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"Only Jade Can Epitomize Human Virtue": Ideas on Education and Moral Development in Han-Period China

This study examines aspects of the discourse on moral development that took place during China's Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). It analyzes the interdisciplinary nature of this discourse by considering the interrelation between, on the one hand, Han views regarding moral education and, on the other, contemporaneous debates concerning "human nature" (*xing* 性), cosmology, economics, law, and statecraft. Although I devote the most attention to the ideas of Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100 AD), Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 90–165 AD), and Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209 AD), all of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220 AD), I also consider viewpoints from other Han sources, including, inter alia, *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, in order to provide a broader diachronic and comparative analysis.[1]

The Han-era opinions analyzed in the present article address three related questions. First, who benefits most from a course of moral education and should therefore be the foremost subject of this kind of intellectual discipline? Whereas Kongzi (Kong Qiu 孔丘, 551–479 BC) repeatedly contrasted ethically "superior 上" and "inferior 下" people, the discourse on moral development during Han times often concerned the vast majority of people who are neither exemplary nor incorrigible but constitute the moral mean.[2] Our Han thinkers used several terms to

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[1] For studies on Han intellectual history, see, e.g., Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongwen daxue, 1975); Tanaka Masami 田中麻紗己, *Ryô Kan no shisō no kenkyū* 兩漢の思想の研究 (Tokyo: Kembun shuppan, 1986); Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, *Shin Kan shisō shi kenkyū* 秦漢思想史研究, 2d edn. (Kyoto: Heirakuji, 1981); and Michael Friedrich, ed., *Han-Zeit, Festschrift für Hans Stumpfeldt aus Anlass seines 65. Geburtstages* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

[2] On the attention Kongzi devoted to distinguishing between superior and inferior people, which he also identified as "noble people" (*junzi* 君子) and "petty people" (*xiaoren* 小人), see, e.g., D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 (Liu Dianjue) and Chen Fong-ching 陳方正, eds., *Lunyu zhuzi suoyin*

designate "average" or "ordinary people," including these four: *zhongren* 中人, *zhongmin* 中民, *zhongyongmin* 中庸民, and *fanren* 凡人.[3] Different interests motivated their ideas concerning this large sector of the populace.

On the one hand, the category of "average people" was an abstract construct used to refute earlier, competing pre-Han theories about human nature's inherent goodness or badness, including those of Mengzi (Meng Ke 孟軻 ca. 372–289 BC) and Xunzi (Xun Kuang 荀況 ca. 313–238 BC). Han thinkers employed it conceptually to offer alternative understandings of most people's basic moral condition. Several viewed the average person's nature as consisting of both good and bad qualities, resulting in an ongoing internal struggle between aspiration toward and embodiment of goodness versus succumbing to badness. As we shall see, this view influenced where these scholars located the ultimate source of moral standards, and, importantly, it enabled them to focus on the matter they deemed most consequential – viz., theorizing persuasively about and effectively instituting suitable external factors and conditions in which people develop proper moral feelings, intentions, and conduct. Those theories posited that, politically, rulers must exert themselves selflessly and tirelessly on the people's behalf by opting for utilizing an active, not non-active, method of statecraft; economically, imperial policy ought to prioritize agriculture and sericulture over industry and trade to improve the people's material well being; legally, laws and punishments, when implemented appropriately, play important roles in a program of moral education befitting average people; and, provided the foregoing afford people suitable conditions for moral self-improvement, ethically they must be accountable for overcoming their cynicism and moral idleness by undertaking both habitual moral training and self-examination.

論語逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995; hereafter, abbreviated as *LY*) 2.14.3, 4.11.7, 4.16.8, 6.21.13, 7.37.18, 12.16.32, 12.19.32, 13.23.36, 13.25.36, 13.26.36, 14.23.39, 15.2.42, 15.21.43, 15.34.44, 16.9.46, 17.3.47, 17.4.48, and 17.23.50. References are in the format: book.passage.page. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Confucius Ridens: Humor in the *Analects*," *HJAS* 50.1 (1990), p. 152, analyzes the notable case of *LY* 17.3 wherein Kongzi includes the "wisest 上知" and the "most ignorant 下愚" in the same category – namely, that of the "unchangeable 不移." Harbsmeier relies on Socrates to interpret Kongzi to mean that the former do not seek what they already possess, whereas the latter do not long for what they have never had or missed.

[3] Such terms that incorporate words denoting "middle" or "common" often accompany the graphs 上 and 下 to designate a third class of people who represent a middle group. Since there is not a substantial enough semantic difference between the four terms here to warrant translating one term as "average people" and another as "ordinary people," and because *zhong* and *yong* appear as a compound, I will use the foregoing English translations interchangeably for them. Other ways Han thinkers referred to this category of people include *min* 民 and *baixing* 百姓, signifying "subjects" or "commoners."

Different Han thinkers argued that when these guidelines were effectively applied, the average sort of person, not the extremely sagacious or extremely depraved, would mature in moral character—conceived broadly as, most notably, moral understanding, conscience, conduct, and aspiration—because qualities of human nature were susceptible to their influence. For them, moral development therefore entails the sociopolitical and educational processes by which inborn, nascent moral dispositions are encouraged and ultimately crafted and polished into superior virtues, while they simultaneously constrain, condition, or more constructively channel human nature's immoral traits.

Such conditions that are conducive to moral betterment were significantly lacking during late-Han times due, in part, to the intrigues, favoritism, corruption, and extravagance exhibited among rival groups within the upper echelon of Eastern Han society, especially the official class, and the court. But on the other hand, scholars of conscience spoke out critically and prioritized the need to educate and thereby elevate the condition – material, intellectual, and moral – of average people, both to improve the sociopolitical order and material prosperity of the realm, and as an ethical aspiration. These thinkers directed part of their intellectual attention not just to a much larger segment of society than the power elite and the emperors and their cliques, but also to the so-called ordinary people, who were the most severely impacted by the ruthlessness and incompetence of those who held power and administered the realm's affairs.[4] They also presupposed that the Han empire could only be prosperous and enduring by virtue of the quality and condition of its citizenry. Efforts to reform the society and age could be aided by constructing a coherent view of the average person's basic moral nature and how best to develop it.

Han scholars also devised different classifications of personhood, or personalities, into which people were categorized. An example of such a typological scheme appears in chapter 20 of the *Hanshu* 漢書, namely, Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92 AD) "Gujin renbiao" 古今人表 ("Tables of Personalities of Antiquity and Recent Times"). Beginning in Western Han 西漢 times (206 BC–9 AD), designations of qualities, primarily moral ones, were also created for use in evaluating the suitability of candidates nominated for office. The designation and criterion most often employed in recommending and selecting candidates was "filial and incorrupt" (*xiaolian* 孝廉). For a discussion of *xiaolian* and other qualities used in this process, see, e.g., Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1980), pp. 132–37; and John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: SUNY P., 1994), pp. 99–102.

[4] It is worth mentioning that of the three thinkers who will be the main focus of the following analysis only Xun Yue came from a family of some means and local influence, and for a time later in his life emerged from obscurity to occupy an office, albeit of no consequence to actual governing, serving on Eastern Han emperor Xian's 獻帝 (r. 189–220 AD) staff. Both Wang Chong and Wang Fu were poor, and whereas the former was a failed low-level local bureaucrat, the latter never held an official appointment.

The second of the three related questions then becomes: What is the most suitable course of moral cultivation to pursue, given internal qualities and external conditions? By Han times different regimens of personal cultivation had long been debated. Kongzi earlier had distinguished between two methods: one involved quiet contemplation, and the other active, accumulated learning.[5] Other early opinions on the optimal means of self-cultivation were also often portrayed by contemporary critics as mutually antagonistic. The contemplative way was directed at safeguarding natural, inner cognitive and affective faculties – such as one's nature and "instinctive dispositions" (*qing* 情) – while another way advocated beautifying these and other faculties through external means of moral education. Two metaphors that were used to differentiate these approaches and explicate them analogically were the "water mirror 鑑" and "polished jade 玉," and different conceptions of moral achievement accompanied them.[6] The following analysis examines aspects of the polished jade model in different Han formulations, because our Han thinkers saw it as the preferred approach, given both their view of human nature and the imperfect, imperial, sociopolitical world in which they lived.

Third: realistically, then, what should be and what should not be sought out as the moral objective? These Han thinkers once more opted for the median between the extreme high of sages who are moral without the aid of education and the near extreme low of people who are left to rely solely on their untrained, basic natures. A mere approximation of the consummate ethical standard exemplified by effortlessly virtuous sages was the most average people could aspire to reach. The limitations imposed on them – both by their natures and their circumstances – necessitated a less-demanding and more realistic goal. Moral virtuosity was not necessary for sufficient goodness to take hold in most people.

The overarching question for these Han scholars concerned both the manner and extent to which moral education can and cannot influence human nature. On the whole they expressed substantially comparable viewpoints in addressing the subject of moral development, and they theorized the educational means appropriate for average people given the conditions of their age, which was based on a commonsensi-

[5] See *LY* 15.31.44.

[6] For an analysis of different conceptual metaphors relating to moral cultivation in notable pre-Han sources, see Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wuwei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2003).

cal and compromise position regarding the basic constitution and moral potential of people's natures.

SECONDARY SCHOLARSHIP

Two areas of scholarship are particularly relevant to our interests. The first concerns scholarly conceptions of moral virtue in early Chinese thought, and the second relates to the period of the Eastern Han and both the intellectual milieu and historical circumstances that informed debates on moral development then. Whether called an "ethics of attunement," an "ethics of ease," an "ethics of mirroring," or an "ethics of reflex," these are all variations on the brand of moral virtuosity modeled on the water mirror. In Warring States times (481–221 BC) both Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou 莊周 ca. 369–286 BC) and Xunzi observed that people do not mirror themselves in moving water but in still water.[7] A. C. Graham remarked on the importance of perceiving circumstances with mirror-like "clarity 清": "The man who reacts with pure spontaneity can do so only at one moment and in one way; by attending to the situation until it moves him, he discovers the move which is 'inevitable' like a physical reflex. But he hits on it only if he perceives with perfect clarity, as though in a mirror."[8] Lee Yearley characterizes the "impartiality 兼" and the "tranquility 靜" of the *Zhuangzi*'s mirror-like mind as follows:

> Applying the image of a mirror to the mind means…not projecting your own attitudes onto a situation…the mind mirrors events when it places them within no general interpretive scheme…That mind maintains peace within strife, tranquility within disturbance; it sends off and welcomes whatever occurs.[9]

Early formulations of this ideal were not exclusive to Zhuangzi. Aaron Stalnaker reveals that Xunzi's ethical thought was similar to

[7] See D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin* 莊子逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2000), 5/13/17–18; and D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Xunzi zhuzi suoyin* 荀子逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1996; hereafter, *XZ*), 21/105/5–7. References are chapter/page/line(s).

[8] A. C. Graham, "Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of 'Is' and 'Ought,'" in Victor Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1983), p. 9. Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61.4 (1993), p. 647, describes this model in terms similar to Graham's: "In this state of spiritual calm, the heart and mind *mirrors* the world…for Zhuangzi *there is* a way to see the world as it really is…in any given situation, there is a best way to act, the trouble is being able to *see* what this best way is."

[9] Lee H. Yearley, "The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu," in Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, pp. 133–34.

Zhuangzi's notions of tranquility, emptying, mirroring, and attuned responsiveness: "Emptying allows one's mind to function as a mirror, perfectly responsive and unclouded; it seems very likely that Xunzi arrived at his idea of the mind as a pan of water, capable of clear responsiveness but subject to beclouding."[10] In Xunzi's essay "Jie bi" 解蔽 he defined "emptiness 虛" as a quality of the "mind" (*xin* 心, often called "heart") that is impervious to the influence of past experience in encountering the present moment impartially:

> By what means do people understand the Way? I say [through] the mind. By what means does the mind understand? I say [through] emptiness, unity, and tranquility. The mind never stops storing, yet it has what is called emptiness...People from birth have consciousness, and with consciousness they have intentions. Intentions are stored, yet [consciousness] has what is called emptiness. Not allowing what has been stored to influence what will be received is what "emptiness" means. 人何以知道? 曰: 心. 心何以知? 曰: 虛壹而靜. 心未嘗不臧也, 然而有所謂虛... 人生而有知, 知而有志. 志也者, 臧也, 然而有所謂虛, 不以所已臧害所將受謂之虛.[11]

A Western Han example of this ethical model appears in *Huainanzi* section titled "Yuan dao" 原道. Its authors recounted the primitive and utopian conditions present during the age of primordial antiquity, and they compared the water mirror's stillness to the original tranquility of people's "heavenly nature 天性":

> When a water mirror comes in contact with shapes, it is not because of wisdom and precedent that it is able to flawlessly reflect the square, round, crooked, and straight. Therefore, the echo does not respond at random, and the shadow does not independently arise. They mimic sounds and forms...That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature...When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, our nature cannot return to the self, and the heavenly patterns are destroyed. 夫鏡水之與形接也, 不設智故, 而方圓曲直弗能逃也. 是故響不肆應, 而景不一設, 叫呼仿佛... 人生而靜, 天之性也... 好憎成形, 而知誘於外, 不能反己, 而天理滅矣.[12]

[10] Aaron Stalnaker, "Aspects of Xunzi's Engagement with Early Daoism," *Philosophy East and West* 53.1 (2003), pp. 87–129.

[11] *XZ* 21/103/25–104/2. My translation has benefited from that given in Stalnaker, "Aspects of Xunzi's Engagement with Early Daoism," p. 90, and in John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1994) 3, p. 104.

[12] D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2002; hereafter, *HNZ*), 1/2/13–16. References are chapter/page/line(s). Trans. John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold

Both the water mirror and people's natures provide flawless reflections of forms and Heaven's patterns when they remain at rest and calm, respectively, because these are their optimal natural conditions.[13] Michael Puett, analyzing correlative cosmological thinking found in *Huainanzi*, explains that human beings were capable of optimizing their inherent connection with the patterns of the cosmos by cultivating their indwelling "spirit 神," which different Han thinkers linked to people's nature.[14] Puett concludes that adepts "have the power to do what should be done. They do not have the power to do what they wish…[rather, they] spontaneously act as they ought."[15]

However, the knowledge and personal preferences people acquire through learning and enculturation alter their natures, resulting in a distortion of and dissonance with that which is heavenly and "natural" (*ziran* 自然), both within and without. In *Huainanzi*'s "Jing shen" 精神 chapter, the literati are criticized for corrupting people's natures and instinctive dispositions (or "genuine responses") by attempting to polish and adorn them through education and cultural refinement:

> Shallow scholars in this declining age do not understand how to get to the origins of their minds and return to their root. They merely sculpt and polish their natures and adorn and stifle their genuine responses in order to interact with their age…Nowadays, Confucians do not get to the foundations of how they have desires but instead prohibit what they desire; [they] do not get to the source

D. Roth, trans. and eds., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China, by Liu An, King of Huainan* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2010), p. 53. Cf. *HNZ* 14/135/10.

[13] Cf. *HNZ* 2/16/6–15. For studies on human nature in *Huainanzi*, see Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: SUNY P., 2001), pp. 101–25; Liao Qifa 廖其髮, *Xian Qin Liang Han renxing lun yu jiaoyu sixiang yanjiu* 先秦兩漢人性論與教育思想研究 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1999), pp. 284–90; Harold D. Roth, "The Concept of Human Nature in the *Huai-nan Tzu*," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 12 (1985), pp. 1–22; and Xu, *Liang Han sixiang shi*, pp. 117–21.

[14] For example, Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BC), writing in his *Xinshu* 新書, described "human nature" as "the place wherein spirit-*qi* collects 性，神氣之所會也." See D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Jia Yi Xinshu zhuzi suoyin* 賈誼新書逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1994; hereafter, *XS*) 8.5/59/27. References are chapter.section/page/line(s).

[15] Michael Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), p. 283. Eric Nelson, "Responding with Dao: Early Daoist Ethics and the Environment," *Philosophy East and West* 59.3 (2009), p. 306, makes a similar point by arguing, "in the *Yuan Dao,* emptying the heart is…appropriately and fittingly responding to things in the opportune moment without anticipation or calculation… the human is itself in its responsive attunement with the fluidity of natural processes." On these and similar themes in the *Huainanzi*, see also Harold D. Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought," *HJAS* 51.2 (1991), pp. 628–50; Xu, *Liang Han sixiang shi*, pp. 122–33; and Kanaya Osamu, *Rōsō teki sekai: Enanji no shisō* 老莊的世界：淮南子の思想 (1959; rpt. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), pp. 238–52.

of how they delight in things but instead restrict what they enjoy. 衰世湊學, 不知原心反本, 直雕琢其性, 矯拂其情, 以與世交… 今夫儒者, 不本其所以欲而禁其所欲, 不原其所以樂而閉其所樂.[16]

Both passages from *Huainanzi* differentiate between two disparate modes of interacting with the world – cognitively, ontologically, and morally. On the one hand, people possess innate spontaneous faculties that – either in their pristine natural states or when cultivated in a suitable quietist manner – afford them the ability to discern reality accurately and respond to the things and events they encounter in the most genuine and appropriate way, morally speaking and in accordance with Heaven's patterns. On the other hand, over time people developed less spontaneous and more calculated, less genuine and more contrived, and less discerning and more beclouded moral conventions that wrongly sought to alter and embellish people's genuine and spontaneous moral sensibilities.[17]

The brand of moral virtue associated with the water mirror involves an array of related concepts, values, practices, and objectives. Cognitively, its qualities include tranquility, clarity, and impartiality. Ontologically, it entails one's consummate "genuineness 真," instinctive responsiveness, and true feelings. Historically, it relates to the conditions of simplicity and naturalness that prevailed during remote antiquity. The method of self-cultivation that occasions it is quietist and contemplative in nature. Its models are stillness, not movement; substance, not form; inner, not outer; the root, not the branch; and *yin* 陰, not *yang* 陽. As we shall see, politically, it relies on "nonaction" (*wuwei* 無爲).

Even jade, in its uncut and unpolished form, was linked to this concept cluster. For instance, in *Yantielun* an imperial government spokesman, Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (152–80 BC), remarks as follows:

The unadorned and uncut [nature of] the utmost in beauty, [among] things there are none that can ornament [it]. The steadfast and genuine [nature of] the utmost in value, [among] feigned refinements there are none that can augment [it]. Thus, a precious jade

16 *HNZ* 7/60/6 and 7/60/13. Translation adopted with slight modification from Major et al., *Huainanzi*, pp. 257–58.

17 This criticism is reminiscent of a view expressed in chapter 19 of the *Laozi* 老子, viz., the way to return people to their genuine feelings of "family reverence" (*xiao* 孝) and "kindness towards others" (*ci* 慈) was to rid them of Ruist "humaneness" (*ren* 仁) and "moral rightness" (*yi* 義). On the *Laozi* as an important source for "Yuan dao" and the *Huainanzi*, see Major, et al., *Huainanzi*, pp. 41–47; D. C. Lau and Roger T. Ames, trans., *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998); and Kanaya, *Rōsō teki sekai*, pp. 121–252.

is not polished, and a beautiful pearl is not decorated 至美素璞, 物莫能飾也. 至賢保真, 僞文莫能增也. 故金玉不琢, 美珠不畫.[18]

Sang used these examples of supreme natural beauty and worth – that require no refinement or embellishment whatsoever – to express his disdain for the literati's penchant to criticize imperial policies and recommend opposing ones by citing the moral principles and didactic lessons they gleaned from Classics such as the *Odes* and *Documents*. Their approach consisted of nothing more than shallow ornamentation, and it lacked any true substance or practicality for governing.

While the spontaneous moral virtuosity of this model conveys a compelling vision of the pinnacle of ethical achievement, at least for some notable Han-era thinkers it was far too uncommon and ambitious to be of much relevance in their age. Sociopolitical and economic problems, combined with threats to the people's security, accompanied the difficult task of administering the large and diverse empire. Han scholars acknowledged that conditions had improved during the Han era, compared to the pervasive violence and chaos of Warring States times. The relative peace and stability achieved through imperial unification were reasons to endorse Han sovereignty and strive to improve its institutions and their functioning. However, different thinkers also noted problematic circumstances of their age, voiced their disapproval of imperial policies, and identified deficiencies of the Han administration, with increasing frequency in Eastern Han times.

Other studies in the secondary literature have provided both historical and intellectual contextualizations that aid in explaining why late-Han thinkers addressed the subjects they did and in the manner that they did. For example, Etienne Balazs surveyed the political intrigues and clashes among contending social groups: the privileged "aristocracy" or landed gentry, rival "external clans" or consort clans, the

[18] D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Yantielun zhuzi suoyin* 鹽鐵論逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1994; hereafter, *YTL*) 5.2/30/10–11. References are chapter. section/page/line(s). For an English translation of the *Yantielun*, see Esson M. Gale, trans., *Discourses on Salt and Iron: A Debate on State Control of Commerce and Industry in Ancient China* (Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Publishing Company, 1967). For a French translation, see Jean Levi, trans., *La dispute sur le sel et le fer*, Bibliothèque Chinoise (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010). For a translation into Russian, see Juri L. Kroll, trans., *Spor o soli i zheleze*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2001). See also ibid., vol. 1 (Saint-Petersburg: Peterburzhskoe vostokovedenie, 1997). For studies on Sang Hongyang and on the arguments supposedly presented during this debate, see, e.g., Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 462–64; Wu Hui 吳慧, *Sang Hongyang yanjiu* 桑弘羊研究 (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1981); J. L. Kroll, "Toward a Study of the Economic Views of Sang Hung-yang," *EC* 4 (1978–79), pp. 11–18; and Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), pp. 91–112.

eunuchs, and the literati. Balazs outlines the oscillations of the political fortunes of these different groups as one group, or multiple groups allied against another, temporarily gained the upper hand in the struggle for influence and power at the imperial court, only to lose a short time later what it had maneuvered cunningly and fought, often ruthlessly, to gain. Balazs also remarks on both the idleness and extravagance exhibited by the upper echelons of Han society during approximately a century of relative peace after the restoration of the Han dynasty in 25 AD, which contributed to the competition among these groups.[19]

Rafe de Crespigny also analyzes these intrigues and clashes, and explains how the upshot of this contentious and fluctuating political climate was that self-interest and self-preservation, at the expense of governing for the public good, became the foremost motivations of many in these competing parties.[20] De Crespigny's discussions of the reigns of "worthless" Eastern Han emperors such as emperors Huan 桓帝 (r. 146–67 AD) and Ling 靈帝 (r. 168–89 AD) recount numerous attendant problems the empire faced. For example, it suffered from severe financial strain due to banditry, greed and embezzlement, extravagant construction projects for the emperor's entertainment, and flawed taxation measures. These problems inhibited the state's ability to provide relief for its subjects in times of famine, epidemic, and disaster. To assist in generating needed revenue for the state, officials' salaries were reduced, political offices were sold, fees were assessed upon promotion, and criminals paid fines to commute their punishments.[21] These measures undoubtedly degraded the quality of both officialdom and the citizenry and contributed to widespread corruption and crime, which too often occurred at the average person's expense. If this state of affairs did not sufficiently discourage capable and worthy scholars from serving, then the emperor's favoritism toward the eunuchs and the charges of factionalism made by eunuchs against reform-minded literati

[19] See Etienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, trans. H. M. Wright, ed. Arthur F. Wright (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1964), pp. 187–225.

[20] See, e.g., Rafe de Crespigny, "Politics and Philosophy under the Government of Emperor Huan 159–168 A.D.," *TP* 66.1–3 (1980), pp. 41–83. Also, Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 1990), pp. 152–54, argues that it would be inaccurate to view, on the one hand, the powerful eunuchs and consort clans and, on the other, scholars of the regular bureaucracy as "being composed of different sorts of people," and to villainize the eunuchs and consort clans as ill-educated, corrupt, and self-interested, while believing many among the scholars were more cultured, morally principled, and blameless for the deficiencies of the imperial court. Vervoorn, and others, have criticized Balazs for holding this opinion.

[21] See the entries for emperors Huan and Ling in Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220 AD)*, Handbuch der Orientalistik IV.19 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 595–603 and 510–17, respectively.

surely did so, because it culminated in the proscriptions of literati from holding any office.[22] This political purging of literati often resulted in scholar-officials being run out of Luoyang or forced into hiding, and, in some instances, they were brutally assaulted.

Moreover, both internal rebellions in different regions and military incursions by the Xiongnu 匈奴 at the empire's frontiers periodically undermined the stability and security of the realm. Concerning Han relations with the Xiongnu, Nicola Di Cosmo analyzes Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC) narrative in *Shiji* 史記 that blames violent reactions by the Xiongnu on the military incursions of Han forces deep into the northern frontier to expand imperial holdings.[23] Economically, state monopolies on valued resources and industries, including salt and iron, were highly controversial. Land mismanagement hindered agricultural productivity, profiteering plagued the marketplace, and, as the wealthy and powerful competed with one another in their profligacy, there was wide economic inequity between the elite and commoners. Sociopolitically, rampant corruption existed and political appointments were based on patronage and nepotism, not merit, which led to administrative idleness and incompetence. Also, the time- and resource-consuming nature of a decidedly unjust legal system that favored the rich and influential in litigating cases motivated strong calls for judicial reform.[24]

22 On these proscriptions and on the anti-eunuch league consisting of dissident literati and court aristocrats, see, e.g., Rafe de Crespigny, "Political Protest in Imperial China: The Great Proscription of Later Han, 167-184," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 11 (1975), pp. 1–36; Chen Qiyun 陳啓雲, *Hsün Yüeh (A.D. 148–209): The Life and Reflections of an Early Medieval Confucian* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1975), pp. 19–39; and Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, pp. 170–75.

23 This approach became official policy during Han Wudi's 漢武帝 reign (r. 140–87 BC), and pro-expansionist court officials who supported a military solution to the problems in Han-Xiongnu relations argued that a successful military campaign against their longtime northern adversaries would improve the empire's security and increase its trade opportunities. For analysis of what Di Cosmo calls Sima Qian's "empirical" and "normative" strategies for "rationalizing" both the Xiongnu and the regions of Inner Asia into the fold of China's history and its imperial enterprise, see his *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002), esp. pp. 206–311. See also Hans van Ess, *Politik und Geschichtsschreibung im alten China: Pan-Ma i-t'ung* 班馬異同, vol. 1, Lun Wen 18 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), pp. 319–88.

24 For surveys of China's early imperial history, see, e.g., Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe, eds., *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2010); Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2007); and Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 BC–AD 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986). For other studies relevant to figures and events discussed in the present article, see, e.g., de Crespigny, *Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*; and Chen, *Hsün Yüeh*: *Life and Reflections*, pp. 1–65.

These and other circumstances made conditions during late Han times ripe for a rebellion on the scale and severity of the Yellow Turbans in 184.[25] Balazs argues that the ensuing chaos and violence created a power "vacuum" at the capital, which allowed another social group, the "daredevil type" strong men of which Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220 AD) was their exemplary "personification," to fill this vacated political space. Balazs, after framing the general historical and political context of Eastern Han times, turns his attention to the ideas of three "philosophers" who responded to these conditions in different ways, the first of which is Wang Fu. Balazs highlights Wang Fu's role as a reclusive critic, remarking on Wang's stances against several disturbing trends, including favoritism and privilege in appointing officials; extravagance among the aristocracy in their dress, consumption, and especially their marriage and funeral rituals; injustice and inefficiency in Han jurisprudence; and, economically, prioritizing the manufacturing of luxury goods over agricultural production.[26]

In another study Margaret Pearson interprets Wang Fu's position regarding human nature as centering on capability, rather than on either moral badness or perfection. She explains that the people Wang considered when discussing human nature were "worthies," who, though morally imperfect in different ways, were still capable of fulfilling the duties of an official appointment. Pearson relates Wang's viewpoint to his contempt for the increasing number of appointments determined through heredity and patronage, not capability and, most importantly, moral integrity.[27] She argues that Wang criticized hereditary privilege and its pretenses – specifically, the presumptions held by members of powerful families that superiority, broadly conceived, strictly derives from "capabilities inherent in one's parentage," and "certain families

[25] De Crespigny, "Political Protest," p. 36, explains that a "major factor in the disintegration of China's first great empire" was the erosion, caused by the proscriptions enacted between 167–184, of the important relationship between the imperial government at the capital and the leading clans and gentry officials in the provinces who played vital roles in administering the realm. Chen, *Hsün Yüeh*: *Life and Reflections*, p. 19, agrees with de Crespigny, remarking on the "divergent social origins of the literati," which enabled their movement against the eunuchs to spread "into other sectors of the society (particularly the local gentry)."

[26] See Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, pp. 198–205. See also Margaret J. Pearson, *Wang Fu and the Comments of a Recluse* (Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 1–91.

[27] On Wang Fu's life and his unwillingness to compromise his integrity given the corruption he observed in how candidates were nominated and appointed to office, see Pearson, *Wang Fu*, pp. 18–34; and Jin Fagen 金發根, "Wang Fu shengzu niansui de kaozheng ji *Qianfulun* xieding shijian de tuilun" 王符生卒年歲的考證及潛夫論寫定時間的推論, *BIHP* 40.2 (1969), pp. 781–99.

are more worthy of holding office than others."[28] Moreover, differences between these superior families and all others were understood by the former to be differences in kind that could never be entirely eliminated. This attitude arose, as Balazs, de Crespigny, and others have shown, at a time when different consort clans held and exercised enormous influence and power during regencies on behalf of child emperors who were sponsored and enthroned by these families. Pearson concludes that discussions concerning human nature during Eastern Han times focused on the manner in which political appointments were made.[29]

Chen Chiyun's work on Xun Yue bears upon some of the themes addressed in what follows. Chen notes Xun's interest in what Chen calls the "malleable mass of men." He discusses Xun's opinion on the difference between things people can control in their lives and things that are determined by fate, highlighting Xun's emphasis on self-determination and correct decision-making – in the former case. Chen explains that Xun therefore judged people by their "accomplished actions," not by "non-observable" phenomena such as either an evil nature or immoral intentions, because their actions are the only accurate indicators of people's goodness or badness insofar as they can be observed and compared to an objective moral standard. Chen also underscores Xun's criticism of certain negative attitudes about the emotions expressed by, most notably, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–104 BC), and Xun's positive opinion of emotions as partly constituting humankind's "inner realm of reality." If Dong's view were true, sages would have to be "devoid of feelings," which Xun found nonsensical.[30]

These are some examples of studies relating not only to how scholars have interpreted early Chinese understandings of moral virtue, but also to the historical conditions in which our Han thinkers lived and how they, in part, responded to them intellectually. By juxtaposing these two scholarly interests, we discern in sharp relief that, for many late-Han thinkers, restoring the utopian conditions of antiquity, including the kind of virtue modeled on the water mirror, which sages exhibited based on pristine inborn faculties they possessed, such as *xing* and *qing*, was not a realistic goal people could reach, nor was it one they should pursue. Instead, different Han thinkers proposed a more suitable objective concerning people's moral development that was both applicable to the conditions of their time and based on their particular

28 Pearson, *Wang Fu*, p. 50.

29 For Pearson's analysis of these aspects of Wang's thought, see ibid., pp. 47–53.

30 For Chen's discussions of these subjects, see his *Hsün Yüeh and the Mind of Late Han China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1980), pp. 37–53.

understanding of human nature. For example, unlike "Yuan dao" and other early chapters of *Huainanzi* that extol antiquity and these innate qualities, the text's later chapters describe the circumstances of the Western Han period. Their authors contended that to discard learning and rely solely on one's nature in their much later, more complex, and degenerate age was as misguided and perilous as abandoning a boat in the hope of walking on water.[31]

For scholars who lived in Eastern Han times, this sentiment gained additional historical support after Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 9–23 AD) overly idealistic and impractical reforms had failed to restore antiquity during his short-lived Xin 新 dynasty. By viewing himself as a sage-king, he had believed he was capable of accomplishing such a restoration. Similar to the foregoing viewpoint expressed in *Huainanzi*, Wang Fu explained in his *Qianfulun* 潛夫論 that, "[The former sages] created the Classics to bequeath to later people. If worthies and noble people cast aside this learning and act by embracing their inborn constitutions, they certainly will not be equipped with it 又造經典以遺後人, 試使賢人君子, 釋於學問, 抱質而行, 必弗具也."[32] Xun Yue, in the conclusion of his *Shenjian* 申鑒, lowered any earlier but now unattainable standard concerning what his contemporaries could accomplish in their personal moral cultivation: "Purest pureness is the highest! The next best reaches a mere approximation [of such pureness]. [Nowadays,] a mere approximation is anyone['s only aspiration]. [Yet] if [anyone] reaches the approximation, [he] will be without depravity, and this suffices 純乎純哉, 其上也. 其次得概而已矣. 莫匪概也, 得其概. 苟無邪, 斯可矣."[33] As

[31] See *HNZ* 19/205/15. For the authors' full discussion of the current degenerate age compared to the sages and more idyllic times of antiquity, see *HNZ* 19/205/7–20. Cf., e.g., *YTL* 1.4/6/30–7/1 and 3.2/18/24–25; and, for a comparable Eastern Han view, see, e.g., D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Lunheng zhuzi suoyin* 論衡逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1996; hereafter, *LH*) 54/242/25–243/5. References are chapter/page/line(s).

[32] D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Qianfulun zhuzi suoyin* 潛夫論逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995; hereafter, *QFL*) 1/2/26–27. References are chapter/page/line(s). For studies on and partial English translations of *Qianfulun*, see Pearson, *Wang Fu*; and Anne Behnke Kinney, *The Art of the Han Essay: Wang Fu's Ch'ien-fu Lun* (Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Asian Studies, 1990). For a complete translation of the work into German, see Rainer Holzer, trans., *Das Ch'ien-fu lun des Wang Fu: Aufsätze und Betrachtungen eines Weltflüchtigen*, Würzburger sinologische Schriften (Heidelberg: Forum, 1992).

For a similar view concerning the people's untaught basic constitution, see D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Baihutong zhuzi suoyin* 白虎通逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995; hereafter, *BHT*) 28/53/26. References are chapter/page/line(s).

[33] D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Shenjian zhuzi suoyin* 申鑒逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995; hereafter, *SJ*) 5/19/6–7. References are chapter/page/line(s). For a study and English translation of the *Shenjian*, see Chen, *Hsün Yüeh and the Mind of Late Han China*. See also, e.g., Chen, *Hsün Yüeh: Life and Reflections*, pp. 127–61; and Zhang Meiyu 張美煜, *Xun Yue Shenjian sixiang yanjiu* 荀悅申鑒思想研究 (Taiwan: Taiwan Normal

we shall see, moral education on the model of polished jade was one course several Han thinkers recommended in order to reach this "approximation," given the circumstances of their age.

HUMAN NATURE IN HAN THOUGHT

Scholarship at times disproportionally focuses either on the highest expressions of a given culture's moral aspirations and achievements, or on its worst cases of abject moral failure. In the chapter of *Lunheng* 論衡 named "Ben xing" 本性, Wang Chong observes a similar dichotomy in the pre-Han debate on human nature's inherent goodness or badness, which often has been portrayed as a disagreement between two oppositional voices: Mengzi's and Xunzi's.[34] Wang commented that Mengzi's insistence on human nature's goodness pertains merely to exemplary people significantly above the ethical mean. Conversely, Xunzi's view on people's badness applies only to those far below the mean.[35] Although Wang acknowledged some limited validity to both views and offered examples to support them, he regarded their positions as overly narrow and incomplete. Both thinkers mistakenly overgeneralized from one type of person to all humankind.[36]

Wang, and others, recognized the shortcomings of dichotomous pre-Han opinions and shifted the focus using mediation and common sense to move beyond them. They directed their intellectual efforts to

University, 1962). Also, 苟無邪 is an allusion to the following line from *Odes* 297: 思無邪 ("His thoughts are without depravity"), James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics*, 2d edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1893-95; rpt., Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991) 4, p. 613.

[34] For classic treatments of this subject, see D. C. Lau, "Theories of Human Nature in Mengzi and Xunzi," in T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000), pp. 188–219; A. C. Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: SUNY P., 1990), pp. 7–66; and Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi: Xian Qin pian* 中國人性論史, 先秦篇 (Taibei: Shangwu, 1969), pp. 161–98 and 223–62. See also, e.g., Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), esp. pp. 1–37; and Dan Robins, "The Warring States Concept of *Xing*," *Dao* 10.1 (2011), pp. 31–51. For other studies of both pre-Han and Han opinions on *xing*, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Readings in Han Chinese Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), pp. 1–22; Liao, *Xian Qin Liang Han renxing lun*; and Anne Behnke Kinney, "Dyed Silk: Han Notions of the Moral Development of Children," in Kinney, ed., *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1995), pp. 17–56.

[35] See *LH* 13/39/10. Note that these are Wang Chong's interpretations of Mengzi's and Xunzi's positions, which differ from the standard readings of them. Wang's reasons for portraying them in these ways will be explained in what follows. For an English translation of *Lunheng*, see Alfred Forke, trans., *Lun-Hêng* (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962). For studies on Wang's thought, see, e.g., Xu, *Liang Han sixiang shi*, pp. 411–79; and Nicholas Zufferey, *Wang Chong (27-97?): Connaissance, politique, et vérité en Chine ancienne* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995).

[36] For Wang's criticisms of Mengzi and Xunzi, see *LH* 13/36/11–28 and 13/37/17–26.

considerations regarding the vast majority of people who fall between these two extremes. They observed that the innate moral constitutions of average people are not homogenous but differ widely. They also underscored the internal struggle between goodness and immorality that characterizes the basic human condition for most people. Several thinkers also explained their views on the moral psychology of human nature by employing correlative, cosmological thinking.

First, a basic threefold division of people as 1. superior – beyond education and incorruptible, 2. inferior – unreceptive to education, and 3. average – to whom education applies – appears in diverse Han sources, including *Huainanzi*,[37] *Qianfulun*,[38] *Shenjian*,[39] and *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露.[40] In pre-Han times Kongzi argued that "only the wisest and the most ignorant do not change" 唯上知與下愚不移, which different Han thinkers interpreted to mean that most people occupy the moral and intellectual mean and can be educated and transformed.[41] Xun Yue, likely influenced by Ban Gu's earlier classification scheme, expanded these three categories into nine classes. Xun explained that half of these groups of people respond to education, and three-quarters of them are law-abiding. Only one of the nine classes could not be reformed through education and laws, but he conceded that even some people in this category might experience a subtle shift in their natures toward goodness.[42] Xun also identified substantial variety, which progressively worsens, among the ranks of the immoral:

> Supreme goodness is pure virtue with no wickedness. [Wickedness that] lies [within] but does not stir is the next best. [Wickedness that] stirs but does not act, [that] acts but does not go far, and that goes far but can be undone are the next best. The lowest goes too far and keeps going. All these [variations] are human nature. What determines them is the heart. 純德無慝, 其上善也. 伏而不動, 其次也.

[37] See *HNZ* 19/204/20–25.

[38] See *QFL* 33B/73/7.

[39] See *SJ* 5/17/9.

[40] See D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin* 春秋繁露逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1994; hereafter, *CQFL*) 10.1/46/1. References are chapter.section/page/line(s). As is well known, the *Chunqiu fanlu* was attributed to Dong Zhongshu, but it is unclear how much of the text he wrote. This issue has been discussed in Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, according to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 39–112; Gary Arbuckle, "Restoring Dong Zhongshu (BCE 195–115): An Experiment in Historical and Philosophical Reconstruction," unpub. Ph.D. (University of British Columbia, 1991), pp. 315–542; and Dai Junren 戴君仁, "Dong Zhongshu bu shuo wuxing kao" 董仲舒不說五行考, rpt. in *Meiyuan lunxueji* 梅園論學集 (Taipei: Kaiming shuju, 1970).

[41] *LY* 17.3.47.

[42] For Xun's discussion of these groupings of his nine classes, see *SJ* 5/18/7–10.

> 動而不行, 行而不遠, 遠而能復, 又其次也. 其下者, 遠而不近也. 凡此, 皆人性也. 制之者則心也.[43]

Wang Chong also emphasized the diversity of people's moral dispositions, and attributed their differences to greater or lesser quantities of the "five (moral) constants" endowed in them as forms of *qi* 氣:

> People receive the five constants…and all are present in [their] bodies. People get them [in] insufficient [amounts], and thus their conduct does not reach to [the conduct of] good people. Still, in some people they are ample and in others they are insufficient, but ampleness and insufficiency do not mean [they] differ in their substance…People's goodness and badness share one original *qi*. With *qi* there is more or less, and thus with human nature there is worthiness and foolishness. 人受五常… 皆具於身. 稟之泊少, 故其操行不及善人, 猶或厚或泊也, 非厚與泊殊其釀也… 人之善惡, 共一元氣. 氣有少多, 故性有賢愚.[44]

Some people are good naturally and others are bad naturally because of differences in the quantities of *qi*. Some are transformable, others, once the die is cast, are not. Among those capable of transformation, some change from bad to good, others from good to bad.[45] Still others change from good to bad and back to good.[46]

Both Wang Chong and Wang Fu also remarked on a category of unseemly people who are cunningly evil. These people are fully cognizant of their evil natures, and they calculatingly feign virtue and flatter their superiors to deceive others from knowing their true immoral

[43] *SJ* 5/18/15–16.

[44] *LH* 8/21/19–21. For other instances where Wang discussed the five constants – "humaneness," "moral rightness," "ritual propriety" (*li* 禮), "wisdom" (*zhi* 智), and "trustworthiness" (*xin* 信); see *LH* 6/14/26, 8/20/6–7, and 14/40/19–20. Cf. *BHT* 30/55/28–56/2. For analysis of the theory that Confucian virtues had material substance in "bodily humors," see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Also, on an early linking of jade with the virtue of wisdom in pre-Han sources, Csikszentmihalyi points out a sentiment shared between versions of "Wuxing" 五行 ("Five Kinds of Conduct") recovered from Guodian and Mawangdui and Mengzi: "[O]ne's 'jade coloration' (*yuse* 玉色) may serve as a visual template for another's wisdom" (p. 78). See also Csikszentmihalyi's analysis of the jade chimestone as a metaphor for sagacity in early Chinese literature (pp. 178–92).

[45] In the "Ben xing" chapter of *Lunheng*, Wang gave examples of these different moral dispositions and cases of moral development and degeneration as counterexamples to reveal weaknesses in the prevailing pre-Han and Han theories on human nature's goodness or badness. For other cases Wang examined, see *LH* 8/18/23–19/6 and 13/39/3. Cf. *SJ* 5/17/9–14, where Xun Yue also used counterexamples to demonstrate how several of these views were philosophically unsound.

[46] For an example of this particular case, see Wang's discussion of king Zhao Tuo 王趙佗 (d. 137 BC) of the Southern Yue 南越 in *LH* 8/22/9–11. For a summary of Zhao's life and career, see Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, pp. 710–11.

selves and malevolent intentions.[47] At the opposite end of the moral spectrum are sages and worthies. Wang Chong and Wang Fu observed a similar diversity among those in the superior ranks, with the notable exception of sages, who represent the highest category of people and closely resemble one another morally: "Sages are uniform (literally, 'of one color' or 'pure'), [whereas] worthies are varied (literally, 'multicolored') 夫聖人純,賢者駮."[48] Both Wang Chong and Wang Fu also followed Kongzi in asserting that education, provided it is of sufficient quality and degree, further widens these disparities in people's natures.[49]

Different Han scholars did not think that the average person's nature was either innately moral or immoral. Rather, it was both because it consisted of good and bad qualities that struggle against one another. For instance, Dong Zhongshu employed correlative cosmological thinking to correlate human nature's innate humaneness with people's *yang* energy, and morally problematic emotions and desires with their *yin* energy.[50] Wang Chong rejected this position, explaining that it simply combined the earlier one-sided opinions of Mengzi and Xunzi by attributing the *yang* element to Mengzi and the *yin* element to Xunzi.[51] In his criticism, Wang compared people's emotions and human nature to jade: "Jade is born from stone, and is both uniform in color and multicolored; emotions and nature are [born] from *yin* and *yang*, how could the uniform in color [alone] be good? 玉生於石, 有純有駮; 情性於陰陽, 安能純善?"[52]

Xun Yue agreed with Liu Xiang's (劉向 79–8 BC) view that also rejected this distinction between people's natures – which are purportedly good – and people's emotions – which are bad. Since people's natures and emotions are mutually implicated in one another, the for-

[47] See *LH* 13/38/3–5. See also the version of Wang Fu's essay "Shu she" 述赦 included in chapter 49 of *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 wherein he compared "evil-natured people 性惡之民" of this ilk, whose "abilities invariably exceed [those of] commoners 才必有過於眾," to "jackals and wolves 豺狼."

[48] *LH* 45/207/1; *QFL* 14/27/1. In what follows we will see that elsewhere in Han sources 純 (*chun*) is also a quality associated with jade.

[49] See *LY* 17.2.47; *LH* 13/37/8; and *QFL* 1/2/7–8. Both Wang and Wang also agreed that Kongzi's instructions on moral cultivation and personal moral conduct, not the pedantic commentarial scholasticism that preoccupied many Han literati, were the genuine contributions of his legacy.

[50] See *CQFL* 10.1/45/29–30. This view remained influential into the Eastern Han in, for example, the "Qing xing" 情性 chapter of *Baihutong* – cf. *BHT* 30/55/23–26. For a discussion of Dong's view, see, e.g., Xu, *Liang Han sixiang shi*, pp. 268–74.

[51] See *LH* 13/38/8–14. Paul Goldin, "Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy," *HJAS* 67.1 (2007), pp. 156–58, identifies a different problem in Dong's position – viz., too much goodness precipitates droughts.

[52] *LH* 13/38/13–14.

mer could not be understood as wholly good and the latter as entirely bad.[53] Xun relied on cosmological ideas to substantiate his view that both moral *and* immoral feelings partly constitute human nature – as qualities of people's spirit:

> As for discussing the spirit, nothing is closer than *qi*. When there is *qi*, there are forms; [likewise] when there is the spirit, there are feelings of like, dislike, joy, and anger. Thus, the spirit's possessing feelings correlates to *qi*'s having forms. *Qi* has both white and black [forms]; [likewise] the spirit has both good and bad [feelings]. 凡言神者, 莫近於氣, 有氣斯有形, 有神斯有好惡喜怒之情矣. 故神有情, 由氣之有形也; 氣有白黑, 神有善惡.[54]

In his work *Fayan* 法言, Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD) began an account of human nature by identifying it with humankind's five activities, that is, the capacities to sense, act, and think: "Sight, audition, speech, demeanor, and cognition are what human nature entails 視、聽、言、貌、思, 性所有也."[55] Morally, Yang contended that, "Human nature is a combination of good and bad 人之性也, 善惡混."[56] He attributed its inherent goodness and badness to the good and bad *qi* of the different faculties that constitute human nature noted above. Each could develop along either a moral or an immoral trajectory: "If one learns, he is upright; if one does not, he is crooked 學則正, 否則邪," and Yang therefore viewed "education" as "the means to cultivate human nature 學者, 所以修性也."[57] This is because education regulates and morally rectifies the *qi* of human nature's cognitive and affective faculties. Moral education constrains the disposition toward badness, while it simultaneously cultivates the potential for goodness: "If people

[53] See *SJ* 5/17/10–14. These Han thinkers affirmed a prior opinion that emotions are part and parcel of human nature, which notably appeared in the "Xing zi ming chu" 性自命出 (2/179), a writing of the late fourth century BC. See *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). Reference is strip number/page. For pertinent scholarly analyses, see, e.g., Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asian Series, 2012), pp. 697–750; Edward Slingerland, "The Problem of Moral Spontaneity in the Guodian Corpus," *Dao* 7.3 (2008), pp. 237–56; Paul R. Goldin, "Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts," in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2005), pp. 36–57; and Michael Puett, "The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* in Early Chinese Thought," in Halvor Eifring, ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 37–68.

[54] *SJ* 5/17/18–20.

[55] D. C. Lau and Chen Fong-ching, eds., *Fayan zhuzi suoyin* 法言逐字索引, ICS series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995; hereafter, *FY*) 1/1/26. References are chapter/page/line(s). For an English translation of *Fayan*, see Michael Nylan, trans., *Exemplary Figures: Fayan* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2013).

[56] *FY* 3/6/1. On Yang's view, see, e.g., Liao, *Xian Qin Liang Han renxing lun*, pp. 320–22; and Xu, *Liang Han sixiang shi*, pp. 367–81.

[57] *FY* 1/1/26.

cultivate its goodness, they become good people; if they cultivate its badness, they become evil people. Is not *qi* what advances the steeds of goodness and badness? 修其善則爲善人, 修其惡則爲惡人. 氣也者, 所以適善惡之馬也與?"[58]

Wang Chong remarked that Yang, unlike Mengzi and Xunzi, who based their theories on the highest and lowest types of people, had average people in mind when formulating his position.[59] Wang, having assessed the strengths and weaknesses of competing pre-Han and Han opinions on human nature's moral constitution, concluded that the most plausible were those contending it was both good and bad. The most convincing variations of this mediating view belonged to writers such as Shizi 世子 (Shi Shi 世碩), Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子, and Yang Xiong.[60]

The Han opinions surveyed above agreed that it was problematic to overgeneralize based on the extreme high and extreme low of human character. The crux of the matter for average people therefore hinged not only on which of their two basic dispositions would supplant the other, but also on the pivotal role education plays in resolving this internal conflict positively. The proportional strength of moral and immoral impulses afforded each one substantial sway over people's motivations.[61] These and other Han thinkers recognized, as did Mengzi and Xunzi, that education and a suitable environment assist the good in prevailing over the bad. They are the foremost means whereby different types of people, or at least most of them, come to resemble one another in goodness.

POLISHED JADE, EDUCATION, AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

A consensus view among our Han authors held that ordinary people require both education and effort, and effort *at* education, to develop morally, given the circumstances of the times and the diverse qualities of their natures. Wang Fu cited Kongzi's decisive preference to devote his time and effort to active and accumulated learning, after Kongzi had experimented with quiet contemplation for a day.[62] If even someone of Kongzi's character and ability required a sustained course of education and concerted effort on his part to improve himself, doubtless this would apply to average people. Wang also recounted

58 *FY* 3/6/1.

59 See *LH* 13/39/10–11.

60 See *LH* 13/38/26–27.

61 On this point, see *QFL* 13B/25/24–26; *SJ* 5/17/22–27.

62 See *QFL* 1/1/21.

how earlier sages – including Huangdi 黃帝, Yu 禹 of the Xia 夏 dynasty (traditional dates 2205–1766 BC), Tang 湯 of the Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1550–1045 BC), and kings Wen 文 and Wu 武 of the Western Zhou 西周 period (1045–771 BC) – still required instruction from accomplished teachers for "their knowledge to reach breadth and their virtue maturity." Wang then rhetorically asked, "How much more is this true for ordinary people? 其智乃博, 其德乃碩, 而況於凡人乎?"[63]

Several Han thinkers employed the image of polished jade to illustrate different aspects of this educational model. Earlier we mentioned Sang Hongyang's remarks on the unadulterated natural beauty of a pristine jade stone, which he deployed to criticize the insubstantial objections the literati leveled against the state's salt and iron monopolies. The literati refuted Sang's criticism, and the assumption underlying it that state officials who rely on political techniques and institutions need not cultivate their character, by referencing the story of Bian He's jade disk 卞和之璧. Bian He's uncut jade 玉璞 needed to be cut and polished by a skilled gem-cutter to reveal its exquisite qualities and alluring beauty. Unfortunately, the delay in processing the stone properly cost Bian He his two feet over the course of two kings' reigns.[64] The literati analogized that people, even exemplary ones such as the Duke of Zhou 周公, require moral instruction from worthy teachers "to control [one's] self…[and] to encourage [one's] virtue 以治身… 以輔德."[65] Similar to the *Huainanzi*'s sentiment noted earlier, they argued that to dispense with

[63] *QFL* 1/1/4–7. Cf. *BHT* 15/35/27–28. *Baihutong* also recounts how the monarch's teachers were among a limited number of groups that the sovereign did not regard as subject to his authority, at least on a temporary basis. The monarch exempted them to "honor teachers and emphasize the Way 尊師重道" (*BHT* 21/45/5). For an English translation of the *Baihutong*, see Tjan Tjoe Som 曾珠森 (Zeng Zhusen), *Po Hu T'ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* Sinica Leidensia 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949–52). The status and importance of teachers increased as the Han dynasty progressed, particularly during the Eastern Han. In the biographies included in Fan Ye's 范曄 (398–445 AD) *Hou Hanshu* we read of teachers who are requested, sometimes repeatedly, to accept political appointments, but these offers were often declined because some feared that entering office would require them to compromise their integrity. There are also mentions of funerals for renowned teachers that attracted more than one thousand mourners, and they became rather large public events. Two examples of such teachers were Guo Tai 郭泰 (or 太) (d. 169 AD) and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 AD), and their biographies appear in chapters 68 and 35 of *Hou Hanshu*, respectively. For summaries of these biographies, see de Crespigny, *Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, pp. 289–90 and 1126–28, respectively. On the subject of eremitism and either resigning from office in protest or declining appointment during Eastern Han times, see Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*, pp. 139–201, and on Guo Tai in particular, see esp. pp. 175–78.

[64] Both kings' gemologists took it as an ordinary stone, and each king, on charges of deceiving the throne, amputated one of Bian He's feet. For this anecdote and a political reading of its significance, see the "Heshi" 和氏 chapter of *Hanfeizi* 韓非子.

[65] *YTL* 5.2/30/15–17. See also *BHT* 15/35/23 wherein we read the following passage cited from the "Xue ji" 學記 chapter of *Liji* 禮記: "Thus, [people] learn in order to regulate [their] natures; [they] deliberate in order to modify [their] emotions. 'Hence, jade that is not polished

education and rely solely on untrained ability in performing the tasks of government would be like attempting to ford a waterway without the use of a paddle and rudder.[66]

Other Han sources compared "virtue" (*de* 德) and noble people to polished jade. The compilation of an Eastern Han court conference on interpretations of the classics titled *Baihutong* characterized jade as "the utmost in virtue and beauty 玉者, 德美之至也."[67] Jia Yi explained that "only jade can epitomize human virtue 能象人德者, 獨玉也."[68] In both the *Huainanzi* and *Fayan* noble people are said to resemble qualities found in jade, including "purity 純," "luster 潤," "hardness 堅," and "depth 邃."[69] As we shall see, this metaphor, and the model of moral development associated with it, also bear upon the interrelation between, on the one hand, moral education and, on the other, statecraft, economics, law, and ethical theory.

Debating Two Models of Statecraft

One implication of the distinction between uncut jade and cut and polished jade is the deliberate and persistent work required to craft the latter. A similar process is needed to elevate and beautify ordinary people morally. Different Han thinkers emphasized how arduous a task it is to guide and nurture people's moral development, even under favorable conditions. They envisioned the crafting process as utilizing diverse methods and implements and to be taxing and painstaking, analogous to the different techniques, tools, and labor of gem-cutters. It also required the combined efforts of both rulers and subjects.

The effortful approach to statecraft associated with the polished jade model differed from the quietism and effortlessness that the mirror signified. Wang Chong drew a striking comparison between, on the one hand, Huangdi and, on the other, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, illustrating the

will not become a ceremonial implement; [likewise] people who do not study will not know the Way' 故學以治性，慮以變情。故玉不琢不成器，人不學不知道." Cf. *FY* 7/17/1–2. In addition to the *Yantielun*, other references to Bian He's jade disk appear in different Han texts cited herein, including *HNZ* 16.19/155/29–156/2 (translated in note 100 below); *LH* 84/364/8–14 and 43/203/1–5; and *QFL* 1/1/9–15.

66 See *YTL* 5.2/30/17–18.

67 *BHT* 20/42/26.

68 *XS* 8.5/58/30. In *Xinshu*, the "Daodeshuo" 道德說 chapter, Jia Yi correlates virtue's "six patterns" (*liuli* 六理) – Way, virtue, nature, spirit, perspicacity (*ming* 明), and mandate (*ming* 命) – with, inter alia, six natural qualities jade possesses – luster, glossiness, density, smoothness, resplendence, and hardness – "six beautified [virtues] 六美" – the Way, humaneness, moral rightness, loyalty (*zhong* 忠), trustworthiness, and intimacy (*mi* 密) – and the Six Classics – *Documents*, *Odes*, *Changes*, *Spring and Autumn*, *Rites*, and *Music*. For Jia Yi's totalistic ethico-cosmological correlative scheme, see *XS* 8.5/58/29–61/29.

69 See *HNZ* 16.19/155/29–156/2 (see n. 100, below); and *FY* 12/32/5.

unremitting effort rulers must exert in executing their duties. These duties included both legislating beneficent policies on the people's behalf to establish conditions for them to subsist and remain secure, and educating and transforming them morally through the power of example. In Wang's attempt to debunk the Daoist falsehood that Huangdi ascended to Heaven as an immortal, he contrasted a depiction of Huangdi as physically youthful and robust and mentally tranquil and indifferent with portrayals of the wearied and withered appearances of Yao and Shun. Wang compared them in order to demonstrate how the sage-kings could never have established peace and prosperity throughout the realm – which he assumed all three had done – without being utterly exhausted and aged by the task. Wang attributed Yao's and Shun's frail appearances and conditions to their tireless concern for and ceaseless toil on the people's behalf.[70] Here we need only envision the before and after photographs of American presidents, comparing their hair color and worry lines before and then after they have felt the overwhelming burden and responsibility the presidency entails.

Xun Yue also differentiated between active and non-active approaches to statecraft, and he argued that rulers face a fundamental choice between them:

> The anxiety [felt by] rulers of men is [because they] always stand between two [types of] difficulties. One difficulty consists of [their reigning] on high but the empire's not being governed. The other difficulty is that if [they actively] govern the empire, they invariably exhaust [their] bodies, strain [their] minds, and conceal [their] emotions to follow the Way. The difficulty that entails [the first type of] difficulty (i.e., the empire's not being governed): oblivious rulers choose it. The difficulty that lacks [this] difficulty: discerning rulers adopt it. 人主之患, 常立於二難之間. 在上而國家不治, 難也; 治國家, 則必勤身, 苦思, 矯情以從道, 難也. 有難之難, 闇主取之; 無難之難, 明主居之.[71]

Xun acknowledged that both methods entail their own difficulties. The non-active approach does not burden rulers but the people. Conversely, effortful and active governing burdens rulers, not the people. Xun advocated the latter because the burden falls appropriately on rulers, and because it proactively resolved difficulties, which prevented additional difficulties from arising.

[70] For Wang's comparison between Huangdi and Yao and Shun on the effort required to establish the conditions of "Grand Peace" (*taiping* 太平), see *LH* 24/94/22–28; cf. *HNZ* 19/203/8–10.

[71] *SJ* 4/13/23–26.

A similar viewpoint appeared earlier during the Western Han period in the *Huainanzi*'s "Xiu wu" 脩務 chapter. Its authors refuted a prevalent interpretation of *wuwei* that advocated that rulers govern in a manner whereby they are "solitarily soundless and indifferently unmoving 寂然無聲, 漠然不動."[72] This definition evoked the lexicon, values, and virtuosity associated with the water mirror. In rejecting this approach, the *Huainanzi* authors cited the cultural innovations of the ancient sages-kings Shen Nong 神農, Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang. They reasoned that had these sages endorsed the model of *wuwei* described above and adopted it as the rationale of their statecraft, they could not have advanced civilization in the pioneering and momentous ways they did. Nor could they have benefited the people to the extent that they did. Their concern for their subjects' well being and their tireless exertions on the people's behalf – not a misconceived view of them as having employed solitude, indifference, and inaction in ruling and leading the people – are why no one could argue that these men were not sages.[73]

Recall Wang Fu's earlier remark that not just ordinary people but some of the sages mentioned above also required instruction from worthy and effective teachers to develop intellectually and morally. These examples from the writings of Wang Chong and Xun Yue, and from *Huainanzi*, make a similar point concerning the considerable effort rulers must exert to instruct the people and govern on their behalf. If even these exemplary sage-rulers – who governed during times when desires and demands were simpler and fewer – exhausted themselves, how much greater effort must be expended by lesser rulers of the current more complex and degenerate age? For these particular Han thinkers, active governing, not inaction, was the only suitable way to administer the empire correctly and effectively, especially considering the daunting circumstances discussed earlier. Although such an approach thoroughly taxed rulers, it offered both respite to those they were entrusted to rule and at least the possibility of uplifting the people's material and moral conditions.

Economic Priorities and Education

Polished jade also symbolized material and economic well being, as well as the work needed to achieve it. Prior to Han times Mengzi argued that impoverished circumstances often severely inhibit moral

[72] *HNZ* 19/202/12. Trans. Major et al., *Huainanzi*, p. 766.
[73] See *HNZ* 19/202/12–203/10.

development.[74] Rulers and subjects must therefore first focus their attention on creating suitable economic and material conditions that will grant ordinary people the time and energy needed to pursue this nobler aim. The people's efforts to have their basic material needs met should not exhaust them to the point that no other aspiration can be sought. The authors of "Xiu wu" observed that conditions during the Han did not afford people the "leisure to sit and still their thoughts, to play the *qin* and read books...study and debate, to gain self-mastery daily, to delve into and analyze the affairs of their age...to investigate thoroughly the roots and branches of the Way, [and] to study deeply the essential qualities of things 不能閑居靜思, 鼓琴讀書... 學問講辯, 日以自娛, 蘇援世事... 窮道本末, 究事之情."[75]

Other thinkers were troubled by the economic problems noted earlier, concerning the state's monopolies on vital resources and industries, and the wide economic disparity between the elite and commoners. Imperial policies had prioritized economic enterprises wrongly, which unduly burdened and impoverished the people. The literati referred to in *Yantielun* criticize the state's monopolies because they complicated the people's lives by bringing the state into economic competition with its subjects. This drove people away from the "root" (*ben* 本) occupation of farming and toward the "branch" (*mo* 末) pursuits of industry and trade.[76] The literati argued that the government

> ... contends with the people for profit, which squanders the simplicity of [their] honesty and sincerity and completes the transformation of [their] greed and vileness. Because of this, common people who pursue the root (i.e., farming) are few, [whereas] those who chase after the branches (i.e., industry and trade) are many. When adornments are extravagant, substance decays. When the branches are abundant, the root weakens. When the branches are cultivated, the people transgress. When the root is cultivated, the people behave. When the people behave, resources and necessities are sufficient. When the people are profligate, hunger and

[74] See, e.g., *Mengzi* 6A7 and 7A27. Similar sentiments appear in other early sources, including the "Mu min" 牧民 chapter of *Guanzi* 管子, the "Fu guo" 富國 chapter of *Xunzi* 荀子, and the "Shang nong" 上農 chapter of *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋.

[75] *HNZ* 19/206/25–207/2. Translation adopted with slight modification from Major et al., *Huainanzi*, pp. 779–80.

[76] For studies of Han economics and economic thought, see, e.g., Tamara T. Chin, *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014); Nancy Lee Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1950); Yü Ying-shih, *Trade and Expansion in Han China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1967); and Hsü Cho-yun, *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy, 206 BC–AD 220* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 1980).

> cold arise. 與民爭利. 散敦厚之樸, 成貪鄙之化. 是以百姓就本者寡, 趨末者眾. 夫文繁則質衰, 末盛則本虧. 末修則民淫, 本修則民愨. 民愨則財用足, 民侈則饑寒生.[77]

The literati employed a sorites-style argument to explain not only the interrelation among nonmonopolistic economic interchange, agricultural productivity, peacetime, and moral education, but also how they mutually benefit one another and the empire:

> Mountains and seas are the treasuries and pathways of resources and necessities, and iron tools and implements are the life and death of farmers and workhands. When [the iron tools and implements of] life and death are employed, enemies vanish. When enemies vanish, fields are cleared (for agriculture). When fields are cleared, the five grains ripen. When the treasuries and pathways are opened, the common people are aided and the people's needs are met. When the people's needs are met, the empire prospers. When the empire prospers and education accords with ritual propriety, there is acquiescing when traveling along roadways, artisans and merchants do not impede one another, people embrace honesty and simplicity when they encounter one another, and no one profits at another's expense. 山海者, 財用之寶路也. 鐵器者, 農夫之死士也. 死士用, 則仇讎滅, 仇讎滅, 則田野闢, 田野闢而五穀熟. 寶路開, 則百姓贍而民用給, 民用給則國富. 國富而教之以禮, 則行道有讓, 而工商不相豫, 人懷敦樸以相接, 而莫相利.[78]

The literati reiterated the direct correlation between, on the one hand, prioritizing the "root" occupation of farming and, on the other, educating the people morally by stating the following: "Thus, if not for exalting humaneness and moral rightness, there is no way to transform the common people (morally); [likewise] if not for strengthening the root (i.e., agriculture) and farmers, there is no way to enrich the empire (materially) 故非崇仁義無以化民, 非力本農無以富邦也."[79]

Wang Fu argued similarly concerning their interrelation, and he analogized using the same root/branches imagery employed by the literati in *Yantielun*:

[77] *YTL* 1.1/1/8–10.

[78] *YTL* 1.5/8/5–8.

[79] *YTL* 3.2/18/25. It is worth mentioning that during Han times many teachers and students who were poor and did not have wealthy families supporting them worked as farmers to support themselves. T'ung-tsu Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 1972), pp. 104–6, comments that farming, compared to the trade occupations, was regarded as a more suitable and honorable way for educators and students to earn a living, and it could enhance how others viewed their personal integrity.

> Among all the important essentials of being human, none is as good as restraining the branches and promoting the root, and none is as bad as cutting off the root and adorning the branches. Those who act on the empire's behalf regard enriching the common people (materially) as the root, and [they] take rectifying education as the foundation. When the common people are enriched (materially), they can be educated (morally). When education is rectified, it obtains moral rightness…Thus, the standard of resplendent governance is to promote these two [undertakings] (i.e., enriching the common people materially and rectifying education) and thereby achieve the basis of the Grand Peace. 凡為人之大體, 莫善於抑末而務本, 莫不善於離本而飭末. 夫為國者以富民為本, 以正學為基. 民富乃可教, 學正乃得義… 故明君之法, 務此二者, 以為成太平之基.[80]

Wang then unambiguously identified which occupations he took to be fundamental and which he deemed peripheral. Wang's rationale for his judgment reiterated that the people's subsistence is a necessary precondition for their moral development:

> Enrichers of the common people regard agriculture and sericulture as the root and peripatetic trades as the branches…If [enrichers of the common people] guard the root and cut off the branches, the common people are enriched. If [enrichers of the common people] cut off the root and guard the branches, the common people are impoverished. If [the common people] are impoverished, [they] are anguished and disregard goodness. If [the common people] are enriched, [they] are happy and can be educated. 夫富民者, 以農桑為本, 以游業為末… 守本離末則民富, 離本守末則民貧, 貧則阨而忌善, 富則樂而可教.[81]

In summary, some Han scholars argued that misguided imperial policies, such as the state's monopolies on salt and iron, resulted in economic conditions that did not vouchsafe for ordinary people the leisure they needed to pursue their personal moral development because more pressing priorities superseded this aspiration. The people exhausted their time and effort both in obtaining the basic necessities of life and serving exactions in the military, as well as in corvée labor, which, according to Wang Fu, made their days "short" and hurried rather than "long" and with adequate time for leisure to pursue their moral self-improvement.[82] Too many shorter days effectively relegated education

[80] *QFL* 2/3/6–8.
[81] *QFL* 2/3/10–12.
[82] See *QFL* 18. On this point, see Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, pp. 203–4.

to little more than a superfluous indulgence. By prioritizing economic policy correctly as outlined above, moral education reciprocally reinforces good sociopolitical order and economic prosperity throughout the realm and for its ruler. How? The people's material welfare, moral development, and contentment contribute to the empire's overall stability, productivity, security, and administrative efficiency.

Laws and Punishments and Education

Xun Yue echoed the above thinking about an interrelation between economics and education, and he included legal and martial measures alongside them in enumerating his key administrative policies:

> Exalting agriculture and sericulture is the means to nourish their (i.e., the common people's) lives. Scrutinizing likes and dislikes is the means to rectify their customs. Explicating cultural forms and education is the means to effect their transformation. Establishing a military force and [its] provisions is the means to maintain their authority. Clarifying rewards and punishments is the means to administer their laws. These I would call the Five [Principles of] Governance." 興農桑以養其生, 審好惡以正其俗, 宣文教以章其化, 立武備以秉其威, 明賞罰以統其法. 是謂五政.[83]

Another feature of the polished jade model is the need to integrate, cooperatively, education and the legal means of conditioning behavior in order to nurture and regulate the good and bad qualities of the average person's nature. Wang Fu, preceding Xun, offered a germane analogy to justify the need for statutory rewards and punishments as counterparts to moral education: "Hence, when instructing and commanding, rewards and punishments are necessary…Even working jade with stone…entails using [something] unattractive to make [something else] more attractive 由此教令, 則賞罰必也… 且攻玉以石… 以醜治好者矣."[84] Both Wang and Xun followed Xunzi's prior innovation to combine these two methods that had been viewed as mutually antithetical by earlier thinkers including Kongzi and Mengzi.[85]

Xun Yue begins his discussion on the complementary relationship between education and legal measures by remarking on the higher and lower categories of people:

[83] *SJ* 1/2/1–2.

[84] *QFL* 14/27/6–9.

[85] On Xunzi's advocacy of utilizing both legal and educational means to regulate and transform people's natures, see *XZ* 23/115/1–8. For a study of Xunzi's influence on Han thought, see Goldin, "Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy." For a discussion of Xun Yue's compromise between Confucian "idealism" and Legalist "realism" in his counsels, see Chen, *Hsün Yüeh: Life and Reflections*, pp. 148–61.

> [One] deals with noble people through emotions, and [one] deals with petty people through penalties. Honor and disgrace are the refined adornments of rewards and punishments. Thus, ritual propriety and education and honor and disgrace apply to noble people and they transform their emotions. Shackles and manacles and whips and rods apply to petty people and they administer the penalties. Noble people do not bring disgrace [upon themselves], much less penalties![86] Petty people do not abhor penalties, much less disgrace! 君子以情用, 小人以刑用. 榮辱者, 賞罰之精華也. 故禮教榮辱, 以加君子, 化其情也; 桎梏鞭扑, 以加小人, 治其刑也. 君子不犯辱, 況於刑乎! 小人不忌刑, 況於辱乎![87]

The power of moral example exhibited through rituals and education sufficed to develop corresponding feelings of honor or disgrace in superior people, when they either succeeded in reaching the proper moral standard or fell short of it. Following suit, statutory punishments must be enforced to curtail the transgressive conduct of inferior people because they lack the requisite feelings of shame, guilt, and moral worth. So, noble people simply do not require punishments because their moral feelings are sufficient to make them unnecessary. Conversely, petty people are unmoved by moral persuasion because their moral feelings are woefully deficient.

Xun then turned his attention to what is required for average people: "As for the category of average people, penalties and ritual propriety are combined in their case 若夫中人之倫, 則刑禮兼焉."[88] The ever-present inner conflict between the good and bad qualities of the average person's nature is one justification Xun provided to recommend incorporating both moral education and legal measures to transform this type of person:[89]

> Even though human nature is good, [it] requires education to perfect [its goodness]; even though human nature is bad, [it] requires laws to diminish [its badness]. "Only the wisest and the most ignorant do not change."[90] In everyone else [human nature's] goodness and badness contend with each other. Hence, education encourages its goodness, and laws constrain its badness. 性雖善, 待教而

[86] Compare this sentiment to the following line from the "Qu li shang" 曲禮上 chapter of *Liji*: 刑不上大夫 ("The penalties do not go up to the grand officers.").

[87] *SJ* 1/2/15–17.

[88] *SJ* 1/2/17.

[89] Cf. *QFL* 13A/24/17–19, where Wang Fu discusses the inner battle between one's "upright nature 正性" and one's "crooked nature 邪性."

[90] Citing *LY* 17.3.

成; 性雖惡, 待法而消. 唯上智下愚不移, 其次善惡交爭, 於是教扶其善, 法抑其惡.[91]

Unlike noble people who do not require curtailment, and unlike petty people who do not respond to moral persuasion, average people require both education and punishments because their nature is both good and bad. A productive equilibrium between these two approaches must be achieved in order to develop human nature's innate goodness, and either restrain or constructively channel its morally problematic and unseemly qualities.

Xun also argued that, at the outset of implementing this two-pronged program, education should not be unrealistically over-demanding and laws should not be excessively restrictive, nor penalties unduly cruel. The first extreme would be undertaken in vain because people would simply opt not to pursue such an education. The second extreme not only unjustly entraps the people in wrongdoing, but also would punish them brutally using the draconian "punishments by mutilation 肉刑" that brought the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BC) disrepute and which in late Han times many officials argued should be reinstituted.[92] These approaches also risk the adverse outcome of instigating people to act badly because of the despondency and anger they would feel from being so mistreated and brutalized. Xun's caveats presupposed that average people initially know very little and in pursuing this course of moral self-improvement would be capable of only slight advances. Analogous to the progressive steps (i.e., cutting, sanding, polishing, etc.) used to process raw jade into a finished product, people must be trained using these complementary methods in a rudimentary, slow, and gradual manner over a substantial period of time to produce a transformative and lasting influence on their motivations and conduct. Only after the people's behavior improved and they averted wrongdoing should "education be set out in complete form…and penalties be more precise 教備… 刑密."[93]

Legal means of modifying behavior, though necessary, were not the decisive factor in whether ordinary people would either ascend to the rank of noble people or sink to the level of petty people. For Xun, the outcome ultimately hinged on the transformative power of moral education to develop proper moral feelings and motivations in them: "The

[91] *SJ* 5/18/7–8. For a similar view expressed in the *Lunheng*, see *LH* 8/21/8–9.

[92] See *SJ* 2/7/17–20.

[93] *SJ* 2/7/21–22. See Chen, *Hsün Yüeh*: *Life and Reflections*, p. 105, for his comments on this gradual approach in Xun's two-pronged program as Xun described it in his other notable work, *Hanji* 漢紀.

abrogation of transformation through education pushes down average people, and [they] sink to the level of petty people. The implementation of transformation through education pulls up average people, and [they] enter into the path of noble people 教化之廢, 推中人而墜於小人之域. 教化之行, 引中人而納於君子之塗."[94]

Views on Moral Training and Reflection

As mentioned earlier, the indolence exhibited in Eastern Han times – caused, at least in part, by the often encountered ambiguity about local and court governance – was another condition that proponents of the polished jade model feared would cause average people to degenerate into petty people. While the sociopolitical and economic circumstances undoubtedly contributed to the people's deficient state, their apathy then reinforced both this failing and the problems of the age in a viciously circular fashion. Not only did ill-considered imperial policies limit people's ability to pursue their moral development, people also lacked the necessary resolve and effort because they had become lazy and lax, and the inequities in their society only made matters worse.

In the Western Han writing "Xiu wu" (discussed above), the people's capabilities were said to equal those of subjects who lived during the "Three Dynasties" (*sandai* 三代) – the Xia, Shang, and Zhou – and their intellectual capacity to be no different from the "Five Lord Protectors" (*wuba* 五霸).[95] Whereas earlier subjects were renowned and the Five Lord Protectors possessed sagely knowledge, people during Han times lacked both distinction and the "common knowledge of the impoverished lane-dwellers 窮巷之知" because they were "rude idlers and lazy layabouts 誕謾而悠忽."[96] However, the people's current failings did not preclude them from being morally transformed through education. The authors analogized as follows: "Now, rejecting study because those who study have faults is like taking one instance of being sated to refuse grain and not eat, or taking one problem with stumbling to stop walking and not go [anywhere]. This is deluded 今以為學者之有過而非學者, 則是以一飽之故, 絕穀不食; 以一蹟之難, 輟足不行, 惑也."[97]

94 *SJ* 1/2/17–18.

95 Although lists vary in ancient sources, the *wuba* typically include duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643), duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 635–628), duke Xiang of Song 宋襄公 (r. 650–637), king Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613–591), and duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659–621). Others sometimes included were king Helü of Wu 吳闔閭王 (r. 514–496) and king Goujian of Yue 越句踐王 (r. 496–465).

96 *HNZ* 19/209/10–11. Translation adopted with slight modification from Major et al., *Huainanzi*, p. 786.

97 *HNZ* 19/204/26–27. Translation adopted with slight modification from Major et al., *Huainanzi*, p. 775.

Developing people morally was therefore doubly onerous given both the trying circumstances and people's indolence. Han thinkers emphasized two other aspects of moral education – repeated practice and self-examination – to remedy this idleness. Regarding the first corrective, on the one hand teachers must constantly reinforce the moral lessons and proper deportment they impart to students. Xun Yue compared the way an exceptional teacher unrelentingly inculcates goodness in students to a large metallurgical furnace that continually applies fire to metal to keep it liquefied, and to a well pump that continuously draws water to the surface to prevent it from receding.[98]

On the other hand, students must exert the same degree of effort in their studies to learn and internalize what their teachers seek to convey. In "Xiu wu" the educational process parallels both artistic and athletic training:

> Now dancers twirl their bodies like rings of jade…Acrobats…[h]olding thick tree limbs, raise them effortlessly. As they dance, they rise like dragons or birds as they gather…There is no one among the spectators who does not grow faint at heart and weak in the knees… The dancers do not [inherently] have such supple and nimble [bodies]; the acrobats do not [inherently] have such keenness and strength. It was the gradual, long-term practice and training that made them so. 今鼓舞者, 繞身若環… 木熙者… 捘豐條, 舞扶疏, 龍從鳥集… 且夫觀者莫不爲之損心酸足… 夫鼓舞者非柔縱, 而木熙者非眇勁, 淹浸漬漸摩使然也.[99]

Both the elegant movements of virtuoso dancers and the feats of strength, balance, and flexibility of accomplished acrobats amaze and entertain audiences, albeit for a short duration of time. Their short public performances encompass the culmination of countless hours, months, and years of disciplined, effortful, and repetitive training, during which artists and athletes test all their limits in their constant pursuit of self-improvement. Likewise, people who endeavor to educate themselves to become better morally must commit their time, dedication, and effort to the task in an analogous way. Just as dancers and acrobats elicit astonishment and jubilation from their audiences, so too talented teachers and students wield a profound influence on those around them.

[98] See *SJ* 1/4/27–30.

[99] *HNZ* 19/209/20–24. Translation adopted with slight modification from Major et al., *Huainanzi*, p. 787.

The second corrective for the people's moral indolence is their vigilant self-examination. This is one undertaking where the images of polished jade and the water mirror converge on common ground for a shared purpose. Just as mirrors reflect the things placed before them in the clear, accurate, and impartial manner noted by Zhuangzi, Xunzi, and in *Huainanzi*, mirrors also reflect one's own image and condition in a similar fashion. The mirror-like quality of polished jade was not lost on Han thinkers. For example, Jia Yi correlated the Way – one of virtue's six patterns – with jade's luster that is "reflective" or "mirror-like 鑑."[100]

Xun Yue observed that noble people critically evaluate their intentions and conduct both thoroughly and frequently, and average people who aspire to ennoble themselves morally must do likewise. Adapting a sentiment expressed in *Lunyu*, Xun wrote, "Every day noble people examine themselves (morally) 君子四省其身."[101] They also employ three different things in their thoroughgoing self-scrutiny: "Noble people have three [things they use as] mirrors: they reflect on the past, on other people, and on [their own reflection in] a mirror. The past consists of lessons, other people are [examples of] worthiness, and a mirror amounts to illumination [about themselves] 君子有三鑒: 鑒乎前, 鑒乎人, 鑒乎鏡, 前惟順, 人惟賢, 鏡惟明."[102]

As to the first, the reflections history leaves to posterity, and their moral lessons, inspired the title of Xun's *Shenjian* (*Extending Reflections*):

[100] *XS* 8.5/59/1. See also the following description of several characteristics jade possesses included in the "Shui shan" 說山 chapter of *Huainanzi*:

> When a piece of jade is moistened, it looks bright. [When struck], its sound is slow and harmonious. How expansive are its aspects! With no interior or exterior, it does not conceal its flaws or imperfections. Close up, it looks glossy; from a distance, it shines brightly. It reflects like a mirror revealing the pupil of your eye. Subtly it picks up the tip of an autumn hair. It brightly illuminates the dark and obscure. Thus the jade disk of Mr. He and the pearl of the marquis of Sui emerged from the essence of a mountain and a spring. When the Superior Man wears them, he complies with their purity and secures his repose. When lords and kings treasure them, they rectify the world. 夫玉潤澤而有光, 其聲舒揚, 渙乎其有似也. 無內無外, 不匿瑕穢, 近之而濡, 望之而隧. 夫照鏡見眸子, 微察秋毫, 明照晦冥. 故和氏之璧, 隨侯之珠, 出於山淵之精, 君子服之, 順祥以安寧, 侯王寶之, 爲天下正. (*HNZ* 16.19/155/29–156/2. Trans. Major et al., *Huainanzi*, p. 631.)

[101] *SJ* 5/19/7; cf. *LY* 1.4.1. I follow Chen, *Hsün Yüeh and the Mind of Late Han China*, p. 197, n. 107, in accepting Lu Wenchao's 盧文弨 (1717–1795) emendation of 四 to 日. See Lu's "Shenjian jiaozheng" 申鑒校正, in *Qunshu shibu, chubian* 羣書拾補, 初編 (Baojing tang congshu 抱經堂叢書 edn.) 6, p. 2b. The graph 日 appears in the version of the passage included in *Lunyu*.

[102] *SJ* 4/12/22; cf. *FY* 8/21/3. See also Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959) 18, p. 878, where he compares history to a mirror that one ought to employ in navigating the vicissitudes of one's own age. For analysis of this theme in his writings, see Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: SUNY P., 1995), esp. pp. 145–47.

> The Way's roots are humaneness and moral rightness and nothing more. The Five Classics serve as their warp threads…The reflections of the past already shine brightly. Posterity recovers and extends them. Thus, the ancient sage-kings extended and emphasized humaneness and moral rightness and that is all. Steadfastly perpetuating [them] without end is what *Extending Reflections* means. 夫道之本, 仁義而已矣. 五典以經之… 前鑒既明, 後復申之. 故古之聖王, 其於仁義也, 申重而已. 篤序無疆, 謂之 "申鑒".[103]

Note how Xun mentioned history's reflections first among the "three mirrors." Elsewhere he remarked on the dire consequences of forgetting these lessons: "The falls of the Xia and Shang [dynasties] were because [they] did not reflect on [the examples of their founders] Yu and Tang 夏、商之衰, 不鑒於禹、湯也."[104] For Xun, the moral Way of the ancient sage-kings, as it was woven together and conveyed in the Classics, encapsulates the lessons worth learning from the past. Xun claimed that his own treatise seeks to recover and extend these reflections into the indefinite future.[105] In making these assertions, Xun proposed that the most important reflections to use for comparison in educating oneself morally were not one's own but those of the Way of the sage-kings. Wang Fu argued similarly, "Implore [people] to see [their] reflections in the Way, not in water 願鑒于道, 勿鑒于水."[106] Thus, Xun's mirror of history consisted of didactic lessons reflecting the virtues and conduct of the ancient sage-kings, which were both codified textually in the Classics and perpetuated in a similar way in his *Shenjian*.

The notion that other people provide examples of worthiness to emulate – Xun's second mirror – also appears in the ancient classic *Shujing*: "Let not men look only into water; let them look into the glass of other people 人無於水監, 當於民監."[107] This earlier formulation likely inspired both Xun's thinking and Wang's passage quoted above. Xun argued that average people must look not just to the highest class of people morally speaking but also to the lowest, because they provide different yet complementary kinds of reflections to aid people's self-examination:

103 *SJ* 1/1/3–5.

104 *SJ* 4/12/22–23; cf. *HNZ* 20/216/19–21.

105 Cf. *QFL* 36/85/9–11 wherein Wang Fu describes his *Qianfulun* in a manner similar to how Xun characterizes his *Shenjian*.

106 *QFL* 3/5/9.

107 Trans. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics,* vol. 3*, The Shoo King, or Book of Historical Documents* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960), p. 409. On the need to associate with virtuous people to assist one's moral self-examination, see also, e.g., *LY* 1.14.2.

> [Examine one's] virtues in comparison to the highest [class of people], and [one's] desires in comparison to the lowest. [Examine one's] virtues in comparison to the highest [class of people] so [one] will know shame, and [one's] desires in comparison to the lowest so [one] will know sufficiency. If [one] acts shamefully and recognizes it, then one can be a close approximate to the sages and worthies. If [one] knows sufficiency and stops, then one can be at ease with tenacity and deficiency. Since one approximates the sages and worthies, how could one ever be malevolent? Since one is at ease with tenacity and deficiency, how could one ever be profligate? This is called "having standards [by which to self-examine]." 德比於上, 欲比於下. 德比於上, 故知恥; 欲比於下, 故知足. 恥而知之, 則聖賢其可幾; 知足而已, 則固陋其可安也. 聖賢斯幾, 況其爲慝乎? 固陋斯安, 況其爲侈乎? 是謂有檢.[108]

Recall that ordinary people need not seek the "supreme goodness" and "pure virtue" exhibited by the highest sages, who were simply good naturally and effortlessly. Rather, for them an approximation of these moral qualities will suffice, especially considering the degenerate times and the shortcomings of average people. Although the moral virtuosity exemplified by sages is an unrealistic objective for ordinary people to pursue, Xun did not think that the reflections superior people provide for those below them were useless. On the contrary, average people learn and internalize shame by comparing themselves to virtuous people, which discourages immorality.

Average people also can understand about what is sufficient by comparing their desires to those of immoral people, thus guarding against extravagance and preventing them from compounding their emotional distress in destitute circumstances. Such conditions were the norm for most, and extravagance, both in customs of the age and among the elite, was a main cause of our thinkers' indignation. In short, both kinds of reflection help to correct people's apathy, and aid in preventing average people from degenerating into petty people.

What average people discern when they gaze at their own reflections – either in a water mirror or in polished jade – is the third mirror they must employ to scrutinize themselves morally and overcome deficiencies and idleness. Han thinkers such as Wang Fu, Xun Yue, and others emphasized the importance of personal moral betterment in any effort to enact social reform, and they recognized the need for individuals to confront and learn from the varied indiscretions they in-

108 *SJ* 5/19/4–6; cf. *LY* 7.22.19.

evitably commit. Why? On the one hand, their mistakes remind them not to think too highly of their own accomplishments, and thus they can thwart any moral vanity that arises from dwelling on their successes. On the other hand, the experiences that inspire a willingness by many people to change, because they feel them most poignantly, are people's moral disappointments, not their triumphs. Self-reflections of failings provide people the most vivid appraisals of the conditions of their character. These reflections illuminate not only their obligation to strive tirelessly to do better morally, but also their capacity to do so, as attested by the self-loathing that for most people accompanies wrongdoings. Self-examination reminds people of both the challenges and the importance of the ongoing difficult moral task before them, and the vigilance and surpassing effort it requires from them. Reflections of their faults and mistakes also remind average people how far along the Way they must still travel to develop into the kind of moral people they can become.

Locating the Source of Morality

Since the Han thinkers who have been examined here believed human nature to be both morally good and bad, a question arises concerning their views on the source of moral standards. Early Chinese debates about whether the foundation for morality is generated internally or is imposed on people from without can also be traced through the controversy between Mengzi and Xunzi regarding human nature. As is well known, for Mengzi the ultimate source of moral standards resides internally, in people's innate and spontaneous moral impulses of their Heavenly-endowed hearts and natures, which he termed the "sprouts 端" of the cardinal Confucian virtues. Conversely, Xunzi located the source of moral standards externally, in the "acquired nature 僞" crafted through the "conscious exertion" of past sages.[109] In their effort to advance the discourse on human nature beyond the views of Mengzi and Xunzi, where did our Han scholars locate the source of morality?

In Han fashion of syncretizing and mediating the answer lies somewhere between these internal and external sources.[110] The analogy of Bian He's jade suggests a way that Han thinkers integrated Mengzi's

[109] I adopt "acquired nature" and "conscious exertion" as translations for *wei* from Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation*, vol. 3, p. 143.

[110] Slingerland, "The Problem of Moral Spontaneity in the Guodian Corpus," pp. 251–54, reaches a similar conclusion about the relationship between human nature and self-cultivation as it was formulated in the Guodian corpus. Cf. Erica Brindley, "Music and 'Speaking One's Heart-Mind' in the '*Xing zi ming chu*,'" *Dao* 5.2 (2006), pp. 247–55.

and Xunzi's positions. On the one hand, the exquisite natural qualities of his jade – its color, transparency, and texture – were inherent to the stone itself, notwithstanding that prior to processing it, they were not yet apparent to undiscerning gemologists. Analogously, our Han thinkers viewed moral goodness as a latent endowment of people's natures, at least for the great majority. As we have seen, they conceptualized this inner source of morality in various ways.

Dong Zhongshu correlated people's inborn humaneness with their *yang* energy. In both *Lunheng* and *Baihutong*, the substance of morality was conceived in cosmological terms as *qi* that constitutes the five moral constants, and according to Wang Chong, people have greater or lesser amounts of them. In the "Tian di" 天地 chapter of *Baihutong*, humankind's cultural "adornment and brilliance" (*wenzhang* 文章) are said to have originated in a progression deriving in part from the emotions and human nature: "The Five Phases engendered emotions and nature; emotions and nature engendered harmoniousness and moderation; harmoniousness and moderation engendered spirituality and discernment; spirituality and discernment engendered the Way and virtue; and the Way and virtue engendered adornment and brilliance 五行生情性, 情性生汁中, 汁中生神明, 神明生道德, 道德生文章."[111] This account explains how humankind came to have suitable and efficacious ethical standards deriving from canonical writings and cultural forms that would civilize people by morally educating them. These values, writings, and practices originated from the innate goodness and potent discernment and virtuosity of the ancient sages.

Xun Yue argued that moral (and immoral) feelings are inherent qualities of people's spirits. The embryonic feelings of shame and moral worth are what differentiate both superior and average people from inferior people, within whom they are deficient. Most people possess them to a sufficient degree, as was evident to Xun because their moral feelings respond appropriately to both education (e.g., rituals, virtuous examples, and one's own self-scrutiny) and curtailment (e.g., statutory punishments and warnings about excessive and immoral conduct). If it were the case that most people lacked these feelings of guilt and

[111] *BHT* 34/62/2–3. For a thorough analysis of the concepts *wen* and *wenzhang* in early Chinese culture and literature, see Martin Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *Wen* in Early China," *TP* 87.1–3 (2001), pp. 43–91. Kern, tracing the transition away from *wenzhang*'s association with ritual that was prevalent during pre- and early imperial times, argues that by Eastern Han times it "most concretely" denoted "writings," more specifically "official" or "classicist writings" (i.e., compositions from traditional scholars and statesmen espousing canonical learning in serving the state), as a specific form of "cultural accomplishment" (*wen*).

dignity, then there would be no moral substance on which education and curtailment would accomplish their nurturing and transformative work. There would also be no way to account for the diversity among the ranks of people – superior, average, inferior and further nuances within these categories – that Xun, Wang Chong, and others identified and discussed. Had these Han scholars ignored how widely people differ in their natural moral constitutions, they would have repeated the same error made by pre-Han thinkers – viz., overgeneralizing from one extreme type of person to all humankind, which Wang Chong found objectionable when he assessed Mengzi's and Xunzi's positions.

While possessing the substance of morality internally is necessary for people to improve morally, these Han authors agreed that it is not sufficient. Therefore, it alone could not serve as the ultimate source of moral standards. Recall that in "Xiu wu" a reliance solely on one's basic nature was comparable to abandoning a boat in the hope of walking on water. The underdeveloped nature of most people's inner moral substance accounts for why many Han thinkers argued for the importance of education in crafting it.

Wang Fu agreed that if people relied on their inborn constitutions exclusively, they would lack the invaluable moral education imparted to them by the former sages, which is now encapsulated in the classics. According to Wang, earlier sages wrote the classics to benefit subsequent generations, and teachers instruct learners using them so that people will comply with the sages' hearts and at least approximate their goodness: "The [former] sages utilized their hearts to create the classics, and [their] successors [utilize the classics] to accord with the sages' hearts. Thus, the value of [successors'] assimilation of [the classics'] normative standards is that [their] virtue will approximate that of the [former] sages 聖人以其心來造經典, 往合聖心, 故脩經之賢, 德近於聖矣."[112] Elsewhere, Wang compared the Way's transformative and enlightening influence on people's hearts to that of a flame's light on people's eyesight when they search for something in the dark. Without assistance from this external aid, the eye's capacity for sight is hindered and not fully actualized. Analogously, without the former sages' Way, people's inborn capacities to acquire knowledge and to act morally will not develop and approximate the sages' wisdom and virtue.[113] Wang then identified the specific place in which people must look to locate the Way during Eastern Han times: "To find something in a dark room,

[112] *QFL* 1/2/28.

[113] See *QFL* 1/2/7–15. Cf. *CQFL* 10.1/46/5–8 for a similar analogy and argument.

nothing outdoes a flame; to find the Way in the current age, nothing outdoes the canonical writings. The canonical writings are the classics, and [they] are what the former sages fashioned 索物於夜室者, 莫良於火; 索道於當世者, 莫良於典. 典者、經也. 先聖之所制."[114]

Xun Yue agreed with Wang Fu, since he advised others to "extol the sages' canonical writings, so that the Way's rightness will be ascertained 崇聖典, 則道義定矣."[115] Xun included the moral lessons that the classics bequeath to posterity, which his own *Shenjian* seeks to perpetuate, among his external evaluative standards – viz., the first two of his three mirrors. Subsequent generations learn of history's reflections via the classics, and heed them by appropriating the standards they convey. Xun also highlighted the roles played by the moral and immoral reflections cast by other people, from both the higher and lower moral ranks, because average people must compare their own virtues and desires to these contrasting benchmarks. Xun's salient point about people's embryonic moral feelings was not simply that they *respond* appropriately to moral persuasion and curtailment. More importantly, average people *require* both kinds of external standards to learn and internalize shame and sufficiency properly, and thereby develop these feelings into higher and more nuanced moral qualities. These different compulsory external standards must also be employed in a slow and incremental manner, because, initially, such an approach is all that most people's undeveloped inner moral constitution can bear. In that condition, how could people possibly depend on their untrained natures as a reliable moral compass? How could they not benefit profoundly from these impactful and time-tested standards?

So, although Bian He's jade possessed exquisite natural features, the literati opinions compiled in *Yantielun* emphasized that it required cutting and polishing by a skilled craftsman to reveal and enhance them. Without the gem-cutter's expertise and efforts, these qualities, to Bian He's detriment, remained concealed and latent, not apparent and fully actualized. Likewise, people's innate goodness and embryonic moral feelings require the nurturing and transformative influences of the different methods of moral education to develop into steadfast moral standards that will guide them effectively in their relations and affairs: "Without education, there is no way to control [one's] self; without ritual propriety, there is no way to encourage [one's] virtue 非學無

[114] *QFL* 1/2/16–17. Note how Wang compared his age to a "dark room" in this analogy.
[115] *SJ* 2/6/20.

以治身, 非禮無以輔德."[116] The craftsman's painstaking work to uncover the jade stone's natural beauty parallels several themes analyzed in this study, including the artist's and the athlete's dedication to improve their talents, the sage-ruler's difficulties that arise from his selfless public service to his people, the teacher's impassioned efforts to instruct and enrich students, and the individual's determination to scrutinize his or her intentions and conduct.

Each undertaking requires external means and standards to serve as the basis for assessment and achievement. Craftsmen depend on tools and proven craft methods. Athletes and artisans rely on training apparatuses, techniques, and judges. Rulers trust in suitable economic and legal policies and principled education to establish conditions for their people to subsist, remain secure, and develop morally. Individuals who aspire to ennoble themselves morally look to their teachers and to different "mirrors" as standards by which to evaluate their own intentions and conduct.

Excluding both the lowest of the low and the highest sages for reasons noted earlier, people possess natural moral feelings to varying embryonic degrees, but, in this uneducated state, and because people also have inborn immoral qualities, these nascent feelings do not suffice as true and fully realized standards of morality. The majority of people are, however, at least capable of both inhibiting their bad traits and cultivating a considerably higher form of moral character, provided that the aforementioned educational means are applied to their basic moral substance in the appropriate manner, and when suitable sociopolitical and material conditions exist. Some may even accomplish what Kongzi eventually did at age seventy, and be able to follow their inner moral dispositions (literally, the heart's desires) as trustworthy moral standards.[117] Therefore, education, analogous to processing Bian He's jade, is what crafts people's undeveloped moral constitution into a form that is markedly more reliable as a source of such standards, because, as Wang Fu remarked, education enables people's hearts and character to approximate the sages' hearts and virtue.

CONCLUSION

Several Han thinkers re-crafted, on the model of polished jade, both the subject and purpose of moral development in response to the circumstances of their age. Our authors criticized prevailing attitudes

116 *YTL* 5.2/30/15.
117 See *LY* 2.4.3.

and conventions, extreme and unsound viewpoints, excesses in conduct, and deficiencies, imprudent priorities, and malfeasances in Han governance. One way they sought to contribute to efforts directed at reform and moral renewal was by evaluating the state of the empire through the indices of the moral condition and living standards of, and the obligations owed to, the class of average people on which its continuance and renown depended and would be measured. These thinkers identified this group as the proper subject of a discourse concerning moral development, and theorized about the basic moral nature of those in it in a way that, for them, was not nearly as narrowly conceived and problematic as other competing theories.

Moreover, the manner in which they addressed the matter of greatest consequence to them – namely, explicating a program for how best to develop average people morally – was specifically suited to their mediating conception of the average person's nature as consisting of both good and bad qualities. This approach required an effortful and active, not non-active, method of statecraft that the authors of "Xiu wu" lauded, and that Wang Chong illustrated using depictions of the wearied and withered appearances of Yao and Shun. Specific economic and legal measures were seen as essential components of active rulership. The literati in *Yantielun*, Wang Fu, and Xun Yue all emphasized the interrelation between education and economic policy, and they prioritized agriculture and sericulture because the people's material subsistence was a necessary precondition for their moral development. Several thinkers also acknowledged that laws and statutory punishments play complementary roles alongside moral persuasion in educating average people. Wang Fu analogized that both working jade with stone and conditioning human nature through legal means are instances of using something unattractive to make something else more attractive. Different Han thinkers also emphasized that people must exert their effort through repetitive practice and self-examination to correct their moral idleness and failings. Explicating these diverse yet interrelated themes has underscored the breadth, nuance, and interdisciplinary nature of the Han discourse on moral education and moral development. Lastly, although both the ethical standards and aims associated with polished jade merely approximated those of the kind of virtue modeled on the water mirror, they were, in several thinkers' minds, more realistic and better suited to the task of developing sufficient goodness in people during late Han times.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BHT Lau and Chen, eds., *Baihutong zhuzi suoyin* 白虎通逐字索引
CQFL Lau and Chen, eds., *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin* 春秋繁露逐字索引
FY Lau and Chen, eds., *Fayan zhuzi suoyin* 法言逐字索引
HNZ Lau and Chen, eds., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引
LH Lau and Chen, eds., *Lunheng zhuzi suoyin* 論衡逐字索引
LY Lau and Chen, eds., *Lunyu zhuzi suoyin* 論語逐字索引
QFL Lau and Chen, eds., *Qianfulun zhuzi suoyin* 潛夫論逐字索引
SJ Lau and Chen, eds., *Shenjian zhuzi suoyin* 申鑒逐字索引
XS Lau and Chen, eds., *Jia Yi Xinshu zhuzi suoyin* 賈誼新書逐字索引
XZ Lau and Chen, eds., *Xunzi zhuzi suoyin* 荀子逐字索引
YTL Lau and Chen, eds., *Yantielun zhuzi suoyin* 鹽鐵論逐字索引