

Pre-Qin and Han Philosophical and Historical Prose

Self-Interest, Manipulation, and the Philosophical Marketplace

Readers may wonder why China's first philosophical burgeoning took place during a singularly chaotic period, the aptly named Warring States (*Zhanguo*). Would people really have taken a break from killing each other to engage in refined philosophical debate? The truth is that the people who were doing the refined philosophizing were not the people doing the killing: they were *advising* the people doing the killing, and usually for a good salary. We may like to think of ancient Chinese philosophers as high-minded gentlemen rather than venal careerists, but even high-minded gentlemen need to eat, and the necessities of life were most readily obtained by serving a ruler who wished to profit from their expertise.

The conventions of the Bronze Age, which had long held society together, were manifestly collapsing, and anyone with ideas about how to prosper in the tumultuous new world was bound to get a hearing at court. Philosophers chafed at being categorized with strategists, accountants, even jesters and jugglers—in short, anyone with specialized skills that might appeal to a lordly employer—but the records suggest they were treated with exceptional deference, receiving honorific phrases that dukes and magnates would not have used with ordinary subjects. This makes sense if we think of the Warring States as a great philosophical marketplace: rulers who attained a reputation for mistreating retainers would soon discover that no one wished to serve them. A ruler bereft of competent advisors soon became a ruler bereft of his throne.

We know from Adam Smith (1723–1790) that markets are driven by self-interest,¹ and Warring States China was no different. Moreover, the most cunning participants in that market showed little compunction about manipulating gullible victims, especially rulers and others with enough clout to make the deception worthwhile. Thus, the themes of self-interest and manipulation frequently went hand in hand, and any account of early Chinese philosophical prose would be incomplete without attention to them.

“TANG JU JIAN CHUNSHEN JUN” (“TANG JU HAD AN AUDIENCE WITH LORD CHUNSHEN”)

“Tang Ju Had an Audience with Lord Chunshen” is a brief item in a large and diverse anthology called *Zhanguo ce* (*Stratagems of the Warring States*). This collection of ideologically indifferent anecdotes was compiled by Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE),

a redactor who organized thousands of short bamboo texts in the palace library (as well as some private collections), producing many of the classical texts that survive to this day. Although *Zhanguo ce* is sometimes characterized as a handbook of rhetoric, Liu's own preface discloses a different purpose: to preserve the deeds of lords and ministers who hatched ingenious plans in their struggle for survival. These stratagems, he says, are “worth beholding” (*ke guan*) even though they do not necessarily accord with mainstream morality (*ZGCJZ* 1–3).

“Tang Ju Had an Audience with Lord Chunshen” might not seem noteworthy when taken out of context, but reading it against the known background reveals more layers than initially meet the eye. First, a complete translation:

C5.1 *Stratagems of the Warring States*, “Tang Ju Had an Audience with Lord Chunshen”

Tang Ju^[1] had an audience with Lord Chunshen,^[2] where he said: “The men of Qi^[3] adorn themselves and cultivate their conduct in order to obtain lucrative employment, but I, your servant, would be ashamed [to act like this] and will not emulate them. I did not shirk crossing the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers, traveling more than a thousand *li*, in order to come here, because I secretly admired your purpose, Great Lord, and [wish] to abet your enterprise. I have heard that the world would consider Ben and Zhu^[4] brave even if they hid their blades in their breast; the world would deem Shi of the West^[5] beautiful even if her clothes were shabby. Now, Milord, you are the Prime Minister of the myriad-chariot state of Chu. In defending the Central States against turmoil, you have unfulfilled desires and unattained goals because your servitors' ranks are few. The Owl is able to act because of the assistance of its Pawns.^[6] It is clear that one Owl is no match for five Pawns. Now, Milord, why not become the Owl of the world, and let us, your servitors, be your Pawns?”

On the surface, this is a straightforward example of a productive theme in early Chinese writing: a successful lord needs capable ministers. Tang Ju, an obscure adventurer, has traveled all the way from the north to visit Lord Chunshen, prime minister of the great southern state of Chu (this is why he claims to have crossed both the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers), to offer his services. Lord Chunshen, sometimes known as one of the “Four Princes of the Warring States” (*Zhanguo si gongzi*), was famous for recruiting talented retainers. We do not know whether Tang Ju's

戰國策•唐且見春申君

唐且見春申君曰：“齊人飾身修行得為益，然臣羞而不學也。不避絕江河，行千餘里來，竊慕大君之義，而善君之業。臣聞之，賁、諸懷錐刃而天下為勇，西施衣褐而天下稱美。今君相萬乘之楚，禦中國之難，所欲者不成，所求者不得，臣等少也。夫梟碁之所以能為者，以散碁佐之也。夫一梟之不如不勝五散，亦明矣。今君何不為天下梟，而令臣等為散乎？”

[ZGCJZ 861–62]

[1] This name will be discussed later in this chapter.

[2] Huang Xie (d. 238 BCE), one of the leading statesmen of Chu.

[3] A great state in the northeast, known for its scholars.

[4] Meng Ben (dates unknown), from Qi, was known for his physical strength; Zhu Zhu (d. 515 BCE), from Wu, was a famous assassin. Tang Ju deftly chooses examples from both the North and the South.

[5] A beautiful woman from Yue who was presented to the King of Wu—hence a paradigmatic beauty.

[6] The Owl and Pawns are pieces in the imperfectly understood board game called *liubo*. The Owl is much stronger than the Pawns, but evidently still requires their assistance.

effort was successful because Lord Chunshen's response is not recorded. That, in itself, is telling: for if Tang Ju were as talented as he suggests, we should already know of him as one of Lord Chunshen's followers. Since we do not, we must suspect that he was a charlatan.

A review of other references to Tang Ju, as well as the meaning of his name, adds to the reader's doubts. In a different anecdote in *Zhanguo ce*, Tang Ju is employed by the prime minister of Qin to bribe potential enemies in Zhao (ZGCJZ 343); in another, he appears to be in the service of Wei, for he beseeches the King of Qin to assist that beleaguered state (ZGCJZ 1450-51); and in the most famous story, he threatens to assassinate the King of Qin (the future First Emperor, r. 221-210 BCE), who has been bullying the Lord of Anling, a paltry principality (ZGCJZ 1467-68). As all of these stories are set in the third century BCE, it is conceivable these stories refer to the same person. He would have to be interpreted, however, as a faithless agent for different kingdoms at different times, now working for Qin, now against it.

The Chinese scholar Huang Xinguang has argued that Tang Ju was not a real person, and the name was simply invented for its meaning: "exaggerated proposals," a fine epithet for a cozen. If Huang is right, whenever we encounter the name Tang Ju, we should not trust anything that comes out of his mouth. To use a deprecating term from this period, Tang Ju is a *youshui*: an "itinerant persuader."

Some information about Lord Chunshen sheds even further light. As mentioned earlier, he is best known today for his retinue, which included a man who was at least as famous as he was: Xun Kuang (d. after 238 BCE), variously known as Xunzi (Master Xun) and Sun Qingzi (Master Chamberlain Sun). Xunzi is now considered one of China's greatest philosophers; even in his own day, he was known as "the most revered of teachers" (*zui wei laoshi*). Consequently, Tang Ju's assertion that Lord Chunshen has failed to achieve his ambitions because his "servitors are few" has to be interpreted as an oblique indictment of Xunzi's competence. Just imagine Merlin's reaction if some parvenu announced to King Arthur that he lacked satisfactory advisors.

Thus, "Tang Ju Had an Audience with Lord Chunshen" must be read in conjunction with a nearby story in *Zhanguo ce* (ZGCJZ 892-894), which relates how an unnamed "client" (*ke*) persuaded Lord Chunshen to dismiss Xunzi. Lord Chunshen immediately regrets heeding this advice, but when he tries to recall Xunzi, the latter sends him an outspoken letter that begins with the sentence: "The leper pities the King" (*Lairen lian wang*)—because no one tries to assassinate a leper.² Since Lord Chunshen was, in fact, assassinated in 238 BCE, any ancient reader would have understood Xunzi's words as a sage premonition, and a discerning reader might suspect that the unidentified retainer responsible for ousting Xunzi was none other than Tang Ju.

If that was the case, Tang Ju might best be understood as an agent sent by an enemy who perceived the first step toward assassinating Lord Chunshen was to remove the wise Xunzi from his side. What better method than to trick Lord Chunshen into dismissing Xunzi himself? *Cui bono*? Lord Chunshen's assassin was Li Yuan (d. 228 BCE), another one of his retainers (and, like Xunzi, an expatriate from

Zhao). With Lord Chunshen out of the way, Li Yuan became the prime minister, and his nephews would go on to ascend the throne as King You (r. 237-228 BCE) and King Ai of Chu (r. 228 BCE). (Much of this is related in ZGCJZ 914-916.) Li Yuan and his whole family perished just ten years later at the hands of yet another assassin, who became King Fuchu (r. 228-223 BCE). Soon Fuchu was killed when Qin conquered Chu. It was a violent age.

How much of this is true? That is precisely the wrong question. Readers of *Zhanguo ce* certainly knew that Lord Chunshen was assassinated soon after he dismissed Xunzi. That much was common knowledge. If Huang Xinguang is right that Tang Ju is an invented name, then the anecdote has to be interpreted as a fictitious but instructive story relating to these momentous events. What is more important than the veracity of the tale is its moral: do not heed the unsolicited counsel of people you do not know and cannot trust, especially if you are a juicy target. They might have unpleasant plans for you.

CHUNYU KUN AND THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL ALLIANCES IN *LÜSHI CHUNQIU*

A common example illustrating the untrustworthiness of such itinerant persuaders is their advocacy of the so-called Vertical and Horizontal Alliances (*zongheng*). By the middle of the third century BCE, it was apparent to all observers that the state of Qin was at least as powerful as all the others combined. Accordingly, representatives of Qin's chief rivals attempted to unite under a Vertical Alliance, but Qin's counselors shrewdly recruited desperate states to its own league, known as the Horizontal Alliance. It is difficult to say more than this because almost all relevant information comes from literary sources that focus on the rhetorical strategies employed by self-interested speakers at court rather than the practical details of how the alliances were negotiated, sustained, and invoked. For diplomatic historians, the sources are frustratingly incomplete.

In philosophical and anecdotal literature, the stance toward these alliances is usually disparaging, as in the following anecdote from *Lüshi chunqiu* (*Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü*),³ an encyclopedic text compiled under the auspices of Lü Buwei (d. 235 BCE), a former chief minister of Qin and renowned patron like Lord Chunshen.

C5.2 *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü* (excerpt)

Among the men of Qi there was one Chunyu Kun, who persuaded the King of Wei [to join] the Vertical Alliance. The King of Wei, finding him cogent, furnished him with ten chariots and was about to dispatch him as an ambassador to Chu. As he was taking his leave,^[1] he persuaded the King of Wei^[2] [to join] the Horizontal Alliance, whereupon the King of Wei called off the expedition. He failed not only in his intention [of having the King join] the Vertical

[1] I suspect that this *you* 有 should be read *you* 又, with the sense of "not content with this much."

[2] Perhaps King Hui (r. 370-319 BCE).

呂氏春秋·離謂 (摘錄)

齊人有淳于髡者，以從說魏王。魏王辯之，約車十乘，將使之荊。辭而行，有以橫說魏王，魏王乃止其行。失從之意，又失橫之事。夫其多能不若寡能，其有辯

不若無辯。周鼎著倮而齧其指，先王有以見大巧之不可為也。

[LSCQXJS 1188]

By referring to Chui, the venerable artisan who would rather bite his finger than allow it to mar his work, the anecdote makes use of another early commonplace: too much of a good thing can undo one's entire achievement. One of the most famous examples is the "Adding Feet to the Snake" story in *Zhanguo ce*: during a contest to see who can draw a snake the fastest, the presumptive winner shows off by adding feet to his snake while he waits for the others to finish—thereby ruining it and losing his prize (ZGCJZ 565). In the same vein, Chunyu Kun should be content with his reward of ten chariots and a royal commission, but instead he loses everything because he cannot resist the urge to display his silver tongue.

The very first word, "Qi," warns readers that the commonplace of the itinerant persuader is at work as well. The locus is the court of Wei, but Chunyu is not from Wei; he is an adventurer from Qi who has come to Wei to parlay his forensic skills into wealth and status. One can only surmise that Chunyu must have worn out his welcome in his home state if he is now trying his luck in Wei. In ZGCJZ 1382–1383, for example, he is accused of taking bribes to dissuade the King of Qi from attacking Wei; perhaps such chicanery led to his expulsion. At any rate, in the present story, the King of Wei is initially foolish enough to suppose that Chunyu's support for the Vertical Alliance is sincere, but as soon as he shows that he can just as easily argue for the Horizontal Alliance, the king grasps that he cannot be trusted.

HAN FEIZI

The theme of the self-interested, unscrupulous minister, whose attempts at persuasion must be resisted, is a major focus of *Han Feizi*, a collection of essays attributed to the brilliant writer and political philosopher Han Fei (d. 233 BCE). No one diagnosed more insightfully the interplay of conflicting interests at court. Ironically, he succumbed to the same forces he described so memorably in his writings: he was imprisoned on trumped-up charges and then talked into committing suicide by his main rival, Li Si (280–208 BCE). In the following excerpt from "Wudu" ("The Five Kinds of Vermin"), Han Fei explains how rulers go astray by failing to recognize that ministers make proposals to further their own interests, not those of the sovereign.

C5.3 Han Feizi, "The Five Kinds of Vermin" (excerpt)

The thronging ministers who speak of foreign affairs either are members of the Vertical or Horizontal parties or are attempting to appropriate the strength of the state for the sake of some [personal] vendetta. The Vertical Alliance

[3] A legendary craftsman.

韓非子·五蠹(摘錄)

故群臣之言外事者，非有分於從衡之黨，則有仇讐之忠，而借力於國也。從者，合眾弱以

unites many weak [states] in order to attack one strong one; the Horizontal Alliance serves one strong [state] in order to attack many weak ones. Neither is a means to sustain one's own state.

Ministers who speak in favor of the Horizontal Alliance all say: "If you do not serve the great [state, i.e., Qin], when you come into conflict with an enemy, you will endure calamity." When you serve the great [state], though it is uncertain that [the strategy] will bear fruit, you must gather maps [of your domain] and submit them,^[1] and present your seals [of state] when you request military assistance. If you offer such maps, your territory will be whittled away; if you present your seals, your reputation will be debased. If your territory is whittled away, your state is whittled away; if your reputation is debased, your government will be in disorder. Before you have seen any benefit from serving the great [state] and engaging in the Horizontal Alliance, you will lose your territory and your government will be in disorder.

Ministers who speak in favor of the Vertical Alliance all say: "If you do not rescue small [states] and attack the great one, the world will be lost; if the world is lost, your own state will be imperiled; if your state is imperiled, you, the ruler, will be debased." When you rescue small [states], though it is uncertain that [the strategy] will bear fruit, you must raise troops and become the enemy of the great [state]. When you rescue small [states], it is uncertain that they can be preserved, and when you attack the great [state], it is uncertain that there will be no dissension [among your allies]. If there is dissension, you will be controlled by the mighty state [you attacked]. If you send out your troops, your army will be defeated; if you withdraw in defense, your cities will be captured. Before you have seen any benefit from rescuing small [states] and engaging in the Vertical Alliance, you will lose your territory and your army will be defeated.

For these reasons, if you serve the mighty [state], it will use its influence to employ officials within [your administration]; if you rescue small [states], powerbrokers within [your administration] will seek profit abroad. Before any benefit has been established for the state, lands and generous remuneration will accrue [to such ministers]. The sovereign will be debased, yet ministers will be honored; the state's territory will be whittled away, yet private households will be enriched. If their affairs succeed, they will use their influence to extend their power; if their affairs fail, they will retire with their riches. When the ruler listens to such persuasions and deals with his ministers, he honors them with rank and remuneration even before their affairs have succeeded, nor does he punish them when their affairs fail. Why would itinerant persuaders not employ some "tethered-arrow" scheme and trust in a lucky outcome?^[2]

[1] Offering maps of one's territory is a standard trope of submission because it allows the other country to invade more easily.

[2] A tethered arrow is used to hunt birds; here, presumably, it refers to a moon-shot scheme with little chance of success. Itinerant persuaders will not be reluctant to propose "tethered-arrow schemes" if they know there will be no consequences for failure.

攻一強也；而衡者，事一強以攻眾弱也；皆非所以持國也。今人臣之言衡者皆曰：“不事大則遇敵受禍矣。”事大未必有實，則舉圖而委，效璽而請兵矣。獻圖則地削，效璽則名卑，地削則國削，名卑則政亂矣。事大為衡未見其利也，而亡地亂政矣。人臣之言從者皆曰：“不救小而伐大則失天下，失天下則國危，國危而主卑。”救小未必有實，則起兵而敵大矣。救小未必能存，而交大未必不有疏，有疏則為強國制矣。出兵則軍敗，退守則城拔，救小為從未見其利，而亡地敗軍矣。是故事強則以外權士 [=仕] 官於內，救小則以內重求利於外，國利未立，封土厚祿至矣；主上雖卑，人臣尊矣；國地雖削，私家富矣。事成則以權長重，事敗則以富退處。人主之於其聽說也，於其臣，事未成則爵祿已尊矣；事敗而弗誅，則游說之士，孰不為用。鑿繳之說而徼倖其後？故破國亡主以聽言談者之浮說，此其故何也？是人君不明乎公私之利，不察當否之言，而誅罰不必其後也。

[HFZXJZ 1114]

N.B. Straight underline indicates the use of repetitive

patterning; wavy underline the use of parallel patterning. For a discussion on repetitive and parallel patterning, see Cr.1-4 and Cr.6-7.

Why, then, do the doomed rulers of broken states listen to the fanciful persuasions of speechifiers? It is because such rulers are not clear-sighted about profit for *gong* and *si*,^[3] do not investigate whether [ministers'] words are suitable, and do not necessarily punish them for [disappointing] outcomes.

The key to understanding this passage comes toward the end, in the reference to *gong* and *si*. *Si* is the easier of the two terms to translate: it means "private," especially in the senses of "private interest" or "judgments reached by private, and hence arbitrary, criteria." Ministers who make proposals always do so out of *si*, in expectation of some private benefit. *Gong* is derived from the old word meaning "patriarch" or "duke"; by Han Fei's time, it had come to refer more broadly to the interests of the ruler. In modern writing, *gong* is often translated as "public," but this is misleading. (A phrase like *gongyong che* means "vehicle for public use" in modern Chinese, but would have meant "vehicle for the [exclusive] use of the Duke" in the classical language.) Occasionally *gong* is interpreted as something like "the general interests of the state as opposed to the private interests of its ministers." Although this might be defensible for other early Chinese texts (such as *Lüshi chungiu*), it is still questionable in the context of *Han Feizi*, which acknowledges that the interests of a particular ruler—even long-term, prudential interests—are not necessarily identical to those of the abstract state.

Earlier in "Wudu," *gong* is defined straightforwardly as "that which opposes *si*" (HFZXJZ 1105). In *Han Feizi*, rulers are counseled not to trust anyone, not even their kin and bedfellows, but ministers are regarded as the party most likely to cause harm because they are indispensable: by Han Fei's time, states were already so large that a ruler could not hope to oversee the administration personally (cf. HFZXJZ 107, 1109, and 1141-42).⁴ Relying on ministers is dangerous, however, because they act in their own interest (*si*), not that of their employer and certainly not that of the kingdom they represent (*gong*). Rulers who fail to distinguish between *gong* and *si* when they hear ministers' proposals will inevitably come to grief.

This passage illustrates this tension through the example of the Horizontal and Vertical Alliances. The addressee of "Wudu" is evidently the ruler of a state other than Qin, for he is advised to join neither party for two important reasons: the obligations will only weaken him, and the alliances are promoted by ministers with ulterior motives. The text does not specify the right strategy—a ruler worth his salt will have to analyze that for himself—but its advice is very similar to that of "Tang Ju jian Chunshen jun": do not blindly follow your ministers' proposals, because you cannot be sure of their designs. Above all, be aware that your demise may be all too convenient for them.⁵

A passage in a different chapter, "Zhudao" ("The Way of the Ruler"), illustrates a related point: in the face of all this duplicity, the ruler ought not to reveal his inner thoughts or even to try to outwit his underlings by dissembling (for dissembling

[3] *Si* means "private," especially in the sense of "private interest." *Gong* is derived from the old word meaning "patriarch" or "duke." These terms will be discussed further in the following section.

too can be detected); instead, he should present a blank poker-face to the outside world, leaving his enemies without any toehold whatsoever.

C5.4 Han Feizi, "The Way of the Ruler" (excerpt)

Thus it is said: The lord ought not to make his desires apparent. If the lord's desires are apparent, the ministers will carve and polish themselves [to his liking]. The lord ought not to make his intentions apparent. If the lord's intentions are apparent, the ministers will display themselves falsely. Thus it is said: Eliminate likes; eliminate dislikes. Then the ministers will appear plainly. Eliminate tradition; eliminate wisdom. Then the ministers will prepare themselves.

The ruler must "eliminate wisdom" because the wisest policy of all is to come across as a blockhead, all the while carefully observing and assessing everyone else. Such phrases evoke *Laozi*, although they are not direct quotes (at least not to any known edition of that text). *Han Feizi* contains many such allusions, including two complete chapters (of disputed authorship) offering direct interpretations of *Laozi* from the perspective of statecraft.

SUNZI

Whereas Han Fei was a real person and may have been the author of at least some chapters in *Han Feizi* (including "Wudu"), the military strategist Sun Wu is a less credible figure for several reasons. First, his given name (Warlike) seems too good to be true.⁶ Second, the only biographical information about him is a patently romanticized story in *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian*) that relates how he trained the harem of King Helu of Wu (r. 514-496 BCE) to become a fearsome battalion. Third, and most important, the text of *Sunzi* bears hallmarks of a period much later than the turn of the sixth century BCE, when he must have been active if he really served King Helu. Consequently, we must treat it as an anonymous work that was proleptically attributed to a legendary figure of the past. This was a common practice at the time; another example is *Guanzi*, a collection attributed to Guan Zhong (d. 645 BCE), who probably did not write a single word of it.

The following excerpt from the "Mougong" ("Attacking Strategically") chapter of *Sunzi* stresses that warfare is a matter of rational self-interest rather than valor or bloodlust. Because the fundamental purpose of a military campaign is to increase the state's power, a commander must weigh the strategies that do and do not produce tangible results.

C5.5 Sunzi, "Attacking Strategically" (excerpt)

Master Sun said: According to the method of using troops, [capturing] a state intact is always best; destroying it is inferior. [Capturing] an army intact is best; destroying it is inferior. [Capturing] a battalion intact is best; destroying it is inferior. [Capturing] a company intact is best; destroying it is inferior. [Capturing] a squad intact is best; destroying it is inferior. For this reason, [one who

韓非子·主道(摘錄)

故曰：君無見其所欲，君見其所欲，臣自將雕琢。君無見其意，君見其意，臣將自表異。故曰：去好去惡，臣乃見素，去舊去智，臣乃自備。

[HFZXJZ 66]

孫子·謀攻(摘錄)

孫子曰：凡用兵之法，全國為上，破國次之；全軍為上，破軍次之；全旅為上，破旅

次之；全卒為上，破卒次之；全伍為上，破伍次之。是故百戰百勝，非善之善者也；不戰而屈人之兵，善之善者也。

故上兵伐謀，其次伐交，其次伐兵，其下攻城。攻城之法，為不得已，修 [=脩] 櫓，具器械，三月而後成；距闔，又三月而後已。將不勝其忿而蟻附之，殺士三分之一，而城不拔者，此攻之災也。

故善用兵者，屈人之兵而非戰也；拔人之城而非攻也；毀人之國而非久也。必以全爭於天下，故兵不頓 [=鈍] 而利可全，此謀攻之法也。

[SYJZSJL 44-52]

N.B. Straight underline indicates the use of repetitive patterning; wavy underline the use of parallel phrasing therein. For a discussion on repetitive and parallel patterning, see CI.1-4 and CI.6-7.

孫子·虛實 (摘錄)

故策之而知得失之計，作之而知動靜之理，形之而知死生之地，角之而知有餘不足之處。故形兵之極，至於無形；無形，則深閭不能窺，知者不能謀。因形而錯勝於眾，眾不能知。人皆知我所以勝之形，而莫知吾所以制勝

attains] a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the most adept of the adept. One who subdues the enemy's troops without a battle is the most adept of the adept.

Thus the best military [strategy] is to attack [the enemy's] strategy; next comes attacking his alliances; next comes attacking his troops; last comes attacking cities. The method of attacking cities is to do so only when there is no alternative. Armored siege vehicles and other machinery take three months to complete; the earthworks take another three months to finish. If the commander cannot overcome his frustration and has [his troops] climb the walls like ants, one in three of his warriors will be killed and the city still not be seized. This would be a disastrous attack.

Thus one who is adept at using troops subdues the enemy's troops, but not through battle; he seizes the enemy's cities, but not by attacking; he annihilates the enemy's state, but not through protracted [campaigns]. [One's goal] must be to contend with the rest of the world by [capturing enemy targets] intact; thereby one's troops will not be depleted, but one's gains can be kept intact. This is the method of attacking strategically.

Contemporary literature frequently delights in the exploits of legendary or semi-legendary heroes (like the aforementioned Meng Ben), but *Sunzi* reminds its reader—who is evidently envisioned as a lord or strategist with national interests to consider—that although military glory may inspire encomiasts, it does not necessarily benefit the state. “Protracted campaigns,” in particular, are unlikely to yield enough spoils to compensate for draining the state's coffers. Thus, the best battlefield strategy is often the one that *avoids* confrontation on the battlefield. Decisive action, especially when attacking cities, is inadvisable unless “there is no alternative” (*de bu yi*).

As in *Han Feizi*, one of the best techniques is to manipulate the enemy into committing first.

C5.6 Sunzi, “Weak Points and Strong” (excerpt)

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

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

“Formlessness” (*wuxing*)—another term that resonates with the philosophy of Laozi and allied traditions—is a byword for avoiding any type of committed formation until the enemy has already disclosed his intentions. It is the enemy who determines how he is to be destroyed: for every situation and for every enemy tactic, a shrewd commander will know the appropriate response. (Similarly, in games like curling and *bocce*, whoever throws last ought to win.) The strategy by which one attains victory can never be reused, because never again will precisely the same situation obtain.

The allusions to and evocations of Laozi are too pervasive to be accidental. The opening of *Laozi* 68 must have been written by someone familiar with these military traditions: “One who is adept at using warriors does not fight; one who is adept at battle does not rage; one who is adept at defeating the enemy does not engage him.” (*LDJZJS* 17-172)

MOZI

Not all voices were pleased to see the pursuit of self-interest elevated to an art form, and the annexation of weaker kingdoms, which is presumed in *Sunzi* to be the very purpose of warfare, elsewhere elicited dismay. Nor did Confucians (see chap. 3) have a monopoly on moralizing critique. In a famous passage in *Mozi*, conquerors are compared with criminals such as thieves, kidnappers, and murderers: whereas everyone agrees that the latter should be punished forthwith, bellicose kings shamelessly declare themselves “righteous” (*yi*) merely because they despoil neighboring countries rather than their own.

Mozi is a collection of essays, anecdotes, logical exercises, and treatises on defensive warfare that seems to have served as a school text. Clearly, it is not the work of its putative author, Mo Di (ca. 478–ca. 393 BCE), because the text often quotes him as though he were a long-dead authority. Mo Di may have been a real person and may have established a functioning school, where documents like the received *Mozi* were used in instruction.

Mozi is notoriously repetitive, and the following selection from “Tianzhi xia” (“The Will of Heaven, Part C”) is no exception. Nevertheless, the concrete examples are effectively deployed to convey the *a fortiori* nature of the argument: if filching a neighbor's melons and ginger warrants punishment, how much more so does destroying a kingdom?

C5.7 Mozi, “The Will of Heaven, Part C” (excerpt)

Suppose there is someone who enters other people's gardens and takes their peaches, plums, melons, and ginger. If his superiors apprehend him, they will punish him; if the multitudes hear of [his conduct], they will decry him. Why? One would say it was because he reaped the fruit without engaging in the labor and took what was not his. How much more does this apply to one who climbs over other people's walls and kidnaps their sons and daughters? Or one who drills into other people's treasuries and steals their gold, gems, and silk

之形。故其戰勝不復，而應形於無窮。

[SYJZSJL 120-23]

墨子·天志下 (摘錄)

若今有人於此，入人之場園，取人之桃李瓜薑者，上得且罰之，眾聞則非之。是何也？曰：不與其勞，獲其實，已非其有所取之故。而況有踰於人之牆垣，捃格

人之子女者乎？與角人之府庫，竊人之金玉蚤象 [=蠶絮] 者乎？與踰人之欄牢，竊人之牛馬者乎？而況有殺一不辜人乎？今王公大人之為政也，自殺一不辜人者，踰人之牆垣，担格人之子女者；與角人之府庫，竊人之金玉蚤象 [=蠶絮] 者；與踰人之欄牢，竊人牛馬者；與入人之場園，竊人之桃李瓜薑者。今王公大人之加罰此也，雖古之堯、舜、禹、湯、文、武之為政，亦無以異此矣。今天下之諸侯，將猶皆侵凌攻伐兼并，此為殺一不辜人者數千萬矣！此為踰人之牆垣，格人之子女者，與角人府庫，竊人金玉蚤象 [=蠶絮] 者，數千萬矣！踰人之欄牢，竊人之牛馬者，與入人之場園，竊人之桃李瓜薑者，數千萬矣！而自曰義也。故子墨子言曰：是黃我 [=紛義] 者，則豈有以異是黃 [=紛] 者黑白甘苦之辯者哉！今有人於此，少而示之黑謂之黑，多示之黑謂白，必曰吾目亂，不知黑白之別。今有人於此，能少嘗之甘，謂甘，多嘗謂苦，必曰吾口亂，不知其甘苦之味。今王公大人之政也，或殺人其 [=于] 國家，禁之此蚤越 [=以斧鉞]，有能多殺其鄰國之人，因以為文

fibers?^[1] Or one who climbs into other people's fenced ranches and steals their oxen and horses? How much more does this apply to one who kills an innocent person? In the government of today's kings, lords, and grandees, one who kills an innocent person, climbs over other people's walls and kidnaps their sons and daughters, or drills into other people's treasuries and steals their gold, gems, and silk fibers, or climbs into other people's fenced ranches and steals their oxen and horses, or enters other people's gardens and takes their peaches, plums, melons, and ginger—today's kings, lords, and grandees punish such people just as Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, and Kings Wen and Wu would have done in their own government.

When the territorial lords of the world today all invade, attack, and conquer one another, this is tens of millions of times worse than killing an innocent person. It is tens of millions of times worse than climbing over other people's walls and kidnapping their sons and daughters, or boring into other people's treasuries and stealing their gold, gems, and silk fibers. It is tens of millions of times worse than climbing into other people's fenced ranches and stealing their oxen and horses, or entering other people's gardens and taking their peaches, plums, melons, and ginger. Yet they all call themselves righteous.

Thus Master Mozi said: This is obscuring righteousness; how is it different from obscuring the distinction between black and white or sweet and bitter? Suppose there is someone who, having been shown a bit of black, calls it black, but having been shown a lot of black, calls it white. He would have to say: My eyes are defective; I cannot tell the difference between black and white. Suppose there is someone who, having tasted a bit of something sweet, calls it sweet, but having tasted a lot of it, calls it bitter. He would have to say: My mouth is defective; I cannot tell whether something tastes sweet or bitter. In the government of today's kings, lords, and grandees, killing people within the state is prohibited by means of the executioner's axe, but one who is able to kill many people in neighboring states is, for that reason, deemed praiseworthy and righteous. How is this different from obscuring the difference between black and white or sweet and bitter?

The complaint is reminiscent of Augustine's (354–430 CE) observation that a predator who plies the seas with one vessel is called a pirate, while one who does so with a whole fleet is called an emperor (*City of God* 4.4). Because they had few useful recommendations to offer would-be emperors, Mohists fell out of favor; eventually, the whole philosophy became a relic. The philosophical marketplace was a marketplace, after all.

[1] Although there is little doubt that the phrase *zaolei* must refer to precious silk, commentators do not agree on the precise meaning. I follow the emendation suggested in *MZJG*, even though the basis seems flimsy, because the overall meaning is not affected.

FALSE VIRTUE, TRUE REWARDS

Another story about Chunyu Kun exemplifies a final commonplace to be discussed: as “men-of-service” (*shi*) became known as a greedy and mendacious lot, feigning extraordinary honesty emerged as yet another profitable strategy.

C5.8 Grand Scribe's Records, “Biographies of Amusing Figures” (excerpt)

In the past, the King of Qi sent Chunyu Kun to offer a crane to [the King of] Chu. He set off through the gates of the city, and, on the road, the crane flew away. Bearing only an empty cage, he invented a fraudulent excuse. When he went to his audience with the King of Chu, he said: “The King of Qi sent me to offer you a crane, but as I was crossing the river, the crane's thirst was too much for me to bear. When I let it out to drink, it left me and flew away. I wished to die by stabbing myself in the gut or hanging myself by the neck, but I was afraid that people would criticize my king for making his man-of-service kill himself for the sake of a bird. A crane is a feathered creature; there are many [other animals] of the same type. I wished to buy one in place [of the missing crane], but this would have been untrustworthy and deceptive toward my king. I wished to flee to another kingdom, but it pained me that this would cause a breach between the two rulers. Thus I have come here to admit my transgression; kowtowing, I shall accept your punishment, Great King.”

The King of Chu said: “It is very good that the King of Qi has such trustworthy men-of-service!” He rewarded [Chunyu] generously, with riches several times greater than if the crane had still been with him.

This vignette appears in *Shiji* (卷六 chap. 6), but was probably inserted by Chu Shaosun (104?–30? BCE), a scholar who has been criticized for having dared to add his words to Sima Qian's masterpiece. Regardless of its origin, the literary effect of this piece lies in its modulation of prior tales. The theme of the crane lost on the road is attested in a variety of early Chinese sources, but in earlier versions, the hapless emissary is someone other than Chunyu Kun; moreover, he is spared because he confesses *sincerely*.⁸ Good things come to those who freely admit their guilt. The present text, however, reconfigures the dynamics by inserting the shifty Chunyu Kun as the protagonist and having the narrator state explicitly that he “invented a fraudulent excuse” (*zaozha chengci*). Now the moral is quite different: do not be a dupe like the King of Chu, who not only rewards Chunyu richly, but also pronounces him “trustworthy” (*xin*)—precisely what a man-of-service *should* be, and the very opposite of what he is.

In later centuries, such themes were expanded into what Alan J. Berkowitz has called “reclusion as a ruse”—that is, conspicuously declining offers of employment to raise one's market value.⁹ The more such men pretended not to be motivated by rank and salary, the more mercenary they really were. Even Confucius is said to have held out for the right price (*Analects* 9.13). To be sure, he is usually

義，此豈有異黃白黑、甘苦之別者哉？

[MZJG 711–718]

N.B. Straight underline indicates the use of repetitive patterning; wavy underline the use of parallel phrasing therein. For a discussion on repetitive and parallel patterning, see Cr.1–4 and Cr.6–7.

史記·滑稽列傳（摘錄）

昔者，齊王使淳于髡獻鵠於楚。出邑門，道飛其鵠，徒揭空籠，造詐成辭，往見楚王曰：“齊王使臣來獻鵠，過於水上，不忍鵠之渴，出而飲之，去我飛亡。吾欲刺腹絞頸而死。恐人之議吾王以鳥獸之故令士自傷殺也。鵠，毛物，多相類者，吾欲買而代之，是不信而欺吾王也。欲赴佗國奔亡，痛吾兩主使不通。故來服過，叩頭受罪大王。”

楚王曰：“善，齊王有信士若此哉！”厚賜之，財倍鵠在也。

[SKK 126.25]

thought to have meant this metaphorically, but not all men-of-service were so pure and incorrupt.

Paul R. Goldin

NOTES

1. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest" (*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.2). Similar observations can be found in *Shenzi* and *Han Feizi*.
2. This view does not cohere with what we know of Xunzi's philosophy from the extant text attributed to him; rather, it sounds like Han Fei, whom we will meet in the next section.
3. A parallel account appears in *Huainanzi* (HNZJS 1313).
4. The story of Yan Chu (late-fourth century BCE) in *Zhanguo ce* (ZGCJZ 639–641) is another famous text highlighting the need for competent ministers.
5. This is not the only criticism of the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances in *Han Feizi*. In a different chapter, the objection is that "mere words are not the means to achieve order" (HFZXJZ 1159).
6. Cf. Jens Østergård Petersen, "What's in a Name? On the Sources Concerning Sun Wu," *Asia Major* (3rd series) 5, no. 1 (1992): 28.
7. The core essays in *Mozi* are each presented in three distinct versions. This is the third of the three essays titled "The Will of Heaven."
8. See Giulia Baccini, "Narrative Variation and Motif Adaptation in Ancient Anecdotal Lore: A Perspective on the Bird-Gift Story in Early and Early Medieval Chinese Sources," *Archiv Orientalní* 82, no. 2 (2014): esp. 299–305.
9. Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 118 and 136–138.

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