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The Theme of the Primacy of the Situation in Classical Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric

There is a widespread misconception about the Confucian virtue called *shu* 恕, “reciprocity.” Conventionally, *shu* is explained as a variant of the Golden Rule (“Do unto others as you would have others do unto you”),¹ an interpretation for which there seems to be very good textual warrant, inasmuch as Confucius himself is quoted in *Analects* xv/24 as saying that *shu* means “What you yourself do not desire, do not do unto others” 己所不欲，勿施於人。² But the problem with letting Confucius’s own words speak for themselves is that for twenty-first-century readers this maxim leaves out an important qualification. In the context of early China, *shu* means doing unto others as you would have others do unto you, if you were in the same social situation as they.³ Otherwise, *shu* would require fathers to treat their sons in the same manner that their sons treat them – a practice that no Confucian has ever considered appropriate. Precisely this misunderstanding has

¹ See, e.g., Herbert Fingarette, “Following the ‘One Thread’ of the *Analects*,” in Henry Rosemont, Jr., and Benjamin I. Schwartz, eds., *Studies in Classical Chinese Thought, Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47.3, Thematic Issue S (1979), pp. 373–405; H. G. Creel, “Discussion of Professor Fingarette on Confucius,” in *ibid.*, pp. 407–15; David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1996), pp. 59–76; Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Reweaving the ‘One Thread’ in the *Analects*,” *Philosophy East and West* 40.1 (1990), pp. 17–33; Sin Yee Chan, “Disputes on the One Thread of *Chung-Shu*,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 26.2 (1999), pp. 165–86; Bryan W. Van Norden, “Unweaving the ‘One Thread’ of *Analects* 4:15,” in Bryan W. Van Norden, ed., *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 216–36; and Bo Mou, “A Reexamination of the Structure and Content of Confucius’ Version of the Golden Rule,” *Philosophy East and West* 54.2 (2004), pp. 218–48.

² Text in Cheng Shude 程樹德 (1877–1944), *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, ed. Cheng Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), *j.* 32, p. 1106. Zigong 子貢 (fl. 495–468 BC), the disciple to whom this statement is addressed, affirms a similar credo in *Analects* v/12 (*Lunyu jishi* 9, p. 316): “What I do not wish others to impose on me, I surely wish not to impose on others” 我不欲人之加諸我也，吾亦欲無加諸人。Confucius’s wry response: “That is not something you have reached 非爾所及也。”

³ Martha Nussbaum seems to sense this problem in “Golden Rule Arguments: A Missing Thought?” in Kim-chong Chong et al., eds., *The Moral Circle and the Self: Chinese and Western Approaches* (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 2003), esp. p. 6: “The Chinese forms [of the Golden Rule] do not say, ‘Treat another as you would have that other treat you,’ but ‘Treat another as you would have anyone else related to you as you are related to that other treat you.’”

led Du Gangjian and Song Jian, two active participants in the current human-rights debate, to translate *shu* as “tolerance,” as though it were simply an ancient Chinese anticipation of the ideology of tolerance of Gustav Radbruch (1878–1949).⁴ The failure of this equation is apparent if we consider an ancient Chinese father who was intolerant of his son’s behavior. Such a father might still be said to have observed *shu*, even if his intolerance would be considered unjust by our (or Radbruch’s) standards.

The crucial qualification – namely that the calculus of *shu* requires us also to take the actors’ social status into account – is not explicit anywhere in the *Analects*, but in another famous statement attributed to Confucius and recorded in the *Application of Equilibrium* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), the point is unmistakable:

Integrity and reciprocity are not far from the Way. What you would not suffer others to do to you, do not do to them. There are four things in the way of the noble man, none of which I have been able to do. I have not been able to serve my father as I demand from my son. I have not been able to serve my lord as I demand from my servant. I have not been able to serve my elder brother as I demand from my younger brother. I have not been able to do unto my friends first as I demand from them.⁵

To revisit the example of a father and son: in order to apply *shu* correctly, the question for a son to consider is not how his father treats him, but how he would like his own son to treat him. *Shu* is a relation not between two individuated people, but between two social roles. How does one treat one’s father? In the same way that one would want to be treated by one’s son if one were a father oneself.

Since *shu* has always been interpreted in this peculiar way – as mentioned above, it has never been suggested seriously that a son

⁴ Du Gangjian and Song Gang, “Relating Human Rights to Chinese Culture: The Four Paths of the Confucian Analects and the Four Principles of a New Theory of Benevolence,” in Michael C. Davis, ed., *Human Rights and Chinese Values: Legal, Philosophical, and Political Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1995), pp. 39 ff. Du and Song do not explain precisely which aspect of Radbruch’s juridical philosophy they find comparable to *shu* (nor do they even cite any of his works). Radbruch is famous for the so-called *Radbruch’sche Formel*, which is still influential in German law, and states, essentially, that a law incompatible with justice must be passed over for the sake of justice. See *Der Mensch im Recht: Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze über Grundfragen des Rechts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), pp. 111–24.

⁵ *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (SSJZS), j. 52, p. 1627a–b. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper are my own. Compare the translations in Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, trans., *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2001), p. 94; and Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1963), p. 101.

who treats his father in the same way that he is treated by his father is correctly performing *shu* – it is worth asking why Confucius never seems to have felt obliged to clarify this aspect of his teaching. What is at least as remarkable is that none of his disciples, unlike so many modern readers, was ever confused or misled. It is only plausible to assume, then, that *shu* highlights a feature of classical Chinese culture not shared by our own. For Confucius, his disciples, and even most later commentators, modifying standards of behavior according to people’s social roles must have seemed so natural that no one ever needed to articulate the idea.

Another episode from the *Analects*, not directly related to *shu*, sheds further light on this problem:

Zilu 子路 asked: “Should one practice something after having heard it 聞斯行諸?”

The Master said: “You have a father and elder brother who are still alive; how would you practice something after having heard it?”

Ran You 冉有 asked: “Should one practice something after having heard it?”

The Master said: “One should practice something after having heard it.”

Gongxi Hua 公西華 said: “When You 由 [i.e. Zilu] asked whether one should practice something after having heard of it, you said: ‘Your father and elder brother are still alive.’ When Qiu 求 [i.e. Ran You] asked whether one should practice something after having heard of it, you said: ‘One should practice something after having heard it.’ I am confused, and venture to ask about this.”

The Master said: “Qiu is withdrawn; thus I urged him forward. Yóu [has the eagerness] of two men; thus I held him back.”⁶

Once again, the right thing to do – and, by the same token, the right advice for Confucius to give – depends on the person in question; the only difference is that here the salient criterion is not social status, but character. In effect, Confucius is responding not to the questions that his disciples asked of him, but directly to the disciples themselves. This comes close to a classical Chinese conception of indexicality: the phrase “practicing something after one has heard it 聞斯行之,” like the English word “you,” does not refer to the same thing when addressed to two different people.⁷ When addressed to Laurence Olivier, “you”

⁶ *Analects* 11/22; *Lunyu jishi* 23, p. 787.

⁷ For an influential study of indexicals, see David Kaplan, “Demonstratives: An Essay on

refers to Laurence Olivier; when addressed to Vivien Leigh, “you” refers to Vivien Leigh. When addressed to Zilu, “practicing something after one has heard it” refers to impetuous behavior on the part of a man who is already disposed to act too quickly; when addressed to Ran You, it refers to a philosophy of action that the reserved gentleman would do well to adopt.

A common Western approach to analyzing such complications would be to try to infer general rules from Confucius’s occasional comments; for example, the case involving Zilu and Ran You might imply that a teacher should offer advice conducive to a median position somewhere between inaction and overzealousness. But, at least in his surviving statements, Confucius himself refuses to synthesize handy rules. Instead, he always emphasizes the variability of situations, as in *Analects* IV/10: “In his associations with the world, there is nothing that the noble man [invariably] affirms or denies. He is a participant in what is right.”⁸

This theme, which I call “the primacy of the situation” – there is no precise Chinese technical term for this trope, as far as I know – is pervasive in the received literature of the Warring States period (nearly all of which is philosophical in some loose sense). Although it hardly represents an exclusively Chinese way of thinking, this commonplace was extremely popular, and an awareness of its scope and characteristic features can help one avoid certain interpretive pitfalls that still bedevil the study of Chinese philosophy.

The prevalence of Primacy of the Situation arguments in the writings of Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BC) attests to their versatility, for Han Fei and Confucius were two of the most dissimilar thinkers that the classical Chinese culture produced. Han Fei’s essay “The Difficulties of Persuasion” (“Shuinan” 說難), one of the few chapters that are not addressed to a ruler or overlord, serves as a useful frame of reference for the entire *Han Feizi* 韓非子. By emphasizing that a courtier must craft

the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals” (1977), published in Joseph Almog et al., eds., *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1989), pp. 481–563.

⁸ *Lunyu jishi* 7, p. 247; cf. *Mencius* 4B/6 and 11. Several other sayings about or attributed to Confucius echo this theme: *Mencius* 2A/2, in Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820), *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義, ed. Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬, j. 6, p. 215: “To take employment when it is acceptable to take employment; to sojourn [in a state] when it is acceptable to sojourn there; to remain there when it is acceptable to remain there; and to depart when it is acceptable to depart – such was [the way of] Confucius (with a parallel in 5B/1, *Mengzi zhengyi*, j. 20, p. 672); and “Zhongyong” 中庸, sect. 14, in *Liji zhengyi*, j. 52, p. 1627 (the passage beginning with “The noble man acts as befits his station 君子素其位而行”).

his speeches to suit his audience's predilections, the chapter forces the reader to reconsider the arguments of all the others: one cannot simply record Han Fei's various recommendations to rulers and relate these (as so many textbooks do) as Han Fei's "political philosophy," because Han Fei himself tells us in "The Difficulties of Persuasion" that a minister's stated opinions need not – indeed, should not – reflect his innermost beliefs. On the contrary, a minister's stated opinions reflect his impressions of his ruler's temperament:

Eulogize other people who act in a manner similar to the ruler; take as a model those affairs of others that are similar to his plans. If there is someone as vile as he, you must use [that person's] greatness to prettify him, as though he were harmless. If there is someone who has had the same failures as he, you must use [that person's] brilliance to prettify him, as though there were no real loss. If he considers his own strengths manifold, do not cause him to regret⁹ his [past] difficulties. If he considers his decisions brave, do not anger him by reprimanding him. If he considers his plans wise, do not diminish him [by citing] his failures. Only if there is nothing contrary¹⁰ in your general import and nothing stringent in your speech will your wisdom and rhetoric gallop forward to the ultimate. This is the way of attaining both intimacy without suspicion and effectual speech.¹¹

Han Fei evidently earns his bread through indexicality as well (the referents of "brave decisions," to cite only one of Han Fei's examples, vary with the status of his interlocutor), the only difference between his brand and that of Confucius being that the latter never resorts to deception. Confucius gives his disciples two different answers because he sincerely believes that they need two different answers for their spiritual growth, whereas Han Fei advocates brazenly telling a ruler whatever one surmises will be to one's own advantage. It goes without saying, therefore, that no earnest Confucian minister would condone Han Fei's platform of cajolery. But, crucially, both would have to assent to a broader principle, namely that the right thing to say depends on the circumstances.

⁹ Following the commentary of Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校注 (Shanghai: Guji, 2000) 4, p. 263, n. 8.

¹⁰ Following the commentary of Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (1859–1922).

¹¹ "Shuinan" 說難; text in Chen, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu*, 4, p. 261. Compare the translation in Burton Watson, trans., *Han Feizi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2003), p. 76.

Han Fei continues in “The Difficulties of Persuasion” with alleged historical examples that use the theme of the Primacy of the Situation to broach yet deeper fields in the philosophy of language and conversation:

In the past, Lord Wu of Zheng 鄭武公 [r. 770–744 BC] wished to attack Hu 胡, so the first thing he did was to marry his daughter to the Lord of Hu in order to make amusement his [sole] intention. Then [Lord Wu] asked his thronging ministers: “I wish to make use of my troops; whom is it acceptable to attack?”

Grand Master Guan Qisi 關其思 replied: “It is acceptable to attack Hu.”

Lord Wu was enraged and executed him, saying: “Hu is a brother state. How could you say to attack it? “When the Lord of Hu heard of this, he assumed that Zheng would treat him as a relative, so he did not prepare for [an incursion from] Zheng. The men of Zheng invaded Hu and seized it.¹²

In Song 宋 there was a rich man whose walls were damaged by exposure to the elements. His son said: “If you do not rebuild them, there will surely be thieves.” His neighbor’s father said the same thing. One night, as expected, there was a great loss to his wealth. His family considered his son very wise, but suspected the neighbor’s father.¹³

What these two men [namely, Guan Qisi and the neighbor’s father] said fit the facts 當,¹⁴ and yet in the more extreme case one was executed, and in the less extreme case one was suspected [of burglary]. This is because it is not difficult to know, but it is difficult to place one’s knowledge.¹⁵

To take the second example first: the rich man’s son and his neighbor’s father both say the same thing, but the implications of their utterances are fundamentally divergent. In the case of the son, the family naturally assumes that the boy has his father’s financial interests in

¹² There is one other ancient source for this affair, namely *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 (SBBY), j. B, p. 12b, which states that “Zheng put to death its Grand Master Guan Qisi” in 763 BC (without further explanation).

¹³ Compare the parallel in “Shuilin xia” 說林下, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 8, p. 520.

¹⁴ For *dang* as “fit the facts” in Han Fei’s idiom, see Christoph Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic*, ed. Kenneth Robinson, vol. 7.1 of *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1998), p. 196.

¹⁵ *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 4, pp. 266–67. Compare the translation in Watson, pp. 77–78. The final comment calls to mind the statement by René Descartes (1596–1650): “Car ce n’est pas assez d’avoir l’esprit bon, mais le principal est de l’appliquer bien.” Text in *Discours de la méthode*, in *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Victor Cousin (Paris: F.G. Levrault, 1824) 1, p. 122.

mind, and lauds him for his ability to anticipate disaster. But in the case of the neighbor's father, the same assumption is no longer natural; indeed, the very opposite is plausible. To use the terminology of contemporary philosophy of language: the two statements, though lexically identical, have radically different implicature.¹⁶ The same sentence does not mean the same thing when spoken by two different men with two different ostensible intentions. It is the situation, more than the words themselves, that determines the significance of any statement;¹⁷ or, to formulate the same principle in different words: there is no such thing as a statement with universally valid implications.

Writers who cast Han Fei as a proto-totalitarian might be tempted to associate his oratorical prestidigitation with what Hannah Arendt called "the totalitarian contempt for facts and reality."¹⁸ But "The Difficulties of Persuasion" does not lay out anything like a totalitarian machinery of state; on the contrary, Han Fei's vision of government is that of a crude despot who is subverted at every turn by knaves and inveiglers. Totalitarianism, furthermore, requires an ideology – something that Han Fei is too much of a nihilist to offer. Han Fei might advocate authoritarianism, but he is no totalitarian.¹⁹

¹⁶ The term "implicature" was coined by Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard U.P., 1989), p. 24. See also Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), pp. 127 ff.; and Gerald Gazdar, *Pragmatics: Implicature, Presupposition, and Logical Form* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 49 ff.

¹⁷ David Schaberg, "Command and the Content of Tradition," in Christopher Lupke, ed., *The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2005), p. 32, notes provocatively that concerns related to implicature may have influenced Chinese writing as early as the oracle-bone inscriptions, which routinely included "narrative material" that "provides a setting and a cast of characters for the ritual of divination." Schaberg adds: "The words of the divinatory charge are intelligible and valid only when they are framed by a knowledge of the conditions of their utterance."

¹⁸ See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 2004), p. 397; also p. 461: "Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it." Lamentably, Samantha Power's introduction to this book – which manifestly aims to become the new standard – does not say anything about which edition or editions were used for the text. (Arendt made numerous revisions, including both additions and excisions, over the course of the several releases of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.) The catalogue information opposite the title page misleadingly implies that the first edition was used as a basis, but the inclusion of Arendt's retrospective prefaces to each sect. (pp. 3–10, 159–65, and 387–405), as well as "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government" (pp. 593–616), a section that did not appear until the second edition of 1958, reveal that this cannot be the case. For an example of a scholar who casts Han Fei as a proto-totalitarian, see Zhengyuan Fu, *China's Legalists: The Earliest Totalitarians and Their Art of Ruling* (Armonk, N.Y., and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

¹⁹ Compare the influential definitions of "totalitarianism" and "authoritarianism" in Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, The Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Series 4 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 12.

Exploring the varying non-conventional implications of lexically identical sentences is a common theme in *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策). To take the example of “three people make a tiger 三人成虎,” which has since become a proverb: three people will cause everyone to believe that a tiger is in the marketplace if they all independently claim to have seen it. The implication of the first such claim might be that the speaker is insane, but the implication of the second would be that the first speaker may not be insane after all – and the implication of the third would be that there is indeed a tiger in the marketplace.²⁰ Many anecdotes in this collection deal with clever, and often underhanded, ways of manipulating the situation so that the sayings of others, as well as one’s own, take on peculiar implications for a hoodwinked audience. A necklace-maker shows his familiarity with this technique in a conversation with king Xiang of Qi 齊襄王 (r. 283–265 BC), who is worried that a certain minister with usurpatory designs has been conspicuously doing good deeds in order to curry favor with the populace. The necklace-maker tells the king to announce grandly that the minister has correctly gauged the sovereign’s intentions, and to command all his other officers to go out among the people and help anyone who may be cold or hungry. Then all will believe that the magnanimous minister is merely carrying out his ruler’s magnanimous wishes.²¹

Another kind of implicature in classical Chinese philosophy involves oracular rather than conversational meaning. In an *Yijing* 易經 divination, the interpretation of the oracle often focuses on an exceptional line of the hexagram that is thought to be in the process of changing into its opposite. Although it is not clear how such changeable lines were identified,²² accounts in the *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) show

²⁰ “Qin gong Handan” 秦攻邯鄲; text in *Zhanguo ce* (Shanghai: Guji, 1978), 5, p. 209. This passage corresponds to sect. 105 in J. I. Crump, trans., *Chan-kuo Ts’i*, rev. edn., Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies 77 (Ann Arbor: U. Michigan P., 1996). See also “Pang Cong yu taizi zhi yu Handan” 龐葱與太子質於邯鄲, *Zhanguo ce* 23, pp. 845–46; Crump, sect. 302. A variant appears in “Nei chushuo shang” 內儲說上, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu*, 9, pp. 580–81. Cf. Harbsmeier in *Science and Civilisation in China* 7.1, pp. 246–47; idem, “Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China,” in Hans Lenk and Gregor Paul, eds., *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1993), p. 13; and Robert T. Oliver, *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China* (Syracuse: Syracuse U.P., 1971), p. 226. The theme of “three people make a tiger” is related to the tale that Zengzi’s own mother wrongly believed her son was a murderer after hearing it said on three separate occasions. See “Qin Wuwang wei Gan Mao” 秦武王謂甘茂, *Zhanguo ce* 4, p. 150.

²¹ “Yan gong Qi Qi po” 燕攻齊齊破, *Zhanguo ce* 13, pp. 460–62; Crump, sect. 162. The term for “necklace-maker” is *guan zhu* 貫珠, “stringer of pearls,” but some commentators read this as a personal name: Guan Zhu (or perhaps Guan Shu 貫殊). See the commentary at *Zhanguo ce* 13, p. 461, n. 7.

²² For a judicious overview of the problem, see Richard Rutt, *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi): A Bronze Age Document*, Durham East-Asia Series 1 (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996), pp.

that they commonly served as the crux of the prognostication, as in the following example:

Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 divined with the yarrow stalks as to whether he should marry his eldest daughter to [the Lord of] Qin 秦, and encountered the line of the hexagram *Guimei* 歸妹 that changes to the hexagram *Kui* 睽 [i.e. the top line]. Historian Su 史蘇 interpreted this, saying: “It is inauspicious. The line-statement says: ‘The groom stabs a sheep, and indeed there is no blood; the bride bears a basket, and indeed there is no gift.’²³ Our western neighbor reproaches us for our promises which cannot be made good. *Guimei* changing to *Kui* is like getting no assistance. When the trigram *Zhen* 震 [☳, the top trigram of *Guimei*] changes to *Li* 離 [☲, the top trigram of *Kui*], *Li* also changes to *Zhen*; it is thunder and fire, Ying 嬴 [the surname of the Lord of Qin] defeating Ji 姬 [the surname of the Lord of Jin]. Great chariots will lose their axle-casings; fires will burn their flags; it will be unprofitable to march the army, and they will be defeated at Zongqiu 宗丘.”²⁴

The sole difference between the hexagrams *Guimei* ䷵ (No. 54 in the traditional sequence) and *Kui* ䷥ (No. 38) lies in the top line, which is broken in the former and unbroken in the latter.²⁵ Many of the details may be opaque, but it is evident that Historian Su’s prognostication, rather than taking *Guimei* in its entirety, is based specifically on the

154–55, 169–70. Cf. also Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes, 3d edn., Bollingen Series 19 (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1967), pp. li ff.

²³ For the phrase *chengkuang* (rendered here as “to bear a basket”) as a euphemism for the female reproductive organs, see Paul Rakita Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2002), p. 13, and the references in p. 131, n. 23. Historian Su’s version of the line-statement happens to be markedly similar to the corresponding line-statement in the received *Yijing*: “The bride bears a basket and there is no fruit; the groom stabs a sheep and there is no blood.” Text in *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (SSJZS), j. 5, p. 64c. Such congruence between line-statements quoted in the *Zuozhuan* and the received *Yijing* is not always found.

²⁴ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, rev. edn. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), j. 1, p. 364 (Xi 僖 15 [645 BC]). This passage is discussed in Gao Heng 高亨, *Wenshi shulin* 文史述林 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), pp. 375–76; but not in Kidder Smith, Jr., “*Zhouyi* Interpretation from Accounts in the *Zuozhuan*,” *HJAS* 49.2 (1989), pp. 421–63; David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 205 (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2001), pp. 65–72; or Hirase Takao 平勢隆郎, *Saden no shiryō hihanteki kenkyū* 左傳の資料批判的研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko, 1998), pp. 25–34.

Compare the translations in Rut, *Book of Changes*, p. 181; and James Legge (1815–1897), *The Chinese Classics* (N.d.; rpt. Taipei: SMC, 1991), vol. 5, p. 169.

²⁵ In the sequence of the Mawangdui 馬王堆 *Yijing*, *Guimei* is no. 29, while *Kui* is called *Guai* 乖 and assigned no. 53. See, e.g., the table in Edward L. Shaughnessy, *I Ching: The Classic of Changes* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), pp. 28–29. The significance of the differing sequences is explored in Xing Wen 邢文, *Boshu Zhouyi yanjiu* 帛書周易研究 (Beijing: Renmin, 1997), pp. 65–118; and Dominique Hertzler, *Das alte und das neue Yijing: Die Wandlungen des Buch der Wandlungen*, Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 126 (Munich: Diederichs, 1996), pp. 149–84.

top line of the hexagram, which in this instance is somehow discerned to be changing into the unbroken top line of *Kui*. Naturally, the prognostication would be completely different if some other line or lines in *Guimei* were construed on that occasion to be changeable (or if no line at all in the hexagram were considered changeable, as sometimes happens). Not all *Guimei*'s are alike; the implication of any hexagram depends on the new hexagram toward which it is perceived to be moving at any given moment.

The core of the *Yijing* is an index of such line-statements, organized by hexagram, for diviners to consult once they have identified the decisive changeable line or lines in the hexagram at hand. This arrangement reveals certain patterns. The position of a broken or unbroken line within a hexagram can profoundly influence its interpretation in the accompanying line-statement; that is to say, a broken or unbroken line at the bottom of a hexagram does not have the same significance as a broken or unbroken line in the second, third, fourth, fifth, or top rows. Specifically, the second and fifth lines, being the central lines of the two trigrams making up the hexagram (a hexagram consists of one trigram placed on top of another), are regarded as "central"; the third and fourth lines are considered uncertain and potentially hazardous; the bottom line connotes humility and origin; and the top line signifies the end, often with a strong suggestion that, as things return to the nadir after passing their zenith, good fortune will turn to bad fortune and *vice versa*.²⁶

Many of these themes are exemplified by the six line-statements for the hexagram *Qian* 乾 ☰ (No. 1),²⁷ which consists of six unbroken lines:

Nine²⁸ at the origin: A hidden dragon – do not use it.

Nine in the second [line]: An appearing dragon is in the field. It is beneficial to see the great man.

²⁶ Compare the summary in Li-chen Lin, "The Concepts of Time and Position in the *Book of Change* and Their Development," in Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, eds., *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, Sinica Leidensia 33 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 96, drawn from the longer discussion in Qu Wanli 屈萬里, *Xian Qin Han Wei Yili shuping* 先秦漢魏易例述評 (Taipei: Xuesheng, 1969; rpt. Taipei: Lianjing, 1984), j. 8, pp. 12 ff.

²⁷ Called *Jian* 鍵 in the Mawangdui text.

²⁸ "Nine" refers to a changeable unbroken line, "six" to a changeable broken one. The tradition also speaks of "eight" as an unchangeable broken line and "seven" as an unchangeable unbroken one, but only "nine" and "six" appear in line-statements, since only changeable lines yield line-statements at all. Cf. Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes: Seven Eranos Lectures*, Publications on Asia of the Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies 28 (Seattle and London: U. Washington P., 1977), pp. 14–15. Since *Qian* consists of six unbroken lines, all the line-statements contain the number "nine."

Nine in the third: The noble man is creative all day long; at night he is wary as if in danger. There is no misfortune.
 Nine in the fourth: Sometimes it leaps up from within the abyss. There is no misfortune.
 Nine in the fifth: A flying dragon is in the heavens. It is beneficial to see the great man.
 Nine on the top: A haughty dragon has regrets.²⁹

All the lines in *Qian* are unbroken, but their oracular implications depend on their location in the hexagram. An unbroken line at the bottom is interpreted as a “hidden dragon,” replete with unexpended potential; as the lines rise through the hexagram, the dragon begins to emerge, until it attains its rightfully majestic position in the heavens in the fifth line. But in this extraordinarily auspicious hexagram, good fortune reverts to ill at the end: even the dragon goes too far, becomes haughty, and meets with regret.³⁰

Yijing divination, then, is doubly conditional: the prognostication rests on the premise that every line of a hexagram is subject to change,³¹ and the line-statements for changeable lines are in turn dependent on their position in the hexagram’s overall structure. These contingencies required each hexagram result to be interpreted afresh by skilled diviners. No oracle was invested with diuturnal or immutable significance.

The theme of the Primacy of the Situation figures no less prominently in the political sections of *Han Feizi* than in its ruminations on rhetoric. For example, Han Fei’s administrative proposals include the doctrine commonly known as “forms and names” (*xingming* 刑名 – “performance and title” may be a less opaque rendering), which emerges from the viewpoint that there is no universally valid method of distributing responsibilities among ministers. Instead of imposing some preconceived – and, for precisely that reason, doomed – vision of bureaucratic organization, a ruler ought to respond as each minister makes his talents and aspirations apparent:

²⁹ *Zhouyi zhengyi* 1, pp. 13a-14a. Compare the translations in Rutt, *Book of Changes*, p. 224; and R. Wilhelm, *The I Ching*, pp. 7-9.

³⁰ Cf. Lin, “Concepts of Time,” p. 94. The “dragon” in the line-statements is sometimes taken as a reference to a group of constellations apperceived as a Celestial Dragon 蒼龍; the six line-statements thus describe the Dragon’s position in the sky over the course of the annual cycle. See, e.g., Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1997), pp. 197-219, and the references in p. 214, n.12.

³¹ Cf. Michael Loewe, “China,” in Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker, eds., *Oracles and Divination* (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1981), p. 50: “It was probably believed that the only feature of the universe that could be regarded as constant was the fact of change.”

According to the Way of the ruler of men, tranquility and reserve are treasures. Without managing affairs himself, he knows clumsiness from skill. Without deliberating and planning himself, he knows auspiciousness from inauspiciousness. Therefore, he does not speak, but good [words] respond; he does not act, but good [actions] multiply. When words 言 respond, he takes hold of the contract; when actions 事 multiply, he takes the tally in hand.³² The extent to which the two halves of the tally conform determines rewards and punishments. Thus the thronging ministers utter their words; the lord hands down their duties according to their words and assesses their accomplishments according to their duties. If their accomplishments match their duties and their duties match their words, they are rewarded. If their accomplishments do not match their duties or their duties do not match their words, they are punished. According to the way of the enlightened lord, ministers do not utter words that they cannot match.³³

In this passage, Han Fei uses the terms *yan* 言 and *shi* 事, rendered above as “words” and “accomplishments,” instead of the more familiar *ming* and *xing*, but the underlying principle is the same. The ministers themselves determine their “titles” (*ming*) by uttering words; the sovereign then compares their “accomplishments” or “performance” (*xing*) to the “words” or “titles” that they initially submitted. When words and accomplishments match, the minister is rewarded; when they do not, the minister is punished.³⁴ In concrete terms, this means that if a ruler needs to choose a minister of works and a minister of war, it is not sufficient to appoint the minister most likely to succeed at civil engineering as minister of works, and the minister most likely to succeed

³² The relationship between the lord and his ministers is likened here to a tally, which was a form of contract between a debtor and a creditor. At the time of the original agreement, the tally would be broken in two – one piece for each party. Like a creditor whose claim is embodied in his matching half of the tally, a lord assesses how well his ministers have lived up to their end of the bargain by the extent to which their actions conform to their stated obligations. For further details, see the references in Paul R. Goldin, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2005), p. 64.

³³ Han Feizi *xin jiaozhu* 1, p. 81. Compare the translation in Watson, p. 19.

³⁴ For more on *xingming*, see, e.g., Goldin, *After Confucius*, pp. 63–64; Jean Lévi, “Quelques aspects de la rectification des noms dans la pensée et la pratique politiques de la Chine ancienne,” in *Le juste nom, Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 15 (1993), pp. 33–38; John Makeham, “The Legalist Concept of *hsing-ming*: An Example of the Contribution of Archaeological Evidence to the Re-Interpretation of Transmitted Texts,” *MS* 39 (1990–91), pp. 87–114; Hsiao-po Wang and Leo S. Chang, *The Philosophical Foundations of Han Fei's Political Theory*, Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy 7 (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1986), pp. 57–78; Dai Junren 戴君仁, *Dai Jingshan xiansheng quanji* 戴靜山先生全集 (Taipei: n.p., 1980), vol. 2, p. 912; and Herrlee G. Creel, *What is Taoism? and Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago and London: U. Chicago P., 1970), pp. 79–91.

at military strategy as minister of war. Rather, the ruler should appoint as minister of works the minister who promises to serve as minister of works, and punish him only if, after a reasonable trial period, he has manifestly failed. In Han Fei's view, this is the only way to make the bewildering variety of situations facing a ruler work in the ruler's favor; for if this policy is pursued consistently, then ministers will soon learn, directly or indirectly, that they ought not to promise more than they can deliver.

Han Fei's logic is not stated explicitly: the rationale is that if we accept the Primacy of the Situation, and agree that the right course of action cannot be determined unless the situation is fully comprehended, then we must wait as long as possible before making any decision; ideally, we must let the situation unfold by itself and make our decisions for us. *Xingming* is a method designed to avoid making any decisions at all. The ruler simply "responds 應."³⁵

In this respect, *xingming* has an obvious affinity with another keyword of Warring States political philosophy, namely non-action 無為,³⁶ it is, after all, for teachings like *xingming* that Han Fei is sometimes labeled a "Daoist."³⁷ In the most celebrated (and probably the oldest) of the Zhuangzian "knack stories," the cook avoids dulling his cleaver by let-

³⁵ The primacy of the Situation is also clearly at work in Han Fei's conception of history. Against Confucians, who traditionally advocated following the models of the Sage Kings, Han Fei argued that the best policies vary with the times and circumstances. Cf. Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, ed., *Zhongguo zhexueshi* 中國哲學史, rev. edn. (Beijing: Renmin, 2003), pp. 258–63; Gao Boyuan 高柏園, *Han Fei zhexue yanjiu* 韓非哲學研究, Wen shi zhe daxi 82 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1994), pp. 85 ff.; Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹, *Han Fei zhi zhuzuo jiqi sixiang* 韓非之著作及其思想, *Zhongguo zhexue congkan* 35 (Taipei: Xuesheng, 1993), pp. 461–72; A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), pp. 270–73; and Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde, 2d edn. (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1952–53), I, pp. 316–17. For a typical example, see the contrasting account of king Wen 文王 and king Yan of Xu 徐偃王, who both practiced humanity and righteousness, but came to vastly different ends "because humanity and righteousness were useful in ancient but not in modern times" ("Wudu" 五蠹, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 19, p. 1092).

³⁶ The bibliography of literature on this term is overwhelming. See, e.g., Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, *Kanaya Osamu Chūgoku shisō ronshū* 金谷治中國思想論集 (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1997) 2, pp. 353–65; Roger T. Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1994), pp. 28–64; Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. F.W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979), pp. 291–300; and Creel, *What Is Taoism?*, pp. 48–78. Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2003), deliberately excludes the political aspects of *wuwei* from his study.

³⁷ E.g., Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard U.P., Belknap Press, 1985), pp. 343–45; Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Tê Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934; rpt. New York: Grove, 1958), pp. 83 ff.; and especially Alfred Forke, *Geschichte der alten chinesischen Philosophie*, Universität Hamburg: Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiet der Auslandskunde 25; Reihe B., Völkerkunde, Kulturgeschichte und Sprachen 14 (Hamburg: Friederichsen, 1927; rpt. Hamburg: Cram, de Gruyter & Co., 1964), pp. 465 ff.

ting the architectonics of the ox determine his cuts, rather than forcing some preconceived pattern onto it:

A cook was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui 文惠君. Wherever his hand touched, his shoulder leaned, his foot stepped, his knee nudged, the flesh would fall away with a swishing sound. Each slice of the cleaver was right in tune, zip zap! He danced in rhythm to “The Mulberry Grove” 於桑, moved in concert with the strains of “The Managing Chief” 經首.

“Ah, wonderful,” said Lord Wenhui, “that skill can attain such heights!”

The cook put down his cleaver and responded, “What your servant loves is the Way, which goes beyond mere skill. When I first began to cut oxen, what I saw was nothing but whole oxen. After three years, I no longer saw whole oxen. Today, I meet the ox with my spirit rather than looking at it with my eyes. My sense organs stop functioning and my spirit moves as it pleases. In accord with the natural grain 依乎天理, I slice at the great crevices, lead the blade through the great cavities. Following its inherent structure 因其固然, I never encounter the slightest obstacle even where the veins and arteries come together or where the ligaments and tendons join, much less from obvious big bones. A good cook changes his cleaver once a year because he chops. An ordinary cook changes his cleaver once a month because he hacks. Now I’ve been using my cleaver for nineteen years and have cut up thousands of oxen with it, but the blade is still as fresh as though it had come from the grindstone. Between the joints there are spaces, but the edge of the blade has no thickness. Since I am inserting something without any thickness into an empty space, there will certainly be lots of room for the blade to play around in. That’s why the blade is still as fresh as though it had just come from the grindstone. Nonetheless, whenever I come to a complicated spot and see that it will be difficult to handle, I cautiously restrain myself, focus my vision, and slow my motion. With an imperceptible movement of the cleaver, plop! and the flesh is already separated, like a clump of earth collapsing to the ground. I stand there holding the cleaver in my hand, look all around me with complacent self-satisfaction, then I wipe off the cleaver and store it away.”

“Wonderful!” said Lord Wenhui. “From hearing the words of the cook, I have learned how to nourish life.”³⁸

³⁸ “Yangsheng zhu” 養生主; text in Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896), *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子

The interpretations of this parable are understandably varied, but what seems to distinguish this breathtaking cook from an ordinary or even superior cook is his (acquired) ability to “accord with the natural grain 依乎天理” and “follow the ox’s inherent structure 因其固然.” Only in this manner can he keep from colliding with bones and tendons and thereby damaging his blade. Cooks with less experience and insight merely hack away, insensible to the situation before them.³⁹

The classical text that displays the Primacy of the Situation most clearly is *Sunzi* 孫子. Here the core conviction is that “situational advantage,” which, in the parlance of this tradition, is *shi* 勢,⁴⁰ determines the outcome of a battle, and the method of dealing with vagarious battlefield situations is essentially the same as Han Fei’s: delay making any decision for as long as possible, at least for as long as it takes to assess the situation completely.

Winning a battle, according to *Sunzi*, is a matter of using advantages presented by the situation, rather than doggedly relying on the strength of one’s troops or the valor of one’s captains. “The *shi* of one who is adept at sending men into battle is like rolling a round boulder down from a mountain a thousand yards high.”⁴¹ No special military puissance is required to roll a boulder downhill, but the effects are nonetheless devastating even to a well-trained enemy. The puissance lies in recognizing the advantage of the boulder’s lofty position. Accordingly, *Sunzi* devotes substantial space to the commander’s methods of making sense out of perplexing military situations. Chief among these is gaining insight into the enemy’s status and strategy:

集釋, ed. Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚, *Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961), 2A, pp. 117–24. Trans. Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam, 1994; rpt. Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1998), pp. 26–27.

³⁹ For three recent and influential interpretations of this passage, see Alan Fox, “Reflex and Reflectivity: *Wuwei* 無為 in the *Zhuangzi*,” in Scott Cook, ed., *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 2003), pp. 211 ff.; Scott Cook, “Zhuang Zi and His Carving of the Confucian Ox,” *Philosophy East and West* 47.4 (1997), pp. 521–53; and Robert Eno, “Cook Ding’s Dao and the Limits of Philosophy,” Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1996), pp. 127–51.

⁴⁰ See François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone, 1995), pp. 25–38; and the section dealing with *shi* in the introduction to Roger T. Ames, trans., *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), pp. 71–83 – two of the surprisingly few Western publications to take the philosophy of *Sunzi* seriously. See also Gui Sheng 桂勝, *Zhou Qin shilun yanjiu* 周秦勢論研究 (Wuhan: Wuhan Daxue, 2000), pp. 87–138.

⁴¹ “Shi,” *Shiyi jia zhu Sunzi jiaoli* 十一家注孫子校理 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999), j. B, p. 99. Also: “Thus one who is adept at warfare seeks [victory] in the situation, and does not demand it from his men” (ibid.).

Therefore, make the enemy formulate a strategy so as to calculate his strengths and weaknesses. Make him act so as to know the pattern of his movement and stillness. Make him assume a form 形之 so as to know whether his territory will [mean] life or death [for him]. Probe him so as to know the points where he has excess and deficiency.

Thus the supreme [object] in forming one's troops is to be without form 無形. If one is without form, then even those under deep cover will not be able to spy you out, and those who are wise will not be able to plan for you. By adjusting to forms, one provides victories for one's army, but the army is unable to know this. Everyone will know the form that we use for victory, but no one will know the form that we used to determine victory.⁴² Thus when we are victorious in battle, we do not repeat ourselves, but respond to forms inexhaustibly.⁴³

“Formlessness 無形” – another term that resonates with the philosophy of *Laozi* 老子 and allied traditions – is a codeword for avoiding any type of committed formation until the enemy has already disclosed his intentions. It is the enemy who determines how one will destroy him: for every situation and for every enemy tactic, a shrewd commander will know the appropriate response. There are only two caveats. First, the strategy by which one attains victory can never be reused, because never again will precisely the same situation obtain.⁴⁴ Second, the rare enemy who refrains from exposing himself is difficult to defeat.

If many trees move, he is approaching. If there are many blinds in the grass, he is misleading us. If birds take flight, he is lying in ambush. If beasts are startled, he has poured out [his entire force]. If the dust is high and piercing, his chariots are approaching. If the dust is low and wide, his infantry is approaching. If the dust is scattered and wispy, his firewood-gatherers are working. If the dust is slight and comes and goes, he has encamped his forces. If he speaks humbly but increases his preparations, he will advance. If he speaks with strength and charges forward, he will retreat. If

⁴² Cf. “Xing” 形, *Shiyi jia zhu Sunzi jiaoli*, j. A, p. 74: “Thus the victory of one who is adept at warfare does not provide a reputation for wisdom or merit for bravery.” As the commentator Du Mu 杜牧 (803–853?) explains, such victories are secured before the battle even takes place; ordinary soldiers do not understand this, and so have no reason to attribute wisdom or bravery to the commander.

⁴³ “Xushi” 虛實, *Shiyi jia zhu Sunzi jiaoli*, j. B, pp. 120–23. Compare the translation in [no author stated] *The Art of War: The Denma Translation* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2002), p. 23.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ren, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 1, p. 142.

his light chariots emerge first, and settle by his flank, he is deploying. If he is not yet pressed but requests peace, he is plotting. If he runs to deploy his troops and chariots, he has set the time [for battle]. If half [his forces] advance and half retreat, he is luring us. If they lean on their weapons, they are hungry. If those who are sent to draw water are the first to drink, they are thirsty. If they see an advantage but do not advance, they are overworked. If birds gather, [his encampment] is empty. If they call out at night, they are afraid. If his forces sway, the commander has no gravity. If the flags and pennants move, they are in disarray. If the officers are angry, they are exhausted. If they kill their horses and eat the meat, if the troops do not hang up their pots, if they do not return to their lodgings, the invaders are desperate. If they repeatedly gather and speak to each other softly, he has lost [the confidence of] his army. If he frequently rewards them, he is in distress. If he frequently punishes them, he is in difficulty. If he is cruel at first, but then fears his army, he is the epitome of incompetence. If he sends a conciliatory emissary, he wishes to rest. If his soldiers are warlike and face one for a long time without either attacking or leaving, one must certainly investigate this carefully.⁴⁵

Most commentators agree that the commander in the last example is planning a spectacular surprise-attack; generally in *Sunzi*, this is the most dangerous kind of enemy, because it is not possible to prepare for him. (Perhaps this is a commander who is following the same strategies that *Sunzi* itself propounds.)

Considering its contacts with the philosophy and rhetoric of the *Laozi*, it is not surprising that the *Sunzi* uses the simile of water to describe the power of situational advantage:⁴⁶

The form of an army is like water. By virtue of its form, water avoids high [places] and rushes to low ones. By virtue of its form, an army evades “full” [places] and strikes “empty” ones.⁴⁷ Water adjusts to the earth to determine its own flow. An army adjusts to the enemy to determine victory. Thus an army has no constant position; water has no constant form. One who can seize victory by

⁴⁵ “Xingjun” 行軍, *Shiyi jia zhu Sunzi jiaoli*, j. B, pp. 193–202. Compare the translation in [Denma], *Art of War*, pp. 35–38.

⁴⁶ For a general survey of the image of water in Chinese philosophy, see Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1997). She does not address any passages from *Sunzi*.

⁴⁷ As the text has explained earlier, “full” places are well defended, “empty” ones poorly defended.

complying with the enemy's vicissitudes is called "divine." None of the Five Phases 五行 constantly prevails; none of the four seasons has constant standing. The days grow shorter and longer; the moon dies and is reborn.⁴⁸

The intellectual elite that fixed Confucianesque orthodoxy for future generations did not incorporate such texts as *Stratagems of the Warring States*, *Laozi*, *Sunzi*, or *Han Feizi* into their canon, even if they commonly read and enjoyed these works in private. Part of the reason for this repudiation surely lies in the freedom, and in some cases disingenuousness, with which these traditions resort to Primacy of the Situation arguments. For one thing, with the advent of the empire, the rejection of the idea that there are constant norms applicable in all situations was not easy to reconcile with the new demands of dynastic ideology. The Primacy of the Situation may represent an appealing outlook in Warring States times, when ministers, kings, dynasties, and whole states and alliances rose and fell with terrifying frequency and swiftness. But an empire, which prides itself on stability above all else, requires the acceptance of certain basic protocols that override all situational concerns.⁴⁹

The Chinese word for this kind of principle is *jing* 經, literally the "warp" of a warp-weighted loom. Already in ancient times the word had taken on such figurative meanings as "regular period," "regulator," "norm," "canon," and "scripture" – but it is especially characteristic of scholastic philosophy in Han times and later.⁵⁰ It is not surprising that the early empire was the heyday of Huang-Lao 黃老,⁵¹ of Five Phases

⁴⁸ "Xushi," *Shiyi jia zhu Sunzi jiaoli j.* B, pp. 124–26. Compare the translation in [Denma], *Art of War*, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., Zhou Guidian 周桂鈺, *Qin Han sixiang shi* 秦漢思想史 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1999), pp. 12–15.

⁵⁰ This point is emphasized by Fung, *History of Chinese Philosophy* 1, p. 403; *jingxue shidai* 經學時代 (rendered by Bodde as "The Period of Classical Learning") is Fung's term for the entire history of Chinese philosophy from Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (fl. 152–119 BC) to Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927). This sort of viewpoint is criticized in Michael Nylan, "A Problematic Model: The Han 'Orthodox Synthesis,' Then and Now," in Kai-wing Chow et al., eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 17–56. *Jingxue* is the subject of several classic studies: Jiang Guanghui 蔣廣輝, *Zhongguo jingxue sixiang shi* 中國經學思想史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2003); Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), *Liang Han jingxue jingwen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文評議 (Beijing: Shangwu, 2001); Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次 (b. 1883), *Keigaku kenkyū josetsu* 經學研究敘說 (Tokyo: Meguro, 1936); Honda Shigeyuki 本田成之 (1882–1945), *Shina keigakushi ron* 支那經學史論 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1927); and Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908), *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1961).

⁵¹ See, e.g., Leo S. Chang and Yu Feng, *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor*, Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy 15 (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1998); Ding Yuanming 丁原明, *Huang-Lao xue lun gang* 黃老學論綱 (Ji'nan: Shandong

speculation,⁵² and of canon-formation,⁵³ these can all be seen as intellectual projects designed to counter the relativism of situation ethics in Warring States philosophy. To be sure, grand cosmological visions like that of the Five Phases presuppose something like the Primacy of the Situation: knowing how to act, in that scheme, is possible only after knowing the situation, that is, the dominant phase and the phase that will succeed it. But the difference between this world view and that of, for example, *Sunzi* is that according to the Five Phases, change itself is regular and predictable. There is no need to delay strategizing until the situation has become clear, for all possible situations have been carefully taken into account. The Five Phases are changeable, but they are not capricious or vicissitudinous.

However, the Confucian canon typically eschews rigid dogma, and a moderated concept of the Primacy of the Situation can be found even in scriptures that date from after the establishment of the empire. This concept is *quan* 權, literally “weighing one thing against another,”⁵⁴ or disregarding an otherwise binding norm (*jing*) when exigent circumstances warrant. The passage most frequently cited as the *locus*

Daxue, 1997); Edmund Ryden, *The Yellow Emperor's Four Canons: A Literary Study and Edition of the Text from Mawangdui*, Variétés Sinologiques: New Series 85 (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1997); and R. P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1993). The Huang-Lao manuscripts have been translated in Robin D.S. Yates, trans., *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine, 1997).

⁵² See, e.g., Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), pp. 129–30. and 210–16; John S. Major, “Substance, Process, Phase: *Wu-xing* 五行 in the *Huainanzi*,” in Henry Rosemont, Jr., ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham, Critics and Their Critics* 1 (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991), pp. 67–78; Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 340–56; John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1984), esp. pp. 36–37; and above all Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), “Wude zhongshi shuo xia de zhengzhi he lishi” 五德終始說下的政治和歷史, in Gu Jiegang et al., eds., *Gushi bian* 古史編 (rpt. Shanghai: Guji, 1982), vol. 5, pp. 404–617.

⁵³ See, e.g., Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 2001), pp. 37 ff.; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 337–62; Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); Wang Yan 汪延, *Xian Qin Liang Han wenhua chuancheng shulue* 先秦兩漢文化傳承述略 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu, 1998), pp. 161–96; Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996); and Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1991), pp. 81–84. See also the insightful discussion in the introduction to Tjan Tjoe Som, trans., *Po Hu Tung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, Sinica Leidensia 6 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949) 1, pp. 82–100.

⁵⁴ See A.C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1978), p. 184.

classicus of this term is in the *Gongyang* 公羊 *Commentary* to the *Springs and Autumns* 春秋. A certain minister in the state of Zheng, named Zhai Zhong 祭仲, is seized by the state of Song and commanded by his captors to go back and replace his ruler with a figurehead. Zhong acquiesces, and his act of apparent treachery is praised by the *Gongyang* as an exercise of *quan*:

The men of Song seized him, and said to him: “Depose Hu 忽 and install Tu 突 in our behalf.” If Zhai Zhong had not followed their words, his lord would certainly have died and his state would certainly have been doomed. Since he followed their words, his lord could exchange death for life and his state could exchange doom for preservation. After a brief delay, Tu could be expelled as before and Hu could be installed as before. Even if this could not be attained, Zheng might be weakened, but would still exist afterwards. Those among the ancients who had *quan*, had the *quan* of Zhai Zhong. What is *quan*? *Quan* means to be contrary to *jing*, but afterwards to derive some good. There is no call for applying *quan* except in cases of life or death. Practicing *quan* has its proper way, namely, one degrades or harms oneself in order to practice *quan*, but one does not injure others in order to practice *quan*. To kill others in order to survive, to bring about doom for others’ [states] so that one’s own may be preserved – the noble man does not do this.⁵⁵

Despite its subsequent influence, this catechetical discussion of *quan* is relatively late. The date of the *Gongyang Commentary* is dis-

⁵⁵ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (SSJZS), 5, p. 2220a (Huan 桓 11[701] BC). Compare the translations in Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, p. 143 (where the minister’s name is read incorrectly as “Ji Zhong”); and Göran Malmqvist, “Studies on the Gongyang and Guiliang I,” *BMFEA* 43 (1971), p. 106. Cf. also Zhang Duansui 張端穗, *Xi Han Gongyang xue yanjiu* 西漢公羊學研究, Wen shi zhe daxi 187 (Taipei: Wenjin, 2005), pp. 93–96 and 304 ff.; Goldin, *Culture of Sex*, p. 129, n.7; and Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings- und Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)*, Opera Sinologica 12 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), p. 273. The confusing (and perhaps garbled) discussion of *quan* in the “Daqu” 大取 chapter of *Mozi* appears to echo the stipulation that in practicing *quan* one may harm only oneself, not others: “Killing another person in order to preserve the world is not killing another person in order to benefit the world; killing oneself in order to preserve the world is killing oneself in order to benefit the world” 殺一人以存天下, 非殺一人以利天下也; 殺己以存天下, 是殺己以利天下. Text in Wu Yujiang 吳毓江, *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注, ed. Sun Qizhi 孫啓治 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993), j. 11, p. 611 (and see the commentary at 620, n. 21). This (tentative) interpretation is not in agreement with that of Alfred Forke, *Mé Ti des Sozialethikers und seiner Schüler philosophischen Werke*, Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin, Beiband zum Jahrgang 23/25 (Berlin: 1922), p. 504, who takes the passage to mean that killing another person is justified if it is the only way to save the state. On *quan* in the Mohist canons generally, see Zhang, *Xi Han Gongyang xue yanjiu*, pp. 120–21.

puted, but it is not very plausibly placed before the Han 漢 dynasty.⁵⁶ But *quan* has a more ancient pedigree: Mencius 孟子 (371–289 BC) invokes the term in a debate with an opponent named Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 (fl. 320–311 BC):

Chunyu Kun said: “Is it ritually correct that when males and females give and take, they are not to touch each other?”

Mencius said: “That is ritually correct.”

[Chunyu Kun] said: “If one’s sister-in-law is drowning, does one extend one’s hand to her?”

[Mencius] said: “One who does not extend [his hand] when his sister-in-law is drowning is a jackal or a wolf. It is ritually correct that when males and females give and take, they are not to touch each other, but to extend one’s hand to one’s sister-in-law when she is drowning – that is *quan*.”⁵⁷

Chunyu Kun, an able speaker whom later generations often misunderstood,⁵⁸ was hardly so barbaric as to suggest that one stand idly by while one’s sister-in-law is washed away merely because the ritual codes proscribe physical contact between a man and his brother’s wife. Rather, his purpose was to convey to Mencius that the world (*tianxia* 天下) is drowning, and that Mencius, who had a reputation as an admirer of ritual, might do well to abandon his devotion to such niceties and take some bold action.⁵⁹ But the prepotent philosophical significance of the exchange lies in Mencius’s reference to *quan*. As in the *Gongyang Commentary*, *quan*, or setting aside conventional moral dictates, is seen as the right course of action in cases of emergency, but such exceptions are permissible only in genuine cases of life or death. Touching one’s sister-in-law when she is *not* drowning is still unacceptable.⁶⁰

Elsewhere, however, Mencius declares that violations of ritual can be laudable even in cases where there is no immediate danger to one’s survival, as in his response when a certain Wan Zhang 萬章 asks why

⁵⁶ See the careful discussion of the transmission and dating of the text in Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan*, pp. 345–85. It is not surprising that, as an exegete in the Gongyang tradition, Dong Zhongshu applied the concept of *quan* in his legal opinions. See Zhang, *Xi Han Gongyang xue yanjiu*, pp. 159–209 and 310ff.; and Queen, *Chronicle to Canon*, pp. 152–58.

⁵⁷ *Mengzi zhengyi* 15, pp. 520–21. Compare the translation in D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (New York: Penguin, 1970), pp. 124–25.

⁵⁸ For one of the few recent studies of this figure, see Meng Xiangcai 孟祥才, *Guji dashi Chunyu Kun yu Dongfang Shuo* 滑稽大師淳于髡與東方朔 (Ji’nan: Shandong wenyi, 2004), pp. 2–41 (which, curiously, never mentions this discussion with Mencius).

⁵⁹ Mencius’s response: “If the world is drowning, I extend the Way to it; if my sister-in-law is drowning, I extend my hand to her. Sir, do you want me to extend my hand to the world?”

⁶⁰ Cf. Zhang, *Xi Han Gongyang xue yanjiu*, pp. 113–14.

the sage king Shun 舜, who is supposed to be the very embodiment of proper conduct, married without telling his parents:

Wan Zhang asked: “It is said in the *Odes*, ‘How does one take a wife? One must inform one’s father and mother.’ If we are to believe this saying, it appears to be unlike [the example] of Shun. Why did Shun marry without informing [his parents]?”

Mencius said: “If he had informed them, he would not have been able to marry. The domesticity of male and female is the greatest bond of humanity. If he had informed them, he would have cast aside the greatest bond of humanity by arousing odium in his father and mother. Thus he did not inform them.”⁶¹

Although marriage and procreation are, indeed, classified in Confucian philosophy among one’s primary responsibilities toward one’s parents and clan, neither Mencius nor Shun could pretend that this was really a matter of life or death. Shun’s parents – that is, his father and step-mother – were notoriously inimical, so the argument that they would not have permitted him to marry if he had informed them of his plans is not without merit. But neither Mencius nor Wan Zhang seems to have considered another alternative: could Shun not have simply waited for his parents to die before deciding to marry? Evidently marriage and procreation are so important that it is inadvisable even to postpone them.⁶² As a general rule, the right course of action may be to tell one’s parents before one gets married, but if one has good reason to believe that they will stand in the way, then one ought to proceed without them. Mencius does not dub Shun’s action *quan*, but the reasoning is the same as in his retort to Chunyu Kun: situational concerns may supersede general rules.⁶³

The trope presented here as the Primacy of the Situation sometimes overlaps with another classical theme for which I have elsewhere proposed the designation “dilemma”: a situation in which a single agent is bound by two competing principles, and cannot fulfill his or her obli-

⁶¹ *Mencius* 5A/2; *Mengzi zhengyi* 18, p. 618. Compare the translation in Lau, *Mencius*, p. 139; the phrase *yi dui fumu* 以慰父母 is taken there to mean that Shun would have felt hatred for his parents, but I think the opposite (taking *dui* as causative) is more plausible.

⁶² Compare *Mencius* 4A/26; *Mengzi zhengyi* 15, p. 532: “There are three ways to be unfilial, and not having progeny is the greatest of them. Shun took a wife without informing [his parents] out of consideration for the fact that he had no heir; the noble man holds this to be as though he had informed [his parents].”

⁶³ See 7A.39 for another example of the Primacy of the Situation in the *Mencius*: under one set of conditions, it is wrong to permit a king to cut short the mandated mourning period; under another set, it is reckoned as better than letting a prince dispense with the mourning period entirely. Also 7B/23: when still a commoner, Feng Fu 馮婦 may wrestle tigers with his bare hands, but once he has become a gentleman, the spectacle is laughable.

gation to one without violating the other.⁶⁴ Two examples illustrate the dynamic. *Stratagems of the Warring States* refers to an episode in which a servant-girl is told by her mistress, who is having an affair and wishes to remove the inconvenience of a husband, to carry a goblet of poisoned wine to her master. The servant-girl knows that the wine is deadly, and so she is faced with a classic Dilemma: she cannot disobey her mistress, but she can hardly connive at the murder of her master. Her solution is to drop the goblet deliberately.⁶⁵ The *Zuo Commentary* contains an anecdote with a similar tension, involving a woman who knows that her husband is conspiring to assassinate her father.⁶⁶ With their focus on normal moral duties that seem unquestionable, but are shown in extreme cases to be impossible to carry out, these examples are consanguine to the theme of the Primacy of the Situation. In many instances of Dilemma, one of two competing moral duties is judged to take precedence over the other. Both of the examples cited here are of this genus: the servant-girl clearly decides that not killing her master is, in the end, more urgent than obeying her mistress; and in the example from the *Zuo Commentary*, it is implied that the daughter made the right decision by valuing her debt to her father more highly than her debt to her husband.

The wide chronological and doctrinal range of the sources surveyed above testifies to the general esteem enjoyed by the Primacy of the Situation theme in classical Chinese culture. The *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Gongyang Commentary*, *Stratagems of the Warring States*, *Sunzi*, and *Han Feizi* all apply Primacy of the Situation arguments, but not in the same manner or with the same overarching worldview. *Han Feizi*, for example, seems to deny that there are any general valid laws applicable to speech or ethics, while *Mencius* and *Gongyang Commentary* agree that certain norms apply in most situations, but that these may be violated in extraordinary circumstances. Both of these camps, then, agree that the situation must always be considered, but otherwise they are by no means friendly to each other.

⁶⁴ Goldin, *After Confucius*, pp. 83–84.

⁶⁵ “Su Dai wei Yan Zhaowang” 蘇代謂燕昭王, *Zhanguo ce* 29, pp. 1073–74; Crump, *Chankuo Ts’u*, sect. 459.

⁶⁶ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, j. 1, p. 143 (Huan 15 [697 BC]). The father in question, incidentally, is the same Zhai Zhong that we encountered in the discussion of *quan* in *Gongyang zhuan*. Moreover, Zhai Zhong is central to yet another dilemma involving family relationships in the *Zuozhuan*: the famous dispute between lord Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公 (r. 743–701 BC) and his mother prompting the former’s vow not to see her again until they meet in the Yellow Springs. See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, j. 1, pp. 14–15 (Yin 隱 1 [722 BC]); and cf. Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, pp. 184–85, and idem, “Social Pleasures in Early Chinese Historiography and Philosophy,” in Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, ed., *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts*, Mnemosyne Supplement 191 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 5–6. Is there something peculiar about the figure of Zhai Zhong that results in his being used so frequently to illustrate moral dilemmas?

Moreover, it must be stressed that not all classical Chinese thinkers made equal use of this theme. One might read the entire *Mozi* 墨子 without encountering a hint of it. In that moral universe, absolutely everything is judged good or bad according to the “three standards” (*sanfa* 三法 or *sanbiao* 三表),⁶⁷ with no room for exceptions – even when these commitments lead Mohist philosophers to forensically costly positions, such as their opposition to music-making.⁶⁸ Finally, Xunzi 荀子 (fl. 3d c. BC), the third great Confucian, does not seem to be as receptive as Confucius or Mencius to Primacy of the Situation arguments.⁶⁹ For Xunzi, the *dao* is “constant” (*chang* 常);⁷⁰ while the right application of the constant *dao* may vary according to the circumstances, it is characteristic of Xunzi to demonstrate that the *dao* can still be profitably followed in any conceivable situation, whether it be one of warfare, government, or self-cultivation:⁷¹

⁶⁷ Cf. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 36–39. They are called *sanfa* in “Feiming zhong” 非命中 and “Feiming xia” 非命下, *Mozi jiaozhu* 9, pp. 413 and 423, respectively. The term *sanbiao* is used in “Feiming shang” 非命上, *Mozi jiaozhu* 9, pp. 400–1.

⁶⁸ Scott Cook has studied classical criticisms of this Mohist tenet in two publications: “The *Lüshi chungiu* and the Resolution of Philosophical Dissonance,” *HJAS* 62.2 (2002), pp. 341 ff.; and “Xun Zi on Ritual and Music,” *MS* 45 (1997), pp. 21 ff.

⁶⁹ The closest Xunzi comes to adopting the Primacy of the Situation strategy is in the “*Quanxue*” 勸學 chapter, for example: “Though the root of the angelica is fragrant, if it is steeped in urine, a noble man will not come near it, and a commoner will not wear it”; text in Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918), *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, ed. Shen Xiaohuan 沈嘯寰 and Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), j. 1, p. 6. In other words, the finest perfume can be nauseating in the wrong environment. But Xunzi’s larger argument is that we are capable of and responsible for creating our environment; consequently the exhortation to learning is held to be valid in *all* situations. It is also telling that Xunzi does not use the word *quan* in the sense of deliberately disobeying a general dictate.

⁷⁰ This type of thinking may be the intended butt of the “*Qishui*” 秋水 chapter of *Zhuangzi*. The self-satisfied Earl of the Yellow River 河伯 floats into the vast Northern Sea 北海, whereupon he discovers his own puniness (and regrets not having placed any trust in those who belittle the learning of Confucius). In the ensuing discussion, Ruo 若, the god of the Northern Sea, lists several standard Confucian heroes (including Yao, Shun, and Kings Tang and Wu), observing that certain men of latter days acted in the same way, but were destroyed. His observation: “The times determine whether one is noble or base; one cannot make constant principles [*chang*] 貴賤有時，未可以為常也” (*Zhuangzi jishi* 6B, p. 580).

The highlight of Primacy of the Situation rhetoric appears in the opening sect. of “*Shanmu*” 山木, *Zhuangzi jishi* 7A, pp. 667–68., where a goose is killed for supper precisely because it cannot cackle and is therefore useless. (Cackling geese served, before electricity, as a reliable burglar alarm.) Since Zhuangzi has just explained that a great tree in the mountains has been able to escape the hatchets of woodcutters because it is useless, his disciples use the example of the goose to question whether uselessness really is a better survival strategy than usefulness. Zhuangzi replies that the best policy of all is to be whatever the times call for: “It would be different if you could ascend the Way and its Power and float along, without praise, without criticism, at one moment a dragon, at another a snake, transforming with the times, and never willing to act in a single way 若夫乘道德而浮遊則不然，無譽無訾，一龍一蛇，與時俱化，而無肯專為。” Cf. John S. Major, “The Efficacy of Uselessness: A Chuang-tzu Motif,” *Philosophy East and West* 25.3 (1975), pp. 271 ff. (with a slightly different interpretation).

⁷¹ Cf. Goldin, *After Confucius*, pp. 52–53.; and idem, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1999), esp. pp. 47 ff.

The farmer has honed his skill at agriculture, but he cannot become the Master of Agriculture. The merchant has honed his skill at dealing in the marketplace, but he cannot become the Master of the Marketplace. The craftsman has honed his skill at making vessels, but he cannot become the Master of Vessels. Yet there are those who, though they do not know these three arts, can still be deputed to direct the three [aforementioned] offices. It is said: There are those who have honed their skill at the Way, and those who have honed their skill at things. Those who have honed their skill at things treat each separate thing as a separate thing 以物物; those who have honed their skill at the Way treat each separate thing as part of an all-inclusive thing 兼物物.⁷² Thus the noble man derives unity from the Way, and uses it as an aid in canvassing things. Since he derives unity from the Way, he is rectified; since he uses it as an aid in canvassing things, he is perspicacious; and since he advances perspicacious theories with a rectified will, he is the officer of all the myriad things.⁷³

But Xunzi was looking forward to the imperial age. Within two generations, Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 228-ca. 140 BC), one of the first Han ideologues, would declare that the Way is the same in all times and places, and that counselors who employ the rhetoric of the Primacy of the Situation do so only to advance their careers.⁷⁴

⁷² This sentence is inherently difficult to translate, inasmuch as the phrases *yi wu wu* 以物物 and *jian wu wu* 兼物物, despite their evident similarity, cannot be grammatically parallel. See the terse commentary of Liang Qixiong 梁啟雄, *Xunzi jianshi* 荀子柬釋 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936), 21, p. 301. The sense of *jian* as a comprehensive entity made up of diverse components is well illustrated in the technical definition of *ti* 體 found in “Jing shang” 經上, *Mozi jiaozhu* 10A, p. 468 (i.e. A 2): “A *ti* is a portion of the *jian*” 體, 分於兼也, with the “explication” (“Jingshuo shang” 經說上), “Like one part of a dyad, or a point on a line segment” 若二之一、尺之端也; see also “Jingshuo shang,” *Mozi jiaozhu* 10A, p. 474 (i.e. A 46): “A part is a *ti* of the *jian*” 偏也者, 兼之體也. (*Ti* and *jian* correspond to “part” and “whole” in Mohist logic.) Cf. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, p. 265.

⁷³ “Jiebi” 解蔽, *Xunzi jijie* 15, pp. 399–400. Cf. “Feixiang” 非相, *Xunzi jijie* 3, p. 82: “In antiquity and the present day, there is but one measure. Categories do not diverge; however much time has passed, principles are the same.” Compare the (substantially different) translation in John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1988–94), III, p. 106.

⁷⁴ “Shushi” 術事; text in Wang Liqi 王利器, *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校注, *Xinbian Zhuji jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), j. A, p. 43. Cf. also “Mingjie” 明誠, *Xinyu jiaozhu* j. B, 152: “The Way of Heaven does not change, but the way of mankind varies.” In the “Bianhuo” 辨 or chapter, Lu Jia rails against ministers who distort the truth by tailoring their speech to suit the circumstances, citing several examples in the same vein as *Zhanguo ce*, including (*Xinyu jiaozhu* j. A, p. 77) the story of Zengzi’s mother (see n. 20, above). Lu Jia’s heroes are “noble men who proceed by staying true to the Way; they know that they will surely meet with injustice and disgrace, but do not shirk” (*Xinyu jiaozhu* j. A, p. 73).