

THE MUSEUM  
of  
FAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES

(Östasiatiska Museet)

STOCKHOLM



Bulletin No. 76

Stockholm 2004

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THE BMFEA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES  
THE SUPPORT OF VETENSKAPSRÅDET,  
THE SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

The intriguing prehistoric human figure which decorates the cover of the *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* since its inaugural issue in 1929, shows one of the most famous items in the Museum's collections (no. K11038: 5, to be displayed anew from Sept. 2004 in the permanent exhibit "China Before China"). Collected from the Banshan area, Gansu, China, it is fashioned as the painted lid of a ceramic vessel, with tattoo-like facial patterns, truncated "horns" that may have held a shaman's plumes, and on its back a serpent "which covers the neck in graceful coils" (Johan Gunnar Andersson's original description in his "Researches into the Prehistory of the Chinese", *BMFEA* 15, 1943, 240; pl. 187). It may have been modelled on calabash containers (cf. Karl Izikowitz, "Calabashes with star-shaped lids in South America and China," *Comparative Ethnographical Studies* 9, Gothenburg Ethnographical Museum, 1931, 130–34).

The dragon on the title page, the Museum's traditional logo, derives from a series of three dragons on the back of a bronze mirror of the Warring States period in ancient China, also in the collection of the MFEA (K10599: 550, see Bernhard Karlgren, "Early Chinese Mirrors," *BMFEA* 40, 1968, 85-86, plate 35).

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Volume 76, dated 2004, is distributed 2006

ISSN 0081-5691

Printed by  
Fälth & Hässler, Värnamo, Sweden

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Editor's Preface:

# The Value of Misinterpretation and the Need for Re-interpretation

by

Martin Svensson Ekström

*For Magnus Fiskesjö*

## 1. Re-interpreting classical Chinese and Japanese texts—a question of method

Each of the five articles gathered in this volume takes issue with a particular problem of pivotal importance for the field of its respective author.<sup>1</sup> Thus Ken-ichi Takashima discusses the dangers of Wang Guowei's methodological injunction—tacitly accepted by most contemporary oracle bone scholars—that one should understand the language of the oracle bone inscriptions, and the Shang Dynasty culture transmitted by them, in the light of the much later inscriptions and texts of the Zhou Dynasty. With his customary exactitude and brevity, Takashima demonstrates how such a method inevitably leads to a skewed understanding of Shang language and culture. As an alternative, Takashima favours a hermeneutic programme that keeps strictly within the corpus of the oracle bone inscriptions. Such a method, Takashima points out, is not unproblematic—it forces us to give up many long-cherished “truths” about the Shang—but it diminishes the danger of anachronistic misreadings inherent in Wang Guowei's programme.

The sensitivity with which Ken-ichi Takashima approaches the subtleties of the Shang inscriptions is operative also in Carine Defoort's congenial interpretation of “Tang Yu zhi Dao 唐虞之道,” a manuscript buried in a tomb at around 300 B.C. in what is now Guodian, Hubei. This text has often been categorized simply as “Confu-

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Birgit and Gad Rausing Foundation for Humanistic Study for financing this study. Parts 3.1 and 5.1 were presented to the seminar at the East Asia Program at Cornell University on May 4, 2006. I am grateful for all comments from the audience present on that occasion. The remaining parts were written at the Centre Louis Gernet, Paris. My sincere thanks to the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and to Nils-Eric Svensson's Foundation for sponsoring that visit. Thanks, finally, to Katherine Cooper for valuable comments and suggestions.

cian,” a term Defoort feels is much too loose to be informative. Moreover, the ideals propounded by the text—Abdication (*shan* 禪) and Benefit (*li* 利)—are a far cry from the ideals embraced by Mencius, a “Confucian” thinker if there ever was one. What, then, does “Tang Yu zhi Dao” tell us about the formation of Warring States Confucianism? Defoort answers by performing a very shrewd intertextual reading. She brings our attention to the passage in the “Jin xin 盡心” chapter of the *Mencius* where Mencius distinguishes Yang Zhu’s extreme egoism from Mozi’s extreme altruism. Mencius takes objection both to Yang Zhu’s unabashed self-interest (and the anarchistic notion that one should benefit one’s own “nature” by rejecting all forms of mundane power and wealth) and to Mozi’s model of an all-encompassing and impartial love (related indirectly to the concept of a king who benefits the world by abdicating—giving up—his throne to the most merited person instead of passing it on to his proper heir). As an alternative, Mencius speaks in favour of a “middle position” between those two extremes, represented by a certain Zimo 子莫, a Warring States thinker whose oeuvre no longer is extant, and whose theories Mencius ultimately rejects on the grounds that they too are much too biased.

Now this is Defoort’s stroke of genius: she interprets “Tang Yu zhi Dao” precisely as an expression of the kind of “middle position” that Mencius finds in Zimo, and argues that it was just such provocative ideas that forced Mencius to chisel out his “Confucian” philosophy with the rigour and preciseness with which we associate it. Defoort’s article is thus not only an investigation into the intellectual-historical background of “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” but also a piece that brings clarity to the formation of what we know as Confucianism. As such it constitutes a polite but pointed dialogue with earlier readers of “Tang Yu zhi Dao.”

With Wiebke Denecke’s piece on Japanese poetics and its intricate relation to the Chinese literary tradition we meet comparative literature at its finest. If Ken-ichi Takashima and Carine Defoort are concerned with the early Chinese traditions of inscriptions and philosophy, Denecke analyzes the strategies with which early Japanese literary history was able to maintain its dignity and self-dependence “in the face of” the Chinese literary culture on which it undoubtedly built. Denecke identifies two such ruses in early Japanese literary historiography. One the one hand, there is a celebration of the “Great Preface” to the *Shijing* (*Maoshi da xu* 毛詩大序), certainly one of the most influential texts in the history of Chinese poetics. By adhering to the definition in the “Preface” of poetry (*shi* 詩) as the “artless” and completely spontaneous result of a moment of overwhelming inspiration, the Japanese historians could downplay the role that tradition, history and pre-established literary conventions play in the creation of a literary work.<sup>2</sup> And if inspiration, intuition and spontaneity are more important than literary traditions, genres and intertextuality then poetry consequently appears always and everywhere with the same authority. In other words, if poetry is the result of a spontaneous reaction (and not a practice developed during many centuries) then the Japanese historians could claim that it did not matter that the written Japanese literary tradition appeared more than a millennium after its Chinese precursor: poetry is a natural rather than cultural phenomenon and thus preeminently a-historical and non-evolutionary.

<sup>2</sup> The “Great Preface” is a multi-layered and complex text that allows for several, mutually conflicting interpretations. See my “A Second Look at the Great Preface on the Way to a New Understanding of Han Dynasty Poetics,” *Chinese, Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (1999), 1–33.

Somewhat paradoxically, then, by referring to the Chinese "Great Preface" the Japanese historians could pretend to eschew the Chinese influence on Japanese literature. Likewise, by referring to the classical Chinese myth of the advent of writing—Cang Jie establishing the written characters by imitating bird tracks on the ground—the Japanese historian could claim that writing is not a practice rooted in a particular historical context (namely the Chinese) but, again, a habit that derives directly from experiences of natural phenomena that all people have equal access to.<sup>3</sup> Thus, just like poetry, writing is described by the Japanese theorists as fundamentally lacking context, tradition, time and history.

Denecke ends her perspicacious interpretation of how early Japanese poetics wrestles with its Chinese forebears with a wonderfully subversive reference to the anthropologist Johannes Fabian. Fabian has noted that Western anthropologists have tended to describe the cultures that they study as existing in a timeless vacuum, suspended in either a paradisiacal or primitive state without evolution or history. Fabian's point is that this is a trick on the part of the Western anthropologist to subordinate the Other, non-Western culture to the hegemony of Western thought. Denecke turns Fabian's thesis on its head. Are not, she asks, these early Japanese accounts of how poetry and writing emerge with perfect spontaneity and naturalness just such a trick—but on the part of the subsidiary culture—to feign a state beyond time and history, in order to maintain the prestige of its own, nascent tradition?

In her very precise yet low-key analysis of the poetry of Ono no Komachi, Stina Jelbring utilizes another branch of literary studies, namely semiotics. Jelbring demonstrates that Komachi's poetry to an astonishing degree builds on ambiguity, puns and condensation, a poetic texture that lends itself most willingly to a semiotic analysis. Influenced by the recently deceased literary theorist Michel Riffaterre, Jelbring describes how Komachi's poetry can be, and must be, interpreted at different levels simultaneously. For this reason, Jelbring's article inevitably takes the shape of a critical dialogue with earlier scholars of Komachi's poetry who have postulated that ambiguity is a problem, and who espouse a "linear" mode of interpretation that aims at doing away with the polysemy that is such a vital part of Komachi's poetic text.

Like Ken-ichi Takashima, Marc Winter aims at correcting an old habit of sino-logical misreading, and the focus of his analysis is a term that is of central importance for early Chinese thought in general, and for the system of correlative cosmology—the topic of *BMFEA* volume 72—in particular. *Wu xing* 五行 is usually identified as the "five phases" but Winter puts forward an array of evidence that indicates that the term, as it appears in the *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法, is not part of a full-fledged cosmological system. *Wu xing*, Winter claims, should rather be understood as a common name for the five planets that are visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). Since these planets to the observer appear to move in unpredictable ways, the one overtaking the other without any apparent logic, *wu xing* is used by the author of the *Sunzi bingfa* simply as a metaphor for constant change, and illustrates the complexness of warfare and the need for a military strategist to continuously adapt to the situation at hand in a war that is ever changing.

<sup>3</sup> We could turn this argument around and say that since Chinese poetry is merely unpremeditated and artless reactions to the impressions of the world pressed upon us by our senses, and since sinographs are always already imitations of the "writings" of nature, Chinese poetry and Chinese writing were not invented but rather "realized" merely as two possibilities among many others.

## 2. The *Bulletin* and the sinological dialogue

The *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* has a pronounced interest in innovative scholarship that is theoretically informed and critically reviews current sinological trends. Scholarship that, in the parlance of the day, reflect upon the epistemological premises of sinology (and, in some cases, Japanology) as a discipline and a discourse. The five articles accounted for above thus partake in a tradition in which we find, among many other great works, Arthur Waley's short, exquisite and visionary article on the origins of the *Yijing* 易經 in volume 5 (1931) and Bernhard Karlgren's long, robust and methodologically relentless analysis of the representations of "Legends and Cults in Ancient China" in volume 18 (1946).

However, a critical stance toward one's own discipline not only presupposes a recognition of and generosity toward the forerunners whose scholarship one is dependent upon, and a propensity to reflect critically upon one's own theories and methodology. It also presupposes a keen insight into the mechanisms of scholarship. How does scholarly insight come about? The question of method is the red thread that connects the five articles in this volume, but what is methodology? "Method" does not imply a predetermined set of rules which can be applied automatically to the object of inquiry in order to produce a string of correct data. Method is a set of assumptions that must always be tentative. Method—and this is my point—presupposes and celebrates misreading. I hasten to add that good scholars obviously do not accept misreading, or mistakes, but that they, like the great theoretician of research methodology Paul Feyerabend, recognize that we need mistakes, and that what will later be recognized as mistakes is not seldom instrumental, at an initial stage, in bringing about scientific breakthroughs. To err greatly is thus not the same as to greatly err, and *mépris* is not always the adequate reaction to a *méprise*.

This leads us back to the question of generosity. It is the ambition of the *Bulletin* to promote dialogue rather than polemics or diatribe. It is in that spirit that I present the following analysis.

### 3.1 Jullien's *dédoublement*

Sinology has been graced by several inspired and inspiring comparative projects during the past twenty-five years. The question remains, however, as to the premises on which these project in the field of comparative philosophy, poetics and literature are made.

In direct opposition to the stated intent of the sinologists who have worked hard to compare the Greek and Chinese traditions, it is hard sometimes not to perceive in their works a certain tendency to simplify the diversity and the contradictions inherent in the two traditions, and an inclination to present Chinese philosophy, poetry and poetics as though they were the perfect, symmetric opposites of their Greek counterparts, and vice versa. Those bold oppositions of Chinese and Greek (or Western) traditions—let us call them comparative philosophy and literature at the macro-level.

And indeed, when this tendency toward cross-cultural comparison at the macro-level is carried too far, there may occur passages of great, fascinating and bewildering density. One such moment appears in the comparative study of early Greek and Chi-

nese thought *Un sage est sans idée* by the eminent French sinologist and philosopher François Jullien. Speaking of the difference in world view between the two traditions, and its effect upon the two respective philosophical traditions, Jullien claims that

The Chinese do not know [*ignorent*] the skeptic experience of the rod which is immersed in water and so *appears* broken, thus they have never had any notion of a fissure [*dédoublément*] between appearance and reality, between the phenomenon and the one-in-itself. But as is well known, we (and foremost the Greeks) have conceived of Truth [*la vérité*] as the opposition to the “dream” of the appearances.<sup>4</sup>

One is hard put to find a passage that so clearly expresses the tacit assumptions on which mainstream Sinology, and what I have called cross-cultural comparison at the macro-level, builds. In one sweep, Jullien dichotomizes the Chinese tradition and the Greek tradition, as though the two were in themselves homogeneous, pure and without contradiction. He makes the counter-intuitive claim that “the Chinese” have never had, or paid attention to, the common and presumably cross-cultural experience of being duped by a thing, person or situation that is not what it appears to be (a claim invalidated already by Confucius’ criticism, in the *Lun yu* 論語, of the vulgar social climber who “on the surface adheres to *ren* but whose actions contravene it 色取仁而行違,” which in turn prompts the person who genuinely aspires to *ren* to “scrutinize speech and observe surfaces 察言而觀色”).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Jullien conflates the everyday experience of seeing the stick which appears broken when put into water with the philosophical, and thus much more specific, notions of the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. The reader is thereby left wondering if Plato’s *phainomenon* and Kant’s Ding an Sich are parts of a unified discourse emanating from the *philosophical* experience of watching elongated objects being immersed in a water bowl. Conversely, does the everyday experience of the seemingly broken stick in the water glass occur only in a cultural context in which Plato and Kant have distinguished mundane phenomena from the primary, ideal Forms from which they supposedly derive?

### 3.2 Thinking—language

In the introduction to their ingenious “philosophical translation” of the *Lun yu*, Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. take a stance very similar to that of Jullien. “[F]or the ancient Chinese,” they claim, “the appearances were not deceptive.”<sup>6</sup> Instead, “reality and appearance are [in the early Chinese tradition] one and the same, and the reality is that everything changes, in nature, in society, and at the personal level.”<sup>7</sup> Both

<sup>4</sup> “Les Chinois ignorent l’expérience sceptique du bâton trempé dans l’eau et qui *paraît* cassé ; aussi n’ont-ils jamais eu l’idée d’un dédoublement entre apparence et réalité, entre le phénomène et l’en-soi. Or, on le sait, c’est par opposition au ‘mensonge’ des apparences, et d’abord chez les Grecs, que nous avons conçu la vérité.” François Jullien, *Un sage est sans idée* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Lun yu*, Yan Hui 20.

<sup>6</sup> Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trans. and introduction, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical translation. A New Translation Based on the Dingzhou Fragments and Other Recent Archaeological Finds* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1998), 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Jullien and Ames and Rosemont depend on the notion—widespread also among non-sinologists—that the dominant themes in Western philosophy (such as the dichotomy of the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself) derive from the categories inherent in the structure of the Indo-European languages. While this claim is not indisputable it must be taken seriously, not least since a discussion thereof will prepare us for the concept of *si* 似 as it appears in the *Mencius*. Therefore—not unlike Mencius’ interpreting and contextualizing Confucius below—we should make an effort to understand these provocative arguments. How, in the view of these three scholars, do appearances emerge from objects in the Western tradition, and why did a reality/appearance dichotomy not emerge in China? I offer the following, tentative explanation.

In order for a thing to give off an appearance—be it true or false—there must first “be” a Thing, that is, a clearly demarcated object with a stable identity and existence. Such a Thing (or, rather, conception of the Thing) can come into existence only in certain systems of thought, namely those operating in, and determined by, the Indo-European languages which contain the copula “to be.” These languages, according to Ames and Rosemont, are “basically *substantive* and *essentialistic* whereas classical Chinese should be seen more as an eventful language.”<sup>8</sup>

To use Jullien’s example, when a person blessed (or cursed) with an Indo-European tongue says that a certain object “is” a stick he *defines* that object in the sense of limiting it to a set of characteristics (a stick “is” long, thin, linear, unbroken etc.). He thereby distinguishes this object from objects of a different kind, forces upon it a definitive identity, endows it with a Being and thus turns it into a Thing. But the tendency—inherent in the linguistic medium in which the Western philosopher must think—to fix the identities of the objects of the world also inflicts upon Occidental thinking a certain inertia. Since it so struggles to define the static “being of an object,” in contrast to the Chinese stress on transformation and dynamic “process,” Occidental thinking can only conceptualize the changes which might occur in a Thing as deviation, falsity and non-Truth. Hence Jullien says that since the early Chinese tradition “never speculated upon Being (the verb ‘to be’ does not even exist in classical Chinese),” it has “never conceived of Truth [*la vérité*].”<sup>9</sup>

So what is Truth, on this view? It is an Indo-European concept referring to an entity’s (object, person or situation) complete identification with, and correspondence to, all aspects of “itself.” Furthermore, it must be realized that this “itself,” i.e. the self-identity of a Thing, person or situation, is a concept that is manufactured and also nostalgic, in that it always refers back to a past state of affairs when

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 20. Cf. *ibid.*: “[T]here are *presuppositions* underlying all discourse about the world, about beliefs, and about attitudes, which are sedimented into the specific grammar of the languages in which these discourses take place.” Ames and Rosemont are of course correct, but to what degree? And to what degree is it true when it comes to describing the impact of similitude?

<sup>9</sup> “[P]arce qu’elle [la Chine] n’a pas pensé l’être (le verbe être lui-même n’existant pas en chinois classique), elle n’a conçu la vérité.” *Un Sage est sans idée*, 105.

Jullien and Ames are here following a long inquiry with predecessors such as Émile Benveniste and Ernst Cassirer, and Angus Graham among the sinologists. For a critical discussion, see Jacques Derrida’s “The Supplement of Copula,” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982 [1972]), Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), and Roger Hart, “Translating the Untranslatable: From Copula to Incommensurable Worlds,” in Lydia Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The problem of Translation in Global Circulation* (Durham N.C.: Duke UP, 2001). Are these categories *inherent* in the Greek language or, as Derrida suggests, discovered and conceptualized by Aristotle?

that object was defined—conceptually fixed—as having certain characteristics. In other words, since the world is in constant change Western essentialistic thinking is always lagging behind, fixated on definitions that it holds up as Truths but which, in fact, are already dated. We now understand the scandal of which Jullien is speaking: when we immerse in water the object that we have called “a stick” and defined as being elonged, linear and unimpaired, it *appears* broken, although it “truly” is not. The appearance of the broken stick thus *belies* the Thing and its true being. Hence appearances—or *phainomena*—are always a problem to Occidental philosophy and its concept of Truth *qua* the static self-identity of the Thing. If the appearance one habitually associates with a certain Thing suddenly changes, it will create conceptual havoc in the mind of the person who thinks in accordance with the categories that Indo-European languages have forced upon him.

We are now ready to re-read Jullien's provocative claim that “Les Chinois ignorent l'expérience sceptique du bâton trempé dans l'eau et qui *paraît* cassé.” If we interpret *ignorent* as “ignore, disregard” rather than as “be unaware of” Jullien's claim makes perfect sense, in this context. It is not that a stick immersed in water did not appear broken in ancient China, but that “the Chinese” ignored the experience of the appearance of the broken rod because they were not philosophically or linguistically predisposed to defining the objects of the world as discreet Things, in the sense stipulated above. Thus, a stick which is immersed in water and so appears to be broken did not bother the Chinese viewer, who rather appreciated the brokenness (or seeming brokenness) of the stick as a natural change in the stick, instead of being provoked into speculating about how appearance relates to substance.<sup>10</sup> Ames and Rosemont concur: “No-thing or no-body [according to the classical Chinese tradition] has an *essence*.”<sup>11</sup> And the same scholars hold that “classical Chinese cosmology” was characterized by a “priority of process and change over [the Occidental preoccupation with] form and stasis as the natural condition of things.”

Just as the “essentialism” and “substantialism” of classical Greek metaphysics are purportedly part and parcel of the categories of the Greek language, so the preoccupation with change in classical Chinese cosmology is said to be reflected directly by, and conditioned by, the classical Chinese idiom. As we saw above, Jullien pointed out that the absence of the word “to be” makes thinkers who think in classical Chinese less inclined to search for Truth. Ames and Rosemont, in a similar spirit, note that the definite article in Indo-European languages signals “the one and only”: we speak of *the* tree, thus implying that the specific tree remain the same “no matter what the season.” “Essentialism” is thus

<sup>10</sup> I am extrapolating on Jullien here. When we contrast Jullien's example with that of Ames and Rosemont we find that they are in fact talking about slightly different cases of appearance/reality dichotomies. Ames and Rosemont exemplifies change by referring to a tree that changes appearance in the different seasons of the year. A metaphysical philosopher would claim that the substance of the tree remains the same although its appearance changes, whereas for a Chinese thinker neither “substance” nor “appearance” would enter the discussion since he experiences a “world of *events*, seen as persistently episodic” (21). Whereas Ames and Rosemont are speaking of a case where change is a fact Jullien exemplifies change by referring to a case of optical illusion. This difference in example is not trivial, since deceptive appearances (*si* 似) is frequently exemplified with tales of optical illusions. See my “Illusion, Lie, and Metaphor: The Paradox of Divergence in Early Chinese Poetics,” *Poetics Today* 23:2 (2002).

<sup>11</sup> *Analects of Confucius*, 24.

built into English—indeed into all Indo-European languages—by the way things, essences, substances, (nouns) *do* something (they are verbed), or have something else attributed to them (*via* being auxiliary verbed).<sup>12</sup>

These are no doubt important and enlightening research finds. But by turning to the Chinese tradition itself, or, rather, to one of the many heterogeneous parts of which it is composed, can we confirm, reject or modify these statements? Is the claim that “the Chinese” did not care to distinguish between appearance and actuality correct? Or is that claim wrong? That fact that one may answer “Yes, undoubtedly so” to both questions would suggest, as I will argue momentarily, that there is a systematic error—an irritating bug—in the comparative project at the macro-level.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Menicus on identity as performance

François Jullien has an uncanny knack for putting his finger on what is or at least seems to be astonishing points of convergence—or difference—between the Western and Chinese traditions, and his inquiries catapult sinological thinking into being an urgent and not seldom excruciating affair. Jullien is by that fact alone a significant theorist, and we shall as a first step try to validate his claim about a general Chinese indifference to a distinction between appearance and actuality.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup> Truth is thus described as a concept that only occurs with languages that operate with the copula “to be” to mark identities. Let me contextualize this problem from a more philological angle, and very briefly hint at a solution.

The particle *ye* 也, as we know, is in classical Chinese used in definitions to mark the identity between A and B. For example:

使名喪者，淫說也。What causes [true] names to perish is promiscuous discourse.

*Ye* is usually called a copula and may indeed be described as a *marker of identity* between the two segments (使名喪者 and 淫說), as opposed to words such as *si* 似, *ru* 如, *ruo* 若 or *you* 猶 which are *markers of similarity*.

Let us expand on this. The distinction between markers of identity and markers of similarity could be a solution to, and escape from, what was a persistently recurring sinological *and* philosophical theme of the twentieth century, namely that early Chinese thought did not think in terms of essence, identity and being since it lacked the will to define and establish identities among the different things and beings of the world (and can therefore not be deemed philosophy). (On the question of whether “philosophy” is a correct name for early Chinese “thinking,” see Carine Defoort’s “Existe-il une philosophie chinoise? Typologie des arguments d’un débat largement implicite,” in *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 27 [2005], 67–89.)

But the claim that the early Chinese experienced a world in constant flux whereas the early Greeks saw a world ordered into discreet categories is most likely a simplification. Although the claim that classical Chinese does not have words that correspond to the Greek *estin* (“it is”), but instead expresses existence through words like *you* 有, is formally correct its premises are open for debate. (Cf. here, inter alia, Angus Graham, “‘Being’ in Western Philosophy Compared with *Shi/Fei* and *Yu/Wu* in Chinese Philosophy,” *Asia Major* 7 (1959): 79–112. and Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, 7 ff.) The fallacy, it must be said, lies to high degree in the comparative approach. If one sets out to find in classical Chinese an equivalent of a Greek—read Western—*concept* of essence one will be frustrated, but from this one may not necessarily draw the conclusion that early Chinese thought was not interested in establishing differences and discreet identities. One should instead work strictly from within the Chinese corpus, just as Ken-ichi Takashima has suggested we do in our interpretations of the oracle bone inscriptions.

If, instead of embarking on a wild goose chase for Chinese equivalents of concepts such as Being (or, indeed, Metaphor or Mimesis), one would start by contrasting markers of similarity with markers of identity one would see clearly the early Chinese interest in the problem of identity, similarities and dissimilarities, being part and parcel of the problem of *illusion* that the present author has treated elsewhere. The fact that *ru* also functions as a marker of conditionality further underscores the link between similitude, non-identity (or near-identity) and hypothetical, imagined states of mind: 死者如有知也 “Now, if [*ruo* 如] the dead had consciousness...”

Although what Mencius aims at in the famous dialogue that makes up “Gaozi 告子 B2” is a distinction between ability (*neng* 能) and action (*wei* 為), between the dormant capability to be a virtuous person which is inherent in everybody and Virtue actually put in practice, this dialogue also makes a strong statement about what it is that constitutes identity.<sup>14</sup> What is the identity of identity? It is easy to imagine that Mencius’ hesitation to acknowledge that there exist in man any fixed, unalterable characteristics made his dialogue with Jiao of Cao 曹交 appear provocative and counter-intuitive to his contemporaries.

The dialogue commences thus:

Jiao of the state of Cao asked: “All men can be/become/act as [*wei* 為] Yao and Shun”: is this the case?

Mencius said: So it is.

曹交問曰人皆可以為堯舜。有諸。孟子曰然。

What does *wei* 為 mean here? Does it mean “be” or “do,” or is such a distinction concocted by a mind prepossessed by modern, Western language categories and thus wholly inappropriate? Are Jiao and Mencius claiming that sagacity is an essential part of some men, or is it a programme of actions which may be performed by anyone perfunctorily, as a routine? When, further on in the dialogue, Mencius contrasts *wei* 為 with *neng* 能, *wei* obviously means “to do, to act.” Thus, if a person does not act towards his elder brother as a younger brother should—“徐行後長 walking unhurriedly following the senior person”—it is not a question of his being “essentially” unable to do so, but merely of his not “doing it” (*wei zhi* 為之). In this context *wei* clearly refers to action, and therefore *wei* in *wei zhi* 為之 and in *wei Yao Shun* 為堯舜 can hardly be interpreted in the same manner. “Who are you, sir? 子為誰” asks Jieni in *Lun yu* 18:6. “I am Zhongyou 為仲由,” replies Zilu, apparently using *wei* to define his identity and “being.” Moreover, we do not have to look further than to the opening lines of the *Zhuangzi* for another essentialistic usage of *wei* in the story of the *Kun* fish that “transforms and becomes a bird” (*hua er wei niao* 化而為鳥). Although this creature transforms from one being into another it is clearly the state of being a bird that Zhuangzi is describing here, not that it *acts* like a bird, in which case the story would be one of mimicry and not of transformation.

Although this investigation is highly rudimentary, it confirms the two senses of *wei* in classical Chinese (“being” and “acting”). And I would claim that in formulating his question Jiao takes *wei* in the first, essentialist sense whereas Mencius’ reply builds upon the latter, performative sense. Indeed, it is the use of the semantic doubleness of the character *wei*, or rather Mencius’ deliberate misunderstanding of Jiao’s question, that carries the dialogue forward. If this hypothesis is correct then Jiao represents the position that certain qualities, such as sagacity, are inborn and essential whereas Mencius proposes that they are a set of actions which anyone may adopt.

Jiao is obviously puzzled by Mencius affirmative answer and continues with a new, naive—or perhaps *faux-naïf*—question which reveals his substantialist leanings.

I have heard that King Wen was ten *chi* in height and that Tang was nine *chi* tall. Now, I am nine *chi* and four *cun* tall. I can only eat my grain. What shall I do [to become like King Wen and Tang]?

<sup>14</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi* (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 810–16.

Does Jiao want to become a physical replica of a sagely person? Can sagacity be obtained by eating grain? Or is Jiao sarcastic, ironically taking Mencius' claim at face value? At any rate, Jiao's question provokes Mencius into formulating a long tirade in defense of his view.

What can one answer to that? It all lies in doing it [*wei zhi* 為之], and only that. Say you have a person whose strength is not enough to lift two chickens, then he is [*wei* 為] a weak person. Now, if he says "I can lift a weight of a hundred *jun*" then he is [*wei* 為] a strong person. Consequently, lifting the weight of Wuhuo is also being Wuhuo [*wei Wuhuo* 為烏獲]! Why would a man worry about not being enough? It is a case of not doing it [*fu wei* 弗為]. He who walks unhurriedly following the senior person is called [*wei* 謂] brotherly [*di* 弟]. He who walks hurriedly preceding the senior person is called unbrotherly. Could anyone really be unable [*bu neng* 不能] to walk unhurriedly? It is simply something that one chooses not to do [*suo buwei* 所不為].

Until this point Mencius is arguing, on the one hand, that everyone has the capability to be a sage and, on the other, that a person's appearance and deeds equal his being and define his identity. That lifting the same weight as the legendary Wuhuo turns you into Wuhuo and, by implication, that Wuhuo can be said (*wei* 謂) to be Wuhuo only in so far as he performs the actions that are associated with him. Identity is thus performed and, linguistically, *wei* understood as "to act" equals *wei* in the sense of "to be," with Mencius shifting between the two uses in saying that "lifting the weight of Wuhuo is being Wuhuo [*wei* 為烏獲]" and that not to walk unhurriedly is "something that one chooses not to do [*suo buwei* 所不為]."

In the concluding part of the dialogue, however, Mencius focus shifts to the existential question and it is here that Mencius' performative theory of identity is expressed most clearly, and where costume, speech and conduct are described as that which constitutes a person's identity.

The Path of Yao and Shun is filial and brotherly love, and only that. If you, sir, wear Yao's clothes, recite Yao's words and adopt Yao's behaviour then that is Yao 子服堯之服，誦堯之言，行堯之行，是堯而已矣. If you wear Jie's clothes, recite Jie's words and adopt Jie's behaviour then that is Jie.

Mencius hereby proposes a concept of identity in which sagacity or cruelty (as represented by Jie) are defined as a series of traits that can be imitated and performed, as a contrast to Jiao's presupposition that sagacity is inborn. Mencius' focus on a person's appearance rather than his substance would thus seem to validate François Jullien's claim about a general Chinese indifference toward a distinction between appearance and reality. In the words of Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, "[F]or the ancient Chinese...the appearances were not deceptive."

But let us now contrast Mencius' dialogue with Jiao of Cao with an exchange he has with his disciple Wan Zhang, as recorded in the "Jin xin 盡心" chapter.<sup>15</sup> Extrapolating on various scraps of Confucian lore drawn from the *Lun yu*, Mencius here introduces a concept that seems to stand in direct opposition to his celebration of the surface, a concept that would be hard to accommodate within the boundaries

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1025–54.

drawn by Jullien, Ames and Rosemont. That concept is *si er fei* 似而非, “seeming to be but not being,” or “similar but not the same.” Why would a philosopher who denies that behind human action there is a hard core of essential human characteristics, or that there is a difference between carrying out virtuous action perfunctorily or with conviction—why would a philosopher of that bent be at all interested in appearances? Why would one who claims that man “is” the sum of his actions have a concept, let alone a negative one, of the difference between a person’s actions and the way that person really “is”?

## 5. Mencius on *dédoublement* as mimicry (*si er fei* 似而非)

### 5.1 Mencius re-interpreting Confucius

When Confucius declares “I hate that which seems to be, but is not 惡似而非者,” he directs us to a topic that is central in early Chinese philosophical and literary thought, but undetectable from the perspective strategically assumed by mainstream sinology. What Confucius’ denouncement of deceptive appearances may help us appreciate is, paradoxically, an embrace of ironic distance, of the word or ritual artifact that through an act of willful manipulation comes to negate itself, and through the gap between its former and present signification is able to express itself extraordinarily. Confucius’ *skeptical* comment, if properly contextualized, would lead us to a strand of early Chinese thought that conceived of ritual, poetic and philosophic discourse in terms of deviation, artifice and illusion—a discourse designed to induce a moment of puzzlement in the reader, and so spur him or her to return to the text anew, re-read and re-evaluate.

“I hate that which seems to be, but is not.” Let us carefully re-read and contextualize this sentence in order to understand its original setting and how it may complicate François Jullien’s claim about a “Chinese” indifference toward a distinction between appearances and actuality, and how it relates to the dialogue between Mencius and Jiao of Cao.

The early Chinese masters, as we know, do not speak directly but are always quoted. And here it is a case of double quotation, since Confucius speaks through Mencius (or, more correctly, Mencius is quoted as quoting Confucius). Immediately after this statement Mencius has Confucius provide six examples of deceptive appearances, and so implies several interrelated questions. How does appearance relate to actuality, and form to content? How does one distinguish the true identity of an object, person or situation, and how does one properly designate it? And what happens to the genuine article when the fake gains acceptance? For Confucius—the Confucius of the *Lun yu* that is—it is the latter question that is the most acute.

Mencius has him saying:

I hate that which seems to be, but is not. I hate the bristlegrass: that it disorders [*luan*] the young plants [which it resembles] terrifies me. I hate flattery: that it disorders Righteousness terrifies me. I hate the glib mouth: that it disorders Trustworthiness terrifies me. I hate the sounds of the state of Zheng: that they disorder [courtly] Music terrifies me. I hate purple [as an impure mixture of red and blue]: that it disorders [the pure] Red terrifies me. I hate the village worthy:

that he disorders Virtue terrifies me. 惡似而非者，惡莠恐其亂苗也，惡佞恐其亂義也，惡利口恐其亂信也，惡鄭聲恐其亂樂也，惡紫恐其亂朱也，惡鄉原恐其亂德也。

(Mencius, “Jinxin 盡心下 B37”)

Confucius speaks on this topic not without passion: “when you ‘hate’ someone you want him to die 惡之欲其死,” he explains in the *Lun yu*.<sup>16</sup> But before we contemplate its implications for our understanding of early Chinese thinking, we should recognize that this passage builds on two curt statements from the *Lun yu*, which Mencius here brings together in a somewhat anachronistic fashion under the rubric of deceptive appearances, that which “seems to be but is not” (*si er fei* 似而非). In *Lun yu* 17.13, Confucius condescendingly says that the village worthy—the naive rustic who means well but cannot live up to his good intentions—is the “vermin of Virtue” (*xiang yuan dao zhi zei ye* 鄉原德之賊也).<sup>17</sup> And in *Lun yu* 17.18, in a phrasing whose influence on Mencius is obvious, Confucius exclaims:

I hate that purple usurps [*duo* 奪] Red  
 I hate that the sounds of Zheng disorder [*luan* 亂] courtly Music  
 I hate that glib mouths overturn [*fu* 覆] States and Lineages  
 惡紫之奪朱也。惡鄭聲之亂雅樂也。惡利口之覆邦家者。

What happens when these two fragments are appropriated by Mencius? Most importantly, Mencius combines them to suggest that the village worthy, the colour purple, the sounds of Zheng, and the words of glib mouths are all instances of deceptive appearance (*si er fei*)—and that Confucius hates such speciousness. But he also makes slight stylistic alterations to make the passage more uniform, substituting the single word “disorder” for the three verbs “usurp,” “disorder,” and “overturn.” Moreover, he adds two examples of *si er fei*, one drawn from nature (“bristlegrass” is said to resemble “young plants”) and the other from the human realm (“flattery” resembles “Righteousness.”) And whereas the “early” Confucius of the *Lun yu* expresses his anger that glib mouths “overturn States and Lineages,” the Confucius through whom Mencius is ventriloquizing says that glib mouths and, by extension, the unreliable words that flow from them, “disorder Trustworthiness.”

That Confucius suddenly speaks of Trustworthiness may indicate a fondness for abstract concepts on the part of Mencius. More importantly, however, it is a complete re-writing of the original story in terms of *si er fei*, since in the *Lun yu* the glib mouth and the State and Lineages stand in a simple cause-and-effect relationship (dishonest words topple power structures), while with Mencius the unreliable words of the glib mouth *simulate* Trustworthiness, thereby “disordering” it. Mencius is thereby more interested in *how* the damage is effected. And, in this context, it is this hatred of simulation that should surprise us, since Mencius in his dialogue with Jiao of Cao seems to collapse the distinction between original (actually being a sage) and copy (imitating the deeds of a sage). One may at this point ask if this is not a contradiction *within* the corpus of the *Mencius* rather than a contradiction between the two sides of an imagined ontologico-epistemological divide that separates China and Greece.

<sup>16</sup> *Lun yu* 12.10.

<sup>17</sup> I have adopted “Village worthy” as a translation of *xiang yuan* from Ames and Rosemont.

But Mencius does not quite succeed in making Confucius a spokesman against specious appearances. Although Mencius inscribes him into the discourse on *si er fei*, the Confucius who appears in the *Mencius* is first and foremost disgusted with, but also fascinated by, the damage that an inferior person or object may do to an object or person of superior value. Thus, it is not that the lascivious “sounds” of the declining state of Zheng somehow resemble (*si* 似) courtly Music that upsets Confucius, but the fact that the inferior version “disorders” true Music. Likewise, although Mencius furiously speaks about how the village worthy only *appears* (*si* 似) “loyal, trustworthy, unsoiled and pure,” what unsettles Confucius is not the superficial resemblance that obtains between the hypocritical words-and-deeds of the village worthy and those of the truly virtuous person, but simply that the village worthy “disorders Virtue.” A comparison between the two texts bears this out: the passages in the *Lun yu* do not at all speak of simulation but simply say that the village worthy is harmful (*zei*) to Virtue and that the sounds of Zheng “disorder” courtly Music, without specifying *how* the damage is done. It is Mencius that combines, and expands, these examples into a unified theory of *si er fei*.

The passage from the *Mencius* is therefore somewhat discordant, with Confucius railing at the disorder, usurpation and perversion that the corner stones and symbols of civilization are subjected to, and with Mencius struggling to comprehend and explain the manner in which the damage is done. If the later philosopher’s concern thus is the superficial similarity between the real thing and the fake impostor, Confucius rather indicates that the two are caught in a mutually destructive relationship, which is why he, in that memorable turn of phrase, calls the village worthy “the vermin of Virtue.”<sup>18</sup> But, in what way is the village worthy Virtue’s vermin? How, exactly, does the village worthy do damage to Virtue?

## 5.2 The “vermin of Virtue”

The text from the *Mencius* (“Jin xin 盡心 B37”) which we are currently analyzing is a dialogue between Mencius and his disciple Wan Zhang 萬章, and reads rather like a commentary on various statements attributed to Confucius. Wan Zhang begins by asking why Confucius, during his time as a counselor in the state of Chen, expressed his intention to return home to the state of Lu, where the “young ones are wild and careless.”<sup>19</sup> Why did Confucius think of the “wild and negligent” scholars of his home state, instead of concentrating on his present tasks in Chen? Mencius replies that Confucius sought disciples who were “moderate,” but were such men not to be

<sup>18</sup> *Zei* 賊 is defined as “vermin that eats the *jie* [of the millet]” in Mao’s *Commentary* on *Shijing* 212 but as “murderer, villain, bandit” in *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Rpt; Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1972), where Karlgren obviously takes into account the ideo-graphic components that make up this character: “The graph has ‘man’, ‘dagger-axe’ and ‘cowry’ (money).” (GSR entry 907.) It would be a mistake to interpret *dao zhi zei* as “thief of Virtue,” or as “arrogating virtue” since what Confucius stresses is the disorder caused by the second rate copy. In other words, it is not that the village worthy “steals” (or assumes) Virtue from the Sage and so comes to appear virtuous, but that he *disorders* true virtue.

<sup>19</sup> As recorded in *Lun yu* 5.21.

found he would consider those who were “wild” and “forward”—or even those who were “aloof,” and hesitant to take action.<sup>20</sup>

It is at this point—having described Confucius’ predilection for disciples who are moderate in action, but also his willingness to consider scholars who are either too ambitious or not ambitious enough—that Mencius introduces a person who falls outside of all three categories, namely the “village worthy.”

[Wan Zhang:] Dare I ask what defines ‘wild’?

[Mencius:] Men like Qin Zhang, Zheng Xi and Mu Pi were defined as “wild” by Confucius.

What in these people made Confucius define them as “wild”?

Their ambitions were huge, they were saying “The ancients! The ancients!” But examining their actions it was clear that they did not live up to these ambitions. If the wild ones were not attainable, then Confucius wanted the scholars who were hesitant to get their hands dirty. These are the aloof bunch, and even further down the scale. Confucius said “The only person whom I do not resent for passing by my house without calling on me is the village worthy. The village worthy is the vermin of Virtue.”

The village worthy is a weird and uncanny figure. Since he rejects both the wild and the aloof scholars he assumes a middle position, and may therefore pass for a person who is moderate—and thus virtuous—in his actions. But this is exactly the mistake that Confucius, on Mencius’ account, is anxious to avoid.

Wan Zhang continues:

A person who may be defined as a “village worthy,” what is he like?

[It is someone who says about the wild scholars]: “Why these huge ambitions? They speak without paying attention to their actions, and vice versa, and say ‘the ancients, the ancients!’ And [as for the aloof scholars] why their withdrawn comportment? We are born into this age, and whatever is good for this age is fit to do.” Like a eunuch, loved by “the age”—this is the village worthy.<sup>21</sup>

Mencius sarcasm toward the lax opportunist who aims to please “this age” is hardly veiled. *Yanran* 闒然 means “like a eunuch” or “like a gatekeeper,” and portrays the village worthy as an effeminate man bowing and scraping to all and everyone. But Wan Zhang is still not satisfied. Mencius has explained what characterizes the man that “may be called” a village worthy, but Wan Zhang cannot understand the rest of Confucius’ statement. Thus he asks a question that resonates deeply in the early Chinese philosophical discussion, and which relates directly to Mencius’ dialogue with Jiao of Cao:

<sup>20</sup> As recorded in *Lun yu* 13.21. The entire text of *Mencius* “Jin xin B37” up till this point reads as follows:  
[Mencius’ disciple] Wen Zhang asked: When Confucius was in the state of Chen he said ‘Should we not return home? The young men in our district are madly and boldly rushing forward, not overcoming their origins’—why was Confucius thinking of the wild scholars of Lu when he was stationed in Chen?

Mencius said: Confucius’ [motto was] ‘If I cannot get those men who pertain to the Middle Way, must I not make do with the wild and the withdrawn? The wild rush forward, grabbing while the squeamish refrain from doing certain things.’ Thus was it not so that Confucius wanted the Middle Way? But not being able to achieve that he thought about the second best.

[Wen Zhang:] Dare I ask what defines ‘wild’?

[Mencius] Men like Qin Zhang, Zheng Xi and Mu Pi were defined as wild by Confucius.

<sup>21</sup> There is disagreement among the commentators as to who is saying what. I follow Ames and Rosemont.

But if he was called a worthy [or “willing”] man by the entire village, and was also so considered wherever he went, why did Confucius consider him the vermin of Virtue?

Two different but important topics here struggle for our attention. On the one hand, it is a question of designation. The man whom Confucius ridicules is not only called “worthy” by his “village” (in which case he would truly deserve the name “village worthy”), but is considered worthy by the entire world. As Wan Zhang suggests, the high esteem in which the village worthy is held is thus not merely a provincial or temporary phenomenon. But neither he nor Mencius is interested in pursuing the question of “correct denomination” (*zheng ming* 正名), which otherwise is important in early Chinese philosophy. After wavering for a short moment, the discussion takes another direction. Wan Zhang’s question is (in both senses of the term) essential: if a man acts in such a way that people, not only in his own village but always and in all places, consider him “worthy,” then is he not indeed a worthy person? Why and whence Confucius’ resentment? What makes the village worthy Virtue’s vermin, in Confucius’ view? Wan Zhang’s pursuit of the enigma of the village worthy marks a turning point in the text, because it forces Mencius to explain the logic and destructive influence of simulation (*si*). He has already intimated that the village worthy is *yanran*, like a servile gatekeeper or womanish, passive and castrated like a eunuch. Now Mencius answers Wan Zhang’s question by introducing the theme of simulation, adding:

Try to find anything wrong with him and you will find nothing. Try to criticize him and you will find nothing. He conforms to the flow of the vulgar world and becomes one with the dirty waters of this Age. Since in his posture he appears [*si* 似] loyal and trustworthy, and in his actions he appears [*si* 似] unsoiled and pure the great mass loves him. He considers himself to be in the right but you cannot enter the Path of Yao and Shun in his company. Therefore we say he is the vermin of Virtue.

The village worthy is neither wild nor aloof, yet least of all is he a man of moderate action. The wild and the aloof may have flawed characters but what characterizes the village worthy is paradoxically that he has no character or substance or being at all: he is...*not*. Absent of traits, the village worthy—unlike the wild and the aloof—cannot even be blamed or criticized. And in want of positive traits, he passively *conforms* to the external, vulgar world and is swept away by its polluted current.

This is not exactly a straight answer to Wan Zhang’s question of *why* the village worthy is Virtue’s vermin but Mencius makes it obvious that it is through the act of simulation that the village worthy damages Virtue: he mimics the appearances of a loyal and trustworthy person, but does not acquire the defining and constituting characteristics of the real thing. Moreover, the village worthy is too good an imitation, whereas the wild and hesitant disciples are imperfect but genuine?<sup>22</sup> There-

<sup>22</sup> Several other questions which are implicit in Mencius’ dialogue with Wan Zhang must remain unanswered in the present analysis, but I shall briefly indicate both these questions and some possible solutions. First, what happens to the object that is “disordered” by *si*-militude, such as (true) Music, which is damaged by the similar-sounding but lascivious sounds of Zheng? And what becomes of Virtue after the vermin has had its way with it? Second, (conversely), what characterizes the person or object of the second order? We know from Mencius’ description of the village worthy that such a person perverts Virtue by being a unanimated imitation thereof, but do Confu-

fore, the village worthy both devaluates Virtue's value and makes it difficult to tell *echt* Virtue from the second rate copy.

"All men can become Yao and Shun'. Is this the case?" Jiao's question is inevitably haunting us at this point. Mencius' denial that the village worthy cannot enter the Path of Yao and Shun, those paragons of Virtue, is confusing, since he has just confirmed (complainingly) that the appearance of the village worthy is flawless. Thus it is here that the two dialogues clash most clearly: the reason that the village worthy cannot join ranks with the truly virtuous is (or seems to be) that his behaviour is too perfect on the surface, which paradoxically is the very criterion Mencius gives to Jiao as an answer to the question how one may "become Yao and Shun." Combining the two dialogues it is therefore possible to conceive of a person who dresses in Yao's clothes, recites the words of Yao and adopts Yao's behaviour but nonetheless is Jie. This paradox points to the problem of *si* 似, which we may henceforth translate with a pun as *si*-militude.

As suggested above, Mencius' preoccupation with deceptive appearances leads us to a topic seldom visited in sinological studies on classical Chinese philosophy and poetics. In the present context I shall not explore that topic but instead ask: why is this location deserted? Simply because it falls outside of the beaten track to which mainstream sinology and comparative projects at the macro-level confine themselves. Simply because sinology typically holds that the distinction between appearance and reality is a typically Occidental preoccupation, and does not, indeed cannot, come into play in a non-metaphysical system of thought such as the Chinese.

It is in the final part of his dialogue with Wan Zhang that Mencius, by quoting Confucius, makes his grand denouncement of *si*-militude. *Si er fei*—to look like but

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cius or Mencius tell us anything else about the nature of the imitation, of the copy? How has it become a second rate imitation? What is its provenance?

*Lun yu* 6.25 is dedicated to an object that may be understood either as a debased Thing or as a second rate object that itself debases and contaminates its surroundings—or indeed both. Confucius' exclamation is very short, and consists of merely three words repeated in despair, but it nonetheless informs us of what characterizes an object and/or a name that has lost its traditional meaning. That object is the *gu*-vessel 觚, a goblet traditionally used in prestigious Zhou dynasty rituals. What disturbs Confucius is that the ritual order has been upset. Thus Confucius exclaims:

子曰觚不觚。觚哉。觚哉。

The *gu*-goblet does not *gu* [perform/act as a *gu*-goblet]. *Gu* indeed! *Gu* indeed!

How is the ritual order upset? I hypothesize that there are the following alternatives.

1. The *gu* retains its traditional shape but the rituals in which it is used are performed incorrectly, thereby causing the *gu* not to perform properly. The flawed rituals, which "are not themselves," cause the *gu* to differ from itself (which presumably leads to similar flaws in the objects with which the *gu* come into contact, hence the *gu* is both a debased and debasing object). 2. The so-called *gu* has indeed lost its shape so that the name *gu* has come to refer to the wrong object and thus is a mismatch.

In the first case, it is the *gu*-goblet that is damaged by *si*-militude (in the form of the Rituals that are performed as a parody of themselves) and turned into an uncanny object, since it has come to differ from itself although it *appears* to be the same object. In the second case, it is rather the word *gu* 觚 that is "similar but not the same," since it *appears* to refer to the object known as a *gu* but no longer does so.

Although the grammatical structure here—the second *gu* in 觚不觚 being used as a verb—stresses the *function* of the *gu*, it is obviously a question of the identity of a ritual object whose traditional "being" has been upset. The object (or word) which thus comes to differ from itself is kindred to an important theme in early Chinese rhetoric and poetics. See my "Illusion, Lie, and Metaphor," 270 ff.

not to be—is a question of imitation and identity, of a vexing doubling and blurring of identities. Let us re-read the quotation from Confucius:

I hate that which seems to be, but is not. I hate the bristleglass: that it disorders the young plants terrifies me. I hate flattery: that it disorders Righteousness terrifies me. I hate the glib mouth: that it disorders Trustworthiness terrifies me. I hate the sounds of the state of Zheng: that they disorder Music terrifies me. I hate purple: that it disorders Red terrifies me. I hate the village worthy: that he disorders Virtue terrifies me.

All those things that arouse Confucius' hatred, Mencius explains, are things that appear to be something that they are not. Confucius concludes the dialogue by giving his solution to the problem:

The Superior Man returns to the classic norm. If the norm is correct, then the multitude of people will prosper. If the multitude prospers then there will be no aberrations or perversion.

Having reached a point of no return in our exploration of the topic of *si er fei*, let us for the third time re-read François Jullien statement:

The Chinese do not know [*ignorent*] the skeptic experience of the rod which is immersed in water and so *appears* broken, thus they have never had any notion of a fissure [*dédoublement*] between appearance and reality, between the phenomenon and the one-in-itself. But as is well known, we (and foremost the Greeks) have conceived of Truth [*la vérité*] as the opposition to the “dream” of the appearances.

Does not Mencius' critique of the village worthy and of *si er fei* contradict most expressly Jullien's claim that “the Chinese” do not know, or choose to ignore, the difference between appearance and reality? Furthermore, does not Jullien's blindness to this problem in the *Mencius* and elsewhere inform us about a major drawback of what I have called comparative projects at the macro-level? Namely, that the will to establish a neat and symmetrical opposition between the Greek and Chinese traditions tends to obscure the inherent tension in the Chinese (or Greek) traditions, here represented by Mencius' paradoxical embrace and rejection of simulation.

It is to the immense credit of scholars such as Jullien, Ames and Rosemont that they have elaborated with brilliance and honesty their comparative projects to the extent that the cracks in the façade have become apparent. This allows for alternative entrances into the edifice and for the dialectics of interpretation and re-interpretation to continue.

Paris, November 28, 2006

# How to Read Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions: A Critique of the Current Method<sup>1</sup>

by

Ken-ichi Takashima

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese tradition of serious and specialized epigraphic studies can be traced to Song times (tenth to twelfth centuries A.D.). This tradition enabled the Chinese scholars of the late nineteenth century who were interested in the study of bronze and stone inscriptions of ancient China (ca. eleventh to fourth centuries B.C.) to take the initial, albeit faltering, steps to read the oracle-bone inscriptions (hereafter: OBI) of the late Shang Dynasty (ca. thirteenth to eleventh centuries B.C.). A few Japanese and Western scholars followed suit and did service to this new field of scholarship that now has a history of about a century. There are at present many specialists who continue the work of reading OBI as accurately as possible. They range in their interest from the study of a single graph or key word to that of a string of graphs that make up a phrase, clause, sentence, and, ultimately, aspects of the language that would put us in a position to reconstruct part of a cultural history. Thus, the OBI offer an inestimable value in providing us with contemporary information on Shang customs and beliefs, information that, unlike the received texts of later times, has not been tampered with by more than two thousands years of anachronistic re-interpretations. On occasion they too undoubtedly contain distortions. Yet, since there is no authority who, in the final analysis, understands what the Shang intended to write, let alone all the subtleties involved, the task becomes a matter of interpretation. The meaning has to be elicited in each and every case, and it often leads to disagreements among specialists. The present paper critically reviews the

<sup>1</sup> I would like thank the following friends and colleagues who offered me comments and criticism to earlier versions of this paper: Christoph Harbsmeier, Christoph Anderl, David Sehnal, Françoise Bottéro, Björn Wittrock, Sarah Allan, Bill Boltz, Jing Zhichun, Tang Jigen, Liu Xueshun, Martin Svensson Ekström, and Pan Wuyun. Thanks are also due to two anonymous readers of the paper for their critiques and special ones to Martin Svensson Ekström for his numerous editorial comments and suggestions. I was fortunate enough to have been appointed a Fellow at the Swedish Collegium of Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Uppsala from September, 2004 to February, 2005, during which I was able to write this paper. I wish to thank its director, Björn Wittrock, and his very helpful staff members for the most memorable research life I have had in my career.

methodology currently employed or, rather, tacitly followed, in this field of scholarship with a view towards A: stimulating more meta-theoretical discussion and B: arriving at some hermeneutic desiderata.

The most crucial issue, then, is the problem of interpretation. Much of our understanding of the Shang depends crucially on how we interpret the documents that we were fortunate enough to find, and still keep finding, after more than 3000 years underground.<sup>2</sup> How then do we go about interpreting the language of OBI? Although the last one-hundred years of OBI studies have produced an impressive amount of scholarship, rather surprisingly there is hardly any that addresses the important question of methodology. It seems that most modern OBI scholars spend their entire careers without devoting themselves to any work of this sort. It may well be that the field is satisfied with the contribution of such a pioneering work as Wang Guowei's "Gushi xinzheng 古史新證" published about eighty years ago.<sup>3</sup> In this work Wang Guowei put forward a new way of studying ancient Chinese civilization in general and Shang and Zhou history in particular, namely, to employ an *erchong zhengju fa* 二重證據法 "two-layered evidential approach." This refers to the use of two different sources for the study of the past: those texts on paper, the classics, that have been handed down by tradition, and those materials that are unearthed, i.e., OBI and bronze inscriptions (hereafter: BRI).<sup>4</sup> When he wrote this influential article, he included just OBI and BRI as the archaeologically unearthed sources. But modern scholars, particularly archaeologists, take advantage of any relevant, typically underground, materials that can be utilized to study ancient China. In the field of archaeology the question of methodologies is very important, and very justly so, since the understanding of civilization is itself directly dependent on how one goes about acquiring it. There is certainly no escape from rigorous debate on the methodological issue at hand, and in the present paper, Wang Guowei's concern shall also be ours. We will thus narrow our critical investigation to the question of the received texts on the one hand and the OBI and BRI on the other.

<sup>2</sup> Ever since the discovery of the inscribed turtle shells and bovine scapulas, a.k.a. OBI, towards the end of the 19th century, several prominent Chinese scholars perceived the importance of such inscriptions in studying Shang history and civilization. It gradually became clear that the inscriptions were made during the latter part of the Shang, also known as Yin dynasty, after King Pan Geng 盤庚 is said to have moved the capital to its final location near the modern city of Anyang in the northern panhandle of Henan Province. (The OBI are silent about any instance of the movement of the capital.) The time period covers from the 21st king, Wu Ding 武丁 (r. ca. 1230–1170 B.C.), continuously to the last, 29th king, Di Xin 帝辛, until his demise, a historical event referred to as the Zhou conquest of the Shang (ca. 1046 B.C.). The discovery of OBI thus catapulted the hitherto legendary dynasty into the first historical one that existed from the 13th to 11th c. B.C.

<sup>3</sup> Wang Guowei 王國維, "Gushi xinzheng 古史新証," *Wang Guantang xiansheng quanji* 王觀堂先生全集, vol. 6 (1925; rpt. Taipei: Wenhua chubun gongsi, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> The relevant portion of Wang Guowei's argument reads as follows: "吾輩生於今日, 幸於紙上材料外, 更得地下之材料, 我輩固得據以補正紙上之材料, 亦得證明古書之某部分全為實錄, 即百家不雅馴之言, 亦不無表示一面之事實。此二重證據法, 惟在今日始得為之。雖古書之未得證明者, 不能加以否定, 而其已得證明者, 不能不加以肯定, 可斷言也" ("Gushi xinzheng," 2078). In other words, he appeals to the use of the OBI and BRI to "augment and rectify" the accounts found in transmitted texts. At the same time, Wang here claims, "it is possible to show that some portions of them are true records, and that even the ungainly language of one-hundred schools of thought in the 'golden age' of ancient China may at times contain elements of truth. It is only today that we are able to rely on the two-layered evidential approach to study ancient history. Even though there may be some portions in the traditional texts that cannot be proven, we cannot thereby deny them, and even though there are some portions of them that have been proven, we must perforce judge to be correct [i.e., we have to accept them as true if they have been proven by the two-layered evidential approach]. This is certain." This seems to have had a tremendous impact in the field.

As mentioned above, there is a plethora of studies in the field of OBI. Song Zhenhao's 1999 bibliography, the most comprehensive one to date, with a total of 1596 pages, lists more than ten thousand articles and books.<sup>5</sup> They are categorized into ten major sections and more than fifty subsections, but there is none on methodology.<sup>6</sup> This is rather surprising, and I feel it is a symptom of a deficiency in the field. The limited scope I wish to impose on this paper makes it impractical to address in detail various facets of OBI studies. We shall instead concentrate on the problem of meta-hypotheses or meta-theories that go beyond numerous studies on the OBI. Once such methodological approaches are delineated, we can proceed to evaluate them. The paper will present two approaches to interpreting OBI: one is the widely practiced "*erchong zhengju fa* 二重證據法" (two-layered evidential approach) introduced earlier and another is what I previously referred to as the "purist approach."<sup>7</sup> This methodology, if contrasted to the *erchong zhengju fa*, may be referred to in Chinese as "*gongshi zhengju fa* 共時證據法" or in English "synchronic evidential approach."<sup>8</sup> That is, we should try to interpret the data or issues at hand on the basis of as much intrinsic evidence as possible without drawing conclusions from the later transmitted texts and their commentaries. This might seem somewhat idealistic, and sometimes cogent interpretation is impossible due to the paucity of relevant materials, but the synchronic-evidential approach will uncover much that seems clouded, even contradicted on occasion, by the application of the two-layered evidential approach. The paper focuses on the details of the two-layered evidential approach as advocated by Wang Guowei and practiced by other specialists ever since. I should like to do so by contrasting it with the synchronic evidential approach.

<sup>5</sup> Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, ed., *Bainian jiaguxue lunzhumu* 百年甲骨學論著目 (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe 語文出版社, 1999). The paper size is 180 mm x 260 mm; 1/16 (Chinese printing size). It has 2,566,000 characters.

<sup>6</sup> Without listing these subsections, the ten major sections consist of (1) Discovery, (2) General treatises, (3) Collections of inscribed oracle bones, (4) Oracle-bone studies, (5) Specialized or disciplinary studies, (6) References, (7) Rejoinders and sur-rejoinders, (8) Bibliographical works, (9) Biographies of OBI scholars, and (10) Appendix (misc.)

<sup>7</sup> Concerning this topic, I have so far written four papers, of which (3) below is mainly a linguistic and grammatical exposition appreciably different from the present paper:

(1) "Some Problematic Aspects of the Li KUEI Inscription," *Ancient Chinese and Southeast Asian Bronze Age Cultures* (Proceedings of a Conference held at the Edith and Joy London Foundation property, Kioloa, NSW. 8–12 February, 1988), ed., F. David Bulbeck with several articles edited and translated by Noel Barnard (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1996), 345–90.

(2) "Jiaguwen kaoshi de jige jiben buzhou 甲骨文考釋的幾個基本步驟," *Hanyu xianzhuang yu lishi de yanjiu* 漢語現狀與歷史的研究, ed. Jiang Lansheng 江藍生 and Hou Jingyi 侯精一 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1999), 446–69.

(3) "Towards a More Rigorous Methodology of Deciphering Oracle-Bone Inscriptions," *T'oung Pao* LXXXVI (2000): 363–399.

(4) "Tradition vs. Its Critics: A Reconstruction of the Rong 彤 Sacrifice in Jiaguwen 甲骨文 and Shangshu 尚書" (paper presented at the International Symposium on the Historical Aspects of the Chinese Language in Commemorating the Centennial Birthday of the Late Professor Li Fang-Kuei. Seattle: University of Washington. 16–18 August, 2002). Typescript ms. 25 pp.

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Wu Keying 吳可穎, a student of mine, for helping me to find an appropriate expression of the "synchronic evidential approach" in Chinese. She also summarized in Chinese the synchronic evidential approach as being put forward in this paper as follows: "共時證據法包括兩個方面: (1) 以地下之材料補正紙上之材料 — 地下材料應優先考慮 (2) 純粹從地下材料中探索和發現出全新的在以往傳世文獻材料中看不到的現象。" (The synchronic evidential approach comprises two aspects, of which the first is the use of underground [excavated] materials to augment and correct the material handed down by tradition and circulated as texts on paper—with the proviso that the underground material be given precedence. The second is to explore and discover only those phenomena that are hitherto unknown from the received traditions of texts and documents.)

## 2. The “Two-layered Evidential Approach”

Let us begin with a portion of the quote from Wang Guowei (see footnote 4). He states that the OBI and BRI should be used to augment and rectify relevant records in the received classical texts from which our knowledge about the Shang and Zhou has been drawn for centuries. With an active use of these sources, coupled with the newly found inscriptional texts, we can obtain new or different information that would correct traditional knowledge. According to Wang, OBI and BRI are valuable mainly as means of validating the knowledge of Shang and Zhou as it can be gleaned from the transmitted texts. And this is a major concern of many OBI and BRI specialists even today. Although there is nothing wrong with such an approach in and of itself, it has a serious methodological flaw which has to do with another claim by Wang Guowei. Wang, referring here to the use of OBI and BRI to “augment and rectify relevant records in the received classical texts,” says that “it is possible to show that some portions of them are true records, and even the ungainly language of one-hundred schools of thought in the ‘golden age’ of ancient China may at times contain elements of truth.” This may well be true, but in what follows I shall take just one concrete example to show that this is unjustifiably carried too far, and that contemporary scholars need to reconsider the issues involved.

### 2.1 The case of *tu* 土 (𠩺, 𠩻)

The concrete example I would like to use for the purpose of this paper involves various problems associated with the interpretation of *tu* 土 (𠩺, 𠩻) “land, earth” and its etymological doublet *she* 社 “spirit of the land.” Both words (and, only through them, concepts) are represented by one and the same graph in OBI. The acquisition of the altar radical (示) seems to have happened by 300 B.C. as attested in inscriptions and texts from this time, such as the Zhongshan wang *yuanding* 中山王圓鼎, the Baoshan Chu *jian* 包山楚簡, the Wangshan Chu *jian* 望山楚簡, etc.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.1.1 The problems in overview

Wang Guowei cites several OBI examples in support of his interpretation that *tu* 土 is to be identified with Xiangtu 相土 who, according to the Yin benji 殷本紀 of the *Shiji* 史記, was the son of Zhaoming 昭明, the grandson of Xie 契, a legendary high

<sup>9</sup> For the Zhongshan wang *yuanding*, see, e.g., Zhang Shouzhong 張守中, *Zhongshanwang Cuo qi wenzi bian* 中山王罍器文字編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 36. For the Baoshan Chu *jian*, see Hubeisheng Jing-Sha tielu kaogudui 湖北省荊沙鐵路考古隊, *Baoshan Chujian* 包山楚簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), 210. For the Wangshan Chu *jian*, see Hubeisheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖北省文物考古研究所 and Beijing daxue zhongwenxi 北京大學中文系, *Wangshan Chujian* 望山楚簡 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 79/125. See also He Linyi 何琳儀, *Zhanguo guwen zidian—Zhanguo wenzi shengxi* 戰國古文字典—戰國文字聲系. vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 530. In the three long inscriptions on the Zhongshan bronzes, the graph for *she* 社 with the altar radical is used four times in its combination with the word *ji* 稷 “millet,” thus the binomial expression *sheji* 社稷 “altars of Soil and Millet,” referring to state affairs by the king, is no doubt the *she* used in the classics. I have previously translated the three bronze inscriptions into English as appendix to my paper “A Study of the Copulas and Certain Related Words in the Zhongshan 中山 Bronze Inscriptions of the 4th Century B.C.” (paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Classical Chinese Grammar, Peking University, 19–22 August 1996).

ancestor of the Shang.<sup>10</sup> To quote only two representative examples given by Wang:

(1) 貞: 祭于土三小宰卯二牛沈十牛. *Qianbian* 1.24.3<sup>11</sup>

Tested [the following proposition to the numen of this bone]<sup>12</sup>: (We) should burn in holocaust three small specially reared ovines, split open [卯 = 劉] two bovines, and sacrifice by submerging ten bovines [all] directed towards *she* 社.<sup>13</sup>

(2) 貞: 萃年于土九牛. *Tieyun* 2.216.1

Tested [the following proposition to the numen of this bone]: (We) should pray for [萃=禱]<sup>14</sup> a good harvest directed towards *she* 社 (with the offering of) nine bovines.

Without any analysis of the examples cited, Wang Guowei has identified 土 in the above examples with Xiangtu whose name appears in such received texts as *Shijing*, *Zuozhuan*, *Shiben* 世本, and *Zhouli*. Furthermore, he has cited from the commentary to the *Zhouli* (夏官孝人, *juan* 33) a passage that reads: 相土作乘馬 “Xiangtu invented (the use of four) horses for a chariot,” and this is compared with 乘杜作乘馬 which appears in *Xunzi* (解蔽篇 21, *juan* 15) obviously with the same meaning as in the *Zhouli*. Wang Guowei provided other details which I omit here, but although we can recognize a circulation of the name 相土 and/or 乘杜<sup>15</sup> among those who

<sup>10</sup> Wang Guowei, “Gushi xinzheng 古史新証,” 2082–3.

<sup>11</sup> The abbreviations for the oracle-bone collections follow those given in David Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China* (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.) (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California 2000), 159–62.

The following abbreviations are used:

*Sōran* *Kōkotsu moji jishaku sōran* 甲骨文字字釋綜覽. Compiled by Matsumaru Michio 松丸道雄 and Takashima Ken-ichi 高嶋謙一. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1994.

*Sōru* *Inkyō bokuji sōru* 殷墟卜辭綜類. Compiled by Shima Kunio 島邦男. Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1971.

*SW* *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字. Xu Shen 許慎. Redaction of Xu Xuan 徐鉉. Reprint of 1873 edition of Chen Changzhi 陳昌治, which in turn was based on 1809 edition of Sun Xingyan 孫星衍. Reprinted in Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> I supply the portion in the square brackets on the basis of the synchronic evidence available in the inscriptions themselves as presented in Ken-ichi Takashima, “Indai teiboku gengo no honshitsu 殷代貞卜言語の本質,” *Tokyo daigaku tōyō bunka kenkyūsho kiyō* 東京大學東洋文化研究所紀要 110 (1989): 15–21; 142–45. Cf. also footnote 31.

<sup>13</sup> Translations for OBI are mine. For a discussion on the translation of *she* 社, see further below. The citation of the examples follows more or less a direct transcription method as advocated by Noel Barnard, “A Recently Excavated Inscribed Bronze of Western Chou Date,” *Monumenta Serica* XVII (1958), 12–46. He suggests the use of a procedural practice I have used profitably in my paper “Towards a More Rigorous Methodology of Deciphering Oracle-Bone Inscriptions,” *T'oung Pao* LXXXVI (2000), 363–99. The translations are based mostly on the conventional Chinese character equivalents with the sound and meaning associated with them in older stages of the language that are further modified according to OBI usage. They are shown in square brackets in the English translation—like [卯 = 劉] in example (1). The square brackets are also used for all extratextual elaborations. (Cf. also footnote 30.) The parentheses are used to show that I usually have reasons to supply whatever in them—like “(We)” in examples (1), (2), and so on.

<sup>14</sup> I adopt this interpretation proposed by Ji Xiaojun 冀小軍, “Shuo jiagu jinwen zhong biao qiqiuyi de huzi 說甲骨文金文中表祈求義的萃字,” *Hubei daxue xuebao* 湖北大學學報 (Zhexue shehui kexueban 哲學社會科學版) 1 (1991): 35–44.

<sup>15</sup> It is frequently observed that in archaeologically excavated documents the characters are different but are used to stand for the same word. Here 相土 or 乘杜 might be phonetically allowable as the former is reconstructed in Old Chinese (OC) as \*sjang \*thagx and the latter \*djəng \*dagx. But note here that the sibilant \*s- and the occlusive \*d- are usually distinguished and, moreover, the main vowels are different.

crafted these texts that continue to defy accurate dating and provenance, it does not prove anything, nor does it show with any certainty that Wang Guowei is correct. The ultimate reason for this is that he neglected to study the primary sources, the OBI themselves, in their own right.

A perusal of *Sōran*<sup>16</sup> (#1589, 365–6) indicates the considerable extent to which Wang Guowei's hermeneutic and methodological assumptions were accepted by OBI scholars. Such prominent authorities as Dong Zuobin<sup>17</sup> and Guo Moruo,<sup>18</sup> for example, accepted it without any qualifications. On the other hand, dissatisfied with Wang Guowei's simplistic association of 土 with Xiangtu, scholars such as Sun Haibo,<sup>19</sup> Chen Mengjia,<sup>20</sup> and Guo Moruo himself, four years after his 1933 publication just cited, rejected it on the grounds of intrinsic evidence available in OBI.<sup>21</sup> From about the time these works came out, a new trend began to appear in the field, and that was to place more emphasis on OBI evidence itself, though this still seems not as rigorously practiced as it should be. Thus, concerning the issue we are now addressing, we should study how the original graphs such as 土, 土 or sometimes written with dots like 土, are actually used in OBI, and deductions ought to be made on that basis. Such a method has become possible as more and more OBI collections have been published.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the best example of concise and well-rounded studies in this particular problem is by Shima Kunio.<sup>23</sup> Shima established that these graphs stand for the word *tu* 土 “land; place name (as in 土方 ‘Tu region or country’),” as well as for the word *she* 社 “land altar, spirit of the land.”<sup>24</sup> Shima's

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 11 for a list of the abbreviations used.

<sup>17</sup> Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “Jiaguwen duandai yanjiuli 甲骨文斷代研究例,” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊. Waibian di yizhong—shang 外編第一種—上, 1933. Page reference is to a reprint of this paper contained in *Dong Zuobin xiansheng quanji* 董作賓先生全集 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977), 2.371. See also Dong Zuobin 董作賓, “Wushinian lai kaoding Yindai shixi de jiantao 五十年來考訂殷代世系的檢討,” *Xueshu jikan* 學術集刊 1–3 (1953). Page reference is to a reprint of this paper contained in *Dong Zuobin xiansheng quanji* 董作賓先生全集 vol. 8 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977), 357.

<sup>18</sup> Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Buci tongzuan kaoshi* 卜辭通纂考釋 (Tokyo: Bunkyoūdō 文求堂, 1933), 334/69a–b.

<sup>19</sup> Sun Haibo 孫海波, “Du Wang Jingan xiansheng gushi xinzheng shu hou 讀王靜安先生古史新證書後,” *Kaogu xueshe shekan* 考古學社社刊 2 (1935): 57.

<sup>20</sup> Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, “Guwenzi zhong zhi Shang Zhou jisi 古文字中之商周祭祀,” *Yanjing xuebao* 燕京學報 19 (1936): 116–21.

<sup>21</sup> Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Yinqi cuibian kaoshi* 殷契粹編考釋 (Tokyo: Bunkyoūdō, 1937), 20/8a.

<sup>22</sup> By the end of 1936 more than one third of all the known OBI collections had been published.

<sup>23</sup> Shima Kunio 島邦男, *Inkyo bokuji kenkyū* 殷墟卜辭研究 (Hirosaki: Chūgoku kenkyūkai 中國研究會, 1958), 227–31.

<sup>24</sup> The words *tu* 土 and *she* 社 are morphologically related as they are reconstructed in OC as \*thagx and \*djiagx (though their exact morphological details have yet to be worked out involving not just these two but other words with similar or comparable phonological features), and, in terms of meaning, “land” and “land altar” can also be considered as related. There is a good possibility that the land altar is a symbolic representation of the Shang belief in earth Power (cf. *SW*, 13b [as a late work it may not be wholly reliable because of its lack of palaeographical knowledge of the oldest stage of Chinese script and of its belief in the then current *wuxing* 五行 cosmology affecting interpretations]: 地之吐生物者也, 二象地之下地之中物出形也 “*tu* is what produces living organisms; 二 [the graphic element in 土] depicts the shape of things coming out from under the surface and inside of the ground.” Note the pun—to be treated with caution—made between *tu* 土 and *tu* 吐 ‘spit out’, and the illegitimate graphemic extrapolation of 二). Cf. also Tōdō Akiyasu 藤堂明保, *Kanji gogen jiten* 漢字語源辭典 (Tokyo: Gakutōsha 學燈社, 1965), 325–26, where he adduced etymological evidence in favor of this view. Unfortunately, Laurent Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1999), does not deal with *tu* and *she*. An anonymous reviewer of this paper for the *BMFEA* asked an interesting question: “Can we claim that the derivation already happened in the Shang period?” The short answer is: yes, but the

criterion for distinguishing *tu* from *she* is the different context in which the same graph appears: the former is used as a place name, while the latter is used as a deity which, along with other deities such as ancestral spirits, occurs as an indirect object or an addressee of certain ritual verbs (e.g., *yu* 侖 [禦] “to lustrate, exorcize”). Here, however, as noticed earlier by Guo Moruo,<sup>25</sup> the indirect object or addressee which *tu* is in *Cuibian* 20, for example, is preceded clearly by a place name, Bo 亳. This is significant because it shows that 土 cannot be the 相土 as claimed by Wang Guowei. Instead, it would make much better sense if we interpret 亳土 as standing for 亳社 commonly understood to mean “the land altar of Bo.” We shall examine this more in detail shortly.

However, there is a methodological problem in arriving at the conclusion that 亳土 is taken to stand for 亳社 “spirit of the land altar of Bo” even if the conclusion itself may be accepted. As Shima pointed out,<sup>26</sup> the equation of 亳土 (亳 土) with 亳社 is based on such passages from the transmitted classical texts as follows:

- (3) 六月辛丑, 亳社災. *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Ai gong, 4th year)  
In the sixth month, on the xinchou day, the land altar of Bo had the calamity of fire.
- (4) 師宵掠, 以邾子環來; 獻於亳社, 囚諸負瑕. *Zuozhuan* (Ai gong, 7th year)  
The troops plundered during the evening (as well), and taking Yi, the viscount of Zhu with them; he was presented to the land altar of Bo and (then) was imprisoned in Fu Xia.
- (5) 陽虎又盟公及三桓於周社, 盟國人於亳社. *Zuozhuan* (Ding gong, 6th year)  
Yang Hu again had a covenant with the duke and with the Three Huan clans at the land altar of Zhou, as well as with the dignitaries of the state at the land altar of Bo.

In example (5) Zhou *she* 周社 and Bo *she* 亳社 are distinguished, suggesting that if 周社 referred to the land altar of the Zhou, 亳社 must also have referred to that of a state or statelet by the name of Bo.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, scholars often quote the following passage from the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (Ai gong, 4th year):

- (6) 亳社者, 殷之社也.  
The land altar of Bo is that of the Yin.

issues involved are too intricate to be handled adequately in this paper. It would require a monograph in which one should first make a thorough examination of the occurrences of 土 and 社, and then use OC reconstructions for pairs of words with due attention to their meanings in order to make deductions regarding the morphological relationships. In this regard, Baxter and Sagart (1998) is a commendable piece of work, though the meaning of the words given therein requires finer analysis.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Moruo, *Yinqi cuibian kaoshi*, 20/8a.

<sup>26</sup> Shima Kunio, *Inkyo bokuji kenkyū*, 228.

<sup>27</sup> But neither 周社, nor 周土 occurs in OBI.

Generally speaking, OBI scholars take the information obtained from examples (3) to (6) as proof that the OBI phrase  $\text{𠄎} \text{ 𠄎}$  is the same as Bo *she* 亳社 and that Bo *she* is the land altar of the Yin.<sup>28</sup> This is not only anachronistic but quite misleading. While on the lexical level the interpretation of the graph  $\text{ 𠄎}$  (=  $\text{ 土}$ ) as representing the word *she* 社 “land altar” or a spirit, deity or Power, may be acceptable,<sup>29</sup> its nature—how it might have been perceived by the people and the role it played in their life—in the contemporary Shang sources is quite different from that in the received texts. Example (3) suggests that the land altar must have had a combustible roof over it or some other materials that were part of the *she*. Example (4) says that human beings could be “presented” or “offered” to/at the land altar, and (5) says that it is the location where covenants could be made. None of these attributes is attested in any of the OBI specimens. Hence, it is quite likely that the disparity between the two heterogeneous sources is due in part to the time gap that separated the late Shang and the late Zhou when these received texts were presumably written, a gap extending about a thousand years. In fact, there is nothing surprising about this because the gap between the Shang and Zhou is not merely the matter of time but of complex networks of social, cultural, religious, economic, and political dynamics. We need to examine them in their own right first. In this regard, we take solace in the fact that the modern archaeologists are doing just that. The palaeographers should also join forces in their effort to place more emphasis on the contemporary and intrinsic evidence that is available, whenever it is possible to do so.

### 2.1.2 Evidence from OBI

Exactly how, then, is the graph  $\text{ 𠄎}$  used so that it will allow us to interpret it sometimes as *tu*  $\text{ 土}$  and sometimes as *she* 社? The two words (and hence the meanings expressed by them) are different, and it is incorrect to think that the graph in question stands for both words simultaneously. As mentioned, they are morphologically related to each other, but that should not blind us to recognize their intrinsic differences. The following examples will illustrate this point:

<sup>28</sup> But if this is applied to example (5), it would mean that while Yang Hu had a covenant with the duke (of Lu) and with the Three Huan clans at the altar of Zhou, he also had a covenant with the *guo ren* 國人 “dignitaries of the state [of Lu]” at the altar of Yin. Unless I am missing something here, that would be rather odd. Thus it seems more natural to take Bo to have been located near the state of Lu. This is a hypothesis to be tested against contemporary inscriptions.

<sup>29</sup> It may be objected that while we assume a lexical correspondence is matched between the OBI and the received texts (specifically here  $\text{ 𠄎}$  equals  $\text{ 土}$  and  $\text{ 𠄎}$  equals Bo 亳), we do not allow for a sentential one. This objection puts the synchronic evidential approach to a stringent test, and is worth further exploration. For now, however, I shall state my working hypothesis that there are different degrees of change in the evolution of linguistic forms and meanings, and that the lexical items are the least resistant to change. Then the rest of other aspects follow in descending order: phrasal, clausal, sentential, and discoursative changes. The last one is perhaps the easiest to comprehend as it does not have to be historically evolutionary; the longer the discourse the more likely we are to see different versions of it even in synchronic terms. Of course the lexical change does happen in the history of any language, but in Chinese there is a palaeographical and philological test we can administer to verify the continuity of a lexical form in question. Take the graph  $\text{ 𠄎}$ , for example: we know that it changed to  $\text{ 土}$  by the Period-V OBI, and to  $\text{ 土}$ ,  $\text{ 土}$ , etc. in BRI (the former two from Yu *ding* 孟鼎 and Bo *ding* 亳鼎, respectively), and then eventually to the modern form *tu*  $\text{ 土}$ . Furthermore, we can appeal to etymological or morphological tests to see if *tu*  $\text{ 土}$  “earth” and *she* 社 “earth altar,” for instance, can be understood to share similarities in terms of both sound and meaning. This is frequently, though not necessarily always, aided by the characters in the same *xiesheng* 諧聲 series. Cf. also footnote 24.

- (7a) 己巳王卜貞: [今]歲商受[年]. 王乩[= 占]曰: 吉. *Cuibian* 907 (*Heji* 36975)  
 (On) the *jisi* day [6],<sup>30</sup> His Majesty, having divined, tested (the following proposition to the numen of this bone): In the present year Shang will reap a (good) crop. His Majesty, having prognosticated, said: “Auspicious.”
- (7b) 東土受年. *Ibid.*  
 The eastern lands will reap a (good) crop.
- (7c) 南土受年. *Ibid.*  
 The southern lands will reap a (good) crop.
- (7d) 西土受年. *Ibid.*  
 The western lands will reap a (good) crop.
- (7e) 北土受年. *Ibid.*  
 The northern lands will reap a (good) crop.
- (8) 貞: 作大邑于唐土. *Jinzhang* 611 (*Yingguo* 1105a)  
 Tested (the following proposition to the numen of this bone): (We will) make a large settlement in the lands of Tang.

Inscriptions from (7a) to (7e) form a set of divination sentences, more precisely the statements of prediction and forecast, and here mixed with wishes, that were addressed, in the form of a “test” (sc. Example [7a]), to the numen of the divining media for its response.<sup>31</sup> The “wish” element in the charging statement (see the above footnote) is very clear in the prognosticating statement—*zhanci* 占辭 or *zhouci* 繇辭 in modern Chinese jargon—uttered by the king that follows the charging statement in (7a). We now ask ourselves the question: which interpretation is more likely correct—the graph 土 (a variant of 𡗗) standing for the word *tu* 土 “land” or *she* 社 “land spirit, god, or Power”? I would answer that the former is the right choice because it refers to a locale, a place that may yield a “harvest,” rather than to some raised earthen structure which *she* must have been and its presumable occupant, a supernatural Power. Example (7a) mentions Shang 商 which must have been considered as the central locale in the Shang “world” because the examples from (7b)

<sup>30</sup> The number in square brackets indicates the ordinal number in the sixty-day cycle that begins with *jiazi* 甲子 [1] and ends with *guihai* 癸亥 [60].

<sup>31</sup> This characterization represents what I take as equivalent to modern Chinese jargon *zhenci* 貞辭. This is also referred to as *mingci* 命辭 “charging statement” or, simply, “charge” by specialists. The charge frequently, though by no means always, has positive and negative forms. The 貞辭 and 命辭 are often used synonymously, but the former is more general in meaning because any statement introduced by the term *zhen* 貞 “test” can be called 貞辭, whereas the 命辭 is laden with such a specific meaning as “order, command,” signifying that the statement is taken as a “command” put to the divining media which were expected to execute it, rather than respond to it. For more on this topic and more, the reader is referred to Ken-ichi Takashima, “Indai teiboku gengo no hons-hitsu 殷代貞卜言語の本質,” *Tokyo daigaku tōyō bunka kenkyūsho kiyō* 東京大學東洋文化研究所紀要 110 (1989): 1–110. As for my rationale for supplying “the numen of this bone” as the addressee of the 貞辭, see *ibid.*, 15–21; 142–45.

to (7e) show the surrounding locales of Shang in the four cardinal directions.<sup>32</sup> It is of interest that we do not find in the OBI corpus that we are in possession of at the present moment the expression \*Shang *tu* 商土 “the lands of Shang.”<sup>33</sup> Example (8) represents the statement of intention which was tested against the numen of the divining media (cf. footnote 12), namely, the construction of a large settlement in the lands of a place called Tang. We can therefore conclude that in these examples the graph 土 and its variant 𡗗 stand for the word *tu* 土 “land,” rather than *she* 社 “spirit, deity, or Power of the earth.”

In contrast to the above, the following examples would speak strongly for the interpretation of the graphs 土, and its variant 𡗗 as the word *she* 社 “spirit, deity, or Power of the earth,” rather than *tu* 土 “land”:

- (9a) 于小丁𡗗. *Cuibian* 20 (Heji 32675)  
[Addressing ourselves] to (the spirit of) Xiao Ding (we) will conduct the lustration ritual (𡗗 = 饗) (of someone).
- (9b) 于𡗗𡗗. *Ibid.*  
[Addressing ourselves] to (the spirit of) X<sup>34</sup> (we) will conduct the lustration/exorcism ritual [𡗗 = 饗] (of someone or something).
- (9c) 于亳土𡗗. *Ibid.*  
[Addressing ourselves] to the land spirit of Bo (亳土 = 亳社)(we) will conduct the lustration/exorcism ritual [𡗗 = 饗] (of someone or something).
- (9d) 癸巳貞: 𡗗于父丁其五十小宰. *Ibid.*  
*Guisi* day [30] tested [the following proposition to the numen of this bone]: (We) should conduct the lustration ritual (𡗗 = 饗) (of someone) directed towards Fu Ding (with the use of) perhaps (?) fifty small specially reared ovines.

<sup>32</sup> Much further work is needed to substantiate my hypothesis that “Shang 商 ... must have been considered as the central locale in the Shang ‘world’.” I am now working with Professor Jing Zhichun, my archaeologist colleague at UBC, and with other Chinese archaeologists to test the hypothesis that “Shang” could have represented a ritual centre within the Shang “palatial” compound. I have some interesting inscriptional evidence for such an idea. Suffice it to mention here that it has to do partly with the expression “*ru* Shang 入商” that occurs rather frequently in the royal divination inscriptions, as well as in the powerful “Zi 子 family inscriptions” recently found in Huayuanzhuang locus east 花園莊東地. Cf. *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo* 中國社會科學研究院考古研究所. *Yinxu Huayuanzhuang dongdi jiagu* 殷墟花園莊東地甲骨. 6 folio vols. (Kunmin: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2003), 36.3.

<sup>33</sup> It is not impossible that if this was the meaning they wanted to express, they might have called it *zhong tu* 中土 “central lands” as in *Fushi*, Wen, 69 (*Heji* 21090). The weight of this piece of evidence, however, is not heavy as this inscription seems to be only one example of *zhong tu* 中土 “central lands.” Moreover, since the original bone graph has no “streamers” and the central line is not quite straight, its transcription into 中 itself may be incorrect. If so, this represents the name of a place different from Shang.

<sup>34</sup> There is much scholarship on this graph—cf. *Sōran* (4418, 490–91), covering up to 1988, and there are a few more studies since then (e.g., Wu Kuang 吳匡 and Cai Zhemao 蔡哲茂, “Shi ji 釋𡗗 (ji 稷).” Paper presented at the Yinxu jiaguwen faxian 90 zhounian guoji xueshu taolunhui 殷墟甲骨文發現九十周年國際學術討論會. Anyang, August 1989; Lian Shaoming 連劭名, “Jiagu keci congkao 甲骨刻辭叢考.” *Guwenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究 18 [1992], 62–93). The identification of the bone graph with a modern Chinese character varies from one specialist to another, and none is certain. They agree, however, that it stands for the name of some deity, possibly an ancestral spirit of the Shang. I have not had a chance to study it in detail, and thus am hesitant to accept any of the theories that have been put forward.

- (10) 貞: 勿率年于邦土. Qianbian 4.17.3 (Heji 846)  
 Tested [the following proposition to the numen of this bone]: (We) should not pray for [率 = 禱] a good harvest directed towards the land spirit of Bang [邦土 = 邦社].<sup>35</sup>
- (11) 其又祭亳土又雨. Yicun 928 (Heji 28108)  
 (We) should indeed [又 = 有] make a burnt offering (directed towards) the spirit of Bo [亳土 = 亳社], for (we) will get [又 = 有] rain.<sup>36</sup>

Examples (9a) through (9d) form a contextual unit centering around the topic of the lustration or exorcism ritual *yu* 卣 (= 禦). According to my reconstruction of this Shang ritual in linguistic terms,<sup>37</sup> *yu* is on the underlying level a four valent verb which dictates, in its full specifications, the use of a subject (one valent), a direct object (another valent), an indirect object (yet another valent), and an instrumental object (the fourth valent). Given below is just one example which will be used to explain what I have just stated (with a slight change in the translation given in my paper referred to in footnote 37), and after this is done we will revisit examples from (9a) to (9d).

- (12) 辛酉 ... 卣大水于土. Yizhu 835 (Heji 14407)  
*Xinyou* day [58]... (we) will perform the exorcism ritual [卣 = 禦] on big water [i.e., floods caused by an angry spirit] directed towards the spirit of the earth [社] (with the use of [an unspecified number of]) specially reared ovine.

<sup>35</sup> I have tentatively followed the most common interpretation of the bone graph 卣 transcribed as *bang* 邦. See Yu Xingwu 于省吾, ed. *Jiaguwenzi gulin* 甲骨文字詁林, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 2117–9. It is here used as the name of a place. Cf. *Sōran* (802, p. 198) for other, less influential, interpretations. There are also other more recent proposals (e.g., Wang Shenxing 王愼行, *Guwenzi yu Yin Zhou wenming* 古文字與殷周文明. [Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992], 188) interprets this as *feng* 封, which was originally the idea of Wang Guowei, *apud* Yu Xingwu [*Jiaguwenzi gulin* 甲骨文字詁林, 3], 2117–8), but I have not had a chance to examine the problem in detail.)

<sup>36</sup> It is frequently the case that the graph 又 stands for the verb 有 “there is; to have.” (The readings of the two words are different (the 又 being *qusheng* and the 有 *shangsheng*), while one can observe the general tendency that the two graphs are kept distinguished in the Period-I Bin Diviner group inscriptions (the Li Diviner group inscriptions use only 又), as well as in the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. This seems due to some scribal tradition. I wish to study this more fully on some other occasion.) When it is followed by another verb as in the first part of this example (又祭 = 有祭), it is realized as a kind of emphatic verb phrase, a linguistic construction I have previously studied (cf. Ken-ichi Takashima, “An Emphatic Verb Phrase in the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions,” *Bulletin of the History and Philology* 59.3 [1988]: 653–94, a revised version of which is in Michiharu Itō and Ken-ichi Takashima, *Studies in Early Chinese Civilization: Religion, Society, Language and Palaeography*. 2 vols. [Hirakata: Kansai Gaidai University Press, 1996], 1.259–88; 2.90–9). As for the difference between the verb phrase *you yu* 有雨 (lit.) “have rain” and the simple stative verb *yu* 雨 “to rain,” an analysis of the two usages has yielded that the former conveys a sense of “obtain or get rain” and the latter “to rain,” a simple stative description. Thus the former phrase often has a conditional clause before *you yu* 有雨; for example, it occurs in the environment of “if we do such and such, we will get rain (有雨) or we will not get rain (亡雨),” as in example (11) for the positive, whereas the latter (雨 or its negative 不雨) tends to occur without any conditional clause preceding it. Last, but not least, it should be mentioned that the word *liao* 祭/燎 “to make a burnt offering” is in Shang Chinese a directional verb in that it needs to have an indirect object or addressee which is realized as a nature Power usually associated with rain.

<sup>37</sup> Ken-ichi Takashima, “Some Ritual Verbs in Shang Texts,” *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 30.1 (2002): 97–141.

Even if the subject of the verb *yu* is missing in example (12), we can assume on the basis of many other examples that it is the first person inclusive pronoun “we 我” or the first person singular “I 余” (the king). This can also be implied by its negative counterpart in which the modal, prohibitive, negative *wu* 勿 “do not, should not” is used. This negative, in addition to its use for the second person, is commonly used with the first person subject, sometimes with the second person subject, in OBI.<sup>38</sup> As is now known, *wu* is used as a negative of the humanly controllable verbs (first pointed out by myself in 1973—Ph.D. diss. cited in footnote 38), and *yu* 𠄎 (= 禦) “to lustrate, exorcise” indeed is considered as one of them. Furthermore, if this negative is used, no instrumental noun is observed.<sup>39</sup> But example (12) has the positive verb, and as such it dictates the use of an instrumental noun. The direct object is *da shui* 大水 “flood,” a catastrophic disaster believed to have been caused by a malevolent spirit, a Power of Nature, and which thus had to be placated by conducting the exorcism ritual. The indirect object or the addressee is *she* 社 “spirit of the earth,” specifically the supernatural Power believed to have resided therein, and this Power drew its might by consuming the sacrifice offered to it by the living. Such, in a nutshell, is the reconstruction of a part of the Shang belief system according to relevant inscriptions. Grammatically, the ritual verb *yu* 𠄎 (= 禦) “to lustrate, exorcise” is, therefore, a four-valent verb. (Incidentally, another verb which syntactically behaves exactly the same is *dao* 𠄎 [= 禱] as seen in example [2]; there are a few more—see footnote 44.)

Returning now to examples (9a)–(9d),<sup>40</sup> I think that the above excursion would make it easier for us to follow the translations provided. If we pay attention to the indirect objects or addressees of the examples, they are Xiao Ding 小丁, X 𠄎, Bo *she* 亳土 (社), and Fu Ding 父丁. Xiao Ding and Fu Ding are unmistakably the spirits of the ancestors recently deceased from the time of this divination.<sup>40</sup> These ancestors are referred to as *xianwang houqi* 先王後期 “former kings of the late period” by Dong Zuobin.<sup>41</sup> The second addressee must be either an ancestral spirit or some nature Power, considered to have been incorporated in the Shang pantheon.<sup>42</sup> As for the third addressee, there is no doubt that the graph 土 (𠄎) here expressed the word

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ken-ichi Takashima, “Negatives in the King Wu Ting Bone Inscriptions” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington 1973), 146ff. For the distinction of the \*m-initial negatives (勿 and 毋) and the \*p-initial negatives (弗 and 不) in terms of the humanly “controllable” and “uncontrollable” verbs, this 1973 dissertation is the first systematic treatment in the grammar of OBI (cf. 176ff. in particular). Cf. also my paper, “Morphology of the Negatives in Oracle-Bone Inscriptions,” *Computational Analysis of Asian and African Languages* (Tokyo: National Inter-University Research Institute of Asian and African Languages and Cultures) 30 (1988): 113–33.

<sup>39</sup> This is perfectly logical, and I give here just one such an example:

丙午卜勿𠄎雀于兄丁。 Heji 4116

Divined on the *bingwu* day [43]: (We) should not perform the exorcism ritual [𠄎 = 禦] on Qiao[’s illness] directed towards Xiong Ding.

Of all the examples of the negative verb phrase 勿𠄎 (cf. *Sōrui* 52.3–56.2), there is not any that accompanies an instrumental noun.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. also David Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China* (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.) (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California 2000), 133, fig. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Dong Zuobin 董作賓, *Jiaguxue liushi nian* 甲骨學六十年 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), fig. bet. 72 and 73.

<sup>42</sup> This is the standard view. Out of many references that vouch for it, I cite Zhao Cheng 趙誠, *Jiaguxue jianming cidian—Buci fenlei duben* 甲骨文簡明詞典—卜辭分類讀本 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 14–5, for an apt and concise description. At the same time, however, I cite it also for two other reasons. First, Zhao Cheng comments that we need to further study the assumption that the Shang *she* 社 “spirit of the earth” is the same thing as a

*she* 社 “spirit of the earth, a Power believed to reside in the earth” which is preceded by Bo 亳, a place name. Examples (10) and (11) show that the addressees are Bang *she* 邦土 (= 社) and Bo *she* 亳土 (= 社); the former Power was regarded as capable of bestowing the Shang with a good harvest, and the latter Power was regarded as capable of bringing welcome rain as a reward for, or a response to, the burnt offering the living offered. We see here at least two Powers associated with two different places, and both of them were located within the sphere of influence under the Shang. We saw earlier in example (6) that the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (Ai gong, 4th year) has a line that reads “亳社者，殷之社也 The land altar of Bo is that of the Yin,” and specialists often quote this to validate the assumption that Bo *she* 亳土 (= 社) was the land altar of the Yin. But if Bang *she* 邦土 (= 社) was also the land altar of the Yin, what could the relationship between the two have been? One would think that there were two separate entities. As pointed out in footnote 42, there are also other place names which are followed by 土 (= 社). This is a problem newly presented by the synchronic evidential approach, but it is clear that the simple application of the traditional account in the received text(s) does not resolve the problem. All this seems to point to the possibility that plural *she* were located within the Shang cultural sphere and revered by the inhabitants of, or near, the place.

It would be helpful to give a short summary here. The five examples provided in this subsection, from (7b) to (8), show that the geographically defined land, *tu* 土 (土), served as the target for harvesting an agricultural crop and for building a settlement.<sup>43</sup> The seven examples, from (9a) to (12), demonstrate that the same graph 土 (土) represents the word *she* 社 “spirit of the earth, Power believed to have resided therein” because it serves as the addressee, grammatically the indirect object, and as such it was believed to bring about a certain desired thing for the living.<sup>44</sup>

general “earth god” (這個固定的社神 [referring to 亳社] 和一般意義上的土神, 是否同一個對象, 尚需進一步研究). Presumably he means that we need to be careful about the commonly assumed relationship between the “established” god of soil, Boshe 亳社, and the “ordinary” god of soil 土神, and whether they refer to the same thing, particularly when preceded by other place names such as Bang 邦, Kui (or Nao?) 夔 (see below), and Zhong 中 (?). His caution is commendable, but this distinction between the “established” (or, to use his term, “fixed”) god of soil and the ordinary one may be entirely imaginary because he is influenced by the 亳社 appearing in the transmitted classical texts (cf. example [6]). Second, Zhao Cheng makes no distinction between the recipient or addressee of such a sacrificial verb as *liao* 祭/燎 “to make a burnt offering” or such ritual verbs as *yu* 知 (= 饗) “to lustrate, exorcise” and *dao* 禱 (= 禱) “to pray,” so that the particle *yu* 于 “to,” which introduces the recipient or addressee, is invariably taken as meaning “at” or “in.” He only recognizes that 亳土 is Boshe 亳社, and this is used as the recipient, citing *Yicun* 928 [其又燎亳土] where *yu* is not even present. I believe he is mistaken in all this, and his view is methodologically flawed precisely because the information culled from the transmitted texts is superimposed on the OBI evidence.

N.B. The *Nanming* 452 inscription is of much interest because Kui occurs by itself as it does also in *Yicun* 376, showing that the graph 土, though its lower part missing here, definitely has to be taken as the word *she*.

<sup>43</sup> There are other inscriptions in which 土 (土) appears as the target for different activities such as sortie (土 = 至 “to get to”—*Yicun* 21), military inspection or maneuver (土 = 徂 “to correct, straighten”—*Qianbian* 7.7.4), and military campaign (土 = 伐 “to attack”—*Xubian* 3.9.1).

<sup>44</sup> In addition to the three verbs in these examples—*yu* 知 (= 饗) “to lustrate, exorcise,” *dao* 禱 (= 禱), and *liao* 祭/燎 “to make a burnt offering”—, there are several other verbs associated with the word *she* 社 represented by the graph 土: for example, *qiu* 求 (求) “to seek,” *ning* 寧 (寧) “to conduct mollifying ritual, appease,” *you* 又/侑 (侑) “to offer,” and *gao* 告 (告) “to make a ritual announcement.” I have dealt with these verbs in detail in Ken-ichi Takashima, “Some Ritual Verbs in Shang Texts,” *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 30.1 (2002).

### 2.1.3 The specific problems of *she* 社 in the received texts

On the basis of the preceding analysis, I would claim that there is a problem in using the information culled from the received texts and that this practice is methodologically flawed. The problem is that none of the Shang rituals to which those scholars mentioned above refer remained intact. Thus, we must be very careful about, sometimes dismiss outright, virtually all the claims, given below, that are made on the basis of some passage from one classical Chinese text or another, as well as its traditional commentaries which are generally even more unreliable than the former:

- (13) 土疑即相土，史記殷本紀，契卒子昭明立，昭明卒子相土立，相土之字，詩商頌，春秋左氏傳，世本帝繫篇皆作土。<sup>45</sup>

I suspect that Tu is the same as Xiang Tu. In the Yin annals of the *Shiji* we find that after Xie died his son Zhao Ming came to the throne; after Zhao Ming died his son Xiang Tu came to the throne, and as for the name (characters) Xiang Tu, the Shang hymn of the *Shijing*, the Zuo commentary of the *Spring and Autumn*, and the imperial genealogy of the *Shiben* all write it (simply) as Tu.

- (14) 詩大雅迺立冢土，傳云，冢土大社也，商頌宅殷土芒芒，史記三代世表引作殷社芒芒，公羊僖二十一年傳，諸侯祭土，何注土謂社也，是古固以土為社矣。<sup>46</sup>

In the Major elegancia of the *Shijing* [Mao #237, Mian] we have a line that reads “(The ancient lord Dan *fu* 古公亶父) proceeded to build a mound.” The subcommentary says that *zhongtu* 冢土 “mound” refers to a great altar. In the Shang hymn of the *Shijing* [Mao #303, Xuanniao] there is a line that goes: “(The dark bird) lived in the land of Yin, the land vast and expansive.” The table of the major events of the three dynasties in the *Shiji* quotes the same hymn (殷土芒芒) as 殷社芒芒 “the land altar of the Yin, vast and expansive” [the literal meaning does not seem to fit because the altar can hardly be “vast and expansive,” K.T.]. In the 21st year of Duke Xi in the *Gongyang zhuan*, we read “Archer lords offered sacrifices to 土, to which He Xiu [129–182] comments that 土 refers to 社 “spirit of the earth.” This shows that in ancient times 土 was definitely used for 社.

- (15) 此說王於戡釋中已肯定之，案無可易。<sup>47</sup>

This theory of Wang [referring to what is quoted in (13) above and a portion already quoted after example (2) in this paper] has been confirmed in his commentary on the *Jian* [*shoutang suozang Yinxu wenzi*, 2/1b] 戡 [壽堂所藏殷墟文字]. I think it cannot be changed.

- (16) 經傳に於いては「社」は土を祀るものとされていて例えば「社祭土」，「社所以神地之道也」(郊特牲)，「祀社於國所以列地利」(禮運)，「后土能平九州故祀以為社」(祭法)，「土發而社，[助時也]」(魯語)とあり，春秋に「秋

<sup>45</sup> Wang Guowei 王國維, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林, 24 juan (1928; reprinted in Taipei: Shijie shuju 世界書局, 1964), 9.3b/414.

<sup>46</sup> Wang Guowei 王國維, “Yinli zhengwen 殷禮徵文,” *Wang Zhongque gong yishu* 王忠愍公遺書, 二集 (1928; reprinted in Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1940), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Buci tongzuan kaoshi* 卜辭通纂考釋 (Tokyo: Bunkyo-dō, 1933), 334/69b.

大水鼓用牲于社」(莊公25)と大水の禁禦を社に祈っているのは、卜辭に「辛酉... 𠄎大水 𠄎 宰」(鐵雲14.4)と水害の禁禦を 𠄎 に祈っていることと符合して、春秋の「社」は卜辭の「𠄎」である明証であり、...<sup>48</sup>

In the Classics and their commentaries the *she* appears as a sacrifice to the earth; for example, we find such passages as follows: “*She* means to make a sacrifice to the earth” or “*She* is the way to regard the earth as a god” (“Xiaotesheng,” *Liji* 禮記); “To sacrifice to the earth altar in the state is thereby to list the benefits of the earth” (“Liyun,” *Liji*); “(The son of Gonggong 共工 named) Hou Tu was able to appease the Nine Dominions, and thus he was (later) sacrificed to and became the god of earth (*she*)” (“Jifa,” *Liji*); and “That the earth emanates (the Yang *qi* ‘ether’), and (that we) offer the *she* sacrifice to it is to assist timely (harvest)” (“Luyu,” *Guoyu* 國語). In the *Chunqiu* (Zhuang gong, 25th year) we find they offered a prayer to the *she* in an attempt to avert flood damages as in “In autumn there were great floods; (we) beat drums, and offered sacrificial victims to the *she*.” This matches with the prayer offering to 𠄎 to avert flood damages as in “*Xinyou* day [58] ... (we) will perform the exorcism ritual (𠄎 = 禦) on (the malevolent spirit responsible for the) floods directed toward the spirit of the earth (土 = 社) (with the use of) specially reared sheep” (*Tieyun* 14.4/*Yizhu* 835; cf. example [12]). This is a clear proof that the *she* in the *Chunqiu* corresponds to 𠄎 in OBI.

- (17) 第十五, 十六條, 都是以土為社, 社與方同時并祭. 詩小雅甫田: 以我齊明, 與我犧羊, 以社以方. 毛傳: 器實曰齊, 在器曰盛. 社后土也. 方, 迎四方氣於郊也. 鄭箋: 以絜齊豐盛, 與我純色之羊, 秋祭社與四方.<sup>49</sup>

In both inscription 15 and 16 [i.e., 祭于土方帝—*Zhuihe* 211 and 戊申卜殷貞方帝祭于土 ...—*Yibian* 5272] the graph 土 is used to stand for the word 社; the 社 and 方 sacrifices were conducted at the same time. In the Minor elegancia of the *Shijing*, Futian [Mao #211] we find as follows: “With our offer of grain and sacrificial cattle and sheep we (sacrifice) to the spirit of the altar of the earth and to the (four) quarters.” The Mao commentary says: “When the container is full it is called *zi*, what is in the container is called *cheng*. *She* refers to the god of the soil. As for *fang*, it is to welcome the air of the four quarters in the suburb.” The Zheng [Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, 127–200] commentary says: “With our ample and abundant offerings, together with unmixed colored sheep they sacrificed to the land altar and to the four quarters in the fall.”

- (18) [After a quote from *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (祀典) and *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*juan* 532, further quoting from *Xiaojing* 孝經), which I omit, this author says:] 這正是封土以為社神, ... 卜辭中亦有祈年于封土的記載, 正可與典籍相互証釋: 貞: 勿奉年于邦土 (*Qianbian* 4.17.3).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Shima Kunio 島邦男, *Inkyo bokuji kenkyū* 殷墟卜辭研究 (Hirosaki: Chūgoku kenkyūkai, 1958), 231.

<sup>49</sup> Yu Xingwu 于省吾, *Jiaguwenzi shilin* 甲骨文文字釋林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 186–87.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Shenxing 王愼行, *Guwenzi yu Yin Zhou wenming* 古文字與殷周文明 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 187–88. The OBI example Wang Shenxing quotes (*Qianbian* 4.17.3) is translated below on the basis of what I *think* he understands it, but I can not be certain. I have already given my tentative (but defensible) translation of the same inscription in example (10).

(These quotes show), in fact, that earth mounds were regarded as the gods of the soil, ... in the oracular inscriptions there is also a record of praying for a rich harvest at the earth mound, which can prove the textual testimony: “Enquired: Should (we) not pray for a (good) harvest at the earth mound of *bang*?”

What is quoted above, from (13) to (18), are only some samples that would indicate the widespread practice among OBI specialists of adopting the “two-layered evidential approach” (*erchong zhengju fa* 二重證據法) originally put forward by Wang Guowei as already mentioned (section 1). I should now like to spell out exactly what I find as problematical in their use of the transmitted texts and their commentaries. What follows are some critical comments under the number with an asterisk corresponding to the passages from (13) to (18) given above:

(13\*) Even if the name Xiang Tu appears as the name of Zhao Ming’s son who came to the throne according to the *Shiji*, this piece of information cannot be verified in the inscriptions in a clear-cut manner. The identification of 冢 with Xiang Tu in OBI has no independent support or corroborative evidence.

(14\*) It is possible that the term *zhong tu* 冢土, in the *Shi* refers to a mound as the bone graph 冢 can indeed be so interpreted in terms of historical palaeography. However, in the inscriptions we have neither *zhong tu* nor *da she* 大社 (presumably written as 大土). The *Gongyang zhuan* says “Archer lords offered sacrifices to 土, to which He Xiu comments that 土 refers to 社 ‘spirit of the land altar,’” but there is no inscription that says people from places different from Shang came to offer sacrifices to it. Furthermore, although the verb *ji* 祭 “to sacrifice” does occur in the inscriptions, it is not associated with 冢. The authority accorded to He Xiu 何休 (129–182), a Han time commentator who did not even know the existence of OBI, is so pale as to have no impact on the issue.

(15\*) This is Guo Moruo’s view in 1933, and four years later he justifyingly rejected his own view.<sup>51</sup> This has already been pointed out in 2.1.1.

(16\*) One point that Shima makes is worth further consideration. This has to do with the flood mentioned in the *Chunqiu* which Shima compares with the inscription found in *Tieyun* 14.4/*Yizhu* 835 (our example [12]). Indeed we do have the same expression, *da shui* 大水 “flood,” and the sacrificial victims may have been offered to *she* 社 “spirit of the land, Power.” It is thus possible, even likely, that floods were believed to have been caused by a supernatural being, and whatever this supernatural being was, it could, with appropriate sacrifices, be interceded by the *she*-Power. Thus, this does seem at first sight to bridge the textual and inscriptional evidence rather nicely. However, they are not superposable in every systematic detail. First, Shima failed to quote the *Chunqiu*

<sup>51</sup> Guo Moruo, *Yinqi cuibian kaoshi* (Tokyo: Bunkyo-dō, 1937), 20/8a.

entry in its entirety; it should read: 秋大水鼓用牲于社于門. Shima wanted us to understand this sentence up to 于社 as: “In autumn there were great floods; (we) beat drums, and used sacrificial victims *to the she*.” He left out the crucial phrase 于門 which is clearly a locative phrase, rather than a benefactive one. So the proper translation for this sentence has to be “In autumn there were great floods; (we) beat drums, and used sacrificial victims *at the she* and *at the gates*.” Cf. also Legge who has translated this sentence in the same way.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the OBI example uses the ritual verb *yu* 叩 (= 禦) “to lustrate, exorcise” which, as discussed in section 2.1.2, is a four-valent verb dictating the use of a subject, direct object, indirect object, and instrumental object. There is also a cultural dimension to this type of verb as discussed more fully elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> For the purpose of the present discussion I will simply state my findings here. First, I have defined the ritual verb as a kind of verb that is “used in the performance of a devotional service which might have been established by tradition to satisfy the Shang sense of propriety often believed to have some symbolic significance. By contrast, the “sacrificial verb” involves the offering of something to a deity in propitiation or homage (and even to a non-deity under special circumstances).”<sup>54</sup> Second, the ritual verb is a four-valent verb, whereas the sacrificial verb is an ordinary three-valent verb (i.e., lacking the instrumental noun from the four-valent-verb specifications). Third, the ritual verb has the intrinsic, built-in features of [+request] and [+rituality], but the sacrificial verb lacks them. If we now apply these to the verb *yong* 用 “to use, sacrifice” in the *Chunqiu* passage and to OBI, its syntactic behavior requires that we interpret it as a sacrificial, rather than a ritual verb because it lacks the fourth valent of instrument and, moreover, it lacks the [+request] and [+rituality] features as well. It thus follows that Shima is on solid grounds to say “水害の禁禦を $\Omega$ に祈っている” (sc. *inoru* 祈る = [+request] and *kingyo* 禁叩 (= 禦) = [+rituality], and a translation of this Japanese clause should be: offer a prayer to  $\Omega$  to avert flood damages). Yet for him to claim “大水の禁禦を社に祈っている” (offer a prayer to 社 to avert flood damages) for the *Chunqiu* passage is unjustified. I am here appealing to an appreciation of the original *Chunqiu* passage in its entirety. Finally, although the verb *gu* 鼓 “to drum” does occur in OBI (*Sōrui* 400.4), it is not associated with flood damages.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> James Legge, trans. *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. 5. *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*. (Original ed. published in London, 1872; reprinted in Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1966), 109. This passage from the *Chunqiu* presents yet another problem as Legge (*ibid.*) has pointed out: “The calamity of ‘great floods’ has been mentioned several times; but this is the first instance of special deprecatory services on such an occasion. Perhaps the regular ceremonies were now first departed from. The Chuen says: ‘The observances here were also extraordinary. On all occasions of calamities from the hand of Heaven, there were offerings of silks, and not of victims. And drums were not beaten, excepting on the presage of calamities by the sun and moon.’ Too [Du Yu — 222–284] defines 門 as 國門, ‘the city gates’, which is doubtless correct. But the Chuen says nothing about the drumming and sacrificing at them. Kung-yang says it was improper; but I do not know of any authority for his saying so.” If, by any remote possibility, the Gongyang tradition could be shown to have known the Shang sacrificial and ritual practices, it is correct; however, “the drumming and sacrificing at the city gates” were both improper. They sacrificed to the *she* Power.

<sup>53</sup> Takashima, “Some Ritual Verbs in Shang Texts,” *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 30.1 (2002).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. also the last portion of footnote 52.

(17\*) This is typical of Yu Xingwu's method of interpreting the language of OBI. He usually quotes widely from the transmitted texts to impose their meanings on to the inscriptional language. Indeed he is a staunch proponent of Wang Guowei's *erchong zhengju fa* "two-layered evidential approach." Here he quotes from the *Shi*, a line from ode 211 in the Mao 毛 tradition with Mao's and Zheng Xuan's commentaries as well. But, like the quotes Shima has from the *Liji* which I passed over in silence because none of them is applicable to OBI, no substance from the *Shi* passage can be retrieved, not to speak of its anachronistic commentaries. All there is in the *Shi* is the use of the sacrificial victims, *xi* 犧 "(live) sacrificial cattle" and *yang* 羊 "sheep," but *xi* does not occur in OBI, and *yang*, actually a specially reared one at that (i.e., 宰), occurs only with the verb *liao* 燎/燎 "to make a burnt offering" (*Sōru* 172.4; cf. also 祭于土宰方帝—*Zhu* 211). What is worth pointing out is that, if 𡗗 (土) is *she* 社, it is never used as a verb in OBI, while in the *Shi* the *she* is indeed used as a verb. This might suggest that some grammatical change from the language of OBI to that of the *Shi* had occurred. It is therefore difficult to agree with Yu Xingwu's claim "社與方同時并祭 the 社 and 方 sacrifices were conducted at the same time."<sup>56</sup> As regards Zheng Xuan's subcommentary to this passage, there is no evidence in OBI for the amount, color, and season of the supposed *she* sacrifice.

(18\*) When Wang Guowei propounded his "two-layered evidential approach" to Shang and Zhou studies, he limited the use of transmitted texts to the following: *Shangshu* (authentic chapters only), *Shijing*, *Yijing* (excluding the "Ten Wings"), *Wu Dide* 五帝德 and *Di xixing* 帝繫姓, *Chunqiu*, *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Shiben*, *Guben Zhushu jinian*, *Zhanguo ce* and other works by Zhou and Qin philosophers, and *Shiji* (Wang 1925: 2078–9). He believed that these texts are reliable if verified by the texts found underground. Although the field of historical investigation into Shang and Zhou expanded, the textual criticism did not seem to have developed hand in hand with such expansion, especially not, it seems to me, among OBI and BRI specialists. One example is that which I quoted from Wang Shenxing (1992). It might be unfair to pass any harshly critical judgment on the overall quality of his scholarly contribution, particularly when we find that two prefaces to his book were written by the most eminent scholars in OBI studies today, Li Xueqin 李學勤 and Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, who commend the merits of Wang's book. However, the liberal use of just about any text he can put his hands on is quite disturbing. Here he has a quote from *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 of Ying Shao 應劭 (?–?; fl. ca. 184) which, like the *Lunheng* 論衡 of Wang Chong 王充 (27–90?), was compiled with a design to "correct" the folklorish beliefs and interpretation about ancient rituals, gods

<sup>56</sup> The problem of the expression 方帝 in OBI has to be dealt with separately. Tentatively, I analyze it as consisting of 方 as an adverb meaning "to the (Powers of the four) quarters" and 帝 as a verb meaning "to make a binding sacrifice" (締), but how exactly such a sacrifice is related to the *liao* burnt sacrifice is a problem I have not yet investigated. Yu Xingwu imposes the meaning provided in the Mao commentary of "方, 迎四方氣於郊也" ("As for *fang*, it is to welcome the air of the four quarters in the suburb") on to the OBI, but there is not a shred of evidence available in the synchronic OBI sources.

and demons, pronunciations, etc.<sup>57</sup> (The design to “correct” such matters may be unquestioned, but on what basis?) He also has a quote from the *Taiping yulan*, of all things, but it was compiled in the Song dynasty (977) under the imperial edict. I have omitted giving the actual quotes as I believe they have nothing that could illuminate the Shang ritual terms, their actual practices, and their beliefs which gave them the expressions in the first place.

To sum up the above reviews of both the proponent and practitioners of the *erchong zhengju fa* “two-layered evidential approach” applied to OBI studies, it can be said that we find it hard to see any value in superimposing the information culled from the transmitted classical Chinese texts. Often they do not match with what we can glean from careful examination of the OBI text itself. And when they do, they are limited to the surface lexical items and these are used very differently in the contemporary Shang OBI.

### 3. Conclusion

An examination of the “two-layered evidential approach”, a.k.a. *erchong zhengju fa* 二重證據法, originally propounded by Wang Guowei in 1925 and practiced by a great majority of OBI specialists, has shown that it harbours a serious methodological problem. The interpretation becomes largely anachronistic, distorting the contemporary and true picture of Shang religious ideas, beliefs, and practices. We have seen how this is so in the case of *tu* 土 (𠩺, 𠩻) “land, earth” and its etymological doublet *she* 社 “god of the soil.” We have, instead, adopted the synchronic evidential approach (*gongshi zhengju fa* 共時證據法), and have tried to apply it to the problems associated with *tu* 土 and *she* 社, with the result that, although new problems are generated, much of the interpretations based on the received classical texts and their commentaries are shown to be inapplicable to the Shang OBI.

<sup>57</sup> Kondō Haruo 近藤春雄, *Chūgoku gakugei daijiten* 中國學藝大事典 (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1978), 683–84.

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## Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh: The Middle Position of the Guodian Text “Tang Yu zhi Dao 唐虞之道”<sup>1</sup>

by

Carine Defoort

### 1. The notions of Abdication and Benefit in Warring States philosophy

In a well-known passage, Mencius chides both Yangzi and Mozi for their extreme positions in relation to the ideal of “benefiting the world”:

Yangzi chooses “for oneself”: even if he could benefit the world by pulling out one hair, he would not do it. Mozi stands for “inclusive caring”: if by rubbing off [his hair] from head to foot [by hard labour] he could benefit the world, he would do it. 楊子取為我，拔一毛而利天下，不為也。墨子兼愛，摩頂放踵利天下，為之。

The remainder of this passage, which is much less known, continues in a milder spirit:

Zimo adheres to the middle, which indeed is to come close to it [the Way]. Yet, to adhere to the middle without balancing is like adhering to one [extreme]. And what I dislike about adhering to one is that it damages the Way, that it picks out one thing and rejects a hundred others.

子莫執中。執中為近之。執中無權，猶執一也。所惡執一者，為其賊道也，舉一而廢百也。(Mencius 7A26)<sup>2</sup>

Zimo, who according to Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201 C.E.), was “a worthy person from Lu,”<sup>3</sup> presumably held on to a middle position (*zhi zhong* 執中) between the Yangist

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the conference “Confucianism Resurrected,” held at Mount Holyoke, April 23–26, 2004. I thank Nicolas Standaert, Yuri Pines, Paul van Els, Michael Nylan, Huichieh Loy, Martin Svensson Ekström and Göran Malmqvist for comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> See also D.C. Lau, *Mencius* (London: Penguin Books, 1970/1984), 188; J.R. Ware, *The Sayings of Mencius* (Taipei: Confucius Publ. Co., 1970 (fifth ed.), 220; and Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zheng yi* 孟子正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991), II: 915.

<sup>3</sup> Zhao Qi was the first and foremost commentator of the *Mencius*. See Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zheng yi*, II: 917. For speculations on the person Zimo, see Qian Mu 錢穆, *Xian Qin zhuzi xinian* 先秦諸子繫年 (Taipei: Dongda, 1986/1935), 248–50, nr 81. According to Qian Mu (249–50, 621), Zimo was a contemporary of Lu Mugong (r. 415–383), Zisi (ca. 483–402) and Mo Di (444–393). He lived before Yang Zhu (ca. 390–340) and Mengzi (ca. 385–320). He may have been the son of Zizhang, namely Shen Xiang 申詳 (ca. 470–410).

and Mohist extremes. But since he failed to “balance” (*quan* 權), Mencius did not think very highly of him either.

In what follows, the passage quoted above will serve as a framework for exploring some central ideas advocated in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” (The Way of Tang and Yu). This is a short text discovered at Guodian (Hubei) in 1993, in a tomb from ca. 300 B.C.E.;<sup>4</sup> it consists of 706 characters written on 29 bamboo slips and has been reconstructed in various ways by Chinese scholars.<sup>5</sup> Despite unresolved disagreements concerning the order of the slips and the interpretation of some characters, there is general agreement that the text begins with a plea for abdication. Abdication—as becomes clear further in the text—does not only imply renouncing the seat of power before one dies, but also giving it to a person of worth rather than to one’s own heir. This act is presented as a way to benefit the world while not benefiting from it.<sup>6</sup>

The way of Tang [= Yao] and Yu [= Shun]<sup>7</sup> is to **abdicate** [the seat of power] and not to transmit it [to one’s heirs].

The royal principle of Yao and Shun was to *benefit the world* but *not benefit from it*. To **abdicate** and not transmit [the seat of power to one’s heirs] is the fullness of **sagacity**.

To *benefit the world* but *not to benefit from it* is the utmost of *goodness*.

唐虞之道，禪而不傳。

堯舜之王，利天下而弗利也。

禪而不傳，聖之盛也。

利天下而弗利也，仁之至也。(slip 1)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Guodian tomb is generally dated to 278 B.C.E. at the latest, when Chu was invaded by Qin. According to Wang Baoxuan, “A discussion of the composition dates of the various Guodian Chu slip texts and their background—with a discussion on the dating of the Guodian and Baoshan tombs,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 32.1 (fall 2000): 18–42 (translated from *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 20: 366–89), its date could be later, up to 227 B.C.E. Many scholars date “Tang Yu zhi Dao” to or around (right before or right after) Mencius’ time and around the abdication of King Kuai of Yan in 315 B.C.E. See, e.g.: Zhou Fengwu 周鳳五, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 郭店楚墓‘唐虞之道’新釋, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所季刊 70.3 (Sept. 1999): 746.

<sup>5</sup> All reconstructions follow the numbering of slips of the Wen wu ed., *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wen wu, 1998). I follow the reorganization of the slips by Zhan Qunhui 詹群慧, [www.jianbo.org/Wssf/2002/zhanqunhui01.htm](http://www.jianbo.org/Wssf/2002/zhanqunhui01.htm), based on the Wen wu edition, on Li Ling 李零, “Guodian Chu mu xiao du ji” 郭店楚墓校讀記, *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究, 19 (1999): 497–501, and on Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi.” For the reconstruction of difficult characters, I have relied on these editions, while sometimes mentioning alternatives in a footnote.

<sup>6</sup> I have translated “天下 all-under-heaven” as “world” although it rather refers to the known, civilized, ruled world. I have often avoided the term “empire” for its “imperial” associations.

<sup>7</sup> Tang and Yu were, respectively, the clan names and hence dynasties of the mythical rulers, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. See Wen wu, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, 158, note 1. Yuan Kuan 楊寬, “Lun Tang Yu lian cheng 論唐虞連稱,” *Gushi bian* 古史辨 (Taipei: Landeng wenhua, 1987), VII.A, 276–77 and Tong Shuye 童書業, “Di Yao Taotang shi’ minghao suyuan ‘帝堯陶唐氏名號溯源,’” *Gushi bian* VII.C, 1–30: 23–30 have speculated on the relative late origin of the compound 唐虞 (according to them, late Zhou or even Han), without, of course, having seen “Tang Yu zhi Dao.” The expression occurs once in the *Lunyu*, namely 8.20, which Bruce Brooks and Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 177 dates ca. 262 B.C.E.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the text is construed on the basis of a “parallel hierarchy,” with “political” values at a higher level (in this paper in bold letters throughout the translation) and more relational virtues (written in italics throughout the translation) at a lower level. See also below.

Explicitly or implicitly, scholars tend to agree that this is a Confucian text.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, apart from the praise of “sagacity” (*sheng* 聖) and “goodness” (*ren* 仁), and the abdication story referred to above, “Tang Yu zhi Dao” advocates many other values that have been promoted in Confucian writings, such as “filiality” (*xiao* 孝), “righteousness” *yi* 義, “reverence” *zun* 尊 and “respect” *jing* 敬. For instance, Shun, the paragon of the perfect ruler in classical Chinese texts, is chosen to preside over the world because of his loving and respectful attitude toward his own family members (slips 22–24); and the result of his rule is that people are transformed into loving and respectful children and subjects (slips 4–6, 21). This concern of the ruler for his family notwithstanding, the climax—the exemplary act *par excellence*—is the ruler’s abdication in favor of the most worthy person. One further indication of its Confucian bias is the fact that manuscript of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” was found in the Guodian cache amongst various other texts associated with Confucianism.<sup>10</sup> Among them, physically most similar to “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” was another text previously unknown, “Zhong xin zhi dao” (The Way of Loyalty and Reliability), which promotes the Confucian values of “loyalty” (*zhong* 忠) and “reliability” (*xin* 信) of the “gentleman” (*junzi* 君子).<sup>11</sup> It is therefore not surprising that current studies of the philosophy of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” mainly concern its relation to Confucian ideas, with only occasional references to Mohism, Daoism, or other trends of thought.<sup>12</sup>

The problem with the general characterization of “the Way of Tang and Yu” as being “Confucian” is, however, that it appears too vague to be either effectively defended or rejected. In fact, the label of “Confucianism” covers the very broad bibliographical categories of *jing* (Classics) and *ru* Masters (*zi*), established in the Han. It thus encompasses, among others, the *Lunyu*, the *Mengzi*, the *Xunzi*, as well as the many chapters of the *Liji*. These books and their individual chapters or fragments not only defend different and even opposite ideas, but also attest to an evolution in Confucian thinking under the influence of other strands of thought. Some scholars have therefore tried to identify “Tang Yu zhi Dao” with one or other of what is

<sup>9</sup> Most scholars consider the text Confucian (or, in Chinese, *ru*). See, for instance, Jiang Guanghui, “The Guodian Slips and Early Confucianism,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 32.2 (winter 2000–2001): 6–38 (translated from *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學, 20: 81–92 [revised by the author]), 6; Li Ling, “Guodian Chu mu xiao du ji,” 497; Ding Sixin 丁四新, *Guodian chu mu zhujian sixiang yanjiu* 郭店楚墓竹簡思想研究 (Beijing: Dongfang, 2000), 382; Wang Bo 王博, “Guanyu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ de jige wenti 關於‘唐虞之道’的幾個問題,” *Zhujian sixiang* 竹簡思想 (Taipei: Taiwan guoji, 2001), 86; Shu Youchun 束有春, “Yao, Shun, Yu: Ji wei yu shanrang 堯, 舜, 禹: 繼位與禪讓,” *Xun gen* 尋根, 41 (1995): 41; Yang Jianhong 楊健宏, “Shanrang zhi yu rujia lixiang tanxi 禪讓制與儒家理想探析,” *Chang de shifan xueyuan bao* 常德師範學院報, 27.3 (May 2002): 53; Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 746; Peng Bangben 彭邦本, “Chu jian ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ chu tan 楚簡‘唐虞之道’初探,” [zgxs.org/jdyj/jdyi0037.htm](http://zgxs.org/jdyj/jdyi0037.htm), 1.

<sup>10</sup> All Guodian texts, except *Laozi* and *Taiyi sheng shui*, are considered Confucian. One of them is a variant version of the received *Li ji* 30 (“*Zi yi* 緇衣”).

<sup>11</sup> The physical similarity concerns the length of the bamboo slips, the binding and the script. See e.g. Wang Bo, “Guanyu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ de jige wenti,” 79; and Sarah Allan and C. Williams, eds., *The Guodian Laozi. Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May 1998* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 2000), 178.

<sup>12</sup> Another trend in the study of this text is to reflect on its historical value or its date and place of origin. I mainly focus on the ideas in “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” more particularly the, at least in origin, “non-Confucian” ones.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 746, 754 believes that “Tang Yu zhi Dao” slightly postdates the *Mencius*.

assumed to be particular branches of Confucianism, such as the “Zisi and Mengzi” school,<sup>13</sup> or even more narrowly, with Zisi’s line of thought.<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to highlight the variation within Confucian thought, I will trace the two central concepts of “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” namely “abdication” and “benefiting the world,” as they relate to Mohism and Yangism. My main objective is not to argue for the prominence of un-Confucian views in this text, nor merely to indicate the presence of Yangist and Mohist ideas in it. Rather, I wish to analyze how this text reconciles what are two potentially opposite trends of thought. The passage just quoted from the *Mencius* is particularly fruitful for this purpose, since it not only criticizes Yang and Mo, but also indicates a middle position between them, which it then rejects as still deficient, because “adhering to one [extreme]”<sup>15</sup> and not properly balanced.

Apart from an introductory reflection on terms for “abdication” in classical Chinese, this article consists of three parts taking their cue from the ideas expressed in *Mencius* 7A26, without insisting that Mencius did in fact have this particular text in mind. The first part presents Mohist and Yangist ideas concerning “benefiting the world” (*li tianxia* 利天下), which in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” is directly related to the ideal of “abdication.” The second part analyses “the middle position” (*zhi zhong* 執中) that “Tang Yu zhi Dao” adheres to, and which could be seen as located between the two extremes of Mo and Yang, i.e. the sage ruler “benefits the world” while also “nurturing his life.” And the last part asks whether or not this position constitutes a failure, in Mencius’ terms, to “balance” or “weigh” (*wu quan* 無權). The person criticized by Mencius in this passage, somebody called Zimo, could have been the author of “Tang Yu zhi Dao”; and, conversely, Mencius might have reacted against the “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” but these are mere speculations, which I will neither try to defend nor develop further.

## 2. Abdication in “Tang Yu zhi Dao”

All scholars agree that “Tang Yu zhi Dao” advocates the ideal of abdication (*shanrang* 禪讓). Some even consider it the most straightforward promotion of this political ideal known in pre-Han texts.<sup>16</sup> Abdication is indeed presented as the *sine qua non* for ruling the people effectively by education and transformation:

If one gives [the world] to a man of worth, then the people are transformed conform to the Way by being elevated and educated. Since the birth of the people, it has never been possible to transform them without abdicating.

授賢則民興教而化乎道。不禪而能化民者，自生民未之有也。(slip 21)

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Jiang Guanghui, “The Guodian Slips and Early Confucianism,” 12–13, 23 describes this as the most popular, critical and subjective type of Confucianism.

<sup>15</sup> I have not found any other instance of this negative use of the expression “adhere to [the] one 執一” as something one-sided. The expression usually refers to a balanced, central position. See the *Lüshi chungqiu* chapter titled 執一; Riegel and Knoblock, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 434–37. In *Xunzi* 32 (“Yao wen 堯問”) Shun advises Yao to “adhere to the one and not to lose it 執一無失” so that people of “the whole world will come of themselves. To adhere to one is like Heaven and Earth 天下自來。執一如天地。” See Knoblock, *Xunzi*, III: 265. See also *Guanzi* 49 (“Nei ye 內業”) and 37 (“Xinshu xia 心朶下”), *Hanfeizi* 8; *Heguanzi* 9; *Guiguzi* 7; *Shizi* 1.5.

<sup>16</sup> Jiang Guanghui, “The Guodian Slips and Early Confucianism,” 33.

While this characterization of the text is on the whole correct, it is not without its problems. And these problems are almost always overlooked in the secondary literature on “Tang Yu zhi Dao.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, important terms for “abdicate” are absent from the text: *shan* 擅, *rang* 讓, *chuan* 傳 and the binome *shanrang* 禪讓.<sup>18</sup> The absence of *shanrang* is not surprising, since this binome does not occur in any transmitted Zhou or Han Chinese text.<sup>19</sup>

If we look at the original text written in the Chu script, we must conclude that perhaps even *shan* 禪 is absent and that, at least according to most commentators, *chuan* 傳 here means the opposite of “abdicate” as stipulated above, namely to pass the seat of power to one’s heir (and not necessarily before one’s death). For these reasons, the most problematic expression in the text is “(禪?)而不傳,” which occurs twice on slip one. This act, or attitude, is being praised as “the fullness of sagacity 聖之盛也” and the “Way of Tang and Yu 唐虞之道.”

The question of whether or not *shan* 禪 “abdicate” occurs in this text depends of course on the identification of the first character of this phrase. It occurs twelve times in “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” but in no other received or excavated text. The variants of this character on the Guodian bamboo slips are 𠄎, 𠄏, 𠄐, 𠄑, and 𠄒, printed more visibly above the title of this article; its reconstruction by the Wen wu editors is the unknown character 𠄓, also printed at the bottom of this paper.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, it is a core concept in the text, and at one point the author even explicitly defines the term: “By X is meant to elevate the virtuous and give [the seat of power] to a man of worth. (禪?)也者，上德授賢之謂也” (slip 20). But this, strictly speaking, may not refer to abdication at all. To date, this character has not been conclusively identified, but most scholars believe that it is a homophone of *shan* 禪.<sup>21</sup> Others read it as 播 *bo* “diffuse” or “emigrate,”<sup>22</sup> but that term never occurs in the context of abdica-

<sup>17</sup> Peng Bangben 彭邦本, “Chu jian Tang Yu zhi dao yu gudai shanrang chuanshuo 楚簡唐虞之道與古代禪讓傳說,” *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 1 (2003): 50–56: 51 is an exception.

<sup>18</sup> For these and other synonyms, see the pioneering work of Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981), 28, 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Xunzi*, 18 (“Zheng lun 正論”) thrice uses 擅讓, and in other instances *Xunzi* uses 擅 (never 禪), a term that carries the connotation of “arrogate oneself,” “monopolize,” “usurp.” Only its sixth meaning in the *Hanyu dacidian*: VI, 925 is “abdication,” used as a homophone for 禪. The connotation of violence and illegality of 擅 may have influenced *Xunzi* in his rejection of 擅. Moreover, he objects the violence and disorder of 擅讓 more than the possible transfer of power to a minister. “When a sage ruler resides on top, he grades people by evaluating their virtue and bestows offices by measuring their capacities.... When he dies, ... and there is a sage in the world among his descendants, then the world is not interrupted.... If there is no sage among his descendants but among the three dukes, then the world will turn to that person naturally as though he were restoring and reviving it. Only when the court is being removed and the regulations changed, it constitutes trouble. 聖王在上，決德而定次，量能而授官，[...] 聖王已沒，[...] 天下有聖而在後者，則天下不離 [...] 聖不在後子而在三公，則天下如歸，猶復而振之矣，[...] 唯其徙朝改制為難。” *Xunzi* does not consider the latter a case of 擅讓 although it would count as “abdication.” See also J. Knoblock, tr., *Xunzi. A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 Vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1988, 1990, 1994), III, 40.

<sup>20</sup> See Wen wu, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, 157. I have copied the characters from Zhang Shouzhong 張守中, ed., *Guodian Chu jian wenzi bian* 郭店楚簡文字編 (Beijing: Wen wu, 2000), 33–34. The character most to the left occurs on slip 1 (four times), the next one on slip 26, the next one on slip 24 (three times), the next one on slip 7 (two times) and the character to the right of the page occurs on slip 20 (two times).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Qiu Xigui in Wen wu, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, 158 note 2, 153 note 40; and Li Ling, “Guodian Chu mu xiao du ji,” 498.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. the reconstruction of Cheung Kwong-yue, ed., *A Study on the Chu Bamboo Manuscripts of Guodian* (Taipei: Yee Wen Publishing Co, 1999), 549–559, 682–685.

tion stories.<sup>23</sup> On the basis of the *Shuowen jiezi*, Zhou Fengwu has identified the character as *shan* 嬗 “abdicate.”<sup>24</sup> That character, however, does not occur in any of the received pre-Han sources either.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, I will tentatively join the majority of scholars in using the character 禪 in this article.

The second obstacle in the four-character phrase (禪?)而不傳 is the last character, *chuan* 傳, which here appears without any object. To make sense of the phrase as a logical part of the text’s general argument, one naturally is inclined to treat it as the opposite of the act of abdication, and thus translate it as “transmit [the seat of power to one’s heirs].” However, in stories concerning the transfer of the highest power, *chuan* is not used in that sense, but rather as a near synonym of “abdicate,” namely “transmit [the seat of power to a virtuous person].” In the *Shuowen*, the character 嬗 “abdicate” is even explained as 傳 “transmit” or “pass on.”<sup>26</sup> *Chuan* always carries the meaning of abdication to a virtuous person rather than one’s heir when the direct object of the verb is “the world” or “the empire” (傳天下).<sup>27</sup> But when the direct object is one’s state (*guo* 國) or when the recipient of the act is explicitly mentioned, then *chuan* may mean to “transmit” to one’s heir or to a virtuous minister.<sup>28</sup> The apparently illogical negation here of the term *chuan* (“transmit [the seat of power to one’s heirs]”), as in “The way of Tang and Yu is to abdicate [the seat of power] and not to *chuan* 唐虞之道，禪而不傳,” is thus quite remarkable in a text that focuses on the act of abdication. For this reason, Zhou Fengwu suggests reading the character 傳 as *zhuan* 專 “monopolize.”<sup>29</sup> But I have not come across one single instance of *zhuan* in this sense in the stories on abdication in classical Chinese texts.

Despite these uncertainties surrounding the central concepts of “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” there are enough reasons to confirm that this text does support the act of abdication. Aside from the two problematic characters discussed above, which describe the act of power transfer, various expressions in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” are common enough in other textual passages concerning the abdication by Yao in favor of Shun, or in general by the Son-of-heaven in favor of his worthy minister. For instance, it says five times (slips 20, 21, 25, 26 and 27) about Yao or the sage that he “handed over” (*shou* 授) the world to Shun or a worthy person (*xian* 賢), an expression that also occurs in similar stories from other Zhanguo or Han texts such as *Mozi*, *Xunzi*,

<sup>23</sup> I have checked Zhou and Han texts for this term (and others) with the CHANT database.

<sup>24</sup> See Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 741–42, note 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Zhang Minghong 張明弘, ed., *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Liming wenhua, 1991), 627. The *Shuowen jiezi* does not have 禪 but 12B explains 嬗 (*shan*) “change, replace” as 緩 “slow, relax, let go” and it remarks that *chuan* is also used (一曰傳也). Duan Yucai comments: “People now use the character 嬗 (graceful, *chan*)... In *Mengzi* Confucius says: ‘Tang Yu 禪....’ According to Xu Shen [...], in general, where 禪 stands, it should be 嬗. 禪 did not have that meaning. When 禪 became current, 嬗 was abolished. 嬗 has the meaning of 蟬聯 *chanlian* (stay in a position, continue to hold a post for another term).”

<sup>26</sup> See the note above.

<sup>27</sup> As in the *Zhanguo ce*, (“Yan ce 燕策”) 1: “Yu gave (the seat of power) to Yi and made Qi his official. When he grew old he considered Qi incapable to be entrusted with the empire. So he *transmitted* it to Yi 禹授益而以啟為吏，及老而以啟為不足任天下，傳之益也.” See J. Crump, *Chan-kuo ts’u’e* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1979), 518, nr 451.

<sup>28</sup> As in *Mencius* 5A6: “As virtue had declined with Yu, he did not *transmit* (the seat of power) to a man of worth but *transmitted* it to his son 至於禹而德衰，不傳於賢，而傳於子.” See also Lau, *Mencius*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 742, note 1.

*Zhanguo ce*, *Huainanzi* and *Shi ji*.<sup>30</sup> That Yao “gave” (*yu* 與) the seat of power to Shun (slip 22) is also mentioned in *Mozi*, *Mengzi* and *Huainanzi*.<sup>31</sup> And finally, the author states that the sages of antiquity “passed on the rule” (*zhi zheng* 致政; slip 26), a rather rare expression that is also found in *Zhuangzi*<sup>32</sup> and *Guanzi*, 26 (Admonitions), the latter in a passage remarkably similar to “Tang Yu zhi Dao.”<sup>33</sup>

To conclude this brief reflection on lexical matters, I confirm that “Tang Yu zhi Dao” promotes abdication, while keeping in mind the two lingering questions concerning, first, the character that I will read as *shan* 禪 and translate as “abdicate” and, second, the surprising use of the character *chuan* 傳. Inspired by Mencius’ critique of Yangzi’s and Mozi’s opposite views on “benefiting the world,” I will now approach this newly discovered text’s plea for abdication.

### 3. The threat of Yang and Mo

Mencius’ harsh criticism of Yang and Mo is not limited to the passage quoted earlier. The threat of dehumanization that Mencius finds in their views sometimes forces him to join the debate, although only reluctantly. And urged by a sense of responsibility, at times he launches verbal attacks on the most persuasive “heretics” of his days:

The sayings of Yang Zhu and Mo Di are filling the world: all sayings in the world either adhere to Yang or to Mo. Mr. Yang’s ‘for oneself’ amounts to the denial of one’s lord; Mr. Mo’s ‘care for all’ amounts to the denial of one’s father. To deny one’s father or one’s lord, this is to be a beast.

楊朱、墨翟之言盈天下。天下之言不歸楊，則歸墨。楊氏為我，是無君也；墨氏兼愛，是無父也。無父無君，是禽獸也。

Mencius considers the success of Yang and Mo a major threat to the civilized world:

If the ways of Yang and Mo are not stopped, Confucius’ way will not prevail. This means that heretic theories deceive the people and block the way to goodness and righteousness. If that happens, then they lead beasts to devour men and people will eat each other. I worry about this! To safeguard the way of the former sages I will block Yang and Mo and prevent their heretic theories from getting established.

<sup>30</sup> It occurs on slips 20, 21, 25, 26 and 27. See e.g. *Mozi* 8 (“Shangxian shang” 尚賢 A); *Xunzi*, 25 (“Cheng xiang 成相”), section 3, with Mohist and Yangist ideas, probably not Xunzi; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, III: 170, 178–79); *Zhanguo ce*, (“Yan ce 燕策”) 1. See He Jianzhang 何建章, *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), 912, nr 416A; Crump, *Chan-kuo ts’u*, nr. 451; *Huainanzi* 10 (“Miu cheng xun 繆稱訓”); *Shi ji* 15 (“Wu di benji 五帝本紀”), quoted below.

<sup>31</sup> *Mozi* 9 (“Shangxian zhong 尚賢” B), *Mengzi* 5A5, and *Huainanzi* 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Zhuangzi* 1 (“Xiao yao you 逍遙遊”): “When Yao resigned the World to Xu You, he said:....let me pass on the world 堯讓天下於許由，曰：[...] 請致天下.” See also B. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 32; A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1986), 45.

<sup>33</sup> *Guanzi* 26 (“Admonitions 戒”): “He is benevolent and therefore does not use the realm for his own profit. He is righteous and therefore does not use the realm to gain fame. He is benevolent and therefore does not replace the king. He is righteous and therefore turns over the government at age seventy 仁故不以天下為利，義故不以天下為名。仁故不代王，義故七十而致政.” W.A. Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985/1998), I: 379 dates the chapter close to Mencius, at the turn of the fourth and third century B.C.E. in the state of Qi.

楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著，是邪說誣民，充塞仁義也。仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食。吾為此懼，閑先聖之道，距楊墨，放淫辭，邪說者不得作。  
(*Mencius* 3B9)

Mencius finds no other option than to engage in the debate. As a true follower of the sages, and in the footsteps of Confucius, he is willing to fight Yang and Mo with the power of words and argumentation.

Moreover, Mencius not only worries about the success of Yang and Mo among their own followers, but even more about their influence beyond those groups. His complaint that “all sayings in the world either adhere to Yang or to Mo” may be a rhetorical exaggeration, but it nevertheless suggests that some of their ideas flourished everywhere, also among more “traditional” thinkers, defenders of the values that Confucius had stood for. Mencius was irritated not only by the doctrines of Yang and Mo, respectively, but even more by their unstoppable success among scholars who, like himself, defended traditional values. “Tang Yu zhi Dao” may have been just such an “irritating” text: it centers around two topics that Mencius only very reluctantly touches upon, i.e. “benefiting the world” and “abdication.”

First, “benefit” (*li* 利) is definitely not one of Mencius’ favorite topics. Benefit for his own state (*li wu guo* 利吾國) is what King Hui of Wei/Liang 梁惠王 (r. 334–319) naturally expects from Mencius when he welcomes the aging master to his court for the first time. But Mencius rebuffs the King by arguing that a narrow focus on benefit would inevitably turn out to be unbeneficial for, and even detrimental to, the King (*Mencius* 1A1).<sup>34</sup> Although Mencius’ own point is not phrased as bluntly in terms of benefit as it is here by me, this dialogue (the very first in the *Mencius*) demonstrates that the topic of *li* could not be avoided in the late fourth century B.C.E..<sup>35</sup> Mencius, however, never extends the scope of “benefit” to the whole world (*li tianxia* 利天下), except when he cites the extreme views of others, namely Yang and Mo (*Mencius* 7A26).

Secondly, Mencius’ views on “abdication” are also made in response to his opponents’ statements concerning the relation between the ancient sages, Yao and Shun. Mencius is here provoked by his disciples, Xianqiu Meng and Wan Zhang, who want to hear their master’s views on the matter. Irritated, Mencius rejects the question and describes it as “not being the words of a gentleman, but the talk of rustic fellows from Eastern Qi 此非君子之言，齊東野人之語也。” Mencius further insists that, as long as Yao was old but still alive, Shun assisted him (堯老而舜攝也).<sup>36</sup> Challenged by the saying that “Yao gave the world to Shun” (堯以天下與舜), Mencius holds that

<sup>34</sup> Also in *Mencius* 7A25, Shun is the example of a person not choosing for *li* (benefit, profit). For Mencius’ position on *li*, see Shun Kwong-loi, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 166–68.

<sup>35</sup> The argument that being focused on “benefit” is not “beneficial” can be found in other texts. See e.g. *Lüshi chungqiu* 22.1 (“Shen xing 慎行”) praising “one who knows the benefit of not deriving benefit 知不利之利者”; J. Knoblock & J. Riegel, tr., *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 566; and *Zhuangzi* 29 (“Dao Zhi 盜跖”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 338.

<sup>36</sup> *Mencius* 5A4. Lau, *Mencius*, 141 translates 攝 as “acted as regent.” This word means “grab,” “take hold of,” but that is the opposite of what Mencius wants to argue here. Only the fourth meaning, in the *Hanyu dacidian*, VI 970 is to “assist.”

only Heaven could do such a thing, not the Son-of-Heaven.<sup>37</sup> According to Mencius, abdication, as advocated by others, was neither a fact of the past nor an ideal for contemporary rulers.<sup>38</sup>

“Benefiting the world” and “abdication” were thus obviously not Mencius’ favorite topics of conversation. He attributes the former to Yang and Mo, while he vaguely associates the latter with “rustic fellows from Eastern Qi.”<sup>39</sup>

### 3.1 Mohists on “benefiting the world” and “abdication”

Mozi (ca. 479–381 B.C.E.) is known as the earliest and strongest advocate of “benefit,” and more specifically, of “benefiting the world” or “the empire” (*li tianxia* 利天下), as opposed to one’s own family or state. His major criterion for judging any doctrine, custom or action is whether or not it benefits the people, i.e. provides them with a livelihood and security.<sup>40</sup> For Mozi, everybody’s contribution in this respect should be evaluated and rewarded at each level of the social-political hierarchy: whoever sees a person care for and benefit his family (*ai li jia zhe* 愛利家者), should report this so that that person may be rewarded by his superiors and praised by the masses. This is even more valid for a person caring for and benefiting his state (*ai li guo zhe* 愛利國者) and, most of all, for the benefactor of the whole world (*ai li tianxia* 愛利天下).<sup>41</sup> We know that the idea of benefit remained of crucial importance in the Mohist school: the recurrence of *li* in definitions and subtle reflections on *li* throughout the *Mohist Canon* attests to this.<sup>42</sup>

At this point, the particular grammatical use of the verb 利 demands our attention. The paradoxical expression in “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” “利天下而弗利也 (to benefit the world but not to benefit from it)” plays on two opposite transitive uses of the verb *li*: “to benefit” and “to (derive) benefit from.” The second, and more exceptional, use

<sup>37</sup> *Mencius* 5A5, 5A6. See Lau, *Mencius*, 143–45. Much of *Mencius* 5A consists of reactions to such claims concerning Yao and Shun, many of them expressing the tension between familial duties (towards father and brother) and political duties. *Mencius* 5A6 attributes to Confucius the saying that “Tang and Yu abdicated 唐虞禪,” a passage that B. Brooks & T. Brooks, “The Nature and Historical Context of the *Mencius*,” in *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Alan Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 242–81, 256 date right before Qi’s conquest of Song in 286 B.C.E.

<sup>38</sup> *Mencius* advised Qi to invade Yan because the king had abdicated in 315 B.C.E. See *Mencius* 1B10, 1B11, 2B8, 2B9.

<sup>39</sup> Several scholars have associated “Tang Yu zhi Dao” with the state of Qi, more particularly around the time of the abdication in Song. See Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 746; Wang Bo 王博, “Mengzi yu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ 孟子與唐虞之道,” *Zhu jian sixiang* 竹簡思想 (Taipei: Taiwan guoji chuban you xian gongsi, 2001), 73–77, 77; Peng Bangben, “Chu jian ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ chu tan,” 1.

<sup>40</sup> On the three Mohist criteria (in *Mozi* 35) and the dominance of the third one, namely benefit, see A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 39–40.

<sup>41</sup> See *Mozi* 13 (“Shang tong xia 尚同”); Mei Yi-pao, tr., *The Works of Motze* (Taipei: Confucius Publ. Co., 1976), 146–48. See also the stress on “benefit” in *Mozi* 19 (“Fei gong xia 非攻”); Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 231–32.

<sup>42</sup> See A.C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978), 247, 249, 251.

can be traced in the *Mozi* and other writings describing Mohist ideas.<sup>43</sup> Chapter 12 of the *Mozi*, “Conforming upwards, B 尚同、中,” explains that in the times of the sage kings, if superiors had hidden businesses or surplus benefits, then, “inferiors got to benefit from them 下得而利之.”<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, chapter 32, “Against music 非樂,” condemns the lavish lifestyle of vicious kings from whom “the people below did not derive any benefit” (*wanmin fu li* 萬民弗利).<sup>45</sup> Although the choice between the two transitive meanings of *li* may be a matter of debate, paradoxical statements elsewhere similar to the one in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” clearly contain both meanings.<sup>46</sup> In the same vein, the *Lüshi chunqiu*, in the “Honoring impartiality 貴公” chapter, attributes to the Duke of Zhou the advice “Bring benefit but do not derive benefit from it 利而勿利.”<sup>47</sup> And the art of ruling is described in the same terms in another *Lüshi chunqiu* chapter related to Mohism.<sup>48</sup>

The second topic, “abdication,” was traditionally not associated with Mohism. But Gu Jiegang has argued that its first forceful promotion was indeed presented in the *Mozi*, more particularly in the triplets “Shang xian 尚賢” (Elevation of a man of worth; chapters 8, 9, 10) and “Shang tong” (Conforming upward; chapters 11, 12, 13). They reflect the growing need for capable, rather than aristocratic, administrators in increasingly large and independent states. Even Confucian texts and classics, however somewhat reluctantly and unconvincingly according to Gu, incorporated the story of the poor but capable Shun being chosen as Yao’s successor above Yao’s own son. But these Confucian abdication myths were an unsuccessful “digestion” of Mohist ideas by defenders of familial and aristocratic values: according to Gu Jiegang, they were “Mohist blood in Confucian flesh 墨家的血液在儒家的筋肉裡.”<sup>49</sup>

However, I believe that Gu Jiegang is somewhat overstating his case. Mozi may have contributed to the emergence of the ideal of abdication, but he does not focus on this topic. Although “Shangxian A” (ch. 8) states that Yao hands over the government to Shun (*shou zhi zheng* 授之政), it is not really presented as an act of abdica-

<sup>43</sup> This particular grammatical use of the verb 利 may have originated in a Mohist context. This impression is further confirmed by a Mohist-Yangist dialogue on “benefit” from *Liezi* 7, partially quoted below, in which Graham has argued that the translation has to be “corrected” in exactly this sense. See A.C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960/1990), 149. But this use of *li* also occurs in other texts. See e.g. *Xunzi* 10 (“Fu guo 富國”) quoted below; and *Hanfeizi* 5 (“Zhudao 主道”), where it is said about the enlightened ruler that people benefit from his generosity (百姓利其澤).

<sup>44</sup> See *Mozi* 12 (“Shang tong 尚同”); Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 134.

<sup>45</sup> See *Mozi* 32 (“Fei Yue 非樂”); Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 362.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. *Lüshi chunqiu* 20.1 (“Shi jun 恃君”), 3. Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 509 attribute a Mohist flavor to this passage, reminiscent of *Mozi*’s “Conforming upwards.” It explains that sages installed the ruler to make an end to disorder. Only later, when virtue had declined and the world was in disorder, “did the Son-of-heaven,” in Riegel and Knoblock’s translation: 512, “benefit from the world, the ruler of a state from his state, and the head of an office from that office 然後天子利天下，國君利國，官長利官。”

<sup>47</sup> See *Lüshi chunqiu* 1.4 (“Gui gong 貴公”), 2; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> See *Lüshi chunqiu* 20.1 (“Shi jun 恃君”), 1–2; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 511, following an emendation by Yu Yue.

<sup>49</sup> Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, “Shanrang chuanshuo qi yu Mojia kao 禪讓傳說起於墨家考,” *Gushi bian* 古史辨 VII.C, 107, see also 71–78. The “digestion” is unsuccessful, according to him, because of the tension between a certain degree of meritocracy (respect for the worthy 尊賢) and a remaining defence of the aristocracy (love for one’s family 親親). One indication of the Confucian adoption of the abdication ideal was perhaps the extension of the virtue of “yielding” (讓 *rang*) to the whole world, as in *Yaodian*, *Xunzi* and the two recently published manuscripts, *Zi Gao* 子羔 and *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏. See Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhangguo Chu zhu shu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 2 (Shanghai, Shanghai guji, 2002), 190, 285. The term 禪 does not occur in these manuscripts.

tion. It occurs at the top of a list of various meritocratic appointments (*ju* 舉) of capable ministers by exemplary rulers: Yu appointed Yi, Tang appointed Yiyin, and so on. A similar list of appointments on the basis of merit, more specifically of one's capacity to benefit the world, occurs in "Shangxian B and C" (chapters 9 and 10), where Yao is said to have found Shun on the sunny slope of Fuze and "appointed him as son-of-Heaven" (舉以為天子 in ch. 9 and 立為天子 in ch. 10). This clearly refers to the act of abdication by Yao, although it does not state whether Shun was supposed to take over the seat of power *during* Yao's life time or *after* his death, both options being explicitly rejected by *Mencius* 5A5 and 5A6.<sup>50</sup> But in *Mozi* these events are always presented in terms of personnel selection and appointment of a worthy minister by a ruler, and never in terms of *shan* or *rang*. The first in the list of meritocratic appointments of ministers in various positions just happened to coincide with abdication in favor of a worthy minister, a topic that only later became in vogue.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.2 Yangists on "benefiting the world" and "abdication"

Textual fragments tentatively identified as Yangist show more interest in abdication stories and less in benefit than Mohist writings do.<sup>52</sup> The Yangist evaluation of both topics is certainly not unambiguously positive. Yangism, according to A.C. Graham, "starts from the same calculations of benefit and harms as does Mohism, but its question is not 'How shall we benefit the world?' but 'What is truly beneficial to man?', more specifically 'What is truly beneficial to myself?'" Since the answer is not "wealth and power, as the vulgar suppose," but rather "the life and health of the body," Yangist writings abound with abdication stories focusing on "refusers," men who wisely renounced the possession of the world.<sup>53</sup> This Yangist combination of an indifference towards benefiting the world with an admiration for people who refuse the seat of power, seems to point directly to the two central concepts of "Tang Yu zhi Dao." But not all writings recognized as Yangist unanimously promote an extreme anti-political individualism.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Yangism, as opposed to Mohism, lacks a corpus of texts explicitly ascribed to a Master, as well as a formal organization. It is therefore not at all surprising that a variety of different, or even mutually contradictory, ideas are being expressed by those inspired by or named after Yang Zhu.

"Benefit" is one concept for which such variety occurs. In some Yangist writings benefit is indeed, as Graham has argued, perceived as the natural and justifiable object of man's concern.

<sup>50</sup> See D.C. Lau, *Mencius*, 143–44.

<sup>51</sup> Stories about the sage kings are absent from the three "Shang tong" chapters, but it is said that, analogous with all other positions, the Son-of-heaven is also chosen because of his worth. The problem is that in all three cases the subject of the sentence is not mentioned so that the actor is unclear. Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 112, 142 is convinced that the subject is Heaven.

<sup>52</sup> Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 54–55. On the basis of recurrent slogans and dominant concerns with one's life or nature 生/性, with one's own body or person 身 and with genuineness 真, Graham has identified some chapters as displaying a Yangist constellation of ideas in the third century B.C.E.: *Lüshi chungiu* 1/2, 1/3, 2/2, 2/3, 21/4 and *Zhuangzi* 28, 29, 30, 31. He, therein, largely follows Feng Youlan and Guan Feng.

<sup>53</sup> Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 56. See also Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 282.

<sup>54</sup> Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* consistently calls them the "individualists," but much less so in the *Disputers of the Tao*.

Therefore the sage's attitude towards sounds, colors and flavors is that if they are beneficial to his nature he chooses them, and if they are harmful to his nature he discards them. This is the way to keep one's nature intact.

是故聖人之於聲色滋味也，利於性則取之，害於性則舍之，此全性之道也。<sup>55</sup>

Thus, being concerned with benefit, if well conceived, makes one value life more than the rank of Son-of-Heaven or the wealth of the whole world.<sup>56</sup> But the problem is that

The majority of the noble and rich of the age are deluded in their attitude towards sounds, colors and flavors. They seek them day and night. If by chance they get them, then they abandon themselves to them. Since they abandon themselves to them, how can their natures not be damaged?

世之貴富者，其於聲色滋味也多惑者，日夜求，幸而得之則遁焉。遁焉，性惡得不傷？<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, I believe, *pace* Graham, that most Yangist writings tend to express a negative view of 利, since benefit is liable to be ill-conceived.<sup>58</sup> As one author explains, “The body is what one does things for; the world is the means whereby one does it. 身者、所為也，天下者、所以為也。” To risk one's head in order to get hold of a hat, is a confusion of means (所以為) and ends (所為).

Those of our age running after profit have a resemblance to this: they endanger their bodies, harm their lives, cut their throats, and chop off their heads. They too do not understand what they do things for.

世之走利，有似於此。危身傷生、刈頸斷頭以徇利，則亦不知所為也。<sup>59</sup>

According to the Yangist, the delusive attraction of “benefit” or “profit” often endangers one's person and harms one's life.

He who is able to respect life, even though honored and rich, does not harm his person by that which nurtures it, even though poor and humble, he does not allow profit to burden his body.

能尊生者，雖貴富不以養傷身，雖貧賤不以利累形。<sup>60</sup>

The most dangerous attraction is the benefit of possessing the whole world (*you tianxia* 有天下), as various abdication stories show.<sup>61</sup>

But before turning to the second major topic of “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” the ideal

<sup>55</sup> *Lüshi chungiu* 1.2 (“Ben sheng 本生”), 3; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 65; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 283. In *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”), Yao and Shun, by ruling, did what was *li* for themselves and avoided what was harmful; others did the same by declining the seat of power; see Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 337 and Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 242. See also some abdication stories below.

<sup>56</sup> *Lüshi chungiu* 1.3 (“Zhong ji 重己”), 1; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> *Lüshi chungiu* 1.2 (“Ben sheng 本生”), 3; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 65, which is not further quoted in Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 283.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”), and *Zhuangzi*, 29 (“Dao Zhi 盜跖”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 311, 318, 321, 326–29, 338. See also *Lüshi chungiu* 19.1 (“Li su 離俗”), 2; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 477.

<sup>59</sup> *Lüshi chungiu* 21.4 (“Shen wei 審為”), 4; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 556–7.

<sup>60</sup> *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”), the story on King Danfu; Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 310–11. For variation in Yangist thought, see also Shun Kwong-loi, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 40–47.

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. *Lüshi chungiu* 21.4 (“Shen wei 審為”), 4; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 556–9; *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”) and 29 (“Dao Zhi 盜跖”).

of abdication, let us linger a while on the alleged Yangist unwillingness to “benefit the world,” mentioned in Mencius’ criticism. Yangist views on *li* are in fact quite unrelated—and thus not merely opposed—to the Mohist ideal of “benefiting the world.”<sup>62</sup> As we shall see, the Yangist discourse in *li* concerns not “the world” but the integrity and preservation of one’s body. Only their opponents describe the Yangists as unwilling to “benefit the world.” Mencius’ presentation of Yang Zhu is thus in fact a transposition of Yangist themes into a Mohist mode. The distortion of the Yangist view into an antithetical position within the Mohist frame of thought becomes clearly visible in a dialogue from *Liezi* 列子 that Graham considers representative of the historical Yang Zhu.<sup>63</sup> In this passage, Mozi’s disciple asks Yang Zhu “whether he would save the age by discarding one hair 去子體之一毛以濟一世，汝為之乎？” Yang Zhu does not consider this a realistic option, and replies that “The age is certainly not something that can be saved by one hair 世固非一毛之所濟.” Urged by the Mohist to consider the hypothetical possibility anyway (“But supposing it could be done, would you then do it? 假濟為之乎”), Yang Zhu simply refuses to respond (楊子弗應): saving the age or benefiting the world is simply not one of Yang Zhu’s topics of reflection, and certainly not when posed in such ridiculous terms. What follows next is important for our understanding of the distinction between the Yangists and Mohists. One of the disciples rushes to Master Yang’s aid and reformulates the Mohist ideal of “benefiting the world” in Yangist terms. The disciple translates the Mohist ideal of “benefiting the world” into the Yangist fear of “possessing the world,” and the concomitant risk of being harmed by it. He thus asks the Mohist whether he would give up pieces of his body in order to “obtain (*huo* 獲)” heaps of gold or to “gain (*de* 得)” a state, two minor analogies of “possessing the world.”

As this story shows, having power over the world means different things for different people. Mohists naturally see it as a possibility to benefit the world, while in Yangist eyes it is potentially harmful. The presentation, by their opponents, of Yangist thought as built on an unwillingness to “benefit the world” is thus influenced by the rhetorically facile opposition with Mohist ideas. Perhaps it is also caused by the ambiguity of the expression “利天下” as both “benefiting the world” and “benefiting from the world.”<sup>64</sup> If 利天下 were to become a Yangist concern, it would probably be in the latter sense, conceived as something dangerously attractive and harmful for oneself.

The danger of “possessing the world” is thus directly related to the second main topic in “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” namely the question of “abdication.” Indeed, the various chapters identified as Yangist contain many abdication stories, which often focus on sages who refuse the seat of power and more seldom on the humble and generous ruler who abdicates. Gu Jiegang considers these stories a later evolution of the abdi-

<sup>62</sup> Mencius always opposes Yang Zhu to Mo Di—see 3B9 and 7A26—but only once in terms of “benefiting the world.”

<sup>63</sup> *Liezi* 7 (“Yang Zhu 楊朱”); Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 149.

<sup>64</sup> In his *Liezi* translation, Graham “corrects” the “distortion” of the Yangist view by twice translating 利 as “derive benefit from”: “Po-ch’eng Tzu-kaio would not *accept any external benefit* at the cost of one hair 伯成子高不以一毫利物..... When no one would lose a hair, and no one would *take* the Empire, the Empire was in good order 人人不損一毫，人人不利天下，天下治矣” (Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 149, footnote, his italics for the translation of the term *li*).

cation myth in the hands of Daoist thinkers.<sup>65</sup> As was the case with “benefit,” we can identify various views on abdication within the Yangist sphere, although the Yangist sage generally tends to decline the seat of power. Most sages simply motivate their refusal with a reference to the harm to their lives that they choose to avoid;<sup>66</sup> others worry, weep and flee from the abdicating ruler;<sup>67</sup> some are so worried and offended by the offer that they end up committing suicide, which shows that, at least for some Yangists, their concern is not merely for their survival but also for their reputation or the quality of their lives.<sup>68</sup>

But there is also a small number of other stories with a less anti-political and individualist drift. One popular—and paradoxical—topic in those stories is that it is precisely the person who firmly refuses the seat of power that is best qualified to act as ruler, since he knows his priorities and, therefore, never jeopardizes his own life and health for the sake of possessing the world. “Only he who does not harm his life with the world, deserves to be entrusted with the world 惟不以天下害其生者也，可以託天下。”<sup>69</sup> And an explicitly altruistic version is the story about the ruler who would also not sacrifice other people’s lives for his own greedy possession of worldly power, like King Danfu (大王亶父) of Bin (邠), King Wen’s grandfather, who does not want to “harm those whom he nurtures for the sake of that by which he nurtures them 不以所用養害所養。”<sup>70</sup> And, finally, some Yangist stories clearly allow the sage to act as ruler, as long as he is not attached to this exalted position and does not become arrogant.<sup>71</sup>

Such a person is trusted without speaking, correct without planning, successful without pondering. His vital essence circulates through Heaven and Earth and his spirit covers the cosmos. He accepts and encompasses everything, in the same manner as Heaven and Earth. If he rises to the position of Son-of-Heaven he is not arrogant; if he falls to the level of an ordinary subject he is not resentful. This is what we call a man who keeps his power intact.

若此人者：不言而信，不謀而當，不慮而得；精通乎天地，神覆乎宇宙；其於物無不受也，無不裹也，若天地然；上為天子而不驕，下為匹夫而不慍；此之謂全德之人。<sup>72</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Gu Jiegang, “Shanrang chuanshuo qi yu Mojia kao,” 89, 105.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. the two first stories in *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 309; Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. the third and fourth stories in *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 310; Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 225. See also a story close to the end of *Zhuangzi* 26 (“Wai wu 外物”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 302.

<sup>68</sup> See the “second series” of stories in *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”); Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 225; 231–32. See also *Lüshi chunqiu* 19.1 (“Li su 離俗”), 2; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 475–77.

<sup>69</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu* 2.2 (“Gui sheng 貴生”), 2; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 80 about Zi Zhou Zhifu, who declines the seat of power because of his health. See also *Laozi* 13; *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang 讓王”) about Prince Sou of Yue; Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 311; Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 226.

<sup>70</sup> See *Zhuangzi* 28 (“Rang wang”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 310–11; Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 225. There is also an altruistic concern in *Lüshi chunqiu* 1.2 (“Ben sheng 本生”), 4; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 65–66: “Thus, in regulating the myriad things, the sages used them to keep intact the endowment Heaven gave them.... 故聖人之制萬物也，以全其天也。”

<sup>71</sup> I have excluded some late *Liezi* stories in which abdication is rejected as a fraud. See Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 150. The cynic use of and attitude towards abdication was common in the later Han and Wei Jin periods. See Carl Leban, “Managing Heaven’s Mandate: Coded Communication in the Accession of Ts’ao P’ei, C.E. 220,” *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, ed. David Roy & Tsuen-hsuei Tsien (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978), 315–339: 335–39.

<sup>72</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu* 1.2 (“Ben sheng 本生”), 4; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 65–66. See also *Zhuangzi* 29 (“Dao Zhi”); Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 337; Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 242.

We thus find, within the variety of Yangist views, different attitudes towards political engagement and the scope of one's concerns, ranging from a straightforward rejection of the seat of power for individual reasons to a belief that nobody is a better ruler or more beneficial to others than a true Yangist sage.

To conclude, Mencius is not particularly eager to discuss "abdication" and "benefiting the world," two topics that had become increasingly influential in his days. Only when challenged does he join the debate, clearly worried about the success of Yang and Mo. While abdication myths may have been inspired by Mohist concerns, they do not figure prominently in Mozi's writings. Yangist texts, however, abound with abdication stories, but generally do not view the act in a particularly favorable light: they clearly prefer the refusing minister to the abdicating ruler. Benefiting the world, on the other hand, is a concern that most probably originated with Mozi. Although it did not catch Yangist interest, their thought, at least by the late fourth century B.C.E., is interpreted as an opposition to this ideal since Mencius portrays Mohist and Yangist ideas as extreme opposites. How could one possibly adhere to a middle position between them, as a certain Zimo known to Mencius seems to have done?

#### 4. Adhering to the middle

"Tang Yu zhi Dao" appears to be a compromise of Yangist and Mohist concerns in a Confucian shroud. But it is an uneven compromise: a mild version of Yangism, on the one hand, combined with a Mohism more pronounced than what we find in the core chapters of the *Mozi* (ch. 8–39), on the other. And it is in the paradoxical statement that the sage *li tianxia er fu li* 利天下而弗利 that the two meet.

##### 4.1 Yangist ideas in "Tang Yu zhi Dao"

We saw above that the more extreme and dominant position of Yangism tended towards an anti-political individualism, while some stories advocated an altruistic and politically active lifestyle. It is the latter position that "Tang Yu zhi Dao" assumes when its author expresses his admiration both for the ruler and his chosen minister for their part in the act of abdication:

When Yao abdicated the world and gave it to him, Shun reigned over the world while facing south and he was very lordly. Thus, Yao's abdication in favor of Shun was like this. The sages in antiquity ...<sup>73</sup>, when fifty, ordered the world and, when seventy, they handed over the rule. As their four limbs were exhausted and the sharpness of their senses weakened, they *abdicated* the world and gave it to a man of worth, then retiring to take care of their health. Therefore, we know that they did *not derive benefit* from [the world].

堯禪天下而授之，南面而王天下而甚君。故堯之禪乎舜也如此也。古者聖人[...]五十而治天下，七十而致政。四肢倦惰，耳目聰明衰，禪天下而授賢，退而養其生。此以知其弗利也。(slips 24–27)

<sup>73</sup> "When they turned twenty they were capped 二十而冒/冠" (see also *Liji* 40; J. Legge, tr., "The Li Ki," in "The Sacred Books of China. The Texts of Confucianism," vol. 3 & 4, in *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M. Müller (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1885/1986), II: 425); "when thirty they had a family三十而有家..."

Yao's abdication was thus prompted by a concern for his health. Although most Yangist stories draw attention to the minister who refuses to ascend the seat of power, some nevertheless praise the wise abdicating ruler for such an unselfish act.<sup>74</sup> And the worthy minister in Yangist stories is not always expected to refuse the seat of power, flee or commit suicide. In "Tang Yu zhi Dao" too, Shun accepts the seat of power with an attitude that at least some Yangists would have found laudable:

When, in antiquity, Shun lived in the bushes, he was not troubled; and when he became Son-of-Heaven, he was not arrogant. That he was not troubled when living in the bushes, is because he knew his lot. That he was not arrogant when he became Son-of-Heaven, is because he did not monopolize it... Since in lord-ing over the people he was not arrogant, he ended up reigning over the world without ever being doubted. When he happened to be in a low position, he did not consider the status of common man unimportant; and when he possessed the world, he did not consider that important. Possessing the world did not make him feel rich; losing the world did not cause any feeling of loss. This was the utmost of *goodness*: to *benefit* the world and *not derive benefit* from it.

夫古者舜居於草茅之中而不憂，身為天子而不驕。居於草茅之中而不憂，知命也。身為天子而不驕，不專<sup>75</sup>也[...]君民而不驕，卒王天下而不疑。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，亡天下弗能損。極仁之至，利天下而弗利也。(slips 15–20)<sup>76</sup>

Both fragments, the first on the sage ruler and the second on his minister, directly relate the matter of abdication with a certain attitude towards benefit, as do other passages from "Tang Yu zhi Dao." While the latter fragment repeats one of the text's central lines (*li tianxia er fu li* 利天下而弗利), the former only mentions *fu li* 弗利.<sup>77</sup> This is probably where the Yangists' concern lies: they warn against "benefiting from the world" because that makes rulers attached to its wealth and thus harms their lives. The well-known Yangist mistrust of "possessing the world" has thus been translated into the (Mohist) term of "benefit," but in the second sense of "benefiting from": Yao abdicated at seventy, when his senses were weakening, in order to nurture his life; Shun ruled the world in such a way that it did not tie him down.

The Yangist sages in "Tang Yu zhi Dao" were not only politically active but also altruistic, concerned with the lives of the people as well as with their own. Therefore it was characteristic of all the sage rulers to benefit the masses:

Yu regulated the floods, Yi regulated fire, Houji regulated the soil, providing people enough to take care of [their lives. Well, only] by going along the tendencies of

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. *Guanzi* 26 ("Jie 戒"), quoted in a footnote above; and *Zhuangzi* 29 ("Dao Zhi"); Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 242–43: "When Yao and Shun resigned possession of the seat of power, it was not out of goodwill to the world. They wouldn't for the sake of vainglory injure life... All those men preferred the profitable choice and refused the harmful one, and the world cites them as examples of men of excellence... 堯舜為帝而雍 (Wang Niansun replaces 雍 by 推; see Huang Jinhong 黃錦鉉, [comm.] *Zhuangzi du ben* 莊子讀本 [Taipei: San Min Publ., 1983], 344, n44), 非仁天下也, 不以美害生也 [...] 此皆就其利, 辭其害, 而天下稱賢焉."

<sup>75</sup> For the reconstruction of this character, I tentatively follow Li Ling, "Guodian Chu mu xiao du ji," 501.

<sup>76</sup> The previous passage is more corrupt but seems to make a related point about Yao, who "possessed the world through his birth right 堯生於天子而有天下" but was able, "through sagacity to live up to his lot" and "through goodness he meet the right occasion 聖以遇命, 仁以逢時" (slip 14–15, tentatively reconstructed and translated).

<sup>77</sup> Similarly, *Huainanzi* 10 ("Miu cheng 繆稱") admires Yao because he abdicated in favor of Shun in order to get rid of all the troubles that ruling a state brings about. "Since he gave it with pleasure to the worthy, in the end he did not make its benefit his own thing 樂與賢, 終不私其利矣."

their bodies (= fat, skin, blood and energy), did they nurture the correct form of their inborn nature. Accepting their lot, they did not die prematurely; nurturing their lives, they did not hurt it.

禹治水，益治火，后稷治土，足民養[生。夫唯]節/順乎脂膚血氣之情，養性命之正/政，安命而弗夭，養生而弗傷。(slips 10–11)<sup>78</sup>

Under such a ruler, all lives are saved and nurtured:

The utmost state of order is that [even] the unworthy are cared for; the utmost state of chaos is that [even] men of *worth* are destroyed. The *good* person is therefore advanced.

治之至 養不肖；亂之至 滅賢。仁者為此進也。(slip 28)

Thus, of all the Yangist personae portrayed in abdication stories, Yao and Shun of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” belong to the most altruistic and politically minded. Thanks to their capacity to abdicate and “not benefit from the world,” they are able to benefit it. As we saw above, in their contact with Mohists, Yangists talk about the danger of “possessing the world” in terms of *li tianxia* 利天下. By adhering to this milder form of Yangism, the author has taken one big step towards the middle position between Yang and Mo. But does he make a similar move away from extreme Mohism?

#### 4.2 Mohist ideas in “Tang Yu zhi Dao”

As we saw, *li tianxia* 利天下 is a dominant concern in *Mozi*: the few passages that mention abdication—always in terms of meritocracy—occasionally refer to the benefit that the best ruler gives to the world. The most worthy person deserves to rule since he “strives to increase the benefit of the world and to discard what is harmful for the world 求興天下之利，除天下之害。”<sup>79</sup>

Yao and Shun were good examples of such rulers since

Their rule over the people in the world was to care for them all and thus benefit them. They also led all the people of the world to honor Heaven and serve the spirits. Since they cared for the people and benefited them, Heaven and the ghosts rewarded them and made them [in turn] Son-of-Heaven. 其為政乎天下也，兼而愛之，從而利之，又率天下之萬民以尚尊天事鬼，愛利萬民。是故天鬼賞之，立為天子。<sup>80</sup>

Although this simple ideal of “benefiting the world” was not particularly to Mencius’ liking, it nevertheless soon became adopted by mainstream Chinese thought, even of the Confucian bent.

In *Mozi*, the counterpart of “benefiting the world” is to “discard (*chu* 除) what harms it (*hai* 害),” both referring to effectively nurturing and protective acts. This phrase is totally absent from “Tang Yu zhi Dao” but replaced by another one, namely

<sup>78</sup> Tentative reconstruction and translation.

<sup>79</sup> *Mozi* 12 (“Shang tong zhong 尚同”); Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 126. In this chapter “care 愛” is opposed to “family love 親,” while in *Tang Yu zhi Dao* they go well together.

<sup>80</sup> *Mozi* 9 (“Shang xian zhong 尚賢”); Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 88. This description comes close to *Mencius* 5A5, which claims—against abdication—that it is Heaven who gives the seat of power to the most virtuous. For more passages stressing the importance of “benefit” in the three “Shang tong” chapters, see Mei Yi-pao, *The Works of Motze*, 134, 146–48, 154.

“not to derive benefit from it 利天下而弗利.” Hence, the original pendant of “benefit the world” in terms of acting (discarding what is harmful for others) is here being replaced by another complement (not derive benefit from it), a willingness not to act for oneself. This new evolution is not necessarily indicative of a milder variant of Mohism but, on the contrary, takes altruism a step further, beyond the original ideal of actively “benefiting the world.”<sup>81</sup> In “Tang Yu zhi Dao” the ideal ruler not only provides benefit to others but also refuses to derive benefit from them.<sup>82</sup>

Let us now return to the key passages that we have discussed above, and read them together.

The utmost of *goodness* is to *benefit* the world but *not to benefit* from it. “*Abdicating*” means elevating the *virtuous* and giving [the seat of power] to a *man of worth*. If one elevates the *virtuous*, the world has its lord and the age is illumined.<sup>83</sup> If one gives it to a *man of worth*, then people are transformed according to the Way by being elevated and educated. Since the birth of the people, it has never happened that one could transform them without *abdicating*.

極仁之至，利天下而弗利也。禪也者上德授賢之謂也。上德則天下有君而世明。授賢則民興教而化乎道。不禪而能化民者自生民未之有也。<sup>84</sup> (slips 19–21)

The evaluation of Yao, Shun and the ideal of abdication as expressed in terms of this complementary attitude towards “benefit” is not exclusive to this text.<sup>85</sup> According to a *Guanzi* passage that W. Allyn Rickett dates to the Han dynasty, Shun is generally considered the model of this double attitude towards *li*:

In general, Shun is the example of one who is able to benefit others with what is not beneficial [for oneself]. Shun tilled Mount Li, fashioned banks of clay for the Yellow River, and fished the Lei marsh. He did not derive any benefit from it, but did it to instruct the people. And the people all benefited from it. This is what is referred to as one being able to benefit others with what does not benefit oneself.

凡所謂能以所不利，利人者，舜是也。舜耕歷山，陶河濱，漁雷澤，不取其利，以教百姓，百姓舉利之。<sup>86</sup>此所謂能以所不利，利人者也。<sup>87</sup>

This description is closely related to a line in *Shi ji*, 1 (“Wu Di benji 五帝本紀”), but the *Guanzi* adds the double reflection on “benefit.” Elsewhere, “Wu Di benji” contains many elements of the well-known abdication story in *Shang shu*, 1 (“Yaodian 堯典”)

<sup>81</sup> “Benefit” (*li*) is usually considered active and positive in the core chapters, although it occurs as negative and active in the probably oldest Mozi chapters, namely “Fei gong shang 非攻,” and more often in chapter 14 “Jian ai shang 兼愛.” See my “The growing scope of ‘jian 兼’: differences between chapters 14, 15 and 16 of the *Mozi*,” forthcoming in *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005–2006).

<sup>82</sup> For a similar idea, see *Xunzi* “Fu guo 富國,” where the ideal rule is described as “benefiting but not deriving benefit from them 利而不利之” and as something analogous with “caring for but not making use of them 愛而不用者.”

<sup>83</sup> This illumination of the age may relate to the otherwise unattested “Ode of Yu,” the clan name of Shun: “If the great illumination does not come out, everything is in the dark. If the sage is not in the top position, the world is bound to collapse 《虞詩》曰：大明不出，萬物皆隱。聖者不在上，天下必壞” (slip 27–28). For 隱 I follow Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 756.

<sup>84</sup> Zhou Fengwu, “Guodian Chu mu ‘Tang Yu zhi dao’ xin shi,” 754 argues that the expression “since the birth of the people, ... 自生民” is typical for *Mengzi* and *Mozi*.

<sup>85</sup> In *Mencius* 7A25 too, Shun is the example of a person who does not choose for benefit.

<sup>86</sup> Rickett, *Guanzi*, I, 147 translates “They, in turn benefited him,” thus choosing the alternative transitive meaning of *li*.

<sup>87</sup> *Guanzi* 66 (“Ban fa jie 版法解”); Rickett, *Guanzi*, I, 146–47. He, among other scholars, believes that this passage belongs elsewhere and that it quotes *Shi ji* 1. See Rickett, *Guanzi*, I, 136–37.

and *Mencius* 5A5, but where the long parallel passage ends, the *Shi ji* continues:<sup>88</sup>

Yao realized that his son, Dan Zhu, was unworthy and that he did not qualify to be given the world; thereupon Yao considered giving it to Shun. Because he gave it to Shun, the world reaped its benefit; if he had given it to Dan Zhu, the world would have suffered and Dan Zhu would have reaped its benefit. Yao said: "I will not in the end cause suffering to the world in order to benefit one person." And so he finally gave the world to Shun.

堯知子丹朱之不肖，不足授天下，於是乃權授舜。授舜，則天下得其利 而丹朱病；授丹朱，則天下病而丹朱得其利。堯曰「終不以天下之病而利一人」，而卒授舜以天下。<sup>89</sup>

In "Tang Yu zhi Dao," as in this passage, the rejection of "benefiting from the world" specifically refers to passing on the seat of power to one's heirs. The recurrent parallelism between "abdication" and "benefit" shows that this association was constantly on the author's mind.<sup>90</sup> Abdication is the ultimate act of sagacity (*sheng*), while a correct attitude towards benefit is ultimate goodness (*ren*). By embodying the attitude of goodness that goes with abdication, the ruler is a model of correctness and thus naturally gives benefit to the people of his world. In "Tang Yu zhi Dao," the focus has thus moved from acts that "benefit the world" towards the capacity "not to benefit from it." As we saw above (slips 19–21), such a sage has an enormous transformative impact on the people. Perhaps the following lines, tentatively reconstructed and translated, carry a similar message:

Not showing greed when one's life is approaching its end; and not trying to benefit from [the world] when one is about to perish: this is to embody *goodness*.<sup>91</sup> If one makes sure to *correct* first one's person before correcting the age, then the Way of the *sages* is being perfected. Thus, the [Way ... ] of Tang (= Yao) and Yu (= Shun) .... the *correct* one. They were able to *abdicate* the world. 身窮不貪<sup>92</sup>，沒而弗利，躬仁矣。必正其身，然後正世，聖道備矣。故唐虞之[道 ]之正者，能以天下禪矣。(slips 2–3, 22).

Although Mohists tend to argue in terms of "benefit," the Mohist voice in "Tang Yu zhi Dao" nevertheless says something new: while active deeds that benefit the world remain important,<sup>93</sup> they have come to depend on something more important: the *willingness not to benefit from* the world, the capacity to abdicate. This prevalence of a general attitude over concrete acts is perhaps also reflected by the fact that the

<sup>88</sup> The abdication story in *Shangshu* never uses 禪, but 讓. Mencius refuses to consider the act 禪.

<sup>89</sup> *Shi ji* 1.30; W. Nienhauser, ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records 1: The Basic Annals of Pre-Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 10–11. Sima Zhen explains 權 here as a correct decision that goes against the normal rule in the hand-over of the seat of power, which is heredity. For reflections on this term, see part 3 of this paper and Griet Vankeerberghen, "A Trinity of Meaning: *Quan* or Weighing as a Metaphor for Action in Ancient Chinese Texts," forthcoming in *Early China*.

<sup>90</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu* 20.2 ("Chang li 長利"), 1; Knoblock & Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 514–15, a passage identified as Mohist, also opposes "long-term benefit for the world 天下之長利" to "showing favoritism towards their own descendants 私其子孫."

<sup>91</sup> I follow Qiu Xigui in Wen wu, *Guodian Chu mu zhu jian*, 159 n6.

<sup>92</sup> Zhou Fengwu, "Guodian Chu mu 'Tang Yu zhi dao' xin shi," 742, n3 suggests 慍.

<sup>93</sup> Also Later Mohists explicitly appreciate the intention to benefit, even if one does not succeed or is not actually employed. See *Mozi* 44; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 249; the definition of "filial piety 孝" in *Mozi* 42; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 275; the definition of "justice 義" in *Mozi* 42; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 271.

expression “respecting men of worth” (尊賢) in this text (slips 6, 7, 8, 10) lacks the counterpart “using the capable,” which is common in the Mohist expression “honor men of worth and use the capable 尚賢使能.” By going one step further, the Mohist element in this text has thus also deepened and thereby come closer to the Yangist element, which promotes a certain attitude or capacity, namely to refuse and refrain. In “Tang Yu zhi Dao” this deepened “Mohism” is reconciled with an altruistic and political version of Yangism. The Yangist and Mohist voices combined in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” create something new for both of them: the capacity to *fu li* 弗利 in the statement that the sage, “while benefiting the world, *does not benefit from it.*” For Yangists, it is a mild translation of their longstanding fear of being burdened by “the possession of the world;” for Mohists it deepens their duty to benefit others. This is where the Yangist avoidance of a major cause of harm and the Mohist renouncement of one’s own family’s profit finally meet.

### 5. A failure to balance?

“Tang Yu zhi Dao” thus presents a well considered middle position (*zhi zhong* 執中) between Yang and Mo, as did Zimo according to Mencius. Could it be that Mencius nevertheless rejects this position because it fails to *quan* (無權), and that it therefore still adheres to one of them (執一)? What does Mencius mean by *quan*? Aside from this passage, Mencius twice mentions *quan* (1A7 and 4A17), and even goes on to define and promote it.

The first passage is *Mencius* 1A7, a dialogue with King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 (r. 319–301), in which Mencius urges the King to consider the possible alternatives before engaging in war. Since “only after weighing one knows light from heavy 權然後知輕重,”<sup>94</sup> the metaphor of the scale with two even arms suggests that weighing is a matter of choosing between two different or even exclusive options. This is also how Later Mohists define *quan*: “Weighing light and heavy among the things treated as units, is what is meant by ‘weighing’ 於所體之中而權輕重之謂權.”<sup>95</sup> To illustrate this definition, they use an analogy with sacrificing parts of the body in relation to benefit and harm: “cutting off one finger to save an arm is choosing the larger among benefits (利之中取大) and the smaller among harms (害之中取小)” and “when you encounter a robber, to save your life at the cost of an arm is beneficial.”<sup>96</sup>

As Graham has suggested, the use of *quan* as a metaphor for the mechanism of choosing, as used by Mencius in his conversation with King Xuan of Qi, probably originated in Yangist thought and was adopted by Mohists.<sup>97</sup> What is heavy and thus tilts the scales symbolizes what is most important and hence the preferable end, the most valuable thing. Everybody agrees that the world is very heavy, but for a Yang-

<sup>94</sup> *Mengzi* 1A7; see also Lau, *Mencius*, 57; J.R. Ware, trans., *The Sayings of Mencius* (Taipei: Confucius Publ. Co., 1970), 14.

<sup>95</sup> *Mozi* 44; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 252–3. To determine what one likes (欲) and dislikes (惡) one weighs benefit (權利) and harm (權害). See *Mozi* 40; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 332.

<sup>96</sup> *Mozi* 44; Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 252–3.

<sup>97</sup> Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, 46.

ist, some things are even heavier, such as one's own life. However, "Tang Yu zhi Dao" does not *quan* in the sense just described. In its attempt to adhere to the middle, it does not make the point that either one's life or the world is the heavier alternative. By accepting the seat of power but abdicating at the age of seventy, the sage keeps both in a perfect balance. Could it be then that Mencius' criticism of Zimo also holds for this text, namely that it fails to "weigh" as in *Mencius* 1A7, namely to choose between two exclusive positions?

Probably not. If the author of "Tang Yu zhi Dao" did what Mencius describes in his conversation with King Xuan as "weigh," namely let the scales indicate the heavier alternative, he would obviously choose either in favor of his life or in favor of the seat of power, either for Yang or for Mo, and thus do what Mencius accuses Zimo of—precisely because of his failure to *quan*—namely to "adhere to one 執一." Since Mencius praises Zimo for "adhering to the middle" and then chides him for his failure to *quan*, he may be thinking of a different type of scales. According to Griet Vankeerberghen, there is indeed another set of examples in early Chinese philosophical literature in which the underlying metaphor of *quan*, also used in its verbal sense, "is not that of a scale with one arm up and the other down, but one of a scale that the metaphorical agent is trying to bring in balance."<sup>98</sup> This image of a balance can be visualized as a different, more sophisticated type of scale, with subdividing marks on both arms, indicating that both weights could move along the beam, shifting closer to or away from the fulcrum.<sup>99</sup> The aim of *quan*, then, is not to make the scales decisively tilt in one direction, but, on the contrary, to stay in balance. And by taking the circumstances into consideration, one is able to subtly "adjust the scale."

Mencius' remark that Zimo "adhered to the middle" but failed to "balance" can perhaps be understood in light of this alternative metaphor: "Indeed, if one just assumes that the fulcrum will always be in the middle of the two weights, without adjusting the distance toward the fulcrum of the weights suspended on either arm of the balance, the result will be one-sidedness, as the scale will lose balance."<sup>100</sup> According to Zhao Qi, the first commentator of the *Mencius*, the master criticizes Zimo for his inability to change with the situation or the times. Perhaps Zimo rigidly stuck to some fixed middle position between Yang and Mo principles without any adaptation to the concrete circumstances. The Qing scholar, Jiao Xun (1703–1760), agrees with this interpretation and refers to a *Mencius* passage in which Yu and Ji are praised for their devotion to public service, while Yan Hui is also praised for avoiding political participation. Since the former chose for a Mohist lifestyle when "facing a peaceful age 當平世" and the latter for a Yangist redrawing when "facing a disordered age 當亂世," Confucius, in both cases, "considered them worthies 孔子賢之."<sup>101</sup> In another passage, Mencius also describes King Tang 湯王, founder of the Shang dynasty, as able to evaluate men, since his way of adhering to the middle (執

<sup>98</sup> Vankeerberghen, "A Trinity of Meaning," 16.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 refers to such weighing devices discovered in Warring States Chu.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, footnote.

<sup>101</sup> *Mengzi* 4B29; Lau, *Mencius*, 134–35. Mencius believes that "Yu, Ji and Yan Hui share the same Way 禹稷顏回同道" and that they would have acted like the other if they were in each other's place. See also Shun Kwong-loi, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 69–70.

中)<sup>102</sup> was—as opposed to Zimo’s—“to have no fixed formula when he installed worthy men 立賢無方.”<sup>103</sup>

The only other *Mencius* passage with *quan* (4A17) uses the metaphor in exactly this way: the master argues that, in order to save one’s drowning sister-in-law, one ought to reach out one’s hand and thereby temporarily break the ritual prescription that forbids men and women to touch each other. “That men and women should not touch each other, is a ritual prescription; to reach out one’s hand helping one’s sister-in-law who is drowning, is *quan* 男女授受不親，禮也；嫂溺，援之以手者權也。” For Mencius, “not to help one’s sister-in-law who is drowning, is to be a beast 嫂溺不援，是豺狼也,” something he consistently accuses Yang and Mo of.<sup>104</sup>

These two metaphors behind *quan* used in the *Mencius*—“choosing” versus “balancing”—do not necessarily contradict each other. While Mohists and Yangists, according to Mencius, once and for all make and consistently defend their choice in terms of the “heaviest” alternative, Mencius insists that every act of choosing by weighing ought to start from and return to a carefully balancing scale, taking into account various values as well as the concrete conditions. One ought always to determine the heaviest alternative when deciding on a particular course of action (*Mencius* 1A7), but with an attitude or mind that is constantly balancing: assessing the various weights and considering the situation (*Mencius* 4A17). To make one’s choice and rigidly stick to it for the rest of one’s life, is a failure to reflect. Because the capacity for subtle and continuous reflection is what makes humans different from beasts, exposure to the fashionable ideas of Yang and Mo risks depriving man of his most human capacity.

But if Mencius were criticizing the author of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” with reference to this alternative type of *quan* he would seem unfair, because this balancing attitude is exactly what the text advocates, at least according to the one passage that uses the metaphor of weighing. On slips 18–19, quoted above, Shun is characterized as somebody who did not consider the status of common man “light” when he was in a low position, nor did he consider the world “heavy” when he possessed it.<sup>105</sup> Shun’s evaluation is adjusted to the circumstances in which he happens to be, whether living in poverty or possessing the seat of power. And he is furthermore praised for *not* looking down upon the status of common man and for *not* putting too much weight on the world; in other words, for not letting the scales tilt into either one direction. Not perturbed by the possession or loss of the seat of power, he is unattached to it and thus able to remain in balance. In line with the stress on “not benefiting from the world,” the metaphor of weighing in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” describes an attitude of perfect balance as a precondition to taking action.

Moreover, the views in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” can in general be seen as attempts to

<sup>102</sup> 執中 is once mentioned in the *Lunyu*, namely *Lunyu* 20.1, where it is considered positive and related to abdication. But this passage is probably relatively late. Brooks & Brooks, *The Original Analects*, 192, dates it ca 251 B.C. and Gu Jiegang, “Shanrang chuanshuo qi yu Mojia kao,” 62, believes that it postdates *Mencius*.

<sup>103</sup> *Mencius* 4B20; Lau, *Mencius*, 131. Jiao Xun comments: “he only selected the person of worth and did not follow any other fixed method. So, his adhering to the middle was by *quan*.”

<sup>104</sup> *Mencius* 4A17; Lau, *Mencius*, 124. See e.g. *Mencius* 3B9 quoted above.

<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, *Mencius* 7A35 also describes Shun as unattached to the possession of *tianxia*, but here it is opposed to family duties, more specifically to keeping one’s father out of prison. Lau, *Mencius*, 190; Ware, *The Sayings of Mencius*, 224.

balance or weigh. The whole text is construed on the basis of a “parallel hierarchy.” At the highest and political level (in bold letters throughout the translation), the ruler who respects (*zun* 尊) men of worth (*xian* 賢) or virtue (*de* 德), abdicates (*shan* 禪) the seat of power; he is righteous (*yi* 義), correct (*zheng* 正) and sagely (*sheng* 聖). A parallel set of values (which I have put in italics) consists of more relational virtues: the person who truly benefits the world (*li tianxia* 利天下) is good (*ren* 仁), caring (*ai* 愛), loving his relatives (*qin* 親) and filial (*xiao* 孝).

The behavior of Yao and Shun was to *love relatives* and *respect men of worth*. Since they *loved relatives* they were *filial*; since they *respected men of worth* they *abdicated*.

The method of *filiality* is to *care for* the people in the world; the method of *abdication* is that no *virtue* remains hidden in the age.

*Filiality* is the crown of *goodness*; *abdication* is the utmost of *righteousness*.

堯舜之行，愛親尊賢。愛親故孝，尊賢故禪。孝之方，愛天下之民；禪之傳，世亡隱德。孝仁之冕也。禪義之至也。

Although the political values seem to enjoy a higher status, the author takes pains to stress their mutual dependence:

If in *loving relatives* one forgets *men of worth*, one is *good* but not quite *righteous*. If in *respecting men of worth* one omits *relatives*, one is *righteous* but not quite *good*.

愛親忘賢，仁而未義也。尊賢遺親，義而未仁也。(slips 6–9)

This, too, may be seen as an attempt to bring different values—many more than merely Mohist and Yangist ones—together into one harmonious view. But that would lead us far beyond the scope of this article.<sup>106</sup>

It is now time to leave behind the framework of *Mencius* 7A26. It has not been my intention to argue that Zimo was the actual author of “Tang Yu zhi Dao,” nor to insist that Mencius—in this passage or elsewhere—reacted against this particular text. But he was probably provoked by views of likeminded scholars who, in his eyes, were misled by the fashionable ideas of their disorderly age. Although he portrayed Yang and Mo as two opposite extremes, in “Tang Yu zhi Dao” they are well fused into a middle position. As a relatively political and altruistic variant of Yangism, the text does not reject “possessing the world,” but translates fears of attachment to it with a Mohist catchword, “benefit”: the sage can preside over the world, but does not “benefit from it.” The Mohist voice in the text has also changed, and now stresses the sage’s attitude of restraint in relation to *li* as a precondition of his beneficial acts.

It is thus my claim that Confucianism became what it was thanks to such texts as “Tang Yu zhi Dao.” I have left the “typically Confucian” content of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” for others to examine and focused on those ideas that slowly made their way into the Confucian corpus. Confucius was probably not concerned with “benefiting the world” and “abdication;”<sup>107</sup> Mencius was challenged by these ideas; and yet by

<sup>106</sup> For a more general reflection of the content of “Tang Yu zhi Dao” see e.g. Ding Sixin, *Guodian Chu mu zhu jian sixiang yanjiu*, 359–387.

<sup>107</sup> The *Lunyu* passages mentioning abdication date from the middle of the third century B.C.E.: e.g. *Lunyu* 8.1, dated by Brooks & Brooks, *The Original Analects*, 176 ca. 262 B.C.E., and *Lunyu* 20.1, discussed above.

the end of the Zhou both topics were prevalent in Confucian writings.<sup>108</sup> Yangism and Mohism were indeed the blood that, flexibly and fluently, fed the Confucian flesh as embodied in "Tang Yu zhi Dao."

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<sup>108</sup> As for "benefiting the world," Xunzi does not even argue but already assumes that it is an ideal. See e.g. *Xunzi* 6 ("Fei shier zi 非十二子"); Knoblock, *Xunzi*, I: 223, where he criticises Mohists for "not knowing how to benefit the world 不知一天下." See also a possibly intrusive passage (according to Knoblock, *Xunzi*, II: 92) in *Xunzi* 9 ("Wang zhi 王制"); Knoblock, *Xunzi*, II: 104, where the climax of order leads to "benefiting every one in the world 兼利天下." As for the "abdication" question, aside from *Xunzi* 18 ("Zhenglun 正論"), discussed in a footnote above, *Xunzi* 25 ("Cheng xiang 成相") is not only very positive about abdication, but also extremely Mohist in thought, and therefore perhaps not representative for Xunzi. See Knoblock, *Xunzi*, III: 170–1, 178–181.

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# Writing History in the Face of the Other: Early Japanese Anthologies and the Beginnings of Literature

by

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The writing of literary history in textual cultures that develop in symbiosis with an older, more authoritative reference culture faces complex challenges. It has to negotiate the desire for cultural self-colonization, which promises access to a realm of higher refinement and sophistication, against the desire for self-assertion and self-defense of a new tradition. It can not simply choose its beginnings, but it is from the outset entangled in the historiographical models and in the prolific literary production of the possibly much older reference culture. Thus, especially in the early stages of the development of symbiotic cultures, literary history gets written from a place in which the indigenous tradition is just emerging and in which both literature and reflection on literature are shaped and challenged by the models of the reference culture. These models were developed over a much longer time period in the reference culture and in response to its own inner logic of cultural development. Once they get appropriated in the younger culture they enter a new linguistic, sociohistorical and literary force field in which they are adapted, reinvented or discarded depending on new needs.

This article shows how early Japanese anthologies tackled the challenge of writing literary history. From a world historical perspective the Japanese case is quite unique, because it encompassed, unlike Roman literary culture that functioned in Latin and Greek, a triliterate canon of texts that included texts in Chinese, as well as texts in the hybrid literary idiom of “Sino-Japanese” (漢文 *kanbun*) and in Literary Japanese. This peculiar constellation resulted from a lack of a shared history with Japan’s reference culture China. While Rome conquered Greece in the second century B.C. when increasingly expanding its influence over all of the Mediterranean, Japan, in contrast, never conquered China up until the 20th century. Accordingly, Rome became the center of a vast multilingual empire, in which the Roman elite was expected to function in a biliterate mode, namely be able to read, speak, and

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank David Lurie, David Damrosch, Katharina Volk, Martin Svensson Ekström, and the two anonymous referees of *BMFEA* for their comments and contributions to this article.  
All dates are A.D. unless otherwise indicated.

sometimes write in both Greek and Latin. In stark contrast, Japan remained for most of its history a rather isolated archipelago, politically independent, yet culturally heavily influenced by the developments on the Chinese continent and the Korean peninsula.

We could say that Sino-Japanese constituted a linguistic, sociological, and literary “third space”: rather than being a clearly definable language, it captures a pliable linguistic continuum between Literary Chinese and Literary Japanese. Sociologically, Sino-Japanese functioned as clerical language in both senses of the word: it was the language of the Buddhist clergy and of imperial administration, thereby associated with public, male court-culture and ceremonial protocol. In the realm of literature Sino-Japanese poetry was inevitably in constant exchange or even competition with Chinese poetry, the royal literary genre on the continent, but also with Japanese poetry. Thus, the very doubleness of the Japanese literary tradition, which consists of a Sino-Japanese and a Japanese textual corpus, and its relationship to Chinese literature created a complex triangular constellation difficult to capture in any linear account of literary history.

The earliest attempt to account for literary history shaped by this intricate constellation is preserved in the Sino-Japanese anthology *Kaifūsō* (Florilegium of Cherished Airs 懷風藻; 751).<sup>2</sup> Its preface inscribed Japanese literary history into the general history of the rise of civilization (Ch. *wen* 文). This storyline echoed the preface to the canonical Chinese anthology *Wenxuan* 文選, compiled by Xiao Tong (501–31), Prince Zhaoming of the Liang Dynasty, which was part of the standard repertoire of Japanese elite education. The choice of “wen” as key concept allowed the *Kaifūsō* preface to plot the history of civilization and textuality, of governance and literature onto one and the same timeline and thus to conveniently combine the establishment of imperial power with the beginning of civilization and the development of literature. Literature in general, and poetry as its most prestigious genre, could legitimately claim the central place Cao Pi (187–226), Emperor Wen of the Wei Dynasty, had accorded it in his *Discourse on Literature* (*Lunwen* 論文): “Literary works are the greatest accomplishment in the workings of a state, a splendor that never decays 蓋文章經國之大業，不朽之盛事。”<sup>3</sup>

This storyline of the *Kaifūsō* preface was severely challenged by a radically new account of literary history in the first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Collection of Old and New Japanese Poems* (*Kokinwakashū* 古今和歌集; hereafter *Kokinshū*; 905). In order to supplant the authority of Sino-Japanese poetry as a genre of public stature and insert the Japanese tradition in its spot the *Kokinshū* drew on cosmological narratives from Chinese sources and the Japanese Chronicles and scripted the rise of Japanese poetry along the line of the divine beginnings of the cosmos, thereby proving the Japanese tradition superior both on chronological and conceptual grounds.

<sup>2</sup> The most innovative scholarship on the *Kaifūsō* has recently appeared in the volume *Kaifūsō: Kanji bunkaken no naka no Nihon kodai kanshi* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2000) edited by Tatsumi Masaaki. It calls for a research that places the *Kaifūsō* within an East Asian context and explores the social space of the poetry in the anthology, e. g. the contemporary salon and banquet culture. For a comprehensive bibliography of recent *Kaifūsō* scholarship see the appendix of the volume.

<sup>3</sup> *Wenxuan*. *Zhongguo gudian wenxue congshu* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1987), 2271. Translation by Stephen Owen in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature. Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton 1996), 361.

It is significant that in devising their grand narratives of the primeval origins of literature in Japan neither the *Kaifūsō* nor the *Kokinshū* compilers felt compelled to admit to the undeniable historical fact that literature in Japan emerged much later than in China and that the stakes were not on equal ground. This strategy to humbly bow to the reference culture and downplay one's own tradition only appeared much later in the Late Heian period in a piece by Ōe no Masafusa, a late 11th century scholar-official with predilections for Chinese literature and scholarship. The title of his elegant Sino-Japanese prose composition is "A Record on the Realm of Poetry" (J. *Shikyōki* 詩境記). Masafusa had a bent for the quirky—he also wrote a record of itinerant singing girls—and this comes equally to the fore in this unique piece, which unfortunately seems to be unfinished. Masafusa sketches a literary realm distinct from either the political or the natural world with an enchanted logic of its very own:

夫詩境者	As for the Realm of Poetry:
無水土山川	it lacks water or soil, mountains or rivers
無人民戶邑	and has no inhabitants or settlements.
又不知在何方面	Even its whereabouts are unknown.
瞥然而至	One gets there in the blink of an eye
倏然而往	just to be suddenly gone again.
至其佳境	Reaching this fair realm
難中之難也	is one of the most difficult things.
以翰墨為場	Brush and ink are its expanse,
以感傷為俗	sentiment and suffering its customs.
花月輸租稅	Taxes are collected in [units of ] blossoms and moon
煙霞代封錄	and salary is replaced with smoke and mist.
桃李施不言之化	Peaches and pears effect silent moral transformation,
蘭菊飽性馨之德	while orchids and chrysanthemums satiate with their fragrant virtue. <sup>4</sup>
不聞風塵之變	Never would you hear of dust-stirring military upheavals
不看露霧之侵	or see cold dew and fog attack your body. <sup>5</sup>

Masafusa playfully builds his "Realm of Poetry" on a piece by the 7th century Chinese poet Wang Ji (590–644), suggestively entitled "A Record on the Land of Drunkenness" (Ch. *Zuixiangji* 醉鄉記).<sup>6</sup> Grafting the "Realm of Poetry" onto a "Land

<sup>4</sup> The fruits and plants in this parallel phrase stand for a heroic general, Li Guang, and a virtuous minister, Qu Yuan. According to Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) Li Guang was extremely plain and unassuming, yet revered by everybody in the empire for his uprightness. Sima Qian captures the general's qualities with the proverb "Although the peach and pear tree are silent, a path forms naturally underneath them." *Shiji* 109, 2878. The orchids are associated with the poet-official Qu Yuan, a virtuous minister who was not recognized by his ruler, the king of Chu, and therefore committed suicide, recounting his unsuccessful enterprise in "Encountering Sorrow" (*Lisao* 離騷) preserved in the *Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辭). The phrase implies that the realm of poetry is graced with virtuous servants of the state such as Li Guang and Qu Yuan. For the "fragrant virtue" trope in the *Songs of the South* see Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 13–17.

<sup>5</sup> The text is based on the *Shintei zōho Kokushi taikai* and on Gotō Akio's commentary "Ōe no Masafusa 'Shikyōki shichū,'" in *Chūko bungaku to kanbungaku II* (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1986–87): 303–26. Wang Ji's "Record" is preserved in the "Parables" section of the *Wenyuan yinghua*, 833. The image of a "Land of Drunkenness" became popular in the Mid- and Late Tang and is also referred to by Japanese *kanshi* poets such as Sugawara no Michizane, Ki no Haseo, and Masafusa's grandfather Ōe no Masahira.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Ji's "Record" was highly popular in Japan and also served to sketch other alternative realms: the monk Ennin (794–864) whose diary records his experiences in China during the famous persecutions of Buddhism under Emperor Wuzong uses Wang Ji's "Record" as a blueprint for his "Record on the Land of Stillness and Enlightenment 寂光土記" to depict the promised land of Tiantai Buddhism.

of Drunkenness” seems perfectly sensible from the perspective of a literary tradition in which composing poetry and getting drunk are metonymical endeavors and commitments. More importantly, Masafusa sketches his literary realm along two diametrically opposed vectors: on the one hand it is spaceless, empty and hard to get to, but then he takes pains to describe the imaginary realm with its definite expanse, customs, taxes, ranks and salary, moral authority and virtuous government. In this way he sparks the reader’s hope that one can visit that realm as nimbly as one’s mind moves back and forth. Empty illusion or allegorical incarnation, epitome of inaccessibility or armchair travel destination, Masafusa’s realm is built on highly ambivalent ground.

In a further step Masafusa seems to confirm that the Realm of Poetry is indeed universal and for everybody. Masafusa serves up a clichéd digest of poetics that every well-educated Heian courtier would have been familiar with, because it belonged to the exegetical tradition of the *Classic of Poetry*, one of the Chinese Confucian Classics:

心動於中	As the heart is moved within,
言形於外	words form outside.
詠歌不足	If singing it out loud is not enough
故嗟嘆	then you sigh
嗟嘆不足	and if sighing isn’t enough
故不知手之舞	you will unknowingly dance it with your hands
足之蹈	and tap it with your feet.

The adapted lines of the “Great Preface” to the Confucian *Classic of Poetry* propose a universal psychology of composition which posits ever advancing levels of expressive intensity in case words do not suffice. Quite handily for Masafusa, the preface to the *Classic of Poetry* also relies on a spatial metaphor: poetry is the outer manifestation of the inner heart of the poet. It gets translated out of the heart into the world as words, song or dance. There is a nice *pas de deux* between the spatial metaphor of Masafusa’s “Realm of Poetry” and the *Classic of Poetry*’s preface’s spatial conceptualization of the process of poetic composition. For Masafusa undertakes a double translation: natural landscape gets translated into poetic landscape in the first section and, in the process, the internal landscape of the poet is translated into the outer world taking shape in words.

The universal poetics of the preface to the *Classic of Poetry* is the powerful opening of Masafusa’s detailed account of Chinese literary history, in which he stays strictly true to his impulse to translate poetry into poetic landscape: poets are the aristocrats and leaders of the realm, in which even emperors are led by the poets. In one case in Masafusa’s piece poets respond to the execution of poets by emperors—euphemistically referred to as “expulsion from the Realm”—by instituting new “laws” and “rules”—namely the tonal rules underlying Chinese “Recent-Style Poetry” (*jintishi* 近體詩). The “Realm of Poetry” is a seemingly universal interior psychological space. But it is also a Japanese reverie in which Chinese literary history becomes translated into a poetic realm, which mimics and even overcomes the political realm. In Masafusa’s eyes poetry rules supreme and China’s hegemony in East Asia—in the 11th

century certainly much frailer than Early Heian poets had witnessed—is imagined as poetic and pervasive rather than political and threatened. Yet, the loving care with which Masafusa produces this allegorical “translation” of Chinese history is suddenly choked off once he moves to domestic matters:

我朝 起於弘仁承和	At our Japanese court [poetry] arose between the Kōnin (810–824) and Jōwa (834–48) eras,
盛於貞觀延喜 中興於承平天曆	flourished between Jōgan (859–77) and Engi (901–23) reached an intermediary peak in the Jōhei (931–38) and Tenryaku (947–957) eras
再昌於長保寬弘	and flourished again during Chōhō (999–1004) and Kankō (1004–1012).
廣謂則三十餘人 略其英莫不過六七許輩	Broadly speaking some thirty poets, and if we limit ourselves to the outstanding ones we hardly get beyond six or seven.

It comes as a severe disappointment that the transmitted text breaks abruptly off after this sobering statement. Poetry in Japan, according to Masafusa, lacks everything that had made the Chinese Realm so attractive and convincing: whereas in China poets and their poetry rule supreme and unencumbered over a poetic territory, Japanese literary history unfolds alongside a mechanical teleology of imperial eras. Masafusa does not mention names or give reasons for his periodization. But we can assume that he relates the beginning of literature to Emperors Saga and Junna, enlightened patrons of the arts at whose behest three anthologies of Sino-Japanese poetry were compiled. When Masafusa speaks of a first moment of flourishing he refers to Emperor Daigo under whose auspices the first imperial waka anthology, the *Kokinshū*, was produced. And with his second highpoint he points to Emperor Ichijō’s era, when canonical works such as Murasaki Shikibu’s *Tale of Genji*, Sei Shōnagon’s *Pillow Book* and the influential Sino-Japanese anthology *Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing* (*Wakan rôishū* 和漢朗詠集) saw the light. But all this must be added in the reader’s imagination, because Masafusa merely collapses literary history into a list of reign names.

The rich Chinese pantheon of poetic geniuses that Masafusa parades in front of our eyes in a passage that I have left out, meets unfavorably with the paucity of the Japanese record: only three dozen poets and hardly seven of them worth mentioning. And, most divisive of all, Masafusa literally excludes Japan from the “Realm of Poetry” by denying it his *allegorical* translation into the kind of otherworldly poetic realm as which he had portrayed the Chinese tradition. We are dropping out of the allegorical travel account into a one-sided narrative of plain literary history. As Masafusa withholds his playful impulse of allegorical translation, the seemingly universal “Realm of Poetry” has shrunk to the size of China and has banned Japan.

Since we are dealing with a fragmentary text there is no way to know, but there is a slight chance that everything might end happily after all. At the end of his “Record of the Land of Drunkenness”—the above-mentioned blueprint for Masafusa’s piece—the Chinese poet Wang Ji declares that he wrote his “Record” because he was about to visit that land himself.<sup>7</sup> Along these lines we could imagine Masafusa

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Xihou, *Wang Ji yanjiu* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1995), 134.

declaring himself the apogee of a tradition that started admittedly poorly, but by his time—and perhaps even with him—had become a rightful region of the “Realm of Poetry,” where he comes and goes as a regular. In other writings Masafusa is highly adept at boasting of his precocious literary talents and exploits and he would certainly be capable of ending his vision of the “Realm of Poetry” with a telescopic close-up of his own flattering literary profile. But we can’t really know.

Masafusa’s piece is a powerful tool to bring into relief fundamental questions about the writing of literary history in cultures that grow symbiotically in exchange with a canonical reference culture. I have outlined Masafusa’s vision as a foil against which to appreciate the following discussion of the ways the *Kaifûsô* and the *Kokinshû* narrate literary history. From the perspective of these two anthologies Masafusa’s account is anomalous. First, because it tells the truth—after all the Chinese *Classic of Poetry*, compiled around 600 B.C., predated the Kōnin period, Masafusa’s supposed “rise” of poetry in Japan, by 1400 years and was followed by prolific literary production. Second, it is anomalous because Masafusa all too willingly condones inequality between China and Japan in the realm of letters. The Late Heian Period, is a particularly strange moment for pitiful confessions of the absence of a domestic tradition, because Masafusa’s time saw prolific production in all major Sino-Japanese genres, a sense of historical depth towards the indigenous literary tradition a Sino-Japanese canon that coexisted with, and at times even outshone, the Heian curriculum of Chinese texts.

The earliest Japanese accounts of literary history tended to design highly sophisticated scenarios that attenuated and diffused inequality, or even declared superiority over the Chinese tradition. Most often such accounts did so, ironically, by using the rhetorical power of Chinese intertexts. To opt for a narrative of homology rather than for a story of inequality like Masafusa’s was not just a manipulative device to assert one’s cultural ego, although my constructivist vocabulary here seems to suggest that. Instead, it had truly heuristic value: homology between the two traditions served to imagine practices of writing literary history in the first place by assuming that, as claimed by the “Great Preface,” the poetic impulse is innate to all of humanity. I would argue that this was certainly a powerful reason why the earliest Japanese accounts of literary history tended to be fictions of similarity (*not* imitations), rather than acknowledgments of difference.

## 2 Making sense of the regime of “Letters” (Ch. *wen* 文) in eighth century Japan: The *Kaifûsô*

### 2.1 The *Kaifûsô* preface: exploding literacies and the naturalization of writing

The late seventh and early eighth century saw an explosion of textual production in a rapidly expanding number of genres. The administrative construction of the Nara state based on Chinese precedent necessitated a great amount of individuals with thorough scribal training. Heijō, the later Nara, was the first stable capital, as until

710 the court had moved with every new imperial era.<sup>8</sup> The grand construction of a full-fledged capital changed the relation between central authority and the provinces. As authority both of the emperor and of the aristocratic clans became more stable central grasp was extended over the provinces based on a hierarchical system of provinces, districts and villages. The first half of the Nara period saw a number of grand compilation projects that justified the budding authority of the state such as the *Records of Wind and Earth* (*Fūdoki* 風土記), a collection of records on local legends, products, and natural resources of various provinces. Increasing control over the provinces also fostered collecting—and selecting—local cultural memory with the help of the new technology of writing practiced in the center. Justification of central authority vis-à-vis the provinces was also buttressed by the compilation of chronicles relating the history of the imperial clan and other clan lineages: the *Records of Old Matters* (*Kojiki* 古事記; 712) presented a highly selective narrative designed to legitimate the current emperor's descent from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The *Records of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* 日本書記; 720) had no such clear agenda, but voraciously assembled variant versions of local histories to give the nascent state a history from the beginning of times to the late seventh century.

The composition of Sino-Japanese poetry was not just a side-effect of this explosion of literacy and the state's instrumentalization of textual production, but it was part and parcel of establishing imperial power. Much of the poetry in the *Kaifūsō* was composed at court banquets and eulogized the splendors of the current regime. Against this background it comes as no surprise that the *Kaifūsō* is preoccupied with making sense of the explosion and diversification of “Letters” (*wen*) in the seventh and eighth centuries. I argue that “wen” is the pivotal concept at the heart of the collection, and both the preface and the poetry itself strive to think “wen” through in all its meanings, connotations, and implications for a nascent national culture.

“Wen”—one of the potently protean conceptual clusters of the Chinese tradition—means everything from “patterned fur of animals” to “ornament.” By extension, it means “civilization” and “cultural refinement” as well as “writing” and “literature.” It is also the name of King Wen, one of the founders of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty (around 1020 B.C.). A pun in the Confucian *Analects* first equated King Wen with the “cultural heritage” (斯文 *si wen*) of the Zhou dynasty and, in a next step, Confucius declared himself custodian of this heritage. In this way the regime of “wen” came to be particularly associated with the Confucian tradition.

Thus, in short, “wen,” which I translated here simply as “Letters,” encapsulates the art of “Confucian government” through ritual “ornament,” “cultivated” ethos and “refined” “textuality”—a phrase that in Literary Chinese would be a five-fold tautology of the word “wen.” Thus, by choosing “wen” as the guiding concept, the *Kaifūsō* could do several things at once, namely simultaneously tell the beginning of civilization, the advent of writing, the beginning of Confucian learning in Japan, the beginning of literature, and last but not least Japan's homage to King Wen as

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed treatment of the exploding literacy in the seventh and eighth centuries see Chapter 4 of David Lurie's dissertation “The Origins of Writing in Early Japan: From the First to the Eight Century CE” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2001).

the ideal Confucian king and a model of Japanese imperial power. The *Kaifûsô* gradually projected the manifold signification of “wen” onto a historical timeline in precisely this fashion. As a result, literature proper, belles-lettres and poetry, appear in the *Kaifûsô* preface as the rather late outcome of a long process of civilization (or “wen”-ization). This storyline was adapted from the preface to the canonical Chinese anthology *Wenxuan* 文選, which served as a model to the *Kaifûsô* preface. The anthology included a broad spectrum of literary genres and its preface explained the gradual unfolding of literature and its genres within the broader history of civilization. Adopting the *Wenxuan*’s preface’s strategy was certainly double-edged: it placed literature in the venerable position of conceptually encompassing the entire history of civilization. Yet, by assuming this historical, or evolutionary perspective, it also conceded an only gradual and rather late advent of literature in Japan, exposing a vulnerable spot that was going to be capitalized on by the *Kokinshû* prefaces, which without hesitation posit the beginning of poetry to the earliest moment possible, namely around the beginning of the cosmos.

The *Kaifûsô* had no qualms about admitting to a late beginning of Sino-Japanese composition in Japan, especially because this move enabled a powerful conceptual absorption of the *history of civilization* into the *special history* of Sino-Japanese poetry. As a countermove to a story of late arrival, the preface very cleverly downplays the importation of the writing system from China through Korea. It posits writing symbolically as a natural presence in Japan from earliest times on and taps into the Chinese lore of the invention of writing that declares writing a natural phenomenon rather than a human invention. True, mythical sages of Chinese high antiquity were regarded as figures of invention and human creation as in the case of Fu Xi who supposedly invented the hexagrams of the *Classic of Change*—and by extension writing—by watching natural patterns or Cang Jie, who invented writing by “copying” characters from bird tracks in the sand. Yet, their acts of invention were described as mimicry of the natural world, not as the creation of human artifice.

I would argue that the *Kaifûsô* preface relies on this Chinese rhetoric of the “naturalization” of writing in order to cope with the problematic importation of foreign writing into a local oral culture.

Here is how the preface accomplishes this:

遯聽前修	I have heard of sages from the remote past
遐觀載籍	and surveyed the written records of yore.
襲山降蹕之世	In the age when the Heavenly Grandchild’s chariot
	descended on Peak Takachiho
檀原建邦之時	and when [Emperor Jimmu] founded our state at Kashihara <sup>9</sup> ,
天造草創	the workings of Heaven had barely begun
人文未作	and human civilization/writing/letters [ <i>wen</i> ] were not yet
	created.

<sup>9</sup> Both incidents, mentioned in the Chronicles, refer to acts that establish divine authority on earth. The Heavenly Grandchild, grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, was sent down to earth to Peak Takachiho by the Sun Goddess and Takami musubi no kami in order to combat evil gods (*Nihon shoki* II, 9). Emperor Jimmu (trad. ca. 600 B.C.), the first emperor of the “Human Age” following the “Age of the Gods,” established his palace at Kashihara (*Nihon shoki* III 2/3/7). References to the *Nihon shoki* are by book, followed by the year, month, and day of the entry.

至於神后征坎	Then, Empress Jingû (r. 201–69) campaigned in the direction of the “Hole” Hexagram <sup>10</sup>
品帝乘乾	and Emperor Ôjin (r. 270–310) rode the powers of the “Heaven” Hexagram <sup>11</sup> (and came to the throne).
百濟入朝	The Korean state of Paekche did obeisance at our court
啟龍編於馬廐	unraveling dragon texts <sup>12</sup> in the horse stables. <sup>13</sup>
高麗上表	And the state of Koguryo submitted memorials to our throne <sup>14</sup> ,
圖鳥冊於鳥文	drawing up their crow documents with bird-track patterns. <sup>15</sup>
王仁始導蒙於輕島	At first Wani <sup>16</sup> introduced guided instruction at Karushima <sup>17</sup>
辰爾終敷教於譯田	and Shinni completed this by spreading the doctrines in Osada. <sup>18</sup>
遂使俗漸洙泗之風	Thus our customs gradually absorbed the influence of the Zhu and Si Rivers <sup>19</sup>
人趨齊魯之學	And people tended towards the teachings from Qi and Lu <sup>20,21</sup>

The preface makes two clever moves to deal with the adoption of writing from China. First, it claims for Japan what I would call a “hexagrammatic literacy,” the existence of writing literally *avant la lettre*. Although writing is “not yet created” and the Korean envoys have yet to bring their diplomatic documents and the technology of writing to Japan, Empress Jingû and Emperor Ôjin align their actions with the hexagrams from the *Classic of Changes*, which, as mentioned above, were allegedly invented by the mythical hero Fu Xi as a type of proto-writing. “Hexagrammatic literacy” diffused the secondary advent of writing in Japan through importation from China. Second, the preface downplays the importation of Chinese writing through Korea by tapping into a jumble of Chinese legends that “naturalize” the invention of writing in China. The official documents are “dragon texts” echoing the story of

<sup>10</sup> 29th hexagram of *Classic of Changes*. Associated with water and the North, thus referring to the crossing of the ocean northwards, when Empress Jingû launched an attack on the Korean state of Silla.

<sup>11</sup> First hexagram of the *Classic of Changes*. Associated with Yang forces and imperial power.

<sup>12</sup> The “Testamentary Charge” (*Guming* 顧命) chapter of the *Classic of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經) mentions in a list of precious objects the “River Chart” (*hetu* 河圖), a table with the hexagrams discovered by Fu Xi that emerged from the Yellow River on the back of a dragon. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics III. The Shoo King or the Book of Historical Documents* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1893–95), 554.

<sup>13</sup> The Korean envoy Akichi is said to have presented the Japanese court with stallions and to have instructed prince Uji no Waki Iratsume in the Chinese Classics. See *Nihon shoki*, X 15/8/6.

<sup>14</sup> *Nihon shoki*, XX 1/5/15.

<sup>15</sup> Reference to the legendary invention of writing by hero Cang Jie.

<sup>16</sup> Wani and Shinni are both Korean envoys.

<sup>17</sup> Emperor Ôjin’s capital.

<sup>18</sup> Emperor Bidatsu’s (r. 572–585) capital. The graphs used here pun on the literal meaning of “Fields of Translation.” (the *Nihon shoki*’s spelling of “Osada” is 譯語田 *Nihon shoki* XX 4/6). In parallel, “Karushima,” Emperor Ôjin’s capital is represented with the graphs for “Light Island.”

<sup>19</sup> Rivers in the ancient state of Lu, Confucius’s home state.

<sup>20</sup> These two ancient Chinese states were both associated with Confucian learning.

<sup>21</sup> Kojima Noriyuki, ed., *Kaifûsô, Bunka shûreishû, Honchô monzui*, (NKBT), Vol. 69 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 58–62. My translations from the *Kaifûsô* have benefited from Paul Rouzer’s unpublished translation. I have also consulted the translation of Andrea Maurizi, *Il più antico testo poetico del Giappone: il Kaifûsô (Raccolta in onore di antichi poeti)* (Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2002). The *Kaifûsô* preface has been translated in Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition Volume One: From Earliest Times to 1600*. 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 98–99. There is also a French translation of the prefaces to the *Kaifûsô* and to the imperial Sino-Japanese anthologies of the 9th century by Maria Chiara Migliore. See her “L’anthologie entre tradition et transformation: les recueils de poèmes en chinois au Japon (VIIIe-IXe siècle),” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 25 (2003).

a table with the hexagrams emerging from the Yellow River on the back of a turtle. The “bird-track patterns” allude to Cang Jie’s “discovery” of writing while watching bird tracks. The Korean envoys offer the technology of writing as a diplomatic tribute to an imagined superior Japanese court—a court that already possessed a *hexagrammatic notion* of writing. The only true novelty the Koreans bring to Japan are the teachings contained in the Confucian Classics. As the first extant attempt of narrating literary history in Japan, the *Kaifūsō* preface draws up a powerful history of literature as a history of “wen” in all its connotations. And by implying a “hexagrammatic literacy” of early Japanese emperors and tapping into Chinese discourses of the “naturalization” of writing as mimicry of the cosmos, it also downsizes what a tremendous novelty the Chinese writing system constituted when it reached Japan.

## 2.2 Framing the anthology through “wen”: the Civil (*wen*) and the Martial (*wu*) in the biographies of Prince Ôtomo and Prince Ôtsu

“Wen” was not just a major narrative thread in the Preface’s account of civilization and the rise of literature, but the anthology as a whole is preoccupied with working through the semantic logic of “wen.” This theme is further continued in the 9th century Sino-Japanese anthologies. The preface to the *Towering Clouds Collection* (*Ryô’unshû* 凌雲集; 814) states that Emperor Saga commissioned the collection to preserve “our cultural heritage,” echoing *Analects* 9.5 where Confucius confidently takes charge of preserving the “cultural heritage” (*wen*) of King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty.

The proper balance between cultured civility (*wen*) and martial prowess (*wu*) is a prominent concern in the biographies of the two princes whose poetry opens the collection.<sup>22</sup> I shall now demonstrate the ramifications of these concepts in the anthology. The preface had located the beginning of belles lettres and poetry proper at the court of Emperor Tenji (r. 668–671), who built his short-lived capital at Ômi close to the Biwa Lake near Kyoto. Tenji’s son Prince Ôtomo was deposed in the bloody Jinshin War of 772 by Tenji’s brother, the later Emperor Temmu. The preface laments the loss of poetic collections in this succession war, painting an anti-climactic picture of the beginning of poetry followed by immediate destruction. In agreement with this claim in the preface there are only two poems preserved from the time before the Jinshin War, both by Emperor Tenji’s unfortunate deposed heir Prince Ôtomo.<sup>23</sup> Placing Prince Ôtomo at the beginning of the collection is

<sup>22</sup> Out of the 64 poets anthologized in the *Kaifūsō* nine are portrayed in short biographies attached to their poetry. They are either princes or monks, the one exception being Isonokami no Ason Otomaro, third son of Isonokami no Ason Maro, a Korean who came to Japan on the mission that also included Yamanoue no Okura and the monk Shaku Dôji, whose poetry is also included in the *Kaifūsō*. Inserting the genre of biographies from official histories or monk hagiographies such as the *Gaosengzhuàn* 高僧傳 (compiled by Hui Jiao in 519) into a poetry collection is quite unique to the *Kaifūsō*. For theories about the presence of biographies in the *Kaifūsō* see Hatooka Akira, *Jôdai kanshibun to Chûgoku bungaku* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 1989), 17.

<sup>23</sup> There have been hot debates whether Prince Ôtomo was ever enthroned or who ruled during the turbulent months preceding Temmu’s victory. Compilers of the *Dai Nihon shi* compiled between 1657 and 1906 decided that he was enthroned and thus he was conferred the posthumous imperial name of “Emperor Kôbun” in 1870. See John W. Hall, ed., *Cambridge History of Japan: Ancient Japan* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1988–1999), 218 f.

chronologically sensible, but also ideologically desirable: he is a paragon of virtue and erudition who would have been a worthy successor to his father. The biography praises his balance of civil (*wen*) with martial (*wu*) qualities. His portrayal is written as a positive mirror image of the third poet in the collection, Prince Ôtsu, a son of Emperor Temmu who was given high office after Temmu's victory in the Jinshin war, yet later forced into suicide under allegations of rebellion by Temmu's wife Empress Jitô who supported her son's Prince Kusakabe's claim to the throne. There is no doubt that the two princes are intended as a complementary character study, an instructive diptych. They both receive prophecies from foreign diviners and while Prince Ôtomo is praised for his ability to balance cultured civility with martial prowess Prince Ôtsu is doomed for his lack thereof.

Prince Ôtomo is equally proficient in civil and military matters, he excels in speech and writing and brings about a "renaissance of letters" like his father Emperor Tenji, which the preface portrayed as the first properly "literary" ruler:

[Prince Ôtomo] was deeply learned and of broad understanding and he had talents in civil as well as military affairs.... The prince was by nature of keen perception, with an elegant predilection for broadly exploring antiquity. As soon as his brush descended, essays took shape, and when words came out [of his mouth] they were like discourses. The advisors of his time sighed in admiration over his magnificent learning, and before long the renaissance of belles lettres increased with every day. Due to the Jinshin revolt his Heavenly Mandate did not ensue.<sup>24</sup> He was twenty-five.<sup>25</sup> 皇子博學多通, 有文武材幹 [...] 太子天性明悟, 雅愛博古。下筆成章, 出言為論。時議者, 嘆其洪學, 未幾文藻日新。會壬申年之亂, 天命不遂。時年二十五。

The "Heavenly Mandate" (天命 Ch. *tianming*, J. *tenmei*) had been a powerful concept through which the Zhou dynasty justified its overthrow of the presumably cruel and decadent Shang on moral grounds. Prince Ôtomo's virtue and excellence did not translate into entitlement to rule, so that "his Heavenly Mandate did not ensue." The biography does give an explanation for this outrageous mismatch between moral entitlement and political failure. It is couched in the words of the Tang emissary Liu Degao who visited the Yamato court in 665 and who, marveling at the prince's features, exclaimed, "This prince has a character and bone structure<sup>26</sup> quite unlike his contemporaries. It is indeed not the lot of this country to possess such an individual. 此皇子, 風骨不似世間人。實非此國之分."<sup>27</sup>

If Prince Ôtomo is deposed by his Japanese countrymen and his potential to be an ideal ruler goes to waste because of the Jinshin War, it is a Chinese envoy, who, from a culturally and diplomatically superior position, questions the qualification of the Japanese to possess such a promising and exceptional crown prince in the first

<sup>24</sup> The phrase can also simply mean "his Heavenly-appointed life span ran out." But a more political interpretation as "Heavenly mandate" is certainly appropriate in this passage that recounts the prince's deposition and death during the Jinshin War.

<sup>25</sup> *Kaifûsô*, 70.

<sup>26</sup> 風骨 could mean more generally "demeanor" or "character." However, it appears here in a physiognomic context and I thus translate literally "character and bone structure."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

place. Further more obvious signs that the prince will lose power prepare the reader for his sad end and his loss of the throne. He has a dream in which an old man in crimson tries to offer the sun to him which in the very moment of passing it on it is snatched away by somebody else. Fujiwara no Kamatari, a prominent minister under Emperor Tenji and the ancestor of the powerful Fujiwara clan, which in the Heian Period came to *de facto* rule Japan by marrying its daughters to the Japanese emperors, tries to console the prince. He insists that cultivation of his virtue will protect him from bad effects in the future. Yet, according to the logic of this narrative, Liu Degao's prophecy had already made clear that Prince Ôtomo had by birth been endowed with perfect virtue and was in no need to cultivate it to be worthy of the throne. Kamatari's dream interpretation thus seems to serve two other functions: first, structurally, in the narration of the life of Prince Ôtomo, it marks the starting point of his promising, yet short-lived ascent, his marriage to Kamatari's daughter, his appointment to the status of crown prince, and his ability to gather an entourage of talented courtiers around him. Second, it further ennoble the prince's image. Not only was he endowed with perfect virtue, but the inauspicious dream tells us that he made all efforts possible to cultivate his virtue even further. That neither heavenly endowment nor personal effort could avert his end makes him into a full-fledged tragic figure.

Prince Ôtsu is portrayed as the evil, yet still attractive, twin of Prince Ôtomo. His biography opens:

Prince Ôtsu was the eldest son of Emperor Temmu.<sup>28</sup> He was of imposing stature and profound character. In his youth he liked to study, he had a broad grasp of things and was good at literary composition. Reaching adulthood he grew fond of martial affairs and, physically strong, became a talented fencer. His nature was rather unrestrained and he did not adhere to any laws or rules. He was gracious and polite towards others. Therefore he had many followers.<sup>29</sup>

皇子者，淨御原帝之長子也。狀貌魁梧。器宇峻遠。幼年好學，博覺而能屬文。及狀愛武。多力而能擊劍。性頗放蕩。不拘法度。降節禮士。由是人多附託。

Like Prince Ôtomo, Prince Ôtsu possessed both civil and martial qualities, but they were unevenly divided between a literary youth and martial adulthood, the latter eventually leading to his attempted revolt in 686. Connecting the imbalance between the cultivated and the martial to the rest of the biography it seems that the lack of "civility" in his adulthood is reflected in the absence of proper associations. Yes, he was gracious and due to his politeness he had a large following—another endearing characteristic that makes the biography's portrayal of Prince Ôtsu quite complex. But apparently this company did not consist of the right people at the right moment. This is apparent in the prophecy Prince Ôtsu receives, which is a negative mirror image of Prince Ôtomo's: it comes from a diviner monk from the Korean Kingdom of Silla, diplomatically clearly of lower status than the Chinese emissary. It predicts the prince's bad end. The absence of a figure like that of the wise Kamatari in Prince Ôtomo's biography, highlights the prince's lack of good advisors who can

<sup>28</sup> The *Nihon shoki* makes him Emperor Temmu's third son.

<sup>29</sup> *Kaifûsô*, 74.

help him cope productively with a disconcerting prophecy. The astronomer from Silla announces ominously, “Your bone structure reveals a man who will never be a subject of others. This is why your rank has remained low for such a long time. I fear you will not be able to preserve your life 太子骨法，不是人臣之相。以此久在下位。恐不全身。”<sup>30</sup>

The role of the sagely advisor Fujiwara no Kamatari in Prince Ôtomo’s biography is to highlight the Prince’s ability of gathering people of keen judgment around him and of accepting their advice. Kamatari alleviates worries about the ambiguous prophecy and the inauspicious dream and assures the Prince that fate will be just if he only cultivates himself. Indeed, Prince Ôtomo’s rise to a crown prince with the potential to follow in the footsteps of his virtuous father, Emperor Tenji, is inspired by the soothing councils of Kamatari. In contrast, Prince Ôtsu does not have an adept advisor or eager future father-in-law to help him cope with the unfortunate prophecy. The result of this prophecy is dire:

[The prince] thereupon advanced his plans of rebellion. Led astray by these deceptions he thus schemed and got off track—alas, how regrettable! He had good potential, but did not preserve his life through loyalty and filiality. Instead, having come close to that evil monk,<sup>31</sup> he suffered the humiliating punishment of suicide. Based on this example, how profound is the saying of the ancients that “you should be careful of your acquaintances.” He was twenty-four.<sup>32</sup>  
 因進逆謀。迷此註誤，遂圖不軌。嗚呼惜哉。蘊彼良才，不以忠孝保身。近此奸豎卒以戮辱自終。古人慎交遊之意，因以深哉。時年二十四。

Prince Ôtsu goes astray because he lacks a resourceful entourage and because his own character judgment is wanting: he believes the “superstitions” of the astronomer from Silla and nobody is there to keep him from rushing to revolt based on the prophecy that he will never be a good subject and, in consequence, has to become ruler to forego the dire end prophesied for him.

There is no moral to Prince Ôtomo’s biography, but for the cautionary tale about Prince Ôtsu it is directly spelled out as a strong prohibitive. The term “acquaintances” (J. *kôyu* 交遊) is a revelatory cue here, because it connects discourses about ruling through “wen” and about rulers as generous patrons of literature with a more general rhetoric of friendship and cultivation of character by surrounding oneself with the right people. The *Kaifûsô* preface portrayed Emperor Tenji as an expert of making “acquaintances” in precisely this way:

既而以為 調風化俗 莫尚於文 潤德光身 孰先於學 爰則建庠序 徵茂才 旋招文學之士 時開置醴之遊 當此之際宸翰垂文	Before long, [Emperor Tenji] thought: For harmonizing customs and transforming conventions, nothing is more esteemed than letters ( <i>wen</i> ). For nurturing virtue and enlightening oneself, what could come before learning? Thus he established schools and academies, seeking men of flourishing talent; [...] He repeatedly summoned men of letters, often hosted excursions to set out sweet wine. At those occasions the imperial brush descended in composition
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<sup>30</sup> *Kaifûsô*, 74–75.

<sup>31</sup> The Korean diviner.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

賢臣獻頌  
雕章麗筆  
非唯百篇

and worthy ministers presented their hymns:  
Finely carved essays and beautiful brushwork  
were hardly limited to a hundred pieces.<sup>33</sup>

Emperor Tenji is the perfect embodiment of the *Kaifūsō*'s programmatic regime through "wen." He gives literary composition highest priority in his governing, sets up academies to train men of talent to become his resourceful entourage, and invites them to literary outings (*asobi* 遊び) at which the ruler with his ministers composes poetry in the companionable atmosphere of a literary salon. Highest principles of governance, educational politics, literary composition, and a culture of court friendship all intersect at Emperor Tenji's court. Conversely, Prince Ôtsu's inability to have the right "acquaintances" is just another way of pointing to his abandonment of learning and literary composition in his adulthood for the sake of martial pursuits and to his lack of broader political vision.

Thus the theme of the "civil" versus the "martial" that frames the opening of the anthology is further refracted through the lens of character judgment and the proper cultivation of relationships. This is where the biography of Prince Kawashima, Emperor Tenji's second son, comes into play. It is wedged between Prince Ôtomo's and Prince Ôtsu's biography as if to negotiate between these unequal twins while itself providing an unfavorable contrast to Crown Prince Ôtomo—like Prince Kawashima a son of Emperor Tenji. The crown prince sides with the right people who, even though they cannot change his dire fate, direct him to prepare for the role of a model emperor. Prince Kawashima is an ambivalent case: he is a loyal subject but a bad friend. His biography is a diatribe against people who forsake their friends. He swears loyalty to Prince Ôtsu, but then reports him for plans of rebellion. Consequently, "although the court praised his loyalty and uprightness, his friend thought his talent and feelings shallow. 朝廷嘉其忠正, 朋友薄其才情."<sup>34</sup> The biography preaches that one should not let one's "personal connections" (J. *majiri* 交じり) override one's duty towards the ruler, but, in a clear argument for the value of friendship relations, one should consider it a duty to dissuade one's friends from rebellious plans rather than reporting them to the authorities. Prince Ôtsu, as the third in the row, becomes the victim of his lack of wise advisors and virtuous friends.

By juxtaposing the biographies and poetry of Princes Ôtomo, Kawashima, and Ôtsu the *Kaifūsō* compiler did not just arrange the opening of the anthology by chronology and social status, namely imperial lineage. He created contrasting character vignettes of the Princes that intricately connected the more narrowly literary discourses around "wen" and concepts of civil versus martial duty, with the practice of imperial banquets in the company of literary-minded courtiers, and the cultivation of companionship, friendship and loyalty beyond these more formal occasions.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 60. In contrast to the portrayals of other emperors in the earlier part of the preface, the portrayal of Emperor Tenji does not match with the *Nihon shoki* account. The *Nihon shoki* celebrates Temmu instead. Hatooka Akira has shown that Tenji's portrayal here echoes the depiction of Emperor Taizong in the *Zhenguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要 (comp. by Wu Jing 吳兢), which records exemplary debates between Taizong and his ministers about policy issues. See Hatooka, "Hachi seiki ichi Nihonjin no kokusai kankaku—*Kaifūsō* no sekai kara," *Kokugakuin zasshi* 103.11 (2002): 167.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 72.

### 2.3 Balancing an anthology of “wen”: the tension between ornament (*wen* 文) and substance (*zhi* 質)

Confucius said, “A dominance of substance over ornament will result in roughness. A dominance of ornament over substance will result in scribal pedantry. Only a well-balanced mixture of the two results in a superior person” 子曰:質勝文則野,文勝質則史.文質彬彬,然後君子.<sup>35</sup>

The proper balance between solid substance and artful ornament was to become one of the central concerns in the Chinese literary tradition. The balance ensured the production of an attractive, yet morally responsible literature. Its loss was considered not just poetically, but morally and politically harmful. Exceedingly ornate literature could bring dynasties down: in a passage in the *Sui History* (*Suishu* 隋書) such literature is brought forward as the cause for China’s long period of disunion between the fall of the Han Dynasty and the reunification under the Sui and Tang Dynasties.<sup>36</sup> Ideally the outer pattern (*wen*) would be a perfect manifestation of inner substance as described by the Chinese poet Lu Ji (261–303) in his *Poetic Exposition on Literature* (*Wenfu* 文賦):

理扶質以立幹    Nature’s laws bear the substance, they are a tree’s trunk;  
文垂條而結繁    Patterns hang as the branches, a lavish lacework.<sup>37</sup>

But literary composition in China has since the fifth century generally been pressed to defend itself against allegations of giving in to artful ornament at the expense of moral substance. Liu Xie’s *A Literary Heart and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍) is a sensitive mirror of the intricate discourses developing around the polarity between “literary flourish” and “substance” in the fifth and sixth centuries. It takes turns attacking and vigorously defending the related term of “dragon carving,” which had carried negative connotations ever since Yang Xiong’s remark that such “insect carving” and the writing of poetic expositions had been a vice of his youth.<sup>38</sup> The Japanese poets anthologized in the *Kaifūsō* had to deal with that tension inherent in Six Dynasties poetry and poetics.

The *Kaifūsō* preface faced this problem in a less sheltered way than the preface to the *Wenxuan*. Certainly, the *Wenxuan* preface capitalized equally strongly on the polysemantic efficiency of the key term “wen” and told the history of literature—“wen”—from the broad angle of the history of civilization—“wen.” However, looking back to more than a millennium of textual production and several centuries of discussions about textual genres and categorizations the *Wenxuan* preface was written from the perspective of a highly compartmentalized literary landscape in which belles lettres could claim a special position thanks to their “literariness” (*wen*),

<sup>35</sup> *Analects* 6.18.

<sup>36</sup> Luo Genze, *Sui Tang wenxue piping shi* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2nd edition 1996), 157.

<sup>37</sup> Translation from Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York, London: Norton, 1996), 338. *Wenxuan*, 764.

<sup>38</sup> See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 185. On the polarity between “flourish” and “substance” in Six Dynasties poetics see Ke Qingming and Zeng Yongyi, *LiangHan Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue piping ziliao huibian* (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1978), 41–44.

or in its own words “brush flourish” (*hanzao* 翰藻).<sup>39</sup> On this basis the compiler, in contrast to the broad scope of the rise of civilization and textuality sketched at the beginning of the preface, later explains that he excluded selections from the “Histories” and the “Masters” sections of the Chinese encyclopedias for their lack of literary polish. But these were precisely those textual genres in the traditional Chinese classification of texts that had discussed the significance of “wen” as civilizing force and moral power.

In the case of the *Kaifūsō*, the first literary collection in Japanese history, the tension between “literary flourish” and “substance” is complicated due to the lack of a protective concept of “literariness” based on which the *Wenxuan* preface had eliminated historical and philosophical texts. “Wen” itself is still suspended between the moral mission of virtuous Confucian governance on the model of King *Wen* and its more “ornamental” manifestation in the realm of belles-lettres and literary entertainment at the Yamato and Nara courts.

This becomes very clear when the preface tells the history of poetry after the Jinshin War and the demise of Emperor Tenji’s lineage. It changes narrative modes, now telling the story of poetry through its poets and poems:

自此以降	Since those times
詞人間出	poets have emerged now and then:
龍潛王子	A crown prince <sup>40</sup> —like a hidden dragon
翔雲鶴於風筆	made cloud-dwelling cranes soar with his breezy brush (in poem no. 6)
鳳翥天皇	An emperor <sup>41</sup> —like a raising phoenix
泛月舟於霧渚	had the moon boat float by misty islands (in poem no. 15)
神納言之悲白鬢	Counselor Ōmiwa [Takechimaro] lamented his white temples (in poem no. 18)
藤太政之詠玄造	and Chancellor Fujiwara [no Fuhito] sang of mysterious creation (in poem no. 29).
騰茂實於前朝	They elevated the lush fruits of previous reigns
飛英聲於後代	and let their preeminent voices fly on to later eras. <sup>42</sup>

The passage forces very different individuals into a parallel structure: Prince Ōtsu, a prince dreaming of becoming an emperor, gets a favorable treatment put on a par with Emperor Mommu, son of Prince Kusakabe and Empress Gemmei, who ruled for a decade of his short life and under whose behest the famous Taihō legal code was promulgated in 701. The only similarity between the two high officials coupled

<sup>39</sup> *Wenxuan*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Prince Ōtsu.

<sup>41</sup> Emperor Mommu (r. 697–707).

<sup>42</sup> *Kaifūsō*, 60–61. This is an account of the second of the four phases into which the poetry of the *Kaifūsō* is conventionally divided. The first phase, up to the Jinshin war, is only represented by the two poem by Prince Ōtomo. The second phase, from the Jinshin war until the Wado era (708–715) comprises less than half of the collection, while the third and fourth phases (715–729 and 729–751 respectively) belong to poetry composed at the Estate of the great literary patron Nagaya no Ōkimi son of Prince Takechi and grandson of Emperor Temmu, and, lastly, to poetry composed under the patronage of Fujiwara no Muchimaro who took over Nagaya no Ōkimi’s role as literary patron after the latter’s forced suicide in 729. While the preface discusses phase 1 and 2, phase 3 and 4 go unaccounted for.

in the lines is that they were both prominent and unsuccessful in their own way.<sup>43</sup> The line-up of poems alluded to reveals a preference for the “literary”: clearly it is the most ornate, not the most morally instructive, poems that are chosen to represent their authors.<sup>44</sup> This choice is particularly pertinent in the case of Prince Ôtsu. Out of the four poems by the prince it is not the prince’s famous deathbed quatrain that is selected (although it would have alluded to his rebellion and forced suicide, and thus added force to a condemnation of the prince’s behavior on moral and political grounds suggested in his biography). Instead, the preface evokes this beautifully crafted couplet:

天紙風筆畫雲鶴 On heaven’s paper the breezy brush paints cloud-dwelling cranes—  
 山機霜杼織葉錦 Mountain loom and frosty shuttle weave leafy brocade.<sup>45</sup>

Not laments of a life cut short, but a couplet on cranes longevity is invoked from the prince’s poetry. In the couplet nature is made into her own craftsman, painting with a wind-brush and weaving brocade leaves over the mountain ridges. Nature artistically adorns herself so that the poet does not even seem to strike an ornate pose, but describes nature in its seemingly *natural* beauty. There is little reason to read this couplet as a political allegory, although a couplet added by a later poet, which forces such an interpretation on the lines, shows the desire of the compiler to allegorize.<sup>46</sup> The couplet is rather an elegant reverie paying homage to the artfulness of nature and by extension to the nature of poetry as artfulness. And it exemplifies a practice of literature/*wen* that prizes elegant wit and literary artifice, certainly not didactic mission.<sup>47</sup>

The choice of the elegant over the instructive is even clearer in Emperor Mommu’s case. Out of three poems, “Stating my Feelings” shows the emperor’s earnest attempts at Confucian self-cultivation.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, the author of the *Kaifûsô* preface instead chooses the poetically most ornate and sophisticated poem to match Prince Ôtsu’s elegant couplet:

<sup>43</sup> Ômiwa no Takechimaro was sent into exile and Fujiwara no Fuhito, the most powerful person at court after Mommu’s death, never succeeded in putting his favorite Prince Obito on the throne.

<sup>44</sup> Fujiwara no Fuhito’s poem (no. 29) is, in contrast to the other poems referred to by the preface, a heavy-handed praise of Confucian governance in which a New Year’s Day celebration is staged as an audience at an idealized Zhou court. Yet none of the other four poems by Fuhito to which the author of the preface could have alluded to are particularly ornate so that, while intending to match the two ministers Fuhito and Takechimaro, he did not have a matching choice from Fuhito’s poetry.

<sup>45</sup> *Kaifûsô* no. 6, 76.

<sup>46</sup> This later poet links this imagistic couplet *per force* to Prince Ôtsu’s unhappy fate:

赤雀含書時不至 The time for crimson sparrows with letters in beak did not come;  
 潛龍勿用未安寢 Hidden dragon—do not act! —He can never rest in peace.

Crimson sparrows would have brought the message of the prince’s enthronement. The quotation from the first hexagram of the *Classic of Changes* “Hidden dragon—do not act!” warns the Prince, addressed as the imperial dragon about to take power, against rebelling. Yet, the prince took no heed and due to his forced suicide cannot rest in peace. Thus, one could read the selection of Prince Ôtsu’s couplet through the indirect hint to the couplet of the later poet, especially because the Preface mentions the “hidden dragon.” Yet, in the context of the preface the “hidden dragon” serves as nothing more than a fit parallel to Emperor Mommu’s “phoenix-mindedness” and puts the rebellious prince even more on par with the Emperor, his parallelistic correlate.

<sup>47</sup> Sawada Fusakiyo praises the sophistication of this couplet in most flattering terms. See Sawada, *Kaifûsô chûshaku* (Tokyo: Ôokayama shoten, 1933), 54.

詠月	"Composing on 'Moon'"
月舟移霧渚 楓檝泛霞濱 臺上澄流耀 酒中沈去輪	The moon boat advances by misty islands, cassia oars float along the hazy shore. [The moon's] liquid luster shines on the terrace as its departing wheel sinks into the wine cup.
水下斜陰碎 樹除秋光新 獨以星間鏡 還浮雲漢津	Slanting shadows scatter on the flowing water. Its autumn light shines fresh through sparse trees. Alone like a mirror among stars it even floats through the Milky Way's ford. <sup>49</sup>

The poem lives up to its topic as it unfolds layer upon layer of moonlight: the reflection of the moon, which is like a boat floating next to the poet's boat; its glow on the vast expanse of the terrace, its almost tactile caressing of the trees, like a mirror among the stars. This multiplication of emerging translucencies is played off against multiple layers of concealment: misty islands and hazy shores, the disappearing reflection in the small wine cup that in turn is particularly striking in contrast to the vast expanse of the terrace, scattering shadows, and, lastly, the expected disappearance of the moon-mirror's light when it crosses into the bright Milky Way.

The tension between translucent and concealed brightness is delicately sublated in the beautiful closure of the poem: the image of the moon-mirror being one and alone, yet inherently prone to infinite self-multiplication within the landscape of luminous reflective surfaces such as the lake waters, wine cups, terraces, trees, and the Milky Way with which the poem previously had beguilingly enwrapped the reader. Mommu's poem on "Moon" is one of the truly ravishing and clever poems in the collection.<sup>50</sup> It dates to the chronologically earlier part of the collection. As such

<sup>48</sup> *Kaifūsō* no. 16, 87–88:

年雖足戴冕 智不敢垂裳 朕常夙夜念 何以拙心匡	Though in years I am old enough to wear the crown as regards my wisdom I do not dare to let the robes fall. (1) I, a solitary emperor, am persistently poring day and night over how to correct my crude mind.
猶不師往古 何救元首望 然毋三絕務 且欲臨短章	If I do not take those of high antiquity as my teachers (2) how can I entertain the hope to properly head my state? Though I do not take on the duty of [reading the <i>Classic of Changes</i> ] thrice to shreds (3) I would at least like to approach it in this short piece.

This painfully erudite poem uses poetry for an austere reflection on the necessity of Confucian education. The emperor contemplates on his governmental mission by declaring himself incapable of embodying sage kings of high antiquity. (1) He does not dare to be like the mythical Emperors Huangdi, Yao and Shun, paragons of virtue, who "let their robes fall and the world was governed." (from *Xicizhuan* 繫辭傳). (2) He feels he has not yet paid heed to ancient precedent as the sage minister Yue advised King Wuding of the Shang Dynasty (from the "Shuoming" 說命, 3rd chapter of the *Book of Documents*. Legge, *The Chinese Classics III. The Shoo King or the Book of Historical Documents*, 260). (3) He acknowledges that he is not a second Confucius who according to the biography by Sima Qian preserved in the *Records of the Grand Historian* turned late in his life so intensely to the study of the *Classic of Changes* that he read its bindings three times to shreds. Despite the humble gesture of stating his inability to live up to any of these figures or situations, Emperor Mommu places himself at the same time in good and ennobling company who elevates him and his devotion to his imperial duties.

<sup>49</sup> *Kaifūsō*, no. 15, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Based on the sophistication of this poem Nakanishi Susumu suggests reconsidering Emperor Mommu's position in literary history. He argues that the image of the "moon boat" is peculiar to Japanese poetry and invents the witty term "washi" (和詩, perhaps best translated as "Japanized Sino-Japanese poem") for this poem that blends continental diction with indigenous imagery. See Nakanishi, *Nihon bungaku to kanshi*. *Gaikoku bungaku no juyō ni tsuite* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2004), 38–42.

it is an effective, if minute, counterargument against the wide-spread assumption that the *Kaifûsô* is a collection of awkward poetic beginnings of the yet-uneducated Japanese poets and that the quality of the poetry slowly increases as time passes. Rather, one could argue that the presence in the *Kaifûsô* of pedantically didactic poetry such as Emperor's Mommu's poem on his attempts of self-cultivation and of clever and eloquent poems such as the one on the moon by the same author are a symptom of a highly ambivalent concept of poetry in eighth century Japan: the *Kaifûsô* gives a glimpse of a literary culture that was eager to still keep together "literary flourish" and moral "substance" in a way that became unthinkable in China after the *Wenxuan* preface and its concept of the "literary."

## 2.4 Scintillating "wen" between Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist rhetoric

The choice of poems deemed representative by the author of the preface brings out a tension between two versions of "wen" that in the Chinese tradition by the time of the *Wenxuan* preface had become compartmentalized into the properly literary and the morally instructive that lacked literary polish. And the author betrays a proud preference for the ornate and sophisticated over the plain and instructive. This choice is just one example of the complicated collusion and collision of various ideological stances propagated in the poetry. It emerges from the juxtaposition of the preface with the sampled poetry and the attached prose biographies and—as we saw in the case of Prince Ôtsu—considerably complicates what the preface tells us at face value. If "wen" is central to Confucian discourses yet also tied to rhetorical flourish characteristic of belletristic literature, the role of Buddhist presence in the preface and the collection is equally ambivalent: put simply, the preface saw Buddhist endeavors and literary pursuits as incompatible, but in the collection we see Buddhist monks happily versifying.

In the preface, Prince Shôtoku, the famous 7th century regent and propagaster of Buddhism, lacks "leisure" for literary pursuits, because he busies himself with setting up a rank system and studying Buddhist doctrine. Thus, Buddhism is presented as an impediment to literary production. The collection complicates this image by inserting the biography and poetry of monk Chizô, who had been studying in China and was highly rewarded for his Buddhist expertise upon his return to the Nara court. Chizô's insertion among imperial family members is too prominent not to be significant. His biography continues the exemplification of proper friendship relationship that had made Prince Ôtomo become even more virtuous, Prince Kawashima a bad friend, and Prince Ôtsu a rebellious failure. As I shall show below, Chizô is the successful correlate to Prince Ôtsu, whose poetry precedes Chizô's entry in the collection. The biography relates how fellow monks were envious of his superior command of the Buddhist law and how he feigned craziness to escape harm, while secretly copying the essentials of the Buddhist canon and hiding them in a lacquer-sealed tube that he used to carry around during his pilgrimages.

Chizô's story intersects with Prince Ôtsu's case on several levels. First, both have hidden designs. Chizô's secrecy, his feigning of crazy and unrestrained behavior is successful, while Prince Ôtsu's is unraveled and he pays for it with his life. Interest-

ingly, what makes the difference is their similar behavior: Prince Ôtsu is by nature unrestrained and indomitable (*hôtô* 放蕩), resulting in his premature death; Chizô feigns unrestrained (*hontô* 奔蕩) and crazy behavior and this “recipe” (*sube* 方) helps him preserve his life (*mi o mataku* 全軀).<sup>51</sup> The term here suggests survival through a Daoist, particularly Zhuangzian ruse of “uselessness.” As the huge and gnarly tree can avoid the axe in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* “Free and Easy Wandering” (*Xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊), because it cannot be put to any use, Chizô’s acting mad saves him from the intrigues of his fellow monks and helps him preserve his life.

The second intersection between the figures of Prince Ôtsu and Chizô is the interplay between secrecy and its unveiling:

In the reign of Empress Jitô Master Chizô returned to our country. When his fellow monks reached land, they unrolled the sutras they had brought to air them out; Chizô undid the folds of his garment, stood against the wind and said, “I am also airing the mysterious meaning of the scriptures!” All guffawed in scorn and thought his words idle talk. When the time came for the monks to be examined Chizô ascended the lecture seat and expounded [the teachings] in full. The meaning of his words was lofty and profound, and his intonation elegant and beautiful. Though disputants rose fiercely against him, he answered them in fluent flow. All submitted to him and everybody was utterly astonished. The empress esteemed him and appointed him head of his sect. 太后天皇世, 師向本朝。同伴登陸, 曝涼經書。法師開襟對風曰: 我亦曝涼經典之奧義。眾皆嗤笑, 以為妖言。臨於試業, 昇座敷演。辭義峻遠, 音詞雅麗。論雖鋒起, 應對如流。皆屈服莫不驚駭。帝嘉之。拜僧正。<sup>52</sup>

It is a triple revelation of sorts: first, Chizô unfolds the sutras from his secret lacquer tube. The second revelation, the opening of his robe and declaration that his belly contains the Buddhist law is incomprehensible to Chizô’s companions who laugh at him but it prepares the reader for the final revelation, the ultimate triumph when he starts to teach fluently and in recognition of his extraordinary abilities is appointed head of his own new sect by the empress.

The gesture of Chizô’s second and most important revelation, the opening of his robe, in fact opens one of Prince Ôtsu’s poems:

開衿臨靈沼  
遊目步金苑  
澄清苔水深  
曖曖霞峰遠

I open the folds of my robe, stand by Numinous Pond<sup>53</sup>,  
let roam my eyes, strolling in Golden Garden<sup>54</sup>.  
Radiant and clear, mossy waters are deep,  
tenebrous and vague, misty peaks distant.

驚波共絃響  
啁鳥與風聞  
群公倒載歸  
彭澤宴誰論

Surging waves echo, blending with the strings,  
chirping birds are heard alongside the breeze.  
Gentlemen drop drunk and return in their carriages.  
So who would even talk about a banquet at Pengze?<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> In comparing the biographies of monks in the *Kaifûsô* Yamaguchi Atsushi identifies their unconventional iconoclastic behavior as a similarity in their portrayal. See “Higashi Ajia no kanshi to sôryo. *Kaifûsô* sôden kenkyû josetsu,” Tatsumi Masaaki, ed., *Kaifûsô. Kanji bunkaken no naka no Nihon kodai kanshi*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> *Kaifûsô*, 79.

<sup>53</sup> The pond was built by King Wen of the Zhou dynasty in his royal park. In response to the king’s virtue the common people allegedly worked on its construction voluntarily.

<sup>54</sup> Referring to “Golden Valley Garden” (*Jingu yuan*), the pleasure estate of the fourth-century plutocrat Shi Chong, whose literary banquets in his luxurious garden became proverbial.

<sup>55</sup> *Kaifûsô* no. 4, 75.

The opening of his robe is a gesture of the prince's insouciance while enjoying himself away from his court duties with his coterie at a banquet. The banquet evokes the famous salon in Golden Valley Garden of the wealthy Shi Chong. The last line refers to the famous Chinese poet and drinker Tao Qian (365–427) who became famous as a hermit, but served for a couple of months as magistrate of Pengze. Pengze marked the turning point of his life, when he decided to relinquish office and retreat to the countryside. The poem thus mentions Tao Qian at his most courtly and least typical. Yet, a Japanese prince enmeshed in court life could more easily empathize with the more untypical Tao Qian, the official, rather than with Tao Qian, the hermit. In the end the prince empathizes with Tao Qian to the degree of competing with him: the Japanese courtiers are even better drinkers and banqueters than Tao Qian as the governor of Pengze, so that Tao Qian doesn't merit mention after all. Thus Prince Ôtsu does two things at once: he elegantly parades his familiarity with Tao Qian's biography but also uses it to declare Japanese victory in an imaginary competition over whether Tao Qian's companions or Prince Ôtsu's are the better banqueters.

If "opening the robes" leads us to Chizô's triumph to be established as the head of his own sect by using a Daoist ruse of life preservation, the prince-poets relaxing of his official attire and feasting in company leads to disaster, because, as we know from his biography, he tended to be careless about his acquaintances and assembled with the wrong people.

Thus, Chizô serves as effective counter-portrayal to Ôtsu. He astutely manipulates Daoist self-preservation techniques to his advantages, where the Prince deludedly plays Daoist: he truly IS "unrestrained" and this leads to his demise if not in the poem but in the biography framing the poem.

The intricate interlacing of Chizô's acquisition of the Buddhist law and preservation of his life through Daoist recipes which *feign* Daoist escapism is also a collateral lesson in how to be a good courtier: courteously *playing* Daoist libertinage was to be preferred over getting out of control by *being* a Daoist libertine. Thus the lesson to be learnt is that Chizô pretends and gets rewarded for his acting by the Empress, where Prince Ôtsu acts earnestly and fails.

In Chizô's poetry we also revisit the antagonism between Prince Shôtoku's advancement of Buddhist doctrine and Emperor Tenji's support of belles lettres, which the preface had highlighted. This antagonism dissolves in Chizô's production of playfully defensive poetry:

翫花鶯	"Taking Pleasure in Flowers and Orioles"
桑門寡言晤	A monk has rarely time to chat –
策杖事迎逢	So leaning on my staff I busy myself to welcome you.
以此芳春節	In this season of fragrant spring
忽值竹林風	we are suddenly facing bamboo breezes.

求友鶯嬌樹	In search for their mates, orioles embellish the trees;
含香花笑叢	Filled with fragrance, blossoms make the bushes smile.
雖喜遨遊志	Though I enjoy letting my mind ramble freely,
還媿乏雕蟲	I'm still ashamed I fail in this "insect carving." <sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Kaifûsô*, no. 8, 79–80.

Chizô enjoys “letting his mind ramble freely”: this could simply mean that he goes on excursions in the company of other poetry-inclined courtiers and expresses his “mind” in poetry, based on the proverbial belief, first recorded in the “Canon of Shun” of the *Book of Documents*, that “poetry articulates one’s intentions/mind 詩言志.” The humble closure of the poem in which Chizô expresses shame for his poor poetic talent is also a tongue-in-cheek teasing of his companions and an easy excuse for potentially poor poetic performance. He obviously really enjoys writing poetry. Yet, in calling it by its rather derogatory name “insect carving,” Chizô playfully condones the potential triviality of the enterprise, which in turn implies that a failure at “insect carving” is not so grave after all. The Eastern Han rhapsody author and scholar Yang Xiong (53 B.C.–18 A.D.) had deplored the literary pursuits of “insect carving” in his youth as a juvenile *faux pas* off the proper moral path. For Chizô failing in something morally despicable is a good excuse to enjoy indulging in it. Chizô is, however, aware of his duties as a Buddhist monk and his deviance from Prince Shôtoku’s example of Buddhist “busy-ness” that does not leave time for literary pursuits.

According to the first line, monks just cannot afford chatting, especially not in verse. Yet, Chizô is all the happier to receive a visitor in this gorgeous springtime to *waste* his time with. Chizô convinces himself that his impulse to hang out with the guest rather than hold back, to recite and compose poetry rather than to stay silent as it befits a monk, is not misguided: the orioles, too, are “searching for friends.” Again, friendship and poetic composition make for a proper couple. And letting one’s “intention” ramble freely mimics both his outward movement into nature—encountering a nice spot to feast—and the imminent outward manifestation of the poet’s mind in the poet’s words, just as the poetics of the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry* had described it.

The Buddhist monk Chizô is presented as adept in the proper application of Daoist recipes as well as in the loosening of Confucian and Buddhist restraint against “insect carving.” Chizô is the epitome of proper balance among all Three Teachings, and a figure through which the process of balancing can eloquently be exemplified. His crucial positioning in the anthology among members of the imperial family might be due to his success through such balance. But it also reflects, once more, the intention of the compiler to work through the connotations and implications of “wen” in various contexts, in Chizô’s case of course through the meaning of “wen” in relation to his social status as a monk.

## 2.5 Conclusion to the *Kaifûsô*

The *Kaifûsô* constitutes the earliest attempt to make sense of the practice of Sino-Japanese literary composition within the context of the development of civilization and textuality on the Japanese archipelago in the seventh and eighth century. In this sense it is a monument to the regime of “wen” in gradually narrowing inflections. The *Kaifûsô* preface attempts to account for the rise of civilization in general, for writing in practice, and literature in particular.

Following up on the logic of the gradual unfolding of “wen” in its ever more specific historical inflections, the anthology and its preface decline the word “wen” through various fields of signification. In the biographies of Prince Ôtomo and Prince Ôtsu “wen” is coupled with “martial prowess,” with a proper sense for the right company both poetically and politically. Also, “wen” is played off against the anxiety of literary superfluosity, of decline through lack of “substance.” This was a way to work through Confucian prejudices against belles lettres. In the portrayal of the two princes and the one monk the playful tackling of such Confucian prejudices give literature a place in Buddhist discourse which Prince Shotoku could not provide and puts strings on Taoist counter-court reveling at poetic banquets.

It is a tightly woven argumentative plane on which the manifestation and viability of “wen” in the Japanese context is boldly tested out.

### 3. Besting the Sino-Japanese tradition: the *Kokinwakashû*'s universal “Way” (Ch. *dao*, J. *michi* 道) of poetry

#### 3.1. Replacing the regime of “wen” with the realm of the “Way”

The *Kokinwakashû* 古今和歌集 (*Collection of Old and New Waka Poems*; hereafter *Kokinshû*) was the first imperially sponsored anthology of Japanese Poetry (*waka*). Compiled in 905 under the auspices of Emperor Daigo after a good century of imperial support for Sino-Japanese poetry, the collection was inevitably under great pressure to make a convincing argument for Japanese poetry, which lacked the public stature of its Sino-Japanese twin and rival.<sup>57</sup> One sign of the seriousness of this competition is that the *Kokinshû* has two prefaces: one written in Classical Japanese and a second one, in Sino-Japanese, which is in closer dialogue with Sino-Japanese and Chinese precedents.

Bolstering the status of Japanese *waka* poetry in the public arena meant devising a storyline for its development that could trump the narratives used to justify Sino-Japanese practice. Timothy Wixted has beautifully shown how the prefaces tapped into the psychology from the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry*. I would like to reinforce his point by arguing that the *Kokinshû* prefaces did so, first and most importantly, in order to break the hegemony of Sino-Japanese poetry at court.<sup>58</sup> The *Kokinshû* prefaces constructed a timeless and universal “Way” (Ch. *dao*,

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed account of how *waka* poetry gained public face in the half century preceding the *Kokinshû* see Helen McCullough, *Brocade by Night: Kokinwakashû and the Court Style in Japanese Classical Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1985), 231–92.

<sup>58</sup> John Timothy Wixted, “The *Kokinshû* Prefaces: Another Perspective,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43.1 (1983): 215–38. Wixted’s landmark article set out to reconstruct the Chinese background of the *Kokinshû* Prefaces, “Only one face of the *Kokinshû* prefaces, however, came to be viewed, for the prefaces themselves became the *terminus a quo* for most later Japanese discussion of poetics. The context of the original discourse was generally ignored.” (217). Wixted is absolutely right that the *Kokinshû* has overwhelming be read in *forward* direction, that is as the first and thus source of 21 more imperial *waka* collections to come and the Prefaces’ relation to Chinese precedents has been neglected. My paper intends to complement Wixted’s argument by not just looking at Chinese precedents, but at the Sino-Japanese antecedents of the *Kokinshû* prefaces. After all, *waka* poetry did not have to compete for imperial favor against poetry or poetics from China, but against Sino-Japanese texts by their fellow countrymen.

J. *michi*) of poetic practice that transcended the historically conditioned regime of “wen” in the *Kaifūsō*. Second, having polemicized against contingent “wen” through the universality of the “Way,” the authors of the prefaces proceeded to capture cosmogony as literary history. Although they gave up on the broad semantic spectrum to which the Sino-Japanese anthologies had laid claim in using “wen” as civilization, Confucian civility, literature and rhetorical flourish gradually unfolding in a slow evolutionary process, they made poetry into an even more powerful entity: they implanted it into a cosmological timeline reaching back to the very beginning of Heaven and Earth.

The radical novelty of the *Kokinshū* prefaces in comparison to the prefaces to the previous Sino-Japanese anthologies was not the reception of new Chinese sources that had reached Japan in the meantime or on a forceful assertion of complete independence of the indigenous tradition from Chinese precedent. Instead, the crucial difference was a clever shift in the choice of canonical Chinese subtexts—in particular the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry*. The most effective step in this scheme was to capitalize on a niche left by the focus on “wen” in the Sino-Japanese anthologies, namely the *Kaifūsō* and the three imperial Sino-Japanese collections compiled at the behest of Emperors Saga and Junna in the first decades of the ninth century. “Wen” failed to give a psychological account of poetic creativity. Yes, “wen” was certainly a powerful concept to evoke in one and the same breath the invention of writing, the establishment of Confucian-style governance, and the emergence of literary production and rhetorical sophistication. But *why write* in the first place? The *Kokinshū* compilers’ found their best opportunity to exploit that blind spot in the preface to the *Classic of Poetry*, with its psychological explanation of the unfolding of poetry from the latency within the heart into words manifest in the world, as paraphrased in Masafusa’s piece above. It allowed them to sketch a vision of the nature and history of Japanese *waka* poetry not only on par with Sino-Japanese poetry, but psychologically and historically surpassing it.<sup>59</sup>

The Sino-Japanese preface opens:

夫和歌者	Japanese <i>waka</i> poetry
託其根於心地	takes root in the soil of one’s heart
發其華於詞林者也	and spreads its flowers into a Forest of Words.
人之在世	While in the world
不能無為	people cannot be idle.
思慮易遷	Thoughts and concerns easily change,

<sup>59</sup> Mark Morris has forcefully made the point that the adoption of what is usually considered an “expressive” theory of poetic production is in fact an argumentative strategy to bolster the position of Japanese poetry against that of Sino-Japanese poetry: “An enduring cultural solipsism reads this preface as an incitement to lyric expressivity. It is no such thing. Tsurayuki was in the opening comments defending Japanese poetry—*yamato uta*, his nostalgically calculated anachronism for what was called *waka*—in competition with Chinese poetry, the form that had all but crowded *waka* out of the social milieu of the powerful, and arguing that *waka* was as natural as song to a bird and socially useful.” Mark Morris, “Waka and Form, Waka and History,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46.2 (1986): 555. Martin Svensson Ekström has criticized a reading of the “Great Preface” that sees poetry as a spontaneous and natural expression from the perspective of the Chinese tradition, arguing that both the rest of the Preface and the tradition associated with the transmission of the Preface turn against such a reading. Martin Svensson Ekström, “A Second Look at the Great Preface on the Way to a New Understanding of Han Dynasty Poetics,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 21 (Dec 1999): 1–33.

哀樂相變	sorrows and pleasures alternate.
感生於志	As impressions arise in the intent mind,
詠形於言	song takes shape in words [...]
若夫春鶯之囀花中	It is just like the spring warbler singing among blossoms
秋蟬之吟樹上	or the autumn cricket chirping in the treetops:
雖無曲折	though nothing forces them to do so,
各發歌謠	they each put forth their song.
物皆有之	All creatures do it,
自然之理也	it's a natural principle. <sup>60</sup>

It is significant that the image of vegetal growth is chosen to convey the process of how a poem becomes manifest, or “grows,” because it facilitates a convenient figural flow between nature and the mind, and enables the “interiorization” of nature into psychological processes—“every creature has its song.”

The preface describes Japanese poetry as the response to a natural scene in resonance with the inner metaphorical landscape of “seeds and blossoms” shared by all living creatures and growing forth into a “forest of words.” This naturalistic account was a powerful counter-vision to the regime of “wen” propagated in the Sino-Japanese anthologies. It replaced culture and history with nature and psychology, and, concomitantly, “wen” with “the Way.”

The last section of the Sino-Japanese preface vividly shows this powerful replacement of “wen” with “the Way” and, consequently, of the previous hegemony of Sino-Japanese poetry with the wish for a future flourishing of Japanese poetry. After lamenting the decline of *waka* poetry and describing the emperor’s desire of “resurrecting the since long abandoned Way” the preface closes on this powerful gesture, a majestic leap to secure *waka* poetry eternity in the face of Sino-Japanese “wen”:

適遇和歌之中興	If Japanese poetry should meet with a new revival
以樂吾道之再昌	we will delight in the resurrection of Our Way.
嗚呼人丸既沒	Alas, with Hitomaro long dead,
和謠不在斯哉	is Japanese poetry not here with us/ contained in this? <sup>61</sup>

This is a brilliant overwriting of *Analects* 9.5, in which Confucius, when surrounded by enemies in Kuang, exclaims, “Although King Wen is dead, is not our cultural heritage (*wen*)<sup>62</sup> present in me? 文王既沒文不在茲乎。” The logic of replacement is as follows: Hitomaro, the unrivalled poet-saint anthologized in the first Japanese anthology, the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, replaces King Wen; “this Way of *waka* poetry” replaces the “Zhou cultural heritage (*wen*)”; and “Confucius” as the curator of this tradition is replaced with both the contemporary Japanese poets at Emperor Daigo’s court and the *Kokinshū* itself. The “Way of *waka* poetry”—a notion that was brought

<sup>60</sup> Kojima Noriyuki and Arai Eizō (comm.), *Kokin wakashū*. SNKBZ (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 338–40. See also Katagiri Yōichi, *Kokinwakashū zenhyōshaku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998), 279. My translation has benefited from Leonard Grzanka’s translation of the Sino-Japanese Preface in Laurel Rasplca Rodd, *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 379–85.

<sup>61</sup> *Kokinwakashū*, 348.

<sup>62</sup> “Wen” is here a serious pun on the name of King Wen, the embodiment of the virtuous rule of the Zhou dynasty mentioned later in the passage.

to its full consequences only later in the medieval period—resides both in the collection offered to the throne and in the poet-compilers who put it together.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.2 Borrowing cosmology for the creation of poetogony

A second strategy that both prefaces of the *Kokinshû* use to turn tables on the longer-standing status of Sino-Japanese poetry is to tell the beginning of Japanese poetry through the cosmogonic narrative borrowed from the earliest Chronicles, in particular the above-mentioned *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. The *Nihon shoki* opens on the following phrase:

In old times Heaven and Earth were not yet split, Yin and Yang forces not yet divided.<sup>64</sup> They formed a chaotic mass like an egg,<sup>65</sup> of limitless obscurity and containing seeds. 古天地未剖, 陰陽不分, 渾沌如鷄子, 溟滓而含牙.<sup>66</sup>

Using the opening lines from the *Nihon shoki* as rhetorical template to tell the history of literature was sensible, because this Sino-Japanese historical chronicle that recorded events on the archipelago from the beginnings up until the reign of Empress Jitô (r. 690–697) was a canonical precedent for writing about origins. It also provided an ultimate, because cosmological, leap towards sanctioning poetic practice not just within human society but within the universe.

The two *Kokinshû* prefaces stage the poetic beginning with effective variations. The Japanese preface claims

<sup>63</sup> This clever assertion of the Japanese “Way of poetry” over the Sino-Japanese culture of “wen” bears an uncanny resemblance to the way the *Laozi* and early Daoist traditions attempted to dislodge their Confucian rivals: although the date of the *Laozi* is still hotly disputed and tradition, going back at least to Sima Qian’s biography in Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian*, has it that *Laozi* might have preceded Confucius or at least have been his contemporary, on rhetorical grounds the relation between the *Analects* and *Laozi* is clear: while the *Analects* are not concerned with attacking values propagated in the *Laozi*, the *Laozi* is replete with polemics against the Confucian tradition. I would argue that claiming a timeless natural “Way” against the Confucian historical consciousness of civilization and against the importance of ritual and ethical values was one way in which the *Laozi* could also conveniently claim precedence over the Confucian tradition. The concept of “the Way”—a term that plays only a minor role in the *Analects*—was an attractive niche to exploit and this move was obviously effective enough so that the later traditions associated with the *Laozi* came to be called “Daoism.” The structural parallel between the rhetorical struggle for precedence of Daoism over Confucianism with the *Kokinshû* prefaces’s polemics against the Sino-Japanese tradition is important for two reasons: first, it confirms my argument that the replacement of “wen” with “the Way” was indeed part of a struggle over precedence and fought out through a rhetoric of disinheritance. Second, the structural parallel allows us to extend the argument further by sustained analogy. I argue that the second strategy to dislodge the authority of Sino-Japanese literature was to plot literary history onto a narrative of Daoist cosmology which the *Nihon shoki* in turn had borrowed from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a syncretic text of the first century B.C. heavily relying on Daoist rhetoric. It is fascinating to trace inner-Chinese strategies of disinheritance earlier traditions and examine how they are put to similar use in the Japanese case. I would argue that the *Kokinshû* prefaces used a polemical scheme of disinheritance prefigured in the struggle between early Daoists and Confucians in a domestic quarrel to argue for the precedence of *waka* over *kanshi* poetry.

<sup>64</sup> This opening phrase is an almost literal quotation from chapter 2 of the *Huainanzi*.

<sup>65</sup> Quotation from the third century text *Sanwu liji* 三五曆紀 by Xu Zheng fragments of which survive in the Chinese encyclopedias *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 and *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽.

<sup>66</sup> Kojima Noriyuki et al., comm., *Nihon shoki* SNKBZ (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1994–), 18. My translation has benefited from Aston’s translation in *Nihongi. Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to 697 A. D.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), XX 1–2.

Such songs came into being when heaven and earth first appeared. However, legend has it that in the broad heavens they began with Princess Shitateru, and on earth with the song of Susano-o no mikoto. In the age of the awesome gods, songs did not have a fixed number of syllables and were difficult to understand because the poets expressed themselves directly, without polish. By the time of the age of humans, beginning with Susano-o no mikoto, poems of thirty-one syllables<sup>67</sup> were composed.<sup>68</sup>

この歌、天地の開闢初まりける時より、出来にけり。しかあれども、世に伝はる事は、ひさかたの天にしては、下照姫に初まり、あらかねの地にしては、素盞烏尊よりぞ、起こりける。ちはぶる神世には、歌の文字も定まらず、素直にして、事の心分き難かりけらし。人の世と成りて、素盞烏尊よりぞ、三十文字あまり一文字は、詠みける。

## The Sino-Japanese preface states

But in the Seven Generations of the Age of the Gods the times were unsophisticated and people were simple. Feelings (*jō* 情) and desires (*yoku* 欲) were not distinguished and Japanese poetry had not yet been created. Thereafter, when the god Susano-o reached Izumo, poems of thirty-one syllables appeared for the first time.<sup>69</sup> This was the creation of the current “envoy.”<sup>70</sup> After this, everybody—whether the Grandson of the Heavenly Gods or the Daughter of the God of the Sea—would convey their feelings through Japanese poetry.<sup>71</sup> When we reach the Human Age, this custom flourished tremendously. The “long poem,” the “short poem,” the “head-repeated poem” (*sedōka* 旋頭歌), and the “mixed root poem” (*konponka* 混本歌): the various forms were not just of one type, but the original strand gradually diversified.<sup>72</sup>

然而神世七代、時質人淳、情欲無分、和歌未作・逮于素盞烏尊到出雲國、始有三十一字之詠・今反歌之作也・其後雖天神之孫、海童之女、莫不以和歌通情者・爰及人代、此風大興・長歌短歌旋頭混本之類、雜體非一、源流漸繁・

Poetry starts on different trajectories in the two prefaces. The Japanese preface advances a much stronger claim: poetry is as old as the cosmos and it came to be transmitted among the gods since Princess Shitateru and on earth after Susano-o, the notoriously rebellious son of the divine creator couple Izanami and Izanagi and brother of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family, was expelled from heaven to the land of Izumo due to his misbehavior. In the Sino-Japanese preface poetry does not go back to the beginning of time, but only starts with Susano-o. The preface effectively overwrites its rhetorical templates. Where the cosmogony of the *Nihon shoki* states that “Yin and Yang forces were not yet divided” the poetogony of the Sino-Japanese preface proudly translates Yin and Yang into poetic currency: “Emotions and desires were not yet distinguished.” In the same way as Masafusa had translated Chinese literary history into an allegorical

<sup>67</sup> That is *waka* poems.

<sup>68</sup> *Kokinwakashū*, 5. Translation from Rodd, *Kokinshū*, 35–36.

<sup>69</sup> Both in the *Kojiki* and in the *Nihon shoki* the first poem in *waka* form (31 syllables: 5/7/5/7/7) is by Susano-o, when he comes down to earth at Izumo.

<sup>70</sup> The envoy (*hanka* 反歌) was a *waka* poem (also called *tanka* or “short poem”) appended as a coda to a long poem.

<sup>71</sup> According to the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* the Grandson of the Heavenly Gods did not heed the warning of his wife, the Daughter of the God of the Sea, not to look at her during childbirth. Seeing her transform into a sea creature, he fled in terror, while she returned to the sea. The Chronicles record their poetic exchanges.

<sup>72</sup> *Kokinwakashū*, 340. For explanations of these forms see below.

“Realm of Poetry,” the *Kokinshū* preface established a realm of poetogony that could not fail to be both temporally and psychologically superior to that of Sino-Japanese literature.

The preface also takes on the phrase “human ‘wen’ (civilization/writing/letters) had not yet been created,” which the *Kaifūsō* had appropriated from the history of civilization given in the *Wenxuan* preface, and replaces “wen” and Sino-Japanese poetry with its rival twin genre of *waka* poetry: “Japanese poetry had not yet been created.” In the words of the Sino-Japanese preface enriched by the undertones of its subtexts Japanese poetry becomes the synecdoche for writing *per se*. While giving up the claim to the earliest possible rise of Japanese poetry, the preface elevates it almost more powerfully by making it into the rhetorical placeholder—in lieu of “wen”—for all of human civilization, writing, and literature.

The divergent narratives of the two prefaces make sense within their respective linguistic repertoires: the Japanese preface was hardly bound by rhetorical precedents, because its composition dated itself to the very period that saw the rise of Japanese prose writing in the late ninth to early tenth century. Thus it could afford laying claim to the earliest possible beginning for poetry and making the creation of poetry and of the cosmos coextensive. The Sino-Japanese preface, because it is linguistically closer to Literary Chinese discourse and therefore also held more accountable for justifying its enterprise within that tradition, is accordingly more timid about ultimate claims for the earliest origin of poetry and insists on a history of invention on the Chinese model from the *Wenxuan* preface. Yet, tuning in to the statement in the *Nihon shoki* about the Yin and Yang forces it constructs in an equally powerful gesture a cosmology of poetry, in which the *stuff* of poetry, namely the as yet undivided “feelings” and “desires,” are already there, although poetic composition has not yet been created. This move “poeticizes” the cosmic substances and forces and claims the existence of poeticity even before its proper beginning. Poetry *avant la lettre* is the immodest claim of a storyline that only at first glance seems to be encumbered by the seeming modesty of its rhetorical model, the *Wenxuan* preface.

Another striking difference between the prefaces is that the Japanese preface puts greater emphasis on the duality of beginnings. It has poetry start in the moment of the emergence of doubleness, the splitting of Heaven and Earth. This image of the beginning of poetry puts the Japanese preface—in sharp distinction to the Sino-Japanese preface—on a trajectory of repeated moments of doubleness. The first repetition of doubleness occurs in the passage about Susano-o. While the Sino-Japanese preface only mentions Susano-o as the one who established the *tanka* form of 31 syllables in the human realm, the Japanese preface, according to the rhetoric of the initial split of Heaven and Earth, couples Susano-o with a female mate, Princess Shitateru, who establishes poetry in the heavenly realm.

I would suggest that the repetition of the rhetorical figure of doubleness in the Japanese preface might reflect a self-consciousness of fledgling prose writing in Japanese. We should not forget that the Japanese preface is a very early piece of Japanese prose literature: although the first preserved tale, the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (*Taketori monogatari* 竹取物語), might slightly predate the *Kokinshū* prefaces,

the first *kana* diary, the Tosa Diary (*Tosa nikki* 土佐日記) by the same author as the preface—Ki no Tsurayuki—dates to 934. And prefaces to previous *waka* collections like the *Newly Compiled Collection of Myriad Leaves* (*Shinsen Man'yōshū* 新撰万葉集; 893) or to poetic treatises such as the *Kakyō hyōshiki* 歌經標式 (772) were written in Sino-Japanese, not in Japanese. Thus, the rhetorical figure of doubleness in the Japanese preface seems to admit to its existence as a young “duplicate” tradition developing in dependence on and competition with the previously imperially sanctioned Sino-Japanese tradition of writing poetic prefaces or treatises. Also, it is much more gender-sensitive and needs a proper parental couple for all things.

The phase after the establishment of poetry is also treated differently in the two prefaces. Seemingly in response to the *Wenxuan* preface, which devotes much space to accounting for various literary genres and their history, the Sino-Japanese preface creates a scenario of genre diversification—a theme blatantly absent from the Japanese preface. Both prefaces declare *waka* (or *tanka*) poetry as the both most primeval and most mature standard form of poetry. This claim is confirmed by the collection itself which clearly establishes *waka* as the orthodox form, and relegates other verse forms, such as long poems (*chōka* 長歌) that had been so prominent in the mid-eight century *Man'yōshū*, into the ragbag book 19 under the heading of “miscellaneous forms” (*zattai* 雑体).

In suggestive contrast to the collection's agenda to reduce the diversity of poetic forms and to enshrine solely the *waka* form, the Sino-Japanese preface develops a rhetoric of genre diversification in response to the *Wenxuan* preface and tells the story inverse to its historical development. Once upon a time, so goes the myth that is invented to cement the authority of the *waka* form, there was primeval *waka* poetry which then branched out into various miscellaneous forms such as “long-verse poetry” (like *waka* based on sequences of pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic lines), and irregular “*sedōka*” 旋頭歌 (literally “head-repeated poem”). In this context the mention of the obscure and unidentified form of a “mixed root” poetry (*konponka* 混本歌) is a clear sign that Ki no Yoshimochi 紀淑望 (-919), the author of the Sino-Japanese preface, wanted to add more rather than fewer items to flesh out a rhetoric of genre diversification in the Japanese context.

Japanese poetry reaches a new stage when it is practiced by emperors. The Japanese preface says

The “Naniwa Bay” poem celebrates the beginning of a reign.<sup>73</sup> The Asaka Mountain poem was composed by a waiting woman trying to pique someone's interest. These two songs are considered the father and mother of poetry, and are used as the first texts for calligraphy practice.<sup>74</sup>

難波津の歌は、帝の御初め也。安積山の言葉は、采女の、戯れより詠みて、この歌は歌の父母の様にてぞ、手習ふ人の、初めにもしける。

<sup>73</sup> This refers to a poem Emperor Nintoku (first half of fifth century) composed when in Naniwa to celebrate the arrival of spring and the beginning of his reign. “At Naniwa Bay/the trees are dressed in blossoms/the winter-shrouded/trees are now dressed in blossoms/to tell the world spring has come.” Rodd, *Kokinshū*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Kokinwakashū*, 6. Rodd, *Kokinshū*, 37.

## The Sino-Japanese preface states

Then we come to poems such as the “Naniwa Bay” poem offered by Emperor [Nintoku] or the “Tominô River” poem in response to Crown Prince [Shôtoku]<sup>75</sup>: Sometimes the situation is divine and miraculous, or the inspiration verges on the deeply obscure. But when looking at poems of high antiquity, many keep to a diction of pristine substance. They had yet to become pleasure for the eye and ear, serving only as sources of moral instruction.<sup>76</sup>  
 至如難波津之什獻天皇。富緒川之篇報太子。或事關神異。或興入幽玄。但見上古哥。多存古質之語。未爲耳目之翫。徒爲教戒之端。

The differences in the two prefaces point again to a different literary repertoire. The figure of doubleness dominates once more the Japanese preface: Emperor Nintoku’s poem is coupled with the courtesan poem and, in parallel to the gender complementary of their authors, the poems are called “father and mother of poetry” in a historical as well as biographical sense. From a historical perspective, they are both firsts of their kind in the history of *waka* poetry and from the perspective of an individual’s biography they are also the first poems the Heian elite will use as calligraphic models when starting to learn how to write.

At this point the different treatment of time in the two prefaces becomes even more pronounced. Overall the Sino-Japanese preface gives a historical timeline in which the first and next, the earlier and the later are clearly marked and add up to a linear timeline: first the age of the gods, and then Susano-o, whereupon we reach the human age and the stage of increasing genre diversification. In contrast, the Japanese preface lacks linear progression and is more appropriately described as a parataxis of double beginnings: there is the time when Heaven and Earth were separated, there is Princess Shitateru’s and Susano-o’s transmission of poetry in the divine and human realm respectively. There is the “imperial beginning” of *waka* with Emperor Nintoku and the courtesan, which in turn is the ontogenetic beginning of writing, the “father and mother” of calligraphy training. Chronological succession is only suggested in the preface by the paratactic succession of paragraphs and by the familiarity of the reader with the historical accounts in the *Nihon shoki*. Beyond that, poetry in the Japanese preface has these multiple “beginnings” that are arranged as different qualitative aspects of poetry, not so much as successive stages of an historical evolution. I would suggest that the Japanese preface’s choice of universal parataxis over historical progression contributes to the overall agenda of both *Kokinshû* prefaces to compete with historical “wen” through a timeless “Way.”

<sup>75</sup> According to the *Nihon shoki* the Prince offered his robe to a starving beggar by the roadside. When the Prince heard that the beggar had died he was grieved and sent messengers to his grave. But there was no corpse, only the robe folded on the coffin. From this everybody understood that the beggar had not been an ordinary man, but praised the Prince all the more for his ability as a sage to recognize other sages. *Nihon shoki* XXII 21/12/1–2. The poem alluded to is preserved in *Japan’s Records of the Miraculous* (*Nihon ryôiki* 日本靈異記).

<sup>76</sup> *Kokinwakashû*, 340.

### 3.3 Rewriting the advent of writing

In the *Kaifûsô* the advent of writing had been described in enticingly conflicting fashion. In perfect accordance with the *Nihon shoki* writing is described as having reached Japan in the form of diplomatic documents and Confucian Classics through the Korean peninsula during the time of Emperor Ôjin. Yet, the use of hexagrams to describe actions of earlier emperors claimed a “hexagrammatic literacy” before that time. Also, by alluding to Chinese legends that presented writing as an imitation of natural patterns, writing was by implication always already there so that its advent in Japan was treated as a discovery of something pre-existing. Consequently, the role of writing as a revolutionary new and foreign technology could completely be downplayed, a strategy pursued in the Japanese preface.

The Japanese preface does not deal with the advent of writing. Several passages touch upon writing or imply it, but in a tangential fashion that convinces the reader of the marginality of the issue. When the God Susano-o establishes the 31-syllable *tanka* as the standard form of Japanese poetry the expression 31 “written characters” (文字 *moji*) is used with such naturalness that translators tend to give it a “weak” reading as “syllables” to suggest oral recitation rather than written transmission. Also, the mention of Emperor Nintoku’s and the courtesan’s Poems as texts for calligraphic practice *assumes* rather than *explains* the advent of writing. More forcefully, writing as a mode of preservation beyond death is given high praise:

Hitomaro is dead, but poetry is still with us. Times may change, joy and sorrow come and go, but the words of these poems are eternal, endless as the green willow threads, unchanging as the needles of the pine, long as the trailing vines, permanent as birds’ tracks. Those who know poetry and who understand the heart of things will look up to the old and admire the new as they look up to and admire the moon in the broad sky.<sup>77</sup>

人麻呂亡く成りにたれど、歌の事留まれるかな。たとひ時移り、事去り、樂しび悲しび行く交ふとも、この歌の文字あるをや。青柳の糸絶えず、松の葉の散り失せずして、真栄の葛、永く伝はり、鳥の跡、久しく留まれらば、歌の様を知り、事の心を得たらむ人は、大空の月を見るがごとくに、古を仰ぎて、今を恋ひざらめかも。

Writing is a strategy against impermanence and oblivion and confirms the value of the anthology. And, in a nice reversal of the legend of Cang Jie’s discovery of writing through observation of bird track patterns, the description of the historical advent of writing is turned into the vehicle of a metaphor of its future influence: “Letters of these poems—like the tracks of birds they remain.” In this metaphorical form that exceeds their historical origin while preserving their symbolic power, writing seduces future readers of the collection to “look up to the old and admire the new,” in short to read the *Ko-kin-waka-shû*, the “Collection of Old and New Waka Poems.” Again, we see a strategy to transplant themes from Chinese or Sino-Japanese precedents into a new temporal realm to override the historical through the universalized.

In stark contrast to the Japanese preface, the Sino-Japanese preface makes the advent into a major issue, actually into *the main reason* why the reviving of Japanese poetry for which the prefaces argue becomes necessary in the first place. The pas-

<sup>77</sup> *Kokinwakashû*, 17. Rodd, *Kokinshû*, 47.

sage is all the more significant as it lacks any correlate in the Japanese preface:

Since the time of Prince Ôtsu Chinese poems and poetic expositions came to be composed. Poetic talents admired this practice and succeeded each other. They imported those Chinese characters and transformed our Japanese customs. The ways of the people were completely changed, and Japanese poetry gradually declined. Yet we still had the Illustrious Master Kakinomoto [no Hitomaro] who upheld memories of the divine marvels and who alone strode unrivalled between past and present.<sup>78</sup>

自大津皇子之。初作詩賦。詞人才子。慕風繼塵。移彼漢家之字。化我日域之俗。民業一改。和哥漸衰。然猶有先師柿本大夫者。高振神妙之思。獨步古今之間。

The *Nihon shoki* also credits Prince Ôtsu with the beginning of poetic composition in Sino-Japanese.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the compiler of the *Kaifûsô* did not hide his sympathies for Prince Ôtsu's literary talent, although he gave moral and chronological priority to Prince Ôtomo and his poetry. However, Ki no Yoshimochi conflates the advent of writing with the beginning of Sino-Japanese poetic composition. The *Kaifûsô* preface had kept these two moments clearly apart. Writing and books were imported by Korean envoys during the reign of Emperor Ôjin (ca. fifth century), while poetic composition started under Emperor Tenji (r. 668–671). This temporal conflation allowed to imagine a notion of unblemished Japanese oral poetry devoid of any Chinese contamination and refused to acknowledge that any transmission of Japanese poetry had from the outset been conditioned by the Chinese language and its textual archive.

More startling than the temporal conflation is the hostility of the statement. This is not just a Platonic campaign against writing as an onslaught onto the power of orality and memory—the previous passage from the Japanese preface had actually sung the praise of writing's power to rescue writers from oblivion. This is a campaign against the “corruption” through *Chinese* customs and writing *in particular*. Why did the Sino-Japanese preface advance this strong attack? Did not its closer linguistic proximity to Chinese make the attack seem more schizophrenic, after all, than if the Japanese preface had touched upon this sensitive issue? I argue that this was precisely the point. If a preface to a Japanese poetry anthology wanted to make its case to an audience accustomed to the public prevalence of Sino-Japanese poetry it was best to make this plea strategically in the language of public authority, even if that implied assaulting the Chinese language of which Sino-Japanese was a hybrid form. Besides the strategic advantage of broaching the topic in the Sino-Japanese preface, it was also a matter of *necessity*, not just of choice. The Japanese preface could *afford* making the advent of writing into a non-issue. There was no direct precedent that demanded to be redressed or at least addressed. The Sino-Japanese preface, in contrast, faced not just Chinese precedent, but had, more importantly, to engage the treatment of writing in the previous Sino-Japanese anthologies. The violent attack on Prince Ôtsu and on the corruption through Chinese influence in the Sino-Japanese preface is a powerful argument against calling the preface the “Chinese Preface

<sup>78</sup> *Kokinwakashû*, 342.

<sup>79</sup> *Nihon shoki* XXX 1/10/3.

to the *Kokinshū*” as has been customary. This title makes an attack on Chinese writing in a “Chinese Preface” improperly and ludicrously masochistic, disregarding that the preface’s author was enmeshed in the *Lebenswelt* of Heian Japan and not Tang China, and it neglects the intricate dynamic that in reality unfolds between Japanese and Sino-Japanese modes of textuality and their respective powers to enlist Chinese and Sino-Japanese precedents for their own strategic purposes.

### 3.4 Building a new time universe: the *Kokinshū* refracted in two Long Poems (*chōka*) from Book 19<sup>80</sup>

The poem by Emperor Nintoku to which the prefaces refer as an “imperial beginning” constitutes also a natural beginning. As a spring poem it marks the beginning of the year and of a new cycle of the seasons. The *Kokinshū* is indeed the first anthology that uses seasonal time as its overarching principle of arrangement.

Although some books of the *Man'yōshū* show patterns of seasonal arrangement the *Kokinshū* was the first anthology to be arranged in such strict and systematic fashion around a core of seasonal books. Contemporary Chinese anthologies were not arranged by seasons or topics, most of the Tang anthologies were actually rather randomly arranged by author.<sup>81</sup> The four Sino-Japanese anthologies that preceded the *Kokinshū* were either arranged by historical chronology such as the *Kaifūsō* and the first imperially commissioned Sino-Japanese anthology, the *Ryō'unshū* (814). The second imperial anthology, the *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (818), followed thematic categories—such as “travel poems,” “banquet poems,” or “poems on history,” but did not include the seasons among them. The third and last Sino-Japanese imperial anthology relied on the model of the *Wenxuan* and was ordered by genre. Thus, from the point of view of early tenth century compilation practices, the *Kokinshū*'s structure is highly anomalous and demands an explanation. Not only are the seasons used as topical categories, but within each seasonal book the poems follow a more or less continuous timeline of beginning, thriving, and ending of each season created through “progression and association” of individual poems, as Konishi Jin'ichi has termed it.<sup>82</sup> As the seasons progressed fine triggers of seasonal associations such as certain birds, animals, or plants moved meticulously through the seasonal progression of each book. Nothing has become more intuitive and “natural” than the centrality of the seasons for writing, reading, and compiling poetry in Japan, and it is therefore extremely hard to call into question what since the tenth century has established itself as one of the basic tenets of Japanese poetry. Yet, from the per-

<sup>80</sup> Scholars have long been puzzled by the fact that the Long Poems in the *Kokinshū* range under the heading of “tanka,” “Short Poems.” Tokuhara Shigemi has recently advanced an original hypothesis, arguing that the Long Poems all state the authors' feelings and complaints (述懐 *jukkai*) and that they therefore use the self-deprecatory term of “short, minor poems” in deference to Emperor Daigo. Given that two of the Long Poems are by the compilers of the *Kokinshū* and that Mibu no Tadamine's poem is particularly plaintive, this hypothesis seems quite convincing. See Tokuhara, *Kokinwakashū no enkei* (Ōsaka: Izumi shoin, 2005), 305–17.

<sup>81</sup> On Tang anthologies see Pauline Yu, “Poems in Their Place: Collections and Canons in Early Chinese Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50.1 (1990): 183–96. For a collection of surviving Tang anthologies see Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996).

<sup>82</sup> See his by now classical article, “Association and Progression: Principles of Integration in anthologies and Sequences of Japanese Court Poetry, A.D. 900–1350,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958).

spective of the *Kokinshū* Age we have to ask why the compilers singled out the four seasons as the major structure of the anthology. Why were the seasons not just one among many other topic headings, but made up more than a third of the collection? And why were they so prominently placed at the beginning? What was at stake in the choice of such an unprecedented arrangement?

In the context of the voluminous scholarship on the *Kokinshū* it is astonishing how little the arrangement of the collection has come into question. In the same way as the prefaces, the anthology tends to be read in forward direction, along the lines of its reception history. Even articles specifically devoted to the structure of the imperial anthologies hardly address how the *Kokinshū* came to be arranged the way it is.<sup>83</sup> I would like to advance a partial hypothesis for the unprecedented choice of arrangement. In light of my argument so far, the choice of the *Kokinshū* compilers to give such prominence to the seasons perfectly matches their strategy to compete with the “wen” of Sino-Japanese anthologies with the help of the “Way” of Japanese poetry. The argument of the prefaces and the topical arrangement of the anthology can be considered two faces of the same coin. Seasonal time implied circular time without specific ends or beginnings and, although the Japanese preface locates the beginning of poetry at the beginning of time, cosmogony and poetogony intersect in this moment of an eternal past in the age of the gods, which is circularly timeless rather than temporally linear. The notion of time confirmed by the *Kokinshū*'s practice of suppressing the particular historical context of the composition of the individual poems, of decontextualizing them in order to reinsert them into the anthology's seasonal time frame. The collection's structure, like the prefaces' argument, created a new time universe according to which Japanese poetry could be located outside of historical time and could be construed as the medium of an eternal psychological present of future generations of poets to come.

The impression that reconfiguration of time plays an important role in the anthology's arrangement and poetological framing is strongly confirmed by two long poems in book 19. Poems 1002 and 1003 were written by two of the *Kokinshū* compilers, Ki no Tsurayuki (ca. 868–945), the author of the Japanese preface, and Mibu no Tadamine respectively. Their titles suggest that they were submitted as versified “tables of contents” together with the collection or an earlier form of the collection.

<sup>83</sup> See for example Honda Yoshihiko, “Buritsu yori mita kaku chokusen wakashū no tokushoku,” *Heian bungaku kenkyū* 30.6. (1963): 25–41. The classic study of the *Kokinshū*'s structural arrangement, Matsuda Takeo's *Kokinshū no kōzō ni kansuru kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kazama Shōbō, 1965) devotes only a handful out of its mighty 700 pages to the origin of the topical categories, focusing otherwise on the internal arrangement within the topical categories. Apparently the seasonal arrangement of the *Kokinshū* appears so “natural” that it does not call for explanation. However, Ozawa Masao has carefully traced various influences on the *Kokinshū*'s arrangement by seasonal categories, such as the seasonal arrangement of books 8 and 10 of the *Man'yōshū*, the partial seasonal arrangement of several poetic contests since 893, and the seasonal arrangement of two anthologies that preceded the *Kokinshū*, namely the *Shinsen Man'yōshū* and the *Chisatoshū*. The *Shinsen Man'yōshū* 新撰万葉集 (893), attributed to Sugawara no Michizane, juxtaposes *waka* poems with their transpositions into Sino-Japanese quatrains. *Kudai waka* 句題和歌 (or *Chisatoshū* 千里集, 897) by Ōe no Chisato juxtaposes Chinese couplets, mostly by Bo Juyi and his friend Yuan Zhen, with their transposition into Japanese *waka* poems. See Ozawa Masao, “Chokusen wakashū no budate no seiritsu,” *Kokugo kokubungaku hō* 9 (1959.1): 16–25. Although the existence of partial precedents is of importance, it still does not explain why the *Kokinshū* adopted its revolutionary topical arrangement that proved to become wildly successful. For a handy list of the seasonal topical categories in the *Man'yōshū* and in various early Heian poetry contests see Helen McCullough, *Brocade by Night: Kokinwakashū and the Court Style in Japanese Classical Poetry*, 541–47.

Thus, although they are included among the poems of the collection their relationship to the collection is as metatextual as the prefaces'. As poems on a collection of poems, they are even more directly metatextual than the prose prefaces, yet as long poems they are at cross-purposes with the *Kokinshū*'s enshrinement of the short *waka* form. There is a cognitive dissonance between the form of these meta-poems and the indirect argument of the collection *against* longer or irregular forms, a vestigial number of which is rather randomly assembled into Book 19. Certainly, a versified table of contents for a collection with over a thousand poems demanded the long form for purely practical reasons. But the writing of a table of contents in poetic form was completely unprecedented, so that the compilers' creative choice to do so must have been boldly intentional, but certainly also self-conscious enough to perceive the contradiction with their overall principles of compilation.

Yet, from the perspective of the *Kokinshū*'s agenda of asserting the public stature of Japanese poetry against the authority of Sino-Japanese poetry, the choice of the long-verse form was perfectly logical. The long-verse tradition as preserved in the *Man'yōshū* had developed sophisticated registers of encomiastic court poetry and it represented a past public stature of Japanese poetry that the *Kokinshū* compilers intended to revive in spirit, if not in their genre politics. Certainly, Hitomaro wrote seemingly "private" long poems such as the one about the death of his wife, but the set of poems on his excursion to Yoshino in the imperial retinue was precisely the kind of register needed for a solemn poem addressed to Emperor Daigo when submitting this first imperially commissioned anthology of Japanese poetry. Hitomaro had made Yoshino into the place that symbolized eternal rule over eternal land by a divine lineage. Empress Jitō, to whom the poems were addressed, was just the current embodiment of this timeless authority. Kasa no Kanamura (fl. before 733), an important court poet under the devout Buddhist Emperor Shōmu and Empress Genshō continued Hitomaro's encomiastic tradition, and made Yoshino's function as a site, where present imperial splendor intersected with an ever-present divine past in an unblemished primeval landscape even clearer:

山川を	Mountain and river
清みさやけみ	Are so clear, so limpid pure,
うべし神代ゆ	All men can see the reason why
定めけらしも	This site was chosen from the Age of Gods. <sup>84</sup>

In his long poem Tsurayuki applies this time regime, which legitimates the present through its connection to the eternal divine past, to poetry. In the Japanese preface Tsurayuki had used the cosmogony of the *Nihon shoki* to tell the history of poetry. In this poem he echoed the great long-verse poets from the *Man'yōshū* in their praise of the present embodiment of the divine lineage in order to tell a history of poetry:

ちはやぶる	Since the age of the
神の御世より	Awesome gods never ceasing
くれ竹の	During reigns profuse
世世にも絶えず	As the joints of black bamboo

<sup>84</sup> Kojima Noriyuki et al., eds., *Man'yōshū* SNKBZ (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1994-) VI 907-912. Translation by Edwin Cranston in *A Waka Anthology, volume I: A Gem-glistening Cup* (Stanford UP: Stanford, 1993), 295 ff.

天彦の	Men have sung with thoughts
音羽の山の	Entangled by the spring mists
春がすみ	That drift over Mount
思ひみだれて	Otowa [...] <sup>85</sup>

The opening statement that poetry has existed since the age of the gods is combined with the poetic psychology of response to an outer stimulus that the prefaces had appropriated from the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry*. And historical evolution is merged with psychological disposition in people’s response to the seasons: the spring mists over Mount Otowa produce spring poems. This opening leads directly into a narrative rendering of the topical categories of the *Kokinshū*, starting with spring in book 1 and the seasons and concluding on the poems for court occasions of Book 20. Tsurayuki further tells about the commission of the collection, the hardships of the compilation process and his personal sacrifice, and the anxieties of a compiler who might miss poems worthy to be included. Tsurayuki’s connection of circular seasonal time—replicated by the anthologies’ topical categories—with the linear timeline of a poetic cosmology (claimed in both prefaces) is further evidence that the various time regimes pervading the *Kokinshū* are inherently linked and join forces to challenge the dominance of the Sino-Japanese regime of “wen.”

Mibu no Tadamine’s poem is not an extension of the agenda of the prefaces. In some ways it seems to challenge it. Tsurayuki’s poem is overtly programmatic: it connects the time regimes proposed in the prefaces and the arrangement of the collection and it goes through the list of topical categories. Tadamine’s poem is much more loosely connected to the collection as a whole and stylistically quite experimental. Edwin Cranston notes that the poem’s tendency to reach syntactic closure on the short rather than the long line is far removed from the language of *Man’yōshū* long poems. In contrast, the poem brims over with the ambiguous phonetic puns and pivot words (*kakekotoba* 掛詞) that are so characteristic of *Kokinshū*-style poetry. This is already obvious in the opening of the poem in which Tadamine expresses his gratitude towards earlier poets for saving the poetic voice from falling silent and “sinking into Mute Marsh.”

Hitomaro in particular ensures according to Tadamine that poetry, the “leaves of his words,” will stay on until the end of time:

くれ竹の	Length upon length
世世の古言	Ages of the ancient songs
なかりせば	Like black bamboo
伊香保の沼の	By their measures have saved us
いかにして	From sinking silent
思ふころを	Into Mute Marsh, unable
述べへまし	To speak all our hearts.
あはれ昔へ	Ah, how long ago it was!
ありきてふ	Once there was a man
人麿こそは	Known as Hitomaro, so they say
うれしけれ	Of happy fame:
身は下ながら	Though his state was low,
言の葉を	He lifted high
天つ空まで	The leaves of his words until

<sup>85</sup> *Kokinwakashū*, 302. Rodd, *Kokinshū*, 340.

聞えあげ	They swept the heavens
末の世までの	And left their imprint on the world
あととなし	To the last age. <sup>86</sup>

Tadamine cannot help expressing his pride at being selected as a compiler to “follow in Hitomaro’s dust” and describes his ravishment with the help of the following odd image:

これを思へば	When I think of this, I feel
淮南に	Like the Huai-nan beast
薬けがせる	That befouled the elixir,
けだものの	So the story goes,
雲に吠えけむ	And afterward howled in the clouds.
心地して	I think of nothing,
千千のなさけも	Hold as naught the thousand joys
思ほえず	And sorrows of life:
ひとつ心ぞ	With a single heart for the honor
誇らしき	I brim with pride.

The “Huai-nan beast” refers to a dog and a rooster that drank a magical potion made by the Prince of Huai-nan and, inebriated, flew off into the clouds beyond the imperial palace. The image is rather comic, making the poet into a thief and his selection as compiler a case of fraud. It becomes immediately clear that his pride at being selected as compiler is just the favorable side of his deep indignation over his demotion from the Inner Palace Guards to the Gate Guards. From here on the poem turns into a personal lament over his advancing age, greying hair, and low position. Personal bemoaning of age and low status had a firm place in the public idiom of Sino-Japanese poetry. Depending on the situation it could be a gracious gesture of humility and understatement, or a more urgent plea for imperial attention and promotion, which is certainly the case with Tadamine’s poem. He vividly illustrates his decrepit life situation by describing the inclement natural conditions to which he is being exposed throughout the seasons. The *Kokinshū* prefaces and Tsurayuki’s long poem had singled out the seasonal changes as creative triggers of poetic productivity, but Tadamine lashes out at them for their various inconveniences:

九重の	When I was within the walls,
なかにては	Ninefold encircled,
あらしの風も	I never heard the loud crashing
聞かざりき	Of stormwinds blowing.
今は野山し	But now the moors and the mountains
ちかければ	Lie close at hand,
春はかすみに	Wherefore in spring I am covered
たなびかれ	By the trailing mist,
夏はうつせみ	And in summer the locusts
なき暮し	Cry on till dusk
秋は時雨に	In autumn to the chilly rains
袖をかし	I lend my sleeve,
冬は霜にぞ	And in winter am besieged
せめらるる	By the cold hoarfrost.

<sup>86</sup> *Kokinshū* XIX 1003, 304–305. The translation of Tadamine’s poem is by Edwin Cranston. Cranston, *Grasses of Remembrance, vol. II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 646–48. The poem is also preserved in *Kokin waka rokujo* IV:2506.

Tadamine's creative juices are not stimulated by nature, but he is frankly miserable under the onslaught of the seasons. The final intensified lament elevates his ennui and his wrinkled face to poetic heights: if one's days span "like the bridge of Nagara" and one's wrinkles are "like the waves of Naniwa" both reader and poet are rewarded with some comic relief, while visiting these beautiful places in their minds:

身はいやしくて	What a misery to be old
年たかき	If one's station is low,
ことの苦しさ	And only one's count of years is high!
かくしつ	So in this fashion,
長柄の橋の	Like the bridge of Nagara
ながらへて	I span the days
難波の浦に	While the waves of Naniwa,
立つなみの	Rising in the bay,
なみの皺にや	Roll like the sea of wrinkles
おぼほれむ	In which I drown.

At this plaintive point of culmination Tadamine reintroduces the effects of the magic potion mentioned above to help move towards a denouement that solves his personal misery and also manages to infuse this hitherto larmoyant poem with an inkling of encomiastic praise of the emperor, who after all, we should not forget, was the recipient of these verses.

さすがに命	Yet life for all of that
惜しければ	Is a precious thing:
越の国なる	Though my head become as white
白山の	As White Mountain
かしらは白く	Rising in the Land Across,
なりぬとも	The land of Koshi
音羽の滝の	Let me have the magic potion
音にきく	One hears rumors of
老いず死なずの	Echoing like Echo Falls,
くすりもが	Not to grow old or die:
君が八千世を	Let me regain youth and
若えつつ見む	The thousand years of our lord!

Tadamine does not covet the potion of immortality for selfish purposes. Instead, his regaining of youth will ensure that he can continue to praise the emperor for his next thousand years. Given that Tadamine has taken no time for imperial praise until this hastily encomiastic closure, we can of course not be sure whether the emperor really would have wanted to listen to a thousand more years of Tadamine's poetic lamentation. But the closure shows Tadamine's desire to end on a polite bow and promise of future poetic service.

### 3.5 Conclusion to the *Kokinshū*

Even if Tadamine's erratic long poem opposed, almost parodied, the stimulus theory of the prefaces in his private lament, it is clear that both prefaces, the arrangement of the collection, and the two long poems all work towards a framing of time that is seasonal, circular and that conditions a universal psychology of poetic response. I would certainly not argue that the sole motivation for developing such a novel

framing of time was to challenge the conception of time implied in Sino-Japanese anthologies such as the *Kaifūsō*. But it could not avoid doing so. Replacing the Confucian regime of “wen” with a “Way” of *waka* poetry was a powerful move to make. It placed poetry at the beginning of the cosmos, not within the gradual development of human civilization. It brought poetic composition into the reach of all sentient beings, not just a scribal elite trained in the reception and production of “wen,” and included even animals into the “natural principle” to burst forth in song. Fujiwara Katsumi has recently described the shift from the Sino-Japanese anthologies to the *Kokinshū* prefaces as a “depoliticization” and a step towards a universal emotional psychology based on people’s response to seasonal changes.<sup>87</sup> Yet, Takigawa Kōji has shown that the very choice of the seasonal arrangement had at the same time highly political undertones, because it harked back to the “Monthly Ordinances” Chapter (月令 *Yueling*) from the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), which outlined the ideal harmony of imperial rule with the cosmos and with agricultural production.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the *Kokinshū* constructed a notion of the seasons based on the universalized psychology of response to seasonal changes, but also connected this universal notion to the Japanese emperor’s local claims to power through his familiarity with and following of the seasonal cycle.

The rearrangement of temporal framing marks also a difference between the two prefaces, a thorny subject of investigation. Scholars are easily caught between the Scylla of hermeneutical paralysis ensuing from the impossibility of assessing the countless minute, possibly trivial, differences and the Charybdis of reductive overcompensation that tries to dissolve them into all-encompassing master schemes. In other words, the question has been how to straddle the hermeneutic gap between the host of minute variations and an overarching pattern of difference amenable to explanation. I agree in principle with Thomas LaMarre who has projected the complementary modes of “hare 晴れ” (in its most basic sense “bright,” “shining towards the outside,” thus official, solemn) and “ke 褻” (“intimate,” “hidden,” thus private and sentimental) onto the Sino-Japanese and Japanese preface respectively.<sup>89</sup> These terms have been part of poetic discourse since the Late Heian Period and translated into various spheres of Heian reality.<sup>90</sup> They functioned as a bipolar model for “formal” and “informal” writing style, in fashion and clothing, for the type of occasion of public or private composition and even to mark the diurnal cycle of “day”—associated with bright Yang—versus “night,” which was associated with dark

<sup>87</sup> See the record of the roundtable discussion in celebration of the 1100th anniversary of the *Kokinshū* in the special issue “*Kokinshū* 1100 nen” of *Bungaku* 6.3 (2005): 2–24.

<sup>88</sup> Takigawa analyses the opening sequence of the first book of the *Kokinshū* and explores, why the second poem, which, significantly, is by the compiler Ki no Tsurayuki, chooses to echo the phrase from the “Monthly Ordinances” Chapter: “In the first month of spring, the eastern wind melts the ice.” Takigawa argues convincingly that this allusion, which is hardly referred to in Tang poetry, connected the cycle of seasonal time to Confucian ideas of ideal governance of the people based on the virtue of an emperor who rules in harmony with the cosmic and agricultural seasons. See Takigawa, “*Kokinwakashū* no chokusensei ni tsuite—niban Tsurayuki uta no ichi wo megutte,” *Waka bungaku kenkyū* 70 (1995): 1–13.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas LaMarre, “Two Prefaces, Two Modes of Appearance,” in his *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 143–60.

<sup>90</sup> For the wide range of meanings of this conceptual couple see *Ōchogo jiten*, ed., Akiyama Ken (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 2000), 355. In the realm of poetry, it appears that the terms were used in judgments of *utaawase* since the Late Heian period.

Yin forces. However, this master trope bears a striking resemblance to the cliché that equates Sino-Japanese literature with the official and ceremonious and Japanese literature with the private and amorous, despite the fact that La Marre constantly emphasizes that he argues on esthetic, not ethnolinguistic grounds.

Yet, there are more important reasons to resist the attraction of this master trope. First, it frankly does not help to explain many of the differences we have encountered: the later beginning of poetry in the Sino-Japanese preface, the dominance of the paratactic and qualitative over the linear and temporal in the Japanese preface. Second, and most poignantly, the scheme of “*hare*” and “*ke*” might fail as an explanatory tool precisely because the prefaces try to *overcome* this very dichotomy or at least to reallocate the stakes. They want to lay claim to “*hare*” that had been in the hands of Sino-Japanese poetry and do so with various *ke*-related strategies that are transformed in the process into a new, *ke*-ified version of “*hare*.” I argue that these two problems are solved by an approach that sees the two prefaces as parts of different literary repertoires. The Japanese preface as the first preface to an imperially commissioned anthology in Literary Japanese stands on more virgin ground generically, whereas the Sino-Japanese preface had to position itself both within the Chinese tradition of anthology production and the previous 150 years of Sino-Japanese compilation practice. Blatant differences between the prefaces, such as the denigration of Prince Ôtsu and Chinese writing, which appears only in the Sino-Japanese preface, make perfect sense from the perspective of the model I have proposed that analyzes difference through literary repertoire and tradition. And it shows the *Kokinshû* in a history of the same challenge the *Kaifûsô* had to face a century and a half earlier: telling a history of poetry in Japan that could stand with and stand up against the history of Chinese literature.

#### 4. Outlook

We can gaze back over the two anthologies we have surveyed: The *Kaifûsô*, the first Sino-Japanese poetry collection attempted to come to grips with the explosion of textual production in 7th and 8th century Japan and sketched a history of literature along the polysemantic paths of the Chinese concept of “*wen*” and soothes the advent of writing in Japan through “hexagrammatic literacy” and the use of Chinese claims of writing as a cosmic emanation. Then, the early tenth century *Kokinshû*, the first imperially sponsored collection of Japanese *waka* poetry, which made a case for Japanese poetry against the rival Sino-Japanese tradition by challenging the regime of “*wen*” through a universal “*Way*” of poetic composition and that empowers the Japanese tradition in a grand narrative of a “poetogony.” The *Kokinshû* is almost exclusively read “forward in time,” that is as the first of, and the model for, the 21 Japanese imperial anthologies to come, and not within its historical context, namely as an extremely bold—brilliant and desperate—attempt to bring Japanese poetry to the fore against previous dominance of the Sino-Japanese tradition.

Strategies for building and asserting traditions circle within cultures, across cultures, and within cultures that channel much of their legitimizing discourses through a reference culture. Collecting a wide variety of those strategies and their aftermath

can help us make our own case for reading literature cross-culturally and comparatively. And we can envy those after us who will be able to take *us* out of our own historical frame and judge whether and potentially how we succeeded.

In conclusion I would like to place our examination of two early Japanese anthologies of poetry within broader questions of “chronopolitics.” In *Time and the Other* Johannes Fabian uses this term to criticize the practice of Western anthropologists to represent other cultures in an “ethnographical present,” strip them of their historicity, and depict them either as paradisiacal or as primitive in order to subordinate them to Western cultural hegemony: “anthropology emerged and established itself as an allochronic (i. e. not simultaneous/synchronic) discourse. It is a science of other men in another Time.”<sup>91</sup> Fabian emphasizes the uncanny tension between the immediacy of the encounter with members of other cultures during fieldwork that contrasts so starkly with the distance created through the chronopolitics of anthropological writing. He decries chronopolitics that builds “temporal fortresses” to serve hegemonic interests and calls instead for practices built on “coevalness.”

Our case studies become particularly intriguing in the light of Fabian’s critique of the representation of the anthropological other as suspended in an eternal present. Fabian sees this strategy as a ploy of Western researchers collaborating with Western hegemonic interests to assert their superiority over non-textual cultures. However, if we extend Fabian’s study to premodern literate societies and particularly to those which existed in ambiguous symbiosis with older reference cultures, the suspension of one’s own identity into an eternal present could actually be advantageous. Fabian’s model does not foresee that a chronopolitics of timelessness can actually benefit the weaker side, not the hegemonic power. In the case of the *Kokinshū* we could say that the Japanese enthusiastically “self-ethnologized” themselves in order to *overcome history within writing*. Yet, rather than advancing a critique of Fabian’s poignant argument this paper tried to show how crucial a role “chronopolitics” plays in the representation of oneself and the other, and what surprising results further explorations of its intricate strategies in premodern textual cultures might yield in the future.

<sup>91</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), 143. On this issue see also James Clifford’s article “On Ethnographic Allegory” in Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

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# Semiotic-Structural Aspects of Ono no Komachi's Poetry: An Attempt at Re-Interpretation

by  
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## 1. Theoretical Positioning

### 1.1. Critical background: possibilities for a re-Interpretation of Ono no Komachi

Although what follow are strictly text-centered analyses of poetic texts, let us begin with some hard facts.<sup>1</sup> A person referred to by the name of Ono no Komachi 小野小町 appears for the first time in the Japanese poetry anthology the *Kokin Wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems, A.D. 905–914), issued on imperial command and compiled by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之, Ki no Tomonori 紀友則, Ōshikōchi no Mitsune 凡河内躬恒 and Mibu no Tadamine 壬生忠岑. This, however, is based on the premise that the private collection the *Komachi Shū* 小町集 (The Komachi Collection, late tenth century-early eleventh century), which contains an additional ninety-seven poems apart from the eighteen poems in the *Kokin Wakashū* attributed to Komachi, and the lyrical narrative the *Ise Monogatari* 伊勢物語 (The Tales of Ise, mid-tenth century) which include two (five) of Komachi's poems, are

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, Rein Raud, Nakai Kazuko, Mats Karlsson, Gunnar Linder, as well as the two referees for *BMFEA* for their invaluable advice and suggestions.

I use the following abbreviations:

HJAS *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*

Ise M *Ise Monogatari* (Tales of Ise, mid-tenth century)

KKS *Kokin Wakashū* (Collection of Ancient and New Poems, 905–914)

KM *Komachi Shū* (The Komachi Collection, end tenth century-beginning eleventh century)

MN *Monumenta Nipponica*

MYS *Man'yōshū* (Collection of a Myriad Leaves, ca 759)

SNKBT Shin Koten Bungaku Taikai (The New Iwanami Series of Classical Japanese Literature)

Japanese names are given with the family name followed by the given name. Exceptions to this are the names of Japanese writers whose works have been published outside Japan, with their names given in the Western order in the publication.

Japanese names and terms are romanized according to the Hepburn system used in *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, which is based on English consonants and Italian and German vowels. The only typographical alteration is the use of a circumflex rather than a macron to indicate long vowels. In order to make it easier to understand, modern orthography has been used except when there is wordplay involved.

later productions.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter the name is seen in treatises and commentaries as well as in literary works. But although a number of studies have aimed at explaining her biographical background and her social status, all conclusions remain speculations. In the case of Ono no Komachi, fact and fiction are intimately intertwined, since most literary works in which the poet is mentioned are fictitious, and already at an early stage the poet with this name became a legendary figure.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, many scholars, from the earliest times until the present day have searched for biographical data in the verses and in the headnotes of the above-mentioned poetry collections, as well as in other fictional works. For this reason, the division between fact and fiction is not always clearly drawn, even in scholarship during the twentieth century.

The first reference to Ono no Komachi's poetry appears in the prefaces, one written in Japanese and another in Chinese, to the *Kokin Wakashû*, in which Komachi was picked out among six other poets to illustrate central concepts in Japanese poetics, such as *kotoba* 詞 ("language," "expression"), *kokoro* 心 ("feeling," "conception") and *sama* 様 ("style"). The Japanese preface (*Kanaajo* 仮名序) by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 says that "Ono no Komachi belongs to the poetic style of Sotôrihime of ancient times. It is a poetry that deeply touches the heart and it is weak. It resembles a beautiful woman suffering an illness. The reason it is weak might be that it is a woman's poetry."<sup>4</sup> After this passage, an early commentator has added three of Komachi's poems, namely KKS 552, 797 and 938. Ki no Yoshimochi's 紀淑望 Chinese preface (*Manajo* 真名序), on the other hand, says in metaphorical terms that "[t]he poetry of Komachi belongs to the school of Sotôrihime of ancient times. However, though it is beautiful, it lacks strength. It is as if an ill woman has put on make-up."<sup>5</sup>

The earliest studies on Ono no Komachi are found in commentaries on the *Kokin Wakashû* from the Kamakura period (1185–1333), which generally combine explication and interpretation with a prose text that explains the occasion of the composition of the poem and also often contains a specification of unnamed characters in the headnotes etc. In the anonymous *Kôan Jûnen Kokinshû Chû* 弘安十年古今集注 (The *Kokinshû* Commentary of the 10-year Kôan Reign, 1287) short stories are developed around the poems, which are also attributed to other authors than are given in the anthology. Many poems, among them KKS 139, are attributed to Ono no Komachi and her name appears on occasions. Among her own poems, however, only KKS 554 is treated here. In the commentaries on the *Ise Monogatari*, it is, as expected, mostly KKS 623 and KKS 1104 (in episode 25 and 115 respectively) that are commented on, as they appear in all manuscripts of this literary work.

<sup>2</sup> Katagiri Yôichi dates the compilation of the *Komachi Shû* to, at the earliest, the end of the tenth century and the latest, the beginning of the eleventh century. Katagiri Yôichi, *Ono no Komachi Tsuseki: "Komachi Shû" ni yoru Komachi Setsuwa no Kenkyû* (Tokyo, Kasama Shoin: 1975/1993), 127. The *Ise Monogatari*, on the other hand, is supposed to have been compiled by the middle of the tenth century. Many of the poems in the *Kokin Wakashû* also appear in the *Ise Monogatari*. Apart from the two Komachi poems, KKS 623 and KKS 1104, which are found in the Teika-manuscript 定家本 of the *Ise Monogatari*, Komachi's KKS 782, KKS 552 and KKS 635 also appear in other manuscripts of this literary work.

<sup>3</sup> It seems as if the fictionalization of the poet, that is, the formation of myths of Komachi, whereby Komachi came to be used more or less like a literary character, began to take place as early as the Heian period. (Katagiri, *Komachi Tsuseki*, 66.)

<sup>4</sup> Katagiri Yôichi ed., *Kokin Wakashû Zen Hyôshaku*, vol. I (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1998), 244–49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 298–99.

In the treatise *Mumyôzôshi* 無名草子 (Story without a Name, ca. 1200), probably written by Fujiwara no Shunzei no Kyôjo 藤原俊成卿女 (died ca. 1252), Komachi's poetry is presented along with other women's poetry and, as in the Japanese preface to the *Kokin Wakashû*, her KKS 552, 797 and 938 are used as examples.<sup>6</sup> It says that "her appearance, character and behaviour are all wonderful," and that her poetry expresses the impermanence of this world, describing her poetry as "tearful" or "touching" (*namida gumashiku*).<sup>7</sup> In the seventeenth century, the famous scholar Keichû Ajari 契沖阿闍梨 (1640–1701) mentions Komachi's poem KKS 623 in his work *Kasha* 河社 (The Shinto Shrine by the River, 1690).<sup>8</sup> In the next century, the equally famous scholar of National Learning Moto'ori Norinaga (1730–1801) refers to her in his *Tamakatsuma* 玉勝間 (The Beautiful Basket, 1793).<sup>9</sup>

The scholarship on Ono no Komachi's poetry in the twentieth century has in general focused on the "message" of the text, trying to establish the poet's original intent. Much effort has thus been made to figure out what sort of person Komachi might have been. Maeda Yoshiko points out that the dream as a motif is conspicuous in Komachi's poetry. She also argues that Komachi belongs to the poets of the *Rokkasen* 六歌仙 period ("the period of the six poetic geniuses"), a period which she calls "romantic."<sup>10</sup> By this she does not imply any similarities with the literary movement of that name in Europe, but rather the aesthetic ideals of *mono no aware* もののあはれ ("emotional reaction to the things"), which indicates a deep movement towards the phenomena one sees and hears, and that the things of the world are seen in relation to time and perishability, as well as *yûgen* 幽玄 ("mystery and depth"), an aesthetic notion referring to a tranquil kind of deep, mystical beauty, or an elegant simplicity.

Felice Renee Fischer, on the other hand, places Komachi's poetry in the tradition of Japanese poetry in general and in the intellectual and social milieu of the Heian period in particular. She also points to the particularly feminine traits of Komachi's poetry, saying that Komachi, along with the poetess Kasa no Iratsume 笠女郎 (lifespan unknown) of the *Man'yôshû* 万葉集 (Collection of a Myriad Leaves, ca. 759),

<sup>6</sup> *Mumyôzôshi* 無名草子 (Story without a Name, ca. 1200) is a treatise on Japanese poetry and prose mainly from the Heian period. It expounds, for instance, on works like the *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji), the *Ise Monogatari* 伊勢物語 (The Tales of Ise) and the *Yamato Monogatari* 大和物語 (The Tales of Yamato) as well as on female authors like Sei Shônagon 清少納言 and Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部, apart from Ono no Komachi.

<sup>7</sup> Fujiwara no Shunzei no Kyôjo, *Mumyôzôshi* in Kuwabara Hiroshi com., *Mumyôzôshi, Shinchô Nihon Koten Shûsei* (Tokyo, 1976), 106–9.

<sup>8</sup> Keichû Ajari, *Kasha* (1690), in *Nihon Zuihitsu Taisei*, vol. XIII, ed. Nihon Zuihitsu Henshûbu (1928; rev. vers. 1974), 132.

<sup>9</sup> 玉勝間. Moto'ori Norinaga, *Tamakatsuma* (1793), in *Nihon Shisô Taikêi*, vol. 40 (Tokyo, 1978), 127. National Learning, or the Nativist school, was established during the Edo period (ca. 1603–1867) in Japan. The main object of study was the Japanese classics *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan, ca. 720), *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters, ca. 712) and *Man'yôshû* 万葉集 (Collection of a Myriad Leaves, ca. 759). Prominent persons of this school were Keichû 契沖 (1640–1701), Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769), Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) and the above-mentioned Moto'ori Norinaga (1730–1801).

<sup>10</sup> The so-called six poetic geniuses refer to the six poets that are mentioned in the prefaces to the *Kokin Wakashû*, namely Ariwara no Narihira 在原業平 (825–80), Ono no Komachi 小野小町, Sôjô Henjô 僧正偏昭 (816–90), Kisen Hôshi 喜撰法師, Ôtomo no Kuronushi 大友黒主 and also Fun'ya no Yasuhide 文屋康秀.

“interpret the implications of perishability in a more narrowly feminine sense to apply to their own love or beauty, while ignoring the religious ones.”<sup>11</sup>

Yamaguchi Hiroshi, in *Keien no Shijin Ono no Komachi* (Ono no Komachi: The Poet of Elegies, 1979), bases his analyses on the theory that Komachi was a lady-in-waiting and that this meant, as he says, that she could not marry, a circumstance which would explain why Komachi’s poetry expresses rejected love. In so doing, he might be following in the footsteps of Kuroiwa Ruikô (1862–1920) who, in his *Ono no Komachi Ron* (On Ono no Komachi, 1913), also saw the “loneliness” and “arrogance” in Komachi’s poems as signs of “unsatisfied love,” and speculated that this resulted from the status she had as a lady-in-waiting: she could not marry and for that reason was unhappily in love with a certain man.<sup>12</sup>

However, Yamaguchi Hiroshi also examines the Chinese influences on Komachi’s poetry. He gives a number of examples from the Chinese anthology *Yutai Xingyong* (in Japanese *Gyokudai Shin’ei* 玉台新詠 and in English *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*; compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 between 534–45). In addition, he searches for influences from other Japanese poetry anthologies, such as the *Man’yôshû*, the *Bunkashûreishû* 文華秀麗集 (Collection of Glories and Graces, 818), and the *Shinsen Man’yôshû* 新撰万葉集 (New Selection of the Collection of a Myriad Leaves, 893–913), as well as others.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars are more hesitant about the Chinese influences on Ono no Komachi’s poetry. Fujiwara Katsumi, for instance, argues that the poems on dreams were more influenced by the *Man’yôshû* than by Chinese love poetry.

A text-critical study is Tanaka Kimiharu’s *Komachi Shigure* (Komachi: Autumn Drizzle, 1984). As the author states in the introduction, it aims at questioning earlier studies on Komachi’s poetry as being unscientific and rather adding to the legends.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in many respects he sees her poetry from a new point of view, but does not, in spite of his good intentions, totally succeed in separating poetry from the biographical and legendary elements. The same can be said of Mezaki Tokue, whose poetic analyses in *Ariwara no Narihira, Ono no Komachi* (1970) tend to end in biographical discussions that come to dominate the analyses themselves.

What I find lacking in the above scholarship, and what warrants such a long account thereof, is that a biographical method—which might be adequate when

<sup>11</sup> Renée Felice Fischer, *Ono no Komachi: A Ninth-Century Poetess of Heian Japan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1972), 140.

<sup>12</sup> Kuroiwa Ruikô, *Ono no Komachi Ron* (Tokyo: Chôhōsha, 1913), 52, for example. The background to the presumption that Komachi was a lady-in-waiting is that in the *Kokin Wakashû Mokuuroku* 古今和歌集目錄 (Catalogue of the *Kokin Wakashû*, ca.1113, see Katagiri, *Kokin Wakashû Hyôshaku*, vol. III, 781–825 for reference; the passage on Ono no Komachi is found on page 823) it is stated that Komachi came from the province Dewa 出羽 (today’s Akita and Yamagata Prefectures), and that it was from this province, along with the Michinoku province 陸奥 (which together with Dewa corresponded roughly to the present-day Tôhoku district 東北地方) that the ladies-in-waiting at court were chosen. However, another theory based on the “machi” 町 in Ono no Komachi claims that she must have been a secondary imperial consort, or more exactly, a secondary consort at the court of the Emperor Ninmyô 仁明 (reigned 833–850). This is, for instance, Katagiri’s view (*Komachi Tsuiseki*, 21). This view has also been criticized, though, by among others Mezaki Tokue, who points out that there are many different kinds of “machi” in the name-registers of the Heian period, for which reason it cannot be used as a dependable source of the poet’s social status. (Mezaki Tokue, *Ariwara Narihira, Ono no Komachi* (Tokyo: Sanseidô, 1970), 176.)

<sup>13</sup> Yamaguchi Hiroshi, *Keien no Shijin Ono no Komachi* (Tokyo: Sanseidô, 1979), 151–52.

<sup>14</sup> Tanaka Kimiharu, *Komachi Shigure* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobô, 1984), 1.

applied to the writings of an author where the link between biography and text is possible to prove—is used on a poet whose biographical data are extremely scarce, and the attempt to reconstruct the poet's original intent or true feelings is in fact impossible. Since the foundation is shaky, the whole line of argument runs the risk of failure.

Another important methodological question is which poems should be considered Komachi's "true" pieces. Until quite recently the entire *Komachi Shū* (The Komachi Collection) was regarded as the work of Ono no Komachi. More recent scholarship (most convincingly conducted by the scholar of Japanese classical literature Katagiri Yôichi) has shown, however, that the only verses that, with some certainty, can be said to be Komachi's are the eighteen pieces included in the *Kokin Wakashū*. They are: KKS 113, 552, 553, 554, 557, 623, 635, 656, 657, 658, 727, 782, 797, 822, 938, 939, 1030 and 1104. These poems I consider as forming one corpus under the author's name Ono no Komachi. This, however, does not necessarily mean that they have anything to tell us about a certain historical person.

## 1.2. The aim of the present paper: a methodological shift from author to text

Because of the biographical—and thus often speculative—approach of most studies on Ono no Komachi, a method of analysis that focuses on the poetic text itself is called for. This is especially relevant for the poems that, on the one hand, have been exposed to biographical readings, giving rise to the rich flora of legends that surround the poet, and, on the other hand, have been depreciated, for instance for their language, by many commentators. This is indeed the case with the three of Ono no Komachi's eighteen poems in the *Kokin Wakashū*, namely KKS 623, 1030 and 1104, that have been chosen for this article. But the selection of these poems is also motivated by factors concerning what I shall call *codewords*. As I shall explain in detail below, in the selected poems, the codewords *ura* and *oki* are employed. These two—*ura* which means "at the back of," "the reverse side," "inside," "heart" etc. and *oki* with meanings such as "bottom," "outing," and "at the bottom of one's heart"—share mutual similarities in denoting something hidden, at the same time as *oki* is also used in a somewhat different manner in KKS 1030 and KKS 1104.

I will consequently pose the following question: Would a semiotic-structural text-analysis with a recognition of poetic ambiguity help explain aspects of Ono no Komachi's poetry that have remained obscure with the conventional biographical method? And would it then be possible that yet other aspects—such as metaphorical implications and paradigmatic readings—of her poems will appear and change our perception of Ono no Komachi's poetry? My method of analysis is much influenced by that of Michael Riffaterre, as advanced in his *Semiotics of Poetry*. Before proceeding to the main part of the article, I will therefore elaborate on how Riffaterre's method may be applied to the poetics of Japanese court poetry.

### 1.3. A semiotic method of interpreting classical Japanese poetry

#### 1.3.1. Michael Riffaterre's *Semiotics of Poetry*

Michael Riffaterre (1924–2006) was very much a descendant of the formalist school of literary criticism. Thus he was, as was Roman Jakobson, more interested in *how* the poetic text achieves its particular “poeticness” than in attempts to reconstruct, on the basis of and at the expense of the poetic text, the psychology and biography of its author.

What, then, distinguishes poetry from ordinary, non-poetic language? Like Jakobson, Riffaterre holds that ordinary language serves to convey information as smoothly and inconspicuously as possible, whereas poetic language is by design indirect, hard to interpret and prompts re-reading. Riffaterre describes the dichotomy of everyday and poetic language in terms of the *mimetic* and the *semiotic*. On the mimetic level, as in a newspaper article or in daily speech, several pieces of information are given successively, step by step. The reader (or listener) can therefore understand what is being written (or said) consecutively, in a linear fashion. In poetic language and on the semiotic level, however, the *same piece of information* is repeated in various guises, throughout the poem.<sup>15</sup> And, indeed, the difference between linear everyday language and non-linear poetic language may be expressed precisely in terms of *progression* versus *repetition*. Whereas a newspaper article moves from A to B effortlessly, a poem does not progress but keeps repeating itself ceaselessly, thereby inducing a feeling of puzzlement in the reader, who feels compelled to read the poem anew. This explains both how the poem forces its reader to reflect critically upon the poetic form and how it forces him or her to re-read it.

To understand fully Riffaterre's model of how a poetic text (or indeed any work of art) is produced and understood, let me point out that the semiotic, in fact, depends upon the mimetic, and that we read a poem in two phases. We first approach the poetic text as we would a newspaper article, and at this stage the poem appears to us as deviant, unable to carry on a coherent argument and full of inconsequential details. But on a second reading, when we have understood that what at first appeared as incoherent fragments are in fact variants of one and the same topic, we return to the text and read it as a coherent whole. Thus, the rhetorical tension that a poem (or an art work in general) thrives on is that between the mimetic and the semiotic levels.

Thus, the characteristic feature of a poem is the formal and semantic unity that Riffaterre calls the poem's *significance*. The term *meaning* is reserved for the information conveyed by the text at the mimetic level.<sup>16</sup>

As intimated above, Riffaterre shifts his focus between the structure of the poem and the poem as experienced by the reader.

Speaking of the poem itself, Riffaterre hypothesizes that each poem contains a thematic kernel, which he calls the “matrix.” The matrix consists of an inconspicuous minimal and literal sentence (or sometimes just one word, in which case the word

<sup>15</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1978), 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

will not appear in the text). Riffaterre compares the matrix to the psychoanalytical concept of neurosis, for just as a neurosis does not appear manifestly but is represented indirectly through the symptoms that it causes, so the inconspicuous matrix is what causes, and organizes, the mass of seemingly incoherent details. The matrix is often found in the very first lines<sup>17</sup> or even in the poem's title.<sup>18</sup> This first actualization of the matrix is called the *model*. This, in turn, generates a series of variations until the possibilities of the subject have been exhausted.<sup>19</sup> The matrix thus includes all the information that is repeated throughout the poem, giving it unity and thereby *significance*. This process of transformations is called "expansion."<sup>20</sup> Another way to engender variation in the poem is "conversion," that is, the elements in the first realization of the matrix are transformed through the modification of the same factor, by, for example, changing the "code."<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3.2. The poetic code

Kubota Utsuho (1941) defines *waka* 和歌 (Japanese, as opposed to Chinese poetry), the poetry of the *Kokin Wakashû*, as that in which natural phenomena are not subordinate to human affairs and used as similes, but where nature and human affairs fuse into one unit.<sup>22</sup> In Komachiya Teruhiko these units are termed *kago* 歌語 ("poetic words"), which build up a poetic language, *utakotoba* 歌ことば. He defines *kago* as lexical units, which, although looking like ordinary ones, have a stereotyped and conceptualized content when used in *utakotoba*: they thus function as a "sign" (*kigô* 記号).<sup>23</sup> These terms seem to correspond rather well with the terms "poetic code" and "poetic codeword" respectively that Rein Raud uses in his *The Role of Poetry in Classical Japanese Literature: A Code and Discursivity Analysis*. Raud, who refers to Riffaterre but not to Komachiya, defines a poetic codeword as "one that has... a double function in any poetic context it appears in."<sup>24</sup> What characterizes these words is that they ought to be read according to a code, as opposed to ordinary, referential language. Raud's study suggests that semiotics in general, and Riffaterre's theory in particular, may be fruitful in the analysis of Japanese court poetry. Riffaterre describes "code" as "a conventional discourse."<sup>25</sup> This is further developed by Raud, who holds that, apart from the literary devices of metaphor, simile, wordplay, word association, direct statement etc. that Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 mentions in his

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 191, note 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>22</sup> Kubota Utsuho, "Gaisetsu," in *Kokin Wakashû Hyôshaku*, vol. I (Tokyo, Tôkyodô, 1935), rev. vers. (Tokyo, 1941), 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> Komachiya Teruhiko, "*Kokin Wakashû* to *Utakotoba Hyôgen* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994), 101–3 and 214. Komachiya thus agrees with the wider definition of *kago* as expounded by most modern scholars. A limited definition of the term *kago* would only include those poetic words that are different in form from ordinary words, such as *tazu* ("crane") for *tsuru* and *kawazu* ("frog") for *kaeru*.

<sup>24</sup> Rein Raud, *The Role of Poetry in Classical Japanese Poetry: A Code and Discursivity Analysis* (Tallinn: Acta Collegii Humaniorum Estoniense, 1994), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 105.

Japanese preface to the *Kokin Wakashū* (*Kanajo* 仮名序), there is also what he calls supracodal expression.<sup>26</sup>

A system of supracodal expression is...actually a signifying system of its own order where a particular signifier is not attached to a particular signified (or a group of them) and that does not have definable rules of grammar. A sign does not, on this level, refer to one particular concept but to a semantic field that does not have a dominant—a denotation—that arranges second meanings (connotations) around itself; all points of the semantic field are equal and the borders of the semantic field constantly moving; in fact, any noted supracodal use of a sign causes a shift to the borders of the respective semantic field. The same applies to grammar: normally regulated sets of relations between individual signs are suspended. Accordingly, a message transmitted in supracodal expression does not have a determined meaning. It can be interpreted in different ways and its real meaning is the field conceived by all the possible mutually exclusive interpretations.<sup>27</sup>

From this it follows, in more concrete terms, that significant elements of the poem can be read in two or more ways, and that the poem can be viewed as consisting of several clusters of images superimposed on each other, and that each of the clusters can convey an independent message.<sup>28</sup>

As the concept of supracode is not formulated in Riffaterre's theory, in order to formulate a semiotic method of classical Japanese poetry I propose a synthesis of Riffaterre's theory of mimetic and semiotic readings on the one hand, and Raud's theory of code and supracode on the other. Readings on codal and supracodal levels do not correspond exactly to Riffaterre's dual mimetic and semiotic levels; the codal and supracodal levels rather represent different aspects of "semioticness." The shift from mimetic to semiotic takes place simultaneously as the shift to a codal reading. The concept of convention may therefore, in this context, be seen not only from the point of view of referential, everyday language use, but also against the background of the classical Japanese poetical language, the *utakotoba*, in which a sign "refers" to a linguistic item whose content is conceptualized. The code or the different sub-codes may thus be said to generate or engender certain meanings of a sign in that specific context. Apart from these levels, I also see the possibility of making metapoetical readings as yet another level of the semiotic. A metapoetical reading takes into account what the language of the poem says about itself. One such example is sound symbolism.

<sup>26</sup> The so-called six principles mentioned in the Japanese preface are, in Helen Craig McCullough's terms: Indirect Style (*soe-uta* そへ歌), Enumerative Style (*kazoe-uta* かぞえ歌), Figurative Style (*nazurae-uta* なずらえ歌), Metaphorical Style (*tatoe-uta* たとへ歌), Correct Style (*tadakoto-uta* ただこと歌), and Eulogistic Style (*iwai-uta* いはい歌). They correspond more or less to the six principles in the Chinese preface called (in Grzanka's translation included in Rodd/Henkenius' translation of the *Kokin Wakashū*): Suasive (風 *fū*, Ch. *feng*), Narration (賦 *fu*, Ch. *fu*), Analogy (比 *hi*, Ch. *bi*), Evocative Imagery (興 *kyō*, Ch. *xing*), Elegancia (雅 *ga*, Ch. *ya*) and also Eulogies (頌 *shō*, Ch. *song*). (Helen Craigh McCullough, transl. *Kokin Wakashū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry. With Tosa Nikki and Shinsen Waka* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1985) and Laurel Respica Rodd with Mary Catherine Henkenius, *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (Tokyo: Princeton UP and Tokyo UP, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Raud, *Role of Poetry*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

### 1.3.3. Ambiguity and association

Association by an affinity of sound and association by an affinity of meaning are lexicalized, that is, conceptualized and used as poetical devices, in Japanese poetic practice. One form of association by an affinity of *sound* that is popular in the *Kokin Wakashû* is the so-called *kakekotoba* 掛け詞 (“pivot-word”). The pivot-word is closely tied to a formation of related words, *engo* 縁語 which, by contrast, are based on association by an affinity of *meaning*. The pivot-words, firstly, are whole or partial homophones that are either polysemic words or homonyms, alliterative or assonant. Because of the sound similarity, each word evokes associations with the other. Thus, despite the lack of, for instance, any similes or metaphors, we may say that the meanings, as well as the associations, of these words have been *overdetermined*.<sup>29</sup> Thus, through homophony, “paronomastic images” are created. Paronomasia, or wordplay, is thus not only employed for punning but also to evoke different images simultaneously. Moreover, what is specific for the pivot-word is that it can function as a link between two phrases. That is, the same word can apply partly to the preceding and partly to the succeeding phrase. Secondly, *engo* (semantically related words), using Roland Barthes’ terms, may be called paradigms or systems of codewords that have at least two homophonous meanings, because the idea of *engo* is based on an associative or paradigmatic reading rather than a sequential (syntagmatic) one.<sup>30</sup> Closely related to the conception of the paradigm and *engo* is Riffaterre’s conception of “hypogram,” an already existing group of words or an instance of stereotyped language that the text can refer to, and the conception “descriptive system,” a web of words that are by convention associated with each other around a kernel word.<sup>31</sup> I shall exemplify these terms below. Riffaterre describes the descriptive system in the following way:

The descriptive system is a network of words associated with each other around a kernel word, in accordance with the sememe of the nucleus. Each component of the system functions as a metonym for that nucleus. So strong are these relationships that any such metonym can serve as metaphor for the ensemble, and at any point in the text where the system is made implicit, the reader can fill in gaps in an orderly way and reconstitute the whole representation from that metonym in conformity with the grammar of pertinent stereotypes.<sup>32</sup>

Raud suggests that *engo* as a fixed associational group should be treated as a device, while each (pivot-)word should be considered a codeword when used independently.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> I use the term *overdetermined* here in Riffaterre’s sense: a homonymic word has been generated by associations, and the significance arises from two chains of associations that meet, thereby forming it into a semantic node. Riffaterre, “Det referentiella felslutet” (1978), in *Modern litteraturteori: Från rysk formalism till dekonstruktion*, Part 2, ed. Claes Entzenberg & Cecilia Hansson (Lund, 1992/1993), 147.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, *Éléments de sémiologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), transl. *Elements of Semiology* (New York, 1973), 58–88.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Riffaterre’s discussion on the hypogram in *Semiotics of Poetry*, 168, note 16.

<sup>32</sup> Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 39–40.

<sup>33</sup> Raud, *Role of Poetry*, 119. According to Raud “a poetic device is distinct from a figure in the usual sense of the word, as any poetical manoeuvre that can be freely repeated in, or be a repetition of, another poetical context.” (*Role of Poetry*, 104.)

There are those who argue that a pivot-word cannot evoke more than two phenomena, on the one hand natural phenomena and on the other, human affairs. For that reason they argue that there is no ambiguity.<sup>34</sup> However, as I shall try to demonstrate below, they can indeed evoke more than two phenomena and therefore I suggest that they are ambiguous. On one occasion, William Empson defines ambiguity as “something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful.” He proposes to use the word “in an extended sense” and he deems relevant to his subject “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.”<sup>35</sup> Empson’s notion of ambiguity is further developed by Winifred Nowotny, who refers to it as the many-sidedness of language.<sup>36</sup> But to Nowotny the term ambiguity suggests muzziness of meaning or defective meaning, for which reason she prefers the term *extra-loquial*.<sup>37</sup> *Extra-loquial* refers to the fact that a poem is suggestive, i.e. hinting that there may exist additional layers of meaning that have not been explicitly expressed.<sup>38</sup> This tallies well with Dorothy Walsh’s assertion that poetry is language that “means all it says” or, in other words, that poetry means all that the poem itself *does not exclude*.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. *Kokin Wakashū* 623: The Semiosis of love, despair and hopelessness

<sup>1</sup> *Mirume naki*

<sup>2</sup> *Wagami o ura to*

<sup>3</sup> *Shiraneba ya*

<sup>4</sup> *Karenade ama no*

<sup>5</sup> *Ashi tayuku kuru*

みるめなきわが身をうらと知らねばや離れなで海人の足たゆくくる

(KKS 623. Love III. Topic unknown.)

<sup>3</sup> Do you not understand that

<sup>1</sup> (Since) there is no sea-pine seaweed / there is no occasion to meet as lovers /  
my appearance is not worth seeing / there are no seeing eyes

<sup>2</sup> In this bay / my miserable body / my bitter I is a bay /rear/ reverse side /  
heart? / I am as miserable as a bay

<sup>34</sup> For example, Egoyama Tsuneaki in “Kakekotoba” in *Nihon Bungaku Kenkyū Sōsho*-series: *Kokin Wakashū* (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1976), 268.

<sup>35</sup> William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London, 1930; rev. vers. London: New Directions, 1953), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Winifred Nowotny, *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone, 1962), 146.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–56.

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Walsh, “The Poetic Use of Language,” in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXXV (1938), 74.

- 4 Without withering / Without harvesting / Without leaving / Without cease  
the fisher
- 5 Comes and comes until his feet grow weary.<sup>40</sup>

Of Komachi's poems, and beginning with the earliest commentators, KKS 623 has attracted particular attention, interpreted as expressing a strong rejection by the female narrator. The fact is that today many of the interpretations cannot be understood without recourse to the other texts with which KKS 623 was read, in particular the *Ise Monogatari* and its thirteenth-century commentary *Waka Chikenshû* 和歌知顯集 (Collection Revealing the Knowledge of Waka) on the one hand, and the *Komachi Shû* (The Komachi Collection) on the other. In my analysis I shall demonstrate how the themes of love and hopelessness are intertwined in a very subtle way with the motifs of fishing and seascape; but let us first take a look at the other texts that made KKS 623 central in constructing Komachi as a femme fatale. In the *Ise Monogatari*, KKS 623 is put together with KKS 622 in Episode 25. In this episode or short story, a man sends a poem (namely KKS 622)<sup>41</sup> to a woman who is described as "not rejecting him." The woman's reply (our poem here, KKS 623) is preceded by the introductory phrase "the woman, who had a coquettish nature, replied."<sup>42</sup> This led the author of the commentary *Waka Chikenshû* (or *Ise Monogatari Chikenshû* 伊勢物語知顯抄, Treatise Revealing the Knowledge of the Tales of Ise) to identify all

<sup>40</sup> The lines in the romanized version of the poem are numbered 1 to 5. In the translation the same numbers correspond to the line in the romanized version of the Japanese text. The order in which they appear in the translation is therefore not the same as in the romanization. Below the transcription the poem is given in Japanese. It should be noted that in the original Japanese, *waka*-poems are normally written in one (or more) vertical lines. Here it is rendered horizontally for typographical reasons. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. They are made as literal as possible in order to show the expression or structure of the Japanese source-text and I have not aspired to make literary translations. Moreover, different interpretations of the poem are found side by side to make the ambiguities explicit. The information below the poem is given in a way established in Western scholarship on *waka*-poetry with an abbreviation of the name of the collection, the poem's number in that collection, followed by the headnote or topic which often (but not always) accompanies the poem. "Topic" is therefore used in the translations as well as in the text as an established translation term for the Japanese *dai* 題.

<sup>41</sup> 1 *Aki no no ni*  
2 *Sasa wakeshi asa no*  
3 *Sode yori mo*  
4 *Awade koshi yo zo*  
5 *Hijimasarikeru*  
秋の野に笹わけし朝の袖よりも逢はで来し夜ぞひちまさりける  
(KKS 622. Love III. Narihira no Ason.)

3 Even more than  
2 One morning when I found my way through the Bamboo grass  
1 In the fields of autumn  
5 My sleeves got wet  
4 That night when I came, but did not meet you.

However, it should be noted that in Episode 25 in the *Ise Monogatari*, line four runs:

逢はで寝る夜ぞ  
*awade nuru yo zo*

That night when I slept without seeing you.

Horiuchi Hideaki & Akiyama Ken, com., *Taketori Monogatari, Ise Monogatari*, SNKBT 17 (Tokyo, 1997), 108.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the women in the *Ise Monogatari* that are called “coquettish” (*iro gonomi* 色好み) as Ono no Komachi.<sup>43</sup> It is characteristic of this commentary to regard the *Ise Monogatari* as a kind of fable in which unspecified persons like *otoko* 男 (“man”) or *iro gonomi onna* 色好み女 (“a woman with a coquettish nature”), or unspecified places, refer to real, historical persons and places.<sup>44</sup> Like many Chinese commentaries on poetry, *Waka Chikenshû* is on a quest to anchor the poem in an historical reality, thus denying the fictional nature of the text.

Richard Bowring has suggested that ambiguity in a text may cause readers to try at all costs to provide a meaning that makes sense. In the case of KKS 623 this interpretative tendency has resulted in the rise of legends depicting Komachi as a heartless femme fatale, as Sarah M. Strong has pointed out. This is particularly conspicuous in the *Ise Monogatari* and in the above-mentioned commentary *Waka Chikenshû*.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, these fabulous legends derive from an overinterpretation (or misinterpretation) of the poem, which in turn is due to the poem’s powerful suggestiveness, as well as the commentators’ failure to distinguish the text from the author herself. And in the fictionalization of the poet, the *Komachi Shû* has also played an important role. For example, KS 23 (KKS 623) is preceded by the headnote “To a man who reproaches the woman for not being able to see him, though he comes often.” The motif of a reproaching man also appears in the headnotes to KS 15 (KKS 727) and KS 41. What is interesting, however, is how the literary image of a coquettish woman who declines male company came to influence later analyses of KKS 623, quite outside of the context of the *Ise Monogatari* and the *Komachi Shû*. This makes evident the enormous influence that these early commentaries exerted on all later biographical interpretations of Komachi’s poetry. For example, Mezaki Tokue says that the poem expresses an arrogant attitude;<sup>46</sup> and indeed the very title of the chapter that contains the analyses of KKS 623 and KKS 727 in Tanaka Kimiharu’s study is “The False Komachi.”<sup>47</sup> Katagiri Yôichi’s textual analysis may also help us to understand why this poem contributed to the Komachi legends. He writes the following:

The reason why since early times there are so many different interpretations of this poem is that it is extremely difficult to understand. *Karenade* (“not to drift apart from each other”) implies both the verb *kareru*, meaning “to drift apart from each other” and the verb that means “(seaweed) withers.” *Ama* (“fisher”) refers to a man that goes to see a woman. *Ashi tayuku kuru* means “to be so keen on coming that one’s feet/legs become weary.” As we see, there are no problems in understanding the poem from line three onwards. These lines mean: “...maybe x does not understand..., since x comes to y without cease until his legs grow weary.” The problem lies in the second line. This connects to the third line’s *shiraneba ya* (“does x not understand?”) and in general there are two different

<sup>43</sup> Katagiri, *Komachi Tsuiseki*, 12 and “*Ise Monogatari*” no *Kenkyû* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1970) (Shiryôhen), 248 and (Kenkyûhen), 489. The author of *Waka Chikenshû*, also called *Ise Monogatari Chikenshû*, was probably Minamoto no Tsunenobu 源経信 (1016–1097).

<sup>44</sup> Katagiri, “*Ise Monogatari*” no *Kenkyû* (Kenkyûhen), 492.

<sup>45</sup> Sara M. Strong, “The Making of a Femme Fatale: Ono no Komachi in the Early Medieval Commentaries” in *MN*, vol. XXXIX (1994), 394–95 and Richard Bowring, “The *Ise Monogatari*: A Short Cultural History,” in *HJAS* 52:2 (1992), 405 and 428.

<sup>46</sup> Mezaki Tokue, *Ariwara no Narihira, Ono no Komachi. Nihon Shijin Sen XI* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1970), 196.

<sup>47</sup> Tanaka, *Komachi Shigure*, 119.

ways of interpreting it. One is that it is *ushi* ("miserable") that is concealed in the *u* of *ura*, in which case the whole sentence reads: *wagami o ushi to mo shiranade* ("does x not understand that I am miserable?"), but the interpretation differs depending on whether one sees it from the man's point of view, taking *wagami* as the subject of *shiru* ("to understand"), or if it is seen from the point of view of the woman herself.

The most current hypothesis is that the poem is written from the woman's standpoint and that *mirume naki* thus means "this appearance of mine which is not worth seeing." However, such an interpretation will not do. In other contemporary poems, where *mirume* implies human things, it always stands for "there is no occasion to meet." Accordingly, *mirume* should have that meaning here as well. Likewise, there are many examples of *ushi* being understood as having the same meaning as *tsurashi*, but that is also a misunderstanding. For while *tsurashi* refers to the painful feeling one suffers when treated harshly by somebody else, *ushi* is an expression of one's own grief and melancholy.

Looked at in this way, the interpretation of the poem is simple: "As you do not know how miserable I am, who cannot meet you, you come until your feet/legs grow weary." It is about the grief felt when not able to have a good time with a man. But if exaggerated, *wagami no usa* ("my grief") points in the direction of the theory that Komachi had some kind of anatomic deformity... On the other hand, if we take *wagami* ("I," "my body") in *wagami no usa* ("my grief") as pointing at the man, it tends towards a very strong rejection like "not being conscious of the misery of your own body," which develops into the legends of Komachi as being an arrogant beauty.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his erudition and commitment to close reading, Katagiri's analysis is an example of a syntagmatic, linear reading in which ambiguity is looked upon as a difficulty, an obstacle to understanding. One of the difficulties evidently arises when the pivot-words have more than two meanings, as is the case with *mirume* ("seaweed," "occasion to meet as man and woman," "appearance worth seeing") and *ura* ("bay," "reverse side" etc). Although Katagiri is obviously aware of the different senses of the pivot-words in question, he finds it necessary in each case to determine one sole meaning without recognizing that more than one meaning could be implied simultaneously.

In Michael Riffaterre's words, we would say that it looks as if the anti-grammatical structure and suggestive words have threatened the literary representation of reality (i.e. "mimesis"), which he argues is the reader's first reaction to the indications that they meet in a poetic text, as I have described above.<sup>49</sup> In the case of KKS 623, that indirection is one of distortion, namely ambiguity. Considering this, it seems that ambiguity is in fact the most important principle—or at least one of the most important principles—of the poem. The device of ambiguity itself implies (since the meanings of the words cannot be determined) that the poem is dominated by a supracode, as defined by Rein Raud. Raud further suggests that the artistic achievement of this poem consists of the tension between what he calls a codal and a non-codal reading,<sup>50</sup> which seems to coincide with a tension between a linear and syntagmatic reading, and an associative and paradigmatic one. In KKS 623, the codal reading, which may be described as an initial, linear reading of the poem's surface,

<sup>48</sup> Katagiri, *Komachi Tsuiseki*, 101–2.

<sup>49</sup> Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Raud, *Role of Poetry*, 39.

connects to the sea-imagery of love, which is a common motif that already appears in the poetry anthology *Man'yōshū* from around A.D. 759. In this collection, images of different kinds of seaweed appear, often with erotic undertones. In the *Man'yōshū* there are examples of the word *mirume*, but only in the sense “occasion to meet” and not as “*mirume*-seaweed.” However, the same plant also appears as *miru* and *fukamiru*. Sometimes it is written with the Chinese characters for “sea” 海 and “pine” 松. *Fuka* 深 (“deep”) in *fukamiru* 深海松 (“deep-sea pine”) refers to the seaweed growing deep down on sunken reefs or at the bottom of the sea, in contrast to the *miru*, which grows in shallow water. Since it grows in deep water, *fukamiru* was associated in poetry with the deepness of a lover’s heart. In one of Kakinomoto no Hitomaro’s 柿本人麿 poems (Yamato-era, 300–710), for example, the yielding and undulating movements of the *tamamo*-seaweed 玉藻 as a metaphor for his beloved’s sleeping figure is contrasted with the deep feelings for her that he harbours inside, as expressed by the image of the deep-sea *mirume*-seaweed (below translated as “deep-sea pine”).

5	<i>Ikari ni so</i>	5	On the sunken reefs
6	<i>Fukamiru ouru</i>	6	grows the deep-sea pine.
7	<i>Ariso ni so</i>	7	On the reefy coast
8	<i>Tamamo wa ouru</i>	8	grows the gem-weed.
9	<i>Tamamo nasu</i>	10	My beloved who yielded to me
10	<i>Nabikineshi ko o</i>	9	was a gem-weed.
11	<i>Fukamiru no</i>	11	Like the deep-sea pine
12	<i>Fukamete moedo</i>	12	are my deep thoughts harboured in my heart.
13	<i>Saneshi yo wa</i>	13	The nights we spent together
14	<i>Ikuda mo arazu</i>	14	were not many.

海石にそ 深海松生ふる 荒磯にそ 玉藻は生ふる 玉藻なす 靡き寐し児を  
 深海松の 深めて思へど さ寝し夜は いくだもあらず

(MYS 135. Book II. Kakinomoto no Hitomaro.)

Thus, although *mirume* was not employed in the *Man'yōshū* as a codal pivot-word overdetermined with the meanings “seaweed” and “occasion to meet,” sea-imagery in general and *mirume* in particular were connected with love in the poetry that preceded Ono no Komachi. We may say that these words simultaneously belong to the love-code and to the seascape-code. The seascape-code engenders of *ura* the meaning “bay” or “inlet.” This, in turn, connects to <sub>1</sub>*mirume* (“seaweed”), which is also related to *karenade*, which means “without withering” and “without harvesting.” They are semantically related because seaweed is something that both withers and is harvested. In the system of *double entendres* which this poem consists of, <sub>4</sub>*ama* also takes on the meaning “fisher.” The love-code naturally involves human emotions. Consequently, this code engenders the possibilities of interpreting <sub>2</sub>*ura* as either *ushi* (“miserable”) as seen above in the analysis of Katagiri, or as *urami* (“resentment”). The pivot-word <sub>1</sub>*mirume*, however, by this code takes on the meanings “occasion to meet as man and woman” and “appearance worth seeing.” Likewise, the presence of

a <sub>2</sub>*wagami* (“I”) and an <sub>4</sub>*ama* (“fisher”) implies a relation between them and signal, together with the verb <sub>3</sub>*shiru* (“know,” “perceive”), that we are in the world of love poetry.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, determined by the love-code, *karenade* may be interpreted as “without leaving,” “without drifting apart,” and is furthermore also completely homophonous with *karenade* (seascape) and may imply that there has been a previous meeting. Since they are pivot-words, *mirume* (“seaweed,” “occasion to meet as man and woman” and “appearance worth seeing”), *ura* (“bay,” “inlet,” “reverse side,” “miserable,” “resentment”) and *karenade* (“without leaving,” “without drifting apart,” “without withering,” “without harvesting”) function as semantically related words (*engo*) as they are pivot-words. *Ama* (“fisher”), on the other hand, is ambiguous because it functions as a metaphor for a man in general and a suitor—a catcher not of fish, but of women—in particular. If so “fisher” simply replaces “man” or “suitor” and the metaphor is understood from the context, i.e., the above components charged with the sub-code “love” and the sub-code “seascape.”<sup>52</sup>

This codal reading with its rich associations with the Japanese tradition of love poetry may be said to provide the setting, background and condition of the poem. The scene takes place in the external, waking world. In a reading that recognizes ambiguity (or, with Winifred Novotny, extra-loquity), which makes us move to the supracodal level, <sub>2</sub>*ura* is in focus. We may thus suppose that it is the poem’s kernel. *Ura* generates negation and doubleness since, apart from its codal readings, it refers in its literal sense to something that is unseen, namely “a bay,” “rear,” “inside,” “heart,” “reverse side,” “below the surface,” “something hidden,” “the contrary,” “feelings,” and so on. Negation is realized through the negative copula <sub>1</sub>(*mirume*) *naki* “there are no seeing eyes” while doubleness is realized in <sub>5</sub>*ashi* “foot,” “leg.” *Mirume naki* (“there are no seeing eyes”) is ambiguous since it may be either in the attributive, or the conjunctive or the causal form. Thus we get at least two discernable patterns: if we understand it as being in the attributive form, we have *mirume naki ura* (“a bay without seaweed”); *mirume naki wagami* (“my body, which is not worth seeing,” “my body which is not seen”); on the other hand, taking it as the conjunctive/causal form, we have *mirume naki...* (“[since] there is no seaweed,” “[since] there is no occasion to meet as man and woman,” “[since] my appearance is not worth seeing...” and also [since] there are no eyes which see”).<sup>53</sup>

Let us return to the very beginning of KKS 623. The first line connects to line two, in which human presence is introduced by *wagami* 我が身. This passage is ambiguous because *wagami* implies both “I” and “my body” (which usually implies one’s whole existence or being), and because it is unclear whether this “I” or “my body” applies to the poem’s (female) speaker or to the you-person of the fisher (*ama*), introduced in

<sup>51</sup> Komachiya Teruhiko, “*Kokin Wakashū*” to *Utakotoba Hyōgen* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994), 62–63.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Christine Brooke-Rose’s Simple Replacement type of Metaphor in *Grammar of Metaphor* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), 24–66.

<sup>53</sup> *Wagami o u(ra)* or particularly *u* as a pivot-word concealing *ushi* (“miserable”) may be viewed as one expression or more exactly, a pillow-word. This and also the fact that *mirume naki* (“there is no seaweed”) and *ura* (“bay”) are associated words makes it possible to interpret *mirume naki* (“there is no seaweed”) as an attributive phrase referring to *ura* (“bay”). See Tanaka, *Komachi Shigure*, 135–45 and Takeoka Masao, *Kokin Wakashū Hyōshaku*, vol. II (Tokyo: Ubu Shoin, 1976), 229–32 for detailed explanations.

line four. Moreover, *wagami* is combined with the sentence ...*o ura* (*to shiraneba ya*) which is anti-grammatical, since an object particle between the two nouns *wagami* (“I,” “my body”) and *ura* (“bay,” “rear,” “inside” etc) does not make sense. Like Kata-giri, Takeoka therefore argues that *ura* is a pivot-word concealing *ushi* (“miserable,” “gloomy”) and that the whole sentence should be read as *wagami o ushi to omotte iru* (“I think of myself / my body as miserable”).<sup>54</sup> If *ura* is interpreted literally as “bay,” on the other hand, we would take the metaphorical implications of the expression into consideration and have “to think of myself as a bay.” This is not an unthinkable interpretation, which in fact has been made by some critics. Tanaka, for instance, suggests that it is Komachi herself who is a bay.<sup>55</sup> In a modified manner, I would say that a possible interpretation is that it is *wagami*, the I-person (and not necessarily the author Komachi), who compares herself to a bay without seaweed.

The same construction, with an object particle between two nouns followed by a verbal phrase, may also be seen elsewhere in the *Kokin Wakashū*. In the examples below, the second noun begins, as it does in KKS 623, with an *u*: *uguisu* (“warbler”), *Ujibashi* (“the Uji Bridge, the bridge over the Uji River, south of Kyōto), *ukikusa* (“duckweed”) as well as *Ujiyama* (Mount Uji, a mountain in Uji) and the first noun is either *wagami* / *mi* (“I,” “my body”) or *yo* (“the world”).

yo            o            uguisu  
[world OBJ PARTICLE warbler]

<sup>1</sup> Ware nomi ya	<sup>1</sup> Shall I alone
<sup>2</sup> Yo o uguisu to	<sup>3</sup> Grievingly cry
<sup>3</sup> Nakiwabimu	<sup>2</sup> Like the warbler over the misery of this world?
<sup>4</sup> Hito no kokoro no	<sup>5</sup> If the flower scatters
<sup>5</sup> Hana to chirinaba	<sup>4</sup> Of the heart of my beloved.

我のみや世をうぐひすとなきわびむ人の心の花と散りなば  
(KKS 798. Love V. Anonymous.)

mi            o            Ujibashi  
[body (I) OBJECT PARTICLE The Uji Bridge]

<sup>1</sup> Wasuraruru	<sup>1</sup> My forlorn
<sup>2</sup> Mi o ujibashi no	<sup>2</sup> Self is as miserable as the Uji bridge
<sup>3</sup> Naka taete	<sup>3</sup> Crumbled.
<sup>4</sup> Hito mo kayowanu	<sup>5</sup> A year has passed
<sup>5</sup> Toshi zo henikeru	<sup>4</sup> Without my lover coming.

忘らるる身を宇治橋の中絶えて人も通はぬ年ぞへにける  
(KKS 825. Love V. Anonymous.)

<sup>54</sup> Takeoka, *Kokin Wakashū Hyōshaku*, vol. II, 230. See also the above note, note 53.

<sup>55</sup> Tanaka, *Komachi Shigure*, 129.

mi o ukikusa

[body (I) OBJECT PARTICLE duckweed]

<sup>1</sup> <i>Wabinureba</i>	<sup>1</sup> Because I am forlorn
<sup>2</sup> <i>Mi o ukikusa no</i>	<sup>2</sup> My grieving self is like floating duckweed
<sup>3</sup> <i>Ne o taete</i>	<sup>3</sup> Roots cut off.
<sup>4</sup> <i>Sasou mizu araba</i>	<sup>4</sup> If there is a beckoning stream
<sup>5</sup> <i>Inamu to zo omou</i>	<sup>5</sup> I think I will leave.

わびぬれば身をうき草の根をたえて誘ふ水あらば去なむとぞ思

(KKS 938. Miscellaneous II. Komachi.)

yo o Ujiyama

[world OBJECT PARTICLE The Uji Mountain]

<sup>1</sup> <i>Waga io wa</i>	<sup>1</sup> In my hut
<sup>2</sup> <i>Miyako no tatsumi</i>	<sup>2</sup> Southeast of the capital
<sup>3</sup> <i>Shika zo sumu</i>	<sup>3</sup> I abide thus in seclusion.
<sup>4</sup> <i>Yo o ujiyama to</i>	<sup>4,5</sup> By those for whom life is gloomy
<sup>5</sup> <i>Hito wa iu nari</i>	<sup>4</sup> Ujiyama is called Mount Melancholy.

わが庵は宮この辰巳しかぞ住む世をうち山と人はいふなり

(KKS 983. Miscellaneous II. Monk Kisen.)

One codal reading of the *u* in the above second nouns is, as Takeoka suggests, that of the pivot-word for *ushi* (“miserable,” “gloomy”). Based on the fact that the same pattern appears in KKS 623 along with the verb *karu*, whose meaning “wither” is appropriate to retreat poetry, *ushi* might be concealed in *ura*.<sup>56</sup> However, as the examples also show, the second noun may simultaneously be read as a simile of the first noun, where *ura* is a simile phrase of the adjective *ushi*. That is, *wagami o ura to shiraneba ya* then becomes “doesn’t he know that I’m as miserable as a bay without seaweed?”

Secondly, *mirume* generates the evocation of *miru* in the *mi* of *wagami*. This comes from the fact that *mi* in *urami* is a nominalization of *miru* in *uramiru* (“to see the bay,” “to see the heart”). *Uramiru*, in turn, is a codified pivot-word concealing *urami* (“resentment”).<sup>57</sup> In addition, we may see in *wagami o ura* (which, among other things, means “the reverse side”) a very subtle play on words in the form of a palindrome, for “the reverse side” of this expression suddenly appears as if we indeed reversed this anti-grammatical sentence. Then we get the pattern *ura o mi (ura...mi)*, with the *mi* implying *miru* (“to see”).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Retreat poetry is a general term for those poems that express gloom, a weariness of life and a wish to retreat, or thematize aging, this world’s inconstancy or the like. In *Kokin Wakashū* they are collected in the Miscellaneous (*Zō no Uta* 雑歌) volume but are also found elsewhere in the anthology.

<sup>57</sup> This was particularly the case during the Heian period. (Suzuki Hiroko, “Urami Kō: *Kokinshū* no Utakotoba” in *Utakotoba no Rekishi*, 25, 30.)

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, *mi o ura* is a reversion of *ura o mi*. The paronomasia “the visible flesh” with *o* functioning as an object marker thus combines an abstract phenomenon, namely “heart” or “the hidden,” with *miru* (“to see,”) thereby forming a paradox, since what is hidden can usually not be seen: the *significance* of the verb *miru* expands at once. *Mi* (“body”), on the other hand, generates the metonymically related anatomic components *me* (“eyes”) and *ashi* (“feet,” “legs”).

*Wagami* (“I,” “my body”) is separated from *ura* by the Japanese direct object marker *o*. The juxtaposition of *mi* (“to see,” “body”) and *ura* (“rear,” “hidden,” “heart”) separated by *o* thus forms a contrast between exterior and interior, visible and invisible, and corporeal and sentimental (*ura* in the sense of “feelings”). And as what is visible, in contrast to the hidden *ura*, is the body, *mi* (body), which combines associations with both the body and the seeing, it thus becomes a paronomastic image of the visible flesh. Moreover, *mirume*, which originally belonged to the imagery of love, becomes an image of vision, both in whole and in part. *Mirume* literally means “seeing eyes” or “eyes that see,” but we may equally well divide the word as *miru-me*, so that *miru* (“to see”) stands for eyesight and *me* (“eyes”) for the organ itself.

I shall now turn my attention to the role of negations in KKS 623. The negation *nashi* in the first line engenders two more negations, namely <sub>3</sub>*shiraneba ya* (“does x not understand / know?”) and <sub>4</sub>*karenade*, which will be explained below. *Shiraneba ya*, firstly, could be a rhetorical question. The assonance between *shiraneba ya* and *karenade* suggests that they are associated. Secondly, *karenade* (“do not wither,” “do not harvest”) may, as we saw above, refer to *mirume* (“seaweed”) in line one, in which case it would mean “do not wither” and “do not harvest.” But *karenade* may also be associated with the first pronoun *wagami* (“I,” “my body”) and in particular with *mi* (“body”) since the body, indeed, is also something that vanishes with time. But read as referring to the fisher, *karenade* takes on the meaning of “without leaving,” “without drifting apart.” It is followed by the introduction of the you-person, namely *ama* (“fisher”), a word that evokes associations with the homophones “nun” (*ama*), “fish-woman” (*ama*) or “rain” (*ama*). The noun <sub>4</sub>*ashi* (“foot” or “leg”) corresponds to *ura* (“bay,” “inlet”), at least in the sense of “foot,” since it too has a rear, an invisible side. But *ashi* is rare in the love poems of the *Kokin Wakashū*. Apart from Komachi’s KKS 623 and KKS 658, it only appears in KKS 739, and in this poem *ashi* (“foot” or “leg”) belongs to a horse. The employment of *ashi* in reference to a human being, therefore, emphasizes even more the lover’s movement (“he comes and comes,” according to the poem), and in general function as a synecdoche for him.

*Ashi* (“legs,” “feet”) also evokes associations with “reeds,” generated by <sub>2</sub>*ura* (“bay”) since the two are associated words, and since *ashi no ura* (“the bay of reed”) is a traditional topos, i.e. a famous place connected in classical poetry to a particular scene or some historical event. If applied only to the first word in the last line, it becomes *ama no ashi*, which emphasizes the association with rain, as it simultaneously means “the legs of the fisher” and “approaching-receding rain,” which is a metaphor in poetic language for doing something incessantly. The phrase *ama no ashi* (tautological with <sub>4</sub>*karenade*, “without cease”) is thus another expression of the perseverance and repetitiveness of the fisher’s action, and may be described as iconic of the syntagm <sub>4</sub>*karenade ama no* <sub>3</sub>*ashi tayuku kuru* (“without cease the fisher comes and comes until his legs grow weary”). Involved in the homophonous pun on *ama no ashi*, which is found inside the longer *ama no ashi tayuku kuru*, is the double function of the particle *no*: in the former it functions as a possessive, whereas in the latter it functions as a subject marker. The poem ends with an implied play on words on *tayuku*—*kuru* (“weary”—“come”), which, since the former contains *yuku* (“go”), the opposite to *kuru* (“come”), together form a paronomastic image of the fisher’s

weariness and the repetitiveness of his coming and going. This is also emphasized by the repeated “k” and “u” sounds in the same verbs: *tayuku kuru*. Moreover, as Raud has noted, inside the phrase *ashi tayuku* is hidden the phrase *ashita yuku* (“go tomorrow”). And in a poem that dichotomizes the visible and the hidden, such wordplay is a concrete textual manifestation of that theme.<sup>59</sup>

As we can now see, there is in KKS 623 a tension between physical passivity and physical activity; on one level this is a tension between lines 1–2, or the domain of the “I” on the one hand, and lines 4–5 or the domain of the “you” on the other. However, since the attribution of *wagami* (“I”) is ambiguous, there is nothing to contradict that this opposition exists inside one and the same person or two, both the poem’s speaker and the fisher simultaneously.

Let us now conclude this semiotic reading of KKS 623 by looking at how the intricate interplay of words and different semantic levels converge to form a specific theme. A bay without seaweed implies in itself absence, weariness and hopelessness. For a fisherman who wants to harvest seaweed, going there is a vain journey. The repeated negations also suggests vanity and hopelessness, as does the verb *karu* in the sense “wither.” *Mirume* (“seaweed”) and the anatomic components “eyes,” “body” and “feet” are transitory phenomena and likewise visible to the naked eye. But in contrast to those, we have *ura*, which stands for the hidden element, whether bay or heart. *Karu*, the verb that in relation to the seaweed, as well as to the body, generates the meaning “wither” is likewise the link to the fisher, whose action of coming and going is equally in vain. It is important that we realize that the function of ambiguity in this poem is to generalize, for the poem makes a point of not defining whose body, or “I,” (*wagami* 我が身) it refers to—the poem’s female narrator or the male you-person embodied in the fisher. Thus the boundaries between subject and object and between man and woman are meaningfully blurred. Men’s coming and going to women (that is to say, love) belongs as much to the vain things of the world as do seaweed and the human body. Hereby we see that thematically this poem—though it may not clearly express a wish to retreat—is part of the retreat poetry prevalent elsewhere in the *Kokin Wakashū* (for example in KKS 798, KKS 825, KKS 938 and KKS 983) in the sense that “u” in *ura* (“bay,” “rear,” “inside” etc) interpreted as *ushi* (“miserable”) conveys a feeling of weariness of this world’s troubles, where “world” also includes the relation between men and women.

The poem is in fact made up of two pictures of emptiness and hopelessness: a passive one depicting a bay that is supposed to have seaweed, but is devoid of it, and an active one with somebody often going back and forth to this bay without gathering any seaweed. Together they form an image of meaninglessness, of life’s meaninglessness as well as the hopelessness of love.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. here Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept of hypogram found in Starobinski’s *Les mots sous les mots : les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

2.2. *Kokin Wakashû* 1030: The colloquial semiosis of love

<sup>1</sup> *Hito ni awamu*

<sup>2</sup> *Tsuki no naki ni wa*

<sup>3</sup> *Omohi okite*

<sup>4</sup> *Mune hashiribi ni*

<sup>5</sup> *Kokoro yake ori*

人に逢はむ月のなきには思ひをきてむねはしり火に心やけをり

(KKS 1030. Miscellaneous Forms. *Hikai*-poems.)

<sup>1</sup> I try to meet my beloved

<sup>2</sup> When there is no chance / way to meet / When there is no moon.

<sup>3</sup> Sitting up awake by the fire of yearning

<sup>5</sup> My heart is burned

<sup>4</sup> By the crackling fire in my breast.

Although Ono no Komachi was well known for her excellent usage of pivot-words and word association, with reference to this poem she has subsequently been criticized for overusing those techniques. Of KKS 1030, which belongs to the so-called *hikaika* 誹諧歌 (faulty, or joking poems)<sup>60</sup> section of the *Kokin Wakashû*, Takeoka writes:

It has an extremely elaborate way of expression and...on top of that, *tsuki nashi* is colloquial language. The same might be said of the words *oki* and *hashiribi*, by which passionate feelings are conveyed. *Mune hashiri* and other words are also colloquial, why it can hardly be called a love poem of good taste. That should be the reason it was considered a *hikai* (*haikai*)-poem.<sup>61</sup>

Katagiri is of a similar opinion:

The reason why this poem—in contrast to the *oki no ite*-poem<sup>62</sup>—was placed in the *Hikai* (*Haikai*) section, is probably that *tsuki* (“moon”) is used as a pivot-word for *tsuki* = “chance to meet” as well as the abundant use of words that are usually not found in *waka*: *mune*, *hashiribi*, *kokoro yake ori* etc. and the open and exaggerated way in which they are expressed.<sup>63</sup>

Reading those comments, one easily gets the impression that the *Hikaika* (*Haikaika*) section of the *Kokin Wakashû* was something of a rag-bag section for poems that were less successful. But that this might not have been the case is suggested by Robert Brower and Earl Miner:

<sup>60</sup> *Hikai* or *haikai* 誹諧 is a composite noun written by, on the one hand the Chinese character for “bad” (誹 *hi* / *hai*) and on the other, the character for “tune” (諧 *kai*). It might therefore mean “bad tune” or “faulty poem.” However, at the same time, *hi* / *hai* has the meaning “speak ill of” and *kai* “joke,” hence the concept may also stand for “joking,” “play.” Kojima Noriyuki & Arai Eizô, *Kokin Wakashû*, SNKBT 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1989/1998), 309.

<sup>61</sup> Takeoka, *Kokin Wakashû Hyôshaku*, vol. I (1976), 1052.

<sup>62</sup> Refers to KKS 1104.

<sup>63</sup> Katagiri, *Kokin Wakashû Zen Hyôshaku*, vol. III, 524.

Very good poems might be written in unusual diction but although their quality was recognized, they were placed in the category “unconventional poems” (*haikai uta*).<sup>64</sup>

I shall not devote any further attention to the question of the *hikaika*, since this is a matter of classification or of genre. Nonetheless, Takeoka's and Katagiri's comments are valuable since they shed light upon the important role played in this poem by colloquial language and the unconventional employment of codewords. That is to say, Takeoka and Katagiri demonstrate that, at least on one level, the poem should be read not according to the poetical code—since the code is violated—but according to supracode, in which the meanings are not determined. This leads to an open reading of certain words and grammatical elements, which makes various interpretations possible.<sup>65</sup> As we saw above, in the synthesis of Riffaterre's model of how a poem is constructed and interpreted, and Raud's theory of code and supracode, there is on the one hand a tension between a mimetic reading, which understands the poem as everyday referential language, and a semiotic reading, in which the poeticness of the poem is realized (and the poem is read as a work of art), and, on the other hand, a tension between a codal reading, which understands the poem as conceptualized language, and a supracodal, in which the content of the linguistic items is not determined. The same issue appears in this poem, where both a reading according to code (i.e. the poetic code, as opposed to a referential reading) and a reading according to supracode (i.e. undefined content and rules of grammar) are possible, so what appears is a structure based on a tension between codal and supracodal reading. But, on closer examination, this tension prevails only on the surface level. On the metapoetic level of verbal form and sound, and in the way the words relate to each other, it is suspended.

At first sight, the poem indeed appears to be a disorderly mixture of lofty love poetry and colloquialisms. In more technical terms, according to the codal reading a paradigm is formed with the poetic codewords charged with the subcode “love”: <sub>1</sub>*hito* 人 (“beloved”), <sub>1</sub>*au* 逢ふ (“meet as lovers”), <sub>2</sub>*tsuki* 月 (“moon”), <sub>3</sub>*omohi* 思ひ (“yearnings”), <sub>3</sub>*okite* 起きて (“sit up awake, not being able to sleep [because of thoughts of the beloved]”) and also <sub>5</sub>*kokoro* 心 (“heart”). It seems an open question whether they should be called *engo* in the conventional sense—neither in Takeoka nor in Katagiri is their relation discussed. However, they are tied together by the fact that they are all associated with love poetry in the *Kokin Wakashū* and that they thus stand in stark contrast to the colloquial paradigm composed of <sub>2</sub>*tsuki* 付き (“occasion”), <sub>3</sub>*oki* 燠 / 熾 (“hearth,” “charcoal”), <sub>4</sub>*mune* 胸 (“breast”) <sub>4</sub>*hashiribi* 走り火 (“crackling fire”) as well as <sub>5</sub>*yake ori* 焼けをり (“burn”).

On the surface, the darkness of the outside stands in contrast to the light and warmth of the inside. The oppositions darkness-light / outside-inside coincide with the opposition absence-presence as both the <sub>1</sub>beloved and the <sub>2</sub>moon belong to the outside and are absent. Thus, lines one and two form a conceptual paradigm of absence-outside-darkness, which is opposed to the paradigm of presence-inside-light of

<sup>64</sup> Robert H. Brower & Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1961), 200.

<sup>65</sup> Raud, *Role of Poetry*, 26.

lines 3–5. This opposition is, however, neutralized through the cause-effect relation between them. For the absence of light outside is simultaneously the generator of the presence of light inside, just as the fire of the I-person's yearnings (caused by the man's absence) is what woke her up and made her sit by the hearth, which lights up the inside of the house.

The concept of absence is the central idea here as it involves the choice of perspective. The very fact that the object is absent makes it possible for the subject to reign in sole control of the mental room, so the poem becomes totally subjective, dominated by the I-person's consciousness. Lines 1–2 form the you-person's (the object, the beloved) domain in relation to the I-person's in lines 3–5. However, we must not make do with this structure of subject and object. It is treacherous, since in fact the man only exists from the subject's point of view, so he is absent only in relation to her. Consequently, the possibility of the Japanese language to exclude an explicit subject takes on the function here of emphasizing the subject's monopoly of the poem's perspective; while on the other hand the fact that the object—though he is absent from the scene of the poem—is explicitly stated makes its status as object all the more emphasized.

The opposition exterior-interior is transferred from the moon to an opposition between exterior and interior light ("Sitting up awake by the fire...the crackling fire in my breast") which forms two paradigms that shift from exterior to interior. In this movement, two of the words that are employed to represent either of the oppositions also become the opposite in relation to the next word, so that exterior and interior fuse even more. Thus the movement goes from:

exterior: *tsuki* (moon) to interior: *oki* (literal hearth)  
 exterior: *oki* (literal hearth) to interior: *mune* (literal breast)  
 exterior: *mune* (figurative hearth) to interior: *kokoro* (the heart)

As we see, <sub>3</sub>*oki* ("hearth") is interior in relation to <sub>2</sub>*tsuki* ("moon"), but exterior in relation to <sub>4</sub>*mune* ("breast"), while the latter, in turn, is exterior in relation to <sub>5</sub>*kokoro* ("heart"). Thus, these two words belong to both paradigms. Each of the paradigms (the paradigm of exterior and the paradigm of interior) moves in turn from exterior to interior, or rather—psychologically—from interior to exterior, where the elements are metonymically related:

paradigm of interior: *kokoro-mune-oki*  
 paradigm of exterior: *mune-oki-tsuki*

Or: the heart – literal breast – hearth and figurative hearth (in the I-person) – hearth (in the house) – moon (outside of the house).

Understandably, the supracodal reading of the poem coincides with the metapoetic, since it is on the verbal plane that the breaking of the code takes place. As described above, a contrast between the code and the colloquial was discerned on the surface level; now that we pass on to the metapoetical level, however, we shall see how this contrast is broken down and neutralized.

Line one contains two elements of a non-codal character, which also connects it to line three. These two elements are similarity of sound and similarity of metrics. Firstly, the “hi” in <sub>1</sub>*hito* (“beloved”) anticipates the “hi” 火 meaning “fire” in the pivot-word <sub>3</sub>*omohi* (“yearnings”), which also connects to the “hi” (bi) 火 (“fire”) in <sub>4</sub>*hashiribi* (“crackling fire”). Although not conventionally regarded as a pivot-word, considering the closeness between the object (the beloved) and the subject’s (the I-person’s) yearnings, it is here relevant to regard even “hi” in <sub>1</sub>*hito* as implying the fire that the “hi” in <sub>3</sub>*omohi* conventionally stands for as a pivot-word. Together they become a paronomastic image of the subject’s feelings enclosed in the beloved object or in other words, the presence of the absent object in the subject’s consciousness. Secondly, the hypermetricism (*jiamari*) in line one—the appearance of six syllables instead of the expected five—anticipates the hypermetricism that reappears in line 3.

<sub>1</sub>hi-to—ni—a-wa-mu  
<sub>3</sub>o-mo-hi—o-ki-te

The hypermetricism of line three makes it possible to divide the line precisely in the middle, into two three-syllable words. Both of them are pivot-words, but whereas one of them (*omohi*) is conventional and typical of the genre of love poetry, the other (*okite*) is non-conventional and colloquial. Thus, what we have in this line is another opposition between code and non-code, expressed in their contamination, as well as in the employment of pivot-words. However, the words are also closely related. Firstly, seen as individual codewords, “yearnings” and “sit up awake, not being able to sleep” are connected as associated words, as we saw earlier. Secondly, the concealed elements “fire” and “hearth” are semantically related, expressed through the paronomasia of the pivot-word.

Returning to line two, we find *tsuki no naki ni wa* (“when there is no moon”), in which the word *tsuki* (“moon”), being a colloquial expression, is also unconventionally employed as a pivot-word in which is concealed the phrase “chance to meet.” Since the line is negative, this further emphasizes the distance between the two lovers: “there is no measure for (my) trying to meet (you),” “there is no chance to meet” or “there is no way of meeting.”

<i>tsuki</i> <i>no</i> <i>naki</i> <i>ni</i> <i>wa</i>	
[moon SUBJ PRED-neg TIME EMPHASIS]	<sub>2</sub> when there is no <i>moon</i>
[chance to meet SUBJ PRED-neg TIME EMPHASIS]	to meet

The functions of this pivot-word are many and complex. One possibility is that it indicates that the absence of the moon is the *cause* of the unrealized meeting, since the moon in classical Japanese literature bears connotations to the light that carries the man on his love path. It could also be a vehicle to make the codeword non-codal, to fit in with the colloquial paradigm. Another possible reason is the forming of the web of associated words since by making *tsuki* a pivot-word just like <sub>1</sub>*hito*, <sub>3</sub>*omohi*, <sub>4</sub>*hashiribi* and <sub>3</sub>*okite* it can function as an associated word together with the above

words in a fire / light cluster. In a strictly conventional sense, it would perhaps not be correct to say that they are *engo*, but in a supracodal reading, where the poetic code is violated, they are at least associated and form a paradigm.

Let us now move on to an unexpected turn in this poem. Closely related to the paradigm of fire and light are also *₄mune* (“breast”) and *₃yake ori* (“burns”), although they are not pivot-words. The reason why the former is associated with fire and light may not be apparent at once, but seen from the structural pattern of lines 3–4, which is that of a kiasm, it becomes quite evident.

(omo) *hi oki* (te)  
*mune* (hashiri) *bi*  
 or  
 figurative fire–literal hearth  
 figurative hearth–literal fire

A metaphorical displacement has thus taken place: it is not the literal hearth—as may have been expected—that is a metaphor for an inner hearth, but the breast (*mune*), since it is here that the crackling fire burns the I-person’s heart. The pivot-word *hashiribi* conceals the verb *hashiru* (“run”), which together with *mune* forms the phrase *mune hashiru* (literally “the breast/heart runs”), which stands as a verbal metaphor for an agitated heart. The pivot-word trope (and here it is indeed a trope: a turning) makes it possible to integrate the external crackling fire and the agitation of the heart in a sense like “the crackling fire that agitates the heart.”<sup>66</sup> Thus we find here the third paronomastic image, where the I-person’s agitation is enclosed in the breast, which is transformed into a metaphorical hearth with a crackling fire. At the same time, it is an even more direct image of the poetic speaker’s mental state, since the pattern of kiasm (as demonstrated in the schematic illustration above) ties the fire of yearning (*₃omohi*) to the fire of the figurative hearth, and the “figurative” fire in *₃omohi*, as placed beside the literal hearth, is fused with a literal fire. The image of the crackling fire is not only visual; the vocal assonance expressed in the repeated “i” sounds also makes an audible effect that ties the poem as a whole together. In the last line, besides *₃yaku:s* (“burns”) connecting to the paradigm of fire / light, the contamination of the codeword *kokoro* (“heart”) with *yaku* (“burns”), makes it colloquial. Just like the above, *kokoro yake ori* (“the heart burns”) is a verbal metaphor.

The focus of the play on words is the codal pivot-word *omohi* (“fire of yearnings”), since it becomes the poem’s true “theme.” Together with the other fire / light components *hito*, *tsuki*, *okite*, *hashiribi*, *mune*, *kokoro*, *yake ori*, its idea branches out in the whole poem and grows into a picture of the mental state of yearning. This coincides partly with the metonymic chain of exterior and interior sources of light, partly with the repeated “i”-sounds that crackle like fire. The metonymic chain makes two words, namely “hearth” and “breast,” meet, inasmuch as each of them encloses both “interior” and “exterior” in relation to its neighbour. This circumstance does not seem arbitrary, since the breast is a metaphoric hearth. But by the fusion of exterior and interior in both the hearth and the breast, the (literal) hearth also takes on a figura-

<sup>66</sup> Katagiri, *Kokin Wakashū Zen Hyōshaku*, vol. III, 523.

tive meaning, while the breast, the figurative hearth, in its turn, becomes a literal hearth. Thus, the theme becomes its own idea. That is to say, the yearnings are no longer like fire, they *are* the fire, as is the entire poem. Similarly, we can also regard the poem's paradoxes as an illustration of this mental state.

By putting code-language in contrast to a non-codal, this poem makes tensions arise, but these tensions are suspended by a metapoetical reading. This pattern is repeated in the oppositions darkness-light, exterior-interior as well as object-subject, where the two former ones are neutralized by a cause-effect relation and the latter by the fact that the object does not exist outside of the subject's consciousness. Thus, in the poem as a whole the tensions run parallel to their suspensions, giving rise to the paradoxes that—despite the contrast between darkness-light, exterior-interior, object-subject—are in fact not contrasts, but the cause and effect of each other.

### 2.3. *Kokin Wakashū* 1104: The semiosis of the imaginary place, and Separation

<sup>1</sup> *Okī no ite*  
<sup>2</sup> *Mi o yaku yori mo*  
<sup>3</sup> *Kanashiki wa*  
<sup>4</sup> *Miyakoshimabe no*  
<sup>5</sup> *Wakare narikeri*

をきのみて身を焼くよりもかなしきは宮こ島へのわかれなりけり

(KKS 1104. Deleted Poems. Names of Things. *Okinoi Miyakoshima*.)

<sup>2</sup> Even more than to burn one's body  
<sup>1</sup> Sitting on / beside the charcoals / To be on the outing  
<sup>3</sup> It is painful  
<sup>5</sup> To separate  
<sup>4</sup> In the capital when you are going close to the island.

As KKS 1104 is included in the section of “Names of Things” (*Mono no Na no Bu* 物名部) in the Volume of Deleted Poems (*Sumikechi Uta* 墨滅歌),<sup>67</sup> it is a poem of true punning wordplay. The aim of the play on words in this genre is to weave into the poem the syllables of the topic thereby changing their semantic meaning and syntactical pattern.<sup>68</sup> But since *Okinoi* (*o-ki-no-i*) consists of only four syllables and the first line needs five, one syllable is added, namely *-te*. This device is also called *oriku* (“acrostic verse”). Thus, one of the main structuring principles in this genre is the relation between the topic and the poem itself. Here the topic is “Okinoi Miyakoshima,” seemingly two fictive place-names; at least their location has not been identified.<sup>69</sup> Ambiguity conveyed in wordplay is also employed and makes the poem suggestive.

<sup>67</sup> “Names of Things” refers in the *Kokin Wakashū* to poems that are based on a play on words. They are found in the “Names of Things” volume, but also, as is the case with KKS 1104, in the volume of Deleted Poems.

<sup>68</sup> Robert H. Brower & Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 197.

<sup>69</sup> Takeoka, *Kokin Wakashū Hyōshaku*, vol. I (1976), 1202 and Katagiri, *Kokin Wakashū Zen Hyōshaku*, vol. III, 694.

The topic (or title), namely “Okinoi Miyakoshima,” is—since the inscription of the imaginary places is so closely intertwined with the theme of love’s pain—also the matrix of the poem. The first line’s *oki no ite* is the model and the engendering line. *Oki*, which means both “outing” and “at the back of one’s mind” (heart), as well as “charcoal” and “hearth,” engenders in the poem the toponymic (fictive or unknown places) and the psychological (attachment) codes, as well as the fire code. The toponymic code may be divided into two domains: “Okinoi” and “Miyakoshima.” “Okinoi” dominates the first two lines, while “Miyakoshima” dominates the last two lines. These two domains are separated in the middle by the adjective *kanashiki*, which is an expression of the painful feeling one experiences when struck by loneliness on separation and death.

The *Okinoi* domain of lines 1–2 forms in turn a simile comparing separation to the pain of being burnt, which is then contrasted with the action (the separation, and the person leaving for the island) of the *Miyakoshima* domain in lines 4–5. Thus, sound association has been engendered from the toponymic code of the topic (or title), a geographical sea code represented in “outing” and beside this, also the fire code and the psychological code. *Oki*, which by sound association evoked *okibi* (“charcoal”) or *okiba* (“hearth”), has in turn engendered *yaku* (“burn”) in the following line. Simultaneously, *oki* (“outing”) has also generated the sea code that is actualized in *shimabe* (“near the island”). Since each word in the phrase *oki no ite* is ambiguous, it is open to several interpretations. If, for example, *no* is interpreted as *no yô ni* (“like,” “as”) it can mean “sit as far out as the outing,” or “be as far inside as in the heart” or “to sit as a hearth / charcoal.” However, if *no* is interpreted as a subject-marker, it is “outing,” “deep in the heart” or “hearth / charcoal” that is the subject and which “is somewhere” or “sitting somewhere.”<sup>70</sup> Katagiri also suggests that *no* can mean *no ue ni* or *no katawara ni*, that is “on top of” or “at the side of,” making the person the subject and interpreting *iru* as “to sit (on or beside the hearth).”<sup>71</sup> I do not consider this interpretation too far-fetched, but by understanding *oki* as a simile for the female narrator, that is, by interpreting the female person who narrates the poem as sitting like a piece of charcoal herself, or as far away as an outing from the person she loves, it becomes a paronomastic image: a simultaneous image of the feelings at the bottom of her heart (*oki*), inside the charcoal or the hearth.

And indeed, an intertextual reading may provide support for such an interpretation. Models for the use of *oki* in this way may be seen in the *Man’yôshû* (Collection of a Myriad Leaves, ca. 759).

1 *Wata no soko*  
 2 *Oki o fukamete*  
 3 *Waga moeru*  
 4 *Kimi ni awamu*  
 5 *Toshi o henu to mo*

海の底奥を深めてわが思へる君には逢はむ年は経ぬとも

(MYS 676. Book IX. Lady Nakatomi.)

<sup>70</sup> “The charcoal is sitting” is Takeoka’s interpretation.

<sup>71</sup> Katagiri, *Kokin Wakashû Zen Hyôshaku*, vol. III, 694.

<sup>2</sup> From the bottom of my heart  
<sup>1</sup> As deep as the bottom of the ocean  
<sup>4</sup> I want to see you,  
<sup>3</sup> Whom I am yearning for.  
<sup>5</sup> Even if the years and months pass.

*Oki* is used here both in the sense “at the bottom of my heart” and in the sense “at the bottom of the ocean” or “far away,” and as a pivot-word it implies *okiba* (“hearth”) or *okibi* (“charcoal”), since *omoeru* (“to yearn for”) can be read *moeru* (“burn with the fire of my love”). In other words, the other meanings of *oki*, namely “hearth” and “charcoal,” are generated by *moeru* (“to burn”); thereby creating two simultaneous images, one of the yearning at the bottom of one’s heart and the other of a hearth or charcoal burning, and the two reflect each other.

Lastly, let us take a look at how sound symbolism underscores the theme of pain in this poem. Line 1 is held together by its “i”-sounds:

ok/i/—wi/ te

which are picked up again in line 2 and accompanied by the “m” – and “y”-sounds, forming the pattern m-vowel/y-vowel:

m/i—y/a(ku)y/o(ri)—m/o

The repetitive “i”-sounds suggests a symbol of sharpness and brightness, as sharp and bright as the charcoal and the feeling of burning both physically and mentally.<sup>72</sup> The two domains are further bound together through the alliteration of “mi”- and “ya”-sounds, forming a unity around the divider *kanashiki wa* in line three. The “mi” and “ya” of *mi o yaku* are echoed in the third line’s *Miyakoshimabe*. The simile of pain is thereby manifestly interlaced with the capital (*miyako*), which is the place of separation.

Thus, KKS 1104, though foremost a play on words that includes *oriku* (“acrostic verse”), is a love poem that employs both sea and fire imagery. The sea imagery conveys images of love that express the deepness of the heart, while the fire imagery includes an image of love’s pain as charcoal or hearth. *Oki*, which is the central image, becomes a paronomastic image of burning love, deep as the ocean and hot as charcoal: the feeling one experiences when separated from one’s beloved.

Returning again to the topic and its relation to the poem, we may say that the interlacing of the theme of love’s pain at separation and the topic of two imaginary places makes the pain of love itself into an imaginary place, inscribed in the poem as a hypogram.

<sup>72</sup> The linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf asserts that “the psyche is the psychological correlative of the phonemic level in language, related as the feeling-content of the phonemes.” Benjamin Lee Whorf, “Language, Mind and Reality,” in *Theosophist* (Madras, India, Jan/April, 1942), repr. in B. Carroll, ed., *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (New York & London: The Technology Press of M.I.T., 1956), 266–67. He says further (ibid., 268) on the subject that “the vowels *a* (as in “father”) *o*, *u*, are associated in laboratory tests with the dark-warm-soft series, and *e* (English *a* in “date”), *i* (English *e* in “be”) with the bright-cold-sharp set. Consonants also are associated about as one might expect from ordinary naïve feeling in the matter.”

### 3. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to return to the discussion of the biographical method, including research into literary influences, in contrast to the semiotic structural method. The biographical method aims at an interpretation of the literary work based on the author's life or experiences. At times this method also turns the other way around and tries to extract information about the author from the text. When the facts are scant, such research, instead of producing a valid interpretation, adds to a production of fiction. By bringing in Michael Riffaterre's *Semiotics of Poetry*, which outlines a semiotic-structural method while holding on to the notion of context, I have tried to restore the analysis of Ono no Komachi's poetry to the literary context.

Scholars of Japanese literature like Komachiya Teruhiko and Rein Raud have shown that one can speak in terms of a code when analyzing Japanese classical *waka*-poetry. The recognition of the poetic code and thereby its violation (supracode) has also automatically meant a recognition of the many-sidedness of language. In this case it has concerned especially the pivot-word (*kakekotoba*), which hitherto has mostly been treated as an unambiguous trope, since according to a codal reading, it is a poetic word with two meanings, one category of which applies to nature and the other to human emotional life. However, even two meanings of a poetic word may count as ambiguity; moreover, it has become evident that in many cases, more than two implied meanings within these categories of "nature" and "human affairs" are relevant. There are in fact many factors in the text that indicate that the double or many-layered meanings of words and grammar should be read not as either/or, but rather as both...and. In other words, that the ambiguity should be recognized. On top of that, a more thorough paradigmatic reading of the so-called systems of "word association," based on Michael Riffaterre's theories on semiotics, has shown a rewarding result. Ambiguity itself is a fundamental poetical principle.

Some examples of this were evident in the poetic codewords *ura* and *oki*. More pronounced paradigmatic readings have revealed that their integration in the pattern of word association in each poem creates meaning beyond the syntagmatical, that is, semiotic significance. *Ura* ("bay") in KKS 623, harbours *urami* ("resentment") and *ushi* ("miserable") in code, but may also be read according to supracode. For in the anti-grammatical expression *wagami o ura*, it can be satisfactorily interpreted in its basic sense of "rear," "reverse side," "inside," and since both the verb *miru* ("to see") and the noun *mi* ("body") are evoked, *ura* forms a contrast between the oppositions body-heart (in the sense of "feelings"), exterior-interior, and also visible-invisible. *Ura* is here also paradoxical, since what is interior and invisible is not usually seen. In this latter sense, synonymous with *ura* is *oki*, as one of its meanings is "heart," "at the back of one's mind." This meaning is actualized in KKS 1104. Like *ura* in KKS 623, *oki* in this poem stands in contrast to *mi* ("body") and connects to the psychological code, as well as to the toponymic seascape code in the sense of "outing." However, unlike *ura*, *oki* may also be read in fire code as "hearth," a reading that is realized in both KKS 1104 and KKS 1030. In these poems, *oki* evokes an image of burning love, where the literal hearth becomes a figurative one. In KKS 1030, however, this figurative hearth is further transferred to the breast of the I-person.

The stylistic incompatibilities found in KKS 1030 give the poem a humorous or even ironic touch.<sup>73</sup> In accordance with Riffaterre's theory that humour is nothing but a sort of intertextuality, the contamination of stylistically incompatible words in all three poems, and the employment of original pivot-words and word association, particularly in KKS 1030, may be regarded as a form of intertextuality that defines their literarity.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the poems are above all metapoetic, a response to the language of the literary tradition.

While much semantic theory, naturally enough, concentrates on the notion of meaning, semiotics in general and Riffaterre in particular separate meaning from significance and emphasize the latter: rather than asking what and how meaning is created, Riffaterre raises the question of how significance, that is, semiosis, is produced. Semiotic analysis thus implies a metapoetical or metalinguistic analysis. The central issue is the question how the linguistic signs have been combined in order to create significance. As Jonathan Culler says, "semiotics is a metalinguistic enterprise, it attempts to describe the evasive, ambiguous, paradoxical language of literature in a sober, unambiguous metalanguage."<sup>75</sup> The above analyses indicate that this kind of semiotic-structural method may help to reveal elements that would otherwise remain invisible, thus contributing to the understanding of the poem as a whole, although no claims of a full analysis of the poetic text can be made.

<sup>73</sup> This was also noted by Maeda Yoshiko, according to whom this poem is "a poem of true feeling of love, concealed in laughter." *Ono no Komachi* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1943), 94.

<sup>74</sup> Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 125.

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), xi.

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# Suggestions for a Re-Interpretation of the Concept of *Wu xing* in the *Sunzi bingfa*

by

Marc Winter

## 1. The history of the *Sunzi bingfa* and the term *wu xing*

From the terse verses of the *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (Rules for military engagement by Master Sun, conventionally translated as The Art of War) speaks an exceptionally clear and rational mind about how to appropriate strength and advantage in military matters, and in extension in all human relations. The *Sunzi*, written at the latest three centuries before the Christian era, was first and foremost meant for readers of the military class. Due to its philosophical depth and the easy access to its thoughts, however, this book of rules of warfare has appealed also to readers outside the battlefield, and thus claimed its place among the classics of Chinese philosophy.

Hence, the *Sunzi* has been used recently to help decide management strategies, or lay out a political career. One of the cardinal assumptions in this manual of warfare is that the outcome of a battle can often be gauged before it even commences—which explains the notion that “true victors do not need to fight, they win without a struggle.”<sup>1</sup> The possibility of determining the outcome of a battle beforehand is a topic that permeates the *Sunzi*. It is therefore not surprising that the philosophy of the *Sunzi* has been held in high esteem in China and Japan alike, and that the book has since been destined to find readers also in the rest of the world.

The history of the *Sunzi bingfa* from its assumed first public circulation with a commentary by Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) is a splendid one, since the book has been held in high esteem for its wisdom, but for centuries there have also been severe doubts about the authenticity of the text and its alleged author Sun Wu 孫武, and this has put in question the genealogy, integrity, and to some extent the credibility of the work. The life of Sun Wu is virtually unknown, the only transmitted detail about

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of warfare is an exaggeration based on Master Sun's following statement from the fourth chapter: 是故勝兵先勝，而後求戰；敗兵先戰，而後求勝 (“The reason is that those who are victorious in warfare secure victory first and only then look for the fight, while those who are defeated in warfare pick the fight first and then look for victory”).

his biography is that he is said to have been a native from Qi and served as army-general to King Helü 闔廬 of Wu 吳 (r. 514–496 B.C.), but no particulars about his life outside the anecdotal have been handed down to later generations.<sup>2</sup> If the traditional account about the text could be certified, it would make it more ancient than even the words of Confucius as recorded in the *Lunyu* 論語. The *Sunzi bingfa* would be the first text in Chinese literary tradition after the *Yi* 易, parts of the *Shangshu* 尚書 and the *Shi* 詩. Together with the early parts of the *Mozi* 墨子 it would have to be considered the earliest literary source from the hands of one single author.

Doubts about text and author originated relatively late. They were first voiced by the Song-scholar Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223), and they arose for several reasons:

1. The monumental *Zuozhuan* 左傳 does not mention a general of Wu by the name Sun Wu. Nor does any other source which describes the wars between Wu and its neighboring states Yue and Chu at the end of the fifth century B.C. During the war against Yue, described in the 14th year of Duke Ding of Lu, Helü lost a toe in combat and subsequently died from the wound. According to the *Sunzi*, the king should leave wars to specialists like Sun and should not partake in battle.<sup>3</sup>
2. Allegedly, two generations after Sun lived a grandson by the “name” of Sun Bin 孫臏, who became a famous general in Qi, and who also wrote a military treatise, both of which were known as *Sunzi bingfa*.<sup>4</sup> Since the latter Sun’s work had been lost at an early stage, doubt arose also as to whether there had ever been an earlier general Sun.
3. The text is usually described as consisting of thirteen chapters, but the catalogue of the Han dynasty Imperial library states that the book was present in the library, and consisted of eighty two chapters and nine scrolls of maps.
4. The books contains phraseology which is normally attributed to a later period in the history of Chinese thought.

Some of these doubts have been allayed due to archaeological finds. The existence of a historical person named Sun Wu is nowadays usually accepted, and the confusion about the number of chapters has also been more or less solved. Finally, the sensa-

<sup>2</sup> The *Zuozhuan* and *Shiji* use these characters to write King Helü’s name, while other sources, such as the *Guoyu* 國語 and *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, use 闔閭.

<sup>3</sup> For King Helü’s appearance in the *Zuozhuan*, see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes* (5 vols.; Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 1991, altered reprint of the edition: Hongkong, 1870–1995), vol. V: 788, where his death is described. He is also mentioned discussing the upcoming war against Chu in the 30th year of Duke Zhao, *ibid.*, V: 734–35 and during the actual war in the fourth year of Duke Ding *ibid.*, V: 756. None of these passages mention Sun Wu, although the troops of Yue were “distressed by the order and steadiness of the troops of Woo,” which might of course have been due to Sun’s drill.

<sup>4</sup> *Bin* is not a real first name, but rather a reference to the mutilation suffered by the hands of his jealous fellow student, who trapped him and had his legs amputated at the knee, as is related in the same biographical chapter of the *Shiji* as is Sun Wu’s biography. Cf. William H. Nienhauser Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe’s Records: Volume VII. The Memoirs of Pre-Han China by Ssu-ma Ch’ien* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 39–41. This amputation was a form of legal punishment and referred to as *bin*. Usually, the personal name of the former “Master Sun,” Wu, is also regarded as the latter’s real name, even though for a general Wu 武 (“martial”) could of course also be an epithet.

tional find of a Han dynasty manuscript of the text of Sun Bin in 1972 laid to rest concerns about the missing differentiation between the two authors.<sup>5</sup>

Thus today the most serious doubts about the authenticity of the early *Sunzi*-text arise from some of the concepts it analogizes or builds its arguments on. Some of the terms in the text seem parachronistic (i.e. too early for a text from the fifth century) and they make the entire text appear spurious, as if later interpolations had been incorporated in it. This is particularly true for the cosmological phraseology such as *wu xing* 五行 or “Five Phases,” sometimes referred to as the “Five Elements,” and other entities associated with correlative cosmology like the “Five Colors” *wu se* 五色 or the “Five Musical Notes” *wu sheng* 五聲, as discussed below.<sup>6</sup> Also the technology referred to in the text, particularly the crossbow (*nu* 弩) mentioned in chapters two and five, sometimes appears to be parachronistic, for there are no archaeological finds of crossbow trigger mechanisms from before the fourth century B.C.<sup>7</sup>

This has led to the text’s being disintegrated by philological criticism focusing on single phrases, sometimes even single words; indeed some scholars appear to opt for even a further disintegration of the entire text, as will be shown momentarily. The situation has in fact become increasingly complicated: archaeology and philology have cooperated and have been able to antedate the *Sunzi* thanks to the appearance of texts from newly excavated tombs. Nonetheless, the integrity of the text is still doubted and it still presents serious difficulties for scholars, mainly because of the anachronisms discussed above. The problems specialists have had in explaining why these elements occur in a text which allegedly dates from the late fifth century B.C. have led them to re-interpret the textual history of the *Sunzi*. The discrepancy between elements from the fifth century and terms from the third century has been explained as resulting from different layers of text. In other words, like the *Lunyu*, the *Shijing* or the *Zuozhuan*, the *Sunzi* is described as a multi-layered text incorporating elements from different centuries.

Robin D.S. Yates gives a perfect example of this new kind of uncertainty towards the *Sunzi* text. In an article from 1988 he accepts the traditional date of the *Sunzi*

<sup>5</sup> The text of the *Sun Bin bingfa* has been published in several Chinese monographs. For an English translation (with an introduction and commentary) by Ralph D. Sawyer, cf. Sun Bin 孫臏, *Military Methods* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview, 1995). I discuss some of the textual problems below.

<sup>6</sup> In the course of the following discussion, the term “Five Phases” rather than “Five Elements” shall be used, since the *wu xing* do not constitute material components of things as elements would, thus clearly differing from the classical Greek elements of Empedocles. Graham introduces the term “Five Processes,” stressing that “the Five *Hsing* appear to be, not the materials, nor phases in cycles, but processes such as fire rising and burning, water wetting and sinking.” Angus Charles Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 326. John Lee refers to them as “Five Agents.” See John Lee, “From Five Elements to Five Agents: *wu-hsing* in Chinese history” *Sages and Filial Sons: Mythology and Archaeology in Ancient China* (Hongkong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), 163. Since (as I hope to show) in the *Sunzi bingfa* the *wu xing* are not the processes Graham had in mind, there is no need to differentiate between “phases,” “processes” or “agents,” so I shall use the term “Five Phases” because it is well introduced and does not implicate the problems of the term “element.”

<sup>7</sup> I will not consider the passages that mention the crossbow in the *Sunzi*, because I wish to concentrate on the question of cosmology rather than the date of the text. For a good discussion of the subject and a balanced discussion of early forms of the trigger-mechanisms, cf. Robin D.S. Yates, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology. Part VI: Military Technology: Missiles and Sieges (Science and Civilisation in China; Volume 5)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 135–45, particularly 139–40.

as a text from “the period roughly 500 B.C.,” which would also be “the period... for the first appearance of specialized military treatises.”<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless Yates remains reserved in his judgment on the text’s integrity. For methodological reasons Yates’s thesis interests me, since it is based on internal textual analysis, but also because Yates arrives at a conclusion concerning the *Sunzi* that is radically opposed to mine:

When we come to the actual content of the *Sun-tzu*, even a cursory glance will reveal that in many cases the logical connections between the passages are open to question and it is quite likely, in my opinion, that the many *ku* 故 “therefore,” which are liberally scattered through the text and which provide an apparent sense of coherent logical structure, are, in fact, connecting passages of totally different and unrelated import. The conclusion I draw from this is that these *ku* have in many cases been added to the text at a later date by some editor or copyist who was used to a much less aphoristic style, in which arguments were treated at length and in detail. They may also have been added by a copyist, who was working with unconnected bamboo or wooden slips, and was trying to compose a coherent whole out of a multitude of fragmented sections.<sup>9</sup>

Logically speaking, Yates’s argument is as hard to disprove as it is to support, simply because it is circular, and wholly dependent upon interpretation. If the interpreter (like Yates) does not find that the *Sunzi* passages connected by way of *gu* make logical sense, then the entire text appears fragmented and put together by a later editor. If, on the other hand, the interpreter is able to find the red thread joining those passages, then the text may be deemed integral. We should immediately note that Yates’s position involves a major methodological issue, namely that of author versus editor. Yates’s argument depends on the assumption that the original *author* of the *Sunzi* expressed himself in short and logically coherent aphorisms which were later connected willy-nilly by an *editor* who did not appreciate the stylistic terseness and the rigid logic of the “original” author. Hence, with Yates, the *gu* and the alleged later editor are both hallmarks of an anachronistic pseudo-logic that obscures the true, aphoristic nature of the *Sunzi*. Conversely, we must understand Yates as claiming that the “original” author was a person of a strict logical rigor who could not have composed the text in its received form, i.e. an argument characterized by non-sequiturs. There is thus an evolutionary idea hidden in Yates’s argument: the *Sunzi* begins as a collection of short aphorisms, which over time were connected into a lengthier and more detailed argument.<sup>10</sup>

I will try another approach. I argue that the *Sunzi* is coherent and that the entire text is from the hand of a single author. But rather than making a straight argument for the text’s integrity and authenticity, I will attempt to explain the *wu xing* terminology—so important for, and characteristic of, the *Sunzi*—in a way that differs from the traditional interpretation. By doing so, I want to show that we often approach texts with pre-established intellectual categories in mind, and are thus trapped in the *circulus vitiosus* that so often prevents us from re-evaluating ancient texts.

<sup>8</sup> Robin D.S. Yates, “New Light on Ancient Chinese Military Texts: Notes on Their Nature and Evolution, and the Development of Military Specialization in Warring States China,” *T’oung-pao* LXXIX (1988): 219.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Yates’s argument is further complicated by the fact that many pre-Qin texts use the conjunction *gu*, albeit not in syllogisms in the Aristotelian sense. And, of course, once a text is being criticized phrase by phrase, it is difficult to make any convincing argument for its completeness and authenticity.

I am not arguing that the *Sunzi bingfa* was not influenced by conventional *wu xing* terminology, because it clearly uses phrases from this pentadimensional correlative model. But when Sun Wu used the *wu xing* as an *allegory* in his text, this terminology was very much different from when it operated as a fully developed cosmological system during the Han dynasty. The entire complex of *wu xing* has to be seen in another light, which in turn can broaden our understanding of the development of what would later be the “Five Phases.” I argue that the term *wu xing* has to be translated as “The Five Planets,” referring to the five planets of our solar system that are visible to the naked eye: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, some of the most conspicuous heavenly bodies. My argument indicates a different understanding of the development of the entire system of *wu xing*, which in my opinion was developed as a way hopefully to systematize, and finally predict, the movement of the planets.

The upshot of such an argument is that the term *wu xing* in the *Sunzi bingfa* must be considered a *hapax legomenon*.<sup>11</sup> To anticipate my conclusion, *wu xing* appears as an allegory for constant change.

Below, I first discuss contemporary scholarship on the relationship between the cosmos and the human world in early Chinese philosophy, and then authenticity issues of the *Sunzi*-text. I then look at the meaning of the term *wu xing* in pre-Qin Chinese literature and finally discuss the examples of *wu xing* terminology in the *Sunzi bingfa*.

## 2. Cosmos and the human realm

The connection between the mechanisms of nature, especially of the nocturnal sky and cases of parallel observance of phenomena on earth was already described by John Major in his article from 1978, when he wrote:

The operational characteristics [of Chinese cosmology] include an organic conception of cosmic process, expressed in a cosmogony without a first cause or creator, “*yin-yang*” complementary dualism, the theory of *wu hsing* or the Five Phases, other theories of categories, and resonant action at a distance through the medium of *ch'i*.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that the Chinese explanations of the workings of the world, and the cosmological concepts which developed as a result thereof, are based on the observation of nature, rather than on mythical figures.<sup>13</sup> The process of how the observations made in everyday life were systematized and, as concepts of a higher degree of abstraction, used to explain underlying mechanisms of the cosmos has been described

<sup>11</sup> Note, however, that an almost identical sentence appears in chapter 41 “*jing xia* 經下第四十一” of the *Mozi*.

<sup>12</sup> John Major, “Myth, Cosmology, and the Origins of Chinese Science,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 5 (1978), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Chinese mythology brought forth creator-figures, too, of course. But they appeared rather late. The most famous such deity would be Pangu 盤古, who appears to be a cultural loan from the Miao and Yao people in the Southwest of China. The binome Pangu is transmitted from the time of the Six Dynasties on and is quoted in chapter two of the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. Cf. Wolfgang Münke, *Mythologie der chinesischen Antike: Mit Ausblick auf spätere Entwicklungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1998), 250.

in great detail by Christopher Rand.<sup>14</sup> In his discussion of military thought in philosophical Daoism Rand explains how the connection between the heavens and the changing luck in warfare was described in several Daoist treatises of the pre-Qin era, of which none originated later than the third century B.C. Rand demonstrates that at this point in time cosmos and man were conceived of as being directly connected, and hence it was the general's duty to read, transform, and utilize for his ends the *qi* (momentum, energy) and to "gauge the 'five-phasal' (*wu-hsing*) and dialectal (*yin-yang*) relations which characterize the *ch'i* [*qi*] of that situation."<sup>15</sup> Rand expressed it even more pointedly, when he claims that

It is thus the essence of the "metaphysical" solution that unbridled violence be avoided, that potency be sparingly manifested. In so acting, the sage-general promotes not just personal will or even merely human ego-force, but yields to the Way. For it is the ultimate goal of military activity, according to this outlook, to retrieve the Way from the distortions and *luan* effected by unenlightened purveyors of force. By being a mediator in the Heaven-Earth-Man Triad which constitutes the martial microcosm as well as the whole universe, the sage-general conducts conflictual situations in a fashion that will revivify economically such harmonious relations.<sup>16</sup>

However, as I shall try to indicate below, the *Sunzi bingfa* does not build its arguments on the notion of such elaborate interaction between cosmos and the human realm. The author uses the most basic characteristics of *yin-yang* and *wu xing* cosmology as mere images to illustrate and exemplify his rational arguments.

John Major also theorizes about the possible origins of *yin yang* and other cosmological theories, and also of certain myths popular in several cultures on the Eurasian continent. Major concludes that there was a common Origin Myth bringing forth common cosmological concepts among early Eurasian cultures, a process in which also the Chinese partook.<sup>17</sup> The myth in the Chinese context then led to an understanding of nature as a *perpetuum mobile* mechanism that worked without a creator or regulator. Thus, rather than striving to find the laws for its working (as the Greeks did), the Chinese described the "organic relationships within the system, as anything external was inconceivable." This in turn led to Chinese natural science. I will now quote a lengthy passage from Major, because it presents a very central argument for my present purposes as well. At the beginning of his discussion Major speaks of the way in which the interaction between the five phases was described ("overcoming" vs. "bringing forth"; *sheng* 勝 vs. *sheng* 生), and its political use in the question of which phase was to be attributed to which dynasty. He also mentions the long list of correlating things (such as musical notes and so forth), and the way they

<sup>14</sup> Christopher C. Rand, "Chinese Military Thought and Philosophical Taoism," *Monumenta Serica* 34 (1979–1980), 171–73.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>17</sup> Major refers to the study *Hamlet's Mill* from 1969 by DeSantillana and von Dechend. The theory is that there was a myth common to all Eurasian cultures, consisting of the following two basic elements: 1. a concept of an era before heaven and earth were separated, and when the *axis mundi* allowed communication between man and gods. 2. the destruction of this unity, the separation of heaven and earth, the tilting of the *axis mundi* and the loss of communication with the gods resulting, finally, in an all-drowning flood to cleanse the world and start the period of human history. John Major, "Myth, Cosmology, and the Origins of Chinese science," 3.

were combined with the bipolar system of *yin* and *yang*. Further on he discusses the number five and so writes:

Various explanations have been attempted for why the Chinese counted five such Phases rather than some other number. Some of the explanations verge on casuistry: five is a "useful number numerologically," or "there are five fingers on a hand." I believe that the most plausible hypothesis is that the five derived from the five visible planets. DeSantillana and von Dechend show that in all of the cultures that possessed some version of the Grand Origin Myth, the five planets were regarded as important gods; by analogy we would expect that to be the case in China also. In fact, enumerations of correlates of the Five Phases prominently include five planets and five sage-emperors (gods); so for example the planet Saturn and the god Huang Ti are linked with Phase earth, and thus also with the center—the *axis mundi*.

From that example it will be clear that the assignment of the planets/gods to their Five Phases correlates was by no means arbitrary. To take another example, Jupiter, with its nearly 12-year orbit...was regarded as an important determinant of time; Jupiter was correlated with Fu Hsi and the Phase wood (thus also with the direction east, the direction of the vernal equinox), so in Five Phase theory Fu Hsi becomes a god-regulator of earthly time as well as the god of earth itself in yin-yang dualism.

The term *wu hsing* itself provides a clue to the origin of the Five Phases in the five planets. *Hsing* has two meanings: "to move" and "a row or column." The five planets answer both of those definitions: they are the only "stars" that move, hence they are conspicuous by their movement; and it was believed that the five planets lined up in a row at the beginning of an epoch of time, which then lasted until the planets came around into a row again. (In Han astronomy much attention was paid to calculating concordance cycles of orbital times to determine the length of such epochs.) Moreover, in the Chou the five planets were commonly called the "five walkers," *wu pu; hsing* (as a verb) and *pu* are near-synonyms. Finally, in Karlgren's reconstruction of the pronunciation of archaic Chinese, there is a close pun between *wu hsing* (\*g'äng) and *wu huang* (\*g'wäng), "five sovereigns," the five sage-emperors or gods.

Major then takes this hypothesis one step further:

The hypothesis suggested here, then, is that for the early (i.e. Spring and Autumn Period or earlier) Chinese the five visible planets were gods, and that each god had sovereignty over certain types of activity and natural change. During the Warring States Period this function of the gods as cosmic paradigms was abstracted into a philosophical principle, for which the term *wu hsing* was invented; the origin of the concept suggested the choice of the term.

It must be noted that the above reasoning cannot be regarded as a proof of the origin of the Five Phases, but only as a plausible hypothesis. Because of the lack of textual evidence predating the Warring States Period, it is very difficult to establish the influence of planet-gods and their characteristics on early Chinese thought; one's only recourse is to draw inferences about early thought from later evidence, and that is full of uncertainties. Furthermore, other influences on the origin of the term and concept of *wu hsing* must be considered, for example the term *wu fang*, five directions (later an important correlate group of the Five Phases), a term found in Shang oracle bone inscriptions. Nevertheless, it does seem reasonable to believe that something like the Five Phases existed as a cosmological principle in the pre-philosophical state of Chinese thought, expressed in myths about the characteristics of the gods of the five planets. So again we see that a key concept of Chinese science probably can be traced back to Chinese versions of widespread cosmological myths."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> John Major, "Myth," 11–13.

Let us finally consult Angus Graham, who also states that correlative thinking was part of metaphorizing in non-philosophical texts. According to Graham “throughout the classical period correlative schematizing belongs only to astronomers, diviners, music masters, physicians; the philosophers from Confucius to Han Fei did not engage in it at all.”<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, he does not include militarists and strategists in this list, but this is due to the dating problem: “none is confidently datable before the late third century BC.”<sup>20</sup> In the present context, however, it is noteworthy that it was not philosophers, but technical specialists, who first employed correlative concepts to illustrate their points—exactly what we find in the *Sunzi bingfa*.

### 3. *Wu xing* in the *Sunzi bingfa*

I shall now turn to the occurrences of *wu xing*-terminology in the *Sunzi*. In his 1990 article “*Wu xing wenti yu Sunzi bingfa: Sunzi Zhanguo secai shuo buzheng zhi yi* 五行問題與孫子兵法：孫子戰國色彩說補證之一,” Huang Pumin 黃樸民 takes the existence of *wu xing* cosmology for granted, because of the use of terms like *wu xing*, *wu sheng* and the Five Emperors *wu di*. We thus find in Huang’s article another instance of a circular argument: Huang sees the use of such terms as undisputable evidence that the *Sunzi bingfa* is about correlative cosmology and hence a document from the Warring States period. In the present discussion, however, I limit my focus to the interpretation of the term *wu xing* and leave out the consequences thereof for the dating of texts. Hence, the dating question will not be discussed, particularly because to no text can be attributed a certain date from just a couple of sentences, and this is true for predating as much as it is for postdating. Huang’s article will be used rather as a mere signpost, pointing to the sentences he deems related to the *wu xing* terminology in the *Sunzi bingfa*, as quoted below.

In three sections of the book the author of the *Sunzi* refers to groups of five, which are relevant as parts of what in the third century became a fully integrated *wu xing*-system. Chapter five “*Bing shi pian* 兵勢篇” cites “Five Tastes” (*wu wei*), “Five Colors” (*wu se*), and “Five Musical Notes” (*wu sheng*). But although these terms usually refer to specific colors, musical notes and tastes, the author of the *Sunzi* does not quote them in this manner here. Instead, they are mere illustrations of or allegories for the boundless possibilities that come from wisely combining a few basic elements:

凡戰者，以正合，以奇勝。故善出奇者，無窮如天地，不竭如江河，終而復始，日月是也；死而復生，四時是也。聲不過五，五聲之變，不可勝聽也。色不過五，五色之變，不可勝觀也。味不過五，五味之變，不可勝嘗也。戰勢不過奇正，奇正之變，不可勝窮也。奇正相生，如循環之無端，孰能窮之哉。

<sup>19</sup> A.C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (IEAP Occasional Papers and Monograph Series; No 6; Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies 1986), 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> As is evident from one of his footnotes, Graham believed that the *Sunzi bingfa* was written by Sun Bin. He wrote *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* in 1986, when the discovery of the Yinqueshan-tomb at Linyi in Shandong was already 14 years old. Graham gave no reference to this find and maybe was not aware that this archaeological discovery cleared the long-standing dilemma about the *Sunzi bingfa* and the *Sun Bin bingfa*. Cf. my discussion below.

In Lionel Giles' translation this passage reads as follows:

In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory. Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end but to begin anew; like the four seasons, they pass away to return once more.

There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combinations of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard. There are not more than five primary colors (blue, yellow, red, white, and black), yet in combination they produce more hues than can ever been seen. There are not more than five cardinal tastes (sour, acrid, salt, sweet, bitter), yet combinations of them yield more flavors than can ever be tasted. In battle, there are not more than two methods of attack—the direct and the indirect; yet these two in combination give rise to an endless series of maneuvers.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, the five colors are neither specified nor does the author of the *Sunzi* say anything about them. Here, the five colors or tastes appear merely allegorically to exemplify the abundant possibilities that arise from the simple combination of only a few elements. To take this as proof that the *Sunzi* uses the teaching of the five phases is to my mind inappropriate. To give an analogy: had the author of *Sunzi* used the game of chess as an allegory, he might have mentioned that the pieces can only be moved in a limited number of ways, but that after a couple of draws the possibilities become innumerable. This would have been precisely an *allegory* of the way in which a few elements may combine into an almost endless number of variations, and we would not assume that the author had wished to make a statement about chess *per se*.

Another passage, which Huang thinks refers to the Five Phases, mentions a total of five emperors, which Huang takes as a reference to the Five Emperors (*wu di* 五帝) also correlated to the five phases, as discussed by John Major above. This passage appears in the ninth chapter, "Xing jun pian 行軍篇," in which Sun gives advice on the possibilities and lurking dangers that may occur when a general is moving his army on different grounds, and the strategic behavior appropriate on such occasions. He attributes maximum importance to the study of terrain and concludes his advice with the following sentence: "凡此四軍之利，黃帝之所以勝四帝也。These are the four useful branches of military knowledge which enabled the Yellow Emperor to vanquish four several sovereigns" (trans. Giles).<sup>22</sup> Again, it is quite incomprehensible how this sentence could be taken as proof of the presence of *wu xing*-thinking in the *Sunzi*. This passage mentions the Yellow Emperor, who in his turn names the reason why he was able to defeat the other four emperors. Now although this does make a total of five emperors, they have to be different from the five emperors mentioned in correlation to the Five Phases, for the five emperors of the correlation system were

<sup>21</sup> Lionel Giles, *Sun Tzû on the Art of War: The Oldest Military Treatise in the World* (Taipei: Literature House, Ltd., 1964), 35–37. In his own commentary Giles gives an example of "indirect tactics" by reminding the readers of Lord Roberts' night march round the Peiwar Kotal in the second Afghan war, which probably tells us more about British Empirian life before the first World War than about the *Sunzi*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. Giles explains that the "four useful branches" are "those concerned with mountains, rivers, marshes, and plains. Again he refers to a Western source for a deeper understanding, namely Napoleon's "Military Maxims" no.1.

never at war with each other. Although it is not clear which four emperors the book refers to, it cannot be the emperors connected with *wu xing*.

The passage of the *Sunzi* most strongly associated with *wu xing*-theory appears in the sixth chapter, “*Xu shi pian* 虛實篇.” The sentence crowns an extensive discussion of the value of flexibility and of unconventional tactics which cannot be known by the enemy in advance. In order to demonstrate that the *wu xing*-sentence does not rely on “Five Phases”-phraseology, I shall contextualize this passage by reading the sentences preceding it.

人皆知我所以勝之形，而莫知吾所以制勝之形；故其戰勝不復，而應形於無窮。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。

All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved. Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances. Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing. Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.<sup>23</sup>

This observation is concluded with the laws of nature as expressed in the mechanisms of the heavens: “*gu wu xing wu chang sheng, si shi wu chang wei, ri you duan chang, yue you si sheng* 故五行無常勝，四時無常位，日有短長，月有死生.” Here I cannot use Giles’ translation, for it is too strongly influenced by the traditional understanding of *wu xing* as the five elements. Instead, the sentence translates as: “Therefore, among the five *xing* there is none that dominates the others eternally; the four seasons make way for each other in turn. There are short days and long; the moon has its periods of waning and waxing.”

As can clearly be seen, the sentence has an astronomical context and is thus a very strong indication that the *Sunzi* was not referring to the Five Phases, but rather to the five visible planets. But before we can return to these three passages, it is necessary to discuss further the question of textual authenticity.

#### 4. The *Sunzi bingfa* and the question of authenticity

Since the Song dynasty the authenticity of the *Sunzi bingfa* has been doubted with respect to Sun Wu being its author, and to the extent and the age of the text. Since the authenticity of the text is important for the argument that I am attempting to make, I will now discuss this problematic in greater detail. The alleged spuriousness of the text has hampered its reception and acceptance as a historic and philosophical source. When D. C. Lau introduced his notes on the text in 1965, he stated that:

<sup>23</sup> Lionel Giles, *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, 52–53.

[t]he *Sun tzu* presents the reader with greater difficulties than almost any other work of comparable antiquity. Whereas most ancient works have attracted the attention of generations of scholars, most of whom have left their mark in the form of learned notes on difficult points in the text, the *Sun tzu* has been almost completely neglected. True, there has been no lack of commentaries on the *Sun tzu*, but the commentators...were all men of action, if not actually soldiers, and were not employing the painstaking methods of scholarship.<sup>24</sup>

Since Lau's statement, forty years of scholarship and fortunate archeological finds have clarified some of the long-standing puzzles surrounding the *Sunzi*. Yet many questions remain unsolved, among them the question of the date of the text. Several opinions on the question of the *Sunzi*-date shall be discussed here.

One of the earliest accounts of this text and its author is in Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記, where the book is attributed to Sun Wu, a native from the state of Qi and army-general to King Helü. In this well-known story the king states that he "read the thirteen chapters," but wanted a demonstration of Sun Wu's abilities. Sun Wu promptly proves his proficiency as a general by forming and drilling an impromptu unit from the king's concubines, and beheading the king's favorite concubines as a measure to ensure discipline among the palace women.<sup>25</sup> The story may be little more than an anecdote, but it indicates the air of military professionalism that was the ideal of full-time army men, as compared to the lofty noblemen who had conducted warfare during the Western Zhou and most of the Chunqiu-period.<sup>26</sup> The *Shiji* also contains an account of Sun Bin, another general, reported to have lived over a hundred years after Sun Wu. He was also a native from Qi and later general in his home state. Sima Qian explicitly calls him a descendant of the former Sun, and during the Song he was identified as his grandson.<sup>27</sup> Sima Qian named both of them as the authors of a book on warfare, both by the same and obvious title, *Sunzi bingfa*. Shortly after Sima Qian wrote his *Shiji*, Liu Xiang 劉向 (89–9 B.C.) made his catalogue of the imperial library, called the *Qi Lüe* 七略, later incorporated into Ban Gu's 班固 (A.D. 32–92) *Hanshu* 漢書 as the bibliographical chapter "Yi wen zhi 藝文志."<sup>28</sup> In

<sup>24</sup> D.C. Lau, "Some Notes on the *Sun Tzu*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 28 (1965), 319.

<sup>25</sup> For this story from Sun Wu's life cf. chapter 65 of the *Shiji*, cf. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 7:2161–62, and William H. Nienhauser Jr., *The Grand Scribe's Records. Volume VII*, 37–38. The same anecdote, but in different wording, is recorded in chapter "Helü nei zhuan" of the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* 吳越春秋. Cf. Zhou Shengchun 周生春, *Wu Yue Chunqiu Jijiao Huikao* 吳越春秋輯校彙考 (Shanghai, Shanghai Guji Chunbanshe, 1997), 51–52.

<sup>26</sup> For forms of warfare before the Warring States period cf. the studies of Mark Edward Lewis and Raimund Theodor Kolb, respectively. I would like to point out Kolb's book for doing away with the myth of chariot-warfare being predominant before the Warring States period. He argues convincingly that infantry had always been the main fighting unit, albeit infantry units were grouped around chariots. He makes it clear that the common (mis-)understanding of warfare as conducted by small infantry armies grouped around war-chariots, with aristocrats doing all the fighting, has mainly to do with historiography's focus on the aristocracy.

<sup>27</sup> William H. Nienhauser Jr., *The Grand Scribe's Records. Volume VII*, 39–41.

<sup>28</sup> According to Robin Yates, the military section of the *Qi lüe* was compiled by a certain Ren Hong 任宏, a colonel of infantry and official in other positions (Michael Loewe, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of the Qin, former Han and Xin periods, 221 B.C. – A. D. 24* [Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000], 459). Yates suspected that this may be the militarist *Sunzi*, cf. Yates, "New Light," 215–16. The catalogue of books in the *Hanshu* lists at least three authors by the name of "Master Sun," one under "Daoism" in 16 chapters, and the two Suns mentioned above. They are distinct by their native states: "Wu *Sunzi bingfa*" in 82 chapters and "Qi *Sunzi bingfa*" in 89 chapters. Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 6:1731 & 1757).

this catalogue we in fact find several authors referred to as “Master Sun.” There is one “Master Sun” among the Daoists, author of a book of 16 chapters, and another two of the same name among the so-called strategists *bing quan mou jia* 兵權謀家, one from the state of Wu and the other from Qi.<sup>29</sup> Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645), the commentator of the *Hanshu* stated explicitly in a note, that the author of the “*Wu Sunzi bingfa* 吳孫子兵法” is Sun Wu, vassal to King Helü.<sup>30</sup> The number of authors with similar names, and the fact that at least one of the books was not transmitted, have greatly added to the confusion about whether the transmitted *Sunzi bingfa* was in fact Sun Wu’s, and the doubts about the book’s date of creation are thus understandable.

Although by the time Yan Shigu wrote his commentary the *Sunzi* was transmitted in 13 chapters (which is the received version from the time of Cao Cao, see below), and although Yan asserted that he was indeed referring to the same author as Liu Xiang, the size of the treatise is described quite differently. According to the “*Yi wen zhi*”-chapter of the *Hanshu* the book consists of 82 *pian* 篇 and nine *juan* of illustrations or maps (*tu jiu juan* 圖九卷). This is the only account of the *Sunzi* as consisting of anything but thirteen chapters.<sup>31</sup> In the *Shiji*—and since then in all other descriptions—it is explicitly stated that the book had thirteen chapters.

Thus, throughout the history of the reception of the *Sunzi* there were doubts regarding the authorship and also the content and extent of book itself, variously described as consisting of thirteen or eighty two chapters.

Luckily, archaeological finds from the last thirty years have dramatically increased our understanding of the *Sunzi*’s textual history and helped to solve many of these pending questions. Among the many texts unearthed from tombs since the founding of the People’s Republic, the two most spectacular finds concerning military texts are the one from Linyi 臨沂, Shandong Province, where the so-called Yinqueshan tomb 銀雀山墓 was discovered in 1972; and the other from Datong county 大通縣 in Qinghai Province, where just one year later a Western-Han tomb was found in Shangsun Jiazhai 上孫家寨. Both finds yielded many texts, some of them quite sensational.<sup>32</sup> The Yinqueshan tomb concealed several military texts, the most exciting of which were the versions of the *Sunzi bingfa* and the *Sun Bin bingfa* 孫臏兵法.<sup>33</sup> The texts were easy to differentiate, for the *Sunzi bingfa* was obviously similar to the *textus receptus* with only a few taboos not in operation yet, and the

<sup>29</sup> The surname Sun in the *Hanshu* has to be interpreted critically, because the surname Xun 荀 was changed to Sun, because of the taboo of the Xuan-emperor of the Han, Liu Xun 劉詢 (r. 73–49). Cf. Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 6:1782, note 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 6:1756–57.

<sup>31</sup> The statement that the *Sunzi* consists of thirteen chapters is well documented. Beside the account in the *Shiji*, we find the same statement in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. Li, Fang 李昉, ed., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), 2:1263a–b. Traditionally, the preface to the commentary by Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) has also been taken to express the same opinion, but the authenticity of the particular sentence in which this claim is made was challenged already during the Qing. Cf. *Shiyi jia zhu sunzi jiaoli* 十一家注孫子校理 (*Xinbian Zhuzi Jicheng*-Edition; Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1999), 310.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed description of the Yinqueshan site cf. Roger T. Ames, *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare, The First English Translation, Incorporating the Recently Discovered Yin-ch’üeh-shan Texts* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), 261–70.

<sup>33</sup> These two texts from Yinqueshan have since been translated, the *Sunzi* by Roger Ames and the *Sun Bin bingfa* by Ralph D. Sawyer. The title *Sun Bin bingfa* was given to differentiate the two books. As stated above, traditionally they were both known only as *Sunzi bingfa*.

*Sun Bin bingfa* also was easily identifiable. Not only does the latter text contain many parts that begin with the phrase “*Sunzi yue* 孫子曰,” which in the early text appears only once per chapter. Its content is also clearly different from the traditional *Sunzi*, since the text also records discussions between Sun Bin and the King Wei of Qi 齊威王, who had been in power between 356 and 320, and whose adviser on military matters Sun Bin was to become; it also contains a conversation with Tian Ji 田忌, former general of the troops of Qi, according to the biography in the *Shiji*. Thus this archaeological find from 1972 confirmed that there had actually been two strategic thinkers, both by the surname Sun, just as the *Shiji* recorded.

Even more important for my present concern, these newly discovered texts shed a new light on the lingering question of the number of chapters of the original work. Since both manuscripts were from the Western Han, they must have been similar to the one in the imperial library with 82 chapters. But both archaeological finds explicitly demonstrate that the older *Sunzi* was a work in thirteen chapters. Yet the Yinqueshan manuscript contains new text fragments, not included in the *textus receptus*, like the interview with the King of Wu (“Jian Wu wang 見吳王”), a text akin to the biographical anecdote from the *Shiji* and *Wu Yue chungiu*.<sup>34</sup> Even in this additional chapter (i.e. what would be the fourteenth chapter) it is clearly stated that the *Sunzi* consists of thirteen chapters. This suggests that the “Jian Wu wang” was part of an additional corpus of texts, regarded as part of the *Sunzi* text by Liu Xiang, but which did not constitute a part of the original. For this view—that parts were later added to the text, which originally consisted of only 13 chapters—a piece of supporting literary evidence can be found in the *Shiji zhengyi* 史記正義. This Tang dynasty *Shiji*-commentary was written by Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. 713–741), and is reprinted in the modern standard edition of the *Shiji* published by Zhonghua Shuju. Here Zhang quotes a book by the name of *Qi Lu* 七錄—which may refer to Liu Xiang’s original work *Qi lue*, but it is a title not otherwise known—as saying that the *Sunzi bingfa* was a book in three sections (*juan*): 《七錄》云：《孫子兵法》三卷。案：十三篇為上卷，又有中下二卷。<sup>35</sup> Zhang concludes from this that the thirteen chapters must have been the first section of the *Sunzi bingfa*, and that the two other sections were later texts added to Sun Wu’s original.

Of course, this may only be a rationalization of the fact that the book had thirteen chapters during the Tang, but this educated guess by Zhang is but one indication in this direction, another being that Cao Cao, the first commentator and editor of the *Sunzi*, in his postscript to his edition of the *Sunzi* states that he has removed “superfluous” parts from the text: “曹魏武帝削其繁剩，筆其精切 Cao, the Martial Emperor of Wu, cut away what was too elaborate and superfluous, and only wrote down what is the essence and what has been reduced.”<sup>36</sup>

It is impossible to prove with definite authority that the book originally consisted of those 13 chapters, even though we have various indications from later authors.

<sup>34</sup> From the circumstance (which do not accord with the historic reality) that military options are discussed in the dialogue between Sun Wu and his sovereign Yates concludes that this text dates from somewhere between 453 and 403 B.C. Yates, “New Light,” 217–18.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji*, 7:2162.

<sup>36</sup> For this quote, cf. *Shiyi jia zhu sunzi jiaoli*, 310.

Although Cao Cao seems to hint at it and although the 13 chapters completely cover the strategic spectrum, this can never be proven. Naturally, such additions to texts were most likely not uncommon. Particularly early texts were sometimes later added on to.<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless I feel it can be assumed with some amount of certainty from the statements above, and from the archaeological evidence from Shandong and Qinghai, that the core of the *Sunzi bingfa* had always been the thirteen chapters, and that some 69 other chapters were later added to it. The original 13 chapters extant today had existed before the Han and were restored by Cao Cao upon the occasion of his commentary.<sup>38</sup> The question remains, however, to what degree the chapters that have come down to us preserve the intentions of the original author.

Krzysztof Gawlikowski concluded in his account of the text that the traditional portrayal of the *Sunzi bingfa* as written by Sun Wu is basically accurate.<sup>39</sup> What is more important, in refuting the various points made against the traditional date he also brings forth a new argument by demonstrating the literary and argumentative consistency of the book. He compares the *Sunzi* to other classical books that had not been written by the famous men they were attributed to, like the *Guanzi* 管子 (Master Guan [Zhong]) or *Guigu* 鬼谷子 (Master from the demon valley), and makes the following strong arguments for an early compilation of the military manual: it makes no sense at all to forge a book and then attribute it to a general of no reputation, like Master Sun.

Supposing it had been intended to attribute a later text artificially to some earlier personality, it may be assumed that in all probability some well-known historical figure would have been selected; the fact that so little is known of the author would rather seem to confirm the authenticity of the text.<sup>40</sup>

Of course he cannot rule out “the possibility of changes...introduced during the subsequent editing.”

Concluding from the discussion above that the date and thirteen-chapter format traditionally given for the text is basically sound, it is of course still impossible to prove that the three *wu xing*-sentences in the *Sunzi* were part of the original manuscript. They could always be later interpolations, especially because they function as parts of analogies at the end of arguments and, again, their being part of the original

<sup>37</sup> Two examples of compiled books which contain texts from different eras are the *Mozi* which consists of parts going back to Mo Di 墨翟 (~470–370) and also of sections which were later added by followers, and the *Daoist Zhuangzi* 莊子, only parts of which go back to Zhuang Zhou, while others were written in the second century B.C. Cf. Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: a Bibliographic Guide* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 337–38. Also, it is a well-known fact that to the *Shangshu* new chapters were added, and that the *Shijing* contains odes from a period of almost a thousand years. Finally, there are many attempts to stratify the *Lunyu*, the latest is by E. Bruce Brooks and A. Takeo Brooks, see *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the textual history and a discussion of the editing role of Cao Cao, see also Michael Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 447–49. The textual comparison of the different versions of the *Sunzi* in Chiharu Hattori's work suggests very minor discrepancies between the early versions of the texts and the later standard versions, except for standard taboos like *heng* 恒 and *chang* 常, and the use of alternative characters like *yu* 於 and *yu* 于, or characters which were later given a semantic class marker (“radical”), but represent the same word like 立 and 位.

<sup>39</sup> Robin D.S. Yates, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, 12–20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

text is as impossible to prove as it is to disprove. Since this is the case, I would like to let the discussion about the date of the text rest, and for the sake of argument assume that the version told in the *Shiji* is correct, and that Sun Wu was a general of the state of Wu and author of the thirteen chapters.

## 5. *Wu xing* in Chinese thought

In order to assess accurately the three occurrences of *wu xing* terminology in the *Sunzi*, it is necessary to describe some of the phenomena that came to be connected with the *wu xing* in general during the Warring States. It will then be possible to establish just how the *Sunzi* deviates from the system in its best-known form. The cosmological correlations of *wu xing* is only one of several cosmological terms brought forth by the ancient Chinese. Other such terms include the Four Seasons, the cyclical system of the Heavenly Stems (*tiangan* 天干) and the Earthly Branches (*dizhi* 地支), and of course the *yin-yang* 陰陽 dualism.<sup>41</sup>

The system of *wu xing* became, as Henderson puts it, “one of the pivots of correlative cosmology in China” and from the Han dynasty onwards more and more aspects of the world were conceptualized by way of the Five Phases.<sup>42</sup> For example, the ancient philosophico-medical treatise *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (The Yellow Emperor’s classic on internals [of the human body]) makes many references to it, thus causing all later Chinese medicine to rely heavily on the system of the Five Phases. Through the course of its development, it became ever more elaborate, covering not only the “five tastes” or the “five musical notes” of the Chinese pentatonic scale, but even stretching as far out as the “five spices” or the “five fruits” in Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (circa 581–682) medical classic *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 備急千金要方 (Medical recipes for emergencies worth gold a thousand times over).

While the development of the *wu xing*-theory in China’s Imperial age is well documented and researched, its origin and early forms remain obscure. Most scholars trace the origin to the “Hong fan”-chapter of the *Shangshu*, where the Five Phases are for the first time explicitly named as water, fire, wood, metal and earth.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, however, the authenticity of the “Hong fan” is very much in doubt, and the description of the Five Phases therein is already very elaborate, so I strongly doubt it was the earliest occurrence.

Also the original meaning of the five different materials that became the Five Phases is unclear. Pang Pu, one of the more prominent researchers in the field in the

<sup>41</sup> For early cosmological systems and their unification under the Qin and Han, cf. Julia Ching, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5–9; John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 2–10 and 28–40; Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy. Volume II – The Period of Classical Learning*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), chapter II. On its use in astronomy and calendar, cf. Wang Ling, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth (Science and Civilisation in China; Volume 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959)*, 396–408. For its political dimension, cf. the works indicated in note 45 below.

<sup>42</sup> For the further development, see Wang Ling, *History of Scientific Thought (Science and Civilisation in China; Volume 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)*, 261–65.

<sup>43</sup> For the most prominent passage on the Five Phases cf. Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 188b.

PRC, associates these five materials with the *wu cai* 五材, the five basic materials mentioned in the *Zuozhuan*,<sup>44</sup> and calls them the base for building houses and civilization in general. So the Five Phases were often regarded by Chinese commentators and scholars of the Imperial age as those same five materials and forces, even when they were referred to by a different term like *wu cai* 五材, or the even rarer *wu de* 五德 and *wu du* 五度.

The *wu xing* theory was fundamentally revised and systematized, when at the end of the Warring States-period it was given a political interpretation through Zou Yan 鄒衍 (~305–240, also: 騶衍). Zou associated the Phases with the dynasties, and the discussion on legitimate and illegitimate dynasties (i.e. those claiming to be the representatives of a “phase” or only a passing interlude) lasted well into Han times, in particular the question about the legitimacy of the Qin Dynasty.<sup>45</sup>

One strong argument in favor of my claim that *wu xing* in the *Sunzi* has to be understood as the “Five Planets” rests with the irregular movement of the planets. Generally speaking, cosmologies can be successful only when they are founded on particular and reliable observations, because then the law extracted from those observations may be paralleled with something in the human realm that in turn can be understood as part of a larger cosmological mechanism. As regards *yin-yang* dualism, for instance, I assume that the underlying cosmic pattern is the fact that day and night, sun and moon, heat and cold interchange and are nearly equally strong.<sup>46</sup> The five planets, on the other hand, are impossible to systematize, because their movements in the sky form too complicated a pattern: not even one full circle can be observed during the span of one life. In the nightly sky, their relative positions and rapid movements have therefore always stood out to observers. Except for a few relatively immobile stars, the planets move across the sky very fast and since the earth itself is moving as one of the bodies of the solar system, observers notice strange occurrences like planets retrograding (i.e. moving from West to East) and one passing another, only to be passed again later.<sup>47</sup> Thodor S. Jacobsen states that:

<sup>44</sup> *Zuozhuan* “Xiang Gong 27, zhuan 6”: “天生五材，民並用之，廢一不可，” see Ruan Yuan *Shisan jing zhushu*, 1997b. Pang follows the commentary in identifying *wu cai* as metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Pang Pu 龐朴, *Yi fen wei san: zhongguo chuantong sixiang kaoshi* 一分為三：中國傳統思想考釋 (Shenzhen: Wan Juan Lou, 1995), 122–23.

<sup>45</sup> For the political turn in this cosmological theory see Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A History of Chinese Political Thought. Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A. D.* Trans. by F. W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 61–65; Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81–85 and 137–55, and Gu Jiegang, “Wu De zhongshi shuo xia de zhengzhi he lishi 五德終始說下的政治和歷史,” *Gu Shi Bian* 古史辨, vol. 5 (1935), 404–617. Nathan Sivin in his excellent article from 1995 puts forward the theory that during the Han dynasty the “Chinese ideas of Nature, state and body were so interdependent that they are best considered a single complex.” Cf. Nathan Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), 5.

<sup>46</sup> It could be argued that the dichotomies of bright and dark etc. do not necessarily have to be limited to two extremes, for there are stages in between, i.e. dawn and dusk. The strength of the bi-dimensional model is the fact that day and night are, over the course of a year, about equally long, while dusk and dawn are very short periods of transition, which can easily be explained as the time of struggle or transfer of domination of either of these powers.

<sup>47</sup> Jacobsen describes it as follows: “The apparent paths of the planets are still more complicated but always within the 18°-wide zodiac belt centered on the ecliptic. The motion of a planet is alternately eastward and westward, generally either speeding up or slowing down, and often zigzag shaped or looped.” Thodor S. Jacobsen, *Planetary Systems from the Ancient Greeks to Kepler* (Department of Astronomy, University of Washington, 1999), 9.

The so-called inferior planets [i.e. those closer to the Sun than the Earth], Mercury and Venus, seem to move back and forth around the Sun, *never making a full circle, thus never reaching an opposition or even quadrature*; their greatest possible elongations [i.e. the angle between the lines of sight from Earth to a body and to the Sun; M.W.] are 28° and 47°, respectively.<sup>48</sup>

With the so-called superior planets it is a little different: "The orbital motions of all planets outside Earth's orbit...are slower than that of Earth. Hence, as seen from Earth they move westward in the sky relative to the Sun."<sup>49</sup> So from a geocentric point of view it appears as if the planets would race across the sky, where one planet passes another, only to fall back again a little later and again be passed itself. The only constant part of the planets' movements is the fact that they remain within a certain angle over the horizon, which makes it appear as if the planets circulated in a corridor around the earth. But within this corridor, it appears as if the planets would become faster and slower in respect to the others, moving unpredictably and even changing direction.

In my opinion, it is exactly this combination of heavenly bodies moving in what in fact are fixed courses, but which *appear* to be irregular patterns, that was observed and—like the dichotomy of day and night—interpreted as the way the cosmos signifies the laws of nature. The movements of the planets were observed, and their interaction understood as a systematic pattern. The planets were most likely differentiated by their color, and—as I will discuss in greater detail below—understood as consisting of different materials. Since these materials were the most basic ingredients of daily human life, a parallel was drawn between them and the mechanisms in the sky, which consequently led the ancient Chinese to conclude that the spectacle in the sky had direct implications on the interaction of these materials on earth. The urge to find the system behind the movements was not successful, which can help explain why the *wu xing* were sometimes described as bringing forth one another and sometimes as overcoming one another. The planets' main feature was their irregularity, i.e. the fact that they constantly passed one another, and the fact that the planets seemed to be limited by natural boundaries: they are always moving within the same sector over the horizon. I believe that in the early stage of *wu xing*-cosmology the five planets were seen as *wu xing*, which is what Sun Wu tried to say. At this point, the five planets were only an allegory for constant change on a predestined course. Only when they were identified as five materials on earth was it possible to develop patterns of interaction that could be predetermined.

But this development occurred much later than the fifth century of Sun Wu, maybe even as late as Zou Yan. In order to substantiate this point, I will now look at some of the cases in early Chinese literature where the term *wu xing* is mentioned, hoping thereby to determine a semantic field common to those occurrences along the lines indicated above.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., (italics added).

<sup>49</sup> Jacobsen gives an example of a very peculiar constellation, specifically mentioning the case of a conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter in the year 7 B.C., when the two planets produced three conjunctions between May 29th and December fourth, a constellation not seen for centuries before or after. Such peculiarities were widely noticed. Jacobsen also mentions the fact that "Kepler advanced this conjunction as an explanation of the Star of Bethlehem." Ibid., 15.

## 6. The term *wu xing* in early Chinese literature

Let me immediately make an obvious point: the term *wu xing* did not necessarily refer to the Five Phases of wood, fire, earth, metal and water in early Chinese writings, and so it does not automatically have to be translated as “Five Phases.” Unfortunately, the extremely strong influence of the *yin yang* and *wu xing* school and its reception throughout the Imperial age limit the scope of possible interpretations of the term in the earliest literature.

When looking at the handful of quotes from pre-Qin literature that contains the term, we find that its traditional interpretation by the commentators was often ambiguous, and in some prominent cases did not understand *wu xing* as “Five Phases.” Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) in his 1935 article “Yinyang wu xing shuo zhi laili 陰陽五行說之來歷” is an example of a rare re-interpretation of early *wu xing* material. He lists some quotes from pre-Qin literature, namely from the *Shangshu*, the *Mozi* and *Zuozhuan*. Liang notes that in none of the other prominent texts like the *Shijing*, *Yijing zhuan* 易經傳, *Yili* 儀禮, *Daodejing* 道德經, *Mengzi* 孟子 or the *Lunyu* is the term *wu xing* mentioned. Yet, for some reason Liang does not discuss the *Sunzi bingfa* at all in his article. It cannot be determined today whether Liang was not aware of the passage in the text or whether he did not think it worth discussing. Nor does he mention the reference to *wu xing* in the twentieth chapter of the *Xunzi* 荀子. The *Shangshu*, of course, features the term *wu xing* prominently in the “Hong fan,” but since the controversies over the authenticity and editing of this chapter have been very strong, I will not take it into consideration,

But *wu xing* is mentioned again in a chapter of the *Shangshu* that definitely is authentic, namely the “Gan shi 甘誓,” in which the following sentence appears: “有扈氏威侮五行，怠棄三正。”<sup>50</sup> Karlgren translates this as “The lord of Hu despises and violates the 5 elements, he neglects and discards the 3 governing forces.”<sup>51</sup> Liang proposes a different interpretation of this sentence: he glosses *wu xing* as *wu zhong ying xing zhi dao* 五種應行之道, “the five [political] actions [the ruler] has to take.”<sup>52</sup> Liang’s political interpretation of this passage is unconventional, but actually makes more sense, as indeed is indicated by the fact that traditional commentators were unable to elaborate on the “violation against the Five Phases.”<sup>53</sup>

Liang’s re-interpretation may offer a new and more plausible understanding of this sentence by not clinging to the understanding of *wu xing* as the Five Phases. With Liang, the meaning of *xing* in this instance is that of “a path that has to be taken.”

In the *Mozi* the term *wu xing* appears twice. The chapter “Ming gui xia 明鬼下”

<sup>50</sup> Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhushu*, 155c.

<sup>51</sup> Bernhard Karlgrén, “The Book of Documents,” *BMFEA* 22 (1950): 18, #3.

<sup>52</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Yinyang Wu Xing Shuo zhi laili 陰陽五行說之來歷,” *Gu Shi Bian* 古史辨 vol. 5 (1935), 350.

<sup>53</sup> The explanations in the commentaries sound very far-fetched. Kong Anguo in the *Thirteen Classics* explains *wu xing* as the correct way of heaven and earth. Zheng Xuan explains the *wu xing* as five kind of violations: against manners, words, sight, hearing, and the heart. Zhu Xi mentions a kind of “heavenly punishment” that is the result of such “violation.” For these commentaries cf. Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhushu*, 155c.; Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jinwen Shangshu Kaozheng* 今文尚書考證 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), 193; *Sishu wujing* 四書五經 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shudian, 1985): *Shangshu*, 38.

quotes the *Shangshu* passage discussed just now. And in the *Moijing* 墨經 section (Graham B 43) we find a passage that is almost identical with the sentence from *Sunzi bingfa*: “*wu xing wu chang sheng* 五行毋常勝.” I shall return to this passage below.

For some inexplicable reason, Liang Qichao also left out the quote from the *Xunzi*'s twentieth chapter, which also clearly does not refer to the cosmological *wu xing*. In this passage, the *Xunzi* gives a detailed description of the function of Music at a feudal court in Pre-Qin China. He discusses the highly ritualized ceremony, in which the greeting of participants, the drinking of wine, and the musical performance itself are determined by tradition. At the end of this detailed description, the author Xun Kuang 荀況 (ca. 300—230 B.C.) gives a description of five ways of conduct, which he declares as basic for bringing both the country and its individuals in perfect order:

貴賤明，隆殺辨，和樂而不流，弟長而無遺，安燕而不亂，此五行者，足以正身安國矣。Being clear about the distinction between noble and base; keeping distinct those to be exalted and those to be diminished; being congenial and enjoying oneself without dissipation; observing the distinctions between junior and senior without leaving anyone out; and being content at an ease yet in no way becoming disorderly—these five patterns of conduct are sufficient to rectify the individual and to make the country tranquil.<sup>54</sup>

These are the five ways of social interaction, which according to Master Xun are prescribed by tradition and the Heavenly Way. Thus, again we find a usage of *wu xing* where it refers to predestined ways one could not transgress, in this case, ways of conduct.

This short list concludes the early occurrences of the term *wu xing* outside the *Sunzi* and the “Hong fan.”<sup>55</sup> The quotes from *Shangshu* and *Xunzi* suggest the possibility of a less restricted understanding of the term. If we accept Liang Qichao's re-interpretation of the former, it means that both occurrences of *xing* stand for something in the vicinity of “behavior.” The same is obviously also the meaning of the *Guodian* text known as *Wu xing*.<sup>56</sup>

These occurrences of the term *wu xing* are a clear indication that in pre-Qin literature *wu xing* should not automatically be translated as “Five Phases.” Instead, they indicate that *wu xing* refers to a moving along a predestined path, as in the case of a certain behavior dictated by tradition (the *Xunzi*) or a political reaction (the *Shangshu*). I will now go into a more detailed discussion about the *wu xing*-related phrases in the *Sunzi bingfa*.

<sup>54</sup> John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume III, books 17–32*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 86 (§20.5).

<sup>55</sup> It is not a full list, however. In *Zuozhuan*, “Zhao gong 25,” the two words *wu* and *xing* also appear together, but I will not discuss this here because of the many textual uncertainties.

<sup>56</sup> For the *Guodian Wu xing* text, named after the first two characters with which it starts, cf. *Guodian chumu zhujian*, (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1998), 147–51. For a text and interpretation cf. Pang Pu 龐朴, *Zhubo wuxingpian jiaozhu ji yanjiu* 竹帛《五行》篇校注及研究 (Taiwan: Wan Juan Lou, 2000), 97–104, where he also discusses the *wu xing*-related texts from Mawangdui and the “Zai yi”-chapter.

## 7. *Wu xing* terminology in the *Sunzi bingfa*

As stated above, studies of the *Sunzi* conventionally associate *wu xing* with, firstly, the passage on the “five musical notes,” the “five colors” and the “five tastes” in the fifth chapter, “[Bing] shi pian [兵]勢篇.”<sup>57</sup> Secondly, the passage in which the author mentions the Yellow Emperor’s victory over the “four emperors” is understood by, among others, Huang as a reference to the “five emperors” *wu di* 五帝, which in its turn is thought to be correlated with the Five Phases, because just as every phase is attributed a color, animal, cardinal point, human organ, *et cetera*, so it is also attributed an emperor.<sup>58</sup> And thirdly, at the end of the sixth chapter, “Xu shi pian 虛實篇,” the author of the *Sunzi* illustrates change as the only constant law of nature by saying “故五行無常勝, 四時無常位, 日有短長, 月有死生.” This I translate as “Therefore: among the Five planets none is ahead of the others always; among the Four Seasons none has its place of power forever; for the sun, it is there shorter or longer [throughout the year]; for the moon it does die and be born again.”<sup>59</sup>

I shall now discuss each of these three instances.

### 7.1. The Five Emperors

Emperors—or rather “rulers from the past,” since the notion of emperor did not exist prior to the unification of China under the Qin, and is here only the conventional translation of *di*—were by all accounts one of the units in *wu xing* cosmology towards the end of the Warring States period. The rulers were each attributed to a phase and a region, and they were collectively known as “*wu di* 五帝,” which out of convention is translated as The Five Emperors.

But there are also several other groups of former rulers grouped together and collectively named *wu di*. For instance, the *Xunzi* mentions five Emperors, twice referring to them as “*wu di* 五帝” in chapters 5 and 27.<sup>60</sup> In neither passage does the term refer to the Five Emperors as the rulers associated with the Five Regions and, in extension, the Five Phases; this is hardly surprising, since the *Xunzi* does not use

<sup>57</sup> The character *bing* is in brackets because the chapters in the *Sunzi* are named differently in the different manuscripts they were transmitted in. For instance, “Shi pian” is called “Bing shi pian” in the *Wujing Qishu*-Edition 五經七書. Cf. Hattori Chiharu 服部千春, *Sunzi bingfa Jiaojie* 孫子兵法校解 (Beijing: Junshi Kexue Chubanshe, 1987), 105.

<sup>58</sup> As regards the attribution of an emperor to a phase, there are two different sets of emperors. One is the five mythological rulers from high antiquity. In this version, attributed to wood, fire, earth, metal and water are the following: 太昊 Tai Hao, 炎帝 Yan Di, 黃帝 Huang Di, 少昊 Shao Hao, and 顓頊 Zhuan Xu. These are what the *Shiji* and the *Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記 call *wu di*. According to another explanation, the emperors are five prominent rulers of the past, each a founder of a dynasty: 夏禹 Xia Yu, 文王 Zhou Wen Wang, 黃帝 Huang Di, 商湯 Shang Tang, and 秦始皇帝 Qin Shi Huangdi. These five rulers are called the Five Emperors in connection with the *wu xing* in Needham’s *Science and Civilization in China* (i.e. Wang Ling, *History of Scientific Thought*, 263).

<sup>59</sup> All versions of the text have the same wording in these four sentences, only the manuscript from Yinqueshan has a variant in characters, but not in meaning: “五行恆勝.” As is well known, the character *heng* 恆 was replaced by *chang* after 179 B.C., thereby respecting the taboo of Liu Heng, the *wen*-emperor of the Han. At the end of this sentence, the two words: “*shen yao* 神要” appear, meaning “such is the will of the spirits” or “such is divine arrangement,” referring to the natural law of change. In the second sentence, describing the Four Seasons, the Yinqueshan manuscript has 立 for 位. For textual varieties cf. Hattori Chiharu, *Sunzi bingfa jiaojie*, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Xun Kuang calls them *wu di* because this was the most widespread name. He might have called them *wu huang* 五皇 (“the five august ones”) or *wu wang* 五王 (“the five kings”), had he wanted to disambiguate the terms.

*wu xing*-categories at all. Rather the Five Emperors are a reference to five earlier kings, remaining undefined. It is not clear which group the *Xunzi* referred to, and at any rate, it could not have been the same as in the *Sunzi*, for both sets of rulers mentioned here were examples of virtue and did not fight wars against one another. This sentence has always been a tripping stone in reading the *Sunzi*.

Lionel Giles in his commentary quotes the proposal by Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060)—author of the Song dynasty commentary *Sunzi zhu* 孫子注 which has been not handed down entirely—to replace *di* by *jun* 軍, so that the sentence would read: “...which enabled the Yellow Emperor to vanquish four several armies.” This seems a rather arbitrary emendation, for *di* and *jun* have nothing in common graphically or phonetically, and thus it is impossible to argue that it is a textual corruption.

It was previously assumed that the first description of the Five Emperors in correlation to the Five Phases appeared only late in the second century A.D., in Zheng Xuan’s commentary to the *Zhouli* 周禮. *Zhouli* itself only mentions the term *wu di* and Zheng Xuan was the first to explain the names and positions of the Five Emperors in correlation with the Five Phases, which is why they were named after the color assigned to their position, i.e. the “Green Emperor 蒼帝” in the east, the “Red Emperor 赤” in the south, the “Yellow Emperor 黃” in the centre, the “White Emperor 白” in the west and the “Black Emperor 黑” in the north.<sup>61</sup>

But the discovery of the Yinqueshan manuscripts shed new light on this question. One of the additional texts to the original thirteen chapters, which was also found in the tomb by the name of “Huangdi fa Chidi 黃帝伐赤帝,” is a detailed description of how the Yellow Emperor campaigned against his four foes in the south, east, north and west.<sup>62</sup> Since the *terminus ante quem* of the tomb of Linyi is 118 B.C., this description predates Zheng Xuan’s commentary by at least 250 years. “Huangdi fa Chidi” is indeed very specific about the cosmological correlations of these emperors and brings in *yin-yang*-phraseology as well. The crucial passage reads:

孫子曰：〔黃帝南伐〕赤帝〔...〕戰於反山之源，右陰，順術，背衝，大滅有之  
Master Sun said: [The Yellow Emperor to the south attacked the Red Emperor,...]  
and did battle on the steppes of Mount Pan. Advancing with the *yin* conditions  
on his right, following the roadway, and keeping his back to the strategic ground  
he exterminated the enemy and annexed his territory.<sup>63</sup>

This appears much more sophisticated than the passage from the authentic *Sunzi*-text, and I must concur with Roger Ames’s characterization of “Huangdi fa Chidi” as a “fragmentary chapter [which] seems to be a later commentary on “Deploying the Army [“xing jun pian”].”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Ruan Yuan, *Shisanjingzhushu*, 766a. The Five Emperors appear in the *Zhouli* as the rulers of the four corners of the earth, and they are described as cooperating with each other, not fighting one another, as is the case in the *Sunzi*.

<sup>62</sup> The text is named “Huangdi fa Chidi,” after the first characters in the first sentence, and is translated in Roger T. Ames *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare*, 183–84. Cf. also Hattori Chiharu, *Sunzi bingfa jiaojie*, 46–66.

<sup>63</sup> For the translation of the entire chapter cf. Ames, *Sun-tzu*, 183. The two texts are much alike, containing very similar stories about the Yellow Emperor’s campaigns against the Green, Black, and White Emperors. Toward the end, the “Huangdi fa Chidi” draws a parallel to Shang Tang’s campaign against Jie of Xia, and Wu Wang’s against Zhou of Shang. The lacunae in the text are restored according to the textual parallels.

But this additional text to the *Sunzi bingfa* can be interpreted in two, contradictory ways. If it were merely written as an explanation, a commentary to the sentence from chapter nine of the *Sunzi*, it would obviously express the same meaning as the *Sunzi* itself. But to whom is the author of the *Sunzi* actually referring? If he is talking about a legend not transmitted to later times, in which the Yellow Emperor defeated four neighboring rulers, not correlated with the Five Phases, then the “Huangdi fa Chidi” can simply be written off as a possible over-interpretation of the *Sunzi* text, misinterpreting the sentence from the *Sunzi* in the light of *wu xing*-theory. But, conversely, if one assumes that the *Sunzi* was indeed referring to those regional emperors referred to explicitly in the “Huangdi fa Chidi” and in Zheng Xuan’s commentary, there appears another fatal contradiction, since to assume that the Yellow Emperor *defeated* his four “colleagues” would be fundamentally against the cosmological idea of *wu xing*, which is one of cyclical movements where one phenomenon succeeds another. Such an interpretation would be as absurd as the notion of one of the seasons triumphing over all the others and remaining predominant until the end of time. Hence, the passage on the Yellow Emperor and his four foes in the *Sunzi bingfa* cannot refer to a battle, as suggested in the short additional text from the Linyi tomb, but has to be seen in light of something completely different, like the campaigns the Yellow Emperor undertook against the “Flaming Emperor” Yandi 炎帝 and against Chiyou 蚩尤, as related by the *Shiji*.<sup>64</sup> Thus it is incorrect to read the passage in the light of the Five Phase theory, and the theory of correlative cosmology.

## 7.2. Five Colors—Five Sounds—Five Tastes

The categories most often associated with the concept of *wu xing*, apart from the five Phases themselves, are the Five Colors “*wu se* 五色,” the Five Musical Notes “*wu sheng* 五聲” and the Five Tastes “*wu wei* 五味.”<sup>65</sup> References to these terms abound in early Chinese literature, not least in the *Shangshu*, the *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 or the *Daodejing*. The two most explicit *wu xing*-texts from before the Han are the “Yue Ling 月令” chapter of the *Liji* and the *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and it is only in these that the five colors, sounds and tastes are correlated with the Five Phases. In all the other texts, they refer only to the variety of tastes or colors perceptible to mankind. This brings up the important question of whether these five colors, tastes and notes existed independently from the Five Phases and were later incorporated into the cosmological system, or whether these terms were originally created as a part of an integrated penta-dimensional cosmology.

As they appear in the *Shangshu*, the *Xunzi*, the *Hanfeizi* and the *Daodejing* it is obvious that these terms are fixed expressions for all the colors, tastes or notes,

<sup>64</sup> These campaigns of Huangdi against Yandi and Chiyou were undertaken to unify and pacify the world, and to overthrow the Shennong-Clan 神農 under the benign rule of Huangdi. For the portrayal in the *Shiji* cf. William H. Nienhauser Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. I, 2–3.

<sup>65</sup> In *Mengzi* 4A.1 and *Daodejing* 12 the five musical notes are referred to as *wu yin* 五音. According to Zhao Qi's 趙岐 (~108–201) commentary on the *Mengzi*, these are the well known five notes *gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jiao* 角, *zhi* 徵, and *yu* 羽. The tones of the Chinese pentatonic scale correspond to the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth step of the Western octave. The Five Tastes are: sour, bitter, sweet, hot, and salty; the Five Colors are green, red, yellow, white and black.

without any explicit connections to the Five Phase model in the sense of any correlative connection being expressed. For instance the flavor “sour” or the note *jiao* are never, in these texts, correlated with the Phase “wood,” nor is any other correlation explicitly stated as indeed they are in the *Lü shi chungiu* or the *Liji*. Usually the definitions as to what five colors the author was talking about are not made in the texts themselves either. Usually, they were first specified explicitly by the commentators, who of course lived centuries later and were educated after the formulation of the Five Phases cosmology in its full-fledged form. A correlative connection between the Five Notes, the Five Tastes, or the Five Colors with the system of the Five Phases is therefore not supported by textual evidence in the second half of the Warring States period. Such a connection did develop later in the Chinese tradition, of course, but at the time only the *Lü shi chungiu* shows any trace of it, and this in close connection with the calendar.<sup>66</sup>

The *Sunzi bingfa* is no different: the five tastes, sounds and colors are not mentioned as part of a greater cosmological system. They appear in the argument as examples of completeness or of the possibility to combine a few elements to form endless varieties of combinations:

聲不過五，五聲之變，不可勝聽也。色不過五，五色之變，不可勝觀也。味不過五，五味之變，不可勝嘗也。戰勢不過奇正，奇正之變，不可勝窮也。

What the author of the *Sunzi* is conveying in this passage is that even though limiting the forms of battle to “normal and extraordinary 奇正” may seem counterproductive, it is the dynamics in this pair that makes for limitless varieties: their “combinations are limitless; none can exhaust them all 奇正之變，不可勝窮也。” Switching from normal to extraordinary tactics and back again at every stage of a military confrontation of course makes the moves of any general unpredictable. By a creative combination of only two kinds of tactics, a general can create a multitude of variations, sufficient for a life of battle. In order to illustrate his point through an example from everyday life, this passage speaks of the fact that there are only five tastes, but that a person may enjoy food in different ways every day, by only combining the five tastes. The same is meant by the reference to the five notes, which are the fundamentals for creating a universe of music, and indeed the five colors, which in combination create every color there is. The problem with this analogy is, of course, that it appears on the base of a previous discourse about the notes, tastes and colors, so that they are culturally defined. The true and original meaning of the two tactics “normal” and “extraordinary” which the *Sunzi* advocates, is left to the imagination.

<sup>66</sup> This particular book opens with an almanac that stretches over the first 12 chapters. In each chapter the cosmological duties, so to speak, for the particular month are defined and listed in great detail. As the year goes on, the powers of *yin*, *yang* and other forces grow and are reduced, and the activities of man should correlate with those of nature. The chapter “Yue ling” of the *Liji* is basically the same, although it is much briefer. For a translation of the *Lü shi chungiu* cf. John Knoblock & Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 40–43 and 59–293, for an English translation of the “Yue ling” cf. James Legge, *Li Chi: The Book of Rites. An Encyclopaedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions*, (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1967), 245–310.

### 7.3 *Wu Xing*—Five Phases?

Let me now return to the cardinal question. Why do I believe that the term *wu xing* in the passage from the “Xu shi” chapter of the *Sunzi* should be understood as a reference to the five planets visible to the naked eye, rather than as reference to the Five Phases? The first hint is the context of the sentence. The author is not making a cosmological statement in any way. The context which this sentence appears in is naturalistic or astronomical rather than cosmological, and it illustrates allegorically constant change through the four seasons, the length of the day and the moon.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, the author of the *Sunzi* is trying not only to find an allegory for the necessity to make changes constantly, and adapting to the situation at hand. He is also looking for a way to illustrate the fact that nothing is constant, that although he talks about “forms” in this chapter, the forms of military engagement are never fixed, and that whoever is able always to adapt to the situation will be victorious. This becomes quite obvious when we look at the entire statement:

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。故五行無常勝，四時無常位，日有短長，月有死生。

I will again quote Giles’ translation (except for the last sentence):

Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing. Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.<sup>68</sup> Therefore: among the Five planets none is ahead of the others always; among the Four Seasons none has its place of power forever; for the sun, it is there shorter or longer [throughout the year]; for the moon it does die and be born again.

My hypothesis is that the author here felt the need to make a reference to a common and undisputable observation that could illustrate the demand for constant adaptation. But the allegorical use of water was not enough, because it is only an arbitrary comparison. Soldiers might just as well be compared to, let us say, stones, which do not flow, but stay hard during an attack by the enemy. Therefore the author of the *Sunzi* had to cite a law of nature for his allegory, and this he found in everyday observations of astronomical processes.

<sup>67</sup> The fact that the *earthly* phenomena the Four Seasons are mentioned here does not make the context any less “astronomical.” While seasons of the year of course take place on earth, they still originate from processes in the cosmos, which was also the understanding in ancient China. The *Taiping yulan* lists several passages that make it clear beyond any doubt that in ancient China *tian* 天 was seen as the origin of the Four Seasons. Cf. Li Fang 李昉, ed., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), 86–87. The term *wei* 位, used in the *Sunzi bingfa* to designate one Season’s “ruling,” also designates the rightful enthronement of a ruler. It is also commonly used as a verb to denote positions of heavenly bodies, as can be seen in the *Jingji Zuangu* 經籍纂詁 and in many of the *Taiping yulan*’s quotes in the section “Tian bu 天部.” For the *Jingji zuangu* cf. Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Jingji zuangu* 經籍纂詁 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1989), 638.

<sup>68</sup> Lionel Giles, *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, 53. Instead of “heaven-born captain” I suggest the translation “ghostly” or “ghost-like,” in a positive sense.

This suggestion is supported by Wang Aihe's statement that

The military treatises...helped shape the new modes of political authority by applying new models and techniques of military command to the creation of a new bureaucratic state apparatus. The authority of such military professionals and their texts, after all lay in discerning hidden patterns of the cosmos in using them to create order, in warfare as well as in new society.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, why would such an author rely on "hidden patterns of the cosmos" to support his argument, as long as he has perfectly valuable and well known patterns to pick from, like the pattern of the waxing and waning of the moon or the pattern of changing length of day between summer and winter? A possible answer is: if he relied on natural everyday observations, the point he tried to make in his argument, e.g. the stress on flexibility in military matters, would seem to be more convincing to a reader. Since the four seasons, the sun and the moon are precisely such everyday phenomena, using them allegorically in an argument seems most promising for an author, since this way he could rely on a comparison to an everyday astronomical phenomena like the sun, the moon and the four seasons on earth. At least it would seem much easier to grasp than a comparison to a highly elaborate system of five cosmic forces giving way to each other according to two separate cycles.

Therefore, we should explore the astronomical context. The obvious choice of five elements among celestial objects are the five planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. These planets have been observed in China since prehistoric times, and what sets them apart from other objects in the sky is the fact that they not only move across the otherwise relatively immobile sky, but also pass one another constantly.<sup>70</sup> They blend in rhetorically with the other examples like the seasons, the sun, or the moon chosen by Sun Wu, because they are just as unique in the nightly sky. And what was said about them in both the *Sunzi* and the *Mozi*—"among the five *xing* none is victorious constantly"—is a very accurate characterization of the movement the planets describe, as portrayed above. From a geocentric point of view it appears as if the planets pass one another, only to fall back again a little later, which is the *Sunzi*'s characterization exactly: none can permanently "win" the race across the sky.

Following John Major, I would like to add some other evidence for my reading apart from just the context. As far as *xing* 行 is concerned, it would be possible to interpret it as a phonetic loan writing for *xing* 星 "star," but the two words were not perfect homophones in Old Chinese.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the interpretation of this character as loan character seems unnecessary. The standard meaning "to move, to wander" for *xing* 行 is quite acceptable here, since the planets move along their route across the sky.<sup>72</sup> This notion of wandering on a predestined path is also what constitutes the common word field with the meaning "five kinds of behavior" discussed above. The

<sup>69</sup> Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, 85.

<sup>70</sup> For early observation of the planets, cf. David S. Nivison and Kevin D. Pang, "Astronomical Evidence for the *Bamboo Annals*' Chronicle of Early Xia," *Early China* 15 (1990), 89.

<sup>71</sup> William H. Baxter, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 798.

<sup>72</sup> We may here note that "planet" is derived from *planetês*, the Greek word for wanderer. In modern Chinese the word for "planet" is *xingxing* 行星. The term is not an import of the Western word, for Shen Kua 沈括 (1031–1095) used it in his *Mengxi Bitan* 夢溪筆談. See *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 (Shanghai, Hanyu Da Cidian Chubanshe, 1990–1994), 3:901.

behavior which the *Xunzi* calls for is one that a person has no choice of determining: it is defined by tradition just as a planet's path through the sky is determined not by the planet itself but by the mechanics of the cosmos. As Wang Ling claims, *wu bu* 五步 ("the Five Wanderers") was used as a collective expression for the planets after the fourth century B.C.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly enough, it was during this period that the term *wu xing* started to be used in the sense of the "Five Phases." By the time *wu xing* was used as a word for the five planets and for the Five Phases, it soon was necessary to disambiguate the two homophones. Thus, *xing* 行 as an expression for "planet" was replaced by *bu*, leaving *xing* free for its new meaning as a "phase."

Given the obvious astronomical context of this passage, with its reference to the sun, the moon and the Four Seasons, it seems safe to conclude that the words *wu xing* in the "Shi xu pian" of *Sunzi bingfa* should be understood as "the five wanderers," i.e. "the five visible planets." This interpretation makes the analogy seem a lot more convincing, since unlike the elaborate philosophical theory, the movement of the planets in the sky is something everybody can relate to, because it is an everyday phenomenon accessible for anybody who cares to look.

## 8. Other evidence

Although the meaning I propose for *wu xing* in the *Sunzi* is a *hapax legomenon*, interpreting it as a reference to the "five planets" may throw light on another passage outside the *Sunzi* text. Of all pre-Qin texts that mention the term *wu xing*, there is one passage that has been particularly difficult to understand. It is the only other quote from pre-Qin literature where *wu xing* is mentioned in a clearly astronomical context, and it also appears in a discussion of military tactics. The sentence originates from the nineteenth chapter of the legalist text *Hanfeizi* 韓非子. The author (~280–233) discusses what he perceives as the absurd practice to base military actions on fortune-telling. He gives examples of states that were defeated even though the prediction had suggested a positive outcome, and then goes on to say the following:

初時者，魏數年東鄉攻盡陶、衛，數年西鄉以失其國，此非豐隆、五行、太一、玉相、攝提、六神、五括、天河、殷搶、歲星數年在西也，又非天缺、弧逆、刑星、熒惑、奎台數年在東也。故曰：龜策鬼神不足舉勝，左右背鄉不足以專戰。然而恃之，愚莫大焉。

At the outset of the founding state, Wey faced the east for several years and completely conquered both T'o and Wei. Then she turned westward for several years to cope with Ch'in and, as a result, lost land to Ch'in. This was not because lucky stars as Fêng-lung, **Wu-hsing**, T'i-yi, Wang-hsiang, Shê-t'i, Liu-shên, Wu-kua, T'ien-ho, Yin-ch'iang, and Sui-hsing, were for so many years in the direction of Ch'in and to the west of Wey; nor was it because such unlucky stars as T'ien-ch'üeh, Hu-ni, Hsing-hsing, Yung-hui, and K'uei-t'ai, were for so many years in the direction of Wey and to the east of Ch'in. Hence the saying: "Tortoise-shells, bamboo slips, devils, and deities, are not qualified to guarantee victory; nor are the directions of the stars, whether right or left, front or back, qualified to decide the outcome of war." If so, to believe in them is more stupid than anything else.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Wang Ling, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*, 399.

<sup>74</sup> Liao, W. K., *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzû: A Classic of Chinese Political Science*, (London: Probsthain, 1959), 157–58 (bold types not in the original). Liao does not reveal the source of this information, which is unfortunate, for none of the commentaries consulted specifies *wu xing*.

Obviously, the term *wu xing* here refers to some astronomical constellation in the sky, which the standard understanding of *wu xing* has obfuscated. According to Liao's annotations, *wu xing* stands for "the constellation having five stars around a circle." His explanation of *wangxiang* as "the star commanding the motion of Wu-hsing" poses similar problems. Although it may at first seem that the understanding of this passage in general is obvious there are some snags: the names of the stars mentioned are in some cases difficult to translate to Western astronomical terminology. The main source for understanding the names for these stars is the *Hanshu's* "Tianwen Zhi" chapter, and constellations not discussed there cannot be explained satisfactorily. The *wu xing* mentioned here in a clearly astronomical context does not appear elsewhere in early Chinese literature, and the constellation is not to be found on any of the astronomical maps consulted.<sup>75</sup> But because of the context and the statement made in this passage it cannot be doubted that *wu xing* is mentioned as an element of astronomy and divination. Moreover, the author of the *Hanfeizi* does not feel the need to explain any of the astronomical terms mentioned, which indicates that he may have cited only the names of well-known constellations. So with the information about the *Sunzi bingfa* discussed above, it seems most suiting to translate the expression *wu xing* as "Five Planets" in this context as well. The only argument against this is the fact that some of the stars mentioned in Hanfei's list are clearly names for one or the other of the planets: *suixing* 歲星 is Jupiter, *xingxing* 刑星 is Venus and *yinghuo* 熒惑 is Mars.

That names of planets or stars appear repeatedly is not surprising, however, for Hanfei only made a list of all the common celestial bodies rather than relied on the ones actually consulted by fortune-tellers in a particular situation (cf. "lucky stars as..."). So when listing celestial authorities for divination, he most likely did not proceed with scientific scrutiny, but just gathered together whatever superstitious lore on the stars and their fortune-telling implications he could think of. Therefore, not only does the *Hanfeizi* mention the *wu xing* in a clearly astronomical context, at the same time—but only if the here proposed meaning of *wu xing* as "five planets" should prove to be accurate—it also indicates that there may have been a method of divination which relies on the position of the five visible planets.

## 9. *Sunzi bingfa* and the origin of *Wu xing*

This paper has served a double purpose. It has not only been my intention to re-assess the passage from the "Xu shi" chapter but also to propose a possible origin for the development of *wu xing*-cosmology. As stated above, the development of a cosmological system requires observations in the human and in the cosmic realm. And I proposed above that the origin of the system may lie in the sky rather than on earth. For this I have the following reasons.

<sup>75</sup> For astronomical constellations, cf. for instance the astronomical maps in the first two sections of the illustrated *leishu* from the Ming dynasty *Sancai tuihui* 三才圖會. The huge Qing dynasty *leishu* *Gujin tushu jicheng* does not mention the *Hanfeizi* in the astronomical context of *wu xing* either.

The number of the planets is actually five. As opposed to the Five Colors or the Five Notes, the five planets quite naturally form a unit by themselves and no conventional exclusion of possible other elements is required. As for the colors, it is common knowledge that Mars has a red color and in China it has long been called the “fire star” (*huo xing* 火星). The other planets are also known by a name parallel to the *wu xing* terminology: Mercury is the “water star” (*shui xing* 水星), for Venus there are the two terms “metal star” (*jin xing* 金星) and “major white star” (*tai bai xing* 太白星 with metal and white correlating), Jupiter is “wood star” (*mu xing* 木星) and finally Saturn is the “soil star” (*tu xing* 土星).<sup>76</sup> The obvious conclusion from noticing the difference in color must have been that these celestial objects consist of respective materials. A red star was assumed to be burning, *ergo* this star was made of fire; another one shimmered yellowish, so it was made of soil, yet another was white and so assumed to be made from metal.<sup>77</sup> The fact that, unlike the colors or the sounds, the planets did not have proper names outside the *wu xing*-terms<sup>78</sup> shows that their correlative relation is very tight.

It seems plausible to assume that in ancient China the striking appearance of wandering stars constantly passing one another was noticed, as well as the fact that some of them differ in color, while for the ordinary stars no difference in color can be made out and they remain motionless in the sky. Apart from the fact that all five move across the sky, the planets are visible at a similar height above the ground. This observation most likely strengthened the notion that they belonged to one coherent system, not unlike the five fingers that form a hand. Once this first step was made, a second one followed, which was to look for these materials on Earth and assess to what extent the stars in the sky and their “counterparts” on Earth correlated with one another. In order to give this parallelism a meaning, cosmological correlations were sought on the base of the number five. Since the periods of celestial domination by any of the passing planets has nothing to do with the earthly rhythms of the Four Seasons, the waxing and waning of the moon or the tides, yet another independent system was created.

So rather than the planets being named after the Five Phases, as tradition has it, and basing myself on the understanding of the *Sunzi* brought forth above, I propose that exactly the opposite was the case: the planets were seen as celestial objects of different material qualities and their movement was turned into the abstract concept of the Five Phases, bringing forth and destroying one another, i.e. passing and let-

<sup>76</sup> Wang Ling, *History of Scientific Thought*, 398 does not give these names for the planets, but still mentions the fact that “each planet was associated with one of the Five Elements and one of the cardinal points.” These are, however, the standard translations in the German-Chinese dictionary *Deutsch-Chinesisches Wörterbuch* by Huang and Chü from 1927.

<sup>77</sup> This is not meant as an argument to support my claim about the meaning of the term *wu xing* in Ancient China, but as a comment on the peculiar coincidences between astronomy and alchemy in East and West. In Western alchemy the names of planets stood for a certain metal. Today only the name “mercury” for quicksilver has survived, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following other meanings, Jupiter: tin, Venus: copper, Saturn: lead, Mars: iron. Obviously the connection between Mars and iron occurred because of the color of rust.

<sup>78</sup> As discussed in relation to the quote from *Hanfeizi* above, there were separate names for some of the planets. The terminology in connection to *wu xing* suggests that there occurred a systematic name for the five planets as soon as they were understood to be part of a system.

ting pass, without ever ceasing to exist. In the early texts *Sunzi bingfa* and *Mozi* the collective term *wu xing* still appears in its earliest and original meaning. In Chinese history, many texts from high antiquity were not handed down unchanged. There are several reasons for this: the burning of the books during the Qin and their re-compilation during the Han, the intellectual tides that turned against certain schools and rendered their texts obsolete, so that they were not handed down with proper care, and the ambitions of commentators who altered the text to make it more “accessible” to readers. The *Sunzi bingfa* had a relatively quiet textual history: its contents stirred interest only among military specialists, and since the book was understood as a technical handbook, it was left out from ideologically charged controversies. Another advantage was the fact that the first commentator was Cao Cao, who not only posthumously became the First Emperor of the Wei, but was highly esteemed as a writer throughout Chinese history. This fact certainly made the *Sunzi* less open to textual alternations. Also, because the book was excerpted into political collections like the *Tongdian* 通典 by Du You 杜佑 (735–812) and into *leishu* like the *Taiping yulan*, and was later printed during the Song dynasty, we have today an unbroken chain of textual transmissions dating back to the Tang dynasty. Finally, the text is extremely brief (no longer than the *Daodejing*) and highly structured, which thus makes it easy to memorize.

Once the planets and the respective materials on Earth were brought into a correlative relation, the planets were not of philosophical interest anymore, because their movements cannot easily be periodized. Later this origin was obscured, and once the much more prominent text “*Hong fan*” started using the same terminology, it dominated the cosmological theory of *wu xing*, while at the same time it defined the Five Phases, naming them as wood, fire, soil, metal and water for the first time. During the Warring States era, many groups consisting of five elements sprung up independently. Still later Zou Yan, allegedly an expert in astronomy but whose works are lost, initiated a radical redefinition of the system by adding a political dimension, hitherto unheard of.<sup>79</sup> This led to an abstraction of cosmology, so that the Five Phases were seen as abstract forces, while their astronomical origin had eroded to a point of obscurity. Through Zou Yan the cosmological principle of the Five Phases was seen as a universal principle and subsequently other groups of five were integrated into the system and correlated with the Five Phases.<sup>80</sup> These assignments were arbitrary, but conventional, and after the unification of the Empire the bi-, tetra- and pentapolar cosmological traditions were unified as well, which led to the colossus of Han cosmology.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> For the suggestion that Zou Yan was an astronomer, cf. his pseudonym *tan tian yan* 談天衍 (“[Tsou] Yen the Empyrean talker”) mentioned in his biography in the *Shiji* (Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji*, 7:2348; Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 7, 184). Zou Yan apparently did not use the term *wu xing*, but rather called them *wu de* 五德. He may thus have been aware of what I propose was the original meaning of the term *wu xing*.

<sup>80</sup> Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.), author of the *Chunqiu Fanlu*, was a driving force in unifying the different groups of five. See his chapter “*Wu Xing Xiang Sheng*” and Pang Pu 龐朴, *Boshu wuxingpian yanjiu* 帛書五行篇研究, (s.l.: Qi Lu Shushe, 1980), 2.

<sup>81</sup> There is no compelling reason why sweet (as a taste) should be correlated with soil, or why beans should be correlated with water (other than the kidney's beanlike shape). Of course there are obvious similarities like the one between summer, red and the south, but mainly it remains arbitrary.

Naturally, the farther we venture into antiquity, the scarcer literary traces become. One of the dangers is that we read early literary works through the same semantic spectacles that we use when reading texts from the Han dynasty. This inevitably leads to a less accurate understanding of early texts, because the differences in intellectual concepts between the feudal society of Zhou China and the Imperial age are lost. To study these texts sometimes requires new approaches. In the case of the *Sunzi bingfa* the term *wu xing* is so inconspicuous that the term is all too easily understood in its later standard meaning, attributed to it since the "Hong fan," Zou Yan and the *Chunqiu fanlu*. However, not being satisfied with the traditional understanding, we need to look below the surface and try to understand the texts anew. When doing this, relying on the immediate context and proposing unconventional solutions can provide interesting new insights. Only by doing this can we escape the hermeneutic cycle, by which we reassure the traditional meaning of the texts over and over again.

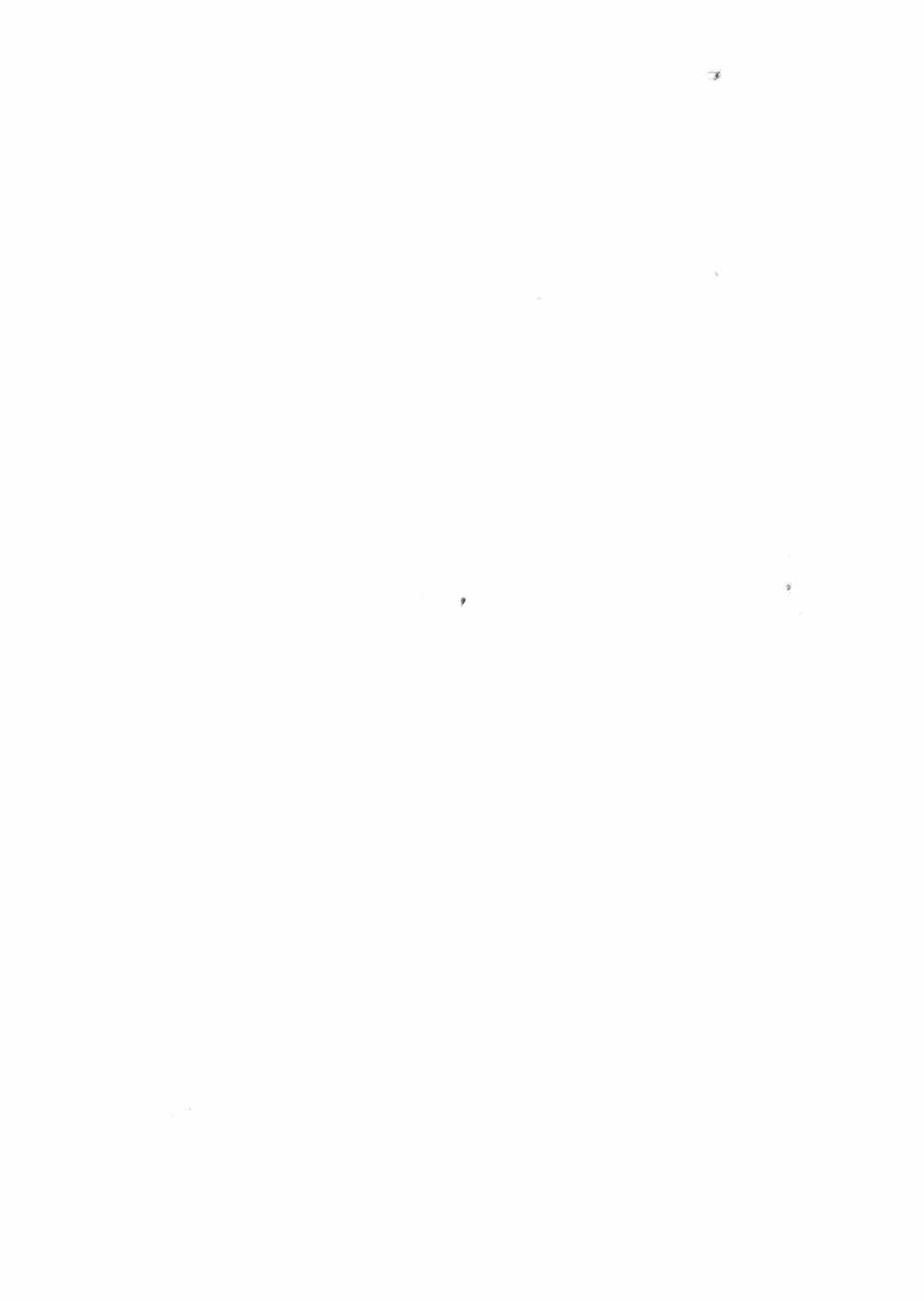
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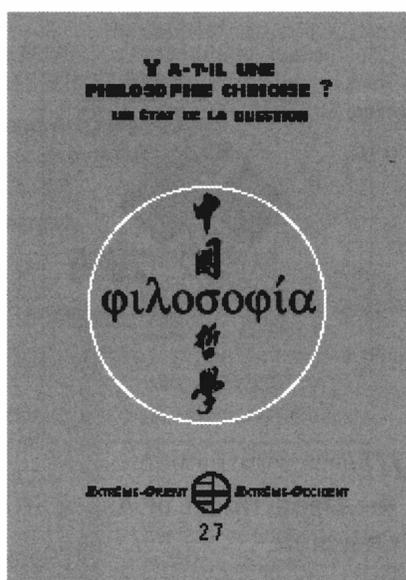
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# **Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident**

## **n° 27**



### **SOMMAIRE**

ANNE CHENG

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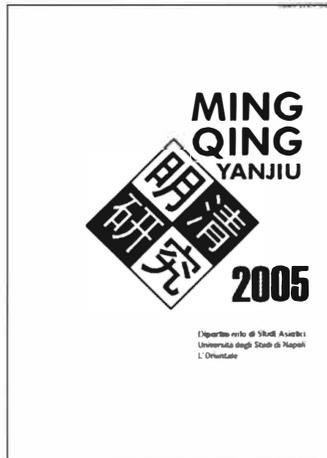
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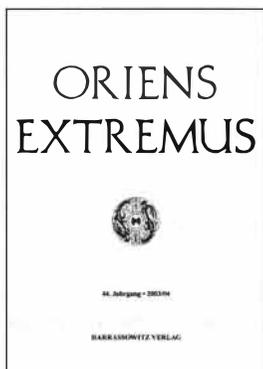
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