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The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12

INTRODUCTION

H*uainanzi* 12, titled “Dao Ying” 道應, or “Responses of the Way,”¹ is a collection of fifty-six anecdotes that typically end with a citation from *Laozi* for support of a didactic claim.² The anecdotes are diverse in content, ranging from profound and recondite accounts of mystical wandering, to moralizing speeches, ethical prescriptions, and practical political counsel. They illustrate, specify, and personify the manner in

THIS ARTICLE is dedicated to Nathan Sivin, who has been the very best of mentors and an unending source of inspiration. I am fortunate to have benefited in countless ways over the years from his rigorous critiques and erudite comments. I would especially like to thank John Major, Andy Meyer, Michael Nylan, Michael Puett, and David Schaberg for their insightful remarks on various versions of this article. I am also grateful to the members of the *Huainanzi* translation team, who reviewed earlier draft translations of *Huainanzi* 12. Thanks to Connecticut College for awarding me financial grants to work on the *Huainanzi* through the R. F. Johnson Fund and Havens Family Fund and to my colleagues and students in the History Department, where I have received a wealth of intellectual support and stimulation while working on this project.

¹ “Dao” here denotes both the all-embracing, singular, and undifferentiated Way that lies beyond the multiplicity of things, as well as its particular, varied, and concrete manifestations within the world of the myriad things. “Ying,” meaning response, has strong resonances with Han-era “gan-ying” stimulus-response cosmology. In the context of this *Huainanzi* chapter the title suggests that the ruler must identify the appropriate response (*ying*) grounded in the Way that is evoked (*gan*) by the circumstances of the moment. As amply shown here, when rulers and ministers did so they succeeded; when they did not, they failed. “Responses of the Way” emphasizes the relevance and applicability of the Way in resolving the often complex challenges of rulership. In this sense, the ruler is the crucial conduit, enabling the Way to work through his person in response to whatever may arise.

² I use the term “anecdote” broadly to refer to a range of narrative techniques that tell a brief story with differing degrees of historicity and which range from longer set pieces containing a beginning, a middle, and an end to shorter pieces consisting solely of dialogue in which the narrative is implicit. In those containing only reported speech, the narrative frame is carried by the identities of the speakers themselves. These dialogues rely on the understood structural relationship among the speakers to create narrative effects such as irony or surprise. Anec-

which the Way may be known to the ruler and utilized to ensure the success and prosperity of his reign. Simultaneously, they demonstrate the versatility of the *Laozi* as an authority of sagely rule. Moreover, the situational and speech-laden characteristics of the *Huainanzi* anecdotes, which generally portray a context or occasion that prompts a crucial conversation or incisive persuasion, suit the philosophical arguments that the chapter seeks to clarify.³ Read as “relics of past affairs,” they were the ideal literary medium to illustrate the relationship between the Way 道 and human affairs 事 as one that unfolds within the context of change and transformation.⁴ Such was the main purpose of *Huainanzi*, according to the author of its postface and chief patron of this grand intellectual project, the king of Huainan Liu An 劉安.⁵

dotes with an explicit narrative generally introduce the reader to a particular setting or occasion that describes the story’s context, historical or mythical characters that conform loosely to conventional patterns, an oral exchange or reported speech, and a final judgment implicit in the narrative itself or made explicit through a closing comment. The time frame and *dramatis personae* are limited, and locales tend to fall within common stereotypes that provide a discrete frame (royal court, battlefield, riverbank, gateway, bridge), though idiosyncratic settings occasionally appear. A skillfully crafted anecdote delivers a pithy, punchy illustration of some abstract principle (“what many consider right is often wrong”) or some quality of a significant cultural icon (“Confucius knew how to judge the subtle tendencies of things”). Exemplary anecdotes have a “snapshot” quality that conveys the impression of a historical moment or momentous exchange captured in writing. Though anecdotes do not always include an oral exchange, having an oral exchange embedded within an anecdote is self-referential in a way that is rhetorically powerful – a person engaged in bilateral oral debate can cast his arguments in a way that deceptively appears dialectical even though s/he controls both sides of the exchange.

The *Laozi* is quoted 53 times corresponding to sections from the following 40 chapters in the received Wang Bi edition: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 36, 38, 39, 43, 44, 45, 47, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 62, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, and 78.

³ Though Ban Gu and Gao You indicate that *Huainanzi* was a collective endeavor, we do not know how individual chapters were composed. It is unclear whether *Huainanzi* 12 is the product of a single compiler or a group, thus references to “*Huainanzi* 12” are to an unknown compiler or compilers. On authorship, see Harold Roth, *The Textual History of the Huainan Tzu*, AAS Monograph Series 46 (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, U. of Michigan, 1992), pp. 19–26. For a thoughtful discussion of the form and function of *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* anecdotes see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2001), pp. 163–90.

⁴ The opening lines of *Huainanzi* 21 state: “We have created and composed these writings and discourses as a means to knot the net of the Way and its Potency and weave the web of humankind and its affairs.” The idea is reiterated later in the paragraph: “Thus if we speak of the Way but do not speak of affairs, there would be no means to shift with the times; if we speak of affairs but do not speak of the Way, there would be no means to move with (the processes of) transformation.” See *HNZ* 21/223/21–24.

⁵ Many aspects of *Huainanzi* 21 indicate Liu An’s possible authorship. This matter is discussed in detail in the introduction to John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Meyer and Harold D. Roth, trans. and annot., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, by Liu An, King of Huainan, with additional contributions by Michael Puett and Judson Murray, forthcoming (New York City: Columbia U.P.; hereafter, *HNZ*).

As we shall see in what follows, to have used citations from *Laozi* as a postscript for such a variety of anecdotes demonstrated that the chapter could speak to virtually any and every occasion. This combination – illustrative anecdote and apposite citation – created a mix of didactic principles, referred to in *Huainanzi* 21 as the “techniques of Lao-Zhuang.” These principles identified the *Laozi* with a range of intellectual, political, and charismatic strategies recommended to the ruler as instrumental to his success. Thus to have read *Laozi* this way imbued the text with a kind of canonical authority commensurate with that of the *Odes*, which could speak to the particular vision of empire promoted in *Huainanzi* more generally.⁶

Huainanzi 21, “An Overview of the Essentials” (“Yao lüe” 要略), claims that chapter 12 (“Responses of the Way”) “picks out and draws together the relics of past affairs and pursues and surveys the traces of bygone antiquity. It investigates the reversals of ill and good fortune, benefit and harm, testing and verifying them according to the techniques of Lao-Zhuang, thus matching them to the trajectories of gain and loss.”⁷ It suggests that by doing so, a comprehensive picture of the ideal ruler emerges. The view of the present article is that an array of anecdotes that generally depicts crucial moments and key dilemmas in a wide range of political contexts is compiled to clarify political principles and attributes of the ideal ruler in order to ensure his success. Using the *Laozi* in this way, the *Huainanzi* chapter espouses and commends techniques to the ruler that are, in fact, highly syncretic, reconciling disparate notions of rulership within the larger context of change.⁸ Since change is normative, the ruler must command a comprehensive array of techniques, to be adapted to the circumstances of the moment.⁹ As

⁶ Why *Huainanzi* 12 in some sense canonizes *Laozi* is a question worthy of further investigation. Such an investigation might consider such factors as the usages and non-usages of *Laozi* across the text, trends in court patronage, and political issues that may have generated interest. Given the length and profundity of *Huainanzi*, it was likely composed over a number of years in the decade prior to emperor Wu’s accession, 140 BC. The historical records suggest that *Laozi* was patronized by key political figures at the central court during these same years. It may very well be that the compilation of *Huainanzi* 12 was generated by such factors, although it would be difficult to prove, given the evidence.

⁷ *HNZ* 21/255/19020.

⁸ In arguing that *Huainanzi* 12 “gives pride of place to the *Laozi*,” I do not mean to suggest that the *Laozi* is given the same prominence throughout the text or that its prominent role in this chapter makes *Huainanzi* a “Daoist” text. For the complicated issue of the “school” affiliation of *Huainanzi*, see the introduction in *Huainanzi*.

⁹ Consistent with the cumulative manner in which the text is meant to be read, the next chapter, *Huainanzi* 13 (“Boundless Discourses,” or “Fan Lun” 汎論), develops the normative aspects of change in great detail. Using numerous historical examples from remote antiquity through the Han, it argues that change has always been a part of human history and that the most successful rulers do not resist change; they do not futilely mimic past policies. Rather,

we soon see, these techniques are meant to address both the character and conduct of the ruler. What, then, were *Huainanzi* 12's "techniques of Lao-Zhuang" that could ensure the ruler's prosperity and success? Before addressing this central question some preliminary remarks on literary genre are in order.

LOCATING *HUAINANZI* 12 WITHIN THE GENRE OF ANECDOTAL LITERATURE

A consideration of the literary form and structure of *Huainanzi* 12, as is true of so many *Huainanzi* chapters, is an essential first step in understanding the intellectual significance and situating the chapter within the relevant genre, or genres, of writing. As suggested above, *Huainanzi* 12 adheres strictly to a consistent structure and literary form throughout its fifty-six sections, each beginning with an anecdote and ending with a *Laozi* citation.¹⁰ The anecdotes were well known and circulated widely. This is clear from the many parallels and near parallels in other late-Warring States and Han texts, such as *Zuozhuan*, *Zhuangzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Lüshi chungiu*, *Hanshi waizhuan* and *Shuo yuan*.

As an illustrative explication of *Laozi*, *Huainanzi* 12 is reminiscent of *Hanfeizi* 21, "Illustrating the *Laozi*" ("Yu Lao" 喻老). The latter is the earliest extant example of a *Laozi* commentary that deploys well-known stories to illustrate the text's relevance specifically to statecraft concerns.¹¹ In it, *Laozi* is read primarily as a resource for the exercise of political power rather than as a guide for the cultivation of the body or for achieving one's place within the natural and cosmic realms.¹² In

they continuously assess change and modify their actions to suit changing circumstances; see *HNZ* 13/120/3-132/6.

¹⁰ The three exceptions to this general rule close respectively with a citation from *Zhuangzi*, *Shenzi*, and *Guanzi*; see *HNZ* 12.42, 12.50, and 12.51; *HNZ* 12/116/5-19, 12/118/10-15, and 12/118/21-29.

¹¹ *Hanfeizi* 21 comments on lines that appear in the following chapters of the extant Wang Bi edition of the *Laozi*: 26, 27, 33, 36, 41, 46, 47, 52, 54, 63, 64 and 71. It mainly employs anecdotes to explicate the *Laozi* but not exclusively so, as in *Huainanzi* 12. Sometimes lines from *Laozi* are introduced with brief philosophical prose, e.g., the chapter's discussion of political purchase. *Hanfeizi* 20, "Explaining the *Laozi*" ("Jie Lao" 解老) comments on the following *Laozi* chapters: 1, 14, 38, 46, 50, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, and 67. It is structured very differently from *Hanfeizi* 21. It does not make use of stories to gloss lines from *Laozi*, preferring to explicate through philosophical prose; see *HFZ* 20/34/8-41/31. These two commentaries have not received the scholarly attention they deserve, given their importance in the commentarial history of *Laozi*. See two brief, insightful discussions on authorship and dating of the two commentaries: Bertil Lundhal, *Han Fei Zi: The Man and the Work*, East Asian Monographs 4 (Stockholm: Stockholm Institute of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University, 1992), pp. 218-41; and Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹, "Hanfeizi Jie Lao pian ji Yu Lao pian chutan" 韓非子解老篇及喻老篇初探, *Hanxueyanjiu* 漢學研究 6.2 (1988), pp. 299-332.

¹² *Huainanzi* 12 and *Hanfeizi* 21 also share two parallels. Compare *HNZ* 12/110/17-19,

replicating this literary form and philosophical tendency, *Huainanzi* 12 constitutes an important descendant of the Warring States prototype.

However, as demonstrated below, there are important departures from *Hanfeizi* 21. Perhaps one of the most striking is the linking of several anecdotes that appear in the received *Zhuangzi* with *Laozi* citations to promote “the techniques of Lao-Zhuang” in a single commentary.¹³ This handful of anecdotes shape the *Laozi* in important ways, orienting the reader to interpret key *Laozi* passages as specific references to the meditative techniques and mystical gnosis revered in the *Zhuangzi*.¹⁴ Conversely, glossing these anecdotes with *Laozi* citations invests the stories with potentially new nuances of meaning.

Huainanzi 12 also resembles *Lüshi chungiu* by its proclivity to select, collect, and compile numerous “historical” anecdotes to illustrate both broad ethical themes and practical political advice. Moreover, twenty-three of the *Huainanzi* 12 anecdotes appear in *Lüshi chungiu*.¹⁵

and *HFZ* 21/44/18–21; and *HNZ* 12/117/12–15, and *HFZ* 21/45/9–13. *HNZ* 12/111/4–7, recounts the tale of Gou Jian’s servitude to and ultimate defeat of king Wu. *HFZ* 21/44/10–13, refers briefly to the story. Other *Huainanzi* chapters contain anecdotes that appear in *Hanfeizi*, but vary in details and are deployed for different didactic purposes. Compare, for example, the anecdote of the ivory chopsticks in *HFZ* 21/44/5–8, with the version in *HNZ* 20/210/27–211/5.

¹³ *Huainanzi* 12 shares nine parallels or near-parallels with the received *Zhuangzi*, two of which also appear in *Lüshi chungiu*. Compare: *HNZ* 12/105/3–18, and *ZZ* 22/62/18–22 (Grand Purity Inquires of the Way); *HNZ* 12/106/28–107/4, and *ZZ* 22/60/31–61/2 (Gaptooth and Ragbag Discuss the Way); *HNZ* 12/109/12–19, and *ZZ* 28/81/23–28 (The Great King Dan Fu Departs from Bin); *HNZ* 12/109/21–25, and *ZZ* 28/84/7–11 (Prince Mou of Zhongshan Speaks with Zhan He); *HNZ* 12/110/1–8, and *ZZ* 13/37/10–13 (Wheelwright Flat Converses with duke Huan of Qi); *HNZ* 12/114/5–8, and *ZZ* 22/63/5–7 (The Forger of Hooks Converses with the Minister of War); *HNZ* 12/114/26–29, and *ZZ* 10/24/27–25/3 (Robber Footpad Enumerates the Five Virtues); *HNZ* 12/115/12–17, and *ZZ* 6/19/17–20 (Confucius and Yen Hui Discuss Sitting and Forgetting); *HNZ* 12/117/6–10, and *ZZ* 22/63/1–3 (Resplendent Light Queries Nothing There). (The above captions are given for ease of reference. They are my own and are not to be found in the original Chinese text.) My renditions of *Zhuangzi* passages have drawn upon the eloquent translation of Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).

¹⁴ Other tropes from *Zhuangzi* that are developed in *Huainanzi* 12 include “the usefulness of the useless” in *HNZ* 12.34; *HNZ* 12/114/5–8; and “valuing life” in *HNZ* 12.15; *HNZ* 12/109/12–19; 12/109/21–25.

¹⁵ For the parallel and near-parallel anecdotes compare *HNZ* 12/105/20–26, and *LSCQ* 18.3/111/16–21; *HNZ* 12/106/1–6, and *LSCQ* 18.5/114/21–24; *HNZ* 12/106/8–13, and *LSCQ* 17.8/107/23–26; *HNZ* 12/106/15–20, and *LSCQ* 25.4/163/24–28; *HNZ* 12/107/6–14, and *LSCQ* 15.1/80/19–81/6; *HNZ* 12/107/16–12/108/3, and *LSCQ* 15.5/85/13–26; *HNZ* 12/108/5–9, and *LSCQ* 15.6/86/20–21; *HNZ* 12/108/11–15 and *LSCQ* 26.2/167/20–23; *HNZ* 12/108/17–21 and *LSCQ* 16.6/95/29–96/2; *HNZ* 12/108/23–27 and *LSCQ* 19.5/124/16–20; *HNZ* 12/109/1–10 and *LSCQ* 19.8/128/10–17; *HNZ* 12/109/12–19 and *LSCQ* 21.4/141/11–17; *HNZ* 12/109/21–25, and *LSCQ* 21.4/141/27–29; *HNZ* 12/109/27–30, and *LSCQ* 17.8/107/18–21; *HNZ* 12/111/9–13, and *LSCQ* 19.8/128/10–17; *HNZ* 12/112/19–12/113/3, and *LSCQ* 6.4/31/20–32/4; *HNZ* 12/113/16–20, and *LSCQ* 19.6/126/3–8; *HNZ* 12/114/26–29, and *LSCQ* 11.4/55/25–56/1; *HNZ* 12/115/19–28, and *LSCQ* 16.4/93/20–94/11; *HNZ* 12/116/21–28, and

Such overlap is common in Western Han literature but its implications are not entirely clear. It may suggest that *Huainanzi* 12 drew upon *Lüshi chungiu* as an important source of anecdotal literature; the earlier collection provided a kind of prepackaged and seemingly endless supply of stories with the appropriate veneer of historicity that could be recycled to suit specific aims and circumstances.¹⁶ It may indicate that *Huainanzi* 12 drew upon another written source or sources not known to us. Or it may mean that both *Huainanzi* and *Lüshi chungiu* drew from a common pool of anecdotal literature that circulated as modular units of “text” in written or oral form.¹⁷ Whatever the case, it is demonstrated below that *Huainanzi* 12 clearly utilized these stories to promote quotidian forms of knowledge and practical techniques that were necessary for a ruler to successfully administer a complex bureaucracy and navigate political challenges. They were not only consistent with the syncretic aims of the *Huainanzi* project as a whole, but served to summarize, illustrate, and reiterate concepts and themes developed elsewhere in the text.

Huainanzi 12 does not simply employ some *Lüshi chungiu* anecdotes to advance similar arguments, it also employs identical stories to highlight different didactic principles.¹⁸ Furthermore, *Huainanzi* 12 adopts a different literary strategy in explicating practical lessons that

*LSCQ*18.8/118/7-13; *HNZ*12/117/22-26, and *LSCQ*24.5/158/24-29; *HNZ*12/117/28-118/8, and *LSCQ*20.3/131/1-5; and *HNZ*12/118/17-21, and *LSCQ*14.3/72/25-73/4.

¹⁶ In this respect my findings support the arguments of David Schaberg, who has described the circulation and exchange of anecdotal narrative in the following way: “One might think of anecdotal narrative in early China in economic terms, as one sort of current in a vast and diffuse exchange system, which changed in response to external needs and desires while also developing according to its own laws. The whole corpus of anecdotes told or tellable at any given moment would represent the total wealth of the era’s imagination; the commonplaces and contradictions of the anecdotes would register the demands made upon discourse by its users, whose conversations made narrative a medium for their prejudices, fantasies, and anxieties. As it changed, leaving traces of its progress in written texts, this body of narrative would not reflect underlying historical realities, but would exert an influence of its own by the weight of its innumerable examples, which would mediate all new historical events and their meanings.” See David Schaberg, unpublished manuscript “Fictions of History in Liu Xiang’s *Shuoyuan*.” I am grateful to David for generously sharing his thoughts on this subject and have benefited greatly from his astute insights.

¹⁷ For the circulation and interchange of anecdotes as modular units of meaning, see Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, pp. 163–90. A proposed strategy to sort out textual parallels through isocolometrical analysis is given in William G. Boltz, “Notes on the Textual Relation between the ‘Kuo yü’ and the ‘Tso Chuan,’” *BSOAS* 53.3 (1990), pp. 491–502; also idem, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts,” in Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2005), pp. 50–78.

¹⁸ For an insightful analysis of such differences in rhetorical strategies, see Charles LeBlanc’s comparison of a parallel passage from *Huainanzi* 12 and *Lushi chungiu*; *Huai Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought. The Idea of Resonance (Kan-Ying), With a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1986), pp. 81–90.

may arise from the shared anecdotes. For example, in *Lüshi chungiu*, many chapters begin with a general claim or statement that serves to frame the particular collection of anecdotes. In contrast, *Huainanzi* 12 presents the anecdote, then follows with a quotation from *Laozi*, which provides broader room for interpreting. In anchoring well-known stories to particular lines in the *Laozi*, *Huainanzi* 12 not only explains the *Laozi* in novel ways, it also refashions ancient stories to suit its particular aims.

Finally, *Huainanzi* 12 shares important elements with Han Ying's 韓嬰 *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 and is structured similarly. Han's text is also a heterogeneous collection of anecdotes containing moral disquisitions, ethical prescriptions, and practical advice, yet the concluding quotations that reinforce the point come from the *Odes*.¹⁹ Similarly, the materials employed in Han Ying's text derive from a wide range of disparate sources, in this case *Xunzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi chungiu*, *Yanzi chungiu*, *Laozi*, and *Mengzi*.²⁰ A handful of anecdotes appear in both texts.²¹ Moreover, the two share a function; namely, they are texts meant primarily to instruct through anecdotes that are linked to suitable quotations. In the case of *Hanshi waizhuan* the *Odes* functions as the *Laozi* does in *Huainanzi* 12. According to James Hightower:

It was a textbook used by Han Ying's school, not to present his interpretations of the Classic (other works performed that function) but to demonstrate the practical use of the Classic: a tag to clinch an argument, a stanza to sum up a philosophical principle, a punning line to delight or confuse. Quotations from the *Shih Ching* had been so used in pre-Han times and continued in use in Han times. Han Ying provided his disciples with a convenient handbook from which they could study to perfect their technique of apt quotation.²²

¹⁹ Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), p. 125. The *Hanshi waizhuan* cites the *Laozi* two times. See *HSWZ* 7.10/52/14 and 9.16/68/16-19.

²⁰ See Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, p. 125.

²¹ For parallel and near parallel anecdotes with *Huainanzi* 12 compare the following: *HSWZ* 3.21/20/27-21/2, and *HNZ* 12/113/22-26; *HSWZ* 3.30/23/14-20, and *HNZ* 12/119/14-20; *HSWZ* 5.6/35/26-36/3, and *HNZ* 12/110/1-8; *HSWZ* 6.15/48/5-9, and *HNZ* 12/111/9-13; *HSWZ* 7.10/51/30-52/5, and *HNZ* 12/110/10-15; *HSWZ* 7.12/52/16-21, and *HNZ* 12/113/28-114/3; *HSWZ* 10.23/78/1-4, and *HNZ* 12/108/23-27. *Hanshi waizhuan* shares other anecdotes and traditional sayings with *HNZ* 10, 11, 13, 14, 18 and 20.

²² See James Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Applications of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P., 1952), p. 2.

The “technique of apt quotation” is clearly relevant here,²³ but I would argue that the aims of Han Ying were more comprehensive in nature: in collecting such a vast array of anecdotes and linking them to the *Shijing*, Han Ying hoped to demonstrate that the *Odes* possesses wisdom that embodies the “essence” of any historical moment and therefore can speak to whatever circumstance might arise in human affairs.²⁴ The *Odes* contains a line or stanza that distills its ultimate import. As we see, below, *Huainanzi* 12 claims the same with respect to the *Laozi*. Composed by an influential academician from the time of emperor Wen (reigned 180–157 BC) just a brief decade before Liu An presented the *Huainanzi* text to emperor Wu, *Hanshi waizhuan* is perhaps most relevant for understanding the slightly later *Huainanzi* 12.²⁵ The striking similarities in form, structure, function, and purpose suggest that *Huainanzi* 12 aimed to demonstrate that the *Laozi* could serve the same canonical ends as the *Odes*.²⁶

The brief discussion of *Hanfeizi*, *Lüshi chungiu*, and *Hanshi waizhuan* contained here indicates that *Huainanzi* 12 shares important similarities with these earlier collections of anecdotal narratives. Yet, *Huainanzi* 12 is hardly a carbon copy. Though some might question its originality given that the chapter is a compilation of derivative materials devoid of original prose of any kind, we shall see that the chapter’s original-

²³ Several chapters of *Huainanzi* cite *Odes* in a manner consistent with Han Ying’s *Hanshi waizhuan*, to confirm a particular line of reasoning, illustrate a philosophical principle, or conclude an argument, but *Odes* is never cited at the close of an anecdote, as is the *Laozi* in *Huainanzi* 12. The *Odes* is cited in Chapters 2 (1x), 8 (1x), 9 (1x), 10 (4x), 13 (1x), 14 (3x), 18 (1x), 19 (3x) and 20 (6x). See *HNZ* 2/18/13; 8/64/2; 9/80/15; 10/83/4; 10/85/8; 10/85/13; 10/86/2; 13/124/26; 14/135/21; 14/137/10; 14/139/23; 18/197/8; 19/207/5; 19/208/1; 19/209/27; 20/210/19; 20/210/21; 20/211/4; 20/211/6; 20/211/25; 20/128/28.

²⁴ This is not to argue that Han Ying was attempting to persuade his readers that *Odes* was authoritative *per se*. As far as we know, it was the most authoritative text in the Warring States Period and probably, following the work of Martin Kern, the most stable of canonical texts. Rather my argument speaks to the type of authority Han Ying associated with *Odes*. We see in Han Ying’s endeavor the same tendency exhibited in *Huainanzi* 12 to personify and contextualize a particular source of authority. As Zi Xia claims: “With regard to human affairs, the *Odes* is dazzlingly brilliant like the radiant brightness of the sun and moon; it is lustrously luminous like the alternating movements of the stars and planets. In the most distant past, it embodies the Way of Yao and Shun, and more recently, it possesses the moral principles of the Three Kings.” 時之於事也昭昭乎若日月之光明，燦燦乎如星辰之錯行。上有堯舜之道，下有三王之義；*HSWZ* 2.29/14/11–13.

²⁵ James Hightower maintains that *Hanshi waizhuan*, or more accurately its earlier ancestors *Han waizhuan* and *Han neizhuan*, was likely composed around 150 BC. See Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, p. 126. *Huainanzi* was first presented to the imperial throne in 139 BC, so must have been completed by 140 BC. For a thoughtful and detailed discussion of the context and motives informing the creation of *Huainanzi*, see Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), pp. 1–61.

²⁶ I am indebted to Andrew Meyer for pointing out the relevance of *Hanshi waizhuan* to *Huainanzi* 12 and its similar structure and aims. Our rich exchanges greatly enhanced my understanding of this text.

ity lies in the particular configuration of anecdotes that were selected, their arrangement in the chapter, and their association with specific *Laozi* passages.

SITUATING *HUAINANZI* 12 WITHIN THE *HUAINANZI* LANDSCAPE

In an earlier article I argued that *Huainanzi* 21 (“An Overview of the Essentials”) is invaluable in providing an emic or internal understanding of the content, structure, and goals of the text. There I highlighted the following claims of the authors that their work is:

1. a comprehensive text containing all the knowledge the ruler needs to govern his empire successfully;
2. an eminently practical text, chiefly concerned with elucidating the interconnections between the Way as an abstract entity and its manifestations in concrete affairs; and
3. a programmatic text providing the ruler with the requisite wisdom to choose the most efficacious course of action in any circumstance he might confront, whether looking outward to the world at large or focusing inward on the self.

To do so, according to *Huainanzi* 21, the reader must proceed from the beginning of the work to its end, reading its chapters successively and reaping the benefits that each offers. Thus, the *Huainanzi* constitutes a coherent work, following a purposeful organization that is anything but haphazard. The authors’ vision is that of an interlinked and overarching coherence built upon a cumulative reading of its individual chapters.²⁷ Moreover, I argued that the first nine chapters of the text move deliberately from cosmogony to cosmology to ontology; from the meta-phenomenal Way as utter non-differentiation to the phenomenal world of differentiated things; from the Way’s macrocosmic aspects visible in Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons, to its microcosmic manifestations in human beings; from cosmology to human genesis; from the motions of the celestial bodies to the movements of human history; from the regulation of one’s physical and spiritual self to the governance of the world.²⁸

After chapter 9, the text shifts from basic principles to applications and illustrations.²⁹ This shift marks a move from explicating principles

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of the organization of the text as a whole, see the introduction in *Huainanzi*.

²⁸ Sarah A. Queen, “Inventories of the Past: Rethinking the ‘School’ Affiliation of the *Huainanzi*,” *AM* 3d ser. 14.1 (2001), pp. 51–72.

²⁹ Mark Lewis has argued for the coherence of the first nine chapters, but concludes that

of the Way 道 to illustrating its various applications in human affairs 事. That the later chapters are chiefly concerned with illustrations and applications is borne out by their literary form, content, and titles. They are generally compilations of materials from different literary genres meant to illustrate broader principles of the Way introduced in 1–9 in terms of specific kinds of human affairs, often accompanied by editoria- lizing comments provided by the *Huainanzi* compilers where deemed appropriate.³⁰ Accordingly chapters in this half of the text carry titles such as precepts 稱, responses 應, overviews 略, discourses 論, sayings 言, and persuasions 說.³¹

Thus, there is a purposeful change in emphasis between the first and second half of the text that corresponds perfectly with the claims of the *Huainanzi* postface. If, as its author insists, the text aims to clarify the relationship between the Way and Affairs, the relationship between the first and second half of the text appears both transparent and co- herent. It also explains why the coherence and logical progression of the text might appear to break down: turning to the later chapters the reader is barraged with a veritable smorgasbord of illustrations on the wide applicability of the Way, tasty treats but nonetheless potentially overwhelming to the palette if consumed all at once.

With this understanding of the structure and organization of the *Huainanzi* as a whole, we can begin to appreciate the specific contribu- tions of *Huainanzi* 12. By its “draw[ing] together ... past affairs and ... testing and verifying [reversals of fortune] according to the techniques of Lao-Zhuang,” a comprehensive picture of the ideal ruler emerges. It is one that both exemplifies key aspects of the sagely ruler of the *Laozi* and the mystical gnosis celebrated in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, yet simultaneously departs from these ideals in significant and intriguing ways.

this coherence breaks down after this point in the text. In contrast, Charles LeBlanc has ar- gued that the organization of *Huainanzi* is coherent throughout and may be divided into three parts according to contents: 1. basic principles (chapters 1–8); 2. applications and illustrations (chapters 9–20); and 3. postface: summary and outline (chapter 21). See Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 307, and Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, p. 189.

³⁰ A good example of this approach is *Huainanzi* 14, “Sayings Explained” (“Quan Yan” 詮言). Though not typically recognized as such, the chapter is a collection of nearly seventy maxims or brief sayings 言, whose illustrative points are typically explicated by the *Huainanzi* compilers at the end of each saying; see introduction to chap. 14 of *Huainanzi*.

³¹ See, for example, *HNZ* 10 (“Profound Precepts,” or “Mou Cheng” 繆稱); *HNZ* 13 (“Bound- less Discourses,” “Fan Lun” 汎論); *HNZ* 14 (“Sayings Explaining,” “Quan Yan” 詮言); *HNZ* 15 (“An Overview of the Military,” “Bing Lue” 兵略), and *HNZ* 16 and 17 (“A Mountain of Persuasions” [“Shuai Shan” 說山] and “A Forest of Persuasions” [“Shuai Lin” 說林]).

HUAINANZI 12 AND THE TECHNIQUES OF LAO-ZHUANG

Though the number of anecdotes contained in chapter 12 and the range of topics addressed are too numerous to recount individually, I will describe and characterize them in terms of three broad categories and provide representative examples in each case. The three categories are epistemology, ethics, and pragmatic politics.

Epistemology: Knowing, Articulating, and Transmitting the Way

This category addresses fundamental questions of epistemology and language. Can knowledge of the Way be acquired? How does one know the Way? How does one communicate knowledge of the Way to others? There are seventeen relevant anecdotes,³² which have many parallels with anecdotes found primarily in the later chapters of the received *Zhuangzi*.³³ As the examples, below, demonstrate, we find that the dual aspects of the Way as changing/unchanging, differentiated/undifferentiated, and eternal/ephemeral may be known by following two distinct but complementary epistemological routes – “knowing” and “not knowing.” These, in turn, correspond to learning through others and learning through the self. Learning of the Way through others involves articulating and transmitting the Way through conventionally accepted wisdom, mediated as it is through human culture and involving reading, writing, and speaking. Learning of the Way through direct experience necessitates practicing mystical regimens of inner cultivation that enable one to gain the Way.³⁴ This type of knowledge cannot

³² These anecdotes correspond to the following sections of my forthcoming translation in *Huainanzi*: HNZ 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.7, 12.11, 12.18, 12.20, 12.25, 12.34, 12.37, 12.39, 12.42, 12.44, 12.45, 12.46, and 12.48. For the Chinese text see, respectively, *HNZ* 12/105/3–18; 12/105/20–26; 12/106/1–6; 12/106/8–13; 12/106/28–107/4; 12/108/11–15; 12/110/1–8; 12/110/17–19; 12/111/15–25; 12/114/5–8; 12/114/26–29; 12/115/12–17; 12/116/5–19; 12/117/1–4; 12/117/6–10; 12/117/22–26.

³³ By noting such parallels I do not intend to argue that the *Huainanzi* compiler(s) necessarily drew upon *Zhuangzi*, and if they did it had already achieved a static form, or final form, as we know it today. Moreover, Harold Roth has argued that the received *Zhuangzi* may have been compiled at the court of Huainan; see idem, “Who Compiled the Chuang Tzu,” in Henry Rosemont, Jr., ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts* (La Salle: Open Court Press, 1991), pp. 79–128.

³⁴ See Harold Roth: “Bimodal Mystical Experience in the ‘Qiwulun’ Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, March 1997; “Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism,” *BSOAS* 60.2 (June 1997), pp. 295–314; “The Yellow Emperor’s Guru: A Narrative Analysis from *Chuang Tzu* 11,” *Taoist Resources* 7.1 (April 1997), pp. 43–60. See also Lee Yearley, “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang Tzu,” in Victor Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1983), pp. 125–39, and Lee Yearley, “Zhuangzi’s Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State,” in Paul Kjelberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 152–82.

be transmitted through reading, writing and speaking but is reliant on nonverbal communication.

As eventually shown, knowledge that yields an understanding of the eternal, unchanging, and undifferentiated Way is described as profound, refined, and internal. In contrast, knowledge of the ephemeral, changing, and differentiated Way is described as shallow, coarse, and external. Though the former is prized most highly, the latter is also recognized as contributing to an understanding of the Way, their arena of application complementing one another in essential ways. Such a hierarchical reading of wisdom, I would argue, sought to resolve and harmonize conflicting positions on the most fundamental questions of epistemology represented in the various intellectual positions that characterized preunification China. In doing so, the most extreme claims of the *Zhuangzi* that eschew politics altogether are tamed, and the most potentially subversive readings of the *Laozi* supportive of a minimalist government and undetectable ruler are domesticated to articulate a vision of ideal rule conducive to the intellectual unity and harmony embodied in the *Huainanzi* as a whole.³⁵ Let us turn now to a representative sampling of anecdotes that illustrate these themes.

Grand Purity inquires of the way

Huainanzi 12 opens with a description of Grand Purity's quest to seek knowledge of the Way. Significantly, Grand Purity does so by turning to others, questioning three different figures that appear in the story, each of which supplies a different answer. The story begins:

Grand Purity asked Inexhaustible, "Do you know the Way?"

Inexhaustible responded, "I don't know it."

In this first instance, when Grand Purity queries Inexhaustible whether it knows the Way, Inexhaustible offers a negative response and the conversation ends. Since Inexhaustible claims that it "does not know," following conventional understandings of wisdom, Grand Purity does not query Inexhaustible further but moves on to a new target of inquiry and potential source of wisdom:

[Grand Purity] further asked Non-action, "Do *you* know the Way?"

Non-action replied, "I know it."

[Grand Purity said,] "Does this Way that you know have norms?"

Non-action responded, "Yes, the Way that I know has norms."

³⁵ This type of position is not necessarily unique to *Huainanzi*; it clearly resonates with some of the "syncretist" chapters of *Zhuangzi* and certain chapters of *Lüshi chunqiu*. However, the possible implications of these similarities will not be explored in this paper.

[Grand Purity] inquired, “What are the norms, then?”

Non-action responded, “The Way that I know can be weak or strong;

IT CAN BE SOFT OR HARD,³⁶

IT CAN BE YIN OR YANG;

IT CAN BE DARK OR BRIGHT;

IT CAN EMBRACE OR CONTAIN HEAVEN AND EARTH;

IT CAN RESPOND TO OR AWAIT THE LIMITLESS.

These are the norms by which I know the Way.”

In contrast to Inexhaustible, Non-action not only proffers an affirmative response that the Way can be known, Non-action also claims that it has norms 數, describing them in terms of three ascending spheres of complexity, Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth, and the Limitless. This, of course, leaves Grand Purity quite perplexed, since one respondent has argued that the Way cannot be known and the other has suggested that not only can it be known but it can be known and described in terms of virtually everything: the world, the cosmos, and what lies beyond. Unable to find a way out of the conceptual quagmire of these contradictory epistemological perspectives, Grand Purity turns to Non-Beginning in the hopes that it will resolve the contradiction. Grand Purity recounts the earlier conversations with Inexhaustible and Non-action and then proceeds to ask Non-Beginning: “This being so, between Inexhaustible’s not knowing and Non-action’s knowing, which is right and which is wrong?” Significantly, Non-Beginning does not identify one position as correct and the other as fallacious. Rather, Non-Beginning responds:

NOT KNOWING IT (VIZ., THE WAY) IS DEEP WHILE KNOWING IT IS SHALLOW;

NOT KNOWING IT IS INTERNAL WHILE KNOWING IT IS EXTERNAL;

NOT KNOWING IT IS REFINED WHILE KNOWING IT IS COARSE.

Non-Beginning’s response, which describes “not knowing” as being deep, internal, and refined and portrays “knowing” as being shallow, external, and coarse clearly challenges conventional understandings of wisdom. Such distinctions may implicitly suggest that the relationship between these two forms of wisdom was to be understood in a hierarchical and progressive way: one can easily envision moving from a shallow to a more profound understanding of the Way; knowing it outside the self or from external sources to knowing it inside the self or

³⁶ In this article, all examples of parallel prose like this one are set in small caps; the visual design shows their structural importance inside the *HNZ* anecdotes.

from within the self; and knowing it in a rough or course manner and then moving to a more refined sense of it. Thus though “not knowing” is clearly prized above “knowing” both are recognized as contributing something to human knowledge of the Way.

In the next stage of the story, the enlightenment or conversion moment is portrayed. This is apparent in Grand Purity’s physical reaction to Non-Beginning’s response and the tentative articulation of Grand Purity’s new understanding of wisdom:

Grand Purity then gazed up at the heavens and said with a long sigh,

“THEN, IS NOT KNOWING, IN FACT, KNOWING?
AND IS KNOWING, IN FACT, NOT KNOWING?
WHO KNOWS THAT KNOWING IT IS NOT KNOWING
AND THAT NOT KNOWING IT IS KNOWING?”

Non-Beginning responds:

“THE WAY CANNOT BE HEARD, FOR WHAT IS HEARD IS NOT THE
WAY;
THE WAY CANNOT BE SEEN, FOR WHAT IS SEEN IS NOT THE
WAY;
THE WAY CANNOT BE SPOKEN, FOR WHAT IS SPOKEN IS NOT
THE WAY.

Who knows the formlessness of that which gives form to form?³⁷

At first glance, Non-Beginning appears to be moving away from its previous position, because here Non-Beginning seemingly argues that since the Way cannot be heard, seen, or spoken, it cannot be known through hearing, sight, or speech. The final line, however, serves to qualify Non-Beginning’s claim in terms of the formless aspects of the Way. The following two *Laozi* citations crown the story’s ending:

When all the world recognizes good as good,
There is ill.³⁸

Therefore

Those who know do not speak;
those who speak do not know.³⁹

The first two lines, taken from *Laozi*, are generally understood to function as a veiled critique of the ethical program and moral distinctions

³⁷ For the *Zhuangzi* version of this anecdote, see ZZ 22/62/18–22.

³⁸ LZ 2. Again, to demonstrate the structure of the passages all passages of verse, such as this, are specially indented.

³⁹ LZ 56; HNZ 12.1; HNZ 12/105/3–18.

upheld by Confucius and promoted in his particular theory of language, the Rectification of Names. In the context of our story, however, good and bad are understood as yet another enumeration of the phenomenal aspects of the Way like weak and strong, soft and hard, and dark and bright. Likewise the second pair of lines, which is typically understood to speak to the ineffability of the Way, shifts semantically to new ground. Anchored to the Grand Purity anecdote, these lines are qualified and their claims are made more modest, pertaining as they now do to only the undifferentiated aspects of the Way: the Way in its formlessness cannot be heard, seen, or described and thus those who know it do not speak about it. Of course, the “knowing” of the *Laozi* line now corresponds to the “not knowing” of the *Zhuangzi* anecdote, which in turn refers to a deep, internal, and most refined understanding of the most profound and mysterious aspects of the Way. By extension, the “knowing” of the *Zhuangzi* anecdote implicitly refers to a more shallow, external, and coarse understanding of the Way, based as it is on the Way as differentiated within the Ten Thousand Things. Moreover, while those who “know” the differentiated aspects of the Way speak readily of it, those who “do not know” the formless Way, as the next anecdote illustrates, transmit their knowledge of the Way without relying on language, through nonverbal forms of communication.⁴⁰

The duke of Bo questions Confucius on “subtle words”

This narrative, like the anecdote before, opens with a figure who inquires about the Way and also receives no answer. But this time the anecdote takes on an air of historicity not seen in the previous example, being a conversation between two historical figures about a certain extant theory of language; the figure seeking knowledge of the Way does so in terms of Confucius’ “subtle words (*wei yan* 微言).” The story begins: “The duke of Bo inquired of Confucius saying: “Is it possible for people to share subtle words?” Confucius did not respond.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ The distinction between “knowing and not knowing” or “small and great knowledge” is also explored in section 12.25, where Bo Le’s skill in judging horses is contrasted with those of Nine Cornered Hillock, and section 12.42, where Lu Ao’s wanderings are contrasted with those of an unnamed gentleman; *HNZ* 12/111/15–25, and 12/116/21–28, respectively.

⁴¹ Confucius appears frequently in this chapter and other chapters of *Huainanzi* and is an important source of authority in many instances across the text. He is mentioned 50 times in Chapters 2 (1x), 7 (1x), 9 (6x), 10 (1x), 11 (5x), 12 (10x), 13 (3x), 16 (5x), 18 (5x), 19 (5x), 20 (6x), and 21 (2x); he is quoted 16 times in chapters 9 (1x), 11 (4x), 12 (7x), 13 (1x), 18 (2x), and 20 (1x). He is most commonly referred to as Kongzi with one instance of Kong Qiu. For references to Confucius, see *HNZ* 2/16/23; 7/60/15; 9/69/4; 9/69/7; 9/70/2; 9/77/22; 9/80/22; 9/81/1; 10/91/15; 11/94/16; 11/96/3; 11/96/4; 11/97/8; 11/103/26; 12/105/20; 12/105/20; 12/107/12; 12/107/23; 12/107/23; 12/108/1; 12/108/21; 12/116/24; 12/119/14; 12/119/15; 13/123/20; 13/128/16; 13/129/9; 16.20/156/4; 16.95/162/27; 16.100/163/12;

This is clearly a reference to the particular strategy for articulating the Way associated with Confucius by exegetes of the Gongyang tradition of the *Spring and Autumn* known more fully as *weiyán dayi* 微言大義. Confucius was said to have employed “subtle words” to convey “profound principles (*dayi*)” about the Way. In asking “Is it possible for people to share subtle words?” the duke of Bo raises fundamental questions about transmitting knowledge of the Way. He does so by asking whether it is possible for people to really share, participate in, and by extension transmit to one another, knowledge of the Way through an expressly coded, esoteric language of “subtle words”? As we will see, Confucius’ answer, in turn, serves to repossess, rework, and subvert this theory of language to support nonverbal forms of communication as the highest expression of the Way.

Fittingly, Confucius does not respond to the duke’s question by “answering” him. His silence prompts the duke to search for possible answers within himself: The duke of Bo inquired further: “Isn’t it like stones thrown into the water?” Once thrown in the water, stones generally sink to the bottom, never to be retrieved. Similarly, knowledge of the Way is difficult to retrieve through subtle words that are meant to convey its most significant aspects. Though the duke’s skepticism is palpable, Confucius replies: “Skilled divers from Wu and Yue could retrieve them.” Those with the requisite skill can retrieve the stones from the pond’s bottom. This is also the case with subtle words that convey the Way. Although the duke of Bo suggests that subtle speech meant to convey the profundity of the Way is easily lost on the listener, like stones thrown in a pond, Confucius’ good diver can retrieve the stone just as a good listener can retrieve the meaning behind the word.

Still unconvinced by Confucius’ response, the duke presses on with an additional question and analogy that raise the ante, so to speak: “Then perhaps it is like throwing water into water?” the duke asked. Again Confucius rejects the analogy. He replies: “When the waters of the Zi and Sheng rivers were blended together, Yiya tasted [the water] and recognized [which was which].” Confucius holds to his argument

16.102/163/17; 16.151/168/4; 18/187/7; 18/189/16; 18/196/25; 18/196/28; 18/198/8; 19/203/6; 19/208/11; 19/208/11; 19/209/2; 19/209/3; 20/212/1; 20/217/6; 20/217/6; 20/218/6; 20/218/14; 20/223/5; 21/228/1; and 21/228/4. For utterances attributed to Confucius, see *HNZ* 9/75/29; 11/94/15; 11/94/16; 11/96/3; 11/100/25; 12/105/22; 12/105/23; 12/107/9; 12/108/18; 12/118/7; 12/116/25; 12/119/14; 13/125/27; 18/196/27; 18/198/10; and 20/215/9. In contrast, Laozi is described once in chapter 10; *HNZ* 10/90/25. Beyond the 53 citations from the *Laozi* in *Huainanzi* 12, Laozi or Lao Dan is quoted only 5 additional times in chapters 1 (1x), 11 (2x) and 18 (2x). See *HNZ* 1/6/9; 11/95/3; 11/100/23; 18/192/6; and 18/194/3. I am presently preparing a study of the varying portrayals of Confucius in *Huainanzi*.

that a person with the requisite skill, in this case the most artful of cooks, Yiya, can still retrieve the two sources of water even if admittedly more challenging than retrieving a stone from the bottom of a pond.

Failing to understand Confucius' import – which is not accidental, as the exchange between the two figures embodies and echoes the very theory of language Confucius hopes to impart – the duke concludes: “Then isn't it the case that people surely cannot transmit ‘subtle words’”? In other words, the duke concludes from Confucius's examples that it must be near nigh impossible for the average person to decode the subtleties of language suitable for expressing the Way. Confucius retorts that this is not the case:

“Why consider it impossible?” asked Confucius. “[But it's possible] only for those who really know to what words refer. Now those who know to what words refer do not rely upon words to speak. Fishermen get wet and hunters chase after their prey, but not because they are pleased to do so. Therefore the best words reject words [altogether] while the best acts are devoid of action. That which [those of] shallow knowledge squabble over is inconsequential.”

Confucius argues that only those who understand the referents of words can participate in the true subtleties of words. Those who hope to catch a fish inevitably get wet; those who hope to catch prey typically must chase after it, not because they find joy in doing so but because the circumstances and situation warrants it. At the same time, one would presumably prefer to stay dry or take a leisurely stroll, just as one would presumably prefer to remain silent. Words then possess limited value and are unavoidable as instruments to communicate certain aspects of the Way. Yet, the highest form of speech dispenses with words altogether, just as the highest form of action leaves acting behind. Thus, Confucius argues that words have a kind of practical, contingent utility as long as one bears in mind their ultimate referent. But the best form of communication, truly “subtle words,” is that which manages to convey meaning without actually using any words whatsoever.

What then is the ultimate referent that allows knowledge to be transmitted through the use of “subtle words”? That the answer is the Way is made clear by the appraisal and citation that concludes the narrative:

The duke of Bo did not grasp Confucius' meaning and consequently died in a bath-house.⁴² Therefore the *Laozi* says:

⁴² For a parallel, see *LSCQ* 18.3/111/16–21, and John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000; hereafter, *Annals*), p. 450.

Words have an ancestor and affairs have a sovereign.
It is only because people lack this knowledge that they
fail to understand me.⁴³

These words describe the duke of Bo.⁴⁴

The *Laozi* lines point to the Way as the “ancestor of words” and the “sovereign of affairs.” Lacking such “knowledge” of the Way, how could the duke ever hope to understand Confucius and the Way to which he referred with his “subtle words”? Moreover, according to *Huainanzi* 12, the duke’s failure to understand Confucius’s claims about the Way was the direct cause of his demise: he was killed in a bath house after rebelling against the prime minister of Chu.⁴⁵

The above anecdote implicitly posits a hierarchy, this time with respect to a theme closely related to knowing the Way: communicating knowledge of the Way to others. Confucius argues: “Now those who know to what words refer do not rely upon words to speak.” Nonetheless, they do speak all the while recognizing that there is a yet better form of communication: “the best words reject words altogether while the best acts do not take action.” Though this nonverbal form of communication is to be prized, Confucius’ claims serve to legitimize speech as a kind of expedient mode of communication, perhaps more “shallow,” “coarse” and “external” than the form of communication that precedes speech or preempts it altogether. In fact, Confucius admits, “that which [those of] shallow knowledge squabble over is inconsequential.” Presumably such people would endlessly debate the use of terminology, all the while missing the point that words function as transitory referents to the Way; meaningful in the moment but lacking universal and eternal validity. In contrast, those possessing deep knowledge of the Way communicate their understanding nonverbally. This valorization of nonverbal communication is not limited to *Huainanzi* 12. Indeed, the significance and efficacy of nonverbal communication as the highest form of communication between the sage and Heaven is developed most extensively in *Huainanzi* Chapter 6, “Surveying the Obscure” (“Lan ming” 覽冥). Nonverbal forms of communication between the sagely ruler and his people are explored in *Huainanzi* 10, “Profound Evalu-

⁴³ LZ 70. Note that another anecdote in the chapter similarly argues: “Now words have their ancestor and affairs have their root. If you lose sight of them, even if you possess muck skill and capability, it would be better if you possessed less. For this reason, when Chui is depicted on the Zhou tripods, he is shown chewing his fingers because the former kings hoped to illustrate that excessive skill should not be practiced”; HNZ 12.50; HNZ 12/118/12-14.

⁴⁴ HNZ 12/105/20-26.

⁴⁵ The precise reasoning behind this claim is difficult to reconstruct from the extant evidence.

ations” (“Mou cheng” 繆稱). In both cases cultivation and refinement of the “Spirit 神” is critical; the former chapter emphasizes cultivating the Spirit to yield “Quintessential Qi” (*jingqi* 精氣) or “Quintessential Spirit” (*jingshen* 精神) while the latter develops the concept of “Quintessential Sincerity” (*jingcheng* 精誠) as the medium through which the ruler communicates nonverbally to his subjects.

Thus, the first two anecdotes confirm and support one another in presenting two types of knowledge (knowing and not knowing) and two modes of corresponding communication (verbal and nonverbal), but do so with slightly different emphases and nuances of meaning. In suggesting that the truly knowledgeable simply do not speak, the story of Grand Purity does not imply that such people do not transmit their “non-knowing” of the eternal aspects of the Way. They do, in fact, communicate such understanding but via nonverbal forms of communication. The second account argues that the truly knowledgeable speak but understand that speech is a mere expedient. Like fishermen who, as we saw, must sometimes get wet to catch fish, sages are compelled to use speech to communicate the import of the Way. They do not equate such verbalizations with the eternal, unchanging, and undifferentiated aspects of the Way. Rather, words are used to articulate the Way’s ephemeral human and natural affairs. As the next anecdote makes clear, words must not be evaluated on their own merit but in terms of how well they suit the momentary circumstances of the differentiated Way.

King Hui of Wei and Zhai Jian discuss the law code of Master Hui Shi

Master Hui drafted the state laws on behalf of king Hui. When he had completed them he showed them to the elders⁴⁶ who all praised them. He then submitted them to king Hui. King Hui was elated by them and showed them to Zhai Jian. Zhai Jian exclaimed, “Excellent.”

King Hui inquired, “Since they are excellent, can we implement them?”

Zhai Jian responded, “We cannot.”

King Hui inquired further, “If they are excellent, why can’t we implement them?”

Zhai Jian responded, “Now take those who haul heavy logs: those in front call, ‘Heave!’ while those behind respond, ‘Ho!’ This is a chant to encourage the strength of those who haul heavy loads. Could it really be the case that they do not know

⁴⁶ Here I follow the original text and do not accept Lau’s emendation, which changes *xiansheng* 先生 to *minren* 民人 based on *LSCQ* parallels.

either the melodies of Zheng and Wei or the [tune called] ‘Whirling Chu?’ Although they know such melodies, they do not use them because they do not suit 宜 the circumstance as well as this chant does. Governing a state is a matter of ritual 禮, and not a matter of literary eloquence 文辯.”⁴⁷ Therefore the *Laozi* says:

The more detailed the laws and edicts
The more thieves and robbers there are.⁴⁸

This is what is meant here.⁴⁹

Here, Master Hui has produced a code of law that everyone – elders and the king – agrees is outstanding. There is no disagreement concerning the merits of the law code. But when the king suggests that the code should be implemented, his minister Zhai Jian argues that it should not. Zhai recognizes that as a code of law, Hui Shi’s draft is outstanding, but he discourages the king from implementing it. Why so?

The anecdote proceeds by way of analogy. Zhai Jian explains that when commoners of Wei and Zhong haul logs they do so by chanting Heave! Ho! Not by chanting “Whirling Chu.” Why? Because the former is more suitable than the latter for encouraging those who carry heavy loads. The laws drafted by Hui Shi, like the “Whirling Chu,” though eloquent in their own right, are not appropriate to the situation. Words – whether spoken, chanted, or written – must suit the circumstances. Zhai insists that like the simple chant of Heave! Ho!, the norms of ritual propriety are most suitable for governing the state of Wei. The *Laozi* lines, traditionally read as a critique of activist and interventionist government that relies on laws and commands to govern their people, take on a new cast. Although the antilegalistic bias remains, coupled with the Hui Shi anecdote the connotative boundaries of the lines are expanded to include support for ritual as a key aspect of governance when the circumstances are suitable. Thus, this anecdote recommends that in the broadest sense the ideal ruler must select the policy option most suitable to the situation or circumstance at hand; in the narrowest sense he must use language prudently and cautiously, keeping in mind its limitations while employing it for limited ends. Such limitations are addressed further in the next anecdote.

Wheelwright Flat converses with duke Huan of Qi

Duke Huan [of Qi] was reading in the upper part of his hall
while Wheelwright Flat was hewing a wheel in the lower part.

⁴⁷ For another version of this anecdote see *LSCQ* 18.5/114/21–24; *Annals*, pp. 459–60.

⁴⁸ *LZ* 57.

⁴⁹ *HNZ* 12.3; *HNZ* 12/106/1–6.

Setting aside his hammer and chisel, the wheelwright inquired of duke Huan, saying, "I venture to ask what books you are reading?"

"The books of the sages," said the duke.

"Are the sages still alive?"

"They're already dead," said the duke.

"Then what you are reading are merely the lees and dregs of the sages."

Flushing in anger, duke Huan replied, "How dare you, a wheelwright, presume to criticize the books I am reading? If you can explain yourself, all right. If you cannot explain yourself, you shall die."

"Yes, I can explain. I will put it in terms of my occupation as a wheelwright," said Wheelwright Flat. "If the [the blows of the mallet] are too hard, [the chisel] bites and won't budge; if they are too gentle, [the chisel] slides and won't hold. To make the chisel neither slide nor stick is something you can sense with your hand and feel with your heart. Then you can get it down to the utmost subtlety. But I haven't been able to teach it to my son, and my son hasn't been able to learn it from me. That's why I'm an old man still hewing wheels after sixty years. Now what the sages have said contains some truth; but since they are dead and long gone, all that remains is the lees and dregs [of their teachings]."⁵⁰

Therefore the *Laozi* says:

The way that can be spoken
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.⁵¹

According to the anecdote, writing is but a dismal record of the words spoken by the sages, and the words spoken by the sages are but an imperfect reflection of the eternal Way of which they speak. Thus, once again, we find the argument that the constant, eternal, and formless aspects of the Way cannot be transmitted or communicated through the spoken or written word, yet they can be apprehended through direct experience. If one is to attain the eternal Way, one must do so through the regimens and practices of inner cultivation that yield the "not knowing" celebrated in the opening anecdote of the chapter, illustrated in additional sections of *Huainanzi* 12, and developed more extensively

⁵⁰ For the *Zhuangzi* variant of this anecdote see ZZ 13/37/10-13.

⁵¹ LZ 1; HNZ 12.18; HNZ 12/110/1-8.

in *Huainanzi* 7 “Jingshen” (“The Quintessential Spirit”).⁵² Nonetheless, as the following examples demonstrate, speaking and listening, writing and reading, teaching and learning still have their instrumental value in providing glimpses of the Way at a particular moment in time, as it unfolds in a continuing cosmogony that brings the ten thousand things and ten thousand affairs into being. As such, the familiar dualities of the Way as eternal/ephemeral, formless/formed, undifferentiated/differentiated, and constant/changing are fully exploited to harmonize the various philosophical positions contained in the text. This is precisely how the *Huainanzi* can uphold the ultimate ineffability of the Way, all the while being committed to articulating a comprehensive account of its attributes.⁵³

Thus, language is working on two levels; and, similarly, claims about language are two-fold. On the one hand, the authors recognize, as so many sages had before, that the Way is ultimately ineffable; it cannot be fully described with the spoken or written word. At the same time, language is useful in capturing the Way at any particular moment as it unfolds in the human world. This dual approach to language is seen very clearly in *Huainanzi* 12. On the one hand, the anecdotes described and discussed above that deal expressly with questions of epistemology and language argue that the unchanging Way cannot be expressed or communicated in words but must be experienced directly. On the other hand, as we shall see in the examples presented below, a number of anecdotes serve to translate the ineffability of the undifferentiated, cosmogonic Way into expressible units of meaning.

Royal Longevity converses with Dignified Ascent

Royal Longevity was traveling with a bundle of books on his back when he bumped into Dignified Ascent in Zhou. Dignified Ascent remarked:

⁵² Harold Roth and Lee Yearly have explored this form of mystical gnosis in great depth, and so it will not be dealt with in detail here. See n. 34, above, for a list of their pertinent publications. E.g., see these relevant anecdotes: sect. 12.7 (Gaptooth and Ragbag Discuss the Way), 12/106/28–12/107/4; sect. 12.39 (Yen Hui and Confucius Discuss Sitting and Forgetting), 12/115/12–17; sect. 12.44 (Resplendent Light Queries Nothing There), 12/117/6–10; and sect. 12.45 (Penumbra Queries Shadow), 12/117/1–4. See also the reference to the Resplendent Light anecdote in *HNZ* 2/10/26–27.

⁵³ Indeed, one way of reading *Huainanzi* 21 is as an extended apologia on just this point. The author is well aware of the tension involved in maintaining these two positions simultaneously and repeatedly excuses himself for doing so. At the beginning he states: “Although they (viz. the writings that constitute the *Huainanzi*) are not yet able to fully draw out the core of the Profound Mystery, they are abundantly sufficient to observe its ends and beginnings. If we [only] summarized the essentials or provided an overview and our words did not discriminate the Pure, Uncarved Block and differentiate the Great Ancestor, then it would cause people in their confusion to fail to understand them”; *HNZ* 21/223/21–28.

“Affairs arise in response to change and change is born of the times. Therefore those who understand timeliness are not constant in their actions.

Books are the product of speech and speech is the product of the knowledgeable. [Therefore] those who understand speech do not hoard books.”⁵⁴

Upon hearing this, Royal Longevity made a bonfire of his books and danced with joy. Therefore the *Laozi* says:

An excess of words leads to countless impoverishments,
It does not compare to preserving the center (viz., the heart).⁵⁵

The transformation or conversion of Royal Longevity from one who “knows” to one “who does not know” is summed up in the contrasting images that open and close the anecdote. The story opens with Royal Longevity plodding along the road, laboring under the weight of the books he carries along with him. This image neatly portrays Royal Longevity’s unquestioned commitment to the written word and dedication to book learning. In contrast, the story closes with Royal Longevity dancing in joy around a bonfire he has just made from those very same books. The ecstasy that moves him to dance with joy is the ultimate joy of enlightenment.⁵⁶ He exemplifies one who moves from the “knowing” to “not knowing” described in the opening anecdote of *Huainanzi* 12 discussed above. He has completely disassociated him-

⁵⁴ This line has generated debate over the years. D.C. Lau proposes emending by supplying the negative “*bu*” before “*cang shu*,” yielding the reading: 書者言之所出也。言出於知者，知者不藏書。 Lau follows the near parallel from the “Yu Lao” chap. of *Hanfeizi*, which reads: “Royal Longevity was traveling with a bundle of books on his back when he bumped into Dignified Ascent in Zhou. Dignified Ascent remarked: Affairs are [what one] does, and [what one does] is born of the times. [Thus] the times have no constant affairs. Books are [what one] says. [What one] says is born of knowledge. Thus one who knows does not hoard books. Why then do you make an exception by carrying books on your back?” Upon hearing this, Royal Longevity made a bonfire of his books and danced with joy. Thus, those who are knowledgeable do not rely upon spoken communication to teach; those who are intelligent do not rely upon hoarded books to learn. Such a principle, our present age has passed by but Royal Longevity returned to it. This is to learn not to learn. Thus it is said: “Learn not to learn and return to what the multitudes pass by”; *HFZ* 21/44/18–21. Rudolph Wagner argues that D.C. Lau is mistaken in following *Hanfeizi* and supplying the negative. He follows *Wenzi*, where no negative appears and proposes leaving the line as is: 書者言之所出也。言出於知者，知者藏書； See Rudolph Wagner’s emendation and reading in *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), pp. 35–36. Finally, Zhang Shuangdi bases his emendations on citations of the *Hanfeizi* preserved in various encyclopedia. He appears to have dug the deepest into this problem and accordingly I follow Zhang Shuangdi, who proposes: 書者言之所出也。言出於知者，知言者不藏書。 “Books are the product of speech and speech is the product of the knowledgeable. Those who understand speech do not hoard books”; Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 (Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), note 2, p. 1249.

⁵⁵ *LZ* 5; *HNZ* 12.20; *HNZ* 12/110/17–19.

⁵⁶ This highest form of joy is discussed elsewhere in *Huainanzi*; e.g., *HNZ* 1/7/20–26.

self from his earlier commitment to writing and the spoken word. The *Laozi* citation serves to support the chief characteristics of this conversion or transition from the type of “knowing” encompassed by the externality of “words” and the world of verbal communication to the “not-knowing” embodied in the human heart and expressed through nonverbal means of communication. How best to understand this critical transition? The key lies in the concept of “change” and its relation to writing and speech as envisioned in the *Huainanzi*. Affairs and those engaged in affairs must both move in accordance with change. If change is the constant, then books must be of only limited value: they express a particular moment in time of the unfolding and ever-changing Way. Words are useful in saying something about the Way at a particular moment in time but they are not nor can they ever be universally or eternally valid.⁵⁷ Royal Longevity’s insights into the highest forms of “not-knowing” the Way are echoed in the following story describing the efforts of the student Yin Ru.

Yin Ru seeks instruction in Autumn Driving

Yin Ru was studying charioteering but three years had passed and he had not yet mastered it. He was so troubled and grieved by this that when he slept his thoughts often drifted to charioteering. Once in the middle of the night he dreamt that he received instruction in Autumn Driving⁵⁸ from his teacher.

The next morning he paid a visit to his teacher who looked at him and said: “It is not that I have been withholding my Way from you. It’s just that I feared you were not capable of receiving my instruction. Today I will instruct you in Autumn Driving.”

Yin Ru turned around to take his leave; facing north he bowed twice and replied: “I have enjoyed Heaven’s good fortune. This past evening I already received such instruction in my dreams!”⁵⁹

Therefore the *Laozi* says:

I do my utmost to attain emptiness;
I hold firmly to stillness.
The ten thousand things act in succession,
And I observe their reversions.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ As Rudolf Wagner has aptly explained in his astute discussion of this anecdote: “There still is a Dao that the truly knowledgeable can understand, but its essence is inconstancy and defies fixation into eternally valid writings”; Wagner, *Language, Ontology*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ This was the name of a special technique of charioteering.

⁵⁹ A version of this story appears in *LSCQ* 24.5/158/24-29; see *Annals*, p. 619.

⁶⁰ *LZ* 75; *HNZ* 12.48; *HNZ* 12/117/22-26.

Yin Ru's single-minded focus and commitment to learn a particular art of charioteer driving is commendable but his efforts are misguided at best for he spends three long years seeking the Way of Autumn Driving from a source outside himself. Like Royal Longevity who initially is devoted to seeking knowledge from books, Yin Ru looks to the instructions of his teacher to gain "knowledge" of the Way before he has looked within himself. Only when he dreams that he "received instruction from an unnamed teacher" does he finally experience a breakthrough in his learning.

The *Laozi* citation, with its references to "emptiness" and "stillness," secures a reading of Yin Ru's dream-state commensurate with meditative stages developed through inner cultivation.⁶¹ Only after he has experienced through dream the rudiments of Autumn Driving does his teacher really begin to instruct him. He could hardly do otherwise, for prior to the moment when Yin Ru directly apprehended the Way of Autumn Driving, there was no possibility that his teacher could instruct him. There was no basis inside Yin Ru to connect his teacher's instructions "to that to which they referred." Having experienced the Way of Autumn Driving first-hand in a dream state, Yin Ru is finally prepared to receive instruction from an external source because now, when his teacher speaks, there is an internal referent. Devoid of that internal referent to the Way that can only be attained through a direct, unmediated encounter with the Way – whether through rigorous meditation or a dream-state that spontaneously mirrors the emptiness of the mind acquired through a certain self-cultivation – book-learned, verbal instruction on the Way is limited. Once again, the distinctions between "knowing" and "not knowing," and their implications for learning and teaching are portrayed and harmonized in a story that describes how both can complement one another. Tellingly, although Yin Ru dismisses his teacher in the end of the story, only after Yin Ru personally encounters the Way is his teacher prepared to instruct.

Ethics: Bringing the Virtue of the Way to the Realm

We have seen that the anecdotes described above exemplify a concern to elucidate questions of epistemology as they relate to the individual's pursuit of the Way. We move to the next group of anecdotes, twenty-three in total,⁶² which portray a more public kind of wisdom

⁶¹ Whereas the *Laozi* citation serves to highlight the enlightenment moment described in the narrative and the mental states of "emptiness" and "stillness" that prepare the mind to directly apprehend the Way, in contrast, *Lüshi chungiu* employs this anecdote, as *Annals* argues, to advocate the single-minded focus of the mind celebrated in *Xunzi*; See *Annals*, p. 619.

⁶² They correspond to the following sections of my forthcoming translation in *Huainanzi*:

grounded in the more commonplace sort of particulars of the political realm. The anecdotes encompass notions of ethical leadership, judgment, and a responsibility to the collective future that can provide a kind of moral inspiration to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Accordingly, the anecdotes deal explicitly with the ethical conduct and moral character of various political agents and rulers in relation to the people and members of the bureaucracy, illustrating the ways in which they came to affect the political circumstances at hand. Through these illustrations, the ruler is counseled to embody certain virtues and exhibit certain kinds of ethical conduct that ultimately bring Virtue to ruler and ruled alike.

More specifically, this group of anecdotes exhibits a commitment to a symbiotic and harmonious vision of governance in which the ruler nurtures and transforms the people through his moral example and exhibits an overriding concern for their welfare, even those from a foreign state. This is made possible through the ruler's personal commitment to cultivate the moral aspects of his person,⁶³ as well as to seek the advice and use the abilities of his worthy ministers.⁶⁴ These anecdotes show that when rulers govern through such virtues as humaneness, rightness, sincerity, trustworthiness, and moderation, they will not only derive support from the officials and the people but also generate the requisite conditions for human flourishing on a grand scale. Finally, such expressions of ethics and the common good contrast markedly with the group of stories in the section that follows this one, which will deal explicitly with the exigencies of political power and purchase.

Zigong ransoms a native of Lu

According to the laws of the state of Lu, if a native of Lu is captured by another Lord of the Land as a slave or a concubine, and if there is someone who is able to ransom [the captive], that person is reimbursed from the state treasury. Zigong ransomed a native of Lu from a Lord of the Land, but when [the ransomed party] returned to Lu, [Zigong] declined and did not accept reimbursement.

HNZ 12.8, 12.9, 12.10, 12.12, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.21, 12.22, 12.24, 12.26, 12.27, 12.28, 12.30, 12.31, 12.36, 12.43, 12.47, 12.49, 12.50, 12.51, 12.53, 12.54. For the Chinese text see, respectively, *HNZ* 12/107/16–108/3; 12/108/5–9; 12/108/17–21; 12/109/12–19; 12/109/21–25; 12/109/27–30; 12/110/21–25; 12/110/27–111/2; 12/111/9–13; 12/112/1–11; 12/112/13–17; 12/112/19–113/3; 12/113/11–14; 12/113/16–20; 12/114/20–24; 12/116/21–28; 12/117/17–21; 12/117/28–118/8; 12/118/10–15; 12/118/17–21; 12/119/1–6; and 12/119/8–12.

⁶³ See, e.g., Zhan He Offers a Persuasion to King Zhuang of Chu at HNZ 12.17; *HNZ* 12/109/27–30.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., the anecdote that attributes the perfect merit achieved by Yao, Shun, and King Wu to their able ministers whose capabilities surpassed their respective rulers at HNZ 12.10, *HNZ* 12/108–5–9.

Confucius heard of the matter and said: “Si (a name for Zigong) has committed an error! When sages initiate undertakings they are able to shift with prevailing habits to change local customs. Their teachings and instructions can be applied by future generations. It is not the case that they suit their personal conduct alone. Now the wealthy of Lu are few while the poor are numerous. Ransoming others and receiving recompense is not the most honorable practice 不廉, but if no reimbursement is received, no one will ever again ransom others, and henceforth the people of Lu might never again redeem anyone from the Lords of the Land.” It may indeed be said that Confucius understood how to transform others 知化.⁶⁵

Therefore the Laozi says:

To notice the details is called discernment.⁶⁶

This illustrates how the sagely ruler morally transforms his subjects. Confucius argues that the Superior Man does not arbitrarily follow his own standards of morality, but takes into account the broader effects of his actions on the customary practices of the populace at hand. Confucius does not approve of the practice of ransoming; but this customary practice can only be reformed by first utilizing it as the local populace does, not by simply disregarding it. He expressly states that “... sages are able to shift with prevailing habits to change local customs.” It is precisely their sensitivity to the particular circumstances on the ground, or local nuances of customary practice, that enables sages to effectively transform the common people through virtuous conduct. As the *Laozi* citation suggests in this context, what enables sagely rulers to translate the eternal principles of the Way into an effective response in the moment is the great attention and care they devote to the particularities of the local circumstances they confront.

The next story also explores the theme of moral transformation, but this time from the perspective of the ruler’s personal moral character.

Master Mi governs with sincerity

Master Mi⁶⁷ governed Shanfu for three years when Wuma Qi altered his appearance by wearing tattered clothes and a short hemp jacket so that he could [secretly] observe what transforma-

⁶⁵ A version of this story appears at *LSCQ* 16.6/95/29-96/2; *Annals*, p. 394.

⁶⁶ *LZ* 52; *HNZ* 12.12; *HNZ* 12/108/17-21. The “Yu Lao” chapter of *Hanfeizi* links a different anecdote to this citation exemplifying the interchangeability of these stories as compact and portable ciphers of intellectual exchange. There the ability to “notice the details” enables the viscount of Ji to foretell impending catastrophe; *HFZ* 21/44/5-8.

⁶⁷ Following D.C. Lau’s emendation from 李 to 密. *HNZ* 12/116/21.

tions had taken place there. He saw a night fisherman catch a fish and let it go. Wuma Qi inquired of him saying: “You sir, being a fisherman, want to catch fish. Why then do you catch them and let them go?”

The fisherman replied: “Master Mi does not want us to catch small fish. Since the fish I caught were all small ones, I let them go.”

Wuma Qi returned home and reported his findings to Confucius: “Master Mi is the most virtuous of all! He is able to inspire people to conduct themselves in the dark of the night as if they were facing a strict punishment for their actions. How is Master Mi able to achieve such things?”

Confucius replied: “I, Qiu, once asked him about governing. He replied, ‘Sincerity in this takes shape in that.’ Master Mi must be practicing this technique.”⁶⁸ Therefore the *Laozi* says:

He discards that and takes this.⁶⁹

Disguised as a peasant, Wuma Qi slips into Shanfu to identify and assess changes among the people as a consequence of Master Mi’s three years of rule. There he encounters a fisherman, who, in the dark of night when presumably he cannot be seen by anyone, catches a fish but promptly lets it go. When asked about it, the fisherman says that his ruler desires that the people not catch and eat small fish. Presumably, returning small fish to their habitat will allow them to mature and reproduce thereby ensuring that the people will never lack a steady supply.⁷⁰ Wuma Qi’s ensuing exchange with Confucius belies a sense of amazement at Master Mi and the virtue he inspires in others. Wuma Qi presses Confucius for an explanation and Confucius responds, with support from the *Laozi*, that Master Mi must be practicing the art of establishing sincerity in oneself so as to give rise to it in others. The message rings clear: If you cultivate sincerity in your own person it will inevitably take shape in others.

Viscount Jian of Zhao attacks the people of Zhongmou

Viscount Jian of Zhao died and had not yet been buried when the people of Zhongmou shifted their allegiance to the state of Qi. When viscount Jian of Zhao had been buried five days, viscount Xiang [his son] raised troops to attack and encircle them. The en-

⁶⁸ This anecdote appears as part of a longer story in *LSCQ* 18.8/117/27-118/16. See *Annals*, p. 471.

⁶⁹ *LZ* 72; *HNZ* 12.43; *HNZ* 12/116/21-28.

⁷⁰ This idea of conservation appears in other earlier texts including *Mencius* 1A.2.

circlement was not yet complete when a one-hundred-foot section of the city wall suddenly crumbled. Viscount Xiang then beat the gong and withdrew his troops. An official of his army remonstrated with him saying, “When you were punishing the crimes of Zhongmou, its city walls crumbled. This is a sign that Heaven supports us. Why, then, should we abandon the attack?”

Viscount Xiang replied, “I heard that Shuxiang⁷¹ once said: ‘A Superior Man does not impose upon others when they profit nor does he attack others in distress.’ Let the people of Zhongmou repair their walls. Only when the walls have been repaired, will we attack them.” When the people of Zhongmou heard of the viscount’s [sense of] justice (*yi*) they asked to surrender.⁷²

Therefore the *Laozi* says:

Now,
it is because he alone does not contend
that no one can contend with him.⁷³

This anecdote opens with viscount Xiang’s efforts to chastise the people of Zhongmou for shifting their allegiance to another ruler. Xiang’s punitive expedition is seemingly justified in terms of principles consistent with righteous warfare: the people have rebelled against their ruler and deserve punishment. But the story’s ending shows that viscount Xiang’s virtue has preempted the need for warfare altogether. Based on this context, the “non-contending” of the *Laozi* serves to underscore the didactic message that when rulers lead with virtue, warfare quickly becomes irrelevant and unnecessary.

Viscount Xiang’s conduct is virtuous on several accounts. First, he embodies notions of filial piety: he chastises the Zhongmou because they had shifted allegiance from his father just days after his death. Second, he is attentive to the warnings of Heaven. Seeing the anomalous “crumbling wall” as a sign of Heaven’s support, Xiang’s ministers do not comprehend Xiang’s withdrawal. Viscount Xiang does not disagree that it is a sign of support, but his notion of battle conduct differs from theirs. He in fact takes into account the impact of his conduct on the enemy: availing himself of the breach in the enemy’s defenses afforded by the fallen segment of wall would not only mean taking unfair advantage of the people of Zhongmou in a time of distress, it would also

⁷¹ Shuxiang was the nickname of Yangshe Xi, a grand officer of the state of Jin during the Spring and Autumn period who was known for his worthiness and ability. See *Annals*, p. 798, for references to additional anecdotes in which he appears.

⁷² A variant of this anecdote appears at *LSCQ* 19.8/128/10–17; *Annals*, pp. 507–8.

⁷³ *LZ* 22; *HNZ* 12.24; *HNZ* 12/111/9–13.

mean making use of an undue advantage not gained through the efforts of his own army. Accordingly, the viscount suspends the attack until the enemy has properly reconstituted their main line of defense.⁷⁴

Such a decision on the part of viscount Xiang demonstrates his well-developed sense of justice, or rightness in terms of knowing what is most proper in a given situation. When the enemy population learns of the viscount's virtuous conduct, they promptly lay down their weapons, happy to bestow allegiance upon such an inspirational and compassionate leader. Similarly, as the next account demonstrates, a virtuous leader can prompt the enemy to give up their fight.

Duke Wen exhibits trustworthiness while attacking the city of Yuan

When duke Wen of Jin attacked the city of Yuan, he agreed with his grand ministers upon [a time frame of] three days [to capture the city]. When three days passed and Yuan did not surrender, duke Wen ordered a retreat. A military officer said: "Yuan is sure to surrender in another day or two."

The ruler responded: "I did not realize that it would not be possible to defeat Yuan in three days and so agreed with the grand ministers upon [a time frame of] three days to capture the city of Yuan. Now if we do not end this campaign, though the designated time has elapsed, it would mean forfeiting my trustworthiness to obtain Yuan. I will not do it."

When the people of Yuan heard of this they said: "With a ruler such as this, how could we refuse to surrender?" They promptly surrendered. When the people of Wen heard of this they also requested to surrender. Therefore the *Laozi* says:

How Dim! How Obscure!
Yet within it is the quintessence.
This essence is profoundly genuine,
For what lies within is trustworthy.⁷⁵
Therefore beautiful words can buy honor,
[But] beautiful deeds can raise a man above others.⁷⁶

Though the circumstances that precipitated the attack are not disclosed, the reader is informed that prior to initiating the siege on the

⁷⁴ The famous tale of duke Xiang of Song's virtuous defeat at the river Hong provides important background to this anecdote. He had waited for the Chu army to finish crossing and forming up its ranks before initiating the attack. Later tellers of the tale differ widely in their evaluations of the duke's wisdom and virtue. See *Zuozhuan*, Xi 22.9. Li Zongtong and Wang Yun wu ed., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jinzhu jinyi*, Taipei shi: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1973, vol. 1, p. 325.

⁷⁵ LZ 21.

⁷⁶ LZ 62; HNZ 12.31; HNZ 12/113/16-20.

city of Yuan, duke Wen made a pact with his high ranking ministers that he would limit the siege to three days. Accordingly, having carried out the siege for three days, duke Wen withdraws his troops. Duke Wen's officer, frustrated at the prospect of retreating when victory is palpable implicitly urges the ruler through his declaration to persist in battle. Duke Wen explains that continuing the campaign would mean forfeiting his words, something he is unwilling to do. He will not compromise his moral integrity to ensure a military victory. When the people of Yuan learn of the duke's virtue they promptly surrender. The consequences of his virtuous actions reverberate beyond to the people of Wen. As in the last story, ultimately the Virtue of the ruler inspires the enemy to surrender, ending the need for warfare altogether.

Duke Jing of Song refuses to pass the buck

The following develops around a similar anomaly, but here the anomaly presages a disaster, the imminent demise of the reigning duke Jing of Song as his minister Zi Wei explains when summoned to clarify the meaning of the anomaly:

During the reign of duke Jing of Song, when Mars was in [the Lunar Lodge] Heart, the duke became fearful and summoned Zi Wei to question him, saying: "Mars is in Heart. What does it mean?" Zi Wei responded: "Mars corresponds to the Heavenly Executioner; [the Lunar Lodge] Heart corresponds to the territory of Song. Disaster awaits you.

Zi Wei continues, however, that the ruler might save his life by shifting the blame to another person who could be punished in his stead, an idea promptly rejected by the duke:

"Nonetheless it is possible to shift the blame to the prime minister."

The duke replied: "The prime minister is entrusted with governing the state. If the blame is shifted to him and he is put to death, it would be unlucky. I request to take the onus on myself"

Zi Wei then suggests a second potential culprit; this time the general populace is proposed as a stand-in for the duke and is likewise dismissed by the duke:

"You can shift the blame to the people," Zi Wei stated. The duke responded: "If the people die, for whom would I act as lord? It would be better if I were the only one to die."

Finally, Zi Wei responds:

"Then you can shift the blame to the harvest (*sui*)." The duke retorted: "The harvest is the people's life (*ming*). If there were a

famine due to the harvest then the people would surely die. I am the people's lord, if I should desire to kill my people in order to survive, who would consider me a true lord? My life (*ming*) has certainly reached its end. Zi Wei, speak no more."

The implication of Zi Wei's last recommendation seems to be that he might somehow shift the baleful effect from the duke's person to the harvest; the harvest would be depleted rather than the duke's life.⁷⁷ Having refused Zi Wei's offers on three occasions to take the easy way out and allow another to suffer in his stead, Zi Wei is prepared to reveal the deeper significance of the duke's moral fortitude and Heaven's recompense to his lord:

Zi Wei turned to go. Facing north,⁷⁸ he bowed twice and said: "I dare to congratulate you. Though Heaven dwells on high, [Heaven] hears what lies below. You have spoken as a true lord on three occasions, so Heaven will certainly reward you three times. This evening Mars will surely shift its position through three Lunar Lodges,⁷⁹ [signaling] that you will extend your life by twenty-one years."

The story wraps up in the following way:

The duke responded: "How is it that you know this to be the case?"

Zi Wei replied: "You have spoken as a true lord on three occasions. Therefore, you will be rewarded three times. Mars will surely shift its position through three Lunar Lodges. Each Lodge traverses seven stars. Each movement of Mars corresponds to one year. Three [Lunar Lodges through which Mars will move] times seven [stars for each Lodge] equals twenty-one. Thus, I stated that you would extend your life by twenty-one years. I beg to be allowed to kneel below your throne and wait. If Mars does not shift its location I request the death penalty."

The duke responded, "It is allowed."

⁷⁷ Another possible interpretation would be that the meaning of Zi Wei's suggestion and duke Jing's response depends on a pun. In the context of this astrological passage, Zi Wei might be suggesting that the duke should shift the blame to the planet Jupiter, called *sui xing* "year star"; Jupiter was regarded as having a powerful influence on the fate of states. But *sui* means "harvest" as well as "year," and duke Jing elects to understand *sui* here as meaning not *sui xing*, Jupiter, but rather "harvest," which allows him to reply to Zi Wei's suggestion in suitably moralistic terms.

⁷⁸ I.e. turning toward the ruler, whose throne faces south.

⁷⁹ A shift of a planet through three Lunar Lodges in one night is not physically possible; however, it would be possible to emulate such a shift on the cosmograph (*shi* 式), allowing the astrological consequences of the shift to be demonstrated.

That very night Mars did, in fact, pass through three Lunar Lodges.⁸⁰ Therefore the *Laozi* says:

One who can accept the misfortunes of his state
May be called a king of the world.⁸¹

The conclusion confirms the logic and validity of Zi Wei's prognostications. In doing so, it commends Zi Wei's ability to read, correctly interpret, and relate Heaven's warnings to the ruler. Such abilities, in turn, depict Zi Wei as a worthy minister who acts as both moral compass and ethical judge to his ruler. Duke Jing of Song is equally praiseworthy but for different reasons. As the *Laozi* citation is to be read here, a ruler such as duke Jing of Song, who is willing to personally shoulder moral responsibility for the "misfortunes" that arise in his state and to resist the temptation to abuse his power and privilege by placing the blame on a convenient scapegoat, is a "true king." In refusing to pass the buck, duke Jing significantly expresses greatest consideration for the common people of his state. Although punishing the prime minister in his stead is characterized as "unlucky," allowing the common people to die in his place undermines the ruler's very *raison d'être*: to care for and bring security of life and limb to his people. This ideal of rulership, which takes the people as the root of governance, is reiterated in the next anecdote that explores and clarifies the emotions that ideally characterize the relationship between the ruler and his people.

King Cheng questions Yin Yi on governance

King Cheng questioned Yin Yi about governing. "What kind of virtuous conduct 德之行 will inspire the people to feel affection for 親 their ruler?" he asked.

Yin Yi replied: "Employ them according to the proper seasons. Treat them with respect and compliance 敬順."

King Cheng inquired: "To what extent should one practice such things?"

Yin Yi responded: "Practice them as if you were facing a deep abyss or treading on thin ice."⁸²

King Cheng said: "How frightening to be a king!"

Yin Yi replied: "Those between Heaven and Earth and within the Four Seas who are good are loved by the people; those

⁸⁰ See also *LSCQ* 6.4/31/20-32/4; *Annals*, pp. 161-62.

⁸¹ *LZ* 78; *HNZ* 12.28; *HNZ* 12/112/19-12/113/3. This anecdote reads like a solution to the problem in the famous story of duke Wen of Zhu and probably would have been read in the context of that story. See *Zuozhuan*, Wen 13.3; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jinzhu jinyi*, pp. 482-483.

⁸² *Shijing*, Xiao ya, "Xiao Min," Mao 195, *Shisanjing suoyin*, vol. 1, p. 449, *xia*.

who are not good, are despised by the people. In ancient times, the subjects of the Shang and Xia reversed their allegiances; they came to despise [the tyrants] Jie and Zhou and submitted to the rulership of Kings Tang and Wu. The people of Susha all took it upon themselves to attack their lord and shift their allegiance to Shen Nong. Such things are well understood in our age. How could you not be frightened!”

Therefore the *Laozi* says:

What others fear
You also must fear.⁸³

This anecdote opens with a query from king Cheng that expresses his eagerness to ascertain what specific acts of virtue or virtuous conduct will cause his people to feel affection for him as one does for kith and kin. Yin Yi makes two suggestions. The first consists of the concrete recommendation that the ruler should set the people to work on government projects at the appropriate season, presumably when their fields lay idle so as not to complicate their endeavors to raise crops and feed themselves. The second speaks to the ruler’s attitude toward the people, arguing that he should approach them with respect and compliance, suggesting a certain degree of reverence and willingness to bend to their needs. Moreover Yin Yi counsels the king with a flourish from the Odes: “Practice them as if you were facing a deep abyss or treading on thin ice.” The king’s response indicates that he has grasped the essential point, which the *Laozi* now reinforces: practice goodness with fear and trepidation. Such is the best way to win the affection and allegiance of the people. The relationship between the emotions and virtue is also explored in the following anecdote concerning viscount Xiang of Zhao.

Viscount Xiang of Zhao expresses anxiety over the attack on Di

Viscount Xiang of Zhao dispatched an attacking force against [the state of] Di and defeated it. When the inhabitants of [the two cities of] Zuo and Zhong had been captured, a messenger arrived to report the victory to viscount Xiang who was just about to eat his meal. When viscount Xiang heard the news an anxious expression appeared on his face. His attendants asked: “Capturing two cities in one morning is a cause for celebration. Why, then, do you appear so anxious?”

Viscount Xiang replied: “The swelling of the Yangzi and Yellow rivers does not last more than three days; wild winds and violent

⁸³ LZ 20; HNZ 12.36; HNZ 12/114/20–24.

rains do not last a morning;⁸⁴ the sun at high noon lasts for less than a moment. Now the virtuous conduct of the Zhao clan has not yet amounted to anything and yet in one morning two cities have been captured. Our demise is imminent!” When Confucius heard of this he said: “The Zhao clan will surely prosper!”

After dispatching his soldiers to attack the state of Di, the viscount’s army wins victory and a messenger returns to report the good news. Having done so, he is puzzled and surprised by the emotional response of his ruler. When asked to explain his worried expression the viscount responds with several analogies. Each in turn suggests that the greatest surges of force - whether the swelling of a river, the violence of a rain and wind storm, or the heat of the sun at noon - quickly expend themselves. Though his officers revel in their fresh victory, viscount Xiang is unhinged by the very same victory, critically aware of the precariousness of success. Moreover, he is worried that the virtuous conduct 德行 of his clan has not accrued sufficient merit to sustain the victory.

In the final movement of the story, Confucius learns of the duke’s conduct and predicts that his clan will succeed. When Confucius heard of this he said: “The Zhao clan will surely prosper!” Confucius’ prediction, in turn, is glossed with the following explanation which had already become part of the fabric of this story long before the *Huainanzi* compiler(s) stitched on the *Laozi* citation, as if updating an old skirt with a new hem:

ANXIETY LEADS TO PROSPERITY;
HAPPINESS LEADS TO RUIN.

Winning is not difficult, but preserving victory presents real challenges. The worthy ruler relies on this [sense of anxiety] to preserve victory and so his good fortune extends to his descendants. The states of Qi, Chu, Wu and Yue were all victorious for a time yet ultimately their rulers were captured and ruined because they did not comprehend how to preserve victory. Only the ruler who possesses the Way can preserve victory. Confucius possessed enough strength to draw back the bolted gate of the capital but he did not desire to become known for his strength. Mozi engaged in defensive warfare that forced Gongshu Ban to submit to him, yet Mozi did not desire to be known as a warrior. Those who are skilled at preserving victory, consider their strength as weakness.⁸⁵ Therefore the *Laozi* says:

⁸⁴ Supplying *bu zhongchao* 不終朝 based on Zhang Shuangdai, *Huainanzi jiaoshi*, note 5, p. 1221.

⁸⁵ A near parallel of this story appears in *LSCQ* 15.1/80/19-81/6; *Annals*, pp. 341-42.

The Way is empty,
Yet when you use it, you need not refill it.⁸⁶

Confucius' optimism that the viscount will sustain his victory, as the gloss explains, is rooted in his belief that the emotional state of foreboding and anxiety that one has not done enough to establish one's virtue generates a kind of inner, psychological vigilance and defensiveness that ensures one's long-term success. In other words, it is this very sense of disquiet and angst that pushes one to new ethical heights. Analogously, though Confucius and Mozi were known for their outstanding might and defensive warfare, neither desired to be identified with such strengths. Seeing their strengths as weaknesses enabled them to push their own personal limits and thereby deepen their lifelong pursuit of the Way. Accordingly, as the *Laozi* citation indicates, one who does so will find an unending source of moral inspiration in the Way.⁸⁷ The ruler's virtue is also emphasized in the following story.

Zifa defeats the state of Cai but declines the rewards of battle

Zifa attacked and defeated the state of Cai. King Xuan of Chu [traveled] to the suburbs to welcome [Zifa when he returned]. He presented him with one hundred *qing* of land⁸⁸ and enfeoffed him as "Holder of the Jade Baton."⁸⁹ Zifa, however, declined to accept [these honors], saying: "To govern a state and set it in order, so that the Lords of the Land will come as guests [to offer their submission], is due to the virtue of the ruler. To issue commands and send down orders so that even before your troops assemble the enemy is routed, is due to the awesomeness of the general. To array your troops in battle order and achieve victory over the enemy is due to the strength of the common people. To take advantage of the people's achievements and efforts to secure rank and emoluments for oneself is not the way of Humaneness and Rightness. Thus I declined to accept [the rewards offered me]." Therefore the *Laozi* says:

Succeed but do not dwell in it
It is only by not dwelling in it
That [success] is not erased.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ LZ 4; HNZ 12.8; HNZ 12/107/6-14.

⁸⁷ Here again the *Huainanzi* seems to deploy this story somewhat differently than the *Lüshi chunqiu*. There, as *Annals* have suggested, the ruler is advised to contemplate defeat at the very moment he enjoys success to ensure that he will preserve victory and that good fortune will extend to his descendants. Those who are skilled at preserving victory, consider their strength to be a weakness.

⁸⁸ One *qing* 頃 equals 100 *mu* 畝.

⁸⁹ Here I follow Riegel and Knoblock's translation of the title "zhi gui" in *LSCQ* 20/3.2. Hucker renders the title as "Baton Holder."

⁹⁰ LZ 2; HNZ 12.30; HNZ 12/113/11-14.

King Xuan of Chu looks to reward Zifa upon his successful completion of a military campaign against the state of Cai. Welcoming Zifa upon his return home, he presents him with a generous fief and title, but Zifa declines the rewards. He argues that his success in battle was not due to his efforts alone but dependent upon working cooperatively with many elements of society. He could have never hoped to vanquish the enemy if the moral leadership within his state did not support his expedition first and foremost. Beyond the battlefield, a well ordered state headed by a virtuous ruler predisposes others favorably to one's leadership, weakening the enemy's resolve to fight even before the battle has begun. On the battlefield, an awe-inspiring general issuing commands and orders can potentially rout the enemy even before the home troops have assembled to carry them out. Finally, and most importantly, victory in battle cannot be won without the fortitude of the common people whose persistence and reliability is truly the stuff of which victory is made. Thus, the story concludes, one who embodies Humaneness and Rightness, does not look to benefit oneself at the expense of others, by securing rank and reward through the hard earned achievements of others. So, as the *Laozi* now suggests, one succeeds by not dwelling in success, that is, not looking to be rewarded for what one does but looking to others and recognizing that success relies on people's cooperation.⁹¹

Pragmatic Politics: Surviving Potential Harm and Destruction

The last group of sixteen anecdotes, of which we examine several, explicitly addresses *realpolitik*. Here are the greatest number of parallels and near parallels with the *Lüshi chungiu*.⁹² The stories counsel the ruler to implement a range of practical measures to ensure that his political purchase will not be compromised, his political power will not be challenged, and his state or person will not be destroyed. Techniques of bureaucratic recruitment and control are particularly emphasized. Several anecdotes recommend techniques enabling the ruler to secure men of worth and talent, arguing that the most efficacious rulers do not overlook talented men, but keep access to a variety of them to help

⁹¹ The story of Zifa is reminiscent of the story of Jie zhi Tui 介之推 (*Zuo zhuan*, Xi 24.2), who refused all rewards on the grounds that the achievement was really Heaven's doing. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan jin zhu jinyi*, vol. 1, pp. 342-43.

⁹² For translations of these anecdotes see HNZ 12.5, 12.6, 12.13, 12.14, 12.19, 12.23, 12.29, 12.32, 12.33, 12.35, 12.38, 12.40, 12.41, 12.52, 12.55, 12.56. For the Chinese text see HNZ 12/106/15-20; 12/106/22-26; 12/107/6-14; 12/108/23-27; 12/109/1-10; 12/110/10-15; 12/111/4-7; 12/113/5-9; 12/113/22-26; 12/113/28-114/3; 12/114/10-18; 12/115/1-10; 12/115/19-28; 12/116/1-3; 12/118/21-29; 12/119/14-20; and 12/119/22-29.

in tough situations. The humorous and entertaining vignettes in which Gongsun Long hires a rustic good at yelling and the Chu general Zi Fa hires an infamous thief, exemplify these arguments.⁹³ Such ideal rulers, moreover, make use of the strong points of others and dismiss their minor flaws. Such, according to the *Huainanzi* compiler(s) is the lesson to be gleaned from the well-known story of neglect and discovery in which duke Huan of Qi bestows office upon Ning Qi.⁹⁴ Both negative and positive illustrations of ancient political figures are employed here: those who lost their states and suffered defeat and those who managed to hang on to them and enjoy long-term prosperity.

The duke of Bo covets the wealth of Chu

With this first anecdote, the curtain drops and the opening scene unfolds in a post-victory context, just days after prince Sheng, the duke of Bo, defeats the state of Chu:

When the duke of Bo won possession of the state of Jing (i.e., Chu), he could not [bring himself to] distribute among the people the grain [kept in] the storehouses. On the seventh day [after the conquest], Shi Qi entered [the capital] and said [to the duke of Bo]: “You obtained this wealth through unrighteous means. Moreover, you could not [bring yourself to] share it out. Calamity is sure to arrive. If you are incapable of giving it to the people it would be best to burn it so as not to give them cause to harm us.” The duke of Bo did not heed his advice.

The duke fails to act with the largesse incumbent upon and commensurate with a leader who has just enjoyed a great victory. Indeed, he acts down right niggardly, failing to share the spoils of war with the local population. When his follower, Shi Qi, arrives on the scene several days later, he immediately upbraids the duke for his moral failures. Not only has the duke gained the food supply through unrighteous means by attacking people from another state, he has failed to minimize the damaging implications of the first ethical lapse by at least sharing the grain with the local population. Such acts of greediness, Shi Qi suggests, will surely bring on the duke’s demise. However, being the loyal minister that he is, Shi Qi concludes his remonstrance by offering the duke a way out of potential harm. He counsels the duke to burn the grain so as not to flame the fire of envy among the defeated popula-

⁹³ See *HNZ* 12/113/5-9; 12/115/1-10. Note that the story of Zifa concludes: “Thus, there are no petty skills and there are no insignificant abilities; it all depends on how they are used by the ruler.” *HNZ* 12/115/9-10.

⁹⁴ See *HNZ* 12/109/1-10.

tion. Unfortunately the duke does not listen to Shi Qi, and the story concludes with the next scene unfolding in the following way:

On the ninth day [after the conquest], the duke of She entered [the capital]. He brought out the goods from the Supreme Storehouse in order to distribute them to the multitudes. He then removed the weapons from the Lofty Repository in order to distribute them to the common people. Consequently he attacked the duke of Bo and on the nineteenth day [after the conquest] he captured him.⁹⁵

The stage is now occupied by the swashbuckling duke of She, who enters the city and moves quickly and decisively to distribute goods and weapons to the local population in sharp contrast to the duke of Bo. With their support won readily, he attacks the duke of Bo and succeeds in capturing him a short nineteen days later. The story having reached its denouement, an appraisal long attached to the story articulates a concluding judgment, supported now by the following *Laozi* citation:

To desire the state when one does not yet possess it may be called the utmost avarice. To be incapable of acting on behalf of others, not to mention being incapable of acting on behalf of oneself may be called utmost foolishness. How is the duke of Bo's stinginess any different from the cannibal-owl's love for its offspring? Therefore the *Laozi* says:

Rather than holding it upright and filling it to the
brim,
Better to have stopped in time;⁹⁶
Hammer it to a point
And the sharpness cannot be preserved forever.⁹⁷

The anonymous judgment, which confirms that the duke of Bo had no rightful claim on the state of Chu, assesses the duke's attack on Chu as the epitome of greed and his failure to help himself or others as the personification of foolishness.⁹⁸ Like the cannibal-owl's love for its offspring that contains the seeds of its own destruction since it teaches its young to be fierce and so it is devoured by them when they

⁹⁵ In the *Lüshi chunqiu* version of the story the duke of Bo "dies" on the nineteenth day.

⁹⁶ D. C. Lau explains: "This refers to a vessel which is said to have been in the temple of Zhou (or Lu). It stands in position when empty but overturns when full." Lau, *Tao Te Ching* p. 65. For a second anecdote that revolves around this same type of vessel see *Huainanzi* 12/119/15.

⁹⁷ LZ 9; HNZ 12.5; HNZ 12/106/15-20.

⁹⁸ For the antithesis of the duke of Bo, one who excelled at acting both for oneself and others, see the comical anecdote describing the prime minister of Lu, Gongyi Xiu, his insatiable craving for fish, and how he ensured that his supply never ran dry. HNZ 12.32; HNZ 12/113/22-26.

mature, the duke's love of wealth brings on his ultimate demise.⁹⁹ The *Laozi* citation echoes this sentiment, suggesting within the context of the duke of Bo account that the ruler is best served when he does not covet the possessions of others but practices moderation instead, and when he understands how to both act on behalf of others and himself; otherwise he will surely bring on his inevitable destruction.¹⁰⁰

Li Ke explains the source of Wu's demise

As in the last account, this anecdote pivots around a misguided understanding of the nature of warfare and victory, this time in an exchange between marquis Wu of Wei and his minister Li Ke that unfolds as follows:

Marquis Wu of Wei 魏 asked Li Ke: "Why did the state of Wu perish?"

Li Ke responded: "Countless battles and countless victories."

Marquis Wu retorted: "But countless battles and countless victories are the good fortune of the state and its ruling family. How could such things be the sole cause of Wu's downfall?"

Li Ke replied:

"WITH COUNTLESS BATTLES, THE POPULACE GROWS EXHAUSTED;

WITH COUNTLESS VICTORIES, THE RULER GROWS ARROGANT.

Rare indeed is the state that does not perish when an arrogant ruler governs an exhausted populace!

ARROGANCE LEADS TO RECKLESSNESS AND RECKLESSNESS DEPLETES MATERIAL RESOURCES.

EXHAUSTION LEADS TO RESENTMENT AND RESENTMENT DRIVES THE PEOPLE TO THEIR WITS ENDS.

Given that superior and subordinate were both depleted, the demise of Wu appears to have occurred rather late. This is why king Fuchai [of Wu] took his life at [the battle of] Gansui.¹⁰¹ Therefore the *Laozi* says:

⁹⁹ See Zhang Shuangdi, *Huainanzi jiaoshi*, note 5, p. 1215.

¹⁰⁰ The *Lüshi chunqiu* draws upon this same story but employs it to somewhat different ends. The vignette is located within a chapter that generally emphasizes the non-action of the ruler and instructs him in exploiting the specialized knowledge and talent of those to whom he has assigned official responsibilities. Thus, principles of hierarchy and division, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing proper functions between the ruler and his subjects are emphasized. See *LSCQ* 25.4/163/24-28; *Annals*, p. 635.

¹⁰¹ King Fuchai of the southeastern non-Sinitic state of Wu, was renowned both for his military prowess and for his arrogance. In the battle of Gansui, he was surrounded by an army of the neighboring state of Yue, and committed suicide. He is mentioned several times in the *Huainanzi*, most fully in 15.25; see also 11.7 and 18.27. The exchange between Marquis Wu of Wei and Li Ke also appears in *LSCQ* 19.5/124/16-20; *Annals*, p. 494.

To withdraw when merit is achieved and reputation
 established
 Is the Way of Heaven.¹⁰²

In the course of the conversation, Li Ke manages to completely transform the marquis' understanding of both the use of violence against another state and the very meaning of victory. He gives two reasons why excessive force in a state cannot be sustained. First, success can generate arrogance in a ruler, and arrogance often brings reckless conduct, which in turn tends to deplete resources. Second, a series of battles will deplete the common people. This spawns various resentments, which in turn bring them despair. The *Laozi* citation is read as a specific recommendation concerning warfare: the ruler is counseled that once he has established his merit and reputation, aggressive warfare should be suspended.

The next stories turn from the subject of interstate conflict to the equally contentious arena of court politics. They highlight the dangers and challenges to the ruler that come not from an enemy beyond the state but from members of his own bureaucracy; the stories suggest ways to stave off conflict of a more subtle nature and to promote stability on the home front. Thus there is an emphasis on how to select and secure men of worth, how to withstand humiliation and deception, and how to ensure that aggrandizing ministers will not wrest away a ruler's power. The next anecdote, accordingly, speaks to the precarious process of selecting a successor.

Viscount Jian of Zhao selects his successor

When viscount Jian of Zhao selected viscount Xiang as his successor, Dong Jianyu queried: "Wu Xie is of humble origins, why did you select him as your successor?"

Viscount Jian replied: "It was on account of [the type of] person he is. He is someone capable of enduring humiliation for the sake of the altars of the soil and grain."

On another day earl Zhi and viscount Xiang were drinking wine together when earl Zhi knocked viscount Xiang on the head. The great ministers suggested that earl Zhi should be executed for this but viscount Xiang replied: "When the former ruler appointed me he said that I was a man who was capable of enduring humiliation for the sake of the altars of the soil and grain. Did he say that I was a man capable of murdering another man?"

¹⁰² LZ 9; HNZ 12.13; HNZ 12/108/23-27.

[Viscount Xiang] had been in office for ten months when earl Zhi besieged him at Jinyang. Viscount Xiang dispatched a small force that attacked earl Zhi and soundly defeated him. He split earl Zhi's head¹⁰³ and made a drinking vessel from it. Therefore the *Laozi* says:

Know the male
But keep to the role of the female
And be a ravine for the world.¹⁰⁴

Viscount Jian of Zhao selects viscount Xiang as his successor based on outstanding moral character, despite his humble origins. "He is someone capable of enduring humiliation for the sake of the state." This is borne out several days later when viscount Xiang is physically humiliated by earl Zhi, who gets too close to him while drinking wine together and bumps him on the head. Though the great ministers of state advise that earl Zhi should be executed, viscount Xiang endures the humiliation without retaliating. This foretold what was to come; earl Zhi's disrespectful behavior toward viscount Xiang presaged rebellious intentions that were to surface ten months later when he attacked and surrounded viscount Xiang. On this occasion, however, viscount Xiang chooses to retaliate, and he quells the earl's rebellion.¹⁰⁵ The viscount's martial triumph is glossed with lines from *Laozi* 28: "Know the male but keep to the role of the female / And be a ravine for the world." Here the "role of the female" is equated with the principle of "enduring humiliation for the sake of the state" embodied in the viscount's earlier actions. By adopting this role, the ruler can become "a ravine to the world." Like

¹⁰³ A later version of this story appears in *Shuo yuan* Chapter 3, "Establishing the Root" (Jian ben 建本). There the text reads "lacquered his head" rather than "split his head." See Lu Yuanjun 慮元駿, *Shuoyuan jinzhū jinyi* 說苑今註今譯 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1967), pp. 100-1.

¹⁰⁴ LZ 28; HNZ 12.6; HNZ 12/106/22-26.

¹⁰⁵ The story of Zhi Bo's or earl Zhi's (知伯 or 智伯) rise and fall is very famous, especially as a tale of strategic insight on the part of viscount Xiang of Zhao. At a certain moment, Zhi Bo could easily have triumphed over Zhao, Han, and Wei but his own arrogance and presumption ultimately defeats him. earl Zhi is a stock figure and his story is retold many times down through the Han in such texts as the *Zhanguo ce*, *Hanfeizi*, and *Lüshi chunqiu*, but the earliest known version appears in the final pages of the *Zuozhuan*. The greatest fund of "earl Zhi stories" is likely the *Zhanguo ce* where he figures in chapters 5, 75, 90, 97, 107, 158, 229, 292, 363, 461, 482, and 483 of the Crump translation (listed in the index under Chih Poyao or Earl Yao of Zhi.) See *Chan-kuo Ts'è*, translated and annotated, with an introduction by James I. Crump, rev. edn. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996). For additional references to Zhi Bo see respectively HFZ 1/2/26; 10/15/20; 14/26/30; 21/42/12; 23/54/12; 38/124/22; 44/133/19; LSCQ 2.4/10/2; 7.4/36/7; 12.5/61/5; 14.4/74/12; 15.2/82/8; 22.6/148/25; 24.3/156/24; and *Zhuozhuan* Ai 27.5, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jinzhū jinyi*, vol. 2, p. 1519. The earl of Zhi is also mentioned several additional times in the *Huainanzi* at HNZ 9/73/16; 11/96/23; 11/103/11; 13/124/24; 15/146/22; 18/188/22; 18/191/20; 18/193/3; 18/194/1; and 20/221/16.

water running through a ravine, which wears down hard obstacles, the ruler will eventually triumph over his aggressors, as viscount Xiang has done. In sum, the ruler is advised that when he is humiliated he should be willing to endure insult for the sake of his state. If he does, he will not only ensure that his state survives, but he will live to see it. Challenges of a less overt and more subtle nature, as the next two anecdotes illustrate, may also emanate from ministers hungry for power.

The rebellious Sicheng Zihan dupes the lord of Song

Formerly, when Sicheng Zihan acted as minister to the state of Song, he said to the lord of Song, “The danger or safety of this state and the orderliness or disorderliness of its people depends upon how you execute rewards and punishments. Now the gifts of rank and reward are what the people love – these you should carry out personally. The punishments of execution and mutilation are what the people hate – may I ask that I administer them?”

The lord of Song responded: “Excellent! I will enjoy the peoples’ praises, and you will suffer their resentments. In this way I’ll be sure to know how to avoid being the laughingstock of the Lords of the Land.”

The lord of Song then carried out the rewards while Zihan [implemented] the punishments. When the people of the state came to understand that the regulations concerning executions and amputations rested solely with Zihan, the grand ministers of state treated him with affection, while the hundred surnames (that is, the common people) feared him. Before a year had passed, Zihan murdered the lord of Song and usurped his government. Therefore the *Laozi* says:

The fish must not be allowed to leave the deep;
The efficacious instruments of state must not be revealed to anyone.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ LZ 36; HN \dot{Z} 12.19; HN \dot{Z} 12/110/10–15. The “Yu Lao” Chapter of *Hanfeizi* explains these lines as follows: “When political purchase is weighty, it constitutes the “deep abyss” of the ruler. To shepherd the people, your political purchase must be weightier than that which rests with the ministers. If it is lost, it cannot be regained. When duke Jian lost it to Tian Cheng and the duke of Jin lost it to the six ministers, their states were destroyed and their lives lost. Thus ‘fish must not be allowed to leave the deep.’ Rewards and punishments are the efficacious instruments of state. If they rest with the ruler, he controls the ministers; if they rest with the ministers, they defeat the ruler. If the ruler reveals his rewards [to his ministers], the ministers will disparage them as acts of virtue; if the ruler reveals his punishments [to his ministers], the ministers will exaggerate them as acts of authority. If the ruler exhibits his rewards, the ministers will make use of his political purchase; if the ruler reveals his punishments, the ministers will avail themselves of his authority. HN \dot{Z} 21/42/31–43/4. The “Inner Collection of Discourses, Lower Section” (Nei Zhu Shuo Xia 內諸說下) also comments on these lines in a somewhat similar fashion. See HF \dot{Z} 31/72/1–4.

In this brief but chilling tale of deception, the minister Sicheng Zihan, who secretly harbors ambitions to rebel against the lord of Song, hoodwinks his ruler in order to take over control of one of the two essential “handles of government.” On the pretext of enhancing the ruler’s prestige and affection among his people, Sicheng Zihan convinces the lord of Song to delegate to him personally the onerous task of implementing execution and mutilation. The new configuration of power secured the affection of the ministers and the fear of the common people, enabling Sichen Zihan within the short space of a year to overthrow his ruler. Thus, the *Laozi* concludes that just as fish cannot survive out of water, so too rulers who delegate to others the responsibility of executing rewards and punishments; to do so diminishes the strategic advantage of the ruler and empowers his underlings. Moreover, as the next story illustrates, the ruler who shares his personal preferences and desires with those below, likewise makes himself vulnerable.

The duke of Xue wins control of the king of Qi

The queen consort of the king of Qi died. The king wanted to appoint a new queen consort but had not yet decided who it would be, so he directed his ministers to deliberate the issue. The duke of Xue, hoping to hit upon the king’s choice, presented him with ten pairs of earrings, one of which was especially beautiful. The next morning he inquired as to the whereabouts of the most beautiful pair of earrings, and urged that the woman who now had it should be appointed queen consort. The king of Qi was delighted by this and thereafter respected and valued the duke of Xue even more. Thus, if the intentions and desires of the lord are visible on the outside, he will fall subject to the control of his subjects. Therefore the *Laozi* says:

Block the openings,
Shut the doors,
And all your life you will not labor.¹⁰⁷

In this short piece, the king hopes to appoint a new queen consort and sets his ministers to the task of deliberating the best choice. Determined to curry favor with the king, duke Bi hatches a plan that he hopes will reveal the king’s favorite so that his recommendation will match the king’s choice. He presents the king with ten pairs of earrings, one pair’s being particularly beautiful. Duke Bi anticipates that it will fall into the hands of the concubine most favored by the king. Having

¹⁰⁷ LZ 52; HNZ 12.41; HNZ 12/116/1-3.

discovered the recipient, the duke makes his recommendation, which naturally wins him favor. Indeed, the story tells us, the king “respected and valued duke Bi even more,” the extent of his admiration growing in direct proportion to the degree of deception with which the duke serves the king. Why so? The king has made himself an open target by allowing his desires to be known; he is easily manipulated by subordinates who thus gain control over him. Echoing *Hanfeizi*, which insists that the ruler keep his desires secret, the *Laozi* recommendation to “block the openings and shut the doors” is read here as the desires and intentions that must be kept locked inside the ruler’s heart and mind, enabling him to avoid falling prey to controlling ministers.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, several anecdotes profess the ideal of a type of wisdom grounded in notions of personal, mystical wandering, as celebrated in the Inner Chapters of *Zhuangzi*. Here the eternal, unchanging, and undifferentiated aspects of the Way come to be known through first-hand experience by the ideal ruler. Once discovered, the sagely ruler understands that such “knowledge” cannot be transmitted to others through verbal communication. He must rely upon nonverbal forms of communication to do so. At the same time, other anecdotes collected in *Huainanzi* 12 exhibit an equally compelling devotion to the expression of a public kind of wisdom grounded in the quotidian particulars of the political realm and encompassing leadership, judgment, and a responsibility to the collective future that provides a kind of moral inspiration toward the greater public good. Still others address political issues of a more pragmatic nature, concerned to illustrate how the ruler can keep his person safe, his state intact, and his ministers in line. In short, the ideal ruler of *Huainanzi* 12 is called upon to be a mystic, a moralist, and a realist.

Moreover, *Huainanzi* 12 seeks to demonstrate that the *Laozi* readily and eloquently speaks to the particulars of these three aspects of rulership. Through paired narrative and citation, *Huainanzi* 12 demonstrates a coherent program of intellectual, moral, and strategic behavior. Filtered through the lens of the *Laozi*, these diverse anecdotes now yield a more tightly unified philosophical perspective that could be taught through reading. The ideal ruler values life, humbles his person, minimizes his desires, and eschews material pleasures. But he also exhibits anxiety when he fails to act virtuously, works with local customs to transform them, practices humaneness and rightness, and aims to earn

the peoples' allegiance and support by practicing trustworthiness and sincerity. He dispenses rewards and punishments, does not delegate such authority to his subordinates, keeps his innermost desires hidden from his ministers, employs men of worth and talent, and practices moderation to stave off threats to his power and person.

In short, although the anecdotal narratives collected in *Huainanzi* 12 are hardly new, the manner in which they are framed by lines from the *Laozi* generate novel readings of the anecdotes and, conversely, new understandings of the *Laozi* passages that have been wedded to them. Besides their narrowing of the potentially multivalent import of *Laozi* passages to very specific readings commensurate with the principles and policies promoted by the *Huainanzi* authors – who as they expressly claim in their postface are attempting to elucidate the crucial relationship between the Way and human affairs within the context of change and transformation – they ultimately expand the range of techniques understood to be encompassed by the *Laozi*. In doing so, they masterfully present the *Laozi* as a kind of counter-canon which speaks to the multifarious and multitudinous moments at hand. In this manner the *Huainanzi* upholds the limits of language and argues for its instrumental value.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The note citations use the following editions of six traditional texts. The numbers that come after the abbreviation conform to the pattern: chapter / page / line.

- HFZ* D. C. Lau, ed., *Hanfeizi zhuzi suoyin* 韓非子逐索引, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 2000)
- HNZ* D. C. Lau, ed., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐索引. A Concordance to the Huainanzi, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1992)
- HSWZ* D. C. Lau, ed., *Hanshi waizhuan zhuzi suoyin* 韓詩外傳逐索引. A Concordance to the Hanshi waizhuan, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1992)
- LSCQ* D. C. Lau, ed., *Lüshi chungiu zhuzi suoyin* 呂氏春秋逐索引. A Concordance to the Lüshi chungiu, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1994)

- LZ D. C. Lau, ed., *Laozi zhuzi suoyin* 老子逐索引. A Concordance to the Laozi, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1996).
- ZZ D. C. Lau, ed., *Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin* 莊子逐子索引. A Concordance to the Zhuangzi, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 2000).

Other abbreviations are as follows:

- Annals* Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*
- HNZ Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth, trans. and annots., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*