

## Death and Ritual Wailing in Early China: Around the Funeral of Lao Dan

The crucial importance of funerary rites in early China would seem to be reflected not only in an abundance of writings devoted to describing – frequently from an idealised standpoint not exempt of normative ends – the complex set of practices, speeches, attire and objects that accompany the proceedings of these ceremonies but also, and in particular, in the intense intellectual debates that these mortuary cults gave rise to in the literature of the Warring States era. In fact, one would do well to recall that one of the first controversies between different factions or doctrines, in this case, that between Confucians (*ru jia* 儒家) and Mohists (*mo jia* 墨家) revolves precisely around the appropriate period of mourning and the frugality or immoderation of the obsequies.<sup>1</sup> Within these disputes over funerary rites, alternative ways of understanding death and destiny, of organising society, and of conceiving interpersonal relations are also set out in such a way that the diatribes bring to light a good part of the social, political, religious and ethical problems that the divergent philosophical programmes are trying to resolve. From this standpoint, and bearing in mind the scope of the matters under discussion, it is not surprising, then, that funerals should frequently constitute an appropriate context from which the master can draw a lesson to impart to his disciples.

Both because of the opulence of these funerary scenes and the provocative nature of some of the attitudes of many of its main characters, the famous Warring States philosophical classic *Zhuangzi* unquestionably occupies, in this regard, an outstanding position in the

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<sup>1</sup> On this issue, see for example Mu-chou Poo, “Ideas Concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China,” *AM* 3d ser. 3.2 (1990): 25–62.

intellectual arena of ancient China. Death and funeral rites accomplish an important function in the inner logic of this text, to the point of constituting one of its major concerns.<sup>2</sup> One of my main aims in this article is precisely to analyse the meaning of this unseemly behaviour. To this end, I shall focus on a brief funeral scene at the end of chapter III of the *Zhuangzi* that has only rarely attracted the attention of scholars. For all its marginal situation, perhaps as a result of its position in the work – where most of the funeral scenes are to be found in chapter VI – this is, in my view, a basic fragment not only for reaching more thorough understanding of the way death is conceived in the *Zhuangzi*, but also for gaining a fuller perception of the intense debate that raged around funerary practices in early China. This seminal scene is described as follows:

When Lao Dan died, Qin Shi went to offer condolences. After emitting three moans he departed. A disciple asked him, “Weren’t you a colleague of this man?” “Yes,” he said. Then, the disciple interrogated him again, “And do you think this is an admissible way to express condolences?” “Indeed, it is. At first I thought it would be his kind of people there, but then I saw that this was not the case. When I entered there to express condolences, I saw the elders wailing as if for their sons, and the young wailing as if for their mothers. Among those whom he had brought together, surely they were some who wished not to speak but spoke anyway, who wished not to wail but wailed anyway. This implies to disdain Heaven and turn away from how things are, neglecting what one has received, which is precisely what the ancients called ‘the punishment for disdaining Heaven.’ When it was time to arrive, the master did just what the time required. When it was time to go, he went with the flow. Content in his time and finding his place in the flow, joy and sorrow have no way to penetrate. The ancients called that ‘Liberation from the Lord’s Dangle.’<sup>3</sup> 老聃死，秦失弔之，三號而出。弟子曰：「非夫子之友邪？」曰：「然。」「然則弔焉若此，可乎？」曰：「然。始也吾以爲其人也，而今非也。向吾入而弔焉，有老者哭之，如哭其子；少者哭之，如哭其母。彼其所

<sup>2</sup> Among the most recent studies in this regard, one should mention, for example: Xu Keqian 徐克謙, *Zhuangzi zhexue xintan* 莊子哲學新探 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), pp. 185–92; Romain Graziani, *Fictions philosophiques du Tchouang-tseu* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), pp. 143–226; Amy Olberding, “Sorrow and the Sage: Grief in the Zhuangzi,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6 (2007): 339–59; Albert Galvany, “Distorting the Rule of Seriousness: Laughter, Death and Friendship in the Zhuangzi,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 8 (2009): 49–59.

<sup>3</sup> “Yang sheng zhu” 養生主, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), p. 127.

以會之，必有不蘄言而言，不蘄哭而哭者。是遁天倍情，忘其所受，古者謂之遁天之刑。適來，夫子時也；適去，夫子順也。安時而處順，哀樂不能入也，古者謂是帝之縣解。」

## A DEAD MAN AND A MISSING MAN

After learning about the death of Lao Dan 老聃, an individual named Qin Shi 秦失, presumably a colleague of the latter, enters his house in order to participate in the burial rites and express his condolences. At this point it makes sense to reflect on the name used in the *Zhuangzi*, to refer to this personage. It is, presumably, a fictitious name invented with the aim of offering several clues to reveal the meaning and extent of the anecdote, as we shall see, rather than merely engaging in wordplay. The procedure is by no means strange in pre-imperial literature and is prevalent in the *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, it was common practice at this time to refer to people by names, frequently posthumous, which may be interpreted as evocative epithets expressing a judgement on an individual's behaviour or features.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the name of the character created by Zhuangzi initially refers to the death, disappearance, or the loss of something which belonged to a person since the term *shi* 失, means "to lose," "mislay," but also "to die," "to pass away" and consequently a clear link may be established with the narrative and thematic nucleus of the story. However, the name of this individual acquires yet another new tone, rich in nuance and meaning when considered in the light of the other character mentioned in the anecdote: Lao Dan 老聃. This is because, as stated in the biographical section which Sima Qian dedicated to him in the *Shiji* 史記, Lao Dan, who up until then worked as an archivist (*shi* 史) in the court of the Zhou 周, decided to leave this place and go on a trip to the West, after witnessing the decline of the dynasty. When he reached a border pass and forced by the customs officer Yin Xi 尹喜, he would have put his

<sup>4</sup> On this topic, see the contributions by Zhou Fagao 周法高, *Zhou Qin mingzi jiegou huishi* 周秦名字解詁彙釋 (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu, 1958); Jens O. Petersen, "What's in a Name? On the Sources concerning Sun Wu," *AM* 3d ser. 5.1 (1992): 1-31; Paul R. Goldin, "Personal Names in Early China: A Research Note," *JAS* 120.1 (2000): 77-81; and Wolfgang Behr, "What's in a Name, Again? Über Schall und Rauch in der antikchinesischen Personennamengebung," in R. Altenburger, M. Lehnert & A. Riemenschnitter, eds., *Dem Text ein Freund. Erkundungen des chinesischen Altertums Robert H. Gassmann gewidmet* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 15-38. The name of Lao Dan is, in fact, an excellent example of such a widespread custom. For the ancients, large drooping ears which, as we find in the meaning of the homophonous terms 聃, 聃, and 儻, were correlated with longevity. Hence all these three names credited to Laozi (Lao Dan 老聃, Lao Dan 老聃, and Lao Dan 老儻) denote an extremely old and long-lived person. See Qian Mu 錢穆, "Laozi za bian 老子雜辨," in his *Xian Qin zhuzi xinian* 先秦諸子繫年 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002), pp. 235-36.

thoughts into writing and delivered them to the latter, which would explain the origin of the text traditionally attributed to him, the *Laozi*. Thenceforth, as Sima Qian informs us, nobody knew anything more about him; his traces fade away and are lost. The account in the *Shiji* does not mention any explicit location for this border pass but commentators, following a fragment from the *Lie xian zhuan* 列仙傳, identified this place as situated in the state of Qin.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in a recent essay, Zhang Songhui 張松輝 has defended, with convincing arguments based on the analysis of early written sources, the hypothesis that Lao Dan was born in the state of Qin and, after abandoning his official task at the court of Zhou, returned to Qin in order to die in his natal region.<sup>6</sup> The literal significance of the name Qin Shi, “disappeared in Qin,” therefore refers to these biographical elements, be they real or not, and with a humorous flourish, reasserts an identity link, a curious connection between the two personages.

Following these initial onomastic investigations, we should now turn again to the character whose death leads to the anecdote in the *Zhuangzi*. Addressing the figure of Lao Dan is no easy task. The brief biographical piece written by Sima Qian in his work *Shiji* contains hardly any reliable historical data. In accordance with what the eminent historian has to say, he would have worked for some time, as mentioned above, as an archivist in the court of the Zhou, and it is here that he would have met up with Confucius as an expert in ritual matters.<sup>7</sup> Confucius also appears as a disciple of Lao Dan in several passages of the *Zhuangzi*,<sup>8</sup> and although we have no textual source clearly prior to the *Zhuangzi* to testify to the veracity of this encounter and their master-disciple relationship, the fact is that this connection already appears as consolidated in the tradition by the end of the Warring States era.<sup>9</sup> However, it is mainly in the *Liji* 禮記 where, within a clearly Confucian context, the figure of Lao Dan acquires several attributes that are relevant to the study of our anecdote.

Three episodes of the *Liji* present Lao Dan as an authority to whom Confucius himself refers when confronting complex questions on rituals. In the first episode, Zengzi 曾子, a disciple of Confucius and one

<sup>5</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 63, p. 2141.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang Songhui 張松輝, *Zhuangzi yiyi kaobian* 莊子疑義考辨 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 56–65.

<sup>7</sup> Among whose Confucius treated with reverence, Sima Qian cites a certain Laozi from Zhou: *Shiji*, 67, p. 2186.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Zhuangzi jishi* 12, p. 427; 14, pp. 516–17 and p. 522; 21, p. 711.

<sup>9</sup> The *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 explicitly states that Confucius learned from Lao Dan. Also

of the most outstanding representatives of the most rigid version of the ritual rigors of the Confucian school, interrogates Confucius about how to carry out funeral rites when it concerns the death of a child and the family cemetery is at a great distance from the household. Confucius considers that under these circumstances the child should be dressed in funeral attire and placed in the coffin before the procession heads towards the cemetery. He also explains the origin of this practice, which in its day had been communicated to him by Lao Dan through an anecdote.<sup>10</sup> In the second episode, again it is Zengzi who asks him for a practical solution to the problem of what to do if there is a solar eclipse during the funeral procession towards the chosen burial site. To resolve this matter in keeping with what is stipulated by the rite, Confucius relates a case that is almost identical to that presented by Zengzi, an experience he shared with Lao Dan himself. Here, Lao Dan addressed Confucius by his personal name, Qiu 丘, which means that Confucius was a minor. Lao Dan then ordered that the funeral procession should halt, that the coffin should be placed on the right hand side of the path, and that the liturgical wailing should cease until the eclipse was over.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in the third example, it is another disciple, Zi Xia 子夏, who asks Confucius for guidance as to whether continuing with military matters, i.e. not abstaining from participating in bellicose conflicts during the three-year mourning period, should be considered contrary to the rites. Confucius resolves the question by once again appealing to Lao Dan's authority. The latter cites the case of the Duke Bo Qin 伯禽 from the state of Lu, who had good reasons to continue the war despite being in mourning for the death of his mother, but who then condemns all of those who, in his opinion, persevere in military matters whilst in mourning because they are solely moved by their quest for personal gain.<sup>12</sup>

In these three episodes contained in the *Liji*, Confucius uses the prestige conferred on Lao Dan as a specialist in ritual matters to resolve the doubts and conflicts that some of his own disciples, such as Zengzi and Zi Xia, have about funeral procedures and ceremonies. From this standpoint, it is plausible to think that the anecdote in the *Zhuangzi*

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the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 mentions Lao Dan as one of the teachers of Confucius; see A. C. Graham, "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan," in L. Kohn and M. LaFargue, eds., *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-te-ching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 23-40.

<sup>10</sup> "Zengzi wen" 曾子問, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p. 547.

<sup>11</sup> "Zengzi wen" 曾子問, *Liji jijie*, pp. 545-55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

about the death of Lao Dan acutely exploits and with decidedly shocking ends, a tradition that was already prevalent at the time, this consisting in considering this person as an expert on funerary ceremonies and closely linked to the Confucian tradition.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the *Zhuangzi's* passage would cover a ceremonial, liturgical dilemma, arising during the mourning rites of Lao Dan who, despite having become the spokesman of critics of the strictest and most severe ritual conventionalism in many passages of the *Zhuangzi*, is presented in the Confucian tradition as an inured expert in mortuary ceremonies.

#### PROGNOSTICATING EMOTIONS THROUGH THE SOUNDS OF SORROW

Having examined these two personages, Qin Shi and Lao Dan, we should now briefly look at the analysis of the circumstances surrounding their encounter. The text explicitly states it: the anecdote is framed within a funeral context arising from the death of Lao Dan. In fact, the action takes place when, informed about the death of his colleague, Qin Shi goes to the presentation of condolences (*diao* 弔), one of the essential stages, together with the procession of the deceased (*song zang* 送葬), which distinguish the rituals of antiquity within the inner workings of death ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> The term *diao* outlines a set of complex and variable practices including greetings, prostrations, genuflexions, laments, offerings, gifts and donations, all of which depend on the social strata in which they occur, plus distinctions of age, sex or hierarchical range of participants. The expression of condolences may take place before and after the body has been put into the coffin,<sup>15</sup> and their presentation, at least according to what is explained about this

<sup>13</sup> I follow the hypothesis offered by Wang E 王鏞 concerning the date of composition as well as the authenticity of the sections of the *Liji*. According to his analysis, the “Zengzi wen 曾子問” section where we find the anecdotes about Lao Dan would be composed by the end of the Spring and Autumn era or the beginning of the Warring States period: Wang E, *Liji cheng shu kao* 禮記成書考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 52–57. On the consistent link between the *Laozi* and the portrait of Lao Dan in the Zengzi wen section of the *Liji*, see Zhang Dainian 張岱年, “Lun Laozi zai zhhexueshi shang de diwei 論老子在哲學史上的地位,” *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化 1 (1992): 74–82, esp. 75.

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive description of funerary ceremonies as they are depicted in the most important ritual treatises of early China, see Zhang Jingming 章景明, *Xian Qin sangfu zhidu kao* 先秦喪服制度考 (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua, 1972); Li Yujie 李玉潔, *Xian Qin sangzang zhidu yanjiu* 先秦喪葬制度研究 (Zhengzhou: Zhengzhou guji, 1991), pp. 97–137; Chen Rongguo 陳戎國, *Xian Qin lizhi yanjiu* 先秦禮制研究 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), pp. 366–77; Qian Xuan 錢玄, *San li tonglun* 三禮通論 (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue, 1996), pp. 597–616.

<sup>15</sup> According to the *Zuozhuan*, the expression of condolences was a socially less relevant phase in funerary rituals than the procession of the deceased since, as it is stated in this writ-

ceremony in the section “Tan gong 檀弓” of the *Liji*, denotes a highly ritualised protocol, subject to a series of principles which, among other things, not only determines the distance and in what circumstances it is inappropriate to travel to express the condolences,<sup>16</sup> but also sanctions many actions which the participants in these ceremonies must avoid during this period of time.<sup>17</sup>

Within this constellation of practices associated with funerary rites in ancient China, laments (*ku* 哭) doubtless occupy a central position.<sup>18</sup> Far from being a spontaneous, irrepressible and uncontrollable response suggesting the inner disintegration of the individual, the emitting of laments and sobbing in mournful situations marked by death should rather be interpreted as a wholly deliberate and purposive act.<sup>19</sup> Wailing, therefore, is included in a factual, performatory dimension, which, in turn, comes under the heading of a type of action that should be defined as ritual to the extent that, in keeping with the description offered by the anthropologist Raymond Firth, it complies with the following features: it follows patterned routines; provides a system of signs that conveys other than overt messages; it is sanctioned by strong expressions of moral approval; and has adaptational value in facilitating social relations.<sup>20</sup> Laments, like other emotional manifestations being acted out in this ritual context, must be considered as essential elements of a perfectly regulated system of communication and as also occupying a central position in social interaction and ceremonial activities. From this standpoint, they constitute a culturally choreographed act and are part of a refined system of communication. As we shall have

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ten source, the rank of the emissaries participating in the former ceremony is lower than the rank of those who participate in the latter: Yang Bojun 楊柏峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), Zhao 昭 3, pp. 1232–33.

<sup>16</sup> “A wife does not cross her region for presenting condolences” 婦人不越疆而弔人; “Someone who is in his fifties and lacks a carriage does not cross his region for presenting condolences” 五十無車者·不越疆而弔人: “Tan gong xia 檀弓下,” *Liji jijie*, p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> “The day in which condolences have been presented do not drink neither alcohol or eat meat” 行弔之日不飲酒食肉焉; “The day in which condolences have been presented, do not play music” 弔於人·是日不樂: “Tan gong xia 檀弓下,” *Liji jijie*, p. 245.

<sup>18</sup> For an etymological study of the terms related with the expression of sorrow in ancient China, see Wolfgang Behr, “Etymologische Notizen zum Wortfeld ‘Lachen’ und ‘Weinen’ im Altchinesischen,” in N. August, S. Justin, B. Dieter, eds., *Überraschendes Lachen, gefodertes Weinen: Gefühle und Prozesse, Kulturen und Epochen in Vergleich* (Wien: Böhlau, 2009), pp. 402–46.

<sup>19</sup> See Christopher Harbsmeier, “Weeping and Wailing in Ancient China,” in H. Eifring, ed., *Minds and Mentalities in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1999), pp. 317–422.

<sup>20</sup> R. Firth, “Verbal and Bodily Rituals of Greeting and Parting,” in J. S. La Fontaine, ed., *The Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A. I. Richards* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), pp. 1–38.

occasion to confirm below, this clamouring and this wailing are subject to a strict and complex process of codification that determines, right down to the finest details, the place, the timing and the ways in which such expressions of pain should be proffered. The intonations and inflections of ritual laments even vary according the stage or phase of the funeral ceremony in which they are being produced:

The wailing of someone wearing sackcloth for his father seems to go forth without returning; that of someone wearing sackcloth for a mother seems to go forth and return; in the mourning of nine months, after the first burst there are three quavers in it, and then it seems to die away; in the mourning of five and three months, an ordinary wailing is enough. These are the manifestations of sorrow in the voice and the modulated sounds.<sup>21</sup> 斬衰之哭，若往而不反；齊衰之哭，若往而反；大功之哭，三曲而偯；小功緦麻，哀容可也。此哀之發於聲音者也。

The term *ku* 哭, which denotes the laments and wails that participants in funerary rites must offer in the course of the obsequies, should therefore not be understood as a non-deliberate emotional reaction but rather as a ritual action in which the subject who is emitting the groans retains a significant degree of control over his own faculties. As stated in this passage of *Liji*, it is expected that participants should be capable of making plaintive sounds endowed with special characteristics according to the phase of mourning and the type of ceremony taking place. Sobs are never homogenous but in their deployment acquire a singular tonality and distinct nuances. According to this passage, laments are an expression of the emotive character of the individual and, in this case, of the affliction (*ai* 哀); they translate with the power of a language unmediated by discourse, even if it is highly delineated and codified, the different forms and degrees of agitation an individual nurtures during the period of mourning; and ideally, at least, they constitute a refined manifestation of the feelings that are churning within. Precisely to the extent that these regulated forms of filtered keening express the inner palpitations of the individual by way of vocal sounds and sonorous modulation (*sheng yin* 聲音), it is possible to trace a direct link with song or music.

<sup>21</sup> “Jian zhuan” 間傳, *Liji jijie*, p. 1365. In this sense, one should also mention another fragment of the *Liji* in which is detailed a series of prohibitions referring to the participation of young people or adolescents in funerary rites and where it is held that their laments should not be prolonged 童子哭不偯: “Zha ji xia” 雜記下, *Liji jijie*, p. 1108.

As to modulated sounds: they arise as incipient in the heart-mind of men; the emotions move inside men, and then they are formed into vocal sounds. When vocal sounds are worked into a formal art, they then finally can be called modulated sounds.<sup>22</sup> 凡音者，生人心者也。情動於中，故形於聲。聲成文，謂之音。

As is repeatedly sustained in a considerable part of early China's political and philosophical literature, music can come to reveal, at least to somebody with a trained and sensitive ear, modalities and hues, the psychological and moral qualities of composers, performers and even countries. One of the most celebrated cases apropos of this expressive capacity of music is the anecdote from the *Zuo zhuan* concerning the ceremonial visit of Duke Zha 公子札 of Wu to Duke Xiang 襄公 of Lu in 543 BC and the assessment by the former of the moral climate in all of the states after carefully listening to their different music styles and airs.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, one might mention the story about Confucius referred to in the *Shiji* and contained in the biographical section devoted to him by Sima Qian. In this account, Confucius appears immersed in a process of training in the art of playing the zither under the supervision of a music master called Xiangzi 襄子. Although his teacher persistently urges him to keep progressing with new melodies, Confucius declines the invitation and stubbornly keeps practising the same piece since, as he confesses, he has not yet grasped the reason for this composition or been able to identify the composer. Finally, after some time, once he has managed to saturate himself and penetrate the most subtle de-

<sup>22</sup> "Yueji" 樂記, *Liji jijie*, p. 978. On the difference between *sheng* 聲, as merely a matter of giving external expression to simple emotional states and *yin* 音, when sounds have formed patterns and achieved a degree of order, see the following fragment from the Yueji section: "In general terms, modulated sounds (*yin*) arise in the hearts of men. Emotion is stirred within and thus takes shape in vocal sounds (*sheng*). When vocal sound are patterned (*wen* 文), it is called modulated sounds (*yin*)". (*Liji jijie*, p. 984). As Scott Cook states: "The term used to denote such unqualified sounds is *sheng*, which, in early texts, was used most often to describe vocal sounds, ranging from human cries and sobs to bird chirpings, animal howls, and the like. When, however, such sounds are heard in conjunction of other sounds, there is potential for musically-meaningful relationships to occur [...]. It is only when sound take on order in association with other sounds that we may speak of music, *yin*. *Sheng* are thus the potential building blocks of music, whereas *yin* are either the component sound of music in which order is already present, or else the sum-total of all such ordered sounds, the music itself." (S. Cook, "Unity and Diversity in the Musical Thought of Warring States China," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1995, p. 51). On this issue, see also Erica Brindley, "Music, Cosmos, and the Development of Psychology in Early China," *TPQ2* (2006): 1-49.

<sup>23</sup> *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, Xiang 襄 29, pp. 1161-66. For an analysis of this anecdote, see Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1982), pp. 21-25. See also the passage from the *Liezi* 列子 concerning Bo Ya 伯牙, a zither player, and Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期, an especially gifted listener (*ting* 聽), where the latter is able to divine the thoughts of the former by deciphering the sounds he produced on his musical instrument: Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Taipei: Zhong zheng shuju, 1976), j. 5, p. 178.

tails of the piece, Confucius states, “This is the work of a man whose thoughts are deep and serious, who is able to see far ahead and has a calm consciousness. I see him now. He is dark and tall, with far-seeing eyes that seem to command over all the countries. Who but King Wen could have composed this music!” Then, Xiangzi rose from his mat and bowed as he confirmed: “Yes, this is indeed the piece for zither by King Wen.”<sup>24</sup>

Hence, given that wailing appears as a faithful reflection of the real state of feelings and emotions through vocal and modulated sounds, appropriate scrutiny of the nuances, variations and tones of the laments may reveal, as is the case of musical pieces, the causes of our agitation and, even the quality of our inner state. An experienced observer, skilled in the interpretation of the slightest ritual gestures and bodily signs may, from studying this audible effect, ponder the causes which produced it. Thus we find Confucius together with his favourite disciple Yan Hui 顏回, in an anecdote which testifies to the skill of the latter in deciphering the precise motives hidden behind an individual’s wailing, from observation of their groans and moans:

Confucius was in the state of Wei. Having risen at dawn and in the company of Yan Hui, he heard a wailing which expressed great affliction. The Master said, “Hui, do you know the reason for this wailing?” and the latter responded, “As far as I understand, the sound of this wailing is not just because of the death of a loved one for there is also the sound of a recent separation.” Confucius then asked, “How can you know that?” And Yan Hui replied, “I have frequently observed the Heng Mountain birds. When their feathers have grown, the chicks abandon the nest to fly with their own wings over the vast ocean and the mothers, before being separated from them forever, made a mournful squawking sound for a moment. The type of sound emitted in this wailing we have just heard reminds me of those sorrowful songs and it made me think of something which is leaving and is not going to return.” So, Confucius sent somebody to ask the man why he was wailing and this is what the emissary recounted: “The father of this man has died and being from a poor family he has been forced to sell his own son in order to afford the funerary ceremonies.”<sup>25</sup> 孔子在衛，昧旦晨興，顏回侍側，聞哭者之聲甚哀。子曰：「回，汝知此何

<sup>24</sup> Sima Qian, *Shiji*, j. 48, p. 1925.

<sup>25</sup> Chen Shike 陳士珂, *Kongzi jiayu shu zheng* 孔子家語疏證 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1980), j. 5, p. 125.

所哭乎？」對曰：「回以此哭聲非但爲死者而已，又有生離別者也。」子曰：「何以知之？」對曰：「回聞桓山之鳥，生四子焉，羽翼既成，將分于四海，其母悲鳴而送之，哀聲有似於此，謂其往而不返也，回竊以音類知之。」孔子使人問哭者，果曰：「父死家貧，賣子以葬，與之長決。」

This is not the only example in which Confucius or his disciples reveal their skill at deciphering commotion and sobbing. In a passage of the *Liji* we find Confucius, this time in the company of Zi Lu, walking on Tai Mountain. Hearing the heart-rending wailing of a woman before a grave, Zi Lu is able to divine the exact cause of the emotions that have given rise to them. Hence, after being questioned about this, the woman declares that her husband's father, her husband, and her son all lost their lives, taken by tigers, in this very place.<sup>26</sup> The understanding and explaining of sounds emitted during wailing therefore implies, as is apparent from these anecdotes, a direct correlation between emotion and expression, between inner feeling and outer manifestation. In this same sense, it is also worth mentioning a famous episode that appears, with critical purposes, in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 in which Zi Chan 子產 is the main figure. In this tale, to the surprise of everyone, Zi Chan on hearing the sobbing of a woman who has just become a widow and who is wailing over the recent death of her husband orders that she be arrested and interrogated. The woman then confesses that she has murdered her husband. The companions of Zi Chan, amazed at such discernment, ask him how he managed to discover this criminal action. Zi Chan elucidates the mystery by declaring that the wailing of the widow did not express sorrow or sadness for the loss of a loved one but fear 哭已死不哀而懼.<sup>27</sup> It is not surprising if this anecdote is framed within the context of a criminal investigation. In accordance with what the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg calls conjectural paradigm, the gesture of Zi Chan would come under the heading of comprehension of significant detail, the scrutiny of the subtle signs which pertain to clairvoyant men, just as they appear described in political and philosophical literature of ancient China.<sup>28</sup> This type of intelligence does not so much project towards the future as the past; instead of anticipating what will happen tomorrow, the events of yesterday are disentangled through deductive procedures. However, this skill of penetrating into

<sup>26</sup> "Tan Gong xia" 檀弓下, *Liji jijie*, p. 292.

<sup>27</sup> "Nan san" 難三, Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu* 韓非子新校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), p. 913.

<sup>28</sup> C. Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 96-125. For a com-

other peoples' emotions, and even conjecturing on the real motive for these laments through examination of the voice patterns or through the scrutiny of some other subtle signs, requires one condition: that the stirrings we feel in our innermost beings are sincere.

What is sincere inside us becomes manifest outside us. By means of the manifest is predicted what is hidden; by means of the tiny is predicted what is large; by means of the sounds is located the vital disposition.<sup>29</sup> 誠在其中，此見於外；以其見占其隱，以其細占其大，以其聲處其氣。

What is sincere inside us will necessarily become manifest outside us. By means of the sounds the substance is located. The vital energy produces things and things produce sounds. Sounds can be firm or weak, clear or murky, pleasant or repellent. Reactions are deployed through the sounds.<sup>30</sup> 誠在其中，必見諸外，以其聲，處其實，氣初生物，物生有聲，聲有剛柔，清濁好惡，咸發于聲。

#### FROM CODIFIED WAILING TO SPONTANEOUS WEEPING

Success in deciphering and judging laments from crying therefore depends on the sincerity of the emotions which stir us up inside. According to this theory, the intensity of the pain, sorrow, impotence, regret or anxiety genuinely coursing through us is externally evident, in an overflow leading someone who knows how to interpret it to discover the exact causes that set off the tears. If Zi Chan manages to reveal the crime committed by the querulous widow in the previous anecdote it is because her wailing, which is genuine enough, does not express affliction but fear. The normal situation within a funerary context is that the person who is affected by the disappearance of a loved one is torn apart and pierced through by sorrow. Through skilful scrutiny of these tears, Zi Chan detects her lack of affliction and this is, in itself, a revelation since, according to traditional beliefs and assumptions, not harbouring sadness when in mourning is incomprehensible. Confucius himself explicitly states that he would not tolerate the idea of a funeral where

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prehensive analysis of the use and abuse of this conjectural intelligence in ancient China, see Jean Levi, "Pratique divinatoire, conjectures et critique rationaliste à l'époque des Royaumes Combattants," *Extrême-Orient Extrême Occident* 21 (1999): 67-77.

<sup>29</sup> Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍, *Da Dai Liji jiegou* 大戴禮記解詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), j. 72, p. 190. For a similar statement, see also: Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoyi* 淮南子校譯 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1989), j. 6, p. 632.

<sup>30</sup> Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, *Yi Zhou shu hui jiao ji zhu* 逸周書彙校集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), j. 58, p. 774-75.

there is no affliction.<sup>31</sup> It is even preferable to err on the side of excess when manifesting this pain, violating the decorum imposed by the ritual forms, rather than falling short of such an expression.<sup>32</sup> Funerary rites require of participants, and especially those who are directly affected by the death, that they proclaim their grief by means of appropriate acts, gestures, and behaviour. It is essential to fulfil the expectations of the community through ritually acceptable movements and bodily patterns. One should thus mention the words attributed to Confucius in the *Mengzi* where, on the occasion of the funeral ceremonies for a monarch, the Master states that the heir should be capable of making his sadness over his loss visible on his face, and his affliction manifest in his laments and sobbing, in such a way that people participating in the presentation of condolences are well satisfied 顏色之戚，哭泣之哀，弔者大悅。<sup>33</sup> In this context, laments and expressions of sorrow are endowed with the faculty of influencing and transforming the practices of an entire state, or at least this is the capacity attributed to the wailing proffered by the widows of Hua Zhou 華周 and Qi Liang 杞梁 in one passage of the *Mengzi*: “The wives of Hua Zhou and Qi Liang excelled at weeping for their husbands 善哭其夫 and transformed the customs of the state. What one possesses on the inside, must take a form on the outside.”<sup>34</sup> It is not therefore strange if the absence of affliction in an individual after the death of a loved one is invariably considered as an ominous sign which often means that this individual is doomed to an ill-fated destiny.

In the *Zuozhuan* we find three revealing episodes of this nature. In the first, after the death of Duke Ding of Wei 衛定公, his chief wife, after

<sup>31</sup> “The Master said: ‘Holding high office without generosity, performing rituals without reverence, being in mourning without sorrow 臨喪不哀, how can I bear to see these things?’” (*Lunyu* III.26; *Lunyu jishi*, j. 6, p. 224).

<sup>32</sup> See *Lunyu* III.4 (*Lunyu jishi*, j. 5, pp. 143–45) and XIX.14 (*Lunyu jishi*, j. 38, p. 1325); see also *Liji jijie*, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> “Teng Wen gong shang” 滕文公上, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 (Taipei: Shijie, 1974), p. 332. The term *ku* 哭 frequently appeared linked with the term *qi* 泣, which is composed with the radical for water and, consequently, could mean to weep or to shed tears. Nevertheless, the binomial *ku qi* 哭泣 denotes, in ancient literature, a sonorous action, as one sees, for example in the *Xunzi*: “Intoning songs and ostensibly laughing, proffering laments (*ku qi* 哭泣) and uttering groans are flamboyant or harmful ways of expressing, by means of vocal sounds and sonorous modulations (*sheng yin* 聲音), the emotions of happiness and sadness.” (“Li lun” 禮論, Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Taipei: Shijie, 1974), p. 364); “The apparel of mourning and grief, along with the sounds of the laments 哭泣之聲, indicate the affliction of the heart” (“Yue lun” 樂論, *Xunzi jijie*, p. 381).

<sup>34</sup> “Gaozi xia” 高子下, *Mengzi zhengyi*, p. 831. For an interpretation of the anecdotes about these two women, see Paul R. Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 67–68.

crying over this loss and confirming with horror that the duke's heir, son of a secondary wife, expresses not the least affliction, predicts a disastrous future not only for the heir but also for the whole kingdom.<sup>35</sup> In the second, Daozi 悼子, whose name means ironically "mourner," shows no signs of sorrow when his father, Shi Gongzi 石共子, dies and one of the ministers of the state of Wei therefore predicts that the heir will not be able to continue the lineage.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, in the third episode, an adviser of the state of Lu 魯 judges that the heir who is the prince is not qualified to take over the reins of the nation since, not only has he been incapable of expressing affliction after the death of his father but his demeanour has even been deemed jovial during the funeral rites, which indicates that he is someone with no sense of proportion 不度.<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, it is not always easy to know whether genuine emotion lies behind the wailings, however sonorous they may be. The body is at once a screen that hides what is authentic and an autonomous entity that is able to disclose the secrets of inner life. In this sense it is worth asking oneself if these sorrowful expressions are always transparent or if, on the contrary, on certain occasions they might be opaque. Would Zi Chan have been able to decipher the meaning of the murder if the widow's laments had been feigned? We should not forget that moans may also be pretence, just as feelings behind them may often be insincere. Wailing does not exclude imposture, falsification, swindle. Thus despite the deductive feat which Chinese literary tradition attributes to sages in their deciphering the causes of laments, knowing whether the person who is wailing or acting out some other type of bodily expression really feels the emotion from which they normally arise has been, and continues to be, an enigma. The situation becomes even more complicated in the case of mortuary ceremonies since in this particular context, in many ancient and modern societies, wailing is not just an act tolerated by the people closest to the deceased but rather a type of requirement demanded by custom of all the individuals participating in the funeral and one that adheres to very precise regulations which determine, among other things, the times when it is right to wail and the times when, during this selfsame ceremony, it must abruptly cease.<sup>38</sup> This is of course the case of many of the gestures

<sup>35</sup> *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Cheng 成 14, p. 870.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Xiang 襄 19, p. 1051.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Xiang 襄 31, p. 1185.

<sup>38</sup> On this issue, see Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death. The Anthropology of the Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 43–61.

during funerals in ancient China. In general terms, according to the most important ritual treatises of the time, both the material contributions, in the form of gifts and offerings, with which the visitors fête the relatives of the deceased and the sentimental contributions, i.e. bodily expressions of bereavement expressed by the participants during the burial, such as the breast-beating (*pi* 辟) or leaping (*yong* 踊), should be graded (*jie* 節), measured (*suan* 算), tempered (*wen* 文), converted into a type of conventional language which they all use and understand.<sup>39</sup> This same regulating vocation applies to wailing. Thus, the main ritual repertoires of ancient China combine a multitude of indications about when and where it is appropriate to wail, when laments should start and how long they should last, who should do it and who is exonerated, on what occasions moans should be stopped, when these expressions of sorrow should finally cease or even under what circumstances they should not take place.<sup>40</sup>

Among the many examples governing the practice of ritual wailing, it is first worth mentioning a passage from the *Liji* in which Confucius, hearing about the death of someone called Bo Gao 伯高, asks himself which is the ideal place to wail for him, bearing in mind the nature of their relationship. Accordingly, and in order to resolve this ritual dilemma, a complete list of the places where it is appropriate to wail for the death of a person is given, depending on his rank and the type of relationship that unites them: if the deceased was a brother, the wailing should take place in the ancestral temple; if it was a friend of one's father, opposite the great door of the ancestral temple; if it was a teacher, in his private lodging; if it was a friend, opposite the main door of their private lodgings; and if it were only an acquaintance, the laments should take place in the countryside.<sup>41</sup> Depending on the social status of the deceased, the duration of the funerary laments is structured: nine days in the case of the deceased being the Son of Heaven, seven days if it is a feudal lord, five days if it is a minister, and three days if it is the death of a simple official.<sup>42</sup> In the same sense, it is worth mentioning the case of Jing Jiang 敬姜, who, as Confucius states, should be

<sup>39</sup> "Tan gong xia" 檀弓下, *Liji jijie*, pp. 252, 253, 256. On the funerary rituals as a sort of common codified language, see the study by Marcel Granet, "Le langage de la douleur d'après le rituel funéraire de la Chine classique," *Journal de Psychologie* 19 (1922): 97-118, reprinted in *Études sociologiques sur la Chine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), pp. 221-42.

<sup>40</sup> According to a fragment from the *Xunzi*, in the funerary ceremonies for punished criminals there is no place for weeping or wailing: "Li lun 禮論," *Xunzi jijie*, p. 361.

<sup>41</sup> "Tan gong shang" 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, p. 190.

<sup>42</sup> "Ben sang" 奔喪, *Liji jijie*, p. 1346.

considered as someone who understood the rites since, after the death of her spouse she only wailed during the day whilst when her son died, she wailed during the night.<sup>43</sup> There even exist regulations which establish with exactitude the moment and conditions in which laments must abruptly stop or, even, the circumstances in which wailing must not take place.<sup>44</sup> Thus, for example, Confucius does not hesitate to reprimand his own son, Bo Yu 伯魚, on considering that his wailing for his mother is excessive, the stipulated period of time for this type of cases having expired.<sup>45</sup> As we have already stated, wailing is subjected to the same logic of ritual coding as the rest of actions and gesticulations which take place throughout funerary ceremonies. Once again, this idea is expressed by Confucius in another passage belonging to the *Liji*:

A man from the district of Bian had lost his mother and was crying over her death like a child. Confucius said, "Pain must be expressed as pain, but his example is difficult to follow. The rite must be conveyed, it must be able to continue. For this reason, wailing and leaping of bereavement should be regulated."<sup>46</sup> 弁人有其母死而孺子泣者，孔子曰：「哀則哀矣，而難爲繼也。夫禮，爲可傳也，爲可繼也。故哭踊有節。」

From this viewpoint, wailing may be understood as an entirely cultural act, a kind of refined ritual product, perfectly regulated (*jie* 節), as an element of the socially acceptable ceremonial choreography. From Marcel Mauss's work, we know that the human body should not merely be considered a physical reality but more as a vector for sym-

<sup>43</sup> "Lu yu xia 魯語下," *Guoyu* 國語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1998), p. 212, and "Tan gong xia 檀弓下," *Liji jijie*, p. 269. For a detailed study on Jing Jiang and the question of rites, see Lisa Raphals, "A Woman Who Understood the Rites," in B. Van Norden, *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 275-302; and Paul R. Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, pp. 58-70.

<sup>44</sup> On the conditions and moments where wailing should be interrupted during the celebration of mortuary rituals, see for example: "Sang da ji" 喪大記, *Liji jijie*, p. 1145; "Ben sang" 奔喪, *Liji jijie*, p. 1343. Concerning the circumstances in which wailing has no place after the death of somebody, the *Yili* 儀禮 states that when a child is deceased before their parents have given him a social name (at the age of three months), there should be no wailing during the burial: "Sang fu 喪服," *Yili zhushu* 儀禮注疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), p. 951. Beyond this funerary context, wailing again appears patterned and codified in other early written sources which include suggestions about when these laments should not occur (*wu ku* 毋哭). On this issue, see the Shanghai-Museum manuscript known as "San de" 三德 and transcribed by Li Ling 李零; Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 5 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), p. 288; as well as the "Day Book A" 日書甲種 of the Qin dynasty manuscripts of Shuihudi 睡虎地: Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, ed., *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), p. 227.

<sup>45</sup> "Tan gong shang" 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, p. 185.

<sup>46</sup> "Tan gong shang" 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, p. 210.

bolic forces expressed through bodily techniques. From this standpoint, wailing would not exclusively be a spontaneous manifestation of instinctive feelings but rather a collective sign and symbol, so to speak, of socialized ideas and feelings.<sup>47</sup> Even when it concerns an isolated individual, wailing could not be considered as a private matter but rather a performative act, complete with actors and an audience, in a tightly scripted program of stylized behaviour.

The practice of ritualised wailing, however, should not necessarily lead us to weighty prejudices about the emotional dishonesty of those who participate in funerary rituals. The fact that a person wails within a social context which compels him to do so, does not mean that the laments uttered on this occasion are less “real” or less “legitimate.” Indeed, comparative study of funerary practices confirms the fact that the emotional significance is more of a cultural construction, a social product, rather than a strictly individual achievement.<sup>48</sup> Contrary to what has often been maintained on the basis of the social condition of this type of funerary behaviour, the ritually determined and coded wailing we find in many of the burial ceremonies of early China does not necessarily imply that the laments uttered by the bereaved are insincere or false. Thus, for example, in a famous passage contained in the *Liji*, Confucius himself, gifted in scrutinising wailing as we have already seen, and particularly sensitive to the feelings behind them, is witness to the genuine emotional abundance which can be aroused during the funeral ceremony:

When Confucius was in the state of Wei, the funeral of an official who had, in the past, offered hospitality on behalf of the prince of this kingdom, took place, and he thus went into the home and cried with grief. On exiting Confucius ordered Zi Gong to untie a horse from his carriage and offer it as a gift. Zi Gong then said, “You never ordered the untying of our horses in any of the burials of your disciples and now you are doing so for an official who offered you his hospitality on behalf of the prince, is that not disproportionate?” and the Master responded, “On entering the house I began to wail but then I found such great sorrow that I burst into

<sup>47</sup> M. Mauss, “Les techniques du corps,” in *Anthropologie et Sociologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989). Mauss had previously studied the formal and obligatory expression of feelings in funerary contexts: “L’expression obligatoire des sentiments,” *Journal de Psychologie* 18 (1921): 425–34.

<sup>48</sup> On this issue, see the classical study by Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

tears. I did not wish that these tears should not be followed by the donation of an offering. Do as I say, my son.”<sup>49</sup> 孔子之衛，遇舊館人之喪，入而哭之哀。出，使子貢說驂而賻之。子貢曰：「於門人之喪，未有所說驂，說驂於舊館，無乃已重乎？」夫子曰：「予鄉者入而哭之，遇於一哀而出涕。予惡夫涕之無從也。小子行之。」

The force of the sorrow and wailing produced by the host of the obsequies unleashed a flood of tears (*ti* 涕) in Confucius, which, in turn, led the latter to give an offering to the family of the deceased. Unlike wailing, which is susceptible to codifying and normative prescription, the irruption of tears in this scene might be considered as a manifestation in which the degree of loss of control over oneself is quite considerable. The emotions unleashed in the funerary space bring about a shift in Confucius from a tense, controlled demeanour to intemperate outpouring. As Helmuth Plessner puts it, with weeping – the onset of which requires internal capitulation as its prior condition – one’s relationship with one’s body is thrown into disarray. One loses control over oneself and is evidently unable to express oneself in the normal fashion because, in having to cope with emergencies and emotions, one is literally “beside oneself,” pushed beyond the limits of everyday normality.<sup>50</sup> Far from the efficient control of bodily faculties that pertains to codified moaning and groaning (and even some forms of ritualised weeping),<sup>51</sup> Confucius’ abundant tears should not be deemed, in this case, to be the result of an action but rather the product of an uncontrolled, genuine and spontaneous emotional response. Indeed, one should refer, at this point, to another anecdote in the *Liji* in which Confucius’ weeping is again described by means of the term *ti* 涕, without which it would be reasonable to surmise that this was an intentional, premeditated manifestation. Although this anecdote is not framed within a strictly funerary context, it naturally contains a link with death since it describes an event that affects the burial of Confucius’ parents. Having finally managed to bring his progenitors together in a single grave, and given that he is obliged to be continuously on the move, Confucius decides to build a burial mound to mark the place. Some time later several of his disciples inform him that, as a result of torrential rain, the mound

<sup>49</sup> “Tan gong shang” 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, p. 193.

<sup>50</sup> See H. Plessner, “Lachen und Weinen,” in his *Philosophische Anthropologie* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1970).

<sup>51</sup> For a study on ritualized weeping from an anthropological point of view, see Gary L. Ebersole, “The Poetics and Politics of Ritualized Weeping in Early and Medieval Japan,” in K. C. Patton and J. S. Hawley, eds., *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 25–51.

has been destroyed. The pain the Master feels is so intense that he is unable to respond so that the disciples have to tell him what has happened three times. Overcome by sadness and sorrow, Confucius bursts into tears (*liu ti* 流涕).<sup>52</sup>

However, let us return to the scene in which Confucius' tears were followed by his donation of a horse. It is possible to trace a type of parallel pattern, a kind of specular structure, between this anecdote of the *Liji* and the narrative regarding the death of Lao Dan in the *Zhuangzi*. Both texts suggest, first of all, the idea that funerary ceremonies are an appropriate, or even ideal, context in which to teach and learn. In both situations, a master passes on a vital lesson to an apprentice who fails to understand his mentor's behaviour. More important, in the two accounts we are witness to a departure, by figures of authority – in this case the masters – from the normal behaviour patterns within a ritual context. However, as we shall now see, these ruptures, though similar, are not identical. In the case of the scene presided over by Confucius, the offering given to the family of the deceased is in keeping with the whole ceremonial tradition sanctioning this type of action. Contrary to what happens in our societies on such occasions, gifts and donations, whether in the form of funerary offerings or gifts made to the deceased or their family, are brought into line with social regulations.<sup>53</sup> Here, the funerals of ancient China are more akin to our marriage ceremonies where, motivated by the cost of the event and depending on the relationship linking the couple together, the participants tend to contribute with gifts and other forms of attention. Still, the gift Confucius offers arouses surprise and even masked indignation in Zi Gong. As far as the disciple can see, it is difficult to understand why the master has decided to make such a major offering; he did not do this before when any of his closest disciples died, yet is now doing so with the death of an almost unknown individual. Zi Gong's reasonable outburst is rooted in the excessive disparity between the value of the offering

<sup>52</sup> “Tan gong shang” 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, pp. 168–69. The use of the expression *liu ti* 流涕, “flowing tears,” in this passage can be read as a revealing sign of Confucius' unrestrained emotion. Ritual action, very often expressed through water related metaphors as the use of dikes (*fang* 坊), implies the capacity of properly channeling the flow of emotions (see, for example, “Fang ji” 坊記, *Liji jijie*, p. 1281), but here the Master seems to be unable to control the impulsive wave of his own feelings.

<sup>53</sup> One of the most illustrative passages in this regard may be found in the *Xunzi*. Here one finds an account of offerings according to the category of object chosen: monetary gifts (*fu* 賻), the offering of horses (*feng* 贈), gifts of garments (*sui* 襚), of trinkets (*zeng* 贈) and jades (*han* 含). (“Da lue” 大略, *Xunzi jijie*, p. 492). On the offering of horses in funerary contexts, see also “Za ji xia” 雜記下, *Liji jijie*, p. 1110; “Wen wang shi zi” 文王世子, *Liji jijie*, p. 572.

and the weak personal tie between the Master with the deceased. With this gesture, Confucius not only compensates for the authenticity of the tears shed and the emotions released at the place of mourning, but at the same time endorses, through a specific example, the conditions and qualities of the ideal ritual action.

For Confucius the ritual action is above all a response respecting the ceremonial norms but its essence is the spontaneous and sincere feelings emanating from the specific circumstances of the event or, in other words, those which combine at one and the same time a dose both of nature and artifice and which demand permanent management of a delicate principle of balance between codification and improvisation.<sup>54</sup> Hence Confucius censures the behaviour of one of his disciples Ranzi 冉子 who makes a funerary offering in his name before the emissary sent by the Master can deliver his gift, thereby making it impossible for him to express the sincerity of his feelings by way of a ritual gesture:

During the burial of Bo Gao, before the messenger sent by Confucius could arrive, Ranzi collected a parcel of garments and a team of four horses and offered them. Confucius then said, “Strange! He has made me fail in showing my sincerity towards Bo Gao.”<sup>55</sup>  
伯高之喪，孔氏之使者未至，冉子攝束帛、乘馬而將之。孔子曰：「異哉！徒使我不誠於伯高。」

Far from being conceived as mere submission to a compendium of protocol driven rules with blind adherence to ceremonial regulations, the ritual action of Confucius would be composed simultaneously of a conventional dimension, linked to respect for the formulas of etiquette sanctioned by custom, and a natural dimension, based on the sincerity (*cheng* 誠) of emotions. I believe the anecdote in the *Liji* concerning the tears shed by Confucius testifies to the tension existing in the heart of the community of the school – a tension between the stiffness of codified behaviour patterns, embodied by the veiled reproaches of Zi Gong, and the naturalness of the gesture spurred on by emotions, represented by the master’s attitude. However, apart from underlining this internal tension, the tale resolves it, since Confucius’ behaviour allows him to be respectful with tradition (his offering is consistent with the traditional funerary uses) and, at the same time, to remain true to the intensity and sincerity of his emotions. If Confucius transcends

<sup>54</sup> On this topic, see: Jean Levi, *Confucius* (Paris: Éditions Pygmalion, 2002), pp. 220–21; and Joel Kupperman, “Naturalness Revisited: Why Western philosophers Should Study Confucius,” in B. Van Norden, *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, pp. 39–52.

<sup>55</sup> “Tan gong shang” 檀弓上, *Liji jijie*, p. 190.

the logic of correspondence, proportion and consonance, essential in liturgical exchanges, he does so with the intention of protecting the spontaneous dimension of the rite; his gestures, moved and driven by the sincere emotion expressed in sorrow, suggest a departure from expectations through excess, an outburst. On the contrary, in the account of the death of Lao Dan, Qin Shi breaks with the ritual expectations of the audience because of the indigence of his mourning gesture. In some way, through Qin Shi's unwonted attitude during the burial of Lao Dan, Zhuangzi sets out a double critique of the conception of the ritual as presented by Confucius. On the one hand, the prescribed or formal dimension of the funeral ceremonies, which are exuberant in their external manifestations, falls apart on being reduced to a minimal expression. On the other, in perfect consonance with this gestural paucity, everything would seem to suggest that, in contrast with the sentimental outpouring that the obsequies provoke in Confucius, the emotions that the death of his colleague Lao Dan awakens in Qin Shi are somewhat meagre. The idea of Confucian ritual action, conceived of as a harmonious blend of routine and emotion, appears to be devalued in the anecdote related in the *Zhuangzi* in favour of an alternative way of understanding and experiencing death.

#### LEARNING TO LOSE: THE LESSON BY QIN SHI

Instead of the expected series of prostrations, leaping, sobs, groans, pleas and other perfectly codified gestures that, in such circumstances, the ritual tradition imposes on all the participants in the mourning ceremonies, Qin Shi limits himself to emitting three succinct moans and abruptly abandons the funerary space. The word used in the fragment of the *Zhuangzi* for designating these moans is *hao* 號, a term denoting a noisy squall with no suggestion of any shedding of tears. In the face of such unusual laconism, incomprehensible in someone who was so close to the deceased, the companion of Qin Shi, probably one of his own disciples, cannot but proclaim his bewilderment asking him a question that challenges the nature of their friendship (*you* 友) or his relationship with the deceased. After confirming the friendly nature of his relationship with Lao Dan, Qin Shi offers a response that provides us a better understanding of his unusual mourning behaviour.

The interpretation and translation of the sentence 始也吾以為其人也，而今非也 entail some philological struggles. Most contemporary scholars tend to interpret it quite differently from the reading I have chosen. For instance, Burton Watson translates it as “At first I took him

for a real man, but now I know he wasn't";<sup>56</sup> Angus C. Graham reads it as "I used to think of him as the man, but now he is not";<sup>57</sup> and, likewise, Chen Guying 陳鼓應 understands the sentence as "原先，我以為他是至人，現在才知道並不是。"<sup>58</sup> All of them seem to follow the commentary of the Tang dynasty scholar Wen Ruhai 文如海 according to which we should read *zhi* 至 instead of *qi* 其 in the original. The French scholar Jean Levi also reads the sentence as, "Au début il était lui et maintenant il n'est plus rien."<sup>59</sup> In general terms, these scholars provide a reading based on the physical disappearance of Lao Dan and consider that the sentence insists on the fact that at the beginning he was a real man and that after his death he is not. They believe that the meaning of the utterance by Qin Shi should be found in the inevitable movement from life to death, to the inexorable passage from existence to disappearance. Against this reading, probably based on the textual rectification suggested by Wenru Hai, I have adopted the recent translation by Brook Ziporyn which, presumably following the commentary of Tang dynasty scholar Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, is much more consistent and convincing: "At first I thought it would be his kind of people there, but then I saw that this was not the case."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* itself comes up with a passage that is very similar and that would seem to support the reading suggested by Ziporyn. Hence at the beginning of the dialogue between Nanbo Zikui 南伯子葵 and the long-lived Nü Yu 女偶, in Chapter VI, the former, astonished by the youthful appearance of the old lady wastes no time in asking how she has managed this. Nü Yu replies that it is because she has listened to the Way (*dao* 道) and, intrigued by this, Zikui then asks if one can learn the Way through study. Thus interrogated, Nü Yu declares, "No, impossible! You are not this kind of person" 惡！惡可！子非其人也。<sup>61</sup> In the light of this passage, it would seem clear that, in the words pronounced by Qin Shi, the negative particle *fei* 非 refers to those who are there bewailing the death of their colleague and who, contrary to what he had believed in

<sup>56</sup> B. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> A. C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2001), p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), pp. 103-5.

<sup>59</sup> J. Levi, *Les Œuvres de Maître Tchouang* (Paris: Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 2006), p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> B. Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2009), p. 23.

<sup>61</sup> "Da zong shi" 大宗師, *Zhuangzi jishi*, pp. 251-52.

the first place, have nothing to do with Lao Dan. There is no need to establish any kind of affiliation, any sort of oneness with them for they are unacquainted with his teachings.

Qin Shi vehemently disapproves of the behaviour displayed by both old and young when, at Lao Dan's funeral, they pronounce words and utter laments that nobody wished or invoked (*bu qi* 不慚). His reproof is explicitly expressed in the phrase 彼其所以會之，必有不慚而言，不慚哭而哭者, reproduced here in my slightly adapted version of the translation by Victor Mair: "Among those whom he had brought together, surely there were some who wished not to speak but spoke anyway, who wished not to wail but wailed anyway."<sup>62</sup> On being questioned by his companion regarding his unwontedly frugal behaviour at the ceremony of presentation of condolences, Qin Shi not only reaffirms his bond of friendship with the deceased but, in criticising the conduct of people who, when partaking of the funeral rite, adapt to expectations imposed by tradition, he is suggesting that, however shocking his stance may be, it is more authentic to the teachings of his old friend and colleague. Indeed, Lao Dan himself, in another passage of the *Zhuangzi* in which he is instructing Zi Gong, alludes to a remote past when people did not censure those who failed to emit cries of pain when someone dear to them died. "In the times in which the Yellow Emperor governed the world, people's hearts were so unified that if someone lost a loved person and did not utter wails of grief (*bu ku* 不哭), other people did not condemn him."<sup>63</sup> From this perspective, what is really abnormal and reproachable is the standardised expression of pain in the words pronounced and lamentations uttered as ordained by the norms of protocol without being in consonance with genuine feelings, since this is understood as a posthumous affront to Lao Dan's teachings. Qin Shi's reproof would arise then from the fact that the people who are participating in this way at Lao Dan's funeral were adulterating their own emotions in keeping with socially acceptable values and practices which have been inculcated through blind, wholesale acceptance of custom and tradition. This position is echoed in other parts of the *Zhuangzi* where contrived acceptance of ritual prescriptions leads to utter denaturing of the emotions and, in the end, works against their effectiveness when it comes to moving others. Hence, for example, in a fragment of chapter XXXI,

<sup>62</sup> V. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 28. However, in the version by Mair the term *ku* 哭 is translated as "crying" and, as I have stated previously, I read it as "wailing".

<sup>63</sup> "Tian yun" 天運, *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 527.

the character of the old fisherman gives Confucius a lesson about the meaning of authenticity in the following terms:

Authenticity is the height of purity and sincerity. Without purity and sincerity, men cannot be moved. Contrived wailing brings forth affliction that does not sadden; contrived fury brings forth fear that does not intimidate; contrived affection brings forth a smile that does not captivate. [...] Rites are the product of manners and mores while authenticity is something received from Heaven, the spontaneous dimension that cannot be altered.<sup>64</sup> 真者，精誠之至也。不精不誠，不能動人。故強哭者雖悲不哀，強怒者雖嚴不威，強親者雖笑不和。真悲無聲而哀，真怒未發而威，真親未笑而和。[...] 禮者，世俗之所爲也；真者，所以受於天也，自然不可易也。

In the light of these arguments, Qin Shi's reproof would be addressed to the servile, acritical conduct of people who utter ritual wails during the obsequies for Lao Dan. This even raises the question of whether the aim of the anecdote might not be to reject the validity of funeral practices by portraying them as artificial and spurious. Yet, to my mind at least, this interpretation does not fully fit with the behaviour or explanation offered by Qin Shi in the recounting. Like other characters in the *Zhuangzi* who are coping with the death of a beloved person – and this is an element that should be kept in mind – Qin Shi voluntarily decides to participate in the funeral rites for his colleague. While his pithy intervention at the presentation of condolences does not wholly conform with the conventional forms of conduct that govern such ceremonies (the behaviour of other characters of the *Zhuangzi* in similar circumstances is, of course, much more radical and extravagant),<sup>65</sup> it is true that his presence at the obsequies is, in itself, significant, inviting one to think that Zhuangzi's aim, with this and other stories set in funerary contexts, is not to reject such practices in their entirety because of their artificiality (which does not mean, as we have already seen, that he cannot be very harsh when dealing with many elements that comprise these customs). These passages dealing with death from the *Zhuangzi* suggest the demolition of a rite understood as an action that comes from a univocal authority and that, accordingly, can only be performed according to rigidly constructed and permanently controlled parameters. The crux of his criticism is to be found, however, on another plane. A passage from chapter VI of the *Zhuangzi* may be

<sup>64</sup> “Yu fu” 漁父, *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 1032.

<sup>65</sup> Among these more radical scenes, one must mention that in which the central figure is Zhuangzi himself, when his wife dies: “Zhi le” 至樂, *Zhuangzi jishi*, pp. 614–15.

helpful in clarifying the matter. Here, Yan Hui is asking Confucius, with an undeniable dose of disquietude, about the case of a certain individual called Mengsun Cai 孟孫才, someone who enjoys an extraordinary reputation with regard to upholding the norms of mourning, even while descriptions of his behaviour appear to be consistent with values that are just the opposite of the socially sanctioned ones:

Yan Hui asked Confucius, “When his mother died, Mengsun Cai wailed without shedding tears, his heart was devoid of sadness and he showed no sorrow during the mourning period. Lacking these three elements, he nonetheless gained a reputation as an exemplary mourner that extends beyond the state of Lu. Is it then possible to obtain such a reputation that does not correspond to any reality? I find it very strange.”<sup>66</sup> 顏回問仲尼曰：「孟孫才，其母死，哭泣無涕，中心不戚，居喪不哀。無是三者，以善處喪蓋魯國。固有無其實而得其名者乎？回壹怪之。」

Mengsun Cai participates in the funeral rites held, in this case, after the death of his mother, in a way that seems shocking, in particular if one bears in mind that, the precepts of the Confucian tradition dictate that the obsequies for one’s progenitors constitute the most crucial moment within this funerary culture.<sup>67</sup> If the three laconic groans proffered by Qin Shi led his disciple to question the authenticity of his relationship with the dead man, the case of Mengsun Cai is still more serious. Although he offers the codified laments (*ku qi* 哭泣) that are proper to such sorrowful events, they do not spill over into a shedding of tears (*ti* 涕) or, in other words, into spontaneous, genuine emotional expression. He confines himself to performing the strictly formal part of the ritual without manifesting the sentimental underpinning which, at least according to the Confucian doctrine, sustains it. Such absence of emotion in Mengsun Cai seems to be explicitly reinforced when he states that his heart harbours no sadness (*qi* 戚) and neither does he show affliction (*ai* 哀) during the mourning period, thereby radically contravening the prescriptions and expectations that comprise, as we have seen above, the conventional procedures of funeral ceremonies. In the anecdote about Mengsun Cai, Yan Hui is unable to understand why this individual, who carries out the funeral ceremonies in accordance with the conventionally accepted rules without harbouring within

<sup>66</sup> “Da zong shi” 大宗師, *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 274. Zhuangzi is almost certainly using the denomination of this person, Mengsun Cai 孟孫才, with the aim of underpinning, through irony, the message of the anecdote. The name can be translated as “Talent of Primogenitors and Grandsons” and, by extension, “Virtue of Descendants”.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, *Lunyu* XIX.17; *Lunyu jishi*, j. 38, p. 1329.

himself any of the emotions that must initiate such actions, is deemed to be an example. As in other sympathetic passages, the character of Confucius recreated in the *Zhuangzi* is shown as more sensitive and lucid about the doctrine he seeks to communicate than are his own disciples, the privileged recipients of his teachings. Noting the uneasiness felt by Yan Hui over the case of Mengsun Cai, the Master offers the following explanation:

Mensun Cai has reached the apogee and is beyond your understanding. When you try to simplify things but are unable to do so things have already been simplified for you. Mengsun understands nothing about why he lives or why he dies, nothing about what has gone before him and nothing about what will come after him. Since he is no more than the transformation of a being he only awaits, in his ignorance, his turn in this process of transformation. When one is undergoing this process of transformation, what can one know of what is not being transformed? And when one is no longer transforming, what can one know of what is being transformed? Are not you and I dreaming beings who have not yet awakened? As for him, his physical form may be affected but not his mind. His life is to him but a mere abode and death therefore also lacks substance. Only Mengsun has awakened. People proffer their laments and he follows suit. This is why he acts thus.<sup>68</sup> 夫孟孫氏盡之矣，進於知矣。唯簡之而不得，夫已有所簡矣。孟孫氏不知所以生，不知所以死；不知孰先，不知孰後；若化爲物，以待其所不知之化已乎！且方將化，惡知不化哉？方將不化，惡知已化哉？吾特與汝，其夢未始覺者邪！且彼有駭形而無損心，有旦宅而無情死。孟孫氏特覺，人哭亦哭，是自其所以乃。

The words offered by the character of Confucius suggest that Mengsun Cai's behaviour is due to the fact that he has attained a simplicity of which he himself is not capable. This consists, first and foremost, in his not knowing from whence life comes or from whence death emanates so that he innocently embraces the incessant cycle of transformations. Yet this ignorance leads him to experience life and death in a way that is more authentic than that of the Master's most brilliant disciple, Yan Hui. From the lucidity arising from his abandoning the desire to understand these processes, Mengsun Cai is able to comply externally with all the expectations imposed by the social norms when he has to perform the funeral rites without altering the qualities of his

<sup>68</sup> "Da zong shi" 大宗師, *Zhuangzi jishi*, pp. 274-75.

internal dimension.<sup>69</sup> In a parallel fashion, and to return to the death of Lao Dan, what for Qin Shi seems anti-natural in this scene is not only the panoply of codified responses his death gives rise to but also, and in particular, the emotions that are intuited behind them and that, in turn, derive from a mistaken conception of death and, by extension, of life. Indeed, the kinds of behavioural reflexes in response to Lao Dan's death and displayed at his funeral, do no more than translate the impulse of a way of understanding life and death that is consistent with "disdaining the celestial dimension and removing oneself from the reality of things in such a way that one ends up neglecting what one has received" 遁天倍情，忘其所受. Hence, instead of regarding these individuals as paragons of virtue, Qin Shi sees them rather as people who have been punished for having scorned the heavenly dimension. Once this point is made, we are offered a brief description regarding the behavioural patterns that lead to an existential way of being that Qin Shi himself defines as liberation (*jie* 解). This means being willing both to accept one's arrival in life and to consent to one's leaving of it, in such a way that neither happiness nor affliction can penetrate us 哀樂不能入也.<sup>70</sup> The scope of this latter expression acquires greater clarity if one reads it in the light of a very brief passage from one of the texts recovered from the Guodian 郭店 archaeological site in 1993. In this text, which the editors agreed to title *Yu cong* 語叢, it is stated, "Possessing, means joy; losing, means sorrow" 得者樂，失者哀也.<sup>71</sup> The vibrations of happiness and affliction to which Qin Shi refers in these words go back, although indirectly, to notions of possession and loss, linked with this conception of life and death, which contrasts with the elaboration of the other existential modality defended by Zhuangzi and that, in the last instance, would culminate with emancipation. Against this coagulated kind of existence where life seems to be subject to a continuous desire for appropriation, there appears a fluid conception of life understood as an unbounded process that is not amenable to learning, that is beyond us and that, in no case, belongs to us. The dialogue between Shun 舜 and his adviser, which belongs to chapter XXII of the *Zhuangzi*, is illuminating here:

<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, Romain Graziani offers the deepest and most convincing reading of the anecdote concerning Mengsun Cai in the *Zhuangzi*. See R. Graziani, *Fictions philosophiques du Tchouang-tseu*, pp. 208–19.

<sup>70</sup> This phrase appears in almost the same terms in a passage of the "Da zong shi" 大宗師 chapter: *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 260.

<sup>71</sup> Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荆門市博物館, *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998), p. 212.

Shun asked his adviser, “Is it possible to obtain the Way and make it mine? The latter responded, “If not even your body belongs to you, how can you hope to possess the Way?” Shun continues, “If my body is not mine, to whom does it belong?” And his adviser said, “It is the form bestowed by Heaven and Earth. Neither is life yours to possess for it is the union of Heaven and Earth; your innate condition and your destiny do not belong to you since they are the product of the disposition of Heaven and Earth; your children and your grandchildren do not belong to you because they are exuviae of Heaven and Earth. Hence we walk without knowing what makes us advance, we linger not knowing what induces us to stay in a place, we eat not knowing what it is that makes us savour a meal. This is nothing less than the sweeping energy deployed by Heaven and Earth, and yet you wish to possess it and make it yours!<sup>72</sup> 舜問乎丞曰：「道可得而有乎？」曰：「汝身非汝有也，汝何得有夫道？」舜曰：「吾身非吾有也，孰有之哉？」曰：「是天地之委形也；生非汝有，是天地之委和也；性命非汝有，是天地之委順也；孫子非汝有，是天地之委蛻也。故行不知所往，處不知所持，食不知所味。天地之強陽氣也，又胡可得而有邪！」

In accordance with what Zhuangzi sustains in both the Lao Dan anecdote and the Shun dialogue, and to the extent to which life should be understood as something that is received and on loan (*shou* 受, *wei* 委) as fruit of the union between Heaven and Earth, which is to say as a consequence of the unfolding of the generous forces that shape the natural course of the world, there is no place for acceptance of the logic of possession and loss. Once one is fully integrated into the flow of life and death and understands the error of remaining bound to the logic of possession and loss, happiness and sadness cannot enter into us. As I have pointed out at the start, the appellative Qin Shi would function as an emblem of the message that the anecdote aims to convey since it signals what must constitute the core of all learning: not possessing life but rather becoming detached from, losing the very idea of possession. This would be, precisely, the ultimate content of the teachings of his deceased colleague Lao Dan.

<sup>72</sup> “Zhi bei you” 知北遊, *Zhuangzi jishi*, p. 739.