

Ideas concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China

The *Tso-chuan* records for 588 BC that an important aspect of burial ritual among the elite of China's central plain had begun to change.

In the eighth month the Duke of Sung died. [This was] the beginning of lavish burial (*hou-tsang* 厚葬). Clam shells and charcoal were used; chariots and horses were furnished; [it was also] the beginning of employ- ing [men as] sacrificial victims, and precious objects were prepared. The outer coffin was supplied with four pillars, and the inner coffin was ornamented above and on the side.¹

The compiler, Tso Ch'iu-ming 左丘明, apparently informs us of the actual beginning of a social custom; or at least the custom was unusual enough to gain his attention. But so much else is unclear. We do not know if the funerary equipment in the tomb of the Duke of Sung exceeded that prescribed for his status. And we do know of much earlier lavish burials, a fact confirmed by archaeology.²

As a starting point we need to ask what the ancient Chinese themselves thought of both lavish and thrifty burial. What was the demarcation between propriety and lavishness? Was there any firm admonition against lavish

¹ *Tso-chuan* (Ch'eng 2); cf. James Legge, *The Ch'un T's'ew with the Tso Chuen*, vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics*, (rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960), p. 347. Throughout this essay I use the phrase "outer coffin" for *kuo* 椁, and "inner coffin" for *kuan* 棺. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own; references to previously published translations are supplied for convenience. Tso was obviously incorrect about human sacrifices. He probably meant that it was the first time in the history of the short-lived duchy of Sung, not the whole realm of China as it then existed.

² Examples of the literature on this are: Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-hsüeh yüan 中國社會科學院, eds., *Yin-hsi fu-Hao-mu* 殷墟婦好墓 (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, 1981); Hu-pei sheng po-wu-kuan 湖北省博物館, eds., *Sui-hsien Tseng-hou-i mu* 隋縣曾侯乙墓 (Peking: Wen-wu, 1980); and Hu-nan sheng po-wu-kuan, Chung-kuo k'o-hsüeh yüan, eds., *Ch'ang-sha Ma-wang-tui i-hao Han-mu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓 (Peking: Wen-wu, 1973). Recent discovery of the huge tombs of the late preimperial Ch'in rulers indicates a general trend toward lavish and ostentatious burial. For a survey of the development of tombs in the pre-Han period, see Poo Mu-chou 蒲慕州, "Lun Chung-kuo ku-tai mu-tsang hsing-chih" 論中國古代墓葬形制, in *Kuo-li T'ai-wan ta-hsüeh wen-shih-che hsüeh-pao* 國立台灣大學文史哲學報 37 (1990), pp. 233-79.

burial? Toward this aim, the present article shows that beginning in the Warring States period (471–221 BC) there was a continuing discussion among intellectuals and leading individuals about the nature of burial practices, the condition of the dead, and the propriety of lavish versus thrifty burial.

PRE-HAN IDEAS CONCERNING BURIAL PROPRIETY

The *Tso-chuan* compiler was one of many intellectuals in the Warring States period whose philosophy derived from and shared elements with Confucian teachings. For Confucians, people's performance of proper rituals, or *li* 禮, was the foundation of an orderly and peaceful society. This orderly society was to be composed of different classes, or categories, of people, each one functioning in a role determined by such *li*.³ Confucius himself once defined filial piety (*hsiao* 孝) in the following way: "When the parents are alive, serve them according to the *li*; when they are dead, bury them according to the *li*; and make offerings to them according to the *li*."⁴ Thus, no matter whether alive or deceased, one was supposed to treat his parents, or anyone else for that matter, with the proper ritual (*li*), no more, no less. When Yen-yüan, one of the best students of Confucius, died, fellow students suggested a lavish burial. Confucius opposed the idea, but in the end his students did not yield to him.⁵ The reason for the master's opposition was probably because Yen-yüan's social status did not deserve lavish ceremony. Confucius later said: "[Although] Hui (Yen-yüan) looked upon me as a father, I must not regard him as if he were my son. It was not I [who decided to give him a rich burial], it was the other disciples."⁶ Since Confucius was the descendant of an official and had also held office himself, to

³ This aspect of early thought is an enormous field. Some of the most widely cited works are: Frederick W. Mote, *The Intellectual Foundations of China* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1971); Feng Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1952–53); Hsiao Kung-ch'uan, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. Frederick W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979); Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard U.P., 1985).

⁴ See *Lun-yü* 論語 ("Wei-cheng" 爲政) (Shih-san-ching chu-shu edn.; rpt. Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, 1970) 2, p. 2b; *Meng-tzu* 孟子 ("T'eng wen-kung" 滕文公) (Shih-san-ching chu-shu edn.) 5A, p. 3b, although these words are from the mouth of Tseng-tzu 曾子. Cf. James Legge, *The Confucian Analects*, vol. 1 of *The Chinese Classics*, p. 147; and Legge, *ibid.*, vol. 2, *The Works of Mencius*, p. 236, respectively.

⁵ *Lun-yü* ("Hsien-chin" 先進) 2, pp. 2a–4b; cf. Legge, *Analects*, p. 240.

⁶ 子不得視猶子也, translated in *ibid.* as: "I have not been able to treat him as my son." This, however, does not suit the context; he himself admitted that his rendering of "shih" (regard) here was different from that of the previous sentence.

treat the commoner Yen as a son and give him a rich burial would have been a violation of the proper *li*. The *Analects* also records that when Yen-yüan died,

Yen-lu begged the carriage of the master to sell in order to furnish an outer coffin (for Yen-yüan). The master said: "Whether talented or not, one is only to call his son his son. When (my son) Li 鯉 died, he was given an inner coffin but without an outer coffin, as I could not consent to walk on foot and give up my carriage in order to make an outer coffin (for Li). For, having followed in the rear of high officials, it was not proper for me to walk on foot."⁷

The master's refusing to give up his carriage can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, as he did not allow his own son to have an outer coffin even if the latter deserved one, there seemed to be no good reason to give one to Yen ("one is only to call his son his son"). On the other hand, Confucius was probably wealthy enough to help furnish an outer coffin for Yen without giving up his own carriage, a symbol of his status. For if his decision was based only on financial considerations he should have gladly consented to the action of his disciples, who finally gave Yen a lavish burial, presumably with an outer coffin, instead of uttering the complaint "It was not I!"—which seems to be a protest that it was not he who had violated *li*. Clearly, the master did not consider it appropriate to give Yen-yüan, the descendant of a commoner, a burial that would exceed his status.⁸ In fact, *Li-chi* 禮記, *The Book of Rites*, records that "When Yen-yüan died, the master mourned him as if he were his own son, but he did not wear the mourning garments."⁹ This further corroborates the assumption that Confucius had drawn a clear line between personal emotion and proper ritual.

It is important, however, to remember that Confucius' concern about *li* did not end with an outward conformity to proper rituals. In fact, the essence of his teaching held that the highest stage of ethics or morality was beyond any ritual conduct: "Being a person, yet without *jen* 仁, it is futile merely to follow *li*."¹⁰ This *jen* is the inner sense of propriety in relation to

⁷ *Lun-yü* 11, pp. 2b–3a; Legge, *Analects*, p. 239.

⁸ A different understanding of the text was offered by the T'ang commentator, who interpreted the unwillingness of Confucius to give up his carriage as due to the poverty of Confucius' household. See *Lun-yü* 11, p. 3a. I do not think the explanation suits the context. Why then did Confucius not simply mention the fact that he was poor? Instead, the reason he gave was that he had been an official. This has to indicate that the master's real concern was with the proper *li* that one observed according to one's own status—his status as an official and Yen's status as a commoner.

⁹ *Li-chi* 7 ("T'an-kung" 檀弓) (Shih-san-ching chu-shu edn.), p. 14a.

¹⁰ *Lun-yü* 3 ("Pa-i" 八佾), p. 3a. Cf. Legge, *Analects*, p. 155.

other members of society, a sense requiring cultivation. In this context, Confucius once said, "In ceremonies it is better to be simple than luxurious, and in the funerals it is better to show deep sorrow than to pay meticulous attention to the details."¹¹ The most important thing in a proper funeral, therefore, was to show sympathy and grief, although a burial according to proper *li* should not be neglected either.

When the family of the deceased could not afford a proper burial, as occurred during an age of social and political upheaval when the old aristocracy would often be replaced by upstart commoners,¹² how should they act? Confucius might have answered in a fashion similar to that recorded in *Li-chi*:

Tzu-yu asked about the [proper way of providing] funerary equipment. The master said, "One should consider the extent to which his household can afford it." Tzu-yu said, "How would one reach a consensus between those who have and those who do not?" The master replied: "If they can afford it, do not exceed *li*; if they can not afford it, wrap up the body, and give a simple burial. How would anyone express disagreement?"¹³

Confucius was of course not advocating thrifty burial. His point was that a simple burial below the status of the deceased should not be considered as improper merely if due to lack of resources.

Mencius' ideas on funerary ritual were close to those of his mentor:

In ancient times there was no standard for making inner and outer coffins. Later it was decided that the thickness of the inner coffin should be seven inches, with the outer coffin to match. This applies to the Son of Heaven as well as for commoners. It was not only for the effect of graceful appearance. It was only by so doing that one's affection could be fully expressed. If one could not acquire [the wood], there would be nothing to be joyous about; if one did not have the money, there would be nothing to be joyous about. When the wood was available and one could afford the cost, all the ancient people used fine wood. Why should I alone be different? . . . It is said that "a filial son should not for all the world be thrifty [in the funeral] for his parents."¹⁴

¹¹ *Lun-yü* 3, p. 3a.

¹² See Hsu Cho-yun, *Ancient China in Transition* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1965), pp. 24 ff.

¹³ *Li-chi* 8 ("Fan-kung"), p. 13b. A similar idea is also found in 10, p. 3a.

¹⁴ *Meng-tzu* 4B ("Kung-sun-ch'ou" 公孫丑), p. 1a; cf. Legge, *Mencius*, pp. 221-22.

This attitude of Mencius is vividly illustrated in another context. When his father died, Mencius was just a gentleman (*shih* 士); he buried his father with a gift of three *ting* 鼎, which was befitting for a *shih*. When his mother died at a time when Mencius had already become an official (*ch'ing* 卿), he supplied five *ting* for his mother's tomb, as per an official's prerogative. Furthermore, the coffins and other funerary equipment that Mencius provided for his mother were more luxurious than those used for his father. When the Duke of Lu 魯平公 learned about this, he declined to seek advice from Mencius, unhappy about the latter's possibly having transgressed the proper *li* by providing rich funerary objects, although Mencius' three and five *ting* were according to *li*. A certain Lo-cheng-tzu 樂正子, after conversing with the Duke of Lu about this, came to Mencius' defense: "This should not be considered as improper, since [Mencius is] wealthier now than before."¹⁵ It seems that Mencius' idea somewhat favored lavish burial, since he would not refrain from providing rich funerals so long as he had the means, and, of course, he did it within the limits of proper ritual. This story also indicates that although a burial might be done according to the recognized system of *li*, it could still be considered lavish if other accessories of the funeral were extravagantly supplied. Thus a lavish burial need not have violated *li*, and herein lies the root of the common practice of lavish burial. For it would be easier for people to defend funerary extravagance by stating their observance of the proper *li*—such as providing the dead with the correct number of *ting* and coffins. When later, in the Han period, proper *li* were gradually sinking into oblivion, only pure extravagance remained.

The writings of Hsün-tzu 荀子 reveal further elaborated principles of funerary ritual advocated by the Confucian school that essentially corresponded to the Chou system. Basically, Hsün-tzu considered that the whole system of *li* was a tool for creating an orderly society, through which all the conflicts and struggles between people would be resolved:

What is the origin of *li*? It is this: people are born with desire. When desire is not satisfied, it is inevitable that one should seek satisfaction. When one seeks for satisfaction without any restraint and limitation, it is inevitable that struggle arises. Once there is struggle, there will be chaos; with chaos comes poverty. The kings of old disliked chaos, therefore they instituted rituals and justice to prevent struggle, to satisfy one's desire, and to fulfill one's need. Thus one's desire would not be curtailed because of the lack of means, and the material means would not

¹⁵ *Meng-tzu* 2B ("Liang-hui-wang" 梁惠王), pp. 13a-b; cf. Legge, *Mencius*, pp. 177-78.

be exhausted by the desire. The two supported each other and continued to exist. This was the origin of *li*.¹⁶

To implement this idea of *li* into specific rituals, it is natural that Hsün-tzu then proposed a system that would bring about certain order to every aspect of human life — and death:

There should be seven layers of inner and outer coffins for the Son of Heaven, five layers for the lords; double layers for the gentlemen (*shih*). And there should also be a designated number of garments and covers, and different degrees of decorations for each class, so that differences in status followed in life are followed after death as well, and so that the wishes of those surviving are granted. This is the way of the kings of old, and the ultimate goal of the loyal subjects and filial sons.¹⁷

Funerary rituals, according to Hsün-tzu's argument, are part of the *li* for the living. Only if one could "serve the dead as he would serve the living" would society function well according to *li*.¹⁸ Otherwise, "if one does not serve the living with loyalty, honesty, and graceful formality, it would be called barbaric; if one does not serve the dead with loyalty, honesty, and graceful formality, it would be called uncultivated. A gentleman despises barbarism and is ashamed of being associated with the uncultivated."¹⁹ Within this frame of mind, it is logical that Hsün-tzu opposed any situation that was either excessive or insufficient with regard to proper conduct and ritual. "It is called stringent when one treats the dead thriftily while adorning the living; it is called confusion when one treats the living thriftily while adorning the dead; and it is called murder when one kills the living to accompany the dead."²⁰ One therefore had to balance his actions so as not to be blamed for any of these vices.

In principle, therefore, a notion of choosing either lavish burial or thrifty burial finds little support in the Confucian lines of thought. However,

¹⁶ Hsün-tzu's chapter "Li-lun" 禮論 ("On Propriety"), in Wang Hsien-ch'ien 王先謙, annot., *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh* 荀子集解 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chū, 1981), p. 231; cf. H. H. Dubs, *The Works of Hsuntze* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), p. 213; B. Watson, *Hsun Tzu, Basic Writings* (N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1967), p. 89.

¹⁷ Wang, *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, p. 239; cf. Dubs, *Hsuntze*, pp. 228-29; also cf. Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Wang, *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, p. 251; cf. Dubs, *Hsuntze*, p. 246; also cf. Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, p. 111.

¹⁹ Wang, *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, p. 239; cf. Dubs, *Hsuntze*, p. 228; also cf. Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, p. 97.

²⁰ Wang, *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, p. 246; cf. Dubs, *Hsuntze*, pp. 238-39; also cf. Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, p. 105.

given the idea of an orderly society based on *li*, and the practical realization of *li* as elaborate rituals, Confucians naturally tended to view lavish burial favorably. Thus Hsün-tzu says, "If one treated another kindly when he was alive, and one treated him thriftily when he was dead, this means one merely respected him while he still possessed senses, paying little attention to him when he was no longer alive. It is the way of the wicked and the intention of the traitors."²¹ Further support for lavish burial within the broad category of Confucianist thinking exists in the work of Han Fei 韓非. According to Han Fei, lavish burial was regarded by contemporary rulers as the expression of filial piety, itself the hallmark of Confucianism.²² The biography of Confucius in *Shih-chi* 史記 provides Yen Ying's 晏嬰 description of Confucians' (*ju* 儒) "making elaborate preparations in funerals, showing excessive emotions in mourning, and spending all their fortunes on lavish burials."²³

Yet Confucian thought was not the only driving force behind the social norms of the turbulent Warring States period. As has been mentioned above, the Chou rituals, represented in the burial system, were seriously challenged and brought close to bankruptcy during this period. The proper, or older, differentiation between social classes, based solely on political status, was blurred by the frequent financial ups and downs of commoners and nobles, as well as by crossovers in status. In this state of turmoil burial custom generally tended toward extravagance: when possible people would provide on the one hand richer funerary goods, showing the wealth of the deceased or his family; and, on the other hand, the bronze ritual vessels (*ting*, or imitations of them), symbolizing actual or putative political status. This, however, does not mean that people had already given up the old ritual system completely. Rather they strived to demonstrate their own achievement by "usurping" funerary rituals that signified the higher social and political statuses of earlier times. It is also important to notice that objects representing material wealth were gradually becoming prominent features in funerary equipment from the Warring States period onward, while the old ritual bronze vessels gradually lost popularity. This is indicative of evolution in both society and ideas of the netherworld.²⁴

²¹ Wang, *Hsün-tzu chi-chieh*, p. 238; cf. Dubs, *Hsuntze*, pp. 227-28; also cf. Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, p. 97.

²² Ch'en Ch'i-yu 陳奇猷, annot., *Han-fei-tzu chi-shih* 韓非子集釋 (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chū, 1959), p. 1085.

²³ *Shih-chi* 史記 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chū, 1982; hereafter *SC*) 47, p. 1911.

²⁴ The idea that change in funerary equipment reflects, to a certain extent, changes in social and political structures, as well as religious ideas, is a legitimate approach in the study of ancient societies. See A. A. Saxe, *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practice* (Ann Arbor: U. M. I., 1970), p. 4; and J. M. O'Shea, *Mortuary Variability* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), pp.

The reality of this changing society captured the attention of thinkers other than the Confucians. Taoists and Mohists also expressed their criticism of lavish burial, although the bases for their views were mutually quite different. One chapter of the book *Mo-tzu* 墨子 is devoted to discussion of burial practices; its title states clearly the central theme: "Economize in Burial." The author observed contemporary burial practices with distress:

It has been said that when kings, dukes, and high officials die several layers of inner and outer coffins must be provided, the funerary objects must be supplied in abundant excess; the clothes and covers [for the dead] must be plentiful, the grave mound must be high, and the decorations [of the coffins and the tomb] must be rich. When commoners or people of low status die, the entire fortune of the family will be exhausted [on the funeral].²⁵

It is obvious, in the eyes of the Mohist, that such a social fad would never direct society toward the ideal "to enrich the poor, to supply the needy, and to achieve stability and order."²⁶ For the utilitarian and philanthropic Mohist, to devote such extended care to the dead, while those who were alive still suffered from hunger and poverty, was not the way of the ancient sage-kings:

In ancient times, the sage-kings decreed the rule for thrifty burial: [The dead were provided with] three layers of clothes, so that the flesh would rot; and the board of the coffin was restricted to three inches thick, so that the bones would decay. When the grave was being dug, the pit should not reach underground water, and the digging should stop when the smell [of the body] could be prevented from rising up. When the dead were buried, the living should not observe a long period of mourning.²⁷

The author then supplies stories about the funerals of these sage-kings, namely Yao, Shun, and Yü, and stresses that they were buried wherever they died, and were provided with merely three layers of clothes and coffins

21-22. As for the change in the style of ritual bronze objects, it is hinted, but not discussed fully, in Wang Zhongshu, *Han Civilization* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1982), pp. 100-1.

²⁵ *Mo-tzu* 墨子 25 ("Chieh-tsang" 節葬), in Sun I-jiang 孫貽讓, annot., *Mo-tzu hsien-ku* 墨子閒詁 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1972) ch. 6, p. 106; cf. B. Watson, *Mo Tzu, Basic Writings* (N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1967), p. 67.

²⁶ Sun, *Mo-tzu hsien-ku* (25 "Chieh-tsang") 6, p. 115; cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, pp. 66-67, 69.

²⁷ Sun, *Mo-tzu hsien-ku* (20 "Chieh-yung" 節用) 6, pp. 103-4; similar argument is found in "Chieh-tsang," ch. 6, pp. 111-12; cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, p. 72.

with thin boards.²⁸ It was the welfare of the living that deserved the attention of the society as a whole. Consequently, for the ancients treatment of the dead became unimportant. On this point, the Mohist scholar even demonstrated a dash of anthropological insight:

To the east of Yüeh, there was a country named K'ai-shu. When the first son was born, people would dissect and eat him, believing that this act would produce more younger brothers [for the family]. When the grandfather died, people would carry the grandmother off and abandon her, then the bones were buried. This act would be called filial (*hsiao*). To the west of Ch'in, there was a country named I-ch'u. When their kinsfolk died, people would pile up wood and burn the body. When the smoke rose up, it was called mounting to the far heaven. They would then be called filial sons.²⁹

The point is that there was no "correct" way of burying the dead. And merely conforming to a convention that requires a fortune for a funeral "hinders the work of the people and exhausts their wealth, the extent of which can not be accounted for. Such is the uselessness [of lavish burial]."³⁰ To what extent this idea of the Mohists found support during the Warring States period, however, would be difficult to estimate. Archaeological data produce little evidence—the coffins and bones of actual followers of Mo-tzu's teachings have presumably been turned into dust long ago according to their wishes.

PRE-HAN IDEAS CONCERNING DEATH

So far we have not dealt with either Confucians' or Mohists' ideas of death, which would certainly have affected their attitudes toward burial practices. For the Confucians, whose main concern was about the living, death was something to which they devoted relatively little speculation. But since Confucians stressed the importance of honoring ancestors, they could not entirely reject the idea that there were gods and spirits in the world, and therefore that the dead somehow possessed senses. Thus it is said in the *Analecets*: "One should make offerings to the dead, as if they were present; and make offerings to the spirits, as if the spirits existed."³¹ But they would rather not get involved in lengthy arguments. Confucius' statements that "as

²⁸ Sun, *Mo-tzu hsien-ku* (25 "Chieh-tsang") 6, pp. 112-14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, p. 74.

³¹ *Lun-yü* 3 ("Pa-yi"), p. 7a; Legge, *Analecets*, p. 159.

the meaning of life has not yet been understood, how could one learn about death?"³² and "revere the ghosts and gods, but keep a distance from them"³³ are simple and short enough. The attitude they reflected remained basically unchanged even as late as the Han period. *Shuo-yüan* 說苑 records that

Tzu-kung asked the master, "When people die, do they have senses or not?" The master said, "If I should say that there are still senses after death, I am afraid that filial sons would neglect their duty to serve the living and concentrate on the funeral; if I should say that there is no sense after death, I am afraid that ungrateful sons would desert their parents and not bury them. If you would like to know whether there are still senses left after people die, you will know when you yourself are dead, and it should not be too late."³⁴

Basically, the Confucians were interested in the proper reaction of the living toward the dead; thus they chose not to confront directly the problem of death or life after death. The Mohists, on the other hand, did stress the importance of "recognizing the existence of ghosts," as the title of a chapter in the book of *Mo-tzu* confirms. For Mohists, to recognize that there are ghosts and spirits in the universe is a way to warn the multitudes: "If all the people under heaven believe that ghosts and spirits have the power to reward the meritorious and to punish the ferocious, how could the world be chaotic?"³⁵ Yet the Mohists seem not to have worried much about a possible conflict between this belief and their advocacy of thrifty burial. (As discussed further on, Wang Ch'ung 王充 refutes this position in a much later era.) If the dead indeed possessed consciousness, would the shabby treatment of the dead incur their dissatisfaction? Would a sumptuous burial, on the other hand, invite blessings from the deceased? No obvious explanation was provided. The Mohist scholars seem to have settled upon a limited logical exercise for separating the arguments, the goals of which in any event were the same—to end poverty and chaos in the world.

Despite differences, the Mohists and the Confucians both intended to save the world by actively engaging themselves in contemporary *Realpolitik*. The Taoist philosophers, however, sought to solve the misery of the world by providing a different approach. The misery and grief that people experienced and tried hard to eliminate, according to the Taoists, arose from a

misconception of the real nature of the universe. The anxiety over life and death, in particular, was the central point in this misconception. The book of *Chuang-tzu*, which we consider to be representative of Taoist philosophy in the Warring States period, deals with this problem on many occasions.³⁶

The life of a human being is merely part of nature, and the birth, growth, and disappearance of this life only reflect the order of the universe. Death brings an end to the individual life; it can also mean the beginning of another cycle of life. Therefore, what one considers as death is, from the perspective of transformation (*hua* 化), actually another life.³⁷ And since death is only a transformation, not a termination, of an individual existence, there is no absolute difference between life and death as ordinary people would understand them. When Chuang-tzu himself was about to die, as one story claims, his disciples wanted a lavish funeral. He flatly turned down the proposal, saying, "I have the heaven and earth as my coffin, the sun and moon for my ornaments, and the stars and planets as pearls to fill my mouth. I have all these things around as my funeral gifts; don't you think these are ample? And what can be added to them for my funeral?"³⁸ Once this Taoist understanding of the nature of life and the universe is appreciated, the manifold desire for material gains, anxiety over life and death, and illusions about power and fame—the causes of misery and distress in the world—should be cleared away. After all, these are but "things external" to the essence of life. In this sense, the funerary rituals, especially that of lavish burial, would certainly have appeared meaningless in the eyes of the Taoist.

In the chapter of *Chuang-tzu* titled "Things External" there is a story about tomb robbery.

Some Confucians (*ju*) were robbing a tomb in accordance with the canons of poems and rituals. A senior Confucian named Lu-ch'uan said, "The east is dawning; how are things going?" The junior Confucian replied, "The clothes have not been stripped off, and there is a pearl in

³² See Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness* (N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 32-43. For a general discussion of the idea of death in Chinese thought; see Daniel T. Overmyer, "China," in F. H. Holck, ed., *Death and Eastern Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon P., 1974), pp. 198-225; also see Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth, and Reason in the Han Period* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 25-37.

³³ See the story about the death of Chuang-tzu's wife, wherein Chuang-tzu compared life and death with the movement of the seasons. *Chuang-tzu* 莊子 18 ("Chih-lo" 至樂), in Kuo Ch'ing-fan 郭慶藩, annot., *Chuang-tzu chi-shih* 莊子集釋 (rpt. Taipei: Ming-lun shu-chü, 1975), pp. 614-15; cf. H. A. Giles, trans., *Chuang-tzu*, 2d edn. (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1926), pp. 223-24.

³⁴ Kuo, *Chuang-tzu chi-shih*, p. 1069. My translation follows closely that of Evan Morgan, *Tao, the Great Luminant: Essays from the Huai-nan-tzu* (rpt. N.Y.: Paragon Book Reprint Ltd., 1969), p. xli.

³⁵ *Lun-yü* 11, ("Hsien-chin"), p. 4b; Legge, *Analects*, pp. 240-41.

³⁶ *Lun-yü* 6 ("Yung-yeh" 雍也), p. 8a; Legge, *Analects*, p. 191.

³⁷ Liu Hsiang 劉向, *Shuo-yüan* 說苑 (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1971) 18, p. 154.

³⁸ Sun, *Mo-tzu Hsien-ku* (31 "Ming-kuei" 明鬼) 8, pp. 138-39; cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, p. 74.

the mouth. It is certainly stated in the *Book of Poetry* that "The wheat is green and flourishing; it grows on the slope of the hill. In life, if one does not help the needy, why should he have a pearl in the mouth when dead! Pull his hair lock, push his chin, use a metal mallet to force his cheeks, slowly squeeze open his jaw, do not injure the pearl in the mouth!"³⁹

This story was probably meant to paint a caricature of Confucians who stubbornly adhered to old texts even in an unlikely context. However, it can also be seen as a criticism of the privileged and their practice of lavish burial. The practice might even be counter-productive: not only might the body of the dead not be preserved, it might even be mutilated by tomb robbers — for too many "external things" had been brought to the grave.

The story just quoted is also symptomatic of a problem that became increasingly prominent during the Warring States period, that is, tomb robbery. It would probably not have become a subject in *Chuang-tzu* had it not already been a fairly widespread phenomenon. It was also one of the main concerns of the compiler of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋, a book of the late Warring States period. In the chapter titled "Economize Funerals" the text holds that to bury the dead is natural for human society:

It is inevitable that anyone who is born between heaven and earth is doomed to die. It is the nature of people to feel pain over this, since filial sons care about their parents and loving parents adorn their sons. When those who are cared for and adorned died, it would be unbearable for people to desert them in the ditches and valleys. Therefore people wished to bury the dead. To bury is to conceal [the body].⁴⁰

The main reason of burial is to conceal and thus to protect the body, not only from the destruction of wild animals, insects, and snakes, but also from the devastation of wicked robbers and bandits. To bury the dead with an extravagant funeral and rich grave goods, according to *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, is no different from inviting robbers. At another place we read:

If someone should erect a stela on top of the grave mound and state: "There are many precious jewels and goods here. One must not refrain from opening it. When you open it, you will become very rich; all your descendants will have wagons to ride and meat to eat," people would

certainly laugh at it and consider it a fool's deed. And yet the excessive burials in our society are just acts like that.⁴¹

From the point of view of "to bury is to conceal the body," it is self-defeating to preserve the dead by installing luxurious burial objects. As a matter of fact, according to the same compiler, the reason why people wanted to bury their kinsfolk with riches was not at all for the sake of the dead. It was because mourning families felt compelled to compete with each other in the display of wealth and prestige. The following, again from *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, is a keen observation of social psychology.

Nowadays when the vulgar lords of this turbulent era bury their dead lavishly, they are not doing it on behalf of the dead. It represents the competition among the living. It is considered glorious if one can stage an extravagant funeral; and it is considered shabby if one only gives a simple burial. They do not concern themselves with the peace of the dead, rather their only worry is whether their actions would be viewed favorably or not by the living.⁴²

The author of this essay also refers to the ancient sage-kings, whom Mo-tzu had praised, as the models and authorities on the validity of thrifty burial. Yet here the explanation of the deeds of the sage-kings is different from that of Mo-tzu, whose main concern was economical.

It was not because the former kings considered it costly, nor was it because they considered it troublesome, that they buried the dead thriftily. It was because they cared about the dead. What they abhorred was the mutilation of the dead. If the tombs should be robbed, the dead would certainly be mutilated. Yet if the burial is simple, there would be no reason for it to be robbed. Therefore the former kings buried the dead thriftily.⁴³

Thus it was for preventing the mutilation of the dead that the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* text spoke against lavish burial. Yet how would this text have argued from the other end — if there were no problem of mutilation? Indeed, there exists some thought on this issue: "If the dead could be kept undisturbed, even if this means that the wealth of the country would be drained, and the people would be hard pressed, a loving parent or filial son should not refrain from doing it."⁴⁴ It seems that although some of the opinions expressed

³⁹ Kuo, *Chuang-tzu chi-shih*, pp. 927-28; cf. Giles, *Chuang-tzu*, p. 355.

⁴⁰ *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 10 ("Chieh-sang" 節喪) (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1971), p. 4a.

⁴¹ *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 10 ("An-ssu" 安死), p. 6b.

⁴² Ibid. ("An-ssu"), p. 4a.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 6a.

⁴⁴ Ibid. ("Chieh-sang"), p. 5a.

sound Confucian or Mohist, they were nevertheless closer to practical Legalism by hinging more on a social reality, that is, tomb robbery. Thus while the answer to the problem of proper burial is mostly tilted to the non-extravagant side, it is not single-minded, as seen in the sentence just quoted.⁴⁵

In reviewing pre-Han deliberations over burial practices it is clear that, no matter towards which side the arguments leaned, the main concern was the effect a proper burial would have on the living. The Mohists were of course contemplating how it would most benefit the living if the funeral expenditures could be saved. The Confucians, although not recommending thrifty burial, nevertheless perceived the problem from an angle not much different from that of the Mohists: proprieties in funerals or burials were mainly rituals that could establish correct moral behaviors, which subsequently could create a harmonious society for the living. The *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* text indeed showed some concern over the condition of the dead by considering the problem of mutilation, an issue to which neither the Confucians nor the Mohists seemed to have given much thought. Yet in the final analysis, it appears that even this concern was but another form of protection for the reputation of the living, since the mutilation of the ancestors' tombs was a disgraceful event. Emerging from all these discussions is another common feature: they did not discuss such problems as whether there is a life after death, or whether the way people treated the dead would affect the condition of the dead in the life hereafter. The Taoists, who liked to ponder upon more abstract ideas, viewed life and death in such a way as to make the problem of burial basically irrelevant. Yet this sentiment was naturally against the unenlightened understanding of life that lay behind the practice of lavish burials. And the Taoists' perception of the meaning of life and death continued to exert a powerful influence in the subsequent era, when the issue of proper burial was again raised.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Because *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* is a compilation of various sources, the intellectual background of its ideas varies. In the discussion of proper burial the author seems to argue from a Confucian point of view, although sometimes Taoist terms can be detected. See Hsü Fu-kuan 徐復觀, "Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu chi ch'i tui Han-tai hsüeh-shu yü cheng-chih ü ying-hsiang" 呂氏春秋及其對漢代學術與政治的影響, in his *Liang-Han ssu-hsiang shih* 兩漢思想史 (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1976) vol. 2, pp. 1-84. Also, see Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, *Chung-kuo che-hsüeh shih hsin-pien* 中國哲學史新編 (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-p'an-she, 1983) vol. 2, p. 471, concerning *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*'s effort to combine Confucian ideas of filial piety with the Mohist idea of thrifty burial.

⁴⁶ In the following discussions, the term "Taoism" is understood as "philosophical Taoism" rather than "religious Taoism," which many scholars consider to be of a different origin and nature. See Timothy H. Barrett's comment in H. Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst: U. of Massachusetts P., 1981), pp. xx-xxii, also Nathan Sivin, "On the Word 'Taoist' as a Source of Perplexity: With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China," in *History of Religion* 17 (1978), pp. 303-30.

LAVISH BURIAL IN HAN CHINA: THE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Modern research is no longer unsubstantiated in maintaining that Han-era Chinese buried their dead lavishly: archaeology continues to provide proof. Contemporary sources, such as the edicts of the emperors and the discussions of the scholar-officials, provide other forms of testimony. It is to these texts that we now turn.⁴⁷

Emperors, most of all, would have enjoyed handsome funerals, as evidenced by the First Emperor of Ch'in. His successors in the Han dynasty, although claiming to have destroyed the tyranny of Ch'in, did little to change the practice.⁴⁸ This of course does not mean that the "published" opinion of the royal court paid no attention to persons throughout the country. Emperor Wen 文 (179-157 BC), later hailed as a model emperor for his "letting the people rest," said in his will,

We have heard [it said] that death comes to every living creature under heaven. Death is the principle of heaven and earth, and it is the nature of the living. What could be so sad about it? Nowadays the entire world cherishes life and dislikes death. People go broke in burying their dead lavishly, and keep long periods of mourning so that it hurts the lives of the living. I strongly disapprove of this.⁴⁹

The decree for the funeral of Emperor Wen stated,

Let an order be given to the officials and people of the entire world such that, when the order reaches them, after three days of mourning, mourning garments should be dispensed with. Do not prohibit marriage ceremonies, offerings, or drinking wine and eating meat. . . . Do not cause civilians to wail in front of the palace. Within the palace, those

⁴⁷ For archaeological evidence, see Wang, *Han Civilization*, pp. 175-213; Robert L. Thorp, *The Mortuary Art and Architecture of Early Imperial China* (Ann Arbor: U. M. I., 1984); Li Fa-lin 李發林, "Han-tai ti hou-tsang feng-ch'i" 漢代的厚葬風氣, in idem, *Shan-tung Han hua-hsiang-shih yen-chiu* 山東漢畫象石研究 (Chinan: Ch'i-lu shu-she, 1982) pp. 19-24. For a comprehensive and systematic study of Han tombs, see Poo, *Han-tai mu-tsang yen-chiu* 漢代墓葬研究 (forthcoming). For a general discussion concerning services to the dead in the Han period, see Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death*, pp. 114 ff.

⁴⁸ See Yang K'uan 楊寬, *Chung-kuo ku-tai ling-ch'in chih-tu shih yen-chiu* 中國古代陵寢制度史研究 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi ch'u-p'an-she, 1983).

⁴⁹ SC 10, pp. 433-34; *Han-shu* 漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1960; hereafter HS) 4, pp. 131-32. Cf. H. H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938; hereafter HFHD) 1, p. 267. A good example of lavish burial in Wen-ti's time is the now famous Ma-wang-tui tombs.

who ought to show mourning should raise their voices fifteen times in the mornings and evenings, and should stop when the ceremony is over. When it is not the time of mourning in the morning and evening, no one is permitted to cry at his own initiative. When the coffin is entombed, the mourners should wear heavy mourning garments for fifteen days and light mourning garments for fourteen days, and thin mourning garments for seven days, then the mourning clothes are to be removed. All the other details that are not covered in this decree should be done in accordance with the spirit of this decree.⁵⁰

Judging from the prohibitions in this decree, one can see how a royal funeral would normally tend to stir up the entire country. The emperor also decreed that only ceramics should be employed in his tomb. No gold, silver, bronze, or tin was to be used as decoration, and no mound was to be built over his tomb, in order to curtail expenses and avoid disturbing the people.⁵¹ And yet *Shih-chi* records that when Emperor Wen died, 16,000 soldiers of the nearby prefectures, plus 15,000 soldiers of the prefect of the capital city, were mobilized together to finish the earth work of the mausoleum.⁵² Some 460 years later, during the Chin 晉 dynasty, Emperor Wen's tomb, together with that of Emperor Hsüan 宣, were reportedly robbed by thousands of people. The Chin Emperor Min 愍 asked his officer So Lin 索綝, "Why are there so many objects in the Han mausoleums?" So Lin replied,

The Han emperors began building their mausoleums as soon as one year after they were enthroned. Of all the tributes and taxes that they received from the country, one third went to the ancestors' shrine, one third was spent on guests and clients, and one third was set aside for the building of the mausoleum. Emperor Wu 武 had a long reign (141-87 BC). When he died, his mausoleum was full of treasures, and the trees on the mound grew to be very tall. The Red Eyebrow bandits robbed his mausoleum, yet they could not exhaust even half of the treasures. There are decayed silks and pearls and jade left till now. Yet these two mausoleums are considered the meager ones.⁵³

In the reign of Emperor Yüan 元 (48-33 BC) a scholar, Kung Yü 貢禹, wrote a memorial to the emperor in which he described the lavish funeral of

Emperor Wu. He maintained that the latter was responsible for the corrupt custom of extravagant burials that prevailed in the country. It was only natural, he pointed out, that subjects would follow the examples set by their superiors.⁵⁴

Emperor Yüan's successor Emperor Ch'eng 成 (r. 32 BC-7 AD) also was concerned about such extravagance:

The sage-kings expounded *li* and regulations in order to differentiate the high from the low, and they made distinctions among carriages and costumes in order to glorify those who possessed virtue. Even if one has the means, without obtaining honorable status, he is not allowed to exceed the established regulations. . . . Nowadays people are prone to extravagance and [they] violate proper regulations without limit, and insatiably. The officials, marquises, relatives, and courtiers are supposed to be the models of the country. Yet their self-cultivation and observation of proper *li*, and their devotion concerning the business of the state, has never been heard of. . . . [Instead they make] extravagant display of wealth for marriages and funerals that exceed regulations. The clerks and common people emulate and imitate their behavior, and it has gradually become an established custom. How difficult it would be to expect the people to conserve so that every family could be fed!"⁵⁵

Although this decree also denounced the prevailing custom in funerals, its philosophical basis was somewhat different from that expressed in Emperor Wen's will, where opposition to lavish burial sprang from the Taoist "principle of Heaven and Earth." Emperor Ch'eng's decree, however, was mainly concerned with the maintenance of an orderly and peaceful society through the implement or enforcement of the proper rites and regulations, so as to "differentiate the high from the low." One can even sense that the real concern behind this decree might have been the contravention of code inherent in extravagant and unruly conduct. In fact, the law at that time prescribed funerary rules, and violation could be punished. In the reign of Emperor Ching 景 (157-141 BC), for instance, the Marquis of Wu-yüan 武原 was dismissed from his marquissate for allegedly having given a burial ceremony that exceeded the limit of law.⁵⁶ The legal significance of these activities, rather than the morality of elaborate burial per se, was probably the real issue. From these two imperial decrees we can also detect the changing atmosphere of Han government ideology: from a more or less Taoist atti-

⁵⁰ SC 10, p. 434; HS 4, p. 132; cf. HFHD 1, pp. 269-70.

⁵¹ SC 10, p. 433; HS 4, p. 134; cf. HFHD vol. 1, p. 273.

⁵² Chin Shu 晉書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974) 60, p. 1651.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ HS 72, pp. 3070-71.

⁵⁵ HS 10, pp. 324-25; cf. HFHD 2, pp. 408-9.

⁵⁶ HS 16, p. 587.

tude to one more in tune with Confucianism. It is reasonable to assume that the decrees reflected not only the emperors' own ideas but also those of the officials who had personal influence on both him and government policy. By Emperor Yüan's time, of course, the support that Confucianism received from the state would have been unimaginable under Emperor Wen's rule.

Despite the decrees, the situation in the country did not change for the better in this regard. In fact, it seems to have taken a turn for the worse in the Eastern Han period. In 31 AD Emperor Kuang-wu 光武 (r. 26-57 AD) issued a decree in which he stated:

All the world thinks that rich burials are honorable and thrifty funerals disgraceful. Thus the rich vie with each other in their extravagance, whereas the poor spend their entire fortune. Law and regulations can not prohibit them; proprieties and justice can not stop them. It is only during times of turmoil that they realize their faults. Now let the entire world know about the proper meaning of thrifty burial for the loyal subjects, the filial sons, the loving elder brothers, and respectful younger brothers.⁵⁷

The "times of turmoil" mentioned here probably refers to the warfare accompanying the downfall of Wang Mang 王莽. In fact up until the time of the decree the country was still unstable. According to the Tang commentator Li Hsien 李賢, because tombs were robbed during these turbulent years people "realized their fault" in making excessive show in burial.⁵⁸ For this, they could have recalled what the compiler of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* had warned against two hundred years earlier. Moreover, the decree also reveals that people actually kept the custom of excessive burial even during civil strife. Thus, when peace was established again, funerary show would become even greater.

During the reigns of subsequent emperors, Emperors Ming 明 in 69 AD, Chang 章 in 77, Ho 和 in 99, and An 安 in 107 and 118 at least another five decrees explicitly mentioned the problem of lavish burials.⁵⁹ These decrees were announced, in one way or another, at times of social unrest or natural disasters. Lavish burial was attributed to the competition among families to exhibit wealth and high social status, especially among those of the upper class. In Emperors Chang and Ho's decrees, the "noble relatives [of the royal family]" were specifically blamed for having led the fad. The decrees, while taking the livelihood of the people as a main point against lavish burials,

also made it clear that the behavior itself was a violation of proper *li*, and therefore a disruption of the order of society. This order was established according to political status, and not according to wealth. Thus on the one hand the decrees expressed a concern over the actual economic life of the people; on the other hand, they also tried to correct the improper behavior of the upper class. Their violation of *li* was equal to an assault against imperial authority.

Considering the political basis of the Eastern Han imperial house, however, it is clear that such decrees exerted little impact on the behavior of the "noble relatives" and the powerful clans in the country.⁶⁰ It is also revealing that for one hundred years after Emperor An's last decree the problem of lavish burial ceased as a topic of decrees. This, of course, does not mean that the situation had corrected itself. On the contrary, this is probably an indication that the problem had already gotten out of control, and the emperors (or their advisers) simply could not and would not deal with it further. This is understandable, as political corruption and social unrest affected government profoundly after the middle of the Eastern Han period. Many high officials and powerful eunuchs were in fact models of extravagant fashion.⁶¹ They would, of course, not have liked to see more decrees denouncing their own life style. Indeed, during the last hundred years of the Eastern Han only one royal decree (154 AD) took up the general issues of extravagant living. Ironically, only three days previously another decree ruled that high officials could observe the three-year mourning period.⁶² It was not until the reign of Emperor Hsien 獻 that Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操, after conquering Chi-chou 冀州 in 205 AD, prohibited the practices of personal revenge and lavish burial,⁶³ both of which signifying people's disregard for the laws and proprieties administered by the government.⁶⁴ This bit of information,

⁵⁷ Yang Lien-sheng 楊聯陞, "Tung-han ti hao-tsu" 東漢的豪族 *CHHP* 11.4 (1936), pp. 1007-63; Yü Ying-shih 余英時, "Tung-han cheng-ch'üan chih chien-li yü shih-tsu ta-hsing chih kuan-hsi" 東漢政權之建立與士族大姓之關係, in *Chung-kuo chih-shih chieh-tseung shih-lun (ku-tai p'ien)* 中國知識階層史論 (古代篇) (Taipei: Lien-ching, 1980), pp. 109-203.

⁵⁸ E.g., see the funerary equipment of the eunuchs Chao Ch'ung 趙充 and Hou Lan 侯覽 (*HHS* 43, p. 1470; 78, p. 2523, respectively).

⁵⁹ *HHS* 7, p. 299. Emperor Ling was once advised not to climb a tower to view the scenery of the capital, on the grounds that such conduct would have driven away the people. In fact, it was for fear that the emperor might discover the high-rise houses that eunuchs had built for their own pleasure. This story is quite revealing of the economic situation in the capital environs. See also *HHS* 8, p. 359; 68, p. 2536.

⁶⁰ *San-kuo-chih* 三國志 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1985) 1, p. 27.

⁶¹ The problem of the relationship between breakdown in law and order, prevailing moral and ethical standards, the attitude of the government toward filial piety, and the power of the great clans and families is too complicated to be discussed here. See n. 60 also; Patricia Ebrey,

⁵⁷ *Hou-han-shu* 後漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1964; hereafter *HHS*) 1, p. 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* ⁵⁹ See, respectively, *HHS* 2, pp. 114-115; 3, p. 135; 4, p. 186; 5, pp. 207, 288.

moreover, shows that during the civil wars that would later shatter the Han regime, or even two hundred years earlier during the struggle to establish the Eastern Han, people acted much as they might have in times of peace and prosperity: they buried their dead sumptuously.

When we examine some of the practices of Han-era people, we see clearly that royal decrees could have no real influence on burial customs. In the pre-Ch'in era the custom of presenting funerary gifts had already existed. By the time of the Western Han period, when an important official or royal member died, the court would customarily give the dead rich funerary gifts, in the form of money and objects, to assist the funeral. The gifts sometimes obviously exceeded the proper status of the dead, such as in the cases of Ho Kuang 霍光 and Tung Hsien 董賢,⁶⁵ when royal burial equipments were provided for their tombs. When a wish for thrifty burial was expressed by an important member of the consort family, as in the case of Liang Shang 梁商 in the reign of Emperor Shun 順 (126-144), his wish was quickly denied, and "royal coffins, a jade suit with silver thread, yellow blocks 黃腸, and the like, altogether twenty-eight kinds of objects, two million coins, 3,000 rolls of cloth, plus the queen's gift—five million coins, and 10,000 rolls of cloth"—were given.⁶⁶ This practice, furthermore, was not limited to the royal court and officialdom; it was a widely accepted custom throughout the country. In a society where a funeral became the competition ground for funerary gifts, and friends and relatives vied with each other in their generosity, the family of the deceased could not but stage an extravagant funeral in order to show people the filial piety of the living. This was, of course, nothing new even in the Western Han period. In the famous writing *Yen-t'ieh lun* 鹽鐵論 (*Debate over Salt and Iron*), compiled in the middle of the Western Han period, the situation was addressed:

In ancient times people served the living with love, and buried the dead with grief; therefore, the sage made rules and ceremonies not as empty formalities. Nowadays people cannot respect the living; [they only vie

"The Economic and Social History of Later Han," in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, gen. eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986) 1, pp. 626-48; and Ch'en Ch'i-yün, "Confucian, Legalist, and Taoist Thought in Later Han," in *ibid.*, pp. 795-805.

⁶⁵ *HS* 68, p. 2948; 93, p. 3734, respectively.

⁶⁶ *HHS* 34, p. 1177. For funerary gifts, see Saeki Tomi 佐伯富, "Kandai no fuzo ni tsuite" 漢代の賜贈について, *Shirin* 史林 62.5 (1979), pp. 1-12. Saeki traces the practice back to the pre-Ch'in period and maintains that it was closely connected with the custom of lavish burial. For the "yellow blocks," a kind of building material for the great earth-pit tombs, see Lu Ch'i 魯琪, "Shih-c'an Ta-pao-t'ai Hsi-Han mu ti tzu-kung, pien-fang, huang-ch'ang t'i-tsu" 試談大葆台西漢墓的梓宮便房黃腸題湊, *WW* (1977.6), pp. 30-33.

with each other] in the luxurious gifts [displayed in the funeral] when [their parents] die. Although no sorrow or grief is expressed, as long as rich burial and abundant funerary goods are furnished, it is called filial piety. His name will be known to the world, his fame remembered by the folk. So the people all emulate and follow this kind of example, even to the extent of selling their houses and properties [to furnish the funeral]. In ancient times, when neighbors were in mourning, people would stop pounding the mortar, no one would sing in the alley. . . . It is the custom these days that people go to the house of the mourners and demand a funerary feast. When they are fortunate to be invited to sit down for a while, they begin to criticize the songs and dances and the various shows [presented by the host].⁶⁷

It is easy to see how the family members of the deceased would have been forced by society to spend a great deal of fortune on a funeral. *Yen-t'ieh lun* was compiled in a period of peace and prosperity after the reign of Emperor Wu. But which part of the empire suffered from this illness of luxury? The "Treatise on Geography" in *Han-shu* 漢書, the *History of Former Han*, pointed out that people arranged luxurious marriages and lavish funerals in the area of Ch'ang-an 長安, the capital city of the empire, in the provinces of Ho-nei 河內, in and around the city of Lo-yang 洛陽, in the old Chin 晉 country up in the Tai-yüan 太原 and Shang-tang 上黨 areas, and also in the old culture centers of Ch'i 齊 and Wei 魏. This was almost the entire central plain area, the center of the empire. The extravagances of the people there were not part of true Confucian, Mohist, or Taoist ideals, yet had become a way of life.⁶⁸

Other evidences from the Eastern Han period confirm the view presented by the imperial decrees, only more so. Wang Fu 王符, a scholar who lived in the second century, described the contemporary funerary customs:

All estimated, the work of thousands of men is devoted to the fabrication of one coffin. When ready, it weighs about ten thousand *chin* and cannot be lifted without a big crowd, nor can it be pulled without a huge cart. From Le-lang 樂浪 in the east to Tun-huang 敦煌 in the west, in a space stretching ten thousand miles, people compete in adopting this kind of coffin. Such a waste of energy and disruption in farm work is very disheartening.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Yen-t'ieh-lun* (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1971) 6, p. 34.

⁶⁸ *HS* 28, pp. 1647, 1651, 1656, 1660, 1665.

⁶⁹ Wang Fu, *Ch'ien-fu lun* 潜夫論 (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1971) 3, p. 15b.

Wang Fu's description of heavy coffins shows that even though it was customary for the nobles and rich of Eastern Han to build brick chamber tombs, in which the coffins usually did not occupy an important position among the funerary equipments, the kind of coffin found in the Ma-wang-tui tombs was by no means uncommon in his time.

Even though a true Confucian might not condone the practice of lavish burial philosophically, the custom certainly was influenced by the Confucian rituals for funeral preparations, as recorded in the *Book of Rites (Li-chi, I-li)*, which gained prominence in the Eastern Han period.⁷⁰ But luxurious display was probably also motivated by filial piety. *Yen-t'ieh lun* pointed out that in the eyes of ordinary folk the proper expression of filial piety was identified directly with elaborate burial and rich funerary goods.

The story of a certain Yüan She 原涉, who flourished in the reign of Emperor P'ing 平 (1-5 AD), shows the working of a complex social norm.

[Yüan She's] father was governor of Nan-yang 南陽. That was the time when the country was in prosperity. Whenever an official of a big commandery of the rank of 2000 *shih* died in office, the funerary gifts usually exceeded ten million [coins]. The wife and children of the dead would take this sum of money and settle down to a handsome life. At that time also, the custom of observing three years of mourning [for one's father] was again in practice. When Yüan She's father died, he gave back the funerary gifts of the Nan-yang commandery, observed three years of mourning by living in a hut by his father's grave. Thus his name was known all over the capital. . . . Later She thought that although his refusing to accept the funerary gifts of the Nan-yang commandery had won him fame, it was not filial to have given a simple burial to his father. He therefore began to rebuild the grave, and splendid chapels and parlors and gateways were erected.⁷¹

Although Yüan She was identified by the author of *Han-shu* as a knight-errant, one who usually acted outside of the established norms of society, he nevertheless understood well how to utilize social sentiment to win fame and fortune. Yüan's story also shows that the idea of filial piety was already permeating society, and that this idea was not necessarily circulating only in Confucian circles, but also in a far wider area that included various social

strata. Consequently, when Emperor Ming (r. 57-75 AD) ordered that the *Classic of Filial Piety (Hsiao-ching 孝經)* be read by all the royal guards and officers,⁷² it might not have been from a desire to promote filial piety. Rather it was probably an act designed deliberately to direct and to manipulate current social customs for the benefit of the royal house. This would have been accomplished when the idea of filial piety, already in vogue in society, was transformed into the idea of loyalty, which in turn would consolidate the legitimacy of the ruling Liu 劉 family.

Examples in *Hsiao-ching* that support this argument are many: "When wealth and nobility are not deprived of one, he can then protect the country and provide peace for the people. This is the filial piety of the feudal lord."⁷³ "To serve the sovereign with filial piety is to be loyal; to serve the elder with respect is to be compliant. Serving the superior with loyalty and compliance, one can then preserve his fortune and position and keep worshipping his ancestors. This is the filial piety of a gentleman (*shih*)."⁷⁴ When the idea of filial piety is mentioned in connection with funerals, we find such sentences in the *Hsiao-ching* as "make inner and outer coffins, clothes, and covers, and raise [the dead onto the bier]; display the offering containers and plates and remember [the dead] in sorrow; prostrate on the ground; crying and escorting [the dead]; consult the oracles in order to find a proper place to bury [the dead]; build an offering shrine to make sacrifice to [the dead]; remember [the dead] during the seasonal offerings of spring and autumn."⁷⁵ Read as Confucian instructions, these ideas made it difficult for people to understand "the proper meaning of thrifty burial for the loyal subjects, the filial sons," as Emperor Kuang-wu had wished. Efforts on the part of the government to curtail excessive burial, therefore, were of little avail.

HAN INTELLECTUALS' IDEAS CONCERNING THRIFTY BURIAL

The official attitude of the Han court, as represented by the royal decrees, basically called for a curtailment in expenses for funerals. The main arguments are political-ethical on the one hand and economical on the other: the overstepping of *li* disrupted the established order of statuses;

⁷⁰ *HHS* 32, p. 1126; 79A, 2546. Although *Hsiao-ching* had existed long before the reign of emperor Ming, only after him did it become a prominent classic at court.

⁷¹ *Hsiao-ching 孝經*, sect. 3 ("Chu-hou" 諸侯) (Shih-san-ching chu-shu edn.), *chüan* 2, p. 12.

⁷² *Hsiao-ching*, sect. 5 ("Shih" 士) 2, p. 5b.

⁷³ *Hsiao-ching*, sect. 18 ("Sang-ch'in" 喪親) 9, p. 2b.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the funerary rituals described in *Li-chi* and *I-li*, see Ch'en Kung-jou 陳公柔, "Shih-sang-li chi-hsi-li chung so chi-tsai ti sang-tsang chih-tu" 士喪禮既夕禮中所記載的喪葬制度, *K'ao-ku hsüeh-pao* 考古學報 (1956.4), pp. 67-84.

⁷¹ *HS* 92, p. 3417.

excessive spending would waste precious energy and wealth and harm livelihoods. Yet when the power of the great clans and royal relatives grew stronger the transgression of *li* was no longer a concern: their wealth was more than ample to cover funeral expenses. Others, including those less wealthy, then followed suit. Clearly, a collective psychological need existed that strived to cope with the strong pressures and prevailing social fashion. The fashion combined both praise of wealth and power and exaltation of "observable morality," culminating in an overt and excessive exhibition of filial piety and its seeming equivalent, the funeral.

Within this general trend, however, there were voices that went against the current. They were based on a variety of premises, yet their opposition to lavish burial was the same. Basically, proposals for thrifty burial can be divided into two main types: a materialistic one that concerned itself with economic consequences, and a philosophical one derived from a special understanding of life and death.

The concern to economize funerary spending of Mo-tzu was in essence an argument based on the undesirable results of lavish burials: they consumed wealth and brought little real benefit to society. This sort of argument found its followers in the Han period. However, by this time similar discussions no longer took the extreme position of the Mohists, but fused it, instead, with Confucian tenets. The discussion in *Yen-t'ieh lun* has shown us that the Confucian scholars whom it records in a debate, besides drawing attention to the apathy of people toward the dead, were criticizing the custom from an economic point of view. Although the idea of thrifty burial was not mentioned directly, this was indeed what such scholars held as appropriate.

In the reign of Emperor Ch'eng, the famous scholar Liu Hsiang 劉向 presented a long memorial requesting the emperor to stop building his mausoleum and to practice thrifty burial. Liu's arguments combined economic considerations with other practical concerns. He cited as examples the ancient sages, from Huang-ti 黃帝 down to Chou-kung 周公 and Confucius, as having practiced simple burials. He also maintained that the tombs of those kings who had had themselves buried richly were all robbed. Thus Liu argued, in the same spirit as the author of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, that "[thrifty burial] is not only for frugality, but also for the security of the body." "Those with prominent virtues often have less costly burials," he added, "as those with deep wisdom often bury themselves shallower."⁷⁶ Liu indicated that sovereigns who knew how to conserve wealth would enjoy

long periods of prosperity, while the mandate of those who indulged themselves in luxury would be curtailed. It was an argument based partly on the threat that this practice could pose to the existence of the ruling house. Liu's main point, however, remained economic in nature:

When Ch'ang Mausoleum 昌陵 was built, height was added to small mounds, and eventually earth was accumulated into a mountain. Tens of thousands of graves of the people were destroyed to make room for the building of mortuary structures. The schedule set for the completion was pressing, and the cost amounted to more than a hundred million. While the dead carried their grievance underground, the living were all filled with distress. The spirit of agony shook heaven and earth, thus famine occurred, and hundreds of thousands of people perished, or were forced to be refugees.⁷⁷

At the end, Liu did offer some philosophical observations: "If the dead are considered as having senses still, then it should be very harmful for those who destroyed people's graves. If the dead possess no sense, then there was no reason to build a large tomb." One way or the other, then, there was no reason for one to have an elaborate burial. However, Liu did not go further into the discussion of the meaning of life and death. As a result, his memorial was more a petition, on behalf of the people, to curtail spending for the imperial mausoleum than a philosophical treatise on the meaning of thrifty burial.

In the Eastern Han period Chang Fu 張輔 (d. 104) expressed a wish to have a simple burial. His reason for so doing was that, having served as one of the highest officials (grand commander), he should be an example for the people through his frugality, a virtue extolled by the former emperor.⁷⁸ So far as one can tell from the record, Chang Fu's idea of thrifty burial was strictly moralistic and utilitarian, aimed at conserving wealth in society. For other proponents, thrifty burial need not have represented the best way, but was certainly worthy of serious thought under special circumstances. Liang Shang, father-in-law of Emperor Shun, was reported to have wished a thrifty burial for himself in such a fashion:

I am not a man of virtue, yet I have enjoyed the blessings of fortune. When living, I did not contribute much to the court; when dead, however, [my funeral] will certainly cost a lot. The funerary equipments, such as garments, covers, jewelry, jade suits, and pearls: what benefit could

⁷⁶ HS 36, p. 1950.

⁷⁷ Ibid. ⁷⁸ HHS 45, p. 1533.

they bring to rotten bones? [During the funeral], all the officials would be hard pressed and disturbed, the roads would be richly decorated, and dust (caused by the funerary procession) would be fuming all about. Although this might be conducting affairs according to the *li*, consideration should be given to proper situations. These days the borders are disquiet, and thieves and robbers have not been controlled; how would it be appropriate to waste the fortune of the court? When I die, carry me to the funeral house by the tomb, prepare for the funeral right away. Use ordinary and used clothes, let no new ones be made. When preparation is done, open the grave pit. After the pit is open, bury the coffin in no time. The offerings should be the same food as those consumed when I was alive, and no sacrificial pigs, goats, or bulls should be used.⁷⁹

Liang's argument, if it really was his own, was mainly centered around the political and economic implications of funerals. Although some traces of Taoist influence can be detected in his idea of the uselessness of the funerary equipment for the rotten bones, he nevertheless conceded that a grand funeral was in conformity with the *li*. Thrifty burial was for him only a proper alternative under particular political and economical conditions. In any case, considering the high positions that Liang and his family members occupied at court, there was little chance that his will would be observed, as we have already seen in the last section.

It is only in Taoist contexts that cosmological arguments for thrifty burial are found. In the book of *Huai-nan-tzu*, composed during the reign of Emperor Wu, the matter of life and death was thought to be of minimal consequence:

In life I have a seven-foot body; in death I have a coffin-length of soil. The relation between my life and this material world is just the same as that between my death and the formless, with which I am mingled when dead. And yet things in the world do not become a bit more while I am alive, nor does the earth increase when I am dead. How am I to be able to decide which among these two I should prefer more than the other?⁸⁰

To this logic then, it seems that the author would adapt a strict Taoist attitude toward proper burial. However this is not quite the case. In a chapter

⁷⁹ HHS 34, p. 1177.

⁸⁰ *Huai-nan-tzu* 7 ("Ching-shen-hsün" 精神訓) (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1971), p. 42; cf. Morgan, *Tao, the Great Luminant*, p. 63.

titled "Placing Customs on a Par," the author discussed the propriety of funerals:

The Confucians and the Mohists did not investigate the origin and consequences of human emotions, but they insisted on imposing rules that were opposite to [the emotions], such as the five degrees of mourning garments. . . . It was not because the ancients did not know the complicated rules of the *li*, or the various styles of fashion; it was because these merely waste days and disturb the people and have no practical use. Therefore to implement the rules of the *li* is only to supplement the real need, and it is enough when the essence [of the *li*] is expressed. It was not because the ancients could not display the ceremonial bells and drums . . . not because they could not exhaust the fortune of the country and abuse the people, and empty the treasury to supply the dead with jewelry and luxury clothes; it was because they thought this would only bring poverty to the people and not benefit the rotten bones and flesh. Therefore for burial, it is adequate to wrap up [the dead] and cover the body.⁸¹

On the surface, the author dismisses Confucians and Mohists as unnatural—imposing rules that were opposite of human emotions. Yet his own proposal for a proper funeral was not necessarily opposite to what the Confucians or Mohists would have liked to see. The Confucians would certainly have agreed that the importance of the *li* lies not in outward display of rituals or ceremonies but in expressing the essence of propriety. The Mohists, on the other hand, would not have objected to the claim that funerary spending only brought poverty to the people. In fact, the tone of this paragraph comes quite close to that of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, discussed above. It vividly shows the complex nature of *Huai-nan-tzu*, a work of heavy Taoist inclination, yet not without a mixture of Confucianism and Mohist ideas.⁸²

The intellectual vitality and diversity found in *Huai-nan-tzu* indicates that at the time of Emperor Wu, Han literati were by no means all captives of Confucianism. For example, Yang Wang-sun 楊王孫 was one of the most

⁸¹ *Huai-nan-tzu* 11 ("Ch'i-su hsün" 齊俗訓), p. 72; cf. Benjamin E. Wallacker, *The Huai-nan-tzu, Book Eleven: Behavior, Culture and the Cosmos* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1962), p. 36.

⁸² For the authorship of *Huai-nan-tzu*, see Charles Le Blanc, *Huai Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1985), pp. 24–41. For the importance of *Huai-nan-tzu* in the intellectual history of the Han period, see Hsü, *Liang-Han ssu-hsiang shih* 2, pp. 175 ff.

radical proponents of thrifty burial. When he was on the point of death, he gave the following order to his son:

I wish to be buried naked so that I may return to my true home. You must not go against my wishes! When I am dead, put my corpse in a hemp bag, dig a hole in the ground seven feet deep, and lower me into it. Then take hold of the bag at the end where my feet are and pull it off so that my body will rest directly on the ground.

The son was unable to decide whether he should follow his father's radical instructions. Thus he went for advice to an old friend of his father, the Marquis of Ch'i 祁侯. The marquis then wrote a letter to Yang Wang-sun:

I have heard some talk of your leaving orders to be buried naked. If the dead have no consciousness, then that will be the end of the matter. But if they do, I'm afraid you will be subjecting your corpse to humiliation in the world below. Do you intend to appear naked in front of your ancestors? Personally I don't think you should do so. Moreover, the *Classic of Filial Piety* says: "Let clothes, coverlets, and inner and outer coffins be provided for the dead," and these after all represent the rules handed down from the sages. Why must you alone be different and insist upon following some private learning of your own? I hope you will give careful thought to the matter.

The argument of the Marquis of Ch'i, that if the dead possessed consciousness, then to bury oneself naked would cause humiliation in the world below, was typical of the thinking of Confucians, who had no definite opinion on the existence of ghosts and spirits, or the life hereafter. Their concern for a proper burial took the safe side of the issue — in case the dead did have consciousness. Yang Wang-sun, however, Taoistically perceived that after death there is no more individual existence: the body decomposes and returns to its "true home." Consequently, he denied the possibility of consciousness after death, let alone ghosts, spirits, and life in the world below. His lengthy reply to the marquis in part said:

A lavish burial is of absolutely no benefit to the dead man, and yet foolish people strive to outdo each other in extravagance, wasting their money, exhausting their resources, putting it all into the ground to rot. In some cases they bury it today only to have it dug up tomorrow, so that the result is the same as if they had left the corpse lying out in the open fields.

Now death is the transformation that comes at the end of life, the final return of all things . . . Thus each thing returns to its true home in deep darkness, where there is neither form nor sound. Then it may achieve union with the essence of the Way. Outward decoration may dazzle the mob, but lavish burial erects a barrier to its goal, prevents that which is to be transformed from undergoing change . . . I have heard that the spirit belongs to Heaven and the bodily form belongs to Earth. After the spirit has left the form, then each returns to its true home. Therefore the spirits of the dead are called *kuai* 鬼, which is to say that they have "returned" (*kuai* 歸). As for the body, it lies there all alone like a clod — how could it possibly have consciousness?⁸³

Despite this rather "cold" analysis of the condition of death, Yang Wang-sun was not a man who despised the value of life. On the contrary, when he was alive, he treated himself generously and did everything to procure a comfortable and prolonged life, which was in tune with the practice of one of the branches of Taoism, the main concern of which was to prolong life with drugs, exotic food, and special physical exercises.⁸⁴ Moreover, although Yang Wang-sun argued strongly for extra-thrifty burial, in order "to reform the times,"⁸⁵ he does not clearly indicate whether others should follow the example. His principle regarding burial can be summarized as not to "expend effort on useless activities or throw away wealth in ways that bring no benefit."⁸⁶ His idea of naked burial must have been widely known in subsequent centuries, because advocates of thrifty burial in the Eastern Han period cited Yang's story, as we see below.

Discussion about thrifty burial continued to be recorded in the Eastern Han period. In the reign of Emperor Kuang-wu, Fan Hung 樊宏, who was from a wealthy family and later became a high official and marquis, expressed the desire for a simple burial for himself when he was dying. His idea was probably based on the kind of Taoist philosophy that he often brought up with his son:

There have never been happy endings for [those who possessed] excessive wealth and power. It is not that I do not like glory and fame, it is be-

⁸³ For the three sections quoted above, see HS 67, pp. 2907-9; Burton Watson, trans., *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China* (N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1974), pp. 107-9. The translation here follows Watson's.

⁸⁴ Cf. Maspero, *Taoism*, pp. 445 ff. A recent study on this subject is Livia Kohn, ed., *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies 61 (Ann Arbor: Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, U. of Michigan, 1989).

⁸⁵ See n. 83. ⁸⁶ See n. 83.

cause the way of Heaven dislikes the arrogant and adorns the humble. The fate of the noble relatives of former eras is a clear example. Protect one's own life and have a whole self. What could be happier than this?⁸⁷

However, unlike Yang Wang-sun, who never occupied any government post, the courtier Fan was not a Taoist who would discard all earthly fame and glory. His conduct in his post was that of a diligent and loyal subject, always humble and soft-spoken. And, having a personality so congenial to the taste of the emperor, he received great praise and was often consulted. After Fan's death the emperor announced, "Now if I do not grant the wish of the Marquis of Shou Chang (Fan Hung), there would be no way to honor his virtue. Besides, when I meet the same fate, I would also like to follow his example."⁸⁸ Presumably Fan was given a simple burial. Yet his family was given ten million coins, ten thousand rolls of cloth, and the emperor attended his funeral in person.

In the reign of Emperor Chang (75-88 AD), we hear another voice of thrifty burial expressed by Chang Pa 張霸, a native of Shu 蜀 province who once served as a provincial governor and later a palace attendant. When he was about to die in the capital, he gave the following order:

Formerly when Chi-tzu 季子 served as an ambassador to the state of Chih, his son died on the journey in the district between Ying and Po. He then dug a pit at the roadside and buried his son. Now the way back to Shu is far and difficult, it is not suitable to bury me back at the family cemetery. You can bury me right here, as it is enough to conceal my body. You must follow my order so that my body would rot quickly and therefore fulfill my wish.⁸⁹

He was quoted as having said, "When the sun reaches to the middle of the sky, it is bound to start falling, and when the moon grows to a full circle, it is bound to begin waning. Lao Tzu has said, 'No humiliation will befall him who is content.'⁹⁰

However, in view of Chang's political career and scholarly achievement, he cannot be considered purely a Taoist either. He was, in addition, a specialist in the tradition of the *Kung-yang* 公羊 commentary to the revered Confucian classic *Ch'un-ch'iu*. When he was governor of K'uai-chi 會稽 "people in the province were encouraged to cultivate their virtue. Thousands of students studied the classics, and the sound of recitation could be

heard on the road."⁹¹ Actually, the example of Chi-tzu was taken from the Confucian classic *Li-chi*. We have here, in Chang Pa's Taoist explication of a Confucian story, the complicated workings of different intellectual traditions within one person.

A similar situation is that of Ts'ui Yüan 崔瑗, the son of Ts'ui Yin 崔駰, whose scholarship and stature had been ranked with those of the great historian Pan Ku 班固. Yüan, however, did not fare well as a political figure. Although he achieved the position of Prime Minister of the state of Chi-pei 濟北相, the last year of his life was spent in litigation. He was finally released from allegations misconduct only to proceed to his death bed. It was perhaps in a mood of disillusion that he left this will with his son: "A man is born in receipt of the spirit (*ch'i* 氣) of Heaven and Earth. When he dies, send his [transformative] essence (*ching* 精) back to Heaven and his bones to Earth. There is no place where one cannot conceal his body. Do not send me back to the family [cemetery]. As for the funeral gifts and the sacrifice of sheep and pigs, none shall be accepted."⁹² His son Shih 寔, who is known for his essay "On Statecraft" ("Cheng Lun" 政論), and who actually condemned therein the contemporary practice of lavish burial, does not seem to have heeded his father's last words faithfully. We do not know if he received any gifts, yet he did sell his house and land in order to build a tomb and raise a memorial stela for his father. When the funeral was over, as the story goes, his household went broke and he had to sell beer and porridge to earn a living.⁹³

One of the proponents of thrifty burial who left a more extensive discourse on the matter was Chao Tzu 趙咨, a scholar-official who flourished in the reign of Emperor Ling 靈 (168-189 AD). An upright moralist, he was more interested in studying at home than working as an official, although several times he was forced to accept positions in the government.⁹⁴ When in office, he displayed incorruptibility by only accepting his salary day by day as earned. Near the end of his life, he asked his former subordinates to bury him with a simple, thin coffin, mixing yellow dirt into the coffin so that his body would rot quickly and return to the earth soon. He then left a written statement for his son that held birth and death of living beings to be the enduring principle of the universe. And when one is dead, "the essential spirit leaves the body, the soul disperses and returns to the beginning, which

⁸⁷ HHS 36, p. 1241. ⁸⁸ HHS 52, p. 1724. ⁸⁹ HHS 52, p. 1731.

⁹⁰ His government posts included Erudit 博士 (the highest rank in the imperial school), Governor of Tun-huang, and Prime Minister of the state of Tung-hai.

⁹¹ HHS 32, p. 1121. ⁹² Ibid. ⁹³ HHS 36, p. 1242. ⁹⁴ Ibid.

is endless emptiness. As all these disappear, they return to dust. Dust is but a worthless thing, so how could there be any consciousness and thus a demand for burial that provides thick cover and proper insulation? It is only because the living could not bear to see the destruction of the body that the custom of burying the dead was instituted."⁹⁵

Chao continued by surveying burial customs from the archaic time of Huang-ti to his time. Some of his claims, by the way, seem amazingly accurate in the light of modern archaeological discoveries. He declared that burial had become chronologically more and more extravagant. In evaluating the prevailing funerary practice he invoked both the Confucian *li* and the Mohist principle of thrifty burial, cited the example of the Taoist Yang Wang-sun, and concluded that a proper funeral should observe only what is simple and sincere at the particular moment and place. In the end, he urged his son not to disobey his order simply because it was disheartening to see a simple burial or for fear of the criticism of others. His burial should consist of the following:

Dig a hole in the ground that will accommodate the inner and outer coffins. As soon as the coffins arrive, they should be buried. The burial ground should be flattened without a mound. No divination should be consulted about the time and date of the burial, no offering should be presented at the funeral. After the funeral, no one should remain at the side of the grave, and no monument or trees should be erected.⁹⁶

Chao Tzu's statement, similar to those of Fan Hung and Chang Pa, betrays the influence of Taoist, Confucian, and Mohist ideas, although the Confucian ideas may have been diluted a little to suit his pro-thrifty burial argument. Viewing it from another angle, however, it can also be said that Chao Tzu's understanding of Taoist, Confucian, or Mohist ideas only reflected a personal approach to a common tradition. For him, there might not have been a clear-cut distinction between the "philosophical basis" of one school of thought and another—the kind of distinction modern historians too often seek. There were no barriers in Chao's intellectual travels.

Contemporary with Chao Tzu, or a little later, were Chang Huan 張奐, Fan Jan 范冉, Lu Chih 盧植, and Chao Ch'i 趙岐, all of whom recorded ideas in favor of thrifty burial. After an arduous career as scholar, general, Grand Minister of Agriculture (*ta-ssu-nung*), and Chamberlain for Ceremonies (*tai-ch'ang*), Chang Huan's old age was without office and spent in

solitude because of the animosity of the eunuch Wang Yü 王雋. He expressed the wish for simple burial in his last words:

I have served in the government in ten different positions, yet I could not conceal my own opinion and was hated by the wicked. It is fated whether one has one's way or not, and it is natural to have a beginning and an end to one's life. Now there is darkness underground, and time there is long and without a moment of light. What I do not like is for the body to be wrapped further with fine cloth and sealed tightly in the coffin with nails. If I am fortunate enough to have a grave, you should bury me the same afternoon if I die in the morning. Put my body on the bier; use only one piece of cloth. I would not follow the extravagant example of the Duke of Chin, neither would I be so stringent as Yang Wang-Sun.⁹⁷

Fan Jan was a radical, often at odds with common customs. His will contained the following:

I lived in a corrupt era and was surrounded by wanton customs. While I could not have helped reforming the times and saving the multitude, how could I allow myself to go with the world when I am dead! Prepare to bury me right after my breath is gone. Use ordinary clothes that are enough to cover the body, and a coffin that is large enough to contain the body. As soon as the preparation is over, start to dig the grave pit. When the pit is dug, bury the coffin right away. Do not bury any offering food or drink. The grave mound should be only high enough to cover myself.⁹⁸

Chao Ch'i, the well-known commentator of *Mencius*, whose experience much resembled that of Chang Huan, left a peculiar instruction for his son when he was about to die: "When I am dead, use sand to make a bed in my tomb, put a cloth mat on the bed and dress me in white, then cover me with a single sheet. Put me down in the tomb the day I die, and cover the tomb when it is done."⁹⁹ His contemporary Lu Chih had a similar idea of a simple burial. Near the end of his life, he ordered his son to bury him in an earth pit with no coffin, using a single sheet in which to wrap the body.¹⁰⁰

Unlike other examples discussed above, here our sources do not offer direct information concerning the reasons that prompted Chao Ch'i and Lu

⁹⁵ HHS 39, p. 1314. ⁹⁶ HHS 39, p. 1315.

⁹⁷ HHS 65, p. 2143. ⁹⁸ HHS 81, p. 2690. ⁹⁹ HHS 64, p. 2122.
¹⁰⁰ HHS 64, p. 2119.

Chih to make such decisions. Similar cases are found in the biographies of Chi Tsun 祭遵,¹⁰¹ Cheng Hung 鄭宏,¹⁰² Ho Hsi 何熙,¹⁰³ Wang Tang 王堂,¹⁰⁴ Ma Jung 馬融,¹⁰⁵ Yang Hsü 羊續,¹⁰⁶ and Cheng Hsüan 鄭玄,¹⁰⁷ all of whom decided on thrifty burial. It is unlikely that their reasons would be the same.

Ma Jung was the mentor of such famous scholars as Lu Chih and Cheng Hsüan. He was equally versed in the Confucian classics and in Taoist literature. He was open-minded and casual, unwilling to conform to the Confucian ethics of conduct. He enjoyed nice homes and fine garments; and he liked to have music performed while giving lessons. However, his reputation was besmirched for having yielded to the pressure of the powerful Liang Chi 梁冀 to persecute Li Ku 李固. According to the author of *Hou-han-shu*, Ma was thus considered not to be an upright gentleman by some contemporaries.¹⁰⁸ Could such a character embody a true Taoist (or Confucian) principle? The fact that he gave in to political pressure shows his incapability of abandoning worldly concerns. It is therefore rather difficult to assess the motive of his wish for a thrifty burial. This is another reminder of the complexity of the relationship between thought and deed in a historical character, who oftentimes seems invisible and impenetrable due to the paucity of sources.

So far the views we have been discussing all favor thrifty burial. In fact, one hardly finds any positive argument for lavish burial, although it was widely practiced in society. If felt by contemporaries to have been simply a fad, then lavish burial may not have engendered theoretical discussion, pro or con. The very nature of our sources, in other words, the formulas used in death-wills, despite their criticism of lavish burial, may also have inhibited any explication or theory.

The only person in the Eastern Han period who has left us with extensive and more systematic examinations and refutations of the religious and intellectual background of lavish burial was the famous Wang Ch'ung 王充. Wang Ch'ung's fatalism, naturalist cosmology, and emphasis on empirical knowledge rather than subjective ethics were the basis of his idea of thrifty burial.¹⁰⁹ He began the essay in *Lun-heng* 論衡 entitled "Thrifty

Burial" by refuting the Confucian and Mohist ideas of proper burial. The problem with the Confucian argument, he thought, was that on one hand it did not admit the existence of ghosts and spirits, while on the other it insisted on performing sacrificial ceremonies for ancestors. The Confucian argument, as Wang stated, was that:

[If one maintains that the dead are unconscious, then the subjects and the sons would disobey their sovereign and their father. Thus should the ceremonies and rituals of funeral be abolished, the subjects and sons would forget the benevolence [of their sovereign and father]. Once their benevolence is forgotten, people will betray the dead and disregard the ancestors. As the dead are betrayed and the ancestors disregarded, the criminal acts of unfilial behavior would multiply. The sage was afraid of letting open the source of unfilial acts; therefore, he did not want to make clear the fact that the dead possessed no consciousness.¹¹⁰

The Confucians encouraged a serious attitude toward burial practices with a keen concern primarily for their social implications. The common people, however, might not appreciate this subtle Confucian position, whereas the more overt of the rituals only encouraged their practice of lavish burial without a true understanding of the essence of proper *li* in funerals.

The problem with the Mohist approach was also its self-contradicting arguments. It was logically incompatible, Wang contested, that Mo-tzu insisted on thrifty burial while maintaining that one should recognize the existence of ghosts and spirits:

The arguments of the Mohists were self-contradictory. They wanted to bury the dead thriftily, yet they venerated the ghosts; therefore, the dead must have consciousness. If the dead indeed possess senses, and you bury them thriftily, it is to enrage the dead. People's natures tend to prefer luxuriance to frugality. If one invites the anger of the dead because of thrifty burial, what good would it bring merely to venerate the ghosts? If they thought that ghosts were not the dead, then their believing in the story of the [ghost of] Tu-po was wrong. If they thought that ghosts were the dead, then their idea of thrifty burial was wrong.¹¹¹

Wang Ch'ung's own position was that of a materialist or naturalist.

¹⁰¹ HHS 20, p. 742.

¹⁰² HHS 33, p. 1157.

¹⁰³ HHS 47, p. 1593.

¹⁰⁴ HHS 31, p. 1106.

¹⁰⁵ HHS 60A, p. 1972.

¹⁰⁶ HHS 31, p. 1111.

¹⁰⁷ HHS 35, p. 1211.

¹⁰⁸ HHS 60A, p. 1972; 63, p. 2084.

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of Wang Ch'ung's thought, see Hsü, *Liang-Han ssu-hsiang shih* 2, pp. 563-640; Hsiao, *Chinese Political Thought*, pp. 580 ff.; Fung, *Chung-kuo che-hsueh-shih* *hsin-pien* 2, pp. 245 ff.; and Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1956) 2, pp. 368 ff.

¹¹⁰ *Lun-heng* 論衡 ("Po-tsang" 薄葬) (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1971), p. 226; cf. Alfred Forke, *Lun Hêng* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1911) 2, p. 372.

¹¹¹ *Lun-heng*, p. 226; Forke, *Lun Hêng* 2, pp. 374-75.

There was nothing left when people died and returned to nature. Any idea about the existence of a ghost or a god was a production of man's illusions and a mistake. "What sustains the life of man are vitality (*ching*) and spirit (*ch'i*). When man dies, vitality and spirit disappear. When this happens, the body begins to rot. Finally it becomes dust. Where could the ghost be?"¹¹² As there is no consciousness after death, and the dead could not become ghosts in any case, the practice of lavish funerals provides no benefit for the dead. It only brings disaster to the living. "If the meaning of death is not fully discussed and understood, the extravagant ceremonies will not cease. If this is the case, properties and energy will be wasted. And if property and energy are wasted, people will suffer from extreme poverty. This is the way toward destruction."¹¹³ Viewed from this perspective, it is clear that although Wang based his argument on a Taoist or naturalist-materialist understanding of the workings of the universe, and flatly denied the validity of the Mohist and Confucian arguments, in the end he did not completely reject the Mohist and Confucian views about the uselessness and the harm that lavish burials could bring to the society. His main purpose, as is also evident from other essays in *Lun-heng*, was to demonstrate the necessity of clear and logical thinking, so that people's irrational beliefs in ghosts and gods could be corrected. Whether his arguments were in fact always rational and logically consistent themselves is a problem that might also involve his educational background, his living environment, and his personal life, as well as the intellectual tradition of Han China; but these are outside the scope of this article.

From the above discussion, it should be clear that the people who favored thrifty burial in the Han Dynasty usually based their arguments either on the undesirable socio-economic results of lavish burial, or on a Taoist understanding of the meaning of life and death and man's relation with the universe. These two types of argument need not be mutually exclusive. At times it was possible for a person to employ Taoist expressions as pretexts to arrive at a positive social criticism, as with Yang Wang-sun and Chao Tzu. Their main object in exalting the value of thrifty burial was to wake up the unenlightened multitude and reform the world. It should also be made clear that although they advocated the idea of some kind of thrifty burial, there obviously was no consensus among them about what exactly constituted "thrifty burial." Someone's burial might be thriftier than

another's. It was their disapproval of current customs that had brought their ideas together as a distinct line of thought.

Chronologically, the majority of the Han-era people whose opinions we read came from the Eastern Han, particularly toward the latter half of the period. Whatever the explanation might be for this phenomenon—whether because of the influence of a stronger anti-social, anti-establishment sentiment that gradually permeated the intellectual community¹¹⁴, or simply because more information is available to us, or both—the fact that their ideas on thrifty burial were recorded at all, shows the existence of a social undercurrent that somehow appreciated unconventional thoughts and deeds.

Moreover, the majority had a background in the Confucian classics. Some of them were important scholars in the Confucian tradition. Thus one may surmise that despite Taoist expressions employed in the arguments for thrifty burial, these men were probably not Taoists who shunned the world; on the contrary, their active careers show otherwise. Their attitudes concerning thrifty burial, therefore, may be indications of open-mindedness regarding things earthly when death was near. But their ideas could also have been messages for a world that they perceived as moving away from the teachings of ancient wisdom. It is curious that, given their intellectual background, many of them preferred to employ Taoist expressions in their arguments for thrifty burial, while such Confucian teachings as "in funeral it is better to show deep sorrow than to pay meticulous attention to the details" could have served equally as well as theoretical bases for thrifty burial. In fact, because the prevailing custom of lavish burial was partly supported by Confucian ideas—even if distorted from the original—deliberate avoidance of such ideas may have occurred. In any case, the fact that thinkers could have expressed such ideas, despite, or because of, the current customs, suggests that through the Eastern Han period at least a fraction of intellectuals thought and acted independently of Confucian canons and social mores. The evidence here provides a good example of the complexity of the relationship between intellectual background and actual historical deed. In all of this also is the implication that so-called orthodox Confucianism had not succeeded in replacing all the other branches of thought at this time. It seems that by the late Eastern Han various intellectual traditions transmitted from the pre-Ch'in era were becoming a mixed body of thought. Some intellectuals might be Confucianistic when

¹¹² *Lun-heng* ("Lun-ssu" 論死), p. 202; cf. Forke, *Lun Hêng* 2, p. 371. Similar arguments can be found in other *Lun-heng* essays: "Ssu-wei" 死僞, "Ting-kuei" 訂鬼.

¹¹³ See n. 110.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ch'en, "Confucian, Legalist and Taoist Thought," pp. 767-807.

actively serving the state, while remaining Taoist disciples privately in search of peace of mind.¹¹⁵ The root of the resurgence of philosophical Taoism during the subsequent Wei-Chin period, therefore, lies at least partially in this kind of intellectual environment.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ It has actually been suggested that the Taoism of the Wei-Chin period grew out of Han Confucianism; see Jack. L. Dull, "The Confucian Origins of Neo-Taoism," in Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, ed., *Dokyo no sagoteki kenkyū 道教の総合的研究* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankō kai, 1977), pp. 7-56. For thrifty burial in the Wei-Chin period, see Wei Ming 魏鳴, "Wei-Chin po-tsang k'ao-lun" 魏晉薄葬考論, in *Nan-ching ta-hsiieh hsieh-pao* 南京大學學報 (1986.4), pp. 133-43. Wei maintains that in the Wei-Chin period, most intellectuals who favored thrifty burial were "Confucianists," and that although intellectuals with Taoist inclination might also have favored thrifty burial, their influence on society was less important. In one sense, Wei's argument supports my observation about the intellectual background of the Han proponents of thrifty burial. However, I am not convinced that the so-called Confucianists of the Wei-Chin period were free of Taoist influence.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HFHD	Homer Dubs, <i>History of the Former Han Dynasty</i>
HHS	<i>Hou Han-shu</i> 後漢書
HS	<i>Han-shu</i> 漢書
SC	<i>Shih-chi</i> 史記