騏[600]控[601]於邵棘
This is not because they had lost their physical condition. 非亡體**狀**也
They exhausted the four seas, reaching as far as a thousand *li* 窮四海至千里 because they had encountered Zao Fu. 遇造[父]故也[602]
To encounter or not to encounter lies with Heaven. 遇不遇天也[603]
(*Guodian* 27: 9-10)

The first stanza underlines the rupture of the causal link between virtuous conduct and social standing. The elevation of Shun, Shao, Tang, and other figures was not due to an increase in their virtue, as Wu Zixu's sentence was not a response to moral failure. The second stanza uses the image of fine horses to represent the virtuous person and reaches the conclusion that whether he

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encounters and opportunities he met (Lai Tanyuan 賴炎元, *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 7: 282). On the different early sources where the story of Wu Zixu appears, such as *Shuoyuan*, *Xunzi* and *Yue Jue shu* 越絕書, see Lewis, 1989: 84-85; and the Johnson Wu Zixu series: Johnson 1981; 1980a; 1980b.

[598] While other authors transcribe the verb as *di* 馱, "horse of good quality," Li Ling identifies it with *e* 厄, "in difficulty or distress," based on *Shuoyuan* chapter "Za yan" 雜言, where the graph *e* appears in combination with *ji* 驥, "thoroughbred horse." Meyer corroborates this reading with the fact that in the next, parallel sentence the second graph is also a verb describing the difficulties of the good horse when facing a challenging situation. Li 2002: 89; Meyer 2012: 279-80.

[599] *Zhang* 張 is read by Tu and Liu as "nervous" (Tu and Liu 2001: 34). Preserving the parallel with the next line, I read it as a place name.

[600] *Qi* 騏, "black mottled grey horse" as Li Ling transcribes it, is understood in the sense of *ji* 駿, a fine horse, like the thoroughbred horse of the first line. Li 1999: 496.

[601] Li Ling does not use *kong* 控 but *sai* 塞, with a similar meaning to *e* 厄. He reads "The black mottled grey horse panicked at the thorns of Shao." Li 2002: 89.

[602] According to *Hanshi waizhuan* and *Shuoyuan*, Zao Fu 造父 was an excellent rider.

[603] The *topos* of not encountering the right time is very common in pre-imperial and early imperial literature. It is the topic of the *Lisao* 離騷, a big theme in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, and frequently appears in other important works such as *Xunzi*, *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Huainanzi*.

succeeds or fails depends not on his virtue but on the encounter of the right person. Whether there is an opportunity to flourish or not depends upon Heaven, not humans.

It is not clear what kind of Heaven the text depicts—natural or personalized—but, no matter what, it is equal to fate. If natural, it is the same as fate; if personal, it is a deity that creates fate. Either one is different from Heaven in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and the odes of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs)—a god who actually rewards good deeds and punishes bad ones. The whole idea of the "Mandate of Heaven" relates to a personal Heaven who oversees human action and responds to it accordingly.[604] Yet according to the *Qiongda yishi* there is no moral justice in the world. The philosophical program offered in this text indeed requires the nonexistence of moral justice. It is only because the realms of Heaven and humans are separate and do not necessarily correspond that a human must search for his independence and self-control by himself, without depending upon the turns of Heaven-fate. The *Qiongda yishi* develops this idea:

> **A** [The virtuous person] moves not in order to succeed, 動非為達也
> which is why he does not [resent] when he fails. 故窮而不[怨
> **B** [The virtuous person] hides not in order to achieve a reputation, 隱非][605]為名也
> which is why he does not care when nobody knows him. 故莫之智而不吝
> **A** When the orchid grows in deep and secluded valleys, [芷蘭生于幽谷][606]
> it is not the case that, because there are no people to smell it, [非為無人]嗅[607]

[604] Among classical passages, this is evident in the *Shuoyuan* (*Shuoyuan jinzhu jinyi* 17.580) and *Hanshi waizhuan* 7.282. For more detailed discussion, see also Lupke 2004.

[605] Li Ling adds the three graphs 怨隱非 where the bamboo strip is broken (Li 2002: 114).

[606] Li Ling adds the six graphs 芷蘭生于幽谷, based on passages in *Xunzi* and *Hanshi waizhuan* (Li 2002: 114).

it would not give out its scent. 而不芳

B When the beautiful jade covers itself in mountain stones, 荅堇[608]愈寶山石

it is not the case that, because no one knows its goodness,不為[無人知其]善

it neglects itself. 仵己也 (*Guodian* 27:11-14)

The four clauses in this section work in parallel pairs, which I have signaled by assigning them A and B. The A clauses work with the idea of acting in the right way no matter the consequences. The virtuous person and the orchid do not choose their actions according to the sociopolitical success they may bring. We may read the orchid's "growing" (*sheng* 生) in an active way, ascribing intention to the orchid as an illustration of the virtuous person's behavior. Given that it is its decision to grow in secluded places, the orchid does not resent the fact that no one can smell its scent, and keeps giving it out: much as the virtuous person does not resent his failures and keeps acting in what he believes is the right way. The B clauses, in turn, work with the idea of being hidden from society yet not to neglect their virtue. Both the virtuous person and the jade choose to be unapparent, not exposed to sight, not claiming attention. For that reason, the text goes, they do not resent the lack of reputation, and more importantly, they keep working in their virtue despite their invisibility.

We can read this passage on two levels. First, the descriptive level speaks of virtue as an inherent quality, a permanent and inseparable element that belongs to the object and not the perceiver. Without an external agent's perception, the inherent qualities still shine, recalling the

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[607] The graphs 非為無人 are added by Li Ling based again on *Xunzi* and *Hanshi waizhuan* according to context and following the pattern "failure, yet not x," visible throughout the passage (Li 2002: 114).

[608] Li Ling transcribes the two graphs as *ge jin* 荅堇, based on the *Er'ya* 爾雅 which glosses them as a kind of precious stone (Li 2002: 114). His reading involves a precious stone by means of which the Doors of the Bao Mountain might open. I do not completely understand the logic behind his reconstruction, so I follow Meyers 2012: 281. In any case, the point is that hidden objects do not lose their inherent qualities just because they cannot be admired.

verse of the mystic poet Angelus Silesius: "The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen."[609] Much as the rose, the virtuous person does not engage in an action to achieve a particular result— "he moves not in order to succeed" —but simply because it is the right thing for him to do. His virtue is an inherent quality regardless of whether or not anyone sees it or what reactions it might provoke. Second, the normative level indicates that the virtuous person must never neglect his virtuous conduct even when he is certain that no one can appreciate it: "It is not because no one knows its goodness that it neglects itself." This idea connects with the last stanza:

> Failure and success depend on opportunity, 窮達以時
> Virtuous conduct may be constant, 德行一[610]也
> Yet praise and slander rest on something else. 譽毀在旁
> If acuity reaches the one mother, 聽之一母
> black and white need not be distinguished. 緇[611]白不釐
>
> Failure and success depend on opportunity, 窮達以時
> Dark and bright do not get reiterated along with them. 幽明不再
> This is why the gentleman 故君子
> is committed[612] to self-examination. 敦于反己 (*Guodian* 27: 14-15)

The recalcitrant lack of control of the individual human over the fruit of his actions leaves him in a state of absolute uncertainty and powerlessness. The only thing he can control is his actions and his thinking. Hence, actions and thoughts belong to humans, while consequences belong to

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[609] Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 1996: 35.

[610] As Meyer states, here it is difficult to make sense of the phrase taking the graph as *yi* 弋, "to shoot with bow and arrow." He suggests the reading of *yi* 弋 as *yi* 一, "one," which is well attested in early manuscripts (Kern, "The Odes in Excavated Manuscripts," 2005a: 187). See Meyer 2012: 282.

[611] The graph was originally transcribed as *zhi* 之, but Li Ling changed it to *zi* 緇, "black," to make sense of it and by virtue of the parallel with *bai* 白 and *youming* 幽明 in the line below. Li 2002: 114.

[612] The verb *dun yu* 敦于 has been understood as "being sincere, honest," or "estimate, insist on, urge." "To be committed to" is my attempt to combine the two meanings.

Heaven. Those who advocate reading the text as holding a Confucian idea of Heaven insist on the reading that a human begins an action, but Heaven (fate) completes it. Therefore, a human must await Heaven's decision and always depends upon it. Li Ling makes this argument alluding to the popular saying "A human proposes but God disposes" 謀事在人，成事在天, attested for the first time in the Ming novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, 14th century). In the "Confucian" vision, Heaven is a rhetorical justification for the lack of success of the virtuous man. The gentleman must accept Heaven's order (fate), even when it seems unfair and incomprehensible. Robert Eno represents this view when he argues that "early Ruists" legitimated both their moralizing worldview and their failure to change the world through the notion of Heaven. The idea of humans' complete dependence on Heaven justifies failure and disgrace. It is as a means of creating contentment and acceptance in an unruly world.[613] Eno's argument wants to emphasize the exonerating function of fate.[614] Scott Cook also focuses on the role of Heaven as fate in the *Qiongda yishi*, although not as a means for self-justification. Rather, he reads the message as one of constant self-cultivation. Given that a life-changing chance encounter might happen any time, the gentleman must keep his virtue constant so he is ready when opportunity calls. In this reading, a human depends on Heaven, and the line of separation between the two is not easy to determine.[615]

In contrast, I read the *Qiongda yishi* to emphasize the moral autonomy of humans with respect to Heaven. In the last stanzas, the individual does not await Heaven's judgment to prove

[613] Eno, 1990.

[614] On "refatalization" and the exonerating function of fate, and its contemporary social usages, see Odo Marquard, *Farewell to Matters of Principle*, 1989: 64-86. And Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations*, 2016: 278-9.

[615] Cook, 2012.

him right. Instead, he acts with moral correctness without expecting any reward or return, keeping to virtuous conduct even in the face of slander and failure. Human responsibility turns back on the person: given that no exterior sign can be read as a direct reflection of his actions, he must become his own judge. Since the only thing the gentleman can control is his own actions, straightening his behavior and conducting himself in a morally right way is the only issue that preoccupies him.

Still, despite the fact that the text puts weight on Heaven's part when it comes to the outcomes of human action, it does not take away human autonomy. On the contrary, it reinforces it, saying that even if there is something that we cannot overcome, we may yet go beyond it by means of exercising our agency within the human sphere of activity. By acting purely as humans and not trying to accomplish a Heaven-like degree of control over outcomes, we can overcome Heaven in the sense of achieving autonomy from its charge, the lot it has assigned us, the fate it has in store for us. The *Qiongda yishi* gives humans a sphere of moral autonomy that goes beyond human achievement. This represents a "turning inward." In this manner, the virtuous person copes with fate and uncertainty, and is able to (re)gain control upon what seemed far beyond it.

The Philosophical Turn of Conformity: "Sayings Explained" and Huangdi sijing

Presentation of the texts

"Sayings Explained"[616] ("Quan yan" 詮言) is chapter 14 of the *Huainanzi*, a collection of paired sayings and explanations on the themes of sagely governance and the behavior of the

[616] Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth's *The Huainanzi* (2010: 528; thereafter "*The Huainanzi*") gives alternative interpretations of the chapter title, such as "Explanations and Theories," and "Convincing Sayings." I agree with the authors that the best translation is "Sayings Explained,"

gentleman that pervade the entire book. Within the general structure of the *Huainanzi*, "Sayings Explained" is part of the branch chapters (*mo* 末), which are meant to show illustrations and applications of the themes explored in the root chapters (*ben* 本).[617] "Overview of the Essentials" (*Yao lüe* 要略, chapter 21 of the *Huainanzi*)[618] explains the function of "Sayings Explained" as that of comparing, elucidating, explaining and mending.[619] By means of several literary techniques such as illustration and analogy, aimed at providing clear explications of subtle sayings on relevant topics, the chapter corrects the audience's potential misconceptions with regard to some of the most important topics treated in the *Huainanzi*.

The four political treatises known as *The Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (hereinafter *Huangdi sijing*) were part of the most important material and textual archaeological discovery in the late twentieth century, Mawangdui 馬王堆.[620] Ever since the publication of the silk manuscripts, much has been written about so-called "Huang Lao **黃**老 thought," the Daoist combination of the philosophies of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi to which both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* allude, as well as about its connection with other Warring States schools of thought and

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since it brings forth both the formal structure and function of the chapter. My translations of texts coming from the *Huainanzi* have greatly benefitted by the translations of Major, Queen, Meyer, and Roth in their accomplished work *The Huainanzi.*

[617] On this classification, see Charles Le Blanc, "Huai nan tzu," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 1993: 189. Kern, "Creating a Book and Performing It: The 'Yaolüe' chapter of Huainanzi as a Western Han Fu," 2014. Kern supports the root and branch classification of chapters with phonological data: The first 8 chapter titles share a rhyme, whereas the title chapter 9 begins a new rhyme sequence. See also *The Huainanzi,* p. 14 and onwards.

[618] On the "Yao lüe," see Kern, 2014.

[619] *Huainan honglie jijie* 21: 4a.

[620] See the original excavation report in Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, *Changsha Mawangdui yi hao Hanmu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓, 1973.

particular texts such as *Laozi, Han Feizi* or *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子.[621] I do not participate in the debate over whether a philosophical trend such as Huang Lao existed during the late Warring States and early Han periods, or if it did, whether the Yellow Emperor silk manuscripts are representative of it. My methodological intention in using these excavated materials, as with all others, is precisely to escape those categorizations and to approach them by contrasting the continuities and discontinuities that appear across texts traditionally ascribed to different ideological affiliations.

Philosophical proposal

The notion of conforming social activity to natural cycles that we have seen in the mantic texts did not require reflection, creativity or personal involvement on the part of the agent. For that reason, I have classified the mantic conforming as a non-philosophical method to cope with the future. Texts such as "Sayings Explained" in the *Huainanzi* and several treatises in the excavated *Huangdi sijing* are witnesses of an interesting phenomenon: in them, calendric knowledge and in particular the notion of conformity that lies at its basis becomes a philosophical proposal. In these philosophical texts, the routine practice of conforming becomes part of an ideological system of action in face of fate, as well as a thoughtful, engaged response to the problem of how to cope with what is beyond our control.

The "Great Ancestral Master" chapter in the *Zhuangzi* proposed to take advantage of whatever happens and, by adapting, turn it to one's favor. The *Qiongda yishi* urged the gentleman to disregard the outcomes of his actions as long as he had morally corrected himself.

[621] For good reference studies in Chinese see Wang Xiaobo, 2007; and Yu Mingguang 余明光, *Huangdi sijing yu Huang-Lao sixiang* **黃**帝四經與**黃**老思想, 1989. Hu Jiacong 胡家聰 has a series of articles in the connection between Huang-Lao thought and different early texts. See Hu 1984a, 1984b, 1987 and 1988. In English language, see Peeremboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China*, 1993; Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, 1997; and Csikszentmihalyi's dissertation, "Emulating the Yellow Emperor," 1994.

The philosophical conformity group, in turn, claims that the agent who conforms to natural rhythms is not accountable for his own actions, given that he does not independently choose his own endeavors and undertakings. Taking responsibility and even the very idea of agency away, this agent feels neither worry or contentment in face of the lashes of fortune, and he remains unencumbered whatever the outcomes of his actions.

The first of the four silk treatises, *Canon and Law* (*Jingfa* 經法), is addressed at a ruler who, to successfully conquer, govern and administer a state, needs to conform his enterprises to the cyclical movements of the seasons. The theme also appears in the other Huangdi silk manuscripts, being an underlying principle of political order. The conformity between the natural and the social realms (what Robin McNeal has called the Naturalist view) guarantees the success of the ruler's actions.

天有死生之時，國有死生之正。因天之生也以養生，謂之文；因天之殺也以伐死，謂之武：文武并行，則天下從矣。[622]

Heaven has seasons for life and death. States have policies for life and death. To *conform*[623] to Heaven's season for life to nourish the living is called civil. To *conform* to Heaven's season for killing to attack the dying is called martial. When both civil and martial jointly are carried out, all under Heaven will follow and obey.

Conforming to the times of Heaven (*yin tianshi/dang tianshi* 因天時/當天時[624]) is a major theme in *Jingfa*. Heaven is the model for all human activities.[625] A conforming ruler is said to form a

[622] "Junzheng" 君正 chapter in *Huangdi*, p. 492.

[623] Remember that *yin* had a technical meaning of "conforming" only in calendrical texts and texts whose political philosophy is strongly based on calendric knowledge, such as the *Huangdi* passage quoted above. For further reference, see chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation," the section "Yin Without Adaptation."

[624] *Dang* 當, "to match," is also a means of conveying the same idea of conforming. In *Shi dajing* 十大經 "Liming" 立命 chapter, the Yellow Emperor says: "I number the days, reckon the months, and compute the years in order to match the movements of sun and moon" 數日、**曆**月、計歲，以當日月之行. *Huangdi*, p. 505. See also Wang, 2006: 53.

triad with Heaven and Earth (*san yu tiandi* 參於天地), which means that he moves or remains quiescent *adjusting* to Heaven and Earth's timing for each form of activity (動靜參於天地).[626] Literally, we read this formulaic expression as "stand side by side with Heaven and Earth," which surely implies to conform and not to transgress their appropriate timing. In one of his direct speeches, the Yellow Emperor claims to be the only person whose power (*de* 德) matches that of Heaven (*pei tian* 配天).[627] It is in this quality of duplicating Heaven's awesome power that the ruler can collaborate with Heaven and Earth in administering his portion of the world – the human realm. Note, however, that the ruler's role in this seemingly collaborative task remains below that of his cosmic matches. Only by making his enterprises accord to the normative celestial order can he successfully administer his state. The opposite, acting in an untimely manner, is called "contrary" (動靜不時謂之逆),[628] and it is the cause of chaos, disasters, harm and eventually the ruler's loss of state power. This ecological theory of political and social order is not so different from what we have seen in the calendric texts known as "Monthly Ordinances."

The term *ni* 逆 (the opposite of *shun* 順, "conformity") is used as "contrariety," "opposition" throughout many different Early Chinese texts such as the Documents (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Guanzi*, or the *Mengzi* to name just a few. In its most abstract meaning, it refers to

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[625] Chapter "Four Measures" ("Si du" 四度) in *Jingfa*, for instance, phrases the idea of taking Heaven as a model in this way: "Encompassing changes, movements and actions: Heaven becomes the model [for these activities]" 周遷動作，天為之稽. *Huangdi*, p. 153.

[626] *Huangdi*, p. 156. Forming a "triad" with Heaven and Earth is also an important concept in *Liji* and *Xunzi*.

[627] "Li ming" chapter. *Huangdi*, p. 254.

[628] "Si du" chapter. *Huangdi*, p. 495.

being contrary to the natural order and the social one when this is understood as a reflection of the former. However, as Peerenboom cautions in his study of the Huangdi silk manuscripts, *ni* can also hold the meaning of "welcoming," "going to meet," "receiving" or "anticipating."[629] It is thus defined in the *Er Ya* 爾雅 and *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, two of the oldest dictionaries of Early Chinese terms.[630] Peerenboom argues that, in the Huangdi texts, the type of action that implies this "meeting" or "anticipating" is the same kind of uneffective lead that we have referred to as "acting first" as opposed to "following after" (staying behind and responding to the situation in an adapted manner) in the previous chapter.[631] The Huangdi texts use the terms "acting first" (*xian* 先) and "following after" (*hou* 後) in the same technical way that we have previously seen in the *Huainanzi* and the military texts. Take the text below as an example:

凡彼禍難也，先者恒凶，後者恒吉。[632]

As a rule, those who in encountering calamities or adversities act first (taking the lead) are constantly inauspicious, and those who follow after are constantly auspicious.

In a different passage, the Yellow Emperor explains the way in which a mythical virtuous ruler was able to bring All under Heaven under his control.[633] Da Ting did not arbitrarily initiate

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[629] Peerenboom, 1993: 65.

[630] See *Shuowen jiezi, juan* 3; and *Er'ya* 爾雅, "Shi yan" 釋言. The both explain *ni* as welcoming, anticipating (逆，迎也). *Er'ya* is the earliest collection of glosses explaining terms contextualized in passages from the early writings, going back to the 3rd century B.C.E. See Coblin, "*Erh ya* 爾雅," 1993: 94–99. The *Shuowen* was compiled by Xu Shen in the 2nd century B.C.E. It is more comprehensive than the *Er'ya* in that it provides the etymology and structure of the characters. See Boltz, "*Shuo wen chieh tzu* 說文解字," 1993: 429–442.

[631] *Huangdi*, p. 336.

[632] *Huangdi*, p. 336.

[633] The mythical ruler is called Da Ting, which has been interpreted as an alternative name for Shen Nong 神農 (Yates, 1997: 264). According to *Zhuangzi* "Qu Qie" 胠篋, Da Ting and Shen Nong are two different rulers from the old ages of perfect virtue (*Zhuangzi jijie* 10: 88). See *Huangdi*, 390.

action (不擅作事)[634] but rather awaited the point in which his enemy had brought his contrariety towards Heaven and Earth to the extreme and only then attacked (以待逆節所窮).[635] At that point, Earth had taken away his enemy's strength and Heaven's times and seasons were acting against his enemy (見地奪力，天逆其時).[636] As a consequence, "he used very little force, but had a sound reputation and a brilliant name, the supreme example of compliance" 用力甚少，名聲章名，順之至也.[637] This minimum effort to bring successful actions to completion is what happens in the ecological or naturalist view of politics when the ruler conforms to the order of nature.

"Sayings Explained" is not a consistent chapter. It contains a total of 72 sayings with the theme of sagely governance and their respective normative interpretations, following the *jing-shuo* 經說 format.[638] Although these sayings relate to a common theme, we can identify different underlying philosophies giving way to different kinds of knowledge and practical proposals. For instance, we find proposals both of adaptation and conformity. The sections I discuss below present the same ecological or naturalist arguments as the *Huangdi sijing.* The ruler, far from acting out of his own will, must adjust his governmental actions to Heaven and Earth's cyclical movements. This leads to a series of interesting consequences with regard to philosophical strategies to cope with the future.

(Saying) 釋道而任智者必危，棄數而用才者必困。有以欲多而亡者，未有以無欲而危者也；有以欲治而亂者，未有以守常而失者也。

[634] *Huangdi*, p. 396.

[635] *Huangdi*, p. 396.

[636] *Huangdi*, p. 398.

[637] *Huangdi*, p. 398.

[638] Major, 2010: 528.

故

(Explication) 智不足免患，愚不足以至於失寧。守其分，循其理，失之不憂，得之不喜，故成者非所為也，得者非所求也。入者有受而無取，出者有授而無予，因春而生，因秋而殺，所生者弗德，所殺者非怨，則幾於道也。[639]

(Saying) Those who disregard the Way and rely on knowledge will necessarily be endangered. Those who abandon numerical calculations and employ ability will necessarily be in trouble. There have been those who perished because their desires were numerous. There have never been those who were endangered by not having desires. There have been those who desired order but suffered disorder. There have never been those who preserved what is constant and yet lost [their state].

Thus,

(Explication) While knowledge will not suffice for you to avoid anxiety, stupidity will not suffice to lose your peace. If you preserve these distinctions, and act in *conformity to* these principles, when you lose you will not feel worried, and when you succeed you will not feel happy. For when you accomplish something, it is not because you have acted deliberately, and when you achieve something, it is not because you have sought after it. What you gain is because of accepting and not because of [consciously] taking. What you give is because of handing to others without [consciously] conferring. If you give life in conformity with spring, and you kill in conformity with autumn, those to whom you grant life will not view you as exerting power, and those whom you subject to death will not view you as expressing anger. Thus you will have come close to the Way.

This saying places the Way, numerical calculations, and the constants on one plane; an individual's knowledge, ability and desires onto an opposite one. The first is the plane of objective standards, universal, unchanging and impartial rules. The second is the plane of subjective choices, partiality, inconstancy and bias. One's own way of doing things must be discarded in favor of an objective mode of dealing with reality. The term "numerical calculations" (*shu* 數) refers to knowledge on constant principles of movement and action (the "constants," *chang* 常) obtained through observation of nature, which is necessary to the understanding of seasonal rhythms, hence the creation of calendars. This is the type of knowledge one must rely on when taking action, and not any other kind of learned expertise (*zhi* 智), which inevitably suffers from partiality and instability. "Desires" (*yu* 欲) relate to the self,

[639] *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 4a. There is a parallel in *Wenzi* "Daode" 道德 (*Wenzi zuanyi* 5: 6a).

and in that regard to egotism, fickleness and blindness. One must not face important affairs with subjective knowledge and fluctuating emotions. There are standards that humanity can follow and especially the ruler must conform to when engaging in actions that have repercussions for all under Heaven.

Let us see the first consequence of acting in conformity. The explication in the *Huainanzi* reads: "If you preserve these distinctions, and act in *conformity to* these principles, when you lose you will not feel worried, and when you succeed you will not feel happy." The "distinctions" (*fen* 分) that the explication urges the ruler to preserve remind us of those listed in *Huangdi sijing* "Six Distinctions" ("Liu fen" 六分). There we find a catalogue of six ways of being compliant (*shun* 順) and six ways of being contrary (*ni* 逆) relevant to the ruling of the state. This is the summary of the outcomes of following the Six Distinctions:

六順六逆[乃]存亡[興壞]之分也。主上執六分以生殺，以賞[罰]，以必伐。天下太平，正以明德，參之於天地，而兼覆載而無私也，故王天下。[640]

The six compliances and six oppositions [then] are the distinctions between preservation and destruction, [prosperity and ruin]. The ruler above grasps the six distinctions to give life or to kill, to reward or to [punish], and to be inevitable in military attacks. When the world is at Grand Peace, [the ruler] governs with discerning virtue, he makes a triad with Heaven and Earth, both covering up and holding down without private bias. Thus, he is able to rule All under Heaven as a true king.

According to "Six Distinctions," when acting in conformity with a set of standard, objective and constant principles that impose a series of orderly, regular actions throughout the year, the agent has no private bias (*wu si* 無私). Indeed, these texts go so far as to say that he does not act out of his own will. As seen above, the conforming agent of "Sayings Explained" does not act deliberately (*fei suo wei* 非所為) or consciously in search of a result (*wu suo qiu* 無所求). He

[640] *Huangdi*, p. 138.

does not arbitrarily initiate actions (*bu wei shi* 不為始) or adhere to his own opinions (*bu zhuan ji* 不專己).[641] He merely does what he is supposed to do according to the natural cycles, what is expected from him. In this sense, he has no will and he is a non-actor. The result is that whatever the outcomes of "his" actions, he experiences no anxiety or stress, as if they are completely unrelated to him.

(Saying)

聖人…不能使禍不至，信己之不迎也；不能使福必來，信己之不攘也。

(Explication)

禍之至也，非其求所生，故窮而不憂；

福之至也，非其求所成，故通而弗矜。

知禍福之制不在於己也，故閒居而樂，無為而治。[642]

(Saying)

The sage (…) cannot prevent ill fortune from arriving yet trusts that he personally will not summon it. He cannot assure that good fortune will invariably come to him, yet trusts that he personally will not yield to it.[643]

(Explication)

If misfortune befalls him, because it is not something he sought to bring about, should he fail, he feels no anxiety.

If good fortune befalls him, because it is not something he sought to bring about, should he succeed, he feels no pride.

He knows that what determines bad and good fortune is beyond his control.[644] Thus he is joyful at his leisure and governs through non-action.

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[641] See also "Designations" (*Cheng* 稱): "The sage does not initiate actions arbitrarily, does not adhere to his own opinions, does not make plans beforehand, nor act for gain, not reject good fortune, but conforms to the rules of Heaven" 聖人不為始，不專己；不豫謀，不棄時；不為得，不辭福。因天之則 (*Huangdi*, p. 414).

[642] *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 5a.

[643] Summon ill fortune is by being contrary to the natural principles, by not conforming. He will not have bad emotions if things go wrong, since he is not an actor.

On the surface this might seem a similar argument to that in the *Qiongda yishi*. However, what we find here is a non-actor persuaded of his lack of control hence his lack of accountability for his own actions. The *Qiongda yishi* agent knows that, in a world that suffers from absence of moral retribution and moral justice, the link between his actions and their outcomes is broken. Therefore he cannot guarantee good external results and must keep to himself. Moreover, the *Qiongda yishi* agent believes in the morality of his actions and in his self-cultivation. He is not discouraged from acting "correctly" while awaiting the right time, whether this is sure to come or not. The conforming agent, in turn, goes beyond thinking that the link action-outcome is broken to believe that he is not acting at all. In this context, and unlike most cases, the popular concept of "non-action" (*wuwei* 無為), which in most occasions should be understood as a type of non-constrictive, adaptive action, indeed means non acting. Not because the ruler simply remains inactive, but because he is persuaded that acting in conformity with Heaven and Earth's rhythms means that he is not the one performing the actions. The world (Heaven and Earth) acts through him.

The philosophical turn of the practice of conformity leads, in the first place, to a relief of the individual's emotional burden with regard to failure in uncontrollable, unforeseen circumstances. In taking away the negative emotions, the relevant positive ones need to go, too ("should he succeed, he feels no pride"). Yet the agent's state of mind is described as joyful (*le* 樂). He is at rest, unencumbered by extreme disturbing passions. Such a sage ruler is a figure that acknowledges that the future is beyond his control, and his way of coping with his powerlessness

[644] See also *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 2a for the topic of fate beyond our control: "Those who comprehend the conditions and qualities of fate, do not concern themselves with what cannot be helped in fate" 通命之情者，不憂命之所無奈何.

and ordinary life's uncertainty is to remain neutral, distant and at peace, unencumbered with reality to the extent of denying his participation on it.

The second consequence is that the conforming ruler-agent is free from blame and resentment from the people, since they understand that he is *not* acting. In the passage from "Sayings Explained" quoted above it says: "If you nourish life in conformity with spring, and you kill in conformity with autumn, those to whom you grant life will not view you as exerting Moral Potency, and those whom you subject to death will not view you as expressing anger." Also, *Huangdi sijing* says: "That when [the people] receive rewards they have no special affection, and when they suffer punishments they harbor no resentment is because of conformity" 號令發必行，俗也。男女勸勉，愛也。動之靜之，民無不聽，時也。受賞無德，受罪無怨，當也.[645] Rather than the ruler enacting endeavors, it is the *dao* itself, nature, or the world, acting through the ruler that is causing things to be done. Hence the ruler is free from responsibility for his actions. He is not accountable, but in any case the world as a whole is, in the form of fate.

The explication to saying XVII from *Huainanzi* "Sayings Explained," quoted above, closes with the formulaic phrase "come close to the Way" (*ji yu dao* 幾於道). The formula appears in other early texts too, where it means sharing the nature of the *dao* –whatever this nature is intended to be— or acting in a way similar to the *dao*. In *Laozi*, water behaves in a way similar to the *dao* when it prefers the low locations everyone else hates and as a result eliminates opposition.[646] In *Huainanzi* and *Wenzi*, the nature of a sage such as Confucius comes close to

[645] *Huangdi*, p. 112.

[646] *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 20.

that of the *dao* in that he is not concerned with his own benefit but with the common good.[647] In the conformity philosophy context, coming close to the *dao* means becoming the hands and feet of the *dao*. That is to say, one is enacting and performing the *dao*'s intent, merging with it to the extent of dissolving into it and losing one's individuality and one's own will. In this case, the expression "close to the *dao*" truly means being so close that the ruler becomes one with the Way. For the ruler of *Huangdi sijing*, behaving in a conforming way as to becoming one with the Way implies not to attempt to rule over things, not to attempt to do violence on things, not to transgress their order, and not to control them.

There is a third consequence for the conforming agent. The apparent lack of control of such an agent turns out to be an unlikely weapon to recover control. In the Huangdi texts, the conforming behavior is also conceptualized as not acting as a "master" or "host" (*zhu* 主), which is key to becoming the true master of the world:

故唯執道者能上明於天之反，而中達君臣之半，密察於萬物之所終始，而弗為主。故能至素至精，浩瀰無形，然後可以為天下正。[648]

Therefore, only he who grasps the Dao is able to understand the turnings of Heaven above and in the middle to comprehend the separation between ruler and minister. He minutely examines where the myriad phenomena begin and end, and does not act as their master. When he is able to be most plain, most quintessential, grandly filling up the formless, only then can he be the rectifier of the world.

The consequence of not acting as a master of things is counterintuitive: by not attempting to control, and acting in conformity with the natural order, the ruler actually achieves the highest level of control over the world. Heaven and Earth then become the ruler's "guests." We observe an oppositional mobility between acting as a "master" (*zhu* 主) and being a "guest" (*ke* 客) in the

[647] *Huainan honglie jijie* 18: 17a. *Wenzi zuanyi* 1: 3b.

[648] *Huangdi*, p. 79.

silk texts, which is fundamental for the conformity philosophical proposal to retaking control.[649] It is made explicit in the following passage:

天道環[周][650]於人, 反為之客。爭作得時，天地與之。爭不衰，時靜不靜，國家不定，可作不作。天稽環周人，反為之[客]。靜作得時，天地與之；靜作失時，天地奪之。[651]

Heaven's way circulates [between Heaven and] man, and [man] can reverse Heaven's [role] to act as his guest. When [the ruler] conforms to the proper season in his contending and leading actions, Heaven and Earth will collaborate with him. But if [the ruler] contends with a state that is not declining and, in the season of quiescence, he is not quiescent, his state will not be stable, and the leading actions that could be taken will not successfully arise. Heaven's plan circulates between Heaven and man, and [man] can reverse Heaven's [role] to act as his [guest]. When quiescence and action are timely performed in the proper season, Heaven and Earth will collaborate with [the ruler]. When quiescence and action lose their proper season, Heaven and Earth will take over him.

In *Huangdi sijing*, the relation between the way of Heaven and that of humanity is reversible (*fan* 反). This reversibility is expressed through the images of the master or host and the guest. In principle, the relationality is clear: Heaven is the host and humans are Heaven's guests. However, by means of accepting being merely a "guest" in the course of nature and not attempting to "master" or rule over things, namely by conforming to the way of Heaven and not imposing

[649] The conceptual pair "zhu-ke" 主客 also appears in military theory, referring to the "defensive force" versus the "invading" or "attacking force." In the military context, these concepts are also reversible through different strategies. See *Tang Li wendui* 唐太宗李衛公問對今註今譯, 1986: 193. Most notably, *Laozi* 69 discuss "zhu-ke" 主客 in a military context in the following way: "In the use of the army there is a saying: I do not dare to act as a host, and prefer to act as a guest; I do not dare to advance an inch, and prefer to retire a foot" 用兵有言：吾不敢為主，而為客；不敢進寸，而退尺. Again, the host is the one initiating the war, whereas the guest is the force awaiting the attack. The Heshang gong 河上公 commentary glosses *zhu* 主 as *xian* 先, "initiating an action," and *ke* 客 as *he* 和, "going along in harmony" (*Daozang* 道藏, *Daode zhenjing jizhu* 道德真經集註 vol. 20: 152b). Initiating the war, as deliberately initiating any other kind of action out of one's own egotistic will, is contrary and pernicious. In war as in everyday life, moving after is a better strategy. See also *Laozi* 73 and 34 for similar notions of successful action.

[650] Missing character. Gao Heng fills it with *zhou* 周 based on a similar line that follows. See *Huangdi*, p. 327.

[651] *Huangdi*, p. 327.

one's own will onto the order of things, the person's role will turn from that of a guest to that of a host. By accommodating to Heaven and Earth, the agent can rely on the order of nature to see his purposes to completion. Relying on Heaven and Earth, the ruler's ruling becomes effortless and successful. If, on the contrary, the ruler attempts to rule over Heaven, he will in turn remain its guest, and not a very welcome one. Conforming, as a philosophical proposal, not only is a way to free the agent from responsibility and anguish in face of the uncertainty of what lies beyond his field of influence. It is also a way to empower the agent so that he overcomes his lack of control over the course of events.

There has been some debate over this issue since the discovery of the Mawangdui manuscripts. Some scholars have argued for a similar retaking of control in the Huangdi texts. Early on, Gao Heng 高亨 and Dong Zhi'an 董治安 argued that the person can make Heaven a guest by accommodating to the natural order. They used the same textual evidence that I have quoted above. The drawback of their article is that it was an attempt to make the newly found philosophy of Huang-Lao consistent with 20th century Chinese Marxism and Materialism. However, Mao Zedong's quotes and isms apart, their analysis is sound.[652] Jin Chunfeng's 金春峰 purpose, in turn, was to demonstrate that the silk manuscripts represented a more positive view of the relationship between man and Heaven than the *Laozi*. In his view, the *Laozi* holds a negative philosophy of action where man can only submit to Heaven. The silk manuscripts, he argues, allow for man to "win over" (*sheng* 勝) Heaven by accepting the principles of natural order and becoming a triad with Heaven and Earth. While I agree with his conclusions, the textual sources that he uses to support this argument do not speak in his favor. He uses an out-of-

[652] See their "Shi da jing chulun" 十大經初論, 1975: 89-97.

context quote from *Huangdi* "Guoci" 國次 that reads "Man forcefully wins over Heaven." The longer context is: "Should [man] exceed and miss the mark [conformity between his actions and the order of nature], Heaven will send down calamity. Should man forcefully win over Heaven, he must be careful not to miss the mark. Should Heaven in turn win over man, conform and march together with him" 過極失當，天將降殃。人強勝天，慎避勿當。天反勝人，因與**俱**.[653] It is not clear what kind of "winning" this would be for man over Heaven, when it is defined as "forceful" and leaves man with the responsibility of not missing the mark.

It is for this reason that Peerenboom rejects the arguments of the authors who defend the idea of man overcoming Heaven in the Huangdi texts. I do not claim that "the author of the *Boshu* [allows] humans to actively determine their own way by overcoming nature."[654] In the manuscripts, man must always conform to Heaven, and thereby is not able to *determine* his fate or completely overcome the natural order. However, there is in these texts a way to retake control within the acknowledged lack of control, much as in "Great Ancestral Master" and *Qiongda yishi*. By acting in an accommodating and conforming way, Heaven will serve the agent's purpose, who will be able to rely on Heaven and Earth, and accomplish everything effortlessly and successfully. In this I agree with Chen Guying 陳鼓應 when he says that the text brings out the human field of deliberate activity: "The relationship master-guest is reversible. If man is able to grasp the regular pattern of movement of the way of Heaven, and timely seize the right moment for action, then man can reverse the positions of host and guest [and gain the

[653] *Huangdi*, pp. 84-85. See Jin Chunfeng, "Lun Huanglao boshu de zhuyao sixiang" 論**黃**老帛書的主要思想, 1986: 54-60

[654] Peerenboom, 1993: 69.

initiative].”[655] This is the *Huangdi sijing* philosophical answer to the problem of control. As we have seen above, the role of man in the triadic relationship with Heaven and Earth was subordinated to his two cosmic partners. Only by agreeing to refrain himself from imposing his own will and enacting his own course of action can man receive the help of Heaven in his undertakings and see them brought to successful completion. By conforming to the way of Heaven and Earth, the ruler becomes one with the *dao* itself, merges with it and achieves its power. This gives the ruler a fantastic capacity to transcend his human limits and acquire the same potency as Heaven and Earth.

In sum, both texts, “Quan yan” and *Huangdi sijing*, which for convenience I have called the “conformity group,” describe an agent devoid of will and accountability for his actions. This agent, most commonly the ruler, claims that his actions are not his, but those of Heaven itself, integrated in the natural process to the extent of being merged or dissolved into it as one. It is in this manner that he relieves pressure from his lack of control over the consequences of his actions and the uncertainty of ordinary and political life. On the top of that, we find a proposal in the Huangdi texts for a retaking of control. By means of tirelessly acting in conformity with the natural order he achieves a maximum degree of efficacy in his actions, which achieve the support of Heaven. It is thus that this agent trades his personal will for success and a sense of existential competence.

[655] *Huangdi*, p. 328.

PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSALS ESCAPE IDEOLOGICAL CATEGORIZATIONS[656]

We have seen different philosophical programs as answers to the same issue: how to take control over our lives when they seem swamped by uncertainty. They are not the only ones in Early Chinese texts. A complex, heterogeneous text like the *Zhuangzi*, for instance, contains at least three different proposals to solve the same set of issues.[657] In "Great Ancestral Master" we have seen that adaptability is key to recover control when things get out of hand.

Interestingly, other chapters of the *Zhuangzi* contain passages that contradict the teachings of "Great Ancestral Master"; they are in intellectual consonance with the moral approach of the *Qiongda yishi*. For example, there is the story of Confucius's sojourn between the two states of Chen 陳 and Cai 蔡.[658] Although Confucius is clearly in distress, expelled from his native state of Lu 魯, lacking food and water, and driven to exhaustion, he keeps singing and playing the lute as if nothing had happened, provoking his disciples to accuse him of being "a complete failure." Confucius responds:

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[656] This section was presented at the 9th International Conference in Daoist Studies, organized by Livia Kohn and held at Boston University in May 2014. It is partially reproduced in my article "Beyond our Control? Two Responses to Uncertainty and Fate in Early China," 2015: 1-22.

[657] In his chapter about the *Zhuangzi*, Perkins considers "more than a dozen discussions of bad things happening to apparently good people" (Perkins, 2014: 151). This chapter presents an interesting discussion of different approaches to what Perkins characterizes as the topic of evil. My emphasis is different, as I deal with three different proposals to solve the problems of uncertainty and taking control, and have a methodological purpose in mind: demonstrating the benefits of taking a problem-oriented, cross-textual approach to the study of Early Chinese philosophy.

[658] The story of Confucius's journey between Chen and Cai is found in different versions in many early sources, including *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Xunzi*, *Lunyu*, and *Mozi*. Each version offers a different take on the story, Confucius' image varying accordingly from sage hero to hypocrite and fool. See Makeham, "Between Chen and Cai," 1998; Chen Shaoming 陳少明, "Kongzi weiyu Chen Cai zhi hou" 孔子危於陳蔡之後, 2004; Li Nailong 李乃龍, "Kongzi zhi e yu Zhuangzi zhi yi" 孔子之厄與莊子之意, 2011.

是何言也！君子通於道之謂通，窮於道之謂窮。今丘抱仁義之道，以遭亂世之患，其何窮之為？故內省而不窮於道，臨難而不失其德，天寒既至，霜露既降，吾是以知松柏之茂也。陳、蔡之隘，於丘其幸乎！[659]

What kind of talk is that! When the gentleman thoroughly understands the way, it is called "success";[660] when he has an exhausted understanding of the way, it is called "failure." Now you see that I, Qiu, embrace the way of humanity and righteousness in order to face the anxieties of our chaotic age. How can this be considered failure? Take as example that I engage in inner reflection and do not fail to understand the way, that when I face difficulties I do not lose my virtue. When the cold weather arrives and the frost and dew fall, I understand how luxuriant pines and cypresses can be. This strait between Chen and Cai is a delight for me, Qiu!

Redefining success and failure with a subjective turn, the Confucius of "Yielding Kings" ("Rang wang" 讓王 chapter in the *Zhuangzi*) proclaims his moral autonomy. He is not dependent upon external conditions to prove his righteous moral conduct. He himself is his only judge, working through "inner reflection" (*nei xing* 內省), another way of referring to self-examination (*fan ji* 反己/ *shen du* 慎獨).[661] Instead of proposing to look outward as "Great Ancestral Master" suggests, this passage matches the position of the *Qiongda yishi* in proposing an inward turn to overcome calamity by means of moral autonomy and independence from external conditions, including Heaven.

The same holds true of the following passage in *Zhuangzi* "Cultivating the Inner Nature" ("Shan xing" 繕性), whose author believes in the idea of the existence of an appropriate timing that cannot be created but merely awaited:

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[659] *Zhuangzi jijie* 28: 257.

[660] There is a wordplay here with the word *tong* 通, which means "understanding thoroughly" but also "go through," and by extension "succeed." The same happens with the word *qiong* 窮, which means "poor," "exhausted" and by extension be understood as "fail."

[661] The expression *shen qi du* 慎其獨 appear in several early texts, including *Liji*, *Zhongyong*, *Daxue* 大學, *Xunzi*, *Wenzi* and *Huainanzi*. The expression *fanji* 反己 also appears in texts as diverse as *Shuoyuan*, *Wenzi*, *Hanshi waizhuan*, *Zhuangzi* and *Shiji*.

道之人何由興乎世，世亦何由興乎道哉！道無以興乎世，世無以興乎道，雖聖人不在山林之中，其德隱矣…當時命而大行乎天下，則反一無跡；不當時命而大窮乎天下，則深根寧極而待。此存身之道也…危然處其所而反其性，己又何為哉！…故曰：正己而已矣。[662]

How can people of the way raise themselves in this age! How can this age raise itself in the way! When the way has no means to rise in the age, and the age has no means to rise in the way, although the sages are not in the middle of mountains and forests, their virtue is hidden. . . If only fate and times were in conformity, [the sages] could carry out great moral actions in the world. They could bring back a state of unity without leaving a trace. Since fate and times are not in conformity, all they find is failure in the world. All they can do is to deepen their roots in tranquility and wait. This is the way to preserve oneself . . . With a sense of autonomy they keep to their places and reflect on their nature. What else is there for them to do? . . . Therefore, we say, they simply rectify themselves.

Other *Zhuangzi* passages, too, speak of taking control over fate through self-reflection and by improving the only thing we control, i.e., our own behavior. Examples include the stories of Shen Tujia 申徒嘉, who has lost a foot in chapter 5, and of Confucius traveling to Kuang 匡 in chapter 17, both representing an attitude in clear opposition to the position represented in "Great Ancestral Master."

There is, moreover, a third position in the *Zhuangzi*. Chapter "Letting be and Exercising Forbearance" ("Zai you" 在宥), links fate with inner nature so that "letting fate be" is a way of realizing one's true nature. People lose their original nature and proper fate when they try to impose an external order upon things, which really should be self-regulating. Concerned with rewards and afraid of punishments, they lose their ability to act in accordance with their inner nature and fate. Therefore, it is best to live by non-constrictive or non-assertive action (*wuwei* 無為), and it also is the best way for the ruler to govern his state.[663] Only by "cutting off sageliness

[662] *Zhuangzi jijie* 16: 136-137.

[663] *Zhuangzi jijie* 11: 91.

and abandoning knowledge" (*jue sheng qi zhi* 絕聖棄知)[664] can we return to our original state and ultimately realize our proper fate. All attempts at control can only lead to chaos and artificiality. Therefore, "the sage comprehends Heaven but does not assist it" 聖人觀於天而不助.[665] This is yet a third view with regard to fate and the uncontrollable in the *Zhuangzi* where what is not under our control is always the best that can happen, and where all attempt to take control over it leads to chaos and artificiality. It is similar to the conforming position, with the difference that we do not find here a fixed, macro natural order to which we should accommodate (Heaven and Earth, the cosmic orderly rhythms) but find instead different and individual natures that must be respected each in their own right.

Philosophical conformity, linked to a naturalist view of the world, is also the case of a proposal that appears cross-textually across different scholastic affiliations. Even more so, the proposal of conformity must remain without single intellectual affiliation by definition, since it comes to light powerfully in all three Early Chinese compilations that were conceived as a perfect collaboration of different philosophies and types of practical and theoretical knowledge: the *Huainanzi*, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, and the *Guanzi.*[666] The other text where we have seen deployed conforming as a philosophy of action, *Huangdi sijing*, too, escapes scholastic definition even if we understand its intellectual affiliation as Huang Lao, as it is supposed to move back and forth from the philosophy of Laozi to that of the mythical Yellow Emperor. The *Guanzi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* and the *Huangdi sijing*, where the proposal of conforming took

[664] *Zhuangzi jijie* 11: 93.

[665] *Zhuangzi jijie* 11: 98.

[666] McNeal has argued that the *Guanzi* is also this kind of overall book of practical knowledge meant for a universal ruler in *The Development of Naturalist Thought in Ancient China*. See pages 193-4, and 199-200.

form and stood as a philosophy of action for the ruling agent, contain multidisciplinary assemblages of practical knowledge and philosophical theories. These philosophical theories are multifarious and not always consistent with each other, conceived to illustrate different aspects of the world and to be applied to different situations.

Let me give one example of philosophical conforming in a text that has been read as Legalist, Confucian, Daoist or as a combination of all, the *Guanzi*. In particular, "Ban fa" 版法 chapter (an approximate translation would be "Taking Models to Establish the Government")[667] is believed to have Mohist influence given its use of the concept of inclusive care, *jian'ai* 兼愛.[668] I present here the "Ban fa" passages that share the same philosophy of action for the ruler as "Sayings Explained" in the *Huainanzi*, a miscellaneous chapter that shows traces of ideas present in *Laozi*, *Xunzi*, *Han Feizi*, *Mozi*, *Zhuangzi* and *Wenzi*, among others;[669] as well as "Jingfa" and "Junzheng" in the *Huangdi sijing*, whose traditional categorization is Huang-Lao thought.

(Ban fa) 凡將立事, 正彼天植.

In general, when [the ruler] is about to put affairs in place, he should make them correct by conforming to Heaven's cultivation [model].[670]

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[667] *Ban* 版 means a written tablet with laws and principles of governance. *Fa* 法 is in this context to model oneself after something. See Rickett, 1985: 136; and Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳, *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注 vol. 3, 2004: 1197.

[668] Rickett, 1985: 136.

[669] *The Huainanzi*, pp. 530-531, and 534.

[670] "Ban fa jie" 版法解 (see next footnote) explains *tian zhi* 天植 as *tian xian* 天心. Following this gloss, one would read *zhi* 植 as *zhi* 志, will. I would like, nevertheless, to capture in my translation the planting and cultivating analogy implied by the word *zhi* 植 and also by *li* 立, which we can read as to put into place, to plant. Note that the text is discussing the right time to carry out different sociopolitical activities based on an agricultural model of growth and decay. *Bi* 彼 is here understood as *shun* 順, to conform. *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 1, p. 125.

(Ban fa jie) 版法者，法天地之位，象四時之行，以治天下。四時之行，有寒有暑，聖人法之，故有文有武。天地之位，有前有後，有左有右，聖人法之，以建經紀。春生於左，秋殺於右，夏長於前，冬藏於後。生長之事，文也；收藏之事，武也；是故文事在左，武事在右。聖人法之，以行法令，以治事理。[671]

"Taking models to establish the government" is about modeling oneself after the positions of Heaven and Earth, and closely imitating the course of the four seasons in order to govern All under Heaven. The course of the four seasons [has times for creating life and causing death],[672] alternates cold and heat. The sage takes this alternating course as his model, thereby bringing about the civil and the martial. The positions of Heaven and Earth include front, back, left and right. The sage takes them as his model in order to construct standards and rules. Spring brings life on his left, fall brings death on his right, summer brings growing before him, and winter brings storing to his rear.[673] Matters related to creating life and growing are civil. Matters related to gathering and storing are military. For this reason, civil matters are treated on the left and military matters on the right. The sage models himself after this [pattern] when enacting laws and orders, and when administering affairs and the principles…

This kind of modeling after (*fa* 法) is conforming to the alternating course of nature when dealing with sociopolitical affairs. The ruler of "Ban fa" is also said to form a triad, not with Heaven and Earth in this case, but with the sun and the moon (*san yu riyue* 參於日月),[674] shining upon the myriads people in an impartial and inclusive manner (*jian* 兼) so that they know that punishments and rewards are objectively and appropriately enforced.[675] Moreover, he should form a quintuplet with the four seasons (*zuo yu sishi* 佐於四時),[676] employing the people according to the tasks proper to each cycle so that they trust that the course of activities is certain

[671] "Ban fa" chapter comes with a line-by-line commentary, the "Ban fa jie," part of which I reproduce here. *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 3, p. 1196.

[672] See Rickett, 1985: 137.

[673] This alignment assumes that the prince sits on the throne facing south, explains Rickett, 1985: 137.

[674] *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 1, p. 128.

[675] *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 3, p. 1203.

[676] See Rickett 1985: 145 for the quintuplet. Emending *zuo* 佐 to *wu* 伍 to accord with the "Ban fa jie."

and necessary.[677] This way of ruling in conformity with the natural world, namely in an objective, unbiased and principled way, is termed "closing the door on disasters" (*bi huo* 閉禍),[678] as it prevents people's resentment from arising, resentment being considered the most destabilizing factor that can bring down a government.

(Ban fa jie) 閉禍在除怨，非有怨乃除之，所事之地常無怨也。凡禍亂之所生，生於怨咎，怨咎所生，生於非理，是以明君之事眾也必經，使之必道，施報必當，出言必得，刑罰必理，如此，則眾無鬱怨之心，無憾恨之意。如此，則禍亂不生，上位不殆，故曰：「閉禍在除怨也。」[679]

"Closing the door on disasters lies in eliminating resentments" does not letting resentments arise and then eliminating them. Where [closing the door] is practiced, there never are resentments. In general, disaster and chaos always stem from resentment and blame. Resentment and blame stem from lack of principles [of action]. This is to say that the discerning ruler's dealings with the masses must be standardized, his employment of the people must have an [objective] way, his enactment of rewards must be conforming, his issuing pronouncements must be to the point, and his punishments must be principled. This being so, the masses will not have grieved and resentful hearts, will not have vexed and regretful thoughts. This being so, disaster and chaos will not arise, and the position of the ruler will not be endangered. Thus ["Ban fa"] says: "Closing the door on disasters lies in eliminating resentment."

These passages present the same philosophy of action for the ruler as the "conformity group." The agent conforms to Heaven, Earth, the seasons, and natural cycles to establish principles of action in his governmental undertakings, ensuring thereby success in his performance and the understanding support of the people. Like we have previously seen in "Sayings Explained" and *Huangdi sijing*, the conforming ruler is a non-actor, not accountable for his own actions, and as a consequence free of resentment and opposition.

Much like the *Zhuangzi* and the early imperial eclectic compilations, most of the Early Chinese texts as they have been transmitted to us are heterogeneous compilations, and thus

[677] *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 3, p. 1203.

[678] *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 1, p. 128.

[679] *Guanzi jiaozhu*, vol. 3, p. 1204.

contain materials holding different and even opposing intellectual and philosophical positions. Unfortunately, the fact that both the ancient texts and the later organized, religio-philosophical traditions of Daoism and Confucianism are multifaceted and encompass a number of different views and perspectives, outlooks and positions, tends to bypass scholars in their desire—like the Dialecticians in the *Zhuangzi*— to create integrated systems, establish limiting classifications, and generally make traditional views conform to their expectations. With regard to uncertainty and fate, notions of adapting (turning outward), correcting (turning inward), and conforming (matching) widely permeate early Chinese texts, crossing traditional categories of schools of thought and intellectual affiliations. Looking at different philosophical proposals for coping with life's vicissitudes in various Early Chinese texts, both received and found, unbound by lineage structures provides a strong argument against all traditional distinctions and opens the doors to a new and more fluid understanding of our early sources.

IMPLICATIONS

"Great Ancestral Master," *Qiongda yishi* and the conformity texts present different philosophical approaches to fate and control. They belong to the plane of philosophically tempered texts, as distinguished from texts that do not offer ontological or psychological means to thoughtfully and creatively reflect upon and develop human behavior in the world. In our introduction to calendric and divination texts we saw that they provided fixed guidelines and a useful set of principles of action, functioning as a prescriptive method that set the lines of adequate behavior. Much as the philosophical proposals, mantic methods are socially constructed means to minimize uncertainty, manage risk, cope with the future, restore a sense of existential competence, and enhance the success rate and efficacy of ordinary actions. However, unlike the

philosophical proposals, mantic methods did not require a thinking, reflective agent that would come out with creative and unique responses to each arising situation. They did not offer unique paths of action, but rather conventionalized responses and ready-made guidelines for everyone to follow.

Another difference is that mantic methods provided an impersonal, external and mechanical sense of security which was mediated by both the mantic instrument and the interpreter. Associated with an unreflective user and agent, we find instruments to quickly and mechanically determine conventional paths of action. Furthermore, in mantic methods the responsibility shifted away from the agent to the interpreter, since the agent was not making critical decisions by himself. All the opposite, philosophical proposals emphasize reflection and self-cultivation as the only tools for the individual's inner work to provide himself with mental peace and a sense of control, without an external technology to offer mediation or an automatized response to solve one's arising problems.

In looking for common threads and discontinuities in early texts, such as responses to the problem of a reified fate and the uncertainty that it produces, I have highlighted the proposal of adaptation vis-à-vis other contemporaneous proposals to solve the same set of issues. Adaptation was advocated in Early China, but it was not the only method in practice. In the same way that there was more to military methods in Early China than the adaptive model, different answers were raised to solve the problem of coping with ordinary life, both philosophical and non-philosophical. Sometimes, as we just saw, even the same textual compilation could contain different proposals for dealing with things. Some of these proposals were opposite and mutually exclusive, while others were favored depending on the kind of situation under examination. Unfortunately, our sources do not always allow us to make this kind of judgment. What we can

attest is that, in almost every sphere of inquiry, there were authors defending a certain type of adaptation as the best course of action, which makes of adaptation a complex, pervasive idea in competition with other advocated practices.

When we considered the adaptive model of military action we saw that, in the military context, the approach to adaptation was purely instrumental. Adaptation was an expedient means to achieve a goal in a successful way, where being successful was understood as being efficacious. The military practice of adaptation was completely unrelated to notions of welfare and the common good. In contrast, in this chapter we have witnessed a moral approach to the practice of adaptation. The illustrative characters of *Zhuangzi* "Great Ancestral Master" advocated adaptation also as a successful means to deal with reality, but in this case successful should be defined differently. In a moral sense, a successful action is not merely an expedient means but that which contributes towards having a good life. In other words, when the characters of "Great Ancestral Master" discuss adaptation they are talking about a path to live well. The same happens with the other proposals that we have seen in this chapter. Self-vigilance had the same moral component in that it was not only a means to cope with fate but also a path for the person to achieve the better, meaningful life possible within adverse circumstances. In the case of conforming, the component was not only moral but also ethical: the conforming ruler was providing himself with a better life but, even more importantly, was preventing the order of things from going awry, hence saving the world from catastrophe and chaos. Namely, when adaptation had an ethical component it was practiced for the sake of improving society's welfare overall. The lesson we must extract here is that adaptation in Early China was a practice that could be *adapted* to different scenarios and different goals. Once mastered, it could serve multiple purposes. Adaptability was always connected to notions of successful agency. But

success was defined differently in different contexts. Some people used adaptability to achieve things efficaciously whereas others behaved adaptively so that they could improve their own lives and/or the human world. Adaptation is not a monolithic phenomenon, but a plural one.

The discussion of ways to cope with uncertainty and fate also leads us to a set of interesting questions related to the agent's freedom. First of all, can we actually decide how to act, or are we compelled, determined or conditioned to act in a certain way? Subsequently, do we have an active and influential role on history? In other words, do our actions (whether they are freely chosen or conditioned) make a difference on the course of events, or is this decided beforehand no matter what we do?

(1) The proposal of self-vigilance allowed for freely choosing one's own path of action. Fateful circumstances surely determine how our conditions of living will be, but they do not impose a certain reactive attitude on us. Ultimately, we decide how we act to the extent that we can (should) decide to act in a morally correct way even when no one will notice it. However, and given that the casual link between our actions and their results is assumed to be broken, we do not have the power to change how things are and how things will become. We have a lack of disposition over both prior givens and outcomes. "Opportunity" is an objective given that we cannot but await, never create.

(2) In the case of the conformity texts, we saw that, on the contrary, the ruler-agent *should* not choose his own path of action. This is not to say that he *cannot* choose it. We are talking about an ethical responsibility. The ruler should not independently and unconditionally choose his actions if they are to be right. And there is a strong ethical responsibility for the ruler's actions to be right since they have a real impact on the course of events. This agent's actions

must be conditioned, or even stronger, determined, by the orderly processes of nature, but at the same time his actions do have great influence on the way things are preserved and develop.

(3) Finally, as opposed to the conformity texts, the proposal of moral adaptation that we have seen in "Great Ancestral Master" allows for the agent to freely choose his own actions. Moreover, it encourages him to do so. Fateful circumstances condition us but do not ultimately determine who we are and what we do, insofar they do not determine what we make of them. We can use "objective determination" (in the form of reified, external fate) as an opportunity to improve our lives. In turn, as opposed to self-vigilance, the proposal of adaptation implies that we have an impact and make a difference on the course of events. Given the assumed phenomenal neutrality and epistemological equanimity, what things are and what they become (as well as how they may affect our lives) is not decided beforehand. It is up to the agent to decide on what to make out of them, which is going to be a key element for the Early Chinese concept of freedom.

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But what do we mean by "acting in a free way"? If adaptation eliminates randomness from action as well as doing whatever you like best at any moment, how is this compatible with freedom? How is an adaptive agent a free agent? What is this freedom after all? We explore this and other related questions in the next chapter, "Finding Adaptive Freedom," which introduces the reader to a different pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world that some Early Chinese thinkers developed in response to the reifying pattern of thinking. I have called this alternative pattern of thinking the "adaptive pattern."

CHAPTER 5

FINDING ADAPTIVE FREEDOM

OVERVIEW

Throughout this dissertation, we have explored different aspects of the idea and practice of adaptation in Early China. In the first chapter, "Locating Adaptation," we focused on understanding the ways in which the idea of adaptation appeared in early texts: the main words used to convey it, their semantic field, the concepts and images with which adaptation was associated, and the metaphors used to express it. This helped us mark boundaries and distinguish the practice of adaptation from other, similar practices with which it is often confused in modern scholarship. At the same time, we briefly compared a variety of examples of adaptive agency applied to different fields, such as politics and ethics, to discover the Early Chinese idea of adaptation for the consideration of the reader.

The second chapter, "Three Models of Military Action," used discourses on military philosophy and warfare to introduce the three prevalent models of agency envisaged by Early Chinese thinkers: the forceful, the prescriptive and the adaptive. We saw that adaptation was presented as the most successful model of agency for the person to attain his goals. It was an instrumental view of adaptive behavior where adaptability was at the basis of efficacy in action when dealing with situations within the agent's control. The third chapter, "The Reification of Fate," changed the focus to acknowledge a major concern in Early Chinese philosophy: the fact that there are things that escape human control. I explained the process by which fate, understood as everything that happens without human intervention and remains out of human control, was

reified in Early China, and the problematic consequences that the reification of fate brought about for early thinkers.

Expanding on the problematic nature of the reifying pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world, chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty," analyzed different solutions that Early Chinese thinkers proposed to address the problems created by a reified notion of fate. These solutions, philosophical and non-philosophical, assumed the existence of external, objectified and detrimental forces outside human control, and suggested different means by which the person could gain a sense of existential competence. Adaptation rose as a philosophical and moral proposal to act in the face of the lashes of fate that helped empower the agent no matter the circumstances, thereby improving his quality of life. The prior epistemological move of eliminating axiological judgments over what is conventionally deemed to be good and bad allowed the agent a practical advantage in using any upcoming events and situations in his favor, thereby retaking control over his life.

In this chapter, "Finding Adaptive Freedom," we will explore two theoretical moves that adaptation undergoes in Early Chinese philosophy. The first move is from adaptation as a pattern of action to adaptation as a pattern of thinking. For sure, the adaptive practices that we have studied so far also involved adaptive thinking. Yet both instrumental-strategic and moral-ethical adaptation put the emphasis on a way of acting and behaving. Adaptation, as we have seen it so far, was above all an Early Chinese model of successful agency. In this chapter, we explore adaptation as an alternative pattern of thinking about the world, and the relationship between the person and the world. This pattern of thinking enables a particular model of agency that is also adaptive, but now the focus is placed on the mode of understanding rather than in the actions that it facilitates. As we will see, adaptation becomes an alternative pattern of thinking where fate is

not understood as an external object (as it was the case in the reifying pattern of thinking), but as integral part of the subject. As long as *ming* is not construed as an external object opposed to the subject, but rather as an integral part that conforms the experience of the subject's being in the world, there is not a dichotomy between subject and fate. This has important philosophical consequences, as we will see later.

The second, interrelated move is from adaptability enabling a *solution* to the problem of fate, understood as everything that is given (to the subject) and cannot be avoided (by the subject), to adaptability as a *dissolution* of the problem of fate. As previously seen, adaptability was presented in some early texts as a strategic behavior for the subject to retake control over his own life. In a world of uncertainty, where most of the areas that have decisive influence over human life escape human control, the capacity to navigate unexpected, upcoming situations with an open mind, and to turn everything that appears into one's favor by acting adaptively, was a strong philosophical proposal advocating for a human sphere of autonomous and free action. In the death dialogues section of the "Great Ancestral Master" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *ming* was thought of in terms of fate-object insofar humans were confronted with unavoidable situations that had determining (and potentially negative) influence over their lives. The proposal of adaptability was meant to turn the objective world of unavoidable fate into human opportunity, and the subject's powerlessness in the face of incertitude into a new form of empowerment. By adapting to *ming*, humans could turn it into the conditions of possibility of a good life, the death dialogues' friends advised. But these conditions, composed of *ming*, were still considered objective and externally opposed to the subject. Adaptability in the death dialogues of "Great Ancestral Master" was, therefore, a solution to the problem created by a reified conception of *ming* in terms of fate-object.

Nevertheless, some early texts make us witnesses of an alternative pattern of thinking about the relationships between the person and fate, agents and the world in Early China. In this alternative pattern of thinking, fate does not become reified, externalized and problematized. Fate, and the general world of phenomena that extends beyond the person, is not considered an external reality in opposition to the subject, or an extra-human force that overpowers the agent's actions. It is on the contrary conceived of as an integral part of the person: something that belongs to the person just as the person belongs to it. In the midst of this view unifying person-world, subject-object, and agent-fate, the problem of *ming* dissolves and disappears. In the texts representative of this alternative pattern of thinking, the agent does not need to create material or psychological strategies to defend himself against the lashes of fate, because fate, and the world in general, are not conceived of as something inherently detrimental and problematic. In this worldview, everything that happens is part of the world just as it is part of the person in the world. The person who understands this basic unity thinks and behaves adaptively, which leads not to frustration and agony (as was the case in the reifying pattern) but to a carefree and joyful existence. Because adaptation is at the basis of this alternative pattern of thinking the relationship between the person and the world, I call it the "adaptive pattern."

In combination, adaptability as an alternative pattern of thinking and as a dissolution of the problem of fate leads to the achievement of a certain type of freedom, which I call Adaptive Freedom, and which will occupy the last part of the discussion in this chapter. Let us go step by step.

THE DEATH DIALOGUES IN THE CONTEXT OF "GREAT ANCESTRAL MASTER"

In the previous chapter, we saw that the death dialogues from the "Great Ancestral Master" chapter of the *Zhuangzi* made a proposal of adaptive agency to solve the problems created by a reified notion of fate. It is my contention that the author of "Great Ancestral Master" brings forward the death dialogues to illustrate a particular way of understanding the relationship between the person and the world. The friends in the death dialogues attest to the reified pattern of thinking about this relationship, where *ming*, which in this case finds its figuration in the notion of Heaven, is made an external object that unavoidably affects and overpowers the subject. In the friends' own words, "a thing can never triumph over Heaven" 物不勝天.[680] The author of "Great Ancestral Master" contrasts this reifying understanding with what he deems a superior one: an understanding of the relationship between the person and the world, agent and *ming*, subject and object, in terms of continuity and non-opposing coexistence.

The "Great Ancestral Master" chapter begins by setting the scene with a dramatization of the problem of the difference between Heaven and humans in conventional terms: "Knowing what Heaven does and knowing what humans do, this is the ultimate" 知天之所為知人之所為者，至矣.[681] This statement parallels the opening lines of the *Qiongda yishi* 窮達以時, and like the latter, invites us to think that humans and Heaven each have their particular tasks, and that the ultimate wisdom consists of knowing the difference between them.[682] However, the illusion

[680] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 63.

[681] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 55.

[682] The *Qiongda yishi* opens with an apparently similar statement: "There is Heaven and there is man, and Heaven and man each has its charge. By examining the different charges of Heaven and man, we understand the actions we should undertake." 有天有人，天人有分。察天人之

of similitude with the message of the *Qiongda yishi* ends with the first paragraph of the *Zhuangzi* chapter, which asks how one can be sure what belongs to Heaven and what to humans, given that these notions are not fixed but coexist in a continuous flux:

雖然，有患。夫知有所待而後當，其所待者特未定也。庸詎知吾所謂天之非人乎？所謂人之非天乎？且有真人，而後有真知.[683]

Although that is so, there is a problem. Knowledge depends on something in order to be fitting, and that on which it depends has not been fixed. How could we be expected to know that what I call Heaven's does not have human in it? That what I call human's does not have Heaven in it? When there is a True Person, then there is True Knowledge.

As we have seen, most Early Chinese thinkers thought of Heaven and humans as distinct from one another, each having a discrete field of activity within which their actions were viable. Furthermore, most Early Chinese thinkers thought of *ming* (Heaven, fate, the realm beyond human control) as overpowering humans. "Great Ancestral Master" begins by acknowledging the prevalent view that assumes a relationship of dichotomy between the realm partly subject to human control and the realm beyond it. But the chapter only presents this prevalent view in order to subvert it. The author of the chapter wants to reset the terms of the debate, shifting the main question from "What shall we do in the face of a realm that is beyond our control?" to "How can we be sure of what belongs to Heaven (*tian zhi* 天之) and what to humans (*ren zhi* 人之)," and ultimately, "How can we even be sure that there is a dichotomy between Heaven and humans?"

In this way, "Great Ancestral Master" proposes a new way of looking at the relationship between Heaven and man, agent and fate. It does not ask for a solution to the problem of fate, but suggests instead that fate might not be a problem after all. Whereas ordinary people, the text

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分，而知所行矣 (*Guodian chumu zhujian* 27: 1). The *Xunzi* also shares this perspective: "Therefore, discerning the difference between the charges of Heaven and those of humans is what makes for the ultimate person" 故明於天人之分，則可謂至人矣 (*Xunzi jishi* 17: 362). See chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty."

[683] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 55.

advises, are caught in the dichotomy between what belongs to humans and what belongs to Heaven, and hence is beyond human control, there were people in the past, True Persons 真人, who understood the "true" nature of the relationship between humans and Heaven-fate.

The term "true" (*zhen* 真) must be taken in this context as a literary argument to make a "persuasive definition." Analytical philosopher C. L. Stevenson first defined persuasive definitions as normative evaluations of controversial and broadly defined "important terms" (such as love, art, person and knowledge) directed at shaping attitudes and creating adherence to a particular axiological view. Persuasive definitions are most common when confronting a conventional or prevalent notion with an alternative one that is being argued for, and they often make use of modifiers such as "true" or "real" before the term that is being redefined.[684] Early Chinese philosophical texts often make argumentative use of persuasive definitions, such as the one we have encountered above, the True Person. More often than not, these persuasive definitions are anchored in the depiction of past ideal figures and their special way of life. We may want to ask, then, who were the True Persons, according to the author of "Great Ancestral Master," and what are these ideal figures being portrayed to argue for in the text?

As we learn from the next section of the chapter, the single most important feature of the True Person is her ability to live in the ideal state in which "Heaven and humans do not [try to] triumph over each other" (天與人不相勝).[685] That is to say, a state in which the heavenly and the personal are not separate, reified and opposed to one another, and neither side is privileged over the other. The True Persons guard both the human and the heavenly sides. For instance, the

[684] Think for instance of the terms "true love" and "real freedom." See Stevenson, 1938: 331-334. On the use of persuasive definitions, paradoxes and important terms in the *Zhuangzi*, see Wim De Reu, "Right Words Seem Wrong," 2006.

[685] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58.

text goes, they follow social customs yet are not controlled by worldly conventions (do not use the human to triumph over Heaven); have no fear of death yet protect their life span from being cut off too early (do not use Heaven to triumph over the human). In all of the examples of the True Person's conduct we see that he keeps a balance between the heavenly and the human. The True Person is said to be a "follower" of both Heaven and humans: "In seeing everything as one, he is a follower of Heaven, and in seeing plurality and difference, he is a follower of humans. When the heavenly and human sides do not triumph over one another, we have a True Person" 其一，與天為徒；其不一，與人為徒。天與人不相勝也，是之謂真人.[686]

Other characteristics of True Persons include equanimity (they value everything equally and do not make axiological judgments over events such as life and death, which are perceived as a continuous process of which we are all part),[687] and adaptability (they do what is suitable for each one of the creatures, benefitting them all, and accommodating themselves to different contexts without losing their own selves).[688]

Interestingly, equanimity and adaptability are among the main features of the *dao* 道 in Early Chinese texts. In this context, the *dao* is to be understood as the source of everything that exists, which remains in every single thing that exists, simultaneously ancient and new: the continuous process of generation, growth, decay and transformation in which we are all inserted. From the perspective of the *dao*, there is no beginning and end, no past and present, no difference among things.[689] The perspective of the *dao*, sometimes characterized as that of the

[686] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58.

[687] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 56.

[688] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 56.

[689] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 60.

center of the circle (環中), or a pivot (道樞),[690] is one of equanimity. From this central perspective, the *dao* can nurture the ten thousand kinds of beings, without favoritism, each in its proper mode, adapting to the specific needs of each creature, yet not losing its center. Because they have grasped the *dao*, the True Persons enjoy the same capabilities of equanimity and adaptation as the *dao* does. As a consequence, they can dissolve the illusory dichotomies that appear necessary to ordinary people and adapt to each situation in the way the context requires, keeping a fluid and interconnected relationship with their environment.[691]

The "true" relationship between the realm of humans and the realm of Heaven is not, the author of "Great Ancestral Master" wants to persuade his readers, one of opposition, where Heaven (understood as a reified fate) would triumph over (*sheng* 勝) humans, and humans would be left to try and find comfort in their powerlessness. The relationship is rather one of continuity and unification: both sides can be activated and harmonized in our daily life. In order to do so, the next section of "Great Ancestral Master" argues, we must stop reifying Heaven as some external reality in a relation of dichotomy towards humans. Indeed, we must stop all dichotomies and fully change our pattern of thinking:

1. 死生，命也，其有夜旦之常，天也。人之有所不得與，皆物之情也。
2. 彼特以天為父，而身猶愛之，而況其卓乎！
3. 人特以有君為愈乎己，而身猶死之，而況其真乎！[692]

[690] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 15; 25: 227; 29: 266.

[691] Harold Roth has explored the mystical aspect of the techniques to grasp the *dao*. In "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the 'Qiwulun' Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*," he argues that the mystical dimensions of the *dao* experience are fundamental to understand the epistemology of the *Zhuangzi*. Roth, 1983: 15-32.

[692] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58.

1. [There are those who say that] “Life and death are [the works of] fate, and the constancy in the succession of days and nights is [the works of] Heaven. That there are things against which humans can do nothing, and that is the particular conditions of all things.”

2. Among them, some are characterized by regarding Heaven as a father and being willing to love it as such –how much more should they [love] that which is greater [than Heaven].

3. Others are characterized by regarding the ruler as superior and better than themselves, and being willing to die for him –how much more should they [die] for a True [Person].

Much as we did with the first lines of the chapter, we must take the opening line of this section not as the author’s viewpoint, but as an acknowledgment of conventional thinking. As we learn from the use of *pi* 彼 and *ren* 人 in the second and third lines, the author is referring to what “other people” believe and how they behave according to their beliefs. Overall, the passage is a critique of the prevalent, reifying pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world. The author of “Great Ancestral Master” denounces this pattern in which external forces are made responsible for our destinies and become exalted as maximum authorities, to detriment to the *dao* and its counterpart, the True Person, who conveys the “true” relationship between agent and world. As we learn throughout the chapter, the True Person has taken hold of the *dao*, which allows her to harmonize both the heavenly and the human sides of her nature. This is argued as the ideal we should all aspire to, instead of getting caught in partial and misguided veneration toward illusory figures of authority. Therefore, the author continues:

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。
與其譽堯而非桀，不如兩忘而化其道。[693]

When the springs dry up, fish get all stranded on the land, help each other breathe with moisture, and wet each other with spit, but it would be better if they could just forget one another in rivers and lakes.

Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, it would be better to forget both and transform our way.

[693] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 58.

Fish are helping one another in times of distress. They are fighting for a lost cause, striving to live when nothing can impede their death. They are in a situation where they cannot succeed. This is the same that happens to men who live within a reifying pattern of thinking that establishes dichotomies: between Heaven and man, between fate and agent, between what is within our control and what is not, but also between what is to be judged as good, like the virtuous Yao, and what is to be judged as bad, like the evil ruler Jie. Instead of striving to survive in such a doomed understanding of life, it would be better, the author advises, to forget about both sides of the dichotomy and completely transform our way of thinking about things, our pattern of thinking about the world. The new pattern is one where subject and object, person and world, human and Heaven do not stand in opposite sides of a dichotomy, but can on the contrary be harmonized and placed together.

All in all, the chapter contrasts the prevalent, reifying pattern of thinking, which works with a dichotomy in which either one of the two poles is favored, with an alternative pattern of understanding the relationship between the person and the world, one in which there is no dichotomic opposition, and no favoring either side, but rather harmonization of the two sides. I am going to call this alternative pattern of thinking the "adaptive pattern," for, as we will see more in detail throughout this chapter, the texts that attest to it understand adaptation as the inherent order of the world.

How do the death dialogues fit into the larger narrative of "Great Ancestral Master"? The rest of "Great Ancestral Master" presents different examples that serve to exemplify the reifying and the adaptive patterns of thinking. The friends of the death dialogues are presented as an example of the prevalent pattern of thinking, the one that reifies fate (Heaven, and the world of events beyond human control) and makes of it an object that overpowers humans. Furthermore,

according to the author of "Great Ancestral Master," the reifying pattern that establishes a dichotomy between the person and the world allows for two possible attitudes: siding with Heaven ("outside of the square" 方之外) or siding with humans ("within the square" 方之內).[694] The "square" (realm, boundary, method) represents the realm of social conventions and the man-made world.[695] The friends of the death dialogues can be classified as acting "outside of the square" insofar they do not accept social conventions and find their own way of responding to the challenges of fate. Confucius, on the other hand, is presented as an example of behaving "within the square," accepting social norms and ignorant of the workings of Heaven. Those who disregard conventions are closer to a Heaven-perspective in their understanding of how the world works and their role in it, whereas those who respect conventions are closer to a human perspective. Each perspective might be useful at different times, although the author of "Great Ancestral Master" clearly favors the "outside of the square." In any case, neither the death dialogues' friends nor Confucius are True Persons, as they all maintain the dichotomy between what belongs to Heaven and what belongs to man.

On the other hand, the adaptive pattern, the one that the author of "Great Ancestral Master" privileges, is exemplified by Mengsun Cai 孟孫才, a True Person who does not reify the world as external and opposed to the subject, and therefore can keep both the heavenly and the human perspectives at the same time. In the story, Mengsun Cai can adapt to social conventions when necessary, yet he does not lose his Heaven-perspective in doing so: he still understands

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[694] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 65.

[695] Willard Peterson explains the notions of inside and outside the square (*fang* 方) in "Great Ancestral Master," and uses them as a means of classifying and mapping ways of knowing and behaving in Early Chinese philosophy. See Peterson 1988: 47-60; and Peterson, "The Grounds of Mencius' Argument," 1979: 307-321.

how the world works and its process of change.[696] He knows Heaven and adapts to humans. If we went back to the image of the square, the True Person would not take his grounds for action either from within or from outside the square. He would rather be placed in the center of a circle (the pivot of the *dao*), from which he would have continuous and equitable access to every single aspect of a changing but unitary reality.[697] Unlike the friends of the death dialogues, Mengsun Cai –the True Person— does not perceive things as external objectivities that affect him. For him, everything is interrelated and connected, continuous, just as the realms of man and Heaven.[698]

In a famous anecdote that keeps being studied today from a multiplicity of angles,[699] the author of "Great Ancestral Master" refers to the process through which a person may attain the *dao* and become a True Person: the meditation technique of *zuo wang* 坐忘, taken literally, "sitting and forgetting." In the dialogue, Confucius's (Zhongni 仲尼) disciple Yan Hui 顏回 gives several reports to his master on his progress (*yi* 益) on the technique of forgetting (*wang* 忘). Yan Hui progressively is able to "forget" values established by social conventions such as humanity and righteousness (*ren yi* 仁義), and rituals and music (*li yue* 禮樂), which is good

[696] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 67.

[697] On the image of the circle, see *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 15, 25: 227, 29: 266. Also, see Peterson, 1988.

[698] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 67.

[699] There is much scholarship in several languages about this meditation technique, whose *locus classicus* is "Great Ancestral Master," and keeps reappearing (and acquiring rigor and meaning) in religious Daoism throughout Chinese history, up to today, when it is an important part of Buddhist practice in East Asian societies. Livia Kohn has dedicated length and efforts to clarify different aspects of the *zuowang* technique, from its original philosophical meaning and its integration into religious Daoism and Buddhism, to contemporary psychological and neurological explanations based on research on meditation. See Kohn, *Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation*, 2010. Also, Kohn, *New Visions of the Zhuangzi*, 2015, and Kohn, "*Zuowang* 坐忘 sitting in oblivion," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. by Fabrizio Pregadio, 2008: 1308-1309.

progress, the Confucius of the story admits, but "not enough" (*you wei ye* 猶未也). So far in the story, we may want to ask two questions: what is meant by "forgetting" these values? And to attain which goal is this progress not enough?

As many readers have noted, the practice of forgetting is this passage is no mere stopping thinking about things. It neither suggests incapacity of recollection, as the terms forgetting and forgetful imply in modern languages. The practice of *wang* that Yan Hui carries out involves intentionally letting go of everything that has been added to our consciousness through the process of socialization, as a sort of getting undressed to wear just our natural selves with no artificial ornaments. For this reason, Livia Kohn translates *wang* as oblivion, rather than forgetting.[700] But getting rid of social values and conventions does not seem to be enough, according to the interlocutor Confucius –enough for what? The last part of the dialogue gives us the answer.

他日復見，曰：回益矣。Another day, [Hui] went to see Zhongni again, and said: "Hui is making progress."

曰：何謂也？ Zhongni replied: "What do you mean?"

曰：回坐忘矣。 "Hui sits and forgets."

仲尼蹴然曰：何謂坐忘？ Zhongni was startled: "What does it mean, to sit and forget?"

顏回曰：墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。

Yan Hui replied: "I let my limbs and trunk fall away, dismiss hearing and sight, abandon physical form and discard knowledge, and make myself one with the Great Pervasion. This is sitting and forgetting."

仲尼曰：同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。

Zhongni said: "You are unified, and therefore free from preferences. You are transforming, and therefore free from permanence. You have indeed become more accomplished than myself. Qiu asks to follow and come after you."

[700] See Kohn, 2010. The concept of forgetting as getting rid of, or letting go of (*wang* 忘), is central to different sections of the *Zhuangzi*.

"Sitting and forgetting" offers a de-reifying experience. Beyond letting go of social conventions and human values, Hui has let go of everything that conforms his individual boundaries and makes him apparently a subject: his bodily form, his sensory perception and his analytic intellect. Not being an individual subjectivity any more, he can unite with the *dao* and the world, or in his words, with the Great Pervasion. The technique Hui describes has the goal of getting rid of the experience of the world as an experience of discrete, separate objects blocking and disrupting one another. It points at achieving a state of pervasive unity, where the person is all and all is in the person, continuous and harmonious, with no subjects, and hence, no objects. As an admiring and humbled Confucius notes in his last intervention, Hui is now free from preferences (has attained equanimity), and free from permanence and fixation (has attained adaptability): Hui has fully changed his pattern of thinking about the world, and become a True Person in the way the author of "Great Ancestral Master" depicts this ideal figure.

Overall, "Great Ancestral Master" claims that there is an alternative way to understand the relationship between person and world, subject and object, agent and fate—a way that is not reifying, externalizing and alienating. It is a way of unification and coexistence, led by the de-reifying experience of grasping the *dao.* In the next section, we analyze in detail the features of the adaptive pattern of thinking.

THE ADAPTIVE PATTERN OF THINKING

Adaptation arises in some Early Chinese thinkers not as a solution to the problem of fate but as part of the inherent order of a unified world. It becomes a pattern of thinking about the world, and about our role as humans living and existing in this world: an alternative way of thinking about the relationships of self-world (*wo* 我-*wu* 物), internal-external (*nei* 內-*wai* 外)

and nature-fate (*xing* 性-*ming* 命). The following three traits of the adaptive pattern of thinking in Early China can be analyzed separately:

De-reification. In the adaptive pattern, the world that extends beyond the person is understood as the opposite of an object. The opposite of an object is not, as the reader could be thinking, a subject, because a subject is only the opposite of object in a worldview that holds this dichotomy. The opposite of an object in the adaptive pattern of thinking is what we would call a no-object, or in contraction, a "nobject." I borrow the term "nobject" from Thomas Macho, an Austrian philosopher and cultural historian. I arrived at Macho through the work of Peter Sloterdijk, a German philosopher whose work has been widely translated into European and Asian languages. Here, and in the following, I follow Sloterdijk's understanding of Macho's "nobject," but quite flexibly, allowing the concept to expand and fit the Early Chinese case, and to accept my own insights.[701] In their use of the term, we deal with things as nobjects when, instead of observing things from a distance with an analytical look, we get fused with them in a nondual relationship of unity. If things are not positioned before a subject of objectifying gaze, they cannot become objects. Which is to say, things (world, reality, phenomena, events and fate) are not objects as such and *per se*, but only when they are construed so by a subject. The object can only exist in the gaze and the treatment received by a subject. When the person does not reify a conceptual item, the item does not become an object, and the person does not become herself a subject in the sense of the relationship expressed by a dichotomy of opposites. It is in this sense that the opposite of an object in this model would not be a subject, but a non-object.

[701] See Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles. Spheres I: Microspherology*, 2011. Sloterdijk discusses the nobject throughout the book. See, for instance, the "Excursus 2: Nobjects and Un-Relationships," pp. 291-322.

Although the term "nobject" might sound novel to the reader, I am not the first one to notice the non-reifiable quality of reality (*dao* 道) in certain Early Chinese philosophical discourses. For instance, explaining a quote from the "Discourse on Equalizing Things" ("Qiwulun" 齊物論) chapter of *Zhuangzi*, Harold Roth observed in 2003 that "knowing what is so of something implies a separation between self that knows and the object that is known. But the Way can never be known as an object."[702] Exploring the epistemology of the "Discourse on Equalizing Things," Roth refers to the necessary distance between knower and known that is involved in the exercise of scientific knowing, to which the *dao* does not lend itself. Sages, True Persons, ideal figures in general are able to *know* the *dao* without objectifying it. Some Early Chinese thinkers imagined a different way of knowing, and I will add, also interacting, that did not involve separation, dualism and reification, and which brought relevant epistemological consequences, but also, as we will see, ethical, behavioral, existential and soteriological ones.

Going back to the term "nobject," these non-objects are for Sloterdijk the material of which the primordial "bubbles" or "spheres" we inhabit are made. He uses the womb and the placenta as examples of primordial spheres where phenomena are perceived in a non-reifying way. The womb and the placenta are the primordial spaces humans inhabit and which facilitate our being, feeling and nurturing. Yet these spaces do not possess the quality of an external object. They are felt as an extension of the person, a part and facilitator of her being, feeling and nurturing. This primordial space of the uterus, Sloterdijk argues, does not allow for a reifying, objectifying and externalizing relationship with the world.[703]

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[702] Roth, 2003: 25. The Zhuangzi quote to which Roth refers is "that of which we do not know what is so of, we call the way" 已而不知其然，謂之道 (*Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 16).

[703] Sloterdijk, 2011: 294-295.

While I find Sloterdijk's example of the uterus illuminating, I think that we can and should go beyond the fetal phase to find illustrations of human experiences in mode nobject, such as the experiences of air, light, sound and temperature. Air, light, sound and temperature, unless that, by lack or excess, become disruptive, are not objectified and externalized in our daily experience. When they are "right" for human comfort, we are not even aware that they exist separately from us. More popular examples of experiences of nonduality include participation in activities of immersion such as reading, watching a movie, and the employment of any skills that have been learned as second nature (playing piano, driving or swimming).[704] In all these cases, the person has an experience of nonduality where elements that are not conventionally considered "I" get confounded with the "I," to the extent that I may be said to become them, or that the experience of being "I" cannot be separated from the experience of those other elements. They sustain one's *being* without one conceptualizing them as external things, hence without any possibility of objectification and confrontation.

Early Chinese ideal figures are also described in some texts as able to interact with the world in non-reifying terms. For instance, a famous cook in *Zhuangzi*, Cook Ding 庖丁, explains the experience of de-reification of reality, and the experience of the world in terms of nobject, when asked by the ruler about his exceptional ox-cutting technique:

臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大**窾**，因其固然。[705]

[704] These experiences are studied in modern psychology, sometimes represented as a state of "flow" (Mihaly Ciskzentmihalyi, several publications 1975-2014), and in studies of the Buddhist experience of nonduality (see for instance David Loy, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, 1988).

[705] *Zhuangzi jijie* 3: 28-29. I also discuss the Cook Ding story in chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation."

> What your servant is good at is the *dao*, which is more advanced than any technique. When I began to cut oxen, all I could see was "ox." After three years, I would not see the entire ox any more. And now I meet the ox with my spirit, and do not use his eyes to see. Analytical knowing based on sensory organs is stopped, and going for based on the spirit is allowed to proceed: according to its Heavenly patterns, slipping through the big crevices, leading through the big cavities, adapting to what is inherently so.

Note that the process Cook Ding describes is extremely similar to the de-reifying technique that Confucius' disciple Yan Hui had named "sitting and forgetting," or "sitting in oblivion" (*zuo wang* 坐忘). In both cases, the person begins the process full and ends it empty after a progressive letting go of everything that disrupt apprehension of the non-dichotomous nature of reality. It takes Cook Ding three years to disallow his perception of the ox as an object onto which he, the subject, must exert violence. Like Yan Hui's, Cook Ding's cultivation process helps him get rid of conventional sensorial and intellectual perception, insofar these create a vision of a world of discrete and external objects, which can only preempt agency from fluidly interacting with its context and environment. Like Yan Hui, Cook Ding achieves pervasive unity between his actions and the recipient of his actions –between his cutting and the cut. As a consequence of this newly acquired understanding of the relationship between the person and the world in non-reifying terms, and just like Yan Hui, Cook Ding achieves equanimity and adaptability, moving along with the forms he encounters rather than imposing a fixed mode of behavior, or acting against their otherness. The butcher calls his way of approaching the ox, i.e. the world, a *dao*, or maybe even *the dao.*

De-reification is one of the main features of the adaptive pattern of thinking, and it accompanies an experience of interdependence and pervasion, which we explore next.

Interdependence and pervasion. The process of de-reification allows the person to conceive of the world in non-dualistic terms, and hence obtain an experience of pervasive unity.

In the reifying pattern, *ming* and the world of affairs beyond the person was positioned in a realm outside the subject's control and in relation of opposition, a process we have called "externalization."[706] In the Adaptive Pattern, the world is inserted instead within the person's field of control, and rather than an obstacle to the human activity, it becomes a means of self-realization. Consider these passages from the first chapter of the transmitted *Wenzi*:

老子曰："聖人忘乎治人，而在乎自理。貴忘乎勢位，而在乎自得"。自得即天下得我矣。"樂忘乎富貴，而在乎和"。知大己而小天下，幾於道矣。

故曰："至**虛**極也，守靜篤也，萬物並作，吾以觀其復"。

Laozi said: "The sages were oblivious toward governing other people, and concentrated on their own patterning. They valued being oblivious toward power and position, and concentrated on realizing themselves." If I can realize myself, the entire world can realize (in) me. "They enjoyed being oblivious toward wealth and status, and concentrating on harmonizing." If you know how to emphasize the self, and deemphasize worldly conventions, you are close to the *dao*.

Therefore, [Laozi] said: "Bring emptiness to the utmost degree and guard stillness earnestly, so that [we can see that] the ten thousand kinds of things arise together. I thereby observe their return [to their common basis]."

夫道者，陶冶萬物，終始無形，寂然不動，大通混冥，深閎廣大不可為外，折毫剖芒不可為內，無環堵之宇，而生有無之間也。

真人體之以**虛**無、平易、清靜、柔弱、純粹素樸，不與物雜，至德天地之道，故謂之真人。[707]

The *dao* molds and smelts[708] the ten thousand kinds of things, yet remains formless from beginning to end. Silent and unmoving, yet it greatly pervades the dark mystery. There is nothing so deep or vast that can be outside it, nothing so minute or small that can be inside it. It has no dwelling within the circle, yet gives life to everything in the realm of the existing and nonexisting.

True Persons embody [the *dao*] by means of practicing emptiness, easiness, clarity, softness, and pure simplicity. They don't get mixed up with "thingness." Their utmost virtue is following the way of Heaven and Earth, and hence they are called "True Persons."

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[706] See Chapter 3, "The Reification of Fate."

[707] *Wenzi zuanyi* 1: 3b-4a.

[708] *Taoye* 陶冶 means working with clay in pottery and metal in metallurgy. It is a craft metaphor to refer to the way in which the *dao* molds and gives form to the ten thousand things yet remains unformed.

As we can see, experiencing the world as a series of obstacles and opposition, or on the contrary finding in the world a means for self-realization, lies with the person. It is in the person's attitude and understanding to conceive of reality as an external impediment for personal attainment or, as an alternative, as a continuous form of existence with the self, thereby not impeding but allowing the person's fulfillment and control. The True Person is once again the ideal figure chosen to portray the state of pervasive unity proper to the adaptive pattern of thinking. The first chapter of the *Wenzi* continues as follows, qualifying the True Persons:

與天同心，與道同體；無所樂，無所苦，無所喜，無所怒，萬物玄同，無非無是。

They have the same mind as Heaven, the same body as the *dao*. There is no thing that pleases them, no thing that gives them pain, no thing to rejoice and no thing to complain about. They are in mysterious unity with the ten thousand kinds of things, and for that reason there can be no excluding or including.[709]

In the next section, I analyze in more detail a particular case of the understanding of the person and the world (*wu* 吾–*tianxia* 天下) in terms of pervasive unity and non-dichotomic coexistence, by means of a case-study of "Yuan dao" chapter of the *Huainanzi*. The *Wenzi* passage above emphasize that, as a consequence of establishing a relationship of pervasive unity with the world, the person experiences no joy or pain. We must understand this statement as illustrating a state of axiological neutrality where the person experiences no rejection or attraction for particular objects, but is moved by the experience of everything as one, continuous and equal. Given the experience of the world as part of oneself, no conditions must be preferred over others. Every single situation is as good as anything else, and can be used for the person to realize herself. This state of neutrality and equanimity disallows ill-conceived and misleading emotions to arise, and

[709] I translate *shi fei* 是非 as inclusion and exclusion. The most common translation for this pair is to affirm and negate (views, perspectives). It is from the conviction that affirming is a way of including, and negating a way of excluding, that I present my translation more fitting for the context of the passage.

hence prevents the person to perform means of exclusion. At the same time, it gives way to a sense of joyful engagement, which is a third feature allowed by the adaptive pattern that we want to analyze.

Joyful engagement. In our analysis of the reifying pattern, we found that the external, opposing, detrimental and limiting *ming* became a problem requiring a solution. The world was experienced as a detrimental limit to the subject's physical, emotional and intellectual development. The subject lived a dramatic life alienated from the world and from his own self. In the understanding of fate as an amoral, external and blind force that controlled people's destinies, people were susceptible to feel miserable and vulnerable when things did not happen the way they would like to, or the way they expected. In their understanding of the relationship between the person and the world, some Early Chinese thinkers felt compelled to create means to ameliorate and counteract the detrimental power of *ming* over their lives.

Thinking about *ming* and the entire world of phenomena in terms of adaptation, in turn, cancels the dualistic relationship of confrontational distance between person and world, the subject and the object, the human and fate. The reality of fate is not negated. Fate still exists, but it is not an aggressive, amoral, blind force that confronts the person. In the adaptive pattern of thinking *ming* as nobject, *ming* is part of the person. We are fate, much as fate is made out of us. This inseparability opens up a limitless world and creates freedom of action. As we will see in our study of "Yuan dao" chapter of the *Huainanzi* in the next section, in this alternative pattern of thinking, the world is experienced as a playground for the agent's enjoyment. Rather than a limit, thinkers committed to the adaptive pattern understood *ming* is an extension of the person, the context in which the person could fulfill a joyous and worth living life, without boundaries.

Vocabulary of fitness (*shi* 適),[710] enjoyment (*le* 樂), and freedom, both negative (free from prejudices, harm, misleading emotions, pride or concern)[711] and positive (free to wander and act) abound in texts representative of the adaptive pattern of thinking. In such texts, the ideal figures are said to be "calm, without worries" (恬然無思)[712] even in times of distress, "placid, without anxieties" (澹然無慮)[713] when taking decisions, and "peaceful, without cares" (恬愉無矜) in their interactions with the world.[714] Because of his non-dichotomic relationship with the world, the ideal person can do more and suffer less than an ordinary person: he can walk on ice without getting cold, or approach fire without getting burnt.[715] Expressed in terms of negative freedom, these images work toward an empowered portrayal of the person who has found unity and non-opposition with the rest of reality through de-reification. The ideal persons also "roam freely" (遊)[716] beyond conventional geographical and symbolic boundaries, a positive freedom to which we will return by the end of this chapter.

The adaptive pattern of thinking the relationship between the person and the world, with its features of de-reification, pervasion, and joyful engagement, reversed the theoretical and practical effects of the reification of fate in Early Chinese philosophy.

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[710] *Zhuangzi jijie* 19: 164.

[711] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 23.

[712] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8.

[713] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8.

[714] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

[715] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 23.

[716] There are a vast number of references of "you" with the meaning of roaming freely beyond boundaries. For some representative instances, see *Zhuangzi* "Xiao yao you" 逍遙遊 and "Qiwulun" 齊物論 chapters, and also *Wenzi* "Dao yuan" 道原 and *Huainanzi* "Yuan dao" 原道.

CASE STUDY OF MING AS NOBJECT: "YUAN DAO"

In the following I present an analysis of the first chapter of the *Huainanzi*, "Originating in the Dao" ("Yuan dao" 原道),[717] a complex and rich text that offers us one of the best philosophical explanations and illustrations of the adaptive pattern of thinking, as well as a contrast with the reifying pattern, and a highlight of the desirable consequences that thinking the relationship between the person and the world in adaptive terms had for Early Chinese philosophers.

Presentation of the Text

"Overview of the Essentials" ("Yao lüe" 要略),[718] a postface to the *Huainanzi* that summarizes and situates each of the previous chapters into a contextualized macro-structure, advises that comprehending the "Yuan dao" chapter's textual purport will give the reader a feeling of vastness (*haoran* 浩然) and a grand vision (*daguan* 大觀). At the same time, "Yuan dao" chapter is supposed to

> 所以應待萬方，鑒耦百變也。若轉丸掌中，足以自樂也。[719]
>
> Provide the means to respond and attend the ten thousand positions,[720] mirror and match a hundred alterations. As if rolling a ball in the palm of your hand, it will suffice to bring joy out of itself.

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[717] An alternative reading of the chapter title is "Tracing *dao* to its source," which Roger Ames defends for emphasizing the practicability of the philosophy contained in the first treatise of the *Huainanzi*: "it means to find the source of *dao* and to use it as a resource" (Ames, 1998: 13). I completely agree with Ames' point about the practical connotations of the philosophy of "Yuan dao."

[718] On the "Yao lüe," and how it was not conceived to become one more chapter of the *Huainanzi*, but was rather a rhapsody or poetic exposition (*fu* 賦) to orally perform and present the entire book to an audience, see Kern, 2014.

[719] *Huainan honglie jijie* 21: 701.

The first chapter offers a grand vision, not only of the *Huainanzi* as a whole, but also of the cosmo-philosophical principles that regulate the universe. Indeed, "Yuan dao" provides reflections and general guidelines to understand the cosmos, the *dao*, the natural world, the role of the person in the natural world, and the interrelations between the ten thousand things. Modern scholars have identified a root-branch structure in the *Huainanzi*, where the first eight chapters would act as "roots," providing the theoretical foundations and basic principles of the work ("Yuan dao" being the first and most foundational among the roots), and the rest of chapters would act as "branches," namely the applications and illustrations of the principles.[721] In a 2014 essay, Martin Kern identified philological bases to claim this division as original: the first eight chapter titles keep a rhyme, whereas the rest of the chapter titles hold a different rhyme sequence.[722] The postface, "Overview of the Essentials," also seems to reinforce this division when it explains that the work moves from the *dao* to affairs (*shi* 事), and from roots (*ben* 本) to branches (*mo* 末).[723]

In my view, the acknowledgement of this general structure by no means implies that the *Huainanzi* has a homogeneous and unitary philosophical system. As a work that aims at

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[720] By translating *fang* 方 as position, I am using Peterson's interpretation of *fang* as a particular place from which to look at the world and make judgments. A particular *fang* provides the person that takes that position with particular grounds for knowledge, different from those who position themselves outside of the *fang* or in a different *fang*. See Peterson, 1988: 47-60.

[721] This distinction was first made by Charles LeBlanc, 1993: 189. The editors of *The Huainanzi. Liu An, King of Huainan*, Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth, follow this general division of the *Huainanzi* chapters but add more import to it. According to them, the branch-root classification is visible at many different levels. It works not only as a division between the theory and the applications of the theory, but also at the levels of cosmology, human development, history, politics, etc. synchronically and diachronically. See *The Huainanzi*, pp. 14-20.

[722] Kern, 2014.

[723] *The Huainanzi*, p.14.

providing the ruler with all the knowledge that might be necessary in all possible situations,[724] the *Huainanzi* contains all sorts of different perspectives, manifold approaches, various kinds of technical expertise, and also opposing philosophical viewpoints. The diversity within the *Huainanzi* is not tamed and harmonized into a single system where different views would become complementary to one another (as we would expect to happen in a syncretic text). On the contrary, some of the *Huainanzi* teachings are supposed to replace one another, for their utility depends on the specific situation the ruler may find himself in. In this sense, it is more of an eclectic and miscellaneous work, insofar as it draws on different sources, than it is a syncretic work, given that it does not build a coherent, organized and unified system. Nevertheless, the *Huainanzi*'s eclecticism not only implies using different sources but also a significant change of the sources to fit the arguments the authors wanted to make, whether it is by selection, omission, addition, framing or interpretation.

Most scholars today consider the *Huainanzi* a syncretic text with a unified system. One of the few to share the view that the *Huainanzi* is an eclectic text is Griet Vankeerberghen. Yet Vankeerberghen claims that, despite its eclecticism, the *Huainanzi* "presents a single, coherent argument,"[725] which, in my view, would make it a syncretic text. The single, coherent argument would be Liu An's 劉安, king of Huainan 淮南, claim to moral authority: the claim that a ruler cannot hold this privilege merely by virtue of his position of power, but needs to cultivate himself into a sage by adhering to the moral principles of the *dao* as the latter is interpreted and explicated in Liu An's book.[726] While the political interpretation and the moral argument are

[724] This is a claim that the *Huainanzi* makes for itself in the postface. *Huainan honglie jijie* 21: 707.

[725] Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority*, 2001: 3-4.

[726] Vankeerberghen, 2001: 2.

interesting perspectives through which to analyze the *Huainanzi* as a whole within the context of the rise to power of young emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝, my approach differs from Vankeerberghen's in two ways.

First, adhering to the idea that the *Huainanzi* is eclectic and presents manifolds intellectual worldviews and practical applications, I do not see the work as holding a single intent, let this be moral or otherwise. I would classify the *Huainanzi* together with other Han manuals for rulers, such as the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the *Daxue* 大學, and probably also the *Lunyü* 論語.[727] The *Huainanzi* as a whole was presented in 139 B.C.E. by Liu An to a young Han Wudi in need of curricular formation. But the *Huainanzi* seems too large and complex to be meant for the ruler to read on his own. Rather, a royal advisor would use it as teaching material, as a kind of textbook that includes different kinds of knowledge applicable to different situations that were relevant for a ruler in the early empire. The different kinds of knowledge and philosophical approaches do not all fit together, and are not needed all at the same time. In this way, I limit my analysis of the *Huainanzi* to the first chapter, "Yuan dao," and do not view the philosophical viewpoints that I ascribe to "Yuan dao" as necessarily representative of the rest of the *Huainanzi*. Even when the same cosmological principles and concepts seem to reappear throughout the book, as well as in other texts, we need to remind ourselves that these discourses could be used to argue for the most diverse ethico-political and philosophical takes.

Second, I do not approach "Yuan dao" from the perspective of morality, but from the perspective of agency. I claim that "Yuan dao" offers a guide on how to act successfully, first

[727] On the *Analects* as a Western Han text, see Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects*, 2017.

and foremost for the ruler, but applicable to everyone else.[728] "Yuan dao" builds a model of adaptive agency based on what I call the adaptive pattern of thinking. The main preoccupation of the author of the chapter is not to present a moral way of doing things, but an efficacious and freeing way of acting by means of correctly understanding the nature of the relationship between the person and the world.

I agree in general terms with Harold Roth's introduction to the big philosophical themes of the first two chapters of the *Huainanzi*, "Yuan dao" and "Chu zhen" 俶真 (Activating the Genuine), in his contribution to the edition of *The Huainanzi, Liu An King of Huainan*. These themes include the recognition of natural tendencies and patterns in the cosmos and its application to the governing of human activities; the ruler's *wuwei* mode of action; the return to an original mode of existence (the genuine) where there is unity; and the liberation from an enslaving relationship with things.[729] I would like to build on Roth's work, and to situate these themes within a larger perspective: the adaptive pattern of thinking, as opposed to the reifying pattern, which, in my view, the two chapters acknowledge and reject.[730]

Roth interprets all these themes under the conceptual framework of early religio-philosophical "Daoism," more specifically, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*.[731] It is undeniable that the first two chapters of the *Huainanzi* share conceptual vocabulary, philosophical approaches and textual parallels with both texts, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi.* However, it is

[728] Puett has also made the point that the means exposed in "Yuan dao" for the ruler to take control are available to everyone else. See Puett, 2002: 267.

[729] See *The Huainanzi*, pp. 43-45 and 79-80.

[730] I do not deal exhaustively with chapter 2 of the *Huainanzi* here because "Yuan dao" suffices to make my point. I will only use selected passages from chapter 2 that are particularly relevant to better illuminate one of the ideas held in chapter 1.

[731] Roth, 2010: 46 and 82.

the spirit of the *Huainanzi* to make use of all resources available and change them to fit new circumstances, to adjust to the handling of new situations. Whereas many passages will resonate to us with ideas traditionally associated with early Daoism, these ideas rise together to create a new meaning of their own –a meaning that cannot be grasped by association with schools of thought. Grasping them only by means of their reverberation and consonance with other early texts obscure the philosophical program that they are creating anew. In the following, I refrain from interpreting "Yuan dao" in the light of pre-conceived notions about Daoism, and get to the task of explaining, instead, how "Yuan dao" is representative of a particular pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world in Early China: the adaptive pattern.

Philosophical Proposal

In his monograph on "Yuan dao," which he translates as "Tracing the *Dao* to Its Source," Roger Ames explains that the chapter provides reflection on the following important questions: "How are we to understand the dynamic world that gives us context, and how are we to function effectively within our ever changing social, political, cultural and natural environments?... How does the world hang together, and how are we to make the most of it?"[732] And also: "What is the most appropriate and efficacious correlation between the particular detail (*de*) and the vastness of the cosmos (*dao*), between the excellence of this particular person in this specific situation and the sum of all orders, between one's uniquely focused personal narrative and the dynamics of one's field of experience?"[733]

Ames provides an excellent summary, in the form of interrogations, of the themes around which the philosophical analyses of "Yuan dao" revolve. My main claim and contribution in this

[732] Ames, 1998: 7.

[733] Ames, 1998: 8.

section is that “Yuan dao” offers a particular response to all these questions, which is the adherence to an adaptive pattern of thinking. The most appropriate and successful way of thinking about the relationship between the person and the larger environment, between the inner and the outer, the one and the many, the agent and fate, the author of “Yuan dao” argues, is in terms of adaptation.

Beyond Reification: Boundless and Unperceivable

The first four sections of “Yuan dao” follow the parallel structure “*dao*,” “sages,” “*dao*,” “sages.” What is said about the *dao* has an echo in what is said about the sages. Parallelism as means of tacit argumentation is kept in the rest of the chapter. Most sections include reflections on the *dao* only to find them reflected afterwards in the workings of the sages. Through parallelism, we understand that the features attributed to the *dao* reflect on the features of the ideal person, the one who has grasped the *dao* and works through the same understanding and principles that move the *dao,* thereby enjoying the same advantages.

“Yuan dao” presents the *dao* as the origin and continuing source of reference for the ten thousand kinds of things: what “generates” (*sheng* 生) being in the world; the cause “responsible for” (*dai* 待) existence, nonexistence and the endless possible transformations between these two points; “the means by which” (*suo yi* 所以) each thing comes to appear in a particular way, and which facilitates their nurturing and fulfillment. By grasping the *dao,* sages (generally used as a term referring to the ideal person) endow themselves with the same capacities the *dao* has. In “Yuan dao,” as is common in other early texts, too, the sage holds a political capacity, with great scope of action and influence upon the governance of the ten thousand kinds of things. Some of the chapter’s sections refer to particular sages from antiquity such as Feng Yi 馮夷 and Shun

舜,[734] setting the scene of their special understanding and behavior to later extrapolate to anyone who attains such a position.

The first feature that calls our attention about the *dao* in "Yuan dao" is that it is boundless in space and time: the *dao* covers everything and has no limits, hence no exteriority. It includes, or *is*, everything. This is expressed in terms of exhaustive inclusiveness through pointing at extreme points of reference. For instance, the *dao* is said to "cover Heaven and uphold Earth" (覆天載地), "be without distinction between dawn and dusk" (無所朝夕), "encompass all within the Four Seas" (彌于四海) and "expand to the six coordinates" (幎於六合).[735]

When transposed into the sages, the boundless feature of the *dao* becomes an unlimited scope of movement and action. Sages go beyond the boundaries of the human world to reach a different level of reality, not accessible to ordinary beings. Again we find symbolic points of reference: [sages] "farther and farther, higher and higher, reached the pinnacle" (歷遠彌高以極往);" "traversing mountains and rivers (經紀山川), they strode over Mount Kunlun (蹈騰昆侖). Pushing through the Chang He gate (排閶), they surged through the gateway of Heaven" (淪天門).[736] At this different level of reality, sages evaluate and understand the world in a non-ordinary being mode: in a *dao*-way, which means that they are not bounded in social, physical, psychological, and spiritual terms as ordinary people are.[737]

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[734] Feng yi, also named Bing Yi 冰夷, was a water god from the Yellow River. Shun is one of the three mythical emperors. Successor of Emperor Yao 堯帝, he passed on the throne to the Great Yu 大禹.

[735] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 1.

[736] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 7.

[737] *Huainan honglie jijie* 2: 63.

Despite its pervasiveness, the *dao* cannot be found: it lies in an unfathomable position. In the first sections, and throughout the chapter, we encounter the idea that the *dao* "cannot be reached" (不可際), "cannot be fathomed" (不可測),[738] and that it "cannot be figured as an image" (不可為象):[739] as opposed to celestial phenomena, which could be traced, represented in maps, diagrams and calendars, and thereby put to human use, the *dao* is unimaginable and inconceivable, beyond grasp. The *dao* resists the human tendency to hypostasis and reification, for what cannot be imagined and conceptualized cannot be reified.[740] This *dao* feature is not unique to "Yuan dao." As mentioned earlier, *Zhuangzi* "Qiwulun" also argues for the impossibility of taking the *dao* as an object of knowledge. But the most famous statement in this regard is without doubt the opening lines of the transmitted *Laozi*: "the *dao* that can be named/walked/discussed/expressed/reasoned/conceived as *dao*/experienced [i.e. turned into an object of knowledge and understanding] is not the constant *dao*" (道可道非常道).[741] In the Early Chinese imagination, the *dao* defies apprehension, to the extent that its workings are not visible

[738] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 1.

[739] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 4.

[740] In the Buddhist context, there is the notion of inconceivable liberation. Inconceivable is taken to mean "difficult to grasp." In Buddhist soteriology, grasping is the origin of suffering. Therefore, liberation, the release from all suffering, can be qualified as something "unable to be grasped." Not only liberation is inconceivable, but also inconceivability itself becomes liberation in some Buddhist texts such as the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*. Liberation is inconceivable because it cannot be thought by a self-centered mind working in terms of duality, dichotomies, opposition, differentiation and reification. At the same time, inconceivability equals liberation because it is the realization of the non-opposition, non-separation or non-duality between attachment and liberation. See Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, 1976.

[741] *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 1. The first lines of the transmitted *Laozi* have been, and still continue to be, translated in a multiplicity of ways. This webpage compiles more than 175 different English translations of *Laozi* 1, from the Scottish missionary John Chalmers' in 1868 up to today:

http://www.bopsecrets.org/gateway/passages/tao-te-ching.htm.

and its reaching influence remains unnoticed. In a parallel way, and despite traversing the world in all directions (in both a literal and literary sense), sages leave no traces (*wu ji* 無跡), and have no shadows (*wu jing* 無景): they are invisible, unfathomable, much like the formless and pervasive *dao*. Why the emphasis on invisibility?

Pervasive yet invisible, the *dao* and the sage are not external to things. They are within things: confounded, diluted into things to the extent that things cannot perceive them as separate. In the case of the *dao*, the source of all beings, the immanence is literal. In the case of the sage, immanence must be understood not in a descriptive but in a prescriptive manner. The sage becomes a sage by not acting as an external imposition to things: modeling on the *dao*, he can dissolve his workings into things so that his actions are not noticeable as coming from the outside. By these means, the effects of the nurturing of both *dao* and sages are perceived as coming from things themselves (*ziran* 自然).[742]

At this point it must be clear that the *dao* is the nobject par excellence. It cannot be perceived, has no form, no sound, no image, and it does not *act upon* things: it enables and *is* things. The second chapter of the *Huainanzi*, "Activating the Genuine," reinforces this idea of the *dao* not acting but enabling things to act out of themselves:

非有為於物也，物以有為於己也。是故舉事而順於道者，非道之所為也，道之所施也.[743]

It is not that it acts on things, it is that things act on themselves. This being so, when [the ruler/the sage] initiates affairs in accordance with the *dao*, it is not that the *dao* has accomplished them, but that the *dao* has enabled them.

[742] Remember the *Laozi* passage: "All tasks completed and affairs successful, and the hundred clans all claimed, 'we are as we are, of ourselves" 功成事遂，百姓皆謂我自然. *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 40.

[743] *Huainan honglie jijie* 2: 55.

The *dao* is not an external object, an external creator, not a god, and definitely not one more object among others. The *dao* is all and everything: the space in which all things alike move, the source of their continuing nurture, and the engine and heart of the process of transformation. Interestingly, by grasping the *dao* the sage succeeds to behave as a nobject, too: he becomes formless and responsive with *dao*-like attributes. The dissolution of *dao* and the sages into reality has several consequences:

First, not being noticed is key for efficacy. The ten thousand things feel like they are acting out of themselves, with no external intervention and interference, therefore they do not arise opposition. We must remember that the *dao* and the sages hold highly influential roles. The *dao* is responsible for the life and death of all creatures.[744] Precisely because it has no fixated form, the *dao* reconciles dualities, can attend to the most opposite things simultaneously, and is able to give everything its own particular form and features.[745] The *dao* is the "means by which" or "that whereby" (*suo yi* 所以) everything else exists in its specificity.[746] The sages, in turn, are responsible for facilitating and maintaining a harmonic order where all beings can spontaneously fulfill their natures:

[744] See, for instance, *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 3.

[745] A consequence of this all-inclusivity is that the *dao* reconciles dualities: it is both A and non-A. For example, the *dao* is "dark but able to brighten" 幽而能明, and "weak but able to strengthen" 弱而能強. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 1.

[746] "Mountains are high thereby" 山以之高, "abysses are deep thereby" 淵以之深, "beasts can run thereby" 獸以之走, "birds can fly thereby" 鳥以之飛. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

We see similar depictions of the *dao* in other early and medieval texts, such as *Laozi* and 3rd century *xuanxue* 玄學 scholar Wang Bi's 王弼 *Laozi*-inspired philosophical system. The idea of the formless giving way to that with form is quite widespread in Early Chinese thought, as it is the idea of the reconciliation of dualities.

是故聖人使人各處其位，守其職，而不得相干也。

Therefore, sages enable everyone to rest in their appropriate position, to preserve their specific functions and [in doing so] not to interfere with one another.[747]

These influential roles can make the *dao* and the sages especially vulnerable. In nurturing the ten thousand things, they risk exposing themselves and hence to become at the mercy of others, which results in invisibility being also important to preserve the agent's autonomy and safety. Giving life and producing satisfying conditions of living can easily generate dependence in other beings. Dependence would be detrimental for both the *dao* and the sages, as they would become a means to attain other beings' ends, and would become objectified and utilized. In order to avoid the ten thousand things becoming dependent on them, the workings of the *dao* and the sages need to pass unnoticed. So it is said that all creatures "depend [on the *dao*] in order to live, but none of them knows about the power [that makes it possible]" 待而後生, 莫之知德.[748] Not being aware of what gives them life, order and the possibility of leading a successful and fulfilling life, they have nothing to praise, and nothing to become dependent on. At the same time, giving death and allowing for loss and decay can easily generate resentment, but acting "from the shadows," as the force of nature rather than as external agents, the *dao* and the sages remain free from blame and from opposition.[749]

From the unfathomable, unperceivable position of a nobject, *dao* and sages influence and order the world without being noticed, and in doing so both *dao* and sages resort to a special

[747] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 40.

[748] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 4.

[749] See *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 4 for free from blame ("none [of the things] is capable of resenting" 莫之能怨); and *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 11 for free from opposition ("it is because they do not contend with the ten thousand things, that no one dares to contend with them" 以其無爭於萬物也, 故莫敢與之爭).

mode of agency: they act in a *wuwei* 無為 manner.[750] There is abundant scholarship explaining the Early Chinese philosophical concept of *wuwei*, usually translated as "non-action." Although it does vary from text to text, "non-action" does not usually mean not acting at all.[751] It rather means acting in a non-coercive and non-imposing way, adapting to the way things are rather than attempting to exercise violence onto them. For this reason, often times a good translation of *wuwei* is "adaptive action." Fortunately, "Yuan dao" provides its own explanatory definition, so we do not need to guess its meaning in this particular context:

是故聖人…漠然無為，而無不為也；澹然無治也，而無不治也。所謂無為者，不先物為也；所謂無不為者，因物之所為。所謂無治者，不易自然也；所謂無不治者，因物之相然也。[752]

Therefore, the sages… Still! Take no action, yet there is nothing left undone. Cool! Do not govern, but nothing is left ungoverned. What we call "take no action" is not to act before things. What we call "nothing left undone" is to adapt to things' doings. What we call "not to govern" is not to change how [things] are of themselves. What we call "nothing left ungoverned" is to adapt to how things are in their interdependent relationship.

Wuwei or adaptive, non-coercive action is the sages' way of governing that allows them to remain unnoticed, as it facilitates affairs to be accomplished without the agents being perceived as an external interference. At this point it may be useful to remember the image of the womb. Not recognized by the fetus as an external object, the womb nevertheless allows the fetus to develop its inherent qualities by providing house and nurture. If we think of the womb as a nobject, we can also think of the womb *acting* in a *wuwei* manner: producing what is necessary for the fetus at every moment, expanding in size as the fetus grows, regulating temperature and sound, supplying nutrients and oxygen, and all this without being noticed as an external

[750] For references to the sages acting in a *wuwei* manner, see for instance *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

[751] *Wuwei* certainly means not acting at all in some contexts, as we have previously seen in Chapter 4, "Coping with Uncertainty."

[752] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 24.

interference. In a similar way, the *dao* generates and completes but does not possess and dominates,[753] and the sages' way of acting respects every single thing's proper tendencies and functions, as well as their interconnections and relations with other things, adjusting to them rather than imposing personal and arbitrary prerogatives. The *wuwei* or adaptive mode of action is the distinctive model of action for a nobject.

In Early Chinese philosophy, the image *par excellence* of the sages' *wuwei* malleability and adaptability is water. Like in Ancient Greece, water is highly respected as one of the main sources of life, but in Early China water is endowed with two extra qualities that turn it into the perfect image to represent the ideal agent. First, by virtue of being soft and weak, water has the capacity to change course and form according to the environment in which it circulates: water is adaptive.[754] At the same time, in benefitting the ten thousand things, water shows no preference among them, keeping always as sense of equanimity.[755]

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, these features of adaptability and equanimity, of reaching and responding to every single thing on their own specific way and without preference, are fundamental to the process of de-reification. They are also the result of an epistemological stance, a particular positioning in the world. "Yuan dao" calls this epistemological position at which sages establish themselves "the center" (*zhongyang* 中央),[756] or the "axis" (*shu* 樞).[757] The

[753] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 4. Similar ideas found in *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 6 ([ten thousand kinds of things] "emerge but are not possessed" 生而不有) and *Zhuangzi jijie* 19: 165 ("being in position of superiority yet not exercising domination" 長而不宰).

[754] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 27 ("Up in the sky it acts as rain and dew"上天則為雨露; "down on the earth it acts as moisture and marshes" 下地則為潤澤).

[755] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 27 ("[water] bestows upon the ten thousand things and does not make distinctions between what is first and what is last" 授萬物而無所前後).

[756] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

center is the position of the *dao*, which gives us the image of reality as a circle. Each point in the circle lies at the exact same distance from the center. Situated at the privileged position of the center of reality, the sages are at the exact same distance from every single thing, event, value or argument, which gives them an exceptional perspective and capacity of response (應無窮).[758] They can respond to each of them with equanimity, not preferring some things over others (事無不應).[759] And without losing their central perspective, they can attend to each thing's particular features (有萬不同而便於性), adapting to their different natures, and not being influenced in turn by them.[760]

The notion of "axis of the dao" is also prominent in *Zhuangzi* "Qiwulun," where it gives us the idea of interconnection and interdependent origination (*fang sheng zhi shuo* 方生之說).[761] In a nutshell, opposites coexist, whether it is from an epistemological or from an ontological point of view. Everything contains the possibility of becoming A and non-A: it is just a question of perspective which side we want to bring into light. Whereas ordinary people have a narrow-minded and biased tendency to affirm one side and negate the opposite, which the author of "Qiwulun" denounces, sages are able to look from a superior perspective, "illuminated by Heaven."[762] This is the perspective of the axis of reality, from which sages can see everything in

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[757] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 9.

[758] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

[759] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

[760] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

[761] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 14. This concept is prominent *Zhuangzi*, where it is called "the axis of the *dao*" (*daoshu* 道樞) but also *tianjun* 天均 and *tianni* 天倪 (*Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 17). See De Reu, 2010: 43-66; Roth, 2003: 23. I discuss the conceptual metaphor of the center of the circle in the *Zhuangzi* in the first chapter, "Locating Adaptation."

[762] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 14, 15.

its complexity without reducing things to one single partial aspect. Having this overview of the interconnected whole that the world is, the response they give to things is not based on "affirming/including" (*shi* 是) or "negating/excluding" (*fei* 非), but is an affirming that includes its opposite: the adaptive "that's so" (*yin shi* 因是).[763] Given that the sage does not take the ten thousand things to be objects opposed to his subjectivity, they do not become reified, and the agent does not become alienated from reality in turn. They coexist in a relationship of codependence in which they constantly adapt and change along with one another.

Interconnection and Interdependence

There is in "Yuan dao" an underlying worldview that assumes that everything exists in a relationship of interdependence. The ten thousand things and every single element of the cosmos are interconnected:

鏡水之與形接也, The way in which the water mirror interacts/comes into contact with/accepts/welcomes shapes
不設智故, is not by wisdom and precedent.
而方圓曲直弗能逃也 and yet the square, circle, crooked and straight cannot escape from it.
是故 Therefore,
響不肆應, echo does not respond at random,
而景不一設, and shadow does not arise independently.
叫呼仿佛, They mimic sounds and forms and
默然自得。[764] tacitly grasp them.

In the passage above, echo is a response to sound, and shadow, a response to light. There is also an interconnection between water and the objects that it reflects, and on which water shapes itself.

[763] *Zhuangzi jijie* 2: 14, 16.

[764] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 10.

None of these responses happen independently, but they heavily rely on another element to arise. It is because they allow the connected element to arise as it is, and only then they adjust to it, that their response is perfect.

The water mirror exemplifies the ideal relationship between things in an interconnected world. Water does not act with a previous, preapproved plan of what and how it is going to reflect (termed in the passage as "wisdom" 智 and "precedent" 故). It awaits something to appear and then reflects, responding accurately and immediately, with no error. It is by being empty and clear that the mirror can reflect everything as it is, accepting the most various forms and shapes.[765] The same happens with echo and shadow: their response is perfect because it is not based on their own desires or preconceptions, but adapts to what they are responding to.

The passage goes on to oppose water's and echo's ideal mode of interaction with shapes and forms (*yu xing jie* 與形接) to the wrong mode in which human intellect approaches things: "When the human intellect interacts with things, likes and dislikes arise from it" 知與物接，而好憎生焉.[766] Full of preferences and emotions, humans are biased toward the world and unable to embrace it, always fighting it as a problem to be solved or trying to make use of it as an external source of satisfaction. The underlying idea of the images of water and echo interacting with forms and sound is that we are all connected, and that is why we need to relate to each other in an adaptive way.

[765] Roger Ames discusses the mirror image in "Yuan dao" as an illustration of a different way of knowing which does not imply correspondence or representation. As I mentioned earlier, there is a different way of knowing in Early China that does not require an objective distance between knower and known. It is a way of interaction that implies interdependence and coordination. See Ames' introduction to his translation of "Yuan dao," 1998: 49.

[766] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 10.

Interconnection leads to a reflection on the self-sustainability of the world:

夫萍樹根于水,	Plants like duckweed take root in water.
木樹根於土,	Plants like trees take root on land.
鳥排**虛**而飛,	Birds beat their wings in the air in order to fly.
獸蹠實而走,	Wild beasts stomp on solid ground in order to run (…)
天地之性也。	This is the nature of Heaven and Earth.
兩木相摩而然,	When two pieces of wood are rubbed together, they make fire.
金火相守而流,	When metal and fire are pushed together, the metal becomes molten.
員者常轉,	Round things always spin.
窾者主浮,	Hollow things excel at floating.
自然之勢也。	This is the propensity of what is so of itself.
是故	Therefore
春風至則甘雨降,	When spring winds arrive, then sweet rains will fall
生育萬物	they vitalize and nurture the ten thousand things (…)
各生所急,	Each [thing] produces what it urgently needs
以備燥濕；	in order to adjust to aridity or dampness.
各因所處,	Each adapts to its location,
以禦寒暑；	in order to protect against cold and heat.
並得其宜,	All things obtain what is suitable to them,
物便其所。	things all adjust to their niches.
由此觀之,	From this perspective,
萬物固以自然,	the ten thousand things are inherently so of themselves,
聖人又何事焉？[767]	so why the sage should have anything to do?

Things work naturally and by themselves when no one interferes with them: creatures of water can deal with humidity, while beings of the air have feathers to fly. Every single thing is adapted to its environment in a biological sense, and at the same time every thing depends on its context and the entire cosmos to live. Intervening in this self-sustainable order, by means of acting in a *wei*-coercive manner, cannot but disrupt it. Everything has its proper way of living, nurturing and

[767] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 17-19.

fulfilling its existence in interrelation with the rest of the world.[768] In this sense, the world is like a sacred vessel: something of inherent power and magic, worthy of awe and respect:

故天下神器：不可為也，[不可執也]。[769]為者敗之，執者失之。

All under Heaven is a sacred vessel. You cannot act upon it. [You cannot control it]. If you act upon it you will spoil it; if you try to control it you will lose it.

夫許由小天下而不以己易堯者，志遺於天下也。所以然者，何也？因天下而為天下也。[770]

The reason why Xu You considered [possessing] All under Heaven something minor and would not trade places with Yao was because he had the intention of leaving All under Heaven behind. Why was this so? Because he thought that you should act on All under Heaven by adapting to it (and not by trying to force your own will on it).

As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, *wuwei* and adaptive behavior are paired in other early texts, too.[771] "Yuan dao" is special, nevertheless, in that it presents a clear explanation of the connection between the two. According to the author of "Yuan dao," it is precisely the interconnected and interdependent nature of our world that prevents forceful behaviors from succeeding and calls for adaptation as the main pattern of action. In this way,

[768] Livia Kohn's section on "The Environment" in her *Zhuangzi: Text and Context* offers many interesting insights in the way in which the natural philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* and other texts that share a similar worldview (which she calls "Daoist," and which would include many texts within the *Huainanzi*) resonates with contemporary scientific theories on interconnectedness and natural patterns of coexistence and complementarity. See Kohn, 2014: 243-254.

[769] This line has been added for parallelism. See *The Huainanzi*, p. 71, footnote 59.

[770] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 25. This text has parallel in *Laozi* 29: "If any one should wish to get All under Heaven and act upon it, I see that he will not achieve his goal. All under Heaven is a spirit-like/sacred vessel. You cannot act upon it. If you act upon it you will spoil it. If you try to control it you will lose it" 將欲取天下而為之，吾見其不得已。天下神器，不可為也，為者敗之，執者失之. *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p 76.

[771] Remember, for instance, Explanation 15 in *Guanzi* 管子 "Nei ye" 內業, which reads "The way of non-coercive action is adaptation. Adaptation is neither add nor subtract anything (from things)" 無為之道因也，因也者，無益無損也 (*Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 36: 637); or the Heshang gong 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi*, which often interprets *wuwei* as *yinxun* 因循, acting adaptively and compliantly.

"harsh laws and severe punishments" (峭法刻誅)[772] will fail to perpetuate kingship (霸王), but if you

修道理之數，因天地之自然，則六合不足均也。是故禹之決瀆也，因水以為師；神農之播穀也，因苗以為教。是故禹之決瀆也，因水以為師；神農之播穀也，因苗以為教。[773]

Cultivate the *dao*'s numerical relationships and patterns, and adapt to the so-of-itself of every single thing between Heaven and Earth, then none within the six directions will be your equal. Thus, when Yu drained the flood, he adapted to water as his master, and when Shen Nong sowed grain, he adapted to the seedlings as his teacher.

As we have observed above, the understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the ten thousand things led to a reflection of the self-sustainability of the world. Further, it led to the conclusion that everything was naturally adapted to its environment: birds have feathers to fly, while fish are skillful at swimming. To sum up the main point:

各生所急,	Each [thing] produces what it urgently needs
以備燥濕；	in order to adjust to aridity or dampness.
各因所處,	Each adapts to its location,
以禦寒暑；	in order to protect against cold and heat.
並得其宜,	All things obtain what is suitable to them,
物便其所。	things all adjust to their niches.

This text speaks of adaptation in a biological sense. In biology, adaptation is the process through which an animal or plant species becomes fitted to its environment.[774] The authors of "Yuan dao" recognized biological adaptation, but also another kind of adaptation that is unique to humans: cultural adaptation, as we see in the continuation of the text below:

[772] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 5a.

[773] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 5b.

[774] Whereas remarks on cultural adaptation are not uncommon in Early Chinese texts, to my knowledge there is only one other early text that speaks of biological adaptation: *Liji* "Royal Regulations" ("Wangzhi" 王制). See *Shisan jing zhushu, Liji* 5: 247b.

九疑之南，陸事寡而水事眾，於是民人被發文身，以像鱗蟲；短綣不綺，以便**涉**遊；短袂攘卷，以便刺舟；因之也。

To the south of the Nine Passes, tasks on dry land are few, while tasks on water are many. So the people cut their hair and tattoo their bodies in order to resemble scaly creatures. They wear short pants, not long trousers, in order to make swimming easier. And they have short sleeves in order to make poling their boats easier. They are adapting to it (their environment).

雁門之北，北狄不穀食，賤長貴壯，俗尚氣力；人不馳弓，馬不解勒；便之也.

To the north of the Yanmen Pass, the northern Di tribes do not eat grain. They devalue the aged and value the strong, and it is a custom to esteem those with strength of vital energy.

People there do not unstring their bows, nor do they remove the bridles from their horses. They are adjusting to it (their environment).

故禹之裸國，解衣而入，衣帶而出；因之也。

Thus, when Yu went to the Country of the Naked, he removed his clothes when he entered and put them back on when he left. He was adapting to it (that *particular* environment).

今夫徙樹者，失其陰陽之性，則莫不枯槁。故橘樹之江北，則化而為枳；鴝**鵒**不過濟；貉渡汶而死；形性不可易，勢居不可移也。[775]

Now, if those who transplant trees neglect the yin yang aspects of their nature, then none will not wither and die. Thus if you plant a mandarin orange tree north of the Yangzi, it will transform into an inedible orange. A mynah bird cannot live beyond the Qi river, and if a badger crosses the Min river, it will die. Physical form and innate nature cannot be changed; propensity and location cannot be shifted.

These passages present peoples from different lands as having an inherent adaptive feature, too. But unlike the animals and plants from the earlier passage, their adaptation is not (only) physical. Humans are used here as example of cultural adaptation: their innate ability to develop sociocultural means to fit their environment is seen as their key trait to successful interaction and survival. In Cultural Ecology, a discipline created at the beginning of the 20th century under the wave of influence of *The Origin of Species*, social organization and cultural institutions are partially explained as human adaptations to physical environments. In this theory, the ability to culturally fit a particular environment enables a population to survive, which is something we see in the text above. Yet this kind of cultural fitness to their natural environment also means that

[775] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 19-20.

they are determined and confined to behave in a particular way according to their environmental needs. This is what appears to be going on in the passage above: the northern Di tribes, for instance, have developed a culture that fits their nomadic lives, but which would not allow them to survive in the watery lands to the south of the Nine Passes, in the same way that mandarin trees cannot bear edible oranges in an unsuitable terrain. Biological and cultural adaptation enables a population to successfully interact with its environment but, at the same time, implies that the population is confined and constrained to a certain space. Overall, this text is meant to show that adaptation is a natural pattern of interaction among the ten thousand kinds of things.

"Yuan dao" is not only unique in providing an explicit link between the interconnected nature of the world, the failure of forceful behaviors and the success of adaptive modes of action. It is also unique in providing a story of the genesis of the notion of adaptive behavior as a cultural object, and the applicability of the adaptive natural pattern of interaction among the ten thousand kinds of things to human affairs, where the mythical emperor Yu 禹 is presented as the exemplar culture hero.

In contrast with the ordinary examples provided above for plants and animals' physical adaptation, and for human cultural adaptation, the narrative presents the extraordinary case of the Great Yu 大禹. Having observed adaptation in nature, the Great Yu extrapolated an adaptive model of purposive human behavior. The ruler of the mythical Xia Dynasty, rather than being *adapted* to a particular environment in the biological and cultural senses, purposively cultivated an *adaptive capacity*: he had agency and could choose how to behave in changing circumstances. There are two differences between *being adapted* and the Great Yu's adaptive agency, both of which mark the boundaries between the descriptive and the normative concept of adaptation. First, whereas plants, fish and the Di tribes did not personally and purposively chose to develop

the characteristics that made them adjusted and fitted to survive in their respective environments, Yu did choose adaptation as a purposive way of action. Second, in this passage, the Great Yu by adapting can change environments and move freely and successfully among different realms. Whereas plants, fish and the Di tribes can only flourish and succeed in their given natural or social environment, the Great Yu has freedom of movement. He not only has mobility but also can change and adapt to all sorts of contexts, thereby enhancing his success rate wherever he goes. In a rhetorical shift, the descriptive and explanatory concept of biological adaptation becomes a normative practical ideal related to successful action, political power, and freedom.[776]

"Yuan dao" explains the turn from biological, non-purposive adaptation to adaptation as a voluntarily chosen path of action. Interestingly, this turn follows the same pattern that we see in other Early Chinese stories of genesis of cultural objects. Mythical stories that narrate the origins of fundamental cultural objects are common in Early Chinese texts. In several accounts, the culture hero Fuxi 伏羲 is credited with the invention of the trigrams;[777] Cang Jie 倉頡, Huangdi's 黃帝 scribe, would have invented the writing system;[778] Shen Nong 神農 is credited with agriculture,[779] while Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor himself, would be responsible for medicine, carts, laws and regulations, some rituals and principles of propriety in social relations, among other things.[780] Culture heroes not only create cultural objects such as writing or fire, they

[776] On the difference between the descriptive and the normative concepts of adaptation, see the Overview section in chapter 1, "Locating Adaptation."

[777] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zhouyi jianyi* 周易兼義, *Xici xia* 繫辭下, 166b; *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字註 15.1:753. *Hanshu* "Yiwenzhi" 藝文誌, 1704.

[778] *Huainan honglie jijie* 8: 252; *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 15.1:753; *Lüshi chunqiu* 17.5.2: 1051; *Lunheng jiaoshi* 5: 249.

[779] *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 84: 1228.

[780] Some references include *Guanzi jinzhu jinyi* 84: 1228*; Shangjun shu* 18: 142; and *Shiji* 5: 192.

also teach humanity how to do things in an improved way; cooking, fishing with nets, and hunting with weapons are all techniques that in different traditions have become associated with particular culture heroes. Culture heroes teach behaviors and exemplify models of conduct for successful action and conflict resolution in different situations. They are created by and for a tradition as models to follow. Interestingly, the *Huainanzi* provides an explanation of the reasoning behind the composition and rhetorical usage of these fabricated stories claiming inventions' ancestry:

世俗之人，多尊古而賤今，故為道者必托之于神農、**黃**帝而後能入說。亂世暗主，高遠其所從來，因而貴之。[781]

Most ordinary people revere the ancient and despise the current. Therefore, those who create ways [of living and thinking] must attribute them to [figures such as] Shen Nong or Huangdi, and only then can they publicly present their theories. Blind monarchs from chaotic times, [believing that those theories] have origins that go back to high antiquity, esteem them for this reason.

As the rest of the passage goes, not only blind kings but even intellectuals and scholars are often tricked by such fabricated associations between inventions and ancient sages.[782] The authors of the *Huainanzi* themselves certainly did not miss their opportunity to endow their teachings, theories and arguments with the authority that comes from pointing at an ancient figure as their source of origin.[783] But what interests me here in particular is how some authors of the *Huainanzi* used these very rhetorical means to turn adaptability into a cultural object –a fundamental sociopolitical strategy— and attribute it to the Great Yu.

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[781] *Huainan honglie jijie* 19: 653.

[782] *Huainan honglie jijie* 19: 653.

[783] Culture heroes represent the cultural ideals of a civilization or society. At the same time, these ideals are vindicated by association with a hero: it is a bidirectional movement. The second movement is the one that we see in the passage from the *Huainanzi*: by associating theories with ancient sages, the theories gain authority. This is common rhetorical means to gain authority when presenting ideas that may not be easily accepted easily if presented as the product of a contemporaneous/not notorious mind.

Adaptive agency is certainly not only associated with the Great Yu, but more generally with the ancient sage rulers of the Three Dynasties (*san dai* 三代). For instance, in chapter "Sayings Explained" ("Quan yan" 詮言) of the *Huainanzi* we learn that:

> 三代之所道者，因也。
> 故禹決江河，因水也；
> 後稷播種樹穀，因地也；
> 湯、武平暴亂，因時也。
> 故天下可得而不可取也.[784]
>
> The way implemented by the Three Dynasties was adaptation:
> Yu dredged the Yangzi and Yellow rivers by adapting to water;
> Hou Ji scattered seed and planted grain by adapting to the land;
> Tang and Wu quelled violence and rebellion by adapting to [the appropriate] time.
> Thus, All under Heaven can be attained but it cannot be appropriated [by force].

In "Yuan dao," both Yu and Shen Nong are portrayed as models of adaptability in successfully dealing with state issues, as opposed to other rulers who failed because of their forceful behavior, such as the use of harsh laws and punishments.[785] Similar statements are found in the "Forest of Persuasions" ("Shui lin" 說林) and "Exalted Lineage" ("Taizu"泰族) chapters of the *Huainanzi.*[786] While the employment of adaptability becomes associated with a group of sage rulers and cultural heroes from the times of the Three Dynasties (Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, King Wu), associations with Yu 禹 are stronger.

According to early mythical accounts, the Great Yu is the founder of the Xia Dynasty, his major achievement being the design of a system to control a flood that had been affecting the

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[784] *Huainan honglie jijie* 14: 477. A similar statement is found in *Lüshi Chunqiu* "Valuing Adaptation" ("Gui yin") chapter, as we saw in Chapter 2. See *Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 925.

[785] Michael Puett has also noted that "Yuan dao" speaks strongly against politics of dominance and control. See Puett, 2002: 262-264.

[786] *Huainan honglie jijie* 17: 583; and 20: 670. More examples of the ancient sages *adapting* appear in *Huainanzi* "Shui lin" 說林 and "Taizu" 泰族 chapters, and *Guanyinzi* 關尹子 3.

area for decades. Whereas in other early cultures the *topos* of the flood is framed as a phenomenon for which either natural causes, fate or the gods are responsible, and only nature, fate or the gods can end, Early Chinese myths of the flood trace its cause to unethical and rebellious human behavior, and therefore only the human ruler-sage holds the capacity to fix it.[787] Much as the image of the flood represents an ethical and political problem in Early China, the different approaches to managing the catastrophic deluge that are portrayed in early myths represent different sociopolitical models of action and governance. The parallel between controlling the waters and administering the realm is made explicit in the use of the verb *zhi* 治, to govern or to manage, to refer to both tasks in numerous early texts. In *Mengzi* "Gaozi B," for example, the speaker Mencius claims that "Yu's method of *governing water* (*zhi shui* 治水) was following water's way."[788] The political usage of the flood myth is also clear from its rhetorical use in political arguments that set the example of Yu's governing the waters as a standard for contemporary ministers and rulers to follow, as in the case of the Eastern Han thinker Xu Gan 徐幹, who points out that "the Great Yu excelled at governing water, and the gentleman excels at leading people. In order to lead people, it is necessary to adapt to people's natures. In order to govern water, it is necessary to adapt to water's propensity."[789]

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[787] Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China*, 2006: 19.

[788] *Shisan jing zhushu, Mengzi* 12B: 222a. The phrase *zhi shui* 治水 also appears in *Shangshu* "Shun dian" 舜典 and "Yu gong" 禹貢 chapters, and in multiple other texts such as *Lunheng, Kongzi jiayu, Liezi, Shiji,* and *Hanshu.*

[789] Xu Gan's 徐幹 *Zhonglun* 中論 (Eastern Han): "故大禹善治水，而君子善導人；導人必因其性，治水必因其勢 (Xu Gan 徐幹, *Zhonglun jiegu* 中論解詁, 6: 17). Interestingly, Mawangdui *Laozi* reads "The one above [ruler] excels at governing the water" (上善治水), where the transmitted *Laozi* reads "The excellence of the one above [ruler] is like that of water" (上善若水). The Mawangdui *Laozi* is clearly making a reference to the political dimension of the flood myth, a reference lost in the transmitted version in favor of a more abstract reflection

In the story of the flood, a mythical narrative of political significance, the model of action employed by Yu's father Gun 鯀, a forceful model, is contrasted with the more successful adaptive model, employed by his son the Great Yu.[790] From the early accounts we learn that, instead of imposing limits on water by means of dams, a system that Yu's father Gun had already attempted and which failed to contain the water, Yu initiated a system of irrigations canals to channel water to places where it would be useful rather than harmful.[791] Yu was able to control the flood by adapting to water's features and propensity, rather than by opposing it with force. The moral of the story is encapsulated in the saying "When Yu dredged the flood, he adapted to water taking it as his master" 是故禹之決瀆也，因水以為師, to be found with variations in several early texts.[792]

Yu's strategic adaptation is reinforced in other facets of his political life. For instance, an anecdote that regards his visit to the mythical Land of the Naked 裸國, claims that "he entered naked and dressed himself back at his exit: he was adapting [to their customs]." This anecdote is mentioned both in "Yuan dao" and in the *Lüshi Chunqiu.*[793] In one of the manuscripts from the

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on the virtues of water.

[790] Gun's *modus operandi* is contrasted with that of his son Yu, though in different terms, throughout the chapter. In a different section, for instance, Gun is said to have built city walls to protect his reign with the result that people turned against one another and against him. His son Yu, in turn, decided to demolish the walls and distribute the city wealth among the people, gaining their allegiance. See *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 4b. Lewis's chapter 3 discusses the *topos* of the relationship between fathers and son in the early myths, and, in particular, the relationship between Gun and Yu in the flood myths. See Lewis, 2006: 103 and onwards.

[791] Dai Yi 戴逸 and Gong Shuduo 龔書鐸, *Zhongguo tongshi* 中國通史, 2003: 38. *Mengzi* "Teng Wen gong" 滕文公 chapters.

[792] See, for instance, *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 5b, and *Lüshi Chunqiu* 16.4.5: 989.

[793] See my Chapter 4: "When Yu went to the Country of the Naked, he put away his clothes as he entered, and wore them back as he exited" 禹之裸國，裸入衣出，因也 (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 15.3.7: 927). See also *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 20: "As for when Yu went to to the Country of the Naked,

Shanghai Museum Collection, in turn, the *Rongchengshi* 容成氏, Yu is said to employ adaptive measures to rule All under Heaven, with the result that his government was perfect:

禹聽政三年，不製革，不刃金，不略矢。田無蔡，宅不空，關市無賦。禹乃因山陵平隰之可封邑者而繁實之。乃因迩以知遠，去苛而行簡。因民之欲，[794]會天地之利。夫是以近者悅，而遠者自至。[795]

When Yu had administered the government for three years, [they] did not manufacture leather [armors], did not grind their metal blades, and did not sharpen their arrowheads. The fields had no weed, the residences were not empty, and the city gates and markets had no taxes. Yu then adapted to what [the terrain of] lofty mountains and even marshes allows in terms of building cities, and caused them to diversify and flourish. He then adapted to those who are near in order to understand those who are far away. He abolished severe [measures] and enacted simple ones. He adapted to the needs of the people, and brought together the advantages given by Heaven and Earth. For this reason, those who were near rejoiced, and those who were far arrived [in Yu's land] out of their own accord.

Throughout different early narratives around the political figure of Yu and the flood myth, Yu's model of adaptive agency is contrasted with other, less successful models of agency used by his contemporaries, such as his father Gun and the liminal figure Gong Gong 公共, who is represented both as an irresponsible water god and a human engineer who invented several techniques to control the water.[796]

Interesting as all these associations are, in "Yuan dao" we find something more than a strong connection between the Great Yu and the use of adaptation as a strategy for action. Yu is credited in "Yuan dao" as the inventor of adaptation as a cultural object, in the same way that Fu

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his putting away his clothes as he entered and putting his clothes back on as he exited, was a case of adapting to [the customs of the place]" 故禹之裸國，解衣而入，衣帶而出，因之也.

[794] "Adapting to people's needs" (*yin min zhi yu* 因民之欲) is an important *topos* when it comes to a philosophy of adaptation. See Chapter 2, "Three Models of Military Action," especially the section on King Wu.

[795] See Allan, 2015: 206-208.

[796] Mark Lewis has written thoroughly about this topic in his 2006 book *The Flood Myths of Early China.* See especially chapters 1 and 2.

Xi, for instance, is credited in several accounts as the inventor of the trigrams that compose the *Book of Change.* See for instance the mythical origins of the trigrams as they are recorded in the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳:

古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。[797]

In antiquity, when Mr. Baoxi (Fuxi) ruled All under Heaven, he looked up and comprehended (conceptualized) the celestial figures in the sky; he looked down and comprehended (conceptualized) the patterns on the earth. He comprehended that the designs of animals participated with the suitabilities of the earth. Nearby he apprehended these patterns in his own body and further away he took them from the various things. Therefore, he for the first time created/raised up the eight trigrams, in order to penetrate the potentiality of the numinous clarity (spirit world), and in order to classify the manifestations of the ten thousand kinds of things (physical world).

The "creation" (*zuo* 作) of the trigrams was a result of the comprehension of the patterns of Heaven and Earth, and it was made as a symbolic system reflecting these natural patterns for the use of humans. This notion of creativity involves previous apprehension of the natural patterns by which the world works and respectful compliance with them. Fuxi could only create the trigrams, which can be understood as a transcription of the structure of the world, because he had previously observed and comprehended Heaven and Earth's patterns. Much as most other cultural innovators in Early China, the first "author" of the *Zhouyi* 周易 did not invent out of nothing: he transferred for human use the knowledge that he had acquired observing and understanding the functioning of the natural world. Sagely cultural creation is thus conceptualized in Early China as responding to a series of pre-existing structures, and not by acting arbitrarily. Indeed, culture heroes do not need to create anything anew. They rather elaborate on what is already in the natural world by introducing key items, values and behaviors that help humans improve their lives on this planet. For this reason, sagely cultural creation lies

[797] *Shisan jing zhushu, Zhouyi jianyi, Xici xia,* 166b.

in between creation or invention *ex nihilo* and discovery: we could call it a model of mimetic extrapolation.[798]

The author of "Yuan dao" gives us the same pattern of sagely creation, or mimetic extrapolation, in the story of Yu. As we have seen in the passage above, Yu begins by observing biological and cultural adaptation in the world: how the ten thousand things inadvertently participate of it and how it is the reason for harmonious and successful coexistence. From these observations, he extrapolates a strategic model of action that humans can use consciously and purposively. Sages and culture heroes create things that are useful for humanity, and they will be remembered for such feats. But in Early China they do not create out of nothing. Natural patterns provide an inspiration for the sages' creations, and being an extension of natural patterns provides the guarantee of their creation's success. The sage listens, observes and comprehends natural patterns and prescriptions, and only by according with them he creates his product for the use of humankind. If the *dao* established the patterns that govern the activities on Heaven and Earth, Fuxi extrapolated the trigrams that correspond with these patterns with the goal of ordering social activities, and the Great Yu extrapolated a strategy for purposive and successful human agency.

There is no clear-cut distinction between the work of nature and the work of the sage in these creations, to the extent that it is not clear whether these creations should be conceptualized as inventions or discoveries. The sense of creatorship, or maybe authorship, is defined by

[798] In *The Ambivalence of Creation*, Michael Puett translates the verb *zuo* 作 in the passage from the *Xici zhuan* as "raising up," in the sense of "causing to arise" (*qi* 起), which is how Xu Shen defines the term *zuo* in his dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*. Puett clarifies his choice: "In this narrative, neither the trigrams nor the writing is presented as an artificial construct, and neither one is in any way discontinuous from nature. Indeed, they were not created in any strong sense of the term at all: instead, sages invented them by raising patterns from the natural world and bringing those patterns into the realm of humanity." See Puett, 1994: 23.

responding to something previously existing and not by promoting individuality or acting randomly, probably because this is a model of sagely authorship: the sage in Early China is "the one who listens," the one who lets the universe talk through him. The sage is the *loci* through which nature prescribes to humans, the intermediary between nature and society, and the medium for the extrapolation of natural rules for the people.[799] Not acting as an individual but as a medium, the sage's creation does not bring us closer to the sage's mind, but, as it were, to the mind of the universe. The *Book of Change* does not tell us anything about Fu Xi, but about the reality of our world, as symbolized in Fu Xi's system of signals. In a similar manner, when one takes on the adaptive model of agency, one does not get to the Great Yu. The Great Yu is irrelevant here: he adds no individuality or personality to the adaptive model of action. Acting adaptively does not bring us closer to the Great Yu, but to the natural objects that behave in this way by their own proper tendencies when left alone. With the help of the sage-culture hero, we go beyond the individual to access a deeper level of reality, the patterned fabric of the world. It is in this sense that "Yuan dao" credits Yu for the implementation of the adaptive model of human purposive action, as an extrapolation of his observation of adaptation as a non-purposive, spontaneous pattern of behavior in the natural world.[800]

Overall, "Yuan dao" not only gives us the story of a cultural hero that extrapolated adaptation as a successful model of action. It also gives us a pattern of thinking the world in

[799] This is the role of the *junzi* 君子 in the *Xici zhuan,* and that of Kongzi and the other sages in standardizing the classics, similar to Kant's concept of the *genius,* who is also a *medium*. See Derrida, "Economimesis," 1975: 55-93.

[800] For more views on Early Chinese accounts of cultural creation, see Puett, 1994. Other relevant studies on early notions of authorship include Zhang Hanmo, "Models of Authorship and Text-Making in Early China," 2012; Alexander Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Ancient Greece and China*, 2010; Kern, "The Masters in the *Shiji*," 2015; Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," 2009; Kern, "The Poetry of Han Historiography," 2004; Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China*, 2011.

adaptive terms. As I remarked in the introduction to this chapter, throughout this dissertation I have been clarifying the notion of adaptation in different discourses, its many usages and its relevance as a model of successful agency. This chapter, however, presents adaptation not only as a way of acting, but more importantly, as a pattern of thinking about the world that differs from the reifying pattern. The story of how Yu came out with an ideal way of behavior reflects a deeper worldview where adaptation is the natural rule and the natural pattern of interaction. In this worldview, everything is believed to exist in interconnection and interdependence, and things are believed to be naturally adapted to all the other things with which they relate in their environments. This adaptive pattern of interaction in the natural world is taken as an argument for the correct fashion in which humans must behave when dealing with other people, events, phenomena and the rest of the world. Not acting adaptively would only result in conflict, harm and loss.

The World as a Playground[801]

The way in which we understand what lies with humanity and what does not, the nature of the relationship between the human and non-human worlds, and between human nature and fate, as well as the nature of the interactions between agents and their surroundings, has great influence over our attitude toward other beings, our environment and ourselves.[802] Thinkers committed to the adaptive pattern of thinking understand the relationship between the person and the world as a relationship of interconnection and interdependence. As a result, a successful agent is not to impose her will arbitrarily onto her surroundings, but rather to behave adaptively in her interactions with the world. It is in this sense that "Yuan dao" says:

[801] This section was presented at the Eleventh East-West Philosophers' Conference held at the East-West Center in Hawai'I in May 2016, and organized by Roger Ames and Peter Hershock.

[802] Kohn, 2014: 248.

天下之事，不可為也，The affairs of the world cannot be deliberately acted upon.

因其自然而推之.[803] You draw them out by adapting to what is so of itself [in every single affair].

Thinkers committed to the adaptive pattern of thinking conceived of the relationship between the person and the world, agent and fate, as a relationship of non-opposition, which facilitated the rupture of the dichotomy between inner and outer, self and other, nature and fate:

夫天下者亦吾有也，吾亦天下之有也，天下之與我，豈有間哉！

The world is my possession, but I am also the possession of the world, so how could it be the slightest gap between me and the world!

夫有天下者，豈必攝權持勢，操殺生之柄，而以行其號令邪？

Why must possessing the world consist of grasping power, holding onto authority, wielding the handles of life and death, and using them to put one's titles and edicts into effect?

吾所謂有天下者，非此謂也，自得而已。自得，則天下亦得我矣。吾與天下相得，則常相有，己又焉有不得容其間者乎？所謂自得者，全其身者也。全其身，則與道為一矣。[804]

What I mean by "possessing the world" is not this. It is merely realizing oneself. Once I am able to realize myself, then the world is also realized (in) me. I and the world mutually realize, we always possess each other, so how could there be any gap among us to be filled in? What I call "realize oneself" means to fulfill one's own person. Once one has fulfilled his own person, he becomes one with the *dao*.

This passage criticizes the thinking that possessing the world, being a sage and a ruler, entails controlling it in a *wei* (coercive) manner. The vulgar meaning of "possessing the world" (有天下) implies that the sage ruler situates himself in a position of distance and opposition toward the world he governs. The formula "possessing the world" appears numerous times in early texts, and it often reflects the reifying meaning of 'subject owning an object' that the author of "Yuan dao" criticizes. The *Mengzi*, for instance, claims that Wu Ding [an important ruler during the late Shang dynasty] "possessed the world as if it had been a thing which he moved round in his

[803] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 10.

[804] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 36.

palm" (有天下猶運之掌也),[805] which emphasizes Wu Ding's sense of superiority, ownership and entitlement toward the world he was supposed to protect and govern. Also in the *Mengzi*, but this time referring to the sage emperor Shun, we read that "riches are what all men desire, and [Shun] had been enriched with the possession of the world" (富，人之所欲，富有天下),[806] emphasizing the reified nature of the world as a commodity. It is in the *Xunzi* where we find the plainest statement of all these points combined:

> 夫貴為天子，富有天下，名為聖王，兼制人，人莫得而制也，是人情之所同欲也，而王者兼而有是者也。[807]
>
> Everyone puts esteem in playing the role of the Son of Heaven: enriched by the possession of the empire, famously known as a sage king, all of it combined to control people, and not to be controlled by anyone else. This is a desire shared by all of the human condition, but it is only the king who can combine and possess all of this.

In the understanding of the relationship between the ruler and the world that is reflected in all of these examples, because the world is seen as an object over which the ruler has ownership, the model of action that the ruler follows is a *wei* (coercive) model, which involves imposing one's own will onto it (in the form of arbitrary behavior) and also forceful measures (such as regulated laws and punishments).

The sage ruler of "Yuan dao" starts from a different pattern of thinking where there is no opposition, not even a gap, between the individual and the world. The world and the person are situated at the same level, breaking with the ontological and epistemic gap created by the reification of the world *vis-à-vis* the subject. Possessing the world is redefined as self-realization, and given that there is no gap between the self and the other, self-realization involves realizing

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[805] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 3A: 51b.

[806] *Shisan jing zhushu*, *Mengzi* 9A: 160b.

[807] *Xunzi jishi* 11: 246.

oneself in the world much as it means realizing the world in one's own person. This allows us to reach the same conclusion as in the practice of "sitting in oblivion" and the de-reification process of Cook Ding that we saw at the beginning of this chapter. The process consists in stopping the understanding the world as an object in front of a subject, and comprehending the relationship of interconnection that ties both inexorably together, to the extent that the person may experience the world as a fundamental part of her own self.

A consequence of this understanding of primordial ontological unity is that fate comes to be seen as part of the person, and therefore it cannot act as an external force that would allow or impede human realization vis-à-vis the world. It is the opposite that what we have seen in the reifying pattern of thinking. As it is said below:

是故夫得道已定，而不待萬物之推移也。非以一時之變化而定吾所以自得也。吾所謂得者，[得]性命之情處其所安也。[808]

Therefore, when the attainment of the *dao* is well fixed, I do not depend on the comings and goings of the ten thousand things. It is not because of a momentary alteration or transformation that I have secured the means to realize myself. What I am calling realization means [understanding] the conditions of nature and fate, and locating oneself in the ease they facilitate.

According to the author of "Yuan dao," representative of the adaptive pattern of thinking, the means to realize myself are not dependent upon a shift of destiny, upon the timing, or upon any other alteration of things. They are not dependent on any external contingency. I have the means to realize myself within me, because *ming* or fate here is not understood as something external to the person. *Ming* or fate works in combination with *xing*, nature, both being the conditions of the person's being at ease in this world, so there is nothing that can oppose him. The second chapter of the *Huainanzi* reinforces this idea:

[808] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 39. I follow the editors of *The Huainanzi* in accepting D. C. Lau's addition of the character *de* 得. *The Huainanzi*, p. 73.

古之聖人，其和愉寧靜，性也；其志得道行，命也。是故性遭命而後能行，命得性而後能明，烏號之弓、溪子之弩，不能無弦而射；越舲蜀艇，不能無水而浮。[809]

The sages of antiquity had as nature their harmony, joy, peace and tranquility; they had as fate their will to realize the *dao* [in themselves]. Therefore, [in the sages] nature met with fate and only then they could behave [according to the *dao*]; fate realized nature and only then [their will to realize the *dao*] could be bright. Neither bows of cudrania tree[810] nor the crossbows of Xizi[811] could be shot without a string. Neither the boats of Yue nor the skiffs of Shu could float without water.

Although it uses the same phrasal structure that we have seen in texts belonging to the reifying pattern of thinking *ming* as fate-object, *zao ming* 遭命, "encountering fate," this text is not saying that the sages need the help of an external force in order to realize themselves. In this passage, the sages' *ming* belongs to them much as the *xing* does. The sages' *ming* is their "will" to act, which implies that *ming* is under the sages' control. As the sages' *ming* is associated with their will or intention to realize the *dao*, fate becomes unified with the person, acting in conjunction with the sages' *xing*. Nature requires fate, much as the bow requires the string, or the boat requires the water: not even the best bows and boats can function separately, without a supporting context. This text is advocating for a view of fate as the person's grounds for self-realization.

In this worldview, fate does not exist beyond the person, and it does not exist independent from the person. *Ming* is rendered powerless by including it within the person's own *xing*, his *dao* nature. And, in this manner, the problem of fate is dissolved:

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[809] *Huainan honglie jijie* 2: 77.

[810] A type of tree related to the mulberry. *The Huainanzi*, p. 107, footnote 85.

[811] Xizi is either a southern land renowned for its bows, or an excellent archer. *The Huainanzi*, p. 107, footnote 86.

天下之要，不在於彼而在於我，不在於人而在於我身，身得則萬物備矣！徹於心術之論，則嗜欲好憎外矣！是故無所喜而無所怒，無所樂而無所苦，萬物玄同也。無非無是，化育玄耀，生而如死。[812]

The essentials of the world do not lie in something else, but lie in one's own self. They do not lie in other people, but in one's own person. If you realize [the *dao* in] your own person, the ten thousand things will be arrayed before you! If you thoroughly penetrate the teachings of the techniques of the mind, you will be able to put lusts and desires, likes and dislikes, outside of yourself! Therefore, there is nothing to rejoice in and nothing to be angry about, nothing to be happy about and nothing to feel bitter about. You will be *mysteriously united with the ten thousand things*. There will be nothing to reject and nothing to affirm. You will transform and nourish a mysterious resplendence and, while alive, will seem to be dead.

As can be understood from this passage, the experience of pervasive unity between the person and the world, and between nature and fate, involves getting rid of extreme and opposed emotions such as happiness and misery, likes and dislikes. And yet, the ideal person who has attained such an experience of unity and codependence, is said to experience joy (*le* 樂), and to live in a world without cares and concerns.

Expressions of carefree existence abound in "Yuan dao." Sages are said to "roam freely" (*you* 遊), to be "calm, without worries" (恬然無思),[813] "placid, without anxieties" (澹然無慮),[814] and "peaceful, without cares" (恬愉無矜).[815] Their world is not a scary, troubled, dramatic world such as the one depicted in the *Mengzi* or the *Qiongda yishi* due to their authors' belief in a reified notion of fate that overwhelms the person's attempts to conduct herself in the world. Far from the notion of an unknowable, overpowering blind force that lashes the person's will and determines his destiny, the cosmos that the sage experiences in "Yuan dao" is friendly and approachable:

[812] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 36.

[813] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8.

[814] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8.

[815] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 2.

是故大丈夫 The great man,
恬然無思, calmly, has no worries
澹然無慮, placidly, has no anxieties.
以天為蓋, Takes Heaven as his canopy
以地為輿, Takes Earth as his carriage
四時為馬, the four seasons as his horse.
陰陽為禦, yin and yang as his charioteers
乘雲陵霄, Rides the clouds and soars through the sky
與造化者**俱** and becomes a companion of the creator and transformer of things.
縱志舒節, Letting his imagination soar and relaxing his grip
以馳大區。 he gallops through the vast vault.
可以**步**而**步**, When appropriate, he canters his steeds
可以驟而驟。[816] When appropriate, he gallops them.

This passage gives us important information about the relationship that the person establishes with reality in the adaptive pattern. First of all, this is a positive view of the world where humans are one part of an interconnected and interdependent whole. Human existence lacks tragedy. Human beings have a place in the world together with everything else. They are not alienated from the world and its mysterious workings but, on the contrary, they live in peace and harmony with the ten thousand things. Things are not seen as external and opposed to each other, but rather as the frames of the existence, and the conditions of possibility, of one another.

Second, and related to the first, the cosmos is experienced in a favorable way: it is a friendly, helpful environment that enables the agent's field of activity. The cosmos becomes a playground for the person's enjoyment. In this playground, the person's joyful movements are boundless and carefree. The "great man" is not alone and trembling while awaiting an amoral, blind force to decide his destiny. He has taken his fate on his own hands, by taking the entire world as his grounds for action.

[816] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8-9.

This carefree, joyful and fulfilling experience is the fruit of the way in which the sage treats the cosmos and all the creatures that inhabit it: he does not establish a reifying and externalizing relationship but a respectful and inclusive one. Heaven and Earth, the four seasons, the ten thousand things: the sage is connected to them all. He does not utilize them as external objects, or as means to achieve his goals, but relates to them in an adaptive manner that implies respect and a sense of measure, timeliness and appropriateness.

As we have seen before, the joy described in "Yuan dao" is a state of axiological neutrality that does not admit extreme emotions that would produce means of separation and exclusion:

喜怒者，道之邪也	Gladness and anger are deviations from the *dao*
憂悲者，德之失也	Concern and sorrow are a loss of virtue
好憎者，心之過也	Likes and dislikes are an excess of the heart
嗜欲者，性之累也.[817]	Cravings and desires are an encumbrance on inner nature.

Contrary to common sense definitions of joy (*le* 樂), the concept of joy that the author of "Yuan dao" defends does not involve the sense of temporary satisfaction produced by activities ordinarily considered pleasurable, such as enjoying luxury and privileges ("residing in the Jing Pavilion or Zhanghua, making excursions to the Yunmeng lake or the Shaqiu Tower"),[818] participating in refined and cultured diversions ("listening to the Jiushao or Liuying music"),[819] or delighting in sensory experiences ("tasting the savory and aromatic").[820] All of these things produce but an artificial and not lasting sensation of joy that can easily reverse to sorrow, anger

[817] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 12b.

[818] 豈必處京台、章華，遊雲夢、沙丘. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13b.

[819] 耳聽《九韶》、《六瑩》. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13b.

[820] 口味煎熬芬芳. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13b.

and disappointment as soon as they conclude or disappear, making the person a slave to the fluctuations of external things.[821]

Joy for the author of "Yuan dao" is nothing else but "self-realization":

吾所謂樂者，人得其得者也.[822]

What I call "joy" is the person realizing what he can realize.

Finding the means to realize oneself in the world, and the world in oneself, without depending on the vagaries and transformations of things, means achieving a state of axiological and aesthetic neutrality, where nothing is to be judged as pleasant or unpleasant, attractive or unattractive:

能至於無樂者，則無不樂；無不樂，則至極樂矣.[823]

If the person can achieve the state in which nothing gives him joy, then there will be nothing he cannot enjoy, and hence he has reached ultimate joy.

The author of "Yuan dao" gives the reader this persuasive definition of joy, a joy that does not imply a feeling of happiness in a sense that can be opposed to the feeling of misery, but that, on the contrary, overcomes both extremes insofar they are externalized and dependent emotions produced by attachment to things in a dualistic and reified worldview.[824] This joy, characterized by equanimity, comes together with the view of the world as a playground, where everything that happens, and everything that exists, is connected to one's own self, and in that way, acts as the grounds where the person can fulfill his freedom, as we explore in the next section.

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[821] 以身役物. *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13b.

[822] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13b.

[823] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 14a.

[824] On persuasive definitions, see footnote 5 in this chapter. The *Zhuangzi* has a chapter entitled "Ultimate Joy" (*zhi le* 至樂), where the same rhetoric is used to question the ordinary concept of joy and advance a different one. In the *Zhuangzi* chapter, ultimate joy is linked to non-coercive action (*wuwei* 無為). See *Zhuangzi jijie* 18: 150.

ADAPTIVE FREEDOM

What does it mean for an agent to be free? Freedom has been a topic of philosophical, political, scientific and social debate since early times. Since Kant, and at least in Western academic circles, freedom, also referred to as liberty, has been largely understood as a phenomenon susceptible of division into two main categories: negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom is the absence of external and/or internal constraints, barriers and impediments to act: it is freedom *from* (in certain contexts referred as liberation in a soteriological sense). Positive freedom is the possibility of acting so as to pursue one's goals: it is freedom *to*. While negative freedom is conceptualized in terms of absence, positive freedom requires presence: the level of self-mastery, self-determination or self-realization that provides autonomy and allows the agent to pursue her goals.[825] In Isaiah Berlin's examination of Kant's concepts during the decades of the 50's and 60's, positive and negative freedom were conceived as opposite, irreconcilable types of freedom.

In the late 60's, American philosopher Gerald MacCallum offered a meta-theory on these different conceptions of freedom aimed at reconciling Berlin's dichotomy between positive and negative types of freedom. He argued that in all claims of freedom there is both a positive and a negative element: freedom means both being free *from* something (constraints or preventing conditions) and being free *to* do or become something (pursuing one's goals or self-realization).[826] MacCallum proposed that freedom should be understood relationally, as a relation between three variables: agent, constraints and purposes. According to MacCallum, those who

[825] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 1969: 121-122.

[826] See MacCallum, "Negative and Positive Freedom," 1967.

see freedom as uniquely positive or negative would be simply placing more emphasis on one side of the triadic relation.[827]

In the late 70's, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor made the distinction between the opportunity and the exercise concepts of freedom.[828] The opportunity concept points at the possibility of doing or becoming without constraints, whereas the exercise concept requires actually doing or becoming, regardless whether there are constraints or not, and in case there are constraints, regardless how the agent chooses to deal with them. In my view, both the positive and the negative types of freedom belong to an opportunity concept of freedom, positive freedom suggesting only the possibility of acting rather than the actual action, and negative freedom assuming a theoretical absence of constraints in order to act.

Early Chinese thinkers were not worried about the possibility to act by itself (the theoretical conditions of agency, such as autonomy or free will), but about how much control agents have over their own actions, their lives, and the course of events. They addressed questions such as "how do I control my destiny?" and "how do I influence what will happen?" Freedom in Early China was not conceptualized as an opportunity, but rather as an exercise and a practice: the agent's control over his medium (including potential forms of constraint) that allows him to achieve his purposes (let these be doing or becoming something). It is from this standpoint that we can be critical of and reform MacCallum's formula of the triadic relation of freedom by including a fourth variable, namely the variable of "control." Control changes the

[827] MacCallum, 1967. In his article "Isaiah Berlin's Challenge to the *Zhuangzian* Freedom," Tao Jiang uses Berlin's framework to analyze and challenge the concept of freedom, as negative freedom, in the *Zhuangzi*, as well as the *Zhuangzi* to correct the direction of negative freedom in Berlin's philosophy. See Jiang, 2012: 69-72. While the divide between negative and positive can be useful to analyze certain aspects of freedom in different texts, I do not find these concepts satisfying enough to exhaustively discuss theories of freedom in Early China.

[828] Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 1979.

way in which the other three variables of MacCallum's formula relate, and allows for interpretations of freedom where self-mastery and self-realization are not mere possibilities but goals achieved by agents by taking control over their own medium and the obstacles and constraints this medium involves.

In Early Chinese terms, freedom requires that the agent deals with his context (call it medium, environment, situation, world) in a manner that allows the agent to take control over given constraints and thereby realize his purposes. This exercise concept of freedom involves the participation of four variables: agent, constraints, control, and purposes, control being the key variable that determines the relationship between the other three. I give you two examples that fit this definition, and which have helped me create this definition: the death dialogues in *Zhuangzi* "Dazongshi," and *Huainanzi* "Yuan dao." As we will see, although both these texts present arguments and means to provide the agent with freedom, they introduce two different kinds of freedom based on two different epistemic approaches to reality: a reifying approach versus an adaptive approach, respectively.[829]

The author of the death dialogues accepts a reifying pattern of thinking about the world as an external and objectified source of constraints for the agent to achieve his purposes: the world is something that happens to the agent from the outside. Within this epistemic approach, the author proposes liberation from patterned and fixed ways of interacting with phenomena and judging events, so that new modes of interaction can happen, enabling the agent to adaptively transform contextual constraints into opportunities for self-realization and the achievement of the

[829] By no means do I want to imply that the examples I provide are the two only theories of freedom in Early China. They are only the two texts providing theories of freedom that I have studied throughout this dissertation, and they are representative of two important epistemic approaches to the relationship between the person and the world: the reifying and the adaptive patterns.

agent's purposes. Using adaptive behavior, the agent becomes empowered and in control of his own life no matter the constraints he faces, or how "bad" conventional wisdom considers these constraints to be. This understanding of freedom does not require the elimination of constraints *per se*, but rather the elimination of an understanding of constraints as absolutely overpowering the agent and determining of the agent's actions. The notion of constraints abandons its negative connotation in favor of neutrality of content and implications. Therefore, constraints become "conditions" that can be used in positive ways by the agent, allowing the agent to self-realize and achieve his purposes.

We may understand the relationship of control over his medium that the agent establishes in this conception of freedom as a sort of *amor fati*, a concept linked to Latin thinkers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, and later revitalized in the philosophy of Nietzsche. *Amor fati*, the love of fate, is the acceptance of everything that happens in one's life as necessary and positive. As Marcus Aurelius puts it in his *Meditations*:

> "All that is in accord with you is in accord with me, O World! Nothing which occurs at the right time for you comes too soon or too late for me. All that your seasons produce, O Nature, is fruit for me. It is from you that all things come: all things are within you, and all things move toward you."[830]

These verses by Marcus Aurelius remind us of Zi Lai's words in the death dialogues, when after falling ill he says that "what makes good my life is what makes good my death" 故善吾生者, 乃所以善吾死也.[831] *Amor fati* in these ancient thinkers' statements can be reinterpreted within the contemporary frame of ethics of affirmation, as Rosi Braidotti does with Nietzsche:

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[830] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* IV.23, quoted in Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, 1998: 143.

[831] *Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 59 and 6: 64.

"This is not fatalism, and even less resignation, but rather Nietzschean ethics of overturning the negative. Let us call it: amor fati: we have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it within an ethics of relation. Of course repugnant and unbearable events do happen. Ethics consists, however, in reworking these events in the direction of positive relations."[832] Braidotti's ethics of affirmation imply a level of "co-existence with the event,"[833] in which "The worthiness of an event –that which ethically compels us to engage with it, is not its intrinsic or explicit value according to given standards of moral or political evaluation, but rather the extent to which it contributes to conditions of becoming. It is a vital force to move beyond the negative."[834] The ways in which Braidotti argues that negative relations can be transformed into positive ones are strikingly similar to the means provided by the author of the death dialogues: de-personalizing what happens as a necessary part of the world; placing the agent at a level of co-existence with the events, either of them having priority over the other; neutralizing the negativity of events and phenomena conventionally construed as constraints to human freedom and therefore perceived as negative; "mobilizing resources that have been left untapped,"[835] in other words, bringing to light alternative possibilities that remained invisible within prevalent wisdom; transposing negative into positive, and thereby taking control over phenomena and events –becoming free *from* the burden of rigid opinion, and free *to* become what the agent wants to become.

This approach allows the agent to become empowered to achieve control over his life, and achieve self-realization, no matter the starting and changing conditions. There is no external constraint that can subjugate the agent, who, by his love of fate, can overcome the assumed

[832] Braidotti, "Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment," 2008: 16.

[833] Braidotti, 2008: 16.

[834] See Braidotti's chapter in *Relational Architectural Ecologies,* 2013: 36.

[835] Braidotti, 2008: 3.

negativity of fate and create empowering alternatives in dealing with it. What is missing in Braidotti's analysis of the ethics of affirmation and the path to freedom, and which the death dialogues can supply, is the adaptive attitude. For the new, positive relations established between agent and world to be appropriate and sustainable, these relations must be conceived adaptively, the agent deciding the best course of action according to his evaluation of a multiplicity of factors involved in each particular situation. I will have more to say about how adaptive agency may play an important role in the development of contemporary notions of relational ethics of affirmation in the Implications section of this chapter.

A second kind of freedom, which I have called adaptive freedom, arises within the adaptive pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world, study of which has occupied this chapter. The kind of freedom that we find in *Huainanzi* "Yuan dao" consists in not accepting the world as a separate, external, reified, opposing object, with the result that every event and phenomena that occurs in the world cannot act as a constraint, for it is a constituent and enabling part of the person. Every single thing in the world understood as codependent and unified with the agent, phenomena that in other worldviews are obstacles, become in the adaptive pattern of thinking the grounds for an agent who is in full control of his actions and his self-realization.

In "Yuan dao," fate is not something that *happens* to the person, and therefore something that can be hated or loved, but a constituent part of the person's being in this world, inseparable from the person, experienced in mode nobject. The freedom derived from understanding the world in adaptive terms, as I have explained in this chapter, consists in finding no boundaries, whether these are social, political, geographical, material, psychological or philosophical. When everything is me, there is nothing left to limit me. Everything becomes the grounds for my

realization and my expansion. This is the type of freedom that I have called adaptive freedom, as it is the result of understanding adaptation as the natural pattern of interaction in the world.

Consider again the image of the vehicle in "Yuan dao," which conveys the sense of union between the person and the cosmos that gives way to freedom. In the image, the entire cosmos unites to enable the person to move freely without boundaries. His whole entourage becomes his cart, which is to say, the context in which he can move, the support for his carefree boundless existence –like the air we breathe and the ground we step on. The world enables the sage (the ideal figure who has grasped the principles of the *dao*) to move freely and joyfully without limits:

故以天為蓋, Thus, use Heaven as your canopy
則無不覆也； and nothing will be uncovered.
以地為輿, Use Earth as your carriage
則無不載也； and nothing will be unsupported.
四時為馬, The four seasons as your horse,
則無不使也； then nothing will be unemployed.
陰陽為禦, Yin yang as your charioteers,
則無不備也.[836] then nothing will be incomplete.

The sage has taken control of the entire world by experiencing it in the mode nobject. In this image, the sage is the "I" and the cosmic vehicle is the "context" that allows for the sage to become himself, to realize himself. The "I" and the "context" cannot be separated. The sage lives in integral unity with the cosmos, which is a part of the sage much as the sage belongs to it. In the adaptive pattern of thinking, and as opposed to the reifying pattern, the "external" world does not act against the agent. According to the thinkers of the adaptive pattern, it is only a reifying view of *ming* that gives the agent such a misconceived perception, and which makes the person experience the world in a dramatic way. When the world and the person are two facets of the

[836] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 8-9.

same reality, they do not hinder each other but rather become the means of realization of one another. It is in this way that the adaptive agent finds his freedom.

There is another image, one that speaks of "stretching the world as to make it a cage" (張天下以為之籠), so no birds can be lost.[837] Apart from "Yuan dao," this image also appears in chapter "Gengsangchu" 庚桑楚 from the *Zhuangzi*, where it reads "if the world were to be made a cage, sparrows would have nowhere to escape to" 以天下為之籠，則雀無所逃.[838] As opposed to using things to confront and control other things, as in the case of using a bow to catch birds or using a net to catch fish, these texts say, if you were to stretch the world as to make it a cage, there would be no where else to go: everything would be within your reach.

What is the place of human freedom in a cage-like world? A cage seems to divide a space between inside and outside, those placed inside cannot go out, and their field of activity is conditioned and restricted. However, in the adaptive pattern of thinking, the cage is not a surrounding, limiting external element. The cage is a part of the person, the medium and context where the person can fulfill her life, and whereby she becomes free. We are in the cage much as the cage is in us.[839] Adaptive freedom (or freedom gained through an adaptive approach to reality) happens when the world of phenomena and events is understood not as an external object opposed to a subject, but as integral part of the agent. In this way, instead of a limit, the world

[837] *Huainan honglie jijie* 1: 13.

[838] *Zhuangzi jijie* 23: 207. A similar image is "hiding the world in the world" 藏天下於天下 (*Zhuangzi jijie* 6: 59).

[839] Inspired by Jung, Gaston Bachelard takes the image of the house as a tool to analyze the human soul. In the introduction to *The Poetics of Space,* he says: "Our soul is an abode, and by remembering "houses" and "rooms" we learn to abide within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them (…)." Bachelard, 1994: xxxvii (introduction).

becomes the person's playground. The cage is like the air for the flying bird and the ground for the running beast. It is only because of the cage that the person can fully perform her humanity and express her freedom.

In this understanding of adaptive freedom, the agent can achieve full control over his life and his self-realization by means of an epistemic move where nothing is allowed to act as a constraint and, as a result, everything becomes a condition of possibility for the agent's being, acting and becoming. The agent is in control of the world (his playground) just like a skilled charioteer is in control of his horses. The kind of control that a charioteer exercises over his horses is not coercing or forceful, but rather adaptive, cooperative, and empathic. In order to get the horses to give their best, the charioteer must be attuned to their needs, cooperating with them to the extent that the horses do not feel controlled and experience every movement as coming from themselves. (Remember the *Laozi* saying, "tasks were achieved and affairs were successful, while the hundred clans all claimed 'we are as we are, of ourselves'" 功成事遂，百姓皆謂我自然[840]). At the same time that the horses do not perceive the charioteer as an external interference, during a race the charioteer does not perceive the horses as an external object over which he must impose control: there is no distance between charioteer and horses, as both of them are unified in the action of *riding.* Let this image be an illustration of the way in which the agent can achieve full mastery over the world, eliminating all source of potential constraint and integrating it within his own set of capacities, and therefore finding no obstruction to the accomplishment of his goals. This type of freedom that Early Chinese thinkers found through an adaptive approach to the world, has implications for current theories in environmentalism, interdependence, and ethics of happiness, as we will explore in the Implications section.

[840] *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi*, p. 40.

These two approaches to freedom, the one we find in the dead dialogues from the *Zhuangzi*, and the one we find in "Yuan dao" (adaptive freedom), perfectly fit the working definition of freedom for Early Chinese philosophy that I outlined earlier, freedom as "the agent's control over his medium (including potential forms of constraint) that allows him to achieve his purposes (let these be doing or becoming something)."

The inclusion of the key variable of control in the relational definition of freedom may bring to the reader's mind other texts that have been the object of analysis in this dissertation and which also revolved around a concern with control. In the second chapter, "Three Models of Military Action," I analyzed the Early Chinese forceful model of agency, where a military agent attempted to fully control his enemy by arbitrarily and non-situationally imposing his will through the use of force, domination and coercion. As we saw, the forceful agent rarely achieved his purposes and, when he did, the success was not enduring –more like winning a battle than winning the war. The forceful model of agency, although occasionally providing the agent with a means of immediate and short-term control over his medium, failed to help the agent achieve his goals in the long term, and hence it failed to enable freedom.

A second model of action that I analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation is the prescriptive model, which consisted in inflexibly adhering to pre-established, fixed, normative guidelines of conduct no matter the circumstances. Following rigid prescriptions without the possibility of adjusting them to a changing, evolving situation proved not to be a successful model of action for Early Chinese thinkers, insofar it rarely allowed the agent to take control of his context and achieve his goals. Much as the forceful model of agency, the prescriptive model could not provide a sustainable relation between agent, situation, control and goals.

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation, "The Reification of Fate," and "Coping with Uncertainty," respectively, presented the Guodian manuscript called *Qiongda yishi,* some sections of the *Mengzi*, and the Shanghai Museum manuscript called *Tang Yu zhi dao* as representative of a "turn inwards" by means of which the agent gained a sense of control and existential competence by retaining a space of moral autonomy independent from the outcomes of his actions. Recovering a sense of control and autonomy was fundamental for the thinkers responsible for these texts, and they certainly offered efficient means to gain such as sense of control (which is a key variable in our working Early Chinese definition of freedom). Nevertheless, these thinkers also failed to provide a satisfactory relation between control and the other variables in the formula. Whereas the agent of the "turn inward" could control his self-cultivation, moral thinking and moral action, he failed to take control over the outcomes of his actions, and failed to deal with his medium and context in a way that enabled the realization of his goals.

How should we understand this failure to establish a successful relation between the agent, control, constraints, and the realization of the agent's purposes –all the four variables in the formula for freedom? In the case of the forceful and the prescriptive models of agency, the agent's ultimate failure to achieve his goals tells us about an unsuccessful model of action. However, in the case of the "turn inward" agent, the failure to establish a successful connection between the agent's control over her situation, potential constraints, and the realization of her goals, needs not be understood as an intellectual failure on the part of the thinkers behind such philosophical theory. It should rather be understood as the result of these thinkers' differing intellectual background and practical concerns. The thinkers behind texts such as *Mengzi* and *Qiongda yishi*, which advocate for a "turn inward," begin from the assumption that the outcomes

of human action necessarily lie beyond human control. In this way, with their proposal of the "turn inward" these thinkers were not attempting to provide the agent with means to gain control over the realization of her goals. In other words, they were not pursuing an exercise concept of freedom, but merely inner moral autonomy, which led to contentment. More specifically, it led to contentment with a pre-established and necessary situation of un-freedom, and provided a means to stay at peace with it while furthering moral development and ethical relations.

Many modern scholars have interpreted freedom in Early Chinese philosophy, and very especially in the *Zhuangzi*, as a sense of acceptance of the world as it is, and the contentment with one's personal situation that results from it. Franklin Perkins recently provided which might be one of the latest restatements of this position when he claimed that, in the *Zhuangzi*, "The fundamental question is no more how we can act effectively to achieve our desires, but how we can alter our desires in order to enjoy the world as it is."[841] In this view, which has been very popular in modern scholarship, contentment is the condition of possibility for freedom. In Perkins' words: "Zhuangzi presents human beings as distinctive in having something like freedom in our ability to change perspectives and alter our reactions and emotions, this freedom is just what makes it possible to overcome tragedy, allowing us to accept the world as it is."[842] This identification of contentment with freedom has been reenacted once and again by readers of *Zhuangzi* since the first extant edition of the text by Guo Xiang 郭象, where the commentary established the acceptance of one's limitations as the only way toward mental peace and satisfaction that could enable a person to become spiritually free.[843]

[841] Perkins, 2014: 171 and onwards.

[842] Perkins, 2014: 183.

[843] Perkins, 2014: 171. See also Guo Xiang's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* in *Zhuangzi jishi*.

Against these authors, I contend that the position that identifies acceptance of fate, contentment and freedom is only one among several other positions regarding freedom and the agent's control in the *Zhuangzi*. As I have already established in this dissertation, the *Zhuangzi* is a heterogeneous compilation of texts of diverse intellectual affiliations and philosophical views. The fact that one can argue for a particular position by taking as example one text from within the *Zhuangzi* does not make that position representative of the *Zhuangzi* as a whole. More importantly, I also contend that contentment and acceptance have nothing to do with freedom.[844] Contentment and freedom can only become equal if two conditions are satisfied: first, the opportunity concept of negative freedom is understood as one's being unhampered to realize one's desires; and second, the agent's desires are modified to fit his contextual limits. The classical example is that of the slave who is content with his situation. The slave can progressively reduce his state of un-freedom by stopping desiring the things that he cannot do, and only desiring those he may do.

J. P. Day criticized this notion in 1970, arguing that the happy slave may *feel* free, but he is not free de facto.[845] As Princeton Professor of Politics and Human Values Philip Pettit puts it, the slave, even content and satisfied, is still not free, because his status makes him permanently liable to interferences of any kind: he is permanently subjected to the arbitrary power of his owner.[846] In this way, the contented slave has no control over what may happen, his medium, or his self-realization, and no influence whatsoever over the course of events and his own life. Something similar happens in the texts representative of the "turn inwards." Although these

[844] For an insightful analysis of acceptance in the *Zhuangzi* with no relation to freedom, see Yuan Ai, "On Acceptance –a Zhuangzian perspective," 2016: 97-121.

[845] Day, "On Liberty and the Real Will," 1970.

[846] Pettit, "Freedom and Probability," 2008.

thinkers create the possibility for a mental space of moral autonomy, and hence they create content agents, the agent's status is still that of a slave, in the sense of a continuing lack of control over the realization of her goals and purposes, for these thinkers presuppose an inevitable rupture of the link between action and outcome, and they accept it as remaining as such.

The problem of the "slave status" is however solved both in the *Zhuangzi* death dialogues' notion of freedom, and in the *Huainanzi* "Yuan dao" notion of adaptive freedom, in different ways. The author of the death dialogues changes the status of the agent from "permanently subjected to fate's lashes" to "able to take advantage of any lashes of fate in her favor," which accounts for the agent's taking of control and subsequent freedom. The author of "Yuan dao," in turn, changes the status of the agent from slave status to "acting from the integration of fate within oneself as the grounds for action," which leads to the same result of enabling freedom. As a scholar of Foucault and the relationship between freedom and power put it, freedom is not so much the absence of constraints as it is "the utilization of power which circulates in all relations… and which is productive as much as it is constraining."[847] If Early Chinese thinkers have taught us something regarding freedom, it is that the problem lays not so much with the constraints as it lays with the ways in which we approach these constraints. Whereas in the "turn inward" the agent decided to disregard the constraints and accept his lack of control over the realization of his goals, the agents of the death dialogues and "Yuan dao" found efficacious ways to handle the constraints and transform them into something else, something that enables them to achieve their goals rather than acting as freedom-preventing events.

In principle, constraints preventing the accomplishment of goals can be of two kinds: (1) external, coming from other agents and the world, including intentional constraints, such as those

[847] Saul Tobias, "Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities," 2005: 63.

exercised by other agents, and non-intentional constraints, such as those provoked by natural and social causes, such as sicknesses, earthquakes and poverty; and (2) internal, coming from oneself, such as psychological constraints, including desires, illusions, phobias and misbeliefs, and physical constraints, such as old age and malformations. This is a rough classification that begs for complexity as we analyze each single case in particular, as we will soon find, for example, that a malformation is the result of a previous social cause exercised intentionally by external agents, such as the use of nuclear weapons; or that the condition of poverty is not so much unintentionally caused when it is interpreted within a sociopolitical system imposed by a particular ruler or administrator. For the sake of this discussion, we can be allowed to look at the simplistic classification, as it is only intended to direct the reader's attention toward different ways in which we can understand freedom-preventing constraints, and hence possible ways in which humans can handle these constraints.

Both the thinkers behind the death dialogues and the "Yuan dao," which I have taken to represent two different kinds of freedom in Early Chinese philosophy, do the necessary epistemic work to neutralize these constraints, eliminating their constraining aspect and transforming them into means for the agent to achieve her freedom. The author of the death dialogues gets rid of psychological constraints (by modifying conventional views and misbeliefs) to allow the agent to see the external constraints as opportunities instead of preventing conditions. In this approach to freedom, external constraints are not eliminated but put to use in the agent's favor. Namely, constraints are transformed into conditions of possibility. The author of "Yuan dao," in turn, rejects the reifying pattern of understanding the relationship between agent and world in dichotomic terms, in order to present a more daring project: the rejection of the notion of constraint itself. A constraint is, by definition, a freedom-preventing item. From the standpoint of

the ideal agent in "Yuan dao," nothing exists in separation from the agent, and nothing can prevent the agent's freedom, therefore the notion of constraint has no meaning. What we conventionally address as constraints, along with every single event and phenomena, is all transformed into grounds for action for the agent.

To sum up, I have introduced in this section a working definition of freedom for Early Chinese philosophy, a definition that is relational and involves interaction between four variables: agent, constraints, control and purposes. Freedom in Early Chinese philosophy is an exercise concept that requires that the agent deals with his context (call it medium, environment, situation, world) in a manner that allows the agent to take control over given constraints and thereby realize his purposes. Then, I have presented two Early Chinese approaches to freedom, one of them represented by the death dialogues in the *Zhuangzi*, and the other one represented by *Huainanzi* "Yuan dao." The latter is the type of freedom that I have called adaptive freedom and which gives title to this section and the entire chapter. Although both these types of freedom necessitate adaptability to different degrees, adaptive freedom can only be found within the adaptive pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world, which has been the object of study of this chapter, and which I consider my main contribution to recent scholarship.

My analysis of freedom in the death dialogues grows from previous scholarship in freedom in the *Zhuangzi*, but it also separates from it. Modern scholars discussing freedom in *Zhuangzi* have often adopted the view that contentment equals freedom, which for reasons explained before I cannot accept. Others have seen a more active element in the *Zhuangzian* search for freedom by focusing on the transformative epistemic aspect, so that it is not so much about passive acceptance of the world, but rather about changing the way in which we perceive

the world. Alan Fox, for instance, in his study of *wuwei* in the *Zhuangzi*, discusses the idea of "fitness" (*shi* 適) between the person and the world not as "a matter of conforming to society and other forms of human contrivance. It is in fact accomplished by stripping away the artificial and arbitrary conventions of thought and behavior that are the result of social indoctrination and that only serve to impede spontaneous response."[848] According to Fox, fitness would give way to freedom, but he understands freedom as a mere negative concept of being *free from* "slavish, obstinate commitment to behavioral and evaluative formulae that force us to act inappropriately, rather than freedom to act inappropriately if we so choose."[849] Fox's concept of negative freedom in *Zhuangzi* ends up leading to contentment, rather than to control over one's context so that the agent can pursue his goals.[850]

Fox's is a restatement of the freedom within constraints, or freedom of doing what is inevitable (the only appropriate and natural response per situation) that Graham popularized.[851] This approach acknowledges the relevance of the epistemic transformation, as well as the importance of flexibility and creativity in discovering new approaches to agent-world interaction, but fails to see that the adaptive attitude empowers the agent to take control over his medium and to realize his goals. In other words, it fails to account for the positive aspect of freedom, and for an exercise concept of freedom. My reading of the dead dialogues rectifies these notions, although by no means claims that the approach to freedom put forward by the author of the dead

[848] Fox, 2003: 214.

[849] Fox, 2003: 214.

[850] Fox, 2003: 214.

[851] Graham, "Daoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of Is and Ought," in Mair ed., *Experimental Essays in the Zhuangzi*, 1983: 9. Fox, like Graham, identifies the appropriate response with the natural response, *ziran* 自然. I have criticized this equation in my first chapter, "Locating Adaptation."

dialogues is representative of the entire *Zhuangzi* compilation. I take this not as a weakness but, on the contrary, as a step forward in a more complex understanding of our early sources and Early Chinese philosophy. Finally, my reading of freedom in the dead dialogues situates this notion of freedom not within the *Zhuangzi* or Daoism, but within a larger pattern of thinking the relationship between the person of the world in Early China, namely the reifying pattern, which was the object of discussion in chapter 3.

My main contribution here is bringing to light the adaptive pattern of understanding the relationship between the person and the world, which highlights how some Early Chinese thinkers understood adaptation as inherent to the way in which things interact with one another, and how they created a purposive model of adaptive action inspired in the natural world. This purposive model of action would fit and enhance the world's natural order and self-sustainability, would provide the means for agents to achieve full control, and lead to a unique kind of freedom that has not been discussed in previous scholarship: adaptive freedom. The adaptive pattern responded to a generalized concern with agency and control in Early China, and it was a reaction against what some thinkers considered a prevailing failed pattern of thinking the world in reified terms. By changing their pattern of thinking about the world, and the position and role of humans in it, some Early Chinese thinkers argued, the agent could find adaptive freedom. Adaptive freedom not only played an important role in the intellectual history of Early China, but may also play a role in contemporary ethics, as I discuss in the Implications.

IMPLICATIONS

The adaptive pattern of thinking established an alternative set of relationships between the person and the world, where (1) the world was not reified into an external and opposing

object, (2) the process of de-reification allowed the person to experience a sense of interconnection, interdependence, and pervasive unity with the world, and (3) this led to a carefree sense of existence in which the world became the agent's playground, every event and phenomena considered an integral part of the person and the grounds on which action could be taken. As a consequence of the understanding of adaptation at the core of natural interaction, and of the adoption of an adaptive pattern of thinking and acting, the agent found adaptive freedom.

In the introduction to his translation of "Yuan dao," Roger Ames argues that in China, and as opposed to Greece, the agent cannot be decontextualized. Because of their specific cosmology, Ames explains, Chinese thinkers always conceived of the agent embedded in a situation, agent and situation being inseparable. In his own words, human beings "are interdependent with the world in which they reside, simultaneously shaping it and being shaped by it. Order is always reflexive, entailing the agent within the action itself. Agency and action, subject and object, are not contraries, but interchangeable aspects of a single category in which any distinction between the agent and the action, between the subject and the object, between what does and what is done, is simply a matter of perspective."[852] Ames sees interconnection as something uniquely Chinese, and representative of Chinese culture and philosophy as opposed to other cultures and philosophies. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the sense of interconnection and interdependence between person and world, or agent and context, is by no means something that we encounter in all of our Early Chinese texts. Interconnection and pervasive unity is a feature that corresponds to a particular pattern of thinking about the relationship between person and world, namely the adaptive pattern.

[852] Ames, 1998: 20.

The most prevalent pattern of thinking this relationship, which I have called reifying, established not interdependence but rather arbitrariness, not unity but rather opposition. In the same way, many Early Chinese thinkers held views of agency that did not involve interdependence between agent and situation. As we have seen in previous chapters, early texts attest to the fact that models that proposed ritual, inflexible, prescriptive, and forceful views of agency were pervasively used. Adaptive agency was one model of action among many others, and although it enjoyed some popularity among Early Chinese thinkers and certainly had great influence in the intellectual history of China, we would be doing ourselves no favor by calling it a representative model of Chinese culture and philosophy, for this would only obscure the interesting relationships and philosophical discussions that arose in Early China around the controversial issue of successful agency.

Ames is of course looking at "Yuan dao" when he makes such claims. "Yuan dao" is a perfect example of the adaptive pattern of thinking, and hence of the features of interconnection, interdependence and unity that Ames wants to make representative of all of Chinese thought. While I agree with his insights with regard to "Yuan dao," I also frame these insights in a different way, a way that is broader but also narrower. My frame is broader than Ames' because mine places the features that Ames discusses discretely back to a pattern of thinking that I call adaptive. The features of interconnection, interdependence and unity do not happen arbitrarily, but are the result of understanding the world from the adaptive pattern of thinking. At the same time, my frame is much narrower than Ames' because I do not make these features representative of the entire Chinese intellectual tradition as opposed to the West, but rather as representative of a particular way of understanding the relationship between the person and the

world in Early China: a way that does not seem to have always been the prevalent one, but rather a countercultural movement.

An important implication of my research in models of agency and patterns of understanding the world in Early China is its contribution toward de-essentializing discourses. There has been enough scholarship of essentialism and exoticization of China in the 20th century. As Goldin remarks regarding what he calls the myth that China has no creation myths, "it is not that all these scholars [Bodde, Mote, Graham, Ames and Hall] happen to be mistaken…they insist on the absence of creation myths in traditional China because their vision of China is one that *cannot have* creation myths." Goldin is referring to the exoticizing discourse that opposes an essentialized and reified notion of China to an equally essentialized notion of the West, so that whatever we find in the West must have happened differently in China. In this way, masked by the fact that this discourse makes China exceptional, exotic, attractive and unique, hides the fact that this discourse reduces China to being an antithesis to the West, always defining it in relation of subordination to the West. 21st century scholarship must take on the task of reversing this popular movement among comparative philosophers (still very much alive). Examples of the scholarship of reversion are the works of Puett, who began his career in Chinese philosophy speaking against the idea that Heaven-man continuity is an essential feature of Chinese thought (another one of the features that only represent a certain worldview within Early Chinese philosophy, but Ames and others want to make representative of China in its entirety). Other scholars that are also working toward de-essentializing philosophical discourses about China

include Paul Goldin regarding cosmogony, Albert Galvany and Roman Graziani regarding war, and Yang Xiaomei regarding linguistic ontology.[853]

Apart from these methodological implications, the study of the adaptive pattern of thinking and freedom in Early Chinese philosophy brings us the following opportunities to engage with contemporary philosophy:

Sensitivity to the epistemic conditions of freedom. In both of the approaches to freedom that we have seen in this chapter, a prerequisite to achieve freedom was the development of a certain epistemic attitude that allowed the agent to neutralize the negative aspects of "constraints" (freedom-preventing conditions) and transform them into opportunities and grounds for action (freedom-enabling conditions). Things themselves (events, phenomena, situations) did not change: what changed was the agent's understanding of them, and thereby the agent's attitude toward them. Early Chinese thinkers interested in freedom were very sensitive to the epistemic conditions necessary to attain freedom, and made of the epistemic stance a prior

[853] Puett, 1994 and 2002. Goldin, "The Myth that China has no Creation Myth," 2008. Yang Xiaomei, "Do Differences in Grammatical Form Between Languages Explain Differences in Ontology Between Different Philosophical Traditions? A Critique of the Mass-Noun Hypothesis," 2011. Galvany and Graziani, "La Guerre en Perspective: Histoire et Culture Militaire en Chine," 2014.

Interestingly, Ames is responsible, if not always for creating them, for developing and popularizing all these essentializing discourses: the ideas that Chinese culture is one of continuity human-nature, that it is a pacific culture ruled by harmony and not by conflict, that there was no creation myth in China, as the *dao* always existed, and that the metaphysics that makes China unique is an inevitable result of their unique linguistic system. In comparative philosophy, and in the divulgation of Chinese philosophy to the Western audience, these essentializing discourses are both helpful (to compare in more abstract and simplistic ways) and useful (to generate interest by means of exceptionalism and exoticism). It is the task of my generation to show that we can do comparative philosophy without reducing, reifying, limiting and betraying either tradition, and that we can show the interest and relevance of Chinese philosophy to the Western audience without resorting to populist means. It is only with great respect toward Roger Ames' contributions toward the study of Chinese philosophy, that I say that he is sometimes wrong about his methods.

fundamental step in the process.[854] Epistemic transformation is not only a requisite for freedom in Early Chinese philosophy, it is the key for larger discourses in ethics and morality. The reader may remember that, for the thinkers of the "turn inward," the inner space of moral autonomy was achieved by the cultivation of an epistemic attitude, too, an attitude of active and self-aware negligence toward what lies beyond the agent's control.[855] Early Chinese thinkers were particularly concerned with action and the taking of control, but the most successful model of action they proposed, the adaptive model, involved at its very foundation an epistemic transformation and the adoption of a particular mindset.

As Allen Buchanan has pointed out in a recent article, the epistemic conditions of freedom remain underappreciated in Western scholarship. Buchanan centers his study on the ways in which misbeliefs (false or unjustified beliefs) undercut freedom, or act as preventing conditions to the attainment of freedom.[856] Overall, he calls on Western scholars of freedom to pay more attention to epistemology in general when it comes to defining freedom and the conditions under which freedom can be obtained, and centers on the following freedom-undermining false beliefs: (1) beliefs about what one is doing, (2) beliefs about the circumstances in which one is acting, (3) beliefs about the effective means for achieving one's ends, (4) beliefs about the range of options open to one, (5) shared beliefs that impair collective

[854] Many scholars have discussed the important role of epistemology for self-transformation in Early Chinese philosophy. In his article "Two Notions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Thought: The Concept of *Hua* 化 in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*," Tao Jiang argues that, for Zhuangzi, freedom begins with self-transformation (*hua* 化), which involves an epistemic change. See Jiang, 2011: 76.

[855] In a forthcoming article, Yuan Ai claims that moral experts in Early Chinese philosophy (represented by the figures of the masters and the sages) do not tell people which path of action to take, but rather which mindset to cultivate in order to make the right choices. See Yuan Ai, forthcoming 2017, "If Moral Experts."

[856] Buchanan, "Prisoners of Misbelief: The Epistemic Conditions of Freedom," 2016.

freedom.[857] The concepts of freedom that I have discussed in this chapter from the Early Chinese tradition may help us reconsider the role of knowledge and beliefs in our contemporary study of freedom. I propose the following paths for further exploration, not covered in Buchanan's reflections: (1) beliefs about the nature of the self, (2) beliefs about the nature of the world, including events, phenomena, beings and things other than the self; and (3) beliefs about the nature of the relationship between the person and the world. It is in the beliefs held about the nature of this relationship where the possibilities for freedom lie.

A relational concept of freedom without free-will, autonomy, or a strong sense of the self. The concepts of freedom that we have explored in this chapter point at an agent whose pursuit of freedom is independent, and needs not be based, on notions of free-will, autonomy, and the self (understood in a strong sense). In this manner, it radically departs from the more traditional and widely accepted Western conceptions of freedom and agency. Let me briefly explain each point.

Free will is the capacity to control what we choose or decide (our will). Western philosophy has been occupied in discerning what kind of capacity is the capacity to will, how free humans capacity to will is, and whether this capacity exists at all (as it has been threatened in multiple ways by different forms of determinism), for over the last 2000 years. Although, as a response to the problem that our will seems not always to be free, freedom of action has sometimes been distinguished from freedom of will, the issue of free will remains deeply intertwined with Western conceptions of freedom. The Early Chinese conceptions of freedom presented above, on the contrary, dwell not on the theoretical or ontological conditions of human freedom, but rather on the epistemological conditions for pursuing freedom, where freedom is going to be understood as an exercise and a practice. Interesting as the exploration of the

[857] Buchanan, 2016: 1.

theoretical and ontological conditions for human freedom be, given the seemingly impossibility to reach a clarifying direction in this regard, it is freeing to consider alternative approaches to the issue of human freedom that do not necessitate the debate about free will. The same is true of autonomy.

Autonomy consists in self-governance. A person or a group are considered autonomous when they have the capacity and the right to govern themselves without external interference. The Early Chinese conceptions of freedom that we have studied do not necessitate autonomy. In the case of the dead dialogues, external interferences are an accepted given (remember the notions of Heaven and the reified fate), and they do not suppose a preventing condition for agents to achieve their freedom. External interferences exist among other possible constraints (such as physical malformations, or birth status) and are neutralized as "conditions" for the agent to succeed. In the case of adaptive freedom in "Yuan dao," external interferences are not conceived to exist, for everything is part of one and the same unified reality. For the person to be autonomous, he must be autonomous from something. But the author of "Yuan dao" negates the possibility of the existence of anything external to the person. The world is understood in nondual, interrelated, and codependent terms, and in such a world everything can potentially become the grounds for the agent to achieve his purposes. As we have seen, in Early China freedom is not so much about the absence of external interferences, or constraints, as it is about the manner in which the agent deals with them. In Western discourses, on the contrary, autonomy (the ontological capacity for self-governance, to base one's action on one's own authority and power), lies at the basis of the theoretical possibility for agency, as well as being a precondition for pursuing freedom. The fact that the Early Chinese conception of freedom did

not necessitate autonomy is linked to the conception of the self that is entertained in these discourses.

The conceptions of freedom in the dead dialogues and "Yuan dao" have in common that they are not based on subjectivity or the self. They are outcome-based: obtaining freedom requires the taking of control over the context (including potential forms of constraints) in order to achieve the agent's goals. One may think that behind the notion of the agent's goal hides a concept of the self: the one who establishes those goals. Yet this conception of the self is quite different from the one Western thinkers may intuitively entertain. In texts such as the dead dialogues and "Yuan dao," the self is a social construct that must be deconstructed in order to pursue freedom. The loss of the self (the social construct of who we are and what we must do, think, value, and feel) is not an impediment, but an achievement: it is a necessary epistemological step in the process toward achieving a liberated, non-enslaving relationship with the world (remember the practice of "sitting in oblivion" 坐忘 and the de-reifying process in the story of Cook Ding). In these Early Chinese philosophies of freedom, the self is considered pathological, together with the emotions and value judgments that accompany it. Therefore, we find in Early China the exercise of freedom without an underlying strong notion of self, but, at the same time, the self that has been deconstructed almost to its disappearance can also become expanded, when the self is understood as inseparable from the rest of the world. We explore the implications of the expanded self next.

The expanded self, happiness, and the new environmentalism. Philosopher Philip Ivanhoe has been working in what he calls an expanded, or more expansive, conception of the self, "a self that is intimately connected to other people, creatures, and things in ways that conduce to the

greater advantage, wellbeing and happiness of all concerned."[858] Understanding the self in connection with other beings has important implications for our ethical and social life, in particular as it could inspire more respectful and caring human interactions with other beings and the world. It is in this way that Ivanhoe places the expanded conception of the self at the core of East Asian conceptions of oneness (an interdependent, interconnected world) and happiness (individual happiness is bound up with the well-being and happiness of other beings).

The adaptive pattern of thinking about the relationship between the person and the world in terms of interconnection and interdependence that we have discussed in this chapter would be a good illustration of Ivanhoe's East Asian "conceptions of oneness." But Ivanhoe's approach is ethical: his project of oneness aims at *explaining* why humans show caring behaviors toward others (because they are inherently connected to others) but also at *prescribing* more caring interactions with others that might enable inclusive well-being and happiness.[859] Both the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of Ivanhoe's project could benefit from the Early Chinese insights on the adaptive pattern of thinking and acting. In the latter, agency is viewed as a relational form of action in which the agent has lost the individualistic, subjectivist, and socially constructed notion of the self, and holds an expanded notion of self that presumes interconnection and interdependence with all elements of his context. The mode of adaptive agency that the adaptive pattern of thinking facilitates is promising to help inspire new modes of ethical and social behavior that would account for this sense of interconnection and unity with the world. For the same reasons, the Early Chinese adaptive pattern of thinking has much to offer

[858] Ivanhoe, *East Asian Conceptions of Oneness, Virtue, and Human Happiness,* forthcoming 2017, introduction. See also Ivanhoe 2013 and 2015.

[859] Ivanhoe, forthcoming 2017, introduction.

to theories on new, interconnected notions of environmentalism such as ecocentrism (Taylor, 2003) and deep ecology (Curry, 2006).

Ethics of affirmation need adaptability. A particular field where Early Chinese philosophy, and in particular the philosophy of adaptation, can offer meaningful contributions is the ethics of affirmation, which have been strongly advocated by contemporary philosopher and cultural theorist Rosi Braidotti. The ethics of affirmation are inspired by the philosophy of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze, Foucault, and Irigaray, and revolve around a critique of the function of "the negative" (negative passions, but also passive and stationary attitudes) in the construction of the person, and of the interpersonal epistemic and axiological world. The main objective of the ethics of affirmation, as we have briefly discussed in the previous section, is the transformation of "the negative" into "positive," conditions of possibility for expansion, growth and self-realization.[860] However, because the ethics of affirmation hold no traditional separation of self-other and advocate for interconnection and interdependence, and they assume a post-human subject (meaning a rupture with the essentialized and rational subjectivity of the Enlightenment opposed to the Other, and its revival in the last decades), within its framework self-realization and self-benefit translate into world-realization and world-benefit.[861] Why would such an ethical program need adaptability?

First, the ethics of affirmation move away from universalism (Kant) and transcendentalism (Platonism) to account for contextual, situational, embodied, and local ways of ethical interactions. Braidotti defines this movement as one of "radical immanence," as it breaks with the notion of a transcendental standard or a universal rule that could oblige every single

[860] Braidotti, 2006: 12.

[861] Braidotti, 2006: 7.

person in every single situation to act in a unique, normatively imposed moral way.[862] Braidotti is calling for ethics *ad hoc*: strategies for action that are not deducted from a transcendental principle and cannot be universally applied to all beings in all situations. Although Braidotti never mentions it, at the basis of this new model to generate ethical options locally and situationally we must find a great capacity of adaptation on the part of the ethical agent.

Second, in its nontraditional mode of understanding the relationship between the other and the self (for Western thinkers), the politics of containment and negotiation of boundaries, limits, costs, affectivity, harm and other issues resulting from interactions between the person and the world will be guided by the principles of interconnection, interdependence and collaboration, rather than the principles of individuality, subjectivity and authority. In these "ethics of embedded nests of shared interests"[863] and "collaborative morality"[864] the starting point is not an isolated individual but a complex net of interconnected and co-dependent realities. Such a worldview necessitated adaptation as a natural pattern of interaction and a most successful model of purposive agency in our Early Chinese texts. It is hard to see how co-dependent realities that affect each other mutually, and need to rely on each other's bases can successfully interact with a collective wellness and a collaborative morality as a goal without these realities acting in reciprocally adaptive ways.

Third, the ethics of affirmation are a sort of *amor fati* (love of fate) with a dynamic and creative axiological view of phenomena where nothing has a frozen value, hence everything can be put into motion and become something entirely different than previously perceived. Braidotti

[862] Braidotti, 2006: 4.

[863] Braidotti, 2006: 7.

[864] Lloyd, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics*, 1996: 74.

emphasizes the transformation of the negative into positive by means of this sort of *amor fati*, yet she does not explain how to actually do it. As we have seen in this chapter, adaptation is a practical path to undergo this transformation, neutralize constraints and achieve freedom. The Early Chinese practice of adaptation can provide the ethics of affirmation with practical measure to carry out its theoretical goals.

Finally, this ethical project is not about providing rules to live by, but about offering normative criteria that can be applied to the search for ever-new, local and contextual ethical ways of interaction.[865] In this way, it is not providing moral standards (content), but rather a standard on how to judge and create new standards (method). The rules different ethical agents come up with will be in constant flux, as they depend on a multiplicity of factors that are situational and temporal. Once again, we find that deeply reflective and critical understanding of one's surrounding circumstances at all levels (from geographical and physical to political and metaphysical), and adaptability to these circumstances rise as core elements to carry out such ethics.

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Looking ahead, I feel optimistic with respect to the new directions that adaptation, as a philosophy of action, a strategy to cope with the future, and a mode of understanding the relationship between the person and the world in Early China, may take in future scholarship, both for acquiring a more subtle and nuanced understanding of Early Chinese philosophy, and as a relevant concept to engage with different lines of reflection in contemporary philosophy. In this future scholarship, for which my dissertation has aimed to establish the basis, I see an opportunity to show the value of adaptive agency and thinking, and of Early Chinese philosophy

[865] Braidotti, 2006: 15.

in general, not only as a content-providing source for existing theories but, more importantly, as a resource to rectify contemporary theories and design new ones.

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