



The Magnitude of *Ming*



**THE
MAGNITUDE OF
*MING***

Command, Allotment, and Fate
in Chinese Culture

Edited by
Christopher Lupke



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*For My Mother,
Clara Lupke*

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Preface

One wonders whether other topics in the scholarship on China are as potentially personal as an examination of *ming*. All living beings must deal with this notion, which in Chinese involves an imbrication of concepts that in the West we consider discrete entities, such as “fate,” “life,” “allotment,” and (heavenly or humanly) “command.” My own first encounter with *ming* was an unforgettable one, one that in part has led to this project. In the mid-1980s I was studying at the Inter-University Program on the campus of National Taiwan University. One of my independent reading courses was on the subject of Zhuangzi taught by Jin Jiayi 金嘉錫. As we perused the *Inner Chapters* and their layers of commentary, Jin Laoshi frequently emphasized that an understanding of *ming* was fundamental to a proper apprehension of Zhuangzi’s thought and, by extension, a proper way to live as well. Professor Jin’s expertise in phonetics led him to develop a theory about an intricate system of double entendres in Zhuangzi. It was a rich course for which I recorded copious notes in anticipation that I might possibly continue on to write a dissertation involving this compelling philosophical classic. One day I happened to forget my book bag in a taxi while riding in Taipei. In that bag were a camera, a recently purchased edition of the *Shiji*, and all my Zhuangzi notes. One can imagine my grief at having lost those notes, the other items of course being easily replaced.

A few days later I related what had happened to Jin Laoshi and was stunned by his reaction, which I will never forget. He looked at me unmoved and dryly responded to the news: “That’s *ming*. There’s nothing you can do about it. Move on.” Jin’s point was not that one should go through life with a fatalistic outlook but that an understanding of the inexorable vagaries of life (*ming*) meant that one should coexist with and not resist them. This acceptance of the forces of life was actually liberating and resulted in a new sort of agency, one that did not entail traversing the inevitable. While a considerable loss in terms of content and work, the experience of losing those notes was a powerful and unforgettable lesson in the need to relinquish the illusion of control over life. And it has remained vivid in my memory.

Over ten years later, in December of 1996, I believe, at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in Washington, DC, I met

Deirdre Sabina Knight, who was writing her dissertation on determinism and its connection to female agency in modern Chinese literature. Considering her topic, she was, of course, very interested in the Chinese concept of *ming*. We began to discuss the idea of developing a panel for the Association for Asian Studies. As this idea gathered momentum over the next year, what we found was that virtually all the scholars we spoke to in Chinese studies acknowledged the relevance of *ming* to their varied research interests. One panel mushroomed into a double panel, and eventually into a conference. Knight and I coorganized the panels for the 1998 AAS in Washington, DC. We had eight presenters, two discussants, and two chairs. The success of the panels led us to continue to pursue the idea into a conference and then into the present volume of essays. After the AAS, I took responsibility for developing a grant proposal to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for a conference. I was able to secure a palatial venue at the Breckenridge Conference Center in York, Maine, for the conference. We invited a few more presenters, and over a dozen papers were presented at the conference. Erica Andree designed the advertising poster, and the basic image of that poster, with an etching by the Mongolian-Chinese artist Su Xinping 蘇新平 called “The Dream” 夢 overlaid with calligraphy by an artist who wishes to remain anonymous now graces the cover of this book. This was in May 2000.

I subsequently moved to Washington State University where I developed a website posting all the revised versions of the papers so that the participants could comment on each other’s essays and think about them as they further revised their own. This process has led to a final product exhibiting more continuity, or at least cross-reference, if still individually conceived chapters, than is found in most edited volumes. I hope readers will be able to sense some of the interaction in them that made the conference so stimulating. After considerable revision, what began as a loss and as a fortuitous conversation at a conference has now blossomed into this book, consisting of twelve very different approaches to the complex issue of *ming* in Chinese culture.

Bringing this project into print has not in any way followed what I had imagined the normal trajectory for a scholarly project to be. It has emerged as a collaboration, most notably with Sabina Knight but also with the other contributors, and the synergy of these unpredictable encounters has shaped the final product even as it has forged new friendships and collegial relations. There are therefore many people whose participation at various stages, support and encouragement all along the way, and contributions to the success of the project deserve grateful acknowledgment. Foremost among these is Sabina, without whose chance encounter at the MLA this project never

would have been initiated, and without whose sustained involvement in it might never have reached its final form. She deserves great credit as the *primum mobile* of the project. Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker and Richard J. Smith, two beloved mentors who championed the project from its inception, served as the chairs of the original AAS panels. Their confidence in it helped secure its acceptance in that venue and was therefore crucial at that convocation. Anthony Yu and Wai-Yee Li served as trenchant and engaged discussants to those first two panels, and their involvement must also be recognized. Several prominent scholars in the field lent their moral support to the project, remarked on its importance, and encouraged us to continue with it. Many would have written essays for the book had their professional lives not already been filled with other projects. These include Ron Guey Chu, Patricia Ebrey, Wai-Yee Li, Stephen West, Hung Wu, and Anthony Yu, among others. Thomas Wilson was someone I had hoped to attract to the project as well. Although he too was overwhelmed with his own endeavors, he assisted in the critical role of suggesting other scholars, many of whose works are now in the volume. The conference in Maine could not have been a success without the guidance and presence of Roger Ames, who was an invaluable source of advice as I planned the conference. Kidder Smith's enthusiasm for the project, and particularly his offer to speak at the conference, was also an asset. He provided a unique perspective that was appreciated by all. Kidder also gave me valuable feedback for the conference grant application, which proved successful. Richard Smith's stalwart mentorship of both Sabina and me has continued since our meeting at the AAS in 1998. We also must acknowledge the generous efforts of two anonymous readers whose perceptive and detailed comments have immeasurably improved this book, beginning to end.

I would like to thank Patricia Crosby, executive editor of the University of Hawai'i Press, for her interest in the project and faith in its eventual fruition. I have learned much from her about developing a manuscript. Ann Ludeman has done a wonderful job as managing editor of the project, trying her best to keep me on schedule. Barbara Folsom's painstaking copyediting of the final manuscript corrected countless infelicities and has bestowed on it an enviable polish. At Washington State University, I would like to thank Douglas Winther, whose technical expertise was crucial to the creation of our website, to the conversion of each chapter to a uniform word-processing program, and to the capture of the image that appears in David Schaberg's essay. Cecil Williams assisted in this endeavor. I must also thank John Harris for proofreading my Greek.

The book would obviously not be what it is without the wonderful contributions of all the authors. Editing this volume has never ceased to

inspire me, largely due to the extraordinary brilliance of my colleagues. *Ming* aside, these essays highlight the work of some of the best scholars currently active in Chinese studies. Without the generosity of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, who awarded us not one but two grants—one for the conference and one as a subvention to defray the cost of printing Chinese characters—this project would never have become a book, despite the high scholarly quality and best intentions of my colleagues. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wife, Shuxin, for her patience and understanding as I channeled hours into this project that properly should have been devoted to her.

CHRISTOPHER LUPKE
Pullman, Washington
February 5, 2004

Diverse Modes of *Ming*

An Introduction

CHRISTOPHER LUPKE

Of the few truly defining concepts that pervade all of Chinese culture, *yin* and *yang* 陰陽, ritual *li* 禮, the *dao* 道, *ren* 仁 (benevolence), and *xiao* 孝 (filiality), among others, most have been the subject of extended study, essay volumes, or both. However, one concept that generally has not received extensive attention, with some exceptions and despite its pervasiveness in Chinese discourse, is *ming* 命, translated as “command,” “allotment,” or “fate.” This volume of essays systematically explores *ming* in its diverse incarnations. The terms “*ming*” and “*tianming*” were ubiquitous in the discourse of pre-Qin China. Early in the *Analects*, Confucius mentions that in the stages of life “at fifty, one understands the commands of heaven” 五十而知天命, an adage that any schoolchild can recite. One of the best-known classic examples of the Confucian appeal to *ming*, one that is discussed by several of the contributors in this volume, is Confucius’ lament over the death of his stellar pupil Yan Hui’s 顏回 *duanming* 短命 (shortened life). Mencius described *ming* as “whatever happens without one’s causing it” 莫之致而致者，命也. Zhuangzi spoke of the need to follow or “go along with one’s *ming*” 順命. *Ming* appears in the work of virtually all the pre-Qin philosophers, though interpretations of it certainly vary. *Ming* is also evident in the work of most or all of the early works of Chinese history. *Ming* occurs in, and even informs, the narrative trajectory of vernacular fiction of the late imperial age such as *huaben* 話本 short stories and the longer *zhanghui* 章回 works. It is frequently found in contemporary works of literature and film, and its presence is manifest in Chinese sayings such as “If it is one’s fate to die in a well, then drowning in a river will not be fatal” 命該井裡死，河裡淹不煞; “If one’s fate is eight inches, it is difficult to attain a foot” 命裡八尺，難求一丈; “If it is one’s fate to have no money, one cannot attain it by force of will” 命裡沒錢不強求; and “If it is one’s fate is to be unprosperous one should accept poverty, for wealth and honor are forged in heaven” 命裡無財該受窮，富貴都是天鑄成. Each of these popular maxims implies that one’s

fate is what is it and one should accept it for what it is; one should not expect to reap the benefits of a fate that one has not been allotted. Yet, does this necessarily mean that Chinese culture is by and large fatalistic? Does it mean that *ming* necessarily shares a one-to-one sameness with the Western notion of fate? Not necessarily. *Ming* is far more complex than that, and its complexity has led in part to its centrality in Chinese discourse. How has *ming* been understood and managed throughout Chinese civilization? In this volume, we attempt to provide an initial answer to just this question from the perspective of disciplines as diverse as philosophy, religious studies, anthropology, literary studies, and cultural history. Our aim has been to focus primarily on essential discourses surrounding the concept, particularly those which appear in paradigmatic classical sources and later narrative literature. As a result, this book primarily is concerned with what people thought and said about *ming* as well as Daoist practices of prolonging life and predetermining its outcome.

The volume includes twelve essays arranged largely in a chronological fashion. While no book could possibly encompass the entire variety of ways in which *ming* has influenced Chinese culture, and ultimately no collected volume can apply the sort of systematicity to the concept that it deserves, the value of this volume will be that the common thread of *ming* is traced through a range of texts and a broad spectrum of Chinese history spanning the earliest times to the present, and that it is pursued by a group of individual scholars whose own perspectives are brought to bear on the concept of *ming* as it appears in Chinese texts. The gaps that are left in the wake of this collective effort reveal more about *ming*'s pervasiveness than they do anything else, and hopefully will be filled by scholars building upon our pioneering work.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I covers the period of early China and comprises essays by David Schaberg, Lisa Raphals, Michael Puett, and Mu-chou Poo. The essays are concerned with writings from the *Shijing*, the *Zuozhuan*, the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Daybook* of Shuihudi, and other texts of the age. The second part deals with the Late Han and Six Dynasties Period and is represented by two essays on esoteric Daoism, one each by Robert Campany and Stephen Bokenkamp, and one essay on the poet Tao Qian by Zong-qi Cai. Essays by Patricia Sieber on the illustrious but tragic career of Jin Shengtian and by P. Steven Sangren on *The Investiture of the Gods* make up the third part. The volume concludes with an essay on contemporary Chinese philosophy by Woei-Lien Chong and one essay each on modern Chinese literature by Deirdre Sabina Knight and myself, Christopher Lupke.

David Schaberg's essay on the origin of the term "*ming*" is a tour de

force. In detailing the etymology, early pronunciation, synonyms, usage, and meaning of *ming*, Schaberg surveys a broad range of early texts that include bronze inscriptions, the *Shijing* and the *Shujing*, and the *Zuozhuan*, as well as modern scholarly investigations on early China.

Schaberg begins and ends his essay with a problem: if the term “*ming*” has come to be understood as meaning “life span,” and thus by extension something roughly associated with the term “fate,” then why in early texts does it refer quite specifically to the notion of “command,” and how does this shift from “command” to “life span” occur? His answer to this question is offered in a careful reconstruction of the early usage first with reference to the etymology of the word. Building on the work of Bernhard Karlgren, William Boltz, and especially Constance Cook, among others, Schaberg establishes a consistency of usage in the term “*ming*” that involves calling or naming. In early texts, *ming* is found to be synonymous with *ling*, the other half of its bound form in the modern compound “to command.” Thus, the usage of *ming* in early China served to mark off a special form of language—as Cook puts it, an “official notice of empowerment.”

From this discussion of *ming* as a sign of the ritual language of the sovereign that commands, calls, or names, Schaberg moves into a detailed inquiry into the way *ming* is invoked in the inscription of bronze vessels. In the course of this inquiry he discovers that *ming* is closely aligned with terms denoting “giving” such as *de* 德, which in turn is associated with its homophone *de* 得. Schaberg describes how the bronze vessels functioned as gifts from Zhou rulers, distributed as parts of enfeoffments and other major gift-giving festivals that included feasting. A *ming* would be inscribed on the vessel itself that commemorated the ceremony. The specialized or ritual language inscribed on the vessels was, as Schaberg goes on to analyze in detail in the next section, highly formulaic in nature. It disclosed a close association between *ming* and *de*, the term that now means “virtue” but then was taken as “gift.”

The gift-giving festivals or commemorations of bounty were enshrined in the language of the *Shijing*, and Schaberg’s last major section is a treatment of the prosody and rhyme schemes of certain of the older *Shijing* poems, in particular ones found in the “great praise” *daya* section. While *ming* at points shares aspects of its meaning with the Greek term “*moira*” and the Latin “*fatum*,” Schaberg distinguishes between these two and the more proscribed *ming*, which always allows for some limited play in its pronouncements and could even be considered an “appeal” of sorts. His analysis of the prosody reveals in certain types of texts, the ones to which the *ming/ling* pronouncements belong, a high degree of consonance in the language. The sound patternings that are common to the poems also arise in many of the

famous speeches recorded in bronze inscriptions. Thus, Schaberg discovers that a common pattern links the bronze inscriptions with the writings of the *Shijing* and *Shujing*. Indeed, he asserts that *ming* is “perhaps the most common patterning word in the Western Zhou texts.”

Schaberg concludes from this richly detailed discussion of early Chinese texts that *ming*, essentially meaning “command,” marks a special designation for speech used in divination and investiture. In these commands, he continues, there is always an element of the difficulty of executing commands and a certain lack of confidence in executing them. Therefore, along with the bestowing of the command from the sovereign comes the necessary compliance to the command, a process that often carried with it considerable anxiety. In fact, many of the commands entailed the risk of death, as did that of Duke Wen of Zhu first mentioned at the outset of his essay. In a way, then, following an order would be especially exemplary if the liege were required to perform some sort of death-defying feat in the process. It is perhaps from this practice of executing such tall orders that the term “*wenming*” 聞命, “to follow an order, especially if this order means death,” has come about. And it is perhaps from there, Schaberg surmises, that the association of *ming* with death, as in the case of Confucius’ “acceptance” of *ming* in the death of his prized pupil Yan Hui, has arisen. For what could be more important in life than following the ultimate order, the acceptance of one’s mortality?

If this notion of following the order of mortality, the acceptance of one’s fate, is the goal of the sage, then Lisa Raphals’ essay, though rather different in its intent and procedure, picks up where Schaberg leaves off. Raphals suggests that “understanding fate is the defining characteristic of a sage.” She presents us with the most comprehensive picture to date of “the whole semantic field of meanings contained in the word ‘fate.’” Raphals’ essay offers the reader a full taxonomy of the meaning of *ming* in its various contexts, and she compares and contrasts its combination forms in Chinese with those of the Western notions of *moira* and *fatum*. She cautions that viewing Chinese notions of fate through a Western prism could lead to the mistaken characterization of Chinese thought and culture as “passive, quietistic, and fatalistic.” Her contribution will help to dispel such notions, which tend to prevail in modern accounts of China’s alleged “stagnant” past.

Raphals’ essay is more than a mere exposition of the various contexts both within and without Chinese thought where fate is employed; it demonstrates the spectrum in which *ming* in the Chinese context and *moira* in the Greek were employed in contrasting as well as complementary ways. There was, for example, as much debate in the early Chinese philosophical context over the status of *ming* by schools such as the Mohist, Daoist, and Confucian

as there were agreed-upon understandings of what *ming* signified. One can find discourses on “understanding,” “establishing,” “following,” “returning to,” and “controlling” *ming*, and Raphals’ essay systematically organizes and classifies these nuances and usages. She extends her classification to include some discussion of the evolution of *ming* in Han Confucianism, Song and Ming neo-Confucianism, and even modern China in the work of Fu Sinian.

In addition, Raphals discusses other Chinese terms that have meanings related to “fate,” and she lays out a description of the development of the fate concept in the Greek semantic field, identifying a watershed that occurred in the fourth century, prior to which fate was accepted as the central notion of “lot” or destiny and was often depicted in a personified form. After the fourth century, fate was broadly debated in all the major philosophical schools and was opposed, for example, by early Christian philosophers. Raphals finally notes that some common notions of fate existed in the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions, but “attitudes toward fatalism” contrasted significantly. For the Chinese, *ming* did not necessarily amount to the demise of free will. Within one’s set life span there was room for maneuver. For the Greeks, in contrast, fate was essentially associated with fatalism. To accept it was to reject the possibility of free will. Thus, fate increasingly became anathema to Western philosophical discourse. Raphals ends with a useful table outlining a complex array of similarities and dissimilarities as well as the usages found in the semantic field of fate.

Michael Puett’s essay illustrates the evolution of the notion of *ming* from the early Chinese period into the Han dynasty by way of an interesting conundrum. The problem that Puett sets out is the question as to whether *ming* is moral or not. It is easy enough to follow the commands of Heaven when it is clear that they have a moral purpose and function according to an ethical calculus. But as Puett observes, most passages in the Confucian texts are associated with random and usually unfortunate events. How does one resolve this discrepancy between the imperative to act in accord with the commands of Heaven and the fact that Heaven itself does not always apparently reward such moral behavior?

In answering this question, Puett offers a comprehensive rereading of the Confucian and Mencian understandings of *ming* and eventually illustrates how the Han philosopher Dong Zhongshu reinterpreted the heavenly command as something less problematic and tension-filled in an effort to institutionalize its use. That there is an apparent inconsistency in Confucian thought has been noted by scholars such as Ning Chen and Ted Slingerland in recent essays. However, Puett takes issue with their respective explanations for the tension between moral behavior and the seeming randomness of some acts attributed to *ming*. He suggests that “two distinct usages of *ming* are not

necessary,” that the term can be understood in these texts in a consistent manner. He also endeavors to refute Slingerland’s assertion that there exist an external and an inner realm, and that humans need only concern themselves with the internal realm in fulfilling their moral duty. In Puett’s reckoning, Heaven does not always seem to act according to the notion that ethical conduct will invariably be rewarded and evil always punished.

Puett argues that the “relationship of Heaven and humanity is charged with tensions,” aligning himself with and even extending the work of Lee Yearley. The relationship between Heaven and humans is a complicated one that is not tantamount to an easy one-to-one system of rewards and punishments. It is entirely within the realm of reason, one could surmise from reading the early Confucians, that one could follow the commands of Heaven, a prerequisite for the gentleman or *junzi*, and still end up with an unfortunate *ming*. In fact, Puett ventures to argue that Heaven may “at times work to prevent the completion of the command.” It seems that Confucius emphasizes not only that events lie outside the control of humans, but that they may even be outside one’s understanding. Confucius advises that humans should strive to accept the mysterious ways of Heaven and to function in accordance with its commands.

Mencius, too, counseled that one should accept Heaven, even though he might have a difficult time doing so himself. Puett argues that the tension implicit in the *Analects of Confucius* threatens to turn into outright conflict between Heaven and humans in Mencius. Reminding the reader that Mencius was frustrated in his attempt to become an adviser to the king of Qi, Puett indicates that Mencius might even have thought that what happens is not necessarily something we don’t comprehend, but may not even be right. Nevertheless, it is the duty of humans to accept it. It may be difficult to understand why Heaven may even work to “block the path of the sage,” as Puett phrases it, but one must never go against the will of Heaven.

It seems that Dong Zhongshu may have recognized the possible crisis in the relationship between Heaven and human beings, for how long could societies be expected simply to resign their fates to the whims of a greater power which may or may not be just? Thus, in institutionalizing the commands of Heaven, Dong seeks to resolve the tensions of Confucius and the potential conflicts of Mencius. Dong reads the Confucian-authored *Spring and Autumn Annals* as a work that, in Puett’s words, “provides the principles by which omens can be understood.” Thus, Dong has insured a secure role for the sage class, the scholars who are exclusively trained to interpret omens. They form a select body, who do not rule but rather advise the rulers whose power derives more arbitrarily from heredity. Puett’s ultimate argument is that, in resolving the conundrum of Heaven’s dispassionate hand versus the

moral imperative of individuals, Dong Zhongshu denies the tensions existing between the two and installs in their place precisely the group of intellectuals who first viewed themselves as disenfranchised by *ming*, the sagely class.

Mu-chou Poo's essay provides the perfect complement to the first set of four, as it takes as its primary subject matter a text that at most was probably designed for the middlebrow reader in ancient China, the *Daybook* of Shuihudi. These fairly recently discovered texts were part of a genre of "almanacs," presumably read by farmers, soldiers, craftsmen, and low-ranking government officials. As such, Poo surmises that these texts "could have represented the mentality of the lower-middle social stratum." The question is, then, did they indeed reflect the kind of mechanistic worldview that one tends to associate with the notion of *ming*? The answer is an intriguing one, for although the term "*ming*" itself is not present within the extant texts, the governing thought structure seems to be.

Poo agrees with both Raphals and Puett that "fate" in the Chinese context is not "unalterable." For while, interestingly, Poo observes that "nowhere is the idea that *ming* can be changed explicitly mentioned" in early Chinese discourse, it seems to be understood that it is not a completely fixed term either. A paradoxical situation exists for humans. Though one's fate may not be "fixed," one could go so far as to suggest it is "prescribed." The *Daybook*, an accumulation of practical guides to daily life, played a very useful role for the common people in early China. Just as the Confucian sage, at least by the time of Dong Zhongshu, could offer guidance to the sovereign on how best to accord with *ming*, so these popular texts served as a manual for ordinary people in a range of activities.

The *Daybook* can be divided into two types of texts, the "calendrical" texts and texts that offer "detailed predictions." Both of these sets of texts offer insight into the Chinese conception of fate. They serve as a sort of finite "map of human action" not dissimilar to the *Yijing*, though the latter was not calendrical in structure. However, it is similar in the sense that conceivably one could chart out all the possible actions available to humans on an intricately arrayed palette. If this is so, then isn't human action, in the Chinese conception, determined? In reconciling the paradox of the seemingly deterministic view with some sort of basic agency, Poo explains how the *Daybook* offers suggestions of ways in which one could improve if not fundamentally alter one's fate.

Poo suggests that while the basic structure of human events may be fixed, "one could have control over one's fate, with the *Daybook* in hand." While there may be an "overarching" scheme that is determined in the last instant, by performing certain acts or avoiding certain prohibitions, one can enhance one's chances with the cold hand of fate. Poo gives several examples

of such actions, which range from choosing or avoiding certain dates for engaging in certain activities (which, of course continues to the present) to performing “magical” measures such as burying an infant’s placenta. He concludes that, far from indicating that all human activity is fated, the *Daybook* paradoxically acknowledges the extraordinary power of fate, which one could presume is *ming*, yet at the same time offers methods for enhancing, or remedies for ameliorating, the fate one is dealt. While the *Daybook* shows little concern for the workings of a moral universe as found in the Confucian texts, it attempts to show the common people certain avenues through which the results of assigned fate may be negotiated.

By the time we get to the third and fourth centuries, beginning with Robert Campany’s essay, *ming* has become a central issue in philosophy and religion and, indeed, one of the problems that “early esoteric and later Daoist methods were designed to resolve.” In fact, as Campany describes it, *ming* is no longer a philosophical category that can be reduced to abstraction; it has taken on an ontogenetic role, determined during the very binding of the fetus. In other words, *ming* is intertwined with the very nature of conception.

Two other aspects of the issue of *ming* distinguish it from earlier accounts. First, by the time of the medieval Daoists, a whole array of methods had sprung up by which one could attempt to lengthen or even “dodge” the inexorable finitude of *ming* and remain alive. As the stories and prescriptions that Campany describes in his essay attest, these “earthbound” methods of transcendence were as complex as they were deceptive. Second, if *ming* emerged from philosophical and historical discourse of the earliest Chinese texts, by now it had taken on an even greater textual presence. One’s *ming* was inscribed in ledgers, recorded as one might perhaps record a debt. Unless one did something to alter the books, just as one might doctor an account book, then one was going to the grave as preordained. Thus, in the writings of Gan Bao, Ge Hong, and Wang Chong, one finds an interesting reversal in the logic of language; for while one customarily thinks of language as describing or depicting living realities, in these cases one could actually alter the reality by first reinscribing the text. The act of representation was thus turned around, just as if altering one’s checkbook might somehow result in more money in the bank.

Nonetheless, transcendence of one’s *ming* could not be affected by altering texts alone. Procedures were required that often involved drinking an elixir and writing a talisman, “escape by means of a simulated corpse,” known as *shijie*, wherein either someone else’s body had to be provided as a substitute for one’s own or some other feigning had to occur accompanied by certain accoutrements, such as clothing, a sword, or another device. One’s name had to be changed, and one had to move far away, abandoning all, and not

return for as long as several generations. And, finally, Daoist adepts were employed to assist in the process. This assistance had political implications. Rival Daoist groups would compete for the reputation of most qualified, and these groups were initiated in a system of esoteric rituals, thus setting them apart from the broader society.

Another solution to the *ming* problem was sought through self-refinement. It was believed that one could advance to an “embryonic version of oneself,” to achieve a “new, purer state of one’s former body” that would “release” one from “one’s corpse.” Though all these methods supposedly involved deception to one degree or another, Campany points out that there is another way to read this altering of the records, switching bodies, changing names, drinking elixirs, and the performance of various esoteric formulae. According to the *Taiping jing*, he shows, some argued that there was no way to improve one’s *ming* “off” the books as it were. The only way to do so would be “on” the books, through a systematic accounting of the merits and sins of one’s life, through confession, and through sincere repentance. This text acknowledges the *shijie* adepts but argues that “any longevity is the result of their merit” and not the machinations in which they engage. Thus, it is not Heaven that is deceived into extending the proscription put on life by *ming*, but rather humans who are deceived into thinking that anything other than merit would afford such an extension.

Moving beyond the connections that *ming* might have to the continuum of determinism versus free will, Stephen Bokenkamp’s essay delves deeply into *ming* as a constitutive element of the human body. *Ming*, according to early medical texts and other accounts of embryonic development, is a “coalescence of *yin* and *yang*” that became fixed within the fetus. Bokenkamp further investigates the range and depth of the Daoist ability to “adjust” *ming*, as it were, claiming that for these celestial masters *ming* was “more manufactured than assessed.”

The Daoist masters of the medieval period contended that they were in possession of certain privileged and exclusive understandings of the ways of Heaven, and these understandings afforded them immunity from fate. By employing psychosomatic techniques that allowed them to alter their own *ming*, they died only “apparent” deaths. These texts suggest there were record-keeping spirits that actually inhabited the body. The spirits could at any time ascend to heaven to report on misdeeds, thus leading to a shortened life span. If, however, one properly nourished one’s bodily *qi*, such spirits might remain within the body and insure that long life and safe passage through death was effected.

Bokenkamp goes on to explore this manipulation within the body through discussions of Daoist embryology and physiognomy. Working with

the writings of Yang Xi, Bokenkamp observes that what the Daoists would do was essentially re-create or even reverse the process of gestation along with the meditative techniques designed to prolong the human lives of fetuses. An adept was to visualize external deities merging with internal bodily spirits. They would join together as one and be guided to the proper bodily area in need of rejuvenation through meditative practices. It is important to note that these techniques could not be carried out by amateurs, for the deities in question were quite different from inborn spirits; in fact, they were the deities originally responsible for fashioning the human body, along with its inborn spirits. Only the Daoists had the skill to access these spirits. Intriguingly, this Daoist practice was designed to lead the body back to the moment of conception. The whole process was, essentially, a re-conception of the self, but not just a newly rejuvenated self—a self that was “etherealized.” The Daoist masters’ manipulation of *ming* enabled them to re-create themselves in a primordial form. Another embryological technique was that of the “perfected embryo,” that is, an “untying of the embryonic knots.” This intricate reconstitution of embryonic development “followed standard medical accounts of fetal development” at the time. One could venture to say that the discourse of the Daoists on this count seemed to differ little from what could be characterized as an esoteric combination of religious ritual with obstetric techniques. Thus, although these techniques were based on common conceptions of fetal development, they were also closely guarded, for Daoist manuals were peppered with injunctions that the secretive meditative techniques not be revealed to the laity.

Remonstrations against the popularization of techniques to alter human destiny also accompanied Daoist instructions concerning the techniques of physiognomy. This “body divination,” as Bokenkamp calls it, experienced a resurgence during the fourth century. But in reading the Shangqing texts and their discussion of “Lord Azure Lad,” Bokenkamp discovered that the practice of physiognomy was really no less opaque than embryonic re-conception. The reason for this is that the so-called physical traits that indicated one’s destiny, and could be altered as well, were only bare outside markings that telegraphed one’s fate. Far more important were the internal traits, to which only the privileged Daoists enjoyed access. In addition, though the signs might be altered, they were mere indications of the “merit inherited by ancestors.” One of the facts that Bokenkamp’s inquiry reveals is the profound extent to which *ming*, whether in Daoist circles or in the society at large, was seen as determined by family connections and lineage.

With Zong-qi Cai’s essay on Tao Qian and the “multiple vistas” of *ming* that influenced his work, there is a shift in the volume from religious,

philosophical, and to an extent political themes to more literary ones, though the political element remains. Cai explores how four different interpretations or “horizons of meaning” came to play a significant role in Tao’s poetry and his view of life. In fact, as he concludes at the end of his detailed account, “to fully understand the transformative power of Tao Qian’s poetry” one must comprehend how these multiple vistas of *ming* interacted with Tao’s life at various stages.

Like Schaberg’s essay, Cai begins his with a reflection on one of the earliest discussions of *ming* in Chinese discourse: Duke Wen’s famed “understanding of *ming*” in the *Zuozhuan*. Cai sees the term as actually containing four different dimensions, each of which is distinguished from the others. *Ming* could mean the demands that Heaven puts on one, one’s actual life span, one’s destiny in life, or the natural course that one should follow. He then goes on to demonstrate how each of these “horizons”—demands, life span, destiny, and natural course—plays out in the poetry of one of the great masters of the Six Dynasties period, Tao Qian.

Cai argues that, especially in Tao’s miscellaneous poems, *zashi*, and in his imitative ancient verse, *nigu*, the poet at the very least is wistful about human transience, though not necessarily obsessed with the finitude of his own life span. Cai then connects this wistfulness with a “hedonist” view of life, one in which one values the corporeal over other dimensions of existence. These poems express sorrow over the evanescence of life. However, far more crucial to Tao’s worldview is what Cai refers to as the struggle between a destiny-centered theory of *ming* and one that emphasizes the demands put on one to act in accordance with Heaven’s wishes. He offers his own broad survey of the historical development of the notion(s) of *ming*, particularly in Confucian texts. In the course of this survey he discovers a gradual loss of faith in a just Heaven’s ability to articulate and effectively reward behavior based on the demands it puts on its subjects. As such, the notion of *ming* gradually experiences a reconceptualization, and a meaning closer to “destiny” or “purposeless predeterminism” gains currency. Cai’s survey culminates in a discussion of Dong Zhongshu and Wang Mang’s accounts of *ming*, the former of which establishes an all-inclusive, vertical system of responsibility and the latter of which incorporates augury telling into the *ming* framework as a way of legitimizing the overthrow of the Han throne. Plaintive rhapsodies by Sima Qian, Li Kang, Tao Qian, and others have come to represent the paradox of the conflict between the “demands” of Heaven and an understanding of one’s irrevocable destiny, but these poems are far different in mood and content from the philosophical discourse. Rather, they exhibit a personal tone in their expression of a real existential

dilemma, the resignation to one's destiny with a simultaneous commitment to fulfilling the demands bestowed by Heaven. Cai's account is an interesting complement to Puett's.

Zong-qi Cai sees Tao Qian as firmly in the tradition of Sima Qian: one who embraces the "demands-centered" theory of *ming* espoused by the Confucians; one who, like the great historian, yearns for an immortal name that will transcend the mutability of physical existence. As an act of defiance against the vagaries of "destiny," Tao returns to his reclusive life on the farm and views poverty as a virtue—much like the Confucian exemplars Bo Yi and Shu Qi as well as Yan Hui. His eremitic poetry provides an opportunity to turn the punishment of destiny—that is, the lack of reward in this life—into a chance to establish a great name for himself as one who persevered against his fate and inscribed it in the elegant language of poetry and prose.

In the process of establishing this identity independent of but not inconsistent with the conventional Confucian path, Tao Qian established the fourth and final horizon of *ming*, basing it on a *xuanxue* (Abstruse Learning) reading of Zhuangzi that one "do what they are naturally inclined to do," to follow one's "inner tendencies." Cai provides a reading of one of Tao Qian's poems of the Dao on returning to a farming life and suggests that it bears a close thematic resemblance to Guo Xiang's reading of Zhuangzi. The result of this understanding is that one should adopt a stoic attitude toward life and follow the natural course of things "without fear or exultation." At one time or another, and sometimes simultaneously, Tao's poetry adheres to one or another of these four shifting horizons in the meaning of *ming*, which together form a complex vision of life.

As an anthropologist, Steven Sangren is particularly interested in the relationship between texts and the cultural context that has produced them. It is with this in mind that he approaches the Ming dynasty epic *The Investiture of the Gods*. Sangren's analysis of the chapters that relate the story of Nezha, a half-immortal, half-human warrior whom legend has it is sent to assist Jiang Ziya with the preordained overthrow of the Shang dynasty, focuses on the issues of transcendence and narrative uses of fate. Like other great late dynastic narratives, such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Investiture of the Gods* narrates historical events whose outcomes are already known and determined. Interest in them as narratives stems from their ability to relate in detail how fated events that the readership is familiar with have come to be.

The narrative posits several hierarchical levels, each of which transcends the previous one: in the human realm, powerful officials transcend ordinary people, and above them is the transcendence of the imperium. Beyond this level still is the transcendent level of the gods. But the theme of

transcendence and fate truly comes into play when one realizes, as Sangren notes, that “not even the gods can withstand the immutability of” Heaven’s decree that the Shang must fall. In the inexorable logic of *tianming*, the transcendent power of history has determined what the outcome will be. However, as Sangren goes on to ponder, in the realm of narrative other transcendent powers are in play, namely the author of the narrative itself.

Drawing upon Terence Turner’s reformulation of the notion of transcendence, an inquiry into the nature of hierarchies, where the upper levels are generative yet are viewed from below, through the lower levels, Sangren describes how each ever more transcendent level appears simply to be implementing the command of Heaven, even as each level forces the lower ones to submit to its own will. All this is perceived as possible only if one accepts the ultimate authority that transcends one’s level—that is, as long as one suspends disbelief in the notion that *tianming* itself is a product, not of Heaven, or even of gods, but of human culture. On the level of the narrative, the enthralling nature of the literary work, similarly, is possible only as long as one is willing to suspend disbelief in its veracity by ignoring the role of an author, who is not representing a preexisting reality but constructing an imagined world itself not “fated” to correspond to anything other than the principles of good fiction writing. Although the author of the work controls how the narrative develops, his own creative powers are represented in veiled form as the workings of Heaven; he therefore attempts to subordinate his authority to a supposed higher, transcendent power. Believability, not to mention the narrative cohesion of the epic, rests on that appeal.

Perhaps not since the fateful acknowledgment of Duke Wen’s understanding *ming* has one’s life so depended upon this notion as has that of the illustrious literary critic Jin Shengtan, the subject of Patricia Sieber’s contribution to our volume. Sieber’s treatment of the relationship between *ming* and *cai* 才 (talent) in late imperial critical discourse shows how one’s literary talent can negatively or even mortally affect one’s public career, as Jin’s public beheading testifies. Indeed, some Qing critics would go on to take an accusatory stance toward *ming*, bemoaning the resentment that Heaven exhibits toward those who possess exceeding talent and achieve a resultant premature vanquishing of their existence. Like many who touch upon the *ming* theme, these critics cited the confluence of *ming*, *cai*, and *de* 德 (virtue) in the person of Yan Hui, Confucius’ favorite disciple.

The material that Sieber chooses for the substance of her discussion is “ledger literature,” copious in-text commentaries on literary works that began with Daoist texts, notably those written by Yuan Huang, Zhuhong Yunqi, and Liu Zongzhou. Yuan Huang argued that *ming* could be altered through human intervention and seemed to grow out of the tradition of

Daoist thinkers that claim the attention of Campany and Bokenkamp. Zhu-hong Yunqi went so far as to develop a complex scheme of penalties and rewards, a point system in fact, according to which the actions one took here on earth would affect one's longevity. When one adds to this Liu Zongzhou's imperatives to adhere strictly to Confucian rituals, what one brings away from these critics is a new sense of how texts are to be produced, reproduced, and distributed. "Proper textual production" would be rewarded, while punitive measures could be taken against those who disseminated to the public texts that were considered inappropriate.

The punitive tone that pervades the works of these early ledger writers is mirrored by the strict rules of censorship imposed on fictional and dramatic literature by the early Ming emperors. Although this eased somewhat in the mid- and late Ming dynasty, the effects of printing and reprinting on the "fates" of scholars was a constant concern for all the prominent collectors and editors of the era. Nevertheless, their dissemination of texts destined to be classics continued unabated. The key to successfully promoting controversial texts such as the *Xixiang ji* and *Shuibu zhuan* was to somehow maneuver around the prohibitions against the propagation of "slanderous" material, as many of the most popular works of the day were considered by the censors. The contribution of Li Zhi in this regard was immense, as he actively sought out texts that had been considered too risky for promotion, or even taboo, by early Ming critics. Li Zhi railed against the "falseness of human relations" that resulted from the overly aggressive pursuit of wealth. In its place, Li advocated *zhen* 真 (authenticity), the expression and cultivation of true feelings in literature. He argued that the best literary representatives of this were the *Shuibu zhuan* and the *Xixiang ji*. He also defended commentaries on these and other texts as well as their dissemination "on the basis of genuine feeling being fostered." His endorsement of these texts facilitated their proliferation. Thus, his work was an excellent example of how one might negotiate the risky business of the injunctions against vernacular fiction and drama. Of course, his suicide is a clear indication that the promotion of such texts could have a drastic effect on one's *ming*.

In the final portion of her essay, Sieber develops an insightful argument that attempts to explain, on the one hand, why it is that Jin Shengtan, a writer of ledgers on the *Shuibu zhuan* and *Xixiang ji*, himself risked death by propagating these dangerous texts and, on the other hand, why he actually invoked punitive discourse in a poem written just before his death. Jin essentially agreed with the censors in arguing that "unless one is a sage one should not write" and, indeed, "one ought to be executed and have his writings burned." But what Jin was attempting to do in fact was turn the tables on the censors in an effort to rescue these much maligned texts. By invoking

the punitive discourse himself, he “preempts any accusations” of salacious activities of his own. He identifies in this *jueming ci*, or “poem written on the eve of execution” (which could be more closely parsed as the “severance” of one’s *ming*), with Confucius—Confucius the censor as Sieber points out. By accepting the censor’s remonstrances against publication and propagation unless one is a sage, Jin actually trumped their accusations and instilled doubt about the justness of their death sentence upon him. He thereby was able to “save” these great texts for posterity even though he himself met an untimely and premature end.

The essays thus far in the volume have tended either to highlight the complexity and cultural/historical situatedness of *ming* or have contested outright the easy equation between this Chinese signifier and the Western concept of fatalism or determinism, preconceived notions that a Western reader could easily mistake for *ming*. In Woei Lien Chong’s essay, we have the first example of a discussion of scholars who are self-consciously anti-*ming*, at least insofar as that would entail a moral position of fatalistic indolence. Chong discusses the work of three contemporary Chinese philosophers—Li Zehou, Liu Xiaofeng, and Liu Xiaobo—delineating how each has attributed China’s modern predicament to a “hubris” in Chinese thought and political action. What constitutes hubris shifts somewhat between the three thinkers, but they all agree in maintaining that modern China is emerging from a stage of severe crisis, and that this crisis has arisen as a result of its general reliance on traditional modes of thought and behavior.

Li Zehou, Chong observes, attributes the great catastrophes of the Mao era to what she refers to as “voluntarism”: the belief that the purified moral will is capable of transforming both physical and mental reality and regulating the cosmic order of things. Li does not locate this type of hubris in a radically antitraditional Maoism, as might be conventionally suggested; rather, he argues that the problem with Maoist thought is that it is too beholden to Confucian thought, in particular Wang Yangming’s strand of neo-Confucianism. Wang allowed for the dynamic role of the human subject, an idea eventually seized upon by Mao but that can be traced from Confucius, who integrated shamanistic rituals into a moral philosophy predicated upon harmony, through Dong Zhongshu, who elevated the human moral will to cosmic proportions, through Wang Yangming and even Kang Youwei, down to Maoism, whose most radical strain advocated marshaling a superhuman will against the forces of nature and history. The only problem was that history and nature would not bend that far.

Liu Xiaofeng also identifies a kind of hubris in traditional Chinese philosophy and maintains that the basic attitude of traditional Chinese

thought, especially Zhuangzi, is “indifference,” an indifference that stems from the overbearing presence of *ming*. But Liu is not satisfied with leaving the critique here. He also suggests that the highly practical or worldly quality of Chinese philosophy, and the absence of a transcendent god, have led traditional Chinese thought to place too much responsibility in the hands of human beings. In particular, this has created a “deification of finite entities,” that is, an elevation of human institutions such as aspects of the government, including the imperium, to the celestial level. As there is no distinction between the heavenly and the human realm, then, Liu Xiaofeng notes that the attempt to make a “heaven on earth” (by deifying the human—the cult of Mao) in the form of the Cultural Revolution was a catastrophe almost fated to occur, given the way traditional Chinese philosophy has developed.

An emphasis on how certain continuities in traditional and post-1949 Chinese thought have led to modern crises is also evident in the work of Liu Xiaobo, an atheist existentialist who advocates “total Westernization.” Western literature and philosophy are superior to Chinese, Liu maintains, precisely because they do not domesticate or embrace notions such as *ming*, but rather view them as anathema to the true building blocks of a modern society: freedom and individualism. Liu Xiaobo’s mixture of British liberalism, with its key concept of liberty, and atheistic existentialism, which challenges the individual to define one’s own essence separately from institutional identities, is an antidote, he would argue, to the modern manifestation of “Chinese despotism,” which he considers only superficially removed from that of imperial China.

All three of these philosophers distance themselves from the traditional notion of *ming*. Although they do not directly attack or criticize it, as may be the case in modern Chinese literature, Woei Lien Chong argues that they certainly see the various “hubrises” of socialist China as functioning in concert with what they would consider the stifling character of *ming* ideology. The three thinkers are different from one another in significant ways. Li Zehou and Liu Xiaobo would not advocate Christianity; the two Liu’s are less teleological than Li. According to Li Zehou, the fundamental source of hubris in Chinese thought is the idea that both knowledge and action are direct and unmediated—misconceptions which, he holds, have fostered an unbridled belief in the ability of the moral hero to mold the cosmos purely by means of his willpower. In contrast, Li follows Kant in his emphasis on the mediated nature of both knowledge and action: empirical knowledge is mediated by the categories of the knowing subject, and human action in the real physical world is mediated by labor and technology. For this reason, Li argues, Mao’s preoccupation with ideological campaigns and mass mobilization as motors of social progress was bound to lead to disaster: it was merely

the most recent form of ancient Chinese belief that there is no ontological rift between mind and matter, and that both are equally malleable by the morally purified human will.

Liu Xiaofeng also locates the origin of Chinese hubris in the field of ontology, but in a different way. In his view, the mistake made by Chinese thought was, rather, that no ontological difference was thematized between humankind and a transcendent, personal divinity. As a result, in Liu's view, the Chinese lack a sense of original sin, and they therefore tend to put humankind on a par with the divine. This has given rise to a strong tendency to deify finite entities such as history, the state, and mortal leaders.

The motif that the absence of a belief in original sin has had far-reaching consequences for China's (political) culture is echoed by Liu Xiaobo, although, unlike Liu Xiaofeng, his idea of authentic personhood is not Christian in origin, but predominantly shaped by atheistic existentialism; in reaction against the utopian frenzy of the Maoist past, he scorns any form of organized narrative that seeks to provide life with a collective meaning. He holds that life has no intrinsic meaning—every attempt to fill this void is fraudulent and based on hubris.

Sabina Knight's essay addresses the relationship between *ming* and gender in Chinese literature by discussing in detail three works from the twentieth century and inquiring into how *ming* "mystifies gender-based oppression" and encourages resignation in the face of the seeming inevitability of such oppression. She prefaces her literary analysis with some remarks on Ding Ling's well-known essay "Thoughts on March Eighth," written in 1942, a watershed year for Chinese literature as it signaled the turning point in the relationship between the educated elite's ability to express itself and the control of the Chinese Communist party led by Mao Zedong. In fact, Ding Ling's essay, in addition to a couple of short stories she wrote around the same time, did not sit well with the party's high echelon and formed in part the impetus for this tectonic reining in of the literate class. While this has all been documented before, Knight's contribution is to dwell in particular on the deployment of *ming* as a way of "militating against thinking about internalized and external oppression." She also notes with some irony that "discourses of inevitability" have changed over time, with more room for maneuver actually being accorded to *ming* in traditional times and a greater sense of resignation in the face of *ming* occurring in the twentieth century, a point that is implicitly upheld by a number of the essays in this volume. In the Tang dynasty classical tale "The Story of Ying-ying," for example, she observes that an appeal to inevitability absolves the male protagonist from any guilt over abandoning a lover, but oddly the moralistic tone of the work undercuts itself, as it portrays Ying-ying sympathetically.

Such ambivalences are less in evidence in the twentieth century, as Knight's inquiry into the late-Qing novel *Sea of Regret*, the Republican-era short story "Crescent Moon," and the post-Mao novella "Soft Is the Chain" establishes. In *Sea of Regret*, the author, Wu Woyao, in constructing a narrative of two failed attempts at arranged marriage, leaves open the question of what destroys the marriages: the individual's inability or unwillingness to change or society itself. Dihua, the female protagonist of one of the narratives, seems unable to entertain alternatives, and although she blames herself for the demise of her marriage, she also is all too willing to attribute her predicament to fate. Her abject devotion to her departed husband and refusal to entertain any options underscore the extent to which she is conditioned to adhere to an ideology where *ming* rationalizes and reinforces social oppression; and, as Knight suggests, it is no solace that in the parallel story line the male protagonist Zhong'ai renounces the world, for his resignation is depicted as being a matter of choice rather than submission to deterministic forces.

The tension of Lao She's "Crescent Moon" lies in the young female protagonist's desperate attempts to seek control over her life in the face of certain doom. The image of the moon serves as a punctuation mark to the theme of determinism by accentuating the feelings of fatalism and cyclicity more present with each failed effort of the protagonist to liberate herself from her lot as a prostitute. As a Marxist, Lao She ultimately would argue that the solution to one's unfortunate fate cannot come from individual effort but must be sought in collective action, though his own despicable treatment at the hands of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution raises doubts over how realistic this solution may actually be. Dai Houying's work takes up the post-Cultural Revolution era and most poignantly raises the question of whether progress in history is possible. While *ming* is used to mark life's turning points for the protagonist Wen Ruixia, a young widow, and tends to "script" her notions of what love, marriage, and mothering should be, the reader is left wondering at the end of this work whether she is not an anachronism, caught in the final throes of a feudalistic era that, hopefully, do not obtain in the case of her own child or in that of other modern subjectivities. But this is a question that probably will remain for later generations not so closely connected with our times to decide.

My own essay, the final one in the volume, treats the question of Chinese cultural continuity, particularly in the immediate contemporary situation, and how it impacts on the status of Taiwan vis-à-vis mainland China. That the status of Taiwan is a burning political issue is clear to all who read the newspapers, but a deeper question is—how is this issue informed and contested by the cultural framework of what constitutes being Chinese? I

cannot in this forum provide a complete answer to this question, but what I venture to do is to isolate the example of *ming* and in the process argue that when one begins to scrutinize particular manifestations or signs of culture, such as a concept that has operated throughout history and transcends class, one finds, at least in the case of *ming*, considerable cross-strait continuity. That is the general picture. Naturally, there are permutations in the way *ming* is deployed or invoked in texts. But these differences, I believe, are more nuances among individual authors than they are essential cultural differences that form a pattern distinguishing Taiwanese literature from that of mainland Chinese literature.

I begin my essay by illustrating just how pervasive *ming* is in contemporary Chinese culture through the example of Gao Xingjian, his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and his magnum opus, *Soul Mountain*. Through textual analysis I illustrate that in fact the issue of *ming* served as the impetus for Gao's writing of this expansive narrative, for it was his (mis)diagnosis as having cancer and resultant "retrieval" of his *ming* from the jaws of death that caused him to rethink the way he was living his life, to redirect his energy and eventually write the book. From there, I essentially discuss four narrative texts, two from Taiwan and two from mainland China. Each has its unique tendencies and trajectories, but each also shares some bedrock notions as well. *Ming*, for contemporary Chinese writers, still signifies the kinds of fatalistic proscriptions and prohibitions one finds in May Fourth literature, such as some of that Sabina Knight discusses. But it also seems to inform part of the psyche, the subjective makeup of some of the characters in the stories I read, such as Madame Qian in Bai Xianyong's "Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream" or the unnamed protagonist in Zhang Xinxin's "Dreams of Our Age." In these two works the protagonists fight against the unremitting logic of their *ming*, but at the same time *ming* then becomes a trope of identity, in a manner of speaking, not just a part of life but the essential part. Added to this, then, is a sense that *ming* is a life-giving force, that which constitutes life even though one may struggle against its strictures. Thus, when Fugui, in Yu Hua's *To Live*, for example, narrates the sorrowful story of his family, each picked off by the vagaries of *ming*, one also comes to note that in spite of our attention to the life-limiting aspect of *ming* we should still treat it with respect, because it is also the life-giving force.

Finally, each text in its own way is shaped in terms of plot progression, style, and structure by the gravity that *ming* exerts upon it. In Wang Wenxing's *Backed against the Sea*, for example, the ultimately failed attempt on Wang's part to create a language that defies the laws of determinism is actually foregrounded and even mocked in part by the action of the story, the totally random and irreverent appropriation of fortune-telling paraphernalia

by the antihero who, in a simple act of trying to make a little money, actually, or perhaps necessarily, comes up with a prediction on the lives of four individuals too uncannily close to the mark for comfort. That is the irony of *ming*: the more one searches in Chinese discourse for ways around it, for avenues of escape or at least avoidance, the more the necessity of its ubiquity is confirmed.

As I mentioned at the outset of this introduction, a volume of collected essays can scarcely exhaust the nearly boundless material on *ming* that exists in Chinese discourse, any more than it will lay to rest debates about the nature of *ming*. One of the interesting features of editing such a book is the opportunity to observe how the book itself is in some ways shaped by conditions outside one's grasp—conditions that tempt one once again to refer the reader to *ming* for an explanation. A crucial factor in the ultimate form of this volume was the extent to which scholars were able or unable to contribute to it, and much of those determinations resided in the coincidental circumstances of each individual. That the volume does not therefore presume to be comprehensive or conclusive is itself a result of the *ming* of this project. That said, there are some major areas in which we would have liked to delve but for one reason or another were unable. Future treatments of *ming* must address the relationship between it and the practice of divination. Richard Smith has already published on this subject, and his eagerly awaited forthcoming article on the subject updates his findings (Smith forthcoming). Lisa Raphals has embarked on a book-length study comparing divination practices in the Chinese and Greek civilizations. These works will help to fill this gap. It also would have been ideal had we been able to include a chapter on the relationship between the indigenous notion of *ming* as a Chinese concept and the Buddhist notion of karmic retribution. Jacques Gernet has argued that, “thanks to certain analogies” such as that between *ming* and karma, Buddhism was more readily absorbed into Chinese practices of belief (Gernet 1982: 215). It would be worthwhile to hear from the perspective of a Buddhist scholar what the ways are in which *ming* and karma are similar and different. The implications for this discussion are quite great in Chinese thought and literature, for the interaction of the two concepts becomes evident not only in popular religion and social practice but in late imperial narrative and neo-Confucian thought (see Metzgar 1977: 127–134 and Hou 1983). In any case, it is my hope that this volume will not put an end to discussions concerning *ming* but will serve to engender more, and that this diverse set of perspectives has produced a work of value to readers in Chinese studies and comparative cultures, scholars and students alike.



PART I

The Foundations of Fate

Early Chinese Conceptions of *Ming*

1

Command and the Content of Tradition

DAVID SCHABERG

邾文公卜遷于繹·史曰·利於民而不利於君·邾子曰·苟利於民·孤之利也·天生民而樹之君·以利之也·民既利矣·孤必與焉·左右曰·命可長也·君何弗為·邾子曰·命在養民·死之短長·時也·民苟利矣·遷也·吉莫如之·遂遷于繹·五月·邾文公卒·君子曰知命·

Duke Wen of Zhu divined about moving his capital to Yi. The scribe said, “It will benefit the people, but it will not benefit you, my lord.” The viscount of Zhu said: “So long as it benefits the people, then it is a benefit to me. Heaven gives birth to the people and sets up a ruler for them in order to benefit them. Since the people will have derived some benefit, then I too must have some part in it.”

His attendants said, “This is a case in which *ming* could be extended. Why do you not act upon it?”

The viscount of Zhu said: “*Ming* consists in nurturing the people. Whether death comes sooner or later is a matter of timeliness. So long as the people are to derive some benefit, then let us move. Nothing else could be so auspicious.”

So they moved to Yi. In the fifth month, Duke Wen of Zhu died. The nobleman says, “He knew *ming*.” (*Zuozhuan* Wen 13.3; Yang Bojun 1990: 597–598)¹

The anecdote is plotted around an ambiguity in the term “*ming*.” The attendants’ question implies that, in regular usage, and perhaps especially in connection with divination, *ming* means “life span”: the disadvantage the prognosticator has warned of is a premature death. To the extent that he shares this interpretation of the divination results, the ruler appears to accept this use of the term. But in a gesture of sublation that is not uncommon in

this text's defense of ritualist values,² he also rejects personal benefit and the corresponding sense of *ming*, substituting for them a notion of *ming* as the “command” that requires a ruler to benefit his people, even at his own expense. Both meanings of the term appear to be as old as the term itself, with the personal sense of “life span” derived from the more general sense of “command.”³ What is new is the perceived gap between the two senses. The narrative suggests that by the time the anecdote was being told in its current form—certainly after the death of the duke in 613 BCE, and likely two or more centuries later (Schaberg 2001: 315–324)—the sense of *ming* as “life span” was quite distinct, and had acquired enough weight to serve as foundation and foil for a conservative reassertion of the older meaning.

If the ruler “knew *ming*,” as the gentleman-commentator claims he did, what is it that he knew? It is not a fated end. The early Chinese narratives that do bespeak a belief in predestination rarely call it *ming*, and the attendants' remarks show that the ruler's end is somehow negotiable.⁴ Nor is it solely the impersonal requirements of ruling; if the anecdote is to be interesting, neither the ruler himself nor the commentator can have believed that the divination was inaccurate. What the ruler is said to have known, both in the anecdote itself and in the gentleman's reconciling précis, is the cost of invoking an abstraction about duty. Where generalization (any ruler's commission to benefit his people) is imposed upon volition and upon particular deeds, there is a loss. This loss, implicit in any use of the term “*ming*,” is a sort of death, whether it is the duke's real disappearance into his duty or a less dramatic subjection of self to impersonal order.

It is not a coincidence that the command the ruler carries out is related to *li* 利, “benefit” or “profit,” and through *li* to an economic *imaginaire* in which public and moral gains can pay for personal losses. Throughout its early history, the term “*ming*” is tied up with precisely such exchanges; on the occasion when it is issued, and as it is transmitted thereafter, the command is financed by gifts both material and intangible. These gifts, understood as the justification for whatever sacrifices the *ming* might require, supply the energy for the various conversions *ming* must undergo and ensure, at least in pious theory, that a commission will not be turned to private profit. In the vision of *ming* that the ruler and the gentleman-commentator uphold, *ming* and the perquisites that are granted with it always win an appropriate return.

The etymology of *ming* and the history of the graph used to write it reflect some of these conceptions. Laurent Sagart, observing that the graphs *ming* 命 and *ling* 令 have nearly identical functions in the earliest writings, argues that the two graphs “represent iambic and fusing variants of the same prefixed word: *^bməreng-s and *^bm-reng-s respectively, with regular loss of

the prefix in the former” (Sagart 1999: 79).⁵ Although the function of the *m*-prefix is more obscure than that of many other affixes, Sagart suggests that in verbs the prefix may signal intense volitional engagement of the agent with the aims of his or her action, and that in some cases the prefix marks an imperative or deontic mood (Sagart 1999: 82–84). William Boltz’s discussion of these graphs suggests another possible relation between them. In his view, *ming* 命 constitutes a *xiesheng* 諧聲 series with *ming* 名 and *ming* 鳴; this series shows that the element *kou* 口, usually read **kbugx*, could also be read **mjing*, meaning “to call,” and that it was phonohoric in all three graphs.⁶ Thus the element 令 in *ming* 命 would serve as a determinative, specifying that 口 was in this case to be read **mjing*, and the element 夕 (itself polyphonic, with a reading **mjiang*) would serve the same purpose in the graph 名 (Boltz 1994: 103–105). As Boltz makes clear in a later examination of the same problem (Boltz 1999: 98), his argument assumes that the readings of 命, 名, and 鳴 were the same, except for the final *-s* that is reflected in the Middle Chinese *qusheng* 去聲 pronunciation of the graph 命.

As different as they are, the two hypotheses confirm in their own ways, and on very different grounds, a common set of etymological truths about the word “*ming*.” The word designates a special form of speech, a sort of calling or naming that is singularly focused on specific goals. Perhaps, as Boltz holds, 口 has a phonohoric function in 命, 名, and 鳴, and these graphs are representations of a single root. In this case, commanding was, for Chinese speakers of the second millennium BCE, related both to the act of assigning a name and to the expressive cries of birds and animals; it was purposive and effective speech. Perhaps, as Sagart maintains, the prefixed *m*- in 命 signals the strong volition that accompanies the act; in this case the command was marked, among all types of utterances, as the type of utterance singularly devoted to the realization of aims. That these aims are realized only at a cost, both to the commander and to the commanded, is evident in the narrative of Duke Wen’s death and in innumerable earlier contexts.

From these elements one may reconstruct for *ming* a definition that accounts for the use of the term in Western Zhou writings and explains in part its later association with notions of predestination. For the Western Zhou, and in ceremonial settings in later centuries, *ming* denoted both the occasion and the content of a special form of speech; this speech was distinguished as memorable and binding, not only by the gifts that accompanied it, but also by internal stylistic features and by a strong association with writing. The act of commanding was one element, and arguably the most important, in the system of distribution and circulation by which the Zhou kings governed. The command itself was speech to be remembered and invoked, and its special status was evident in such characteristics as rhyme and

formulaic phrasing.⁷ While bronze inscriptions recorded commands to particular individuals and families on particular occasions, other texts from early in the Western Zhou commemorated commands that were understood to have more general significance, whether because they were issued to the king himself (as is the case with Heaven’s command, *tianming* 天命) or because the noble family that received them had the power to portray its duties as the shared duties of a whole culture (as was the case with the descendants of the dukes of Zhou 周 and Shao 召). These shared commands, which one might call cultural *ming*, were the origin of such texts as the temple hymns collected in the older sections of the *Shijing* 詩經 and the speeches and dialogues collected in the *Shangshu* 尚書. By the sixth and fifth centuries, when the older institutions of commanding were disappearing, and the special language of the older *ming* was likely employed only in conscious archaism, the process of canon formation was already ensuring the transmission of some of the early texts. In this way, the notion of *ming* governed its own immortalization.

Ming, Distribution, De

The Greek word “*moira*,” whose history in some ways parallels that of *ming*, is, in its concrete and common sense, a “portion” or “share” that one receives on any occasion of distribution.⁸ Interpreted more abstractly, *moira* was a particular fated end, or even destiny itself (Dietrich 1965: 11–13). Chantraine (1968–1980.3: 678–679) relates the word to an Indo-European root meaning “to receive as one’s share or prize.” In her consideration of *moira*’s relevance to early systems of exchange, Gabriella di Mauro Battilana demonstrates that in Homeric usage, *moira* and related terms (*geras*, *dais*) designated the share of meat or of booty that a warrior could expect to receive as reward for his services in battle. Without dismissing the religious dimensions of *moira*, examined in detail by scholars of Greek religion, Battilana interprets the *moira* at work in the *Iliad*, not as a deified personification, but as a name for the system of rewards that makes the heroes fight (Battilana 1985: 53).⁹ This system of rewards implicates language: within epic, one may or may not speak *kata moiran*, “as is one’s due” or “according to destiny,” and epic itself is a reward, in the form of remembered and repeated language, for sufferings that could not be redeemed during the life of the hero (Battilana 1985: 42–47; Nagy 1979: 40).

Western Zhou aristocrats were not Homeric heroes, and no Chinese epic is to be pieced together from the bronze inscriptions and the received texts of the period. What epic is has as much to do with its later fate—organization as large-scale narrative, association with tyrants and festivals, and canonization and translation—as it does with its origins in the com-

memoration of heroic portions. Nevertheless, there are similarities between the distribution that goes on at a Homeric feast and the distribution that is recorded in a Chinese bronze inscription. The similarities stem from features that define aristocratic groupings in different parts of the world. The problem of an aristocracy is to control the conversion of wealth into prestige; since mere possession accomplishes nothing, wealth must be expended, whether as payment for services or in the form of gifts. The latter are especially useful in the process of conversion, since they can simultaneously reward services, symbolize recognition, and advertise generosity. Groups of aristocrats tend to elect from among themselves an individual or group whose charge it is to act as arbiter of rewards and focus of distribution. This chief—*basileus* or *wang* 王—is duty-bound to uphold the system of distribution by which wealth and prestige are conferred. When he fails to do so, and claims for himself something that is recognized as the due of another (as Agamemnon did in seizing Briseis) or otherwise abuses his privileges (as legend says the last king of Shang did in his displays of greed and cruelty), he endangers the system itself. Unless he justifies or redresses the error, the ruler risks his own fall and, in extreme cases, the disintegration of the community that distribution once united.

In an article on the patterns of exchange revealed by Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, Constance Cook has argued that “the right to cast, inscribe and use a bronze vessel was a gift from the Zhou ruler to those he wished to incorporate into his power.” Besides the material objects the king bestowed during an investiture ceremony, gifts also included the *ming* itself, later inscribed upon vessels commemorating the ceremony; Cook explains *ming* as the “charge” or “official notice of empowerment by the king or his representative to the recipient of increased socio-economic rights within Zhou society” (Cook 1997: 260). For Cook, the context in which *ming* was delivered resembles potlatch as it is known from other societies. The display of wealth and beneficence, accompanied by carefully choreographed ritual and concluding in a banquet, helped to seal social bonds and to extend a ruler’s power (ibid.: 284–288).

As *raison d’être* for the ceremony, the language of *ming* was set apart from ordinary language. In reconstructions of the investiture ceremony, the rhythm of the occasion and the movements of the participants appear to be organized around the moment at which the king or his proxy utters the *ming* (Cook 1997: 280; Chen Hanping 1986: 101–130). The use of writing and of sound patterning—features that are discussed further in the second part of this essay—helped to establish the extraordinary nature of the king’s utterance. As Cook notes, Virginia Kane (1982–1983) argued that this utterance was itself a gift, and perhaps the most important of the gifts granted during

the investiture ceremony. This conception of *ming* as gift helps to account for the close association between *ming* and *de* 德. Although it cannot be denied that in the earliest epigraphic materials *de* has already acquired the abstract sense of “inward power” or “charisma” or “virtue,” the concrete sense of “gift” accompanies and contributes to the more abstract sense. David Nivison frames *de* as the “moral force” that the recipient of a gift or favor feels as a “psychic power” emanating from the giver. In his interaction with spirits and noble families, the king cultivates his moral force through regular sacrifices and other displays of beneficence (Nivison 1996b: 26). Vassili Kryukov (1995: 315–316) suggested that one might conditionally translate *de* as “gracious gift of Heaven”: “Besides Heaven and *Shang di*, *de* is in the privileged possession of dead kings and other aristocratic ancestors. . . . *De* is not the private property of individuals, it belongs to the clan and can be transmitted to posterity.” As Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎 (Kominami 1992: 39, 50) has argued, the earliest form of the graph for *de* implies a connection with land tenure and military conquest; although the word seems originally to have designated the vital force bestowed upon an individual by Heaven, when the graph was created it appears to have combined aspects of punishment and beneficence. That the Old Chinese pronunciation of *de* and 得, “to obtain,” was identical (**tik*, in Baxter’s reconstruction) suggests that the words are cognate (Nivison 1996a: 33), as does the tendency of Han philosophers and lexicographers to use the latter graph in glossing the former (Sun Xidan 1989.3: 982; Hao et al. 1989: 434, 1043). In one pair of bronze inscriptions, *de* replaces the word *xiu* 休, “bounty,” in the formula *duiyang wang xiu* 對揚王休, “in response extolled the king’s bounty”; the implication is that *de*, too, can refer to the gifts themselves (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 251–252). Similarly, in a later inscription, the caster speaks of making a *bu* 壺 wine-pot, “with which to feast my guests, creating *de* without flaw” 用卿賓客、為德無瑕 (Shirakawa 1962–1984.39: 517). Besides the sacrificial uses to which he will put the new vessel, the caster looks forward to the feasts where it will serve as part of the equipment of gift giving and entertainment.

The association of *de* with feasting and the redistribution of goods and prestige is especially clear in the *Shijing*’s praise songs. In “*Jia le*” 假樂 (Mao 249),¹⁰ for instance, the nobleman *junzi* 君子, acting as conduit for gifts and commands from Heaven, bestows them upon his guests (represented by the singer) in a feast. His superior *de* (*ling de* 令德) and “reputation for *de*” (*deyin* 德音) allow the man to receive emoluments and blessings from Heaven and to redistribute them to others in a perpetuation of the inherited political and social order.¹¹ In the language of such encomia, the connection between *de* and *ming* is a given and is implicitly a connection financed by the value of

gifts. From this perspective, the *deyin* described in the third stanza of “Jia le” is not simply “the report of virtue” or (as has been suggested) an early graphic error for *de yan* 德言, “virtue and words” (Yu Xingwu 1982: 193–201). Since the phrase is often used in contexts involving the enumeration and exchange of food and other gifts, its meaning appears to be more specific: it is the “reputation for liberality” that a singer may have cause to praise in a host, guest, or ancestor, or that he may blacken in a blame song. In “Ju xia” 車牽 (Mao 218), for instance, the singer who welcomes a bride and her retinue for a wedding feast makes *deyin* the real reason for the match: “It is not thirst, not hunger, / But a reputation for liberality that brings us together” 匪飢匪渴 · 德音來括. That is, *deyin* as fine repute is the immediate justification for both the wedding and the feast itself. That *de* in this passage has to do with gifts is confirmed by a later couplet: “Although we have no *de* to give you, / Let us sing and dance” 雖無德與女 · 式歌且舞.¹² Invoked in the closing lines of certain songs, *deyin* may also have a self-referential dimension: the song itself is the medium by which reputation, good or bad, will be preserved (Mao 83, 128, and 160).

Like *deyin*, *ming* too designates a sort of language, often poetic or patterned, that attends the distribution of gifts. But the two types of language are different. If *deyin* corresponds to *de* as the generosity of an individual, *ming* corresponds to the more abstract *de*, the familial prestige and moral force that is accumulated through liberal behavior. In “Jia le,” the singer’s mention of the *ming* that the nobleman has earned leads directly into an enumeration of the material rewards that *ming* will bring and the descendants who will inherit the duties and emoluments. In the grandest praise songs, the “Daya” 大雅 songs on the origins and maintenance of Zhou dynastic power, *de* and *ming* are closely linked; the former brings the latter, and the latter confirms and commemorates the former. Kominami, who examines the structure of such conversions in the bronze inscriptions, argues elsewhere in the same article (Kominami 1992: 31, 38) that *ming*, whether as Heaven’s command to a king or as a king’s command to a lesser noble, requires that words be spoken aloud; the command must be heard to be effective. To extend his observations in light of the workings of *deyin*, one might argue that, like most bronze inscriptions, many of the *Shu* texts and certain of the oldest *Shi* songs are the end product of a dynamic of distribution and transformation. What begins in the liberality and cultivation of a nobleman, and in Heaven’s recognition of those qualities, is transformed, on occasions of feasting and gift giving, into the words of commands. These words owe their survival, when they do survive, to the wealth and moral excellence implied by early uses of *de*; in the ancient world, as in our own, messages funded by or

told about the powerful were much more likely than others to be transmitted to later generations. The language of the canonical texts is in some respects the echo of the old commands.

Ming, Ritual Speech, and Writing

Ming, like *moira*, is an allotment granted by a superior arbiter on an occasion of distribution. In somewhat different ways, both terms imply a relation between social status and linguistic or literary behavior. *Ming* is a pronouncement that recognizes worth and fixes status accordingly, while *moira* (in phrases like *kata moiran*, “in keeping with his part”) is the prerogative, social or other, that permits one to speak in certain ways and about certain subjects. But phrases like *kata moiran* also imply a nonsocial, superhuman distribution, an allotment of predetermined ends that in Homeric usage already means “destiny” or “death.” In this usage, *moira* is the name for the completed narrative; it is the end of the already-told story folded into the middle of the story, there to be anticipated, dreaded, and ultimately embraced. The Latin word “*fatum*,” often used to translate *moira*, captures this sense of the already-spoken as the predestined. Ernout and Meillet (1985: 220, 245–246), relating the word to the verb *for, faris*, “speak, tell,” and *fabula*, draw a more distant link to *fas*, “divine word, law.” They cite an apparent *figura etymologica* in Virgil, whose Jupiter consoles Venus, saying, “I shall speak (*fabor*) at greater length, since this worry pains you, and unrolling the secrets of the fates (*arcana fatorum*), I shall bring them to light” (*Aen.* 1.261–262). The metaphor Jupiter’s verbs imply, that of fate as language fixed in writing and gathered in a secret book, was to become a commonplace in European literature.

Despite its connections with speaking and with death, *ming* is not equivalent to *fatum*; it is not a story’s inevitable end or a predetermined allotment of life.¹³ Although it is quite clearly associated with writing, *ming* does not take over from writing an image of irrevocability, as *fatum* does. Neither Heaven’s commands to a royal line nor kings’ commands to their nobles presume a particular, necessary end. Instead, even in contexts that suggest predestination, *ming* retains the mood it has on the occasion of its pronouncement; as a locution designed to achieve aims, but by no means certain of achieving them, *ming* frequently includes or is accompanied by prayers.¹⁴ In place of the foreclosure implied by predestination, then, *ming* assumes a limited openness, the openness of an appeal. One of the functions of writing is to signal the extraordinary nature of this appeal and to focus attention on the utterance itself and the circumstances that made it a valid command. In epigraphy and in traditional texts, references to and repro-

ductions of the *ming* return the reader to the setting in which the command was issued; *ming* is generally not transmitted alone, but with some indication of why the appeal might still have force.

As an accessory to the oral delivery of a command, writing was not merely a bureaucratic and religious tool. It was also one of many means of isolating one kind of language from normal speech, and as such was combined with other external and internal factors—gifts, ceremonial procedures, formulas, linguistic patterning—to establish the conditions of a command’s validity. The importance of special speech in ritual, and of writing in the marking of special speech, has been recognized by scholars of orality and literacy (Nagy 1990b: 65–68; Martin 1989: 12). Literacy, when it entered the scene, did not effect an immediate transformation in ritual but was assigned a role in existing practices. Deborah Steiner, writing of the classical Greeks’ use of writing in conjunction with oaths, points out that written texts did not obviate the rite or the pronouncement of the words of the oath: instead, “documents frequently served as additional symbols or talismans, as important for what they signified as for what they said, deserving of the same careful treatment as other charged goods” (Steiner 1994: 63). In connection with inscriptions on memorial statues (many of them in verse and apparently influenced by the use of poetic speech in preliterate funerary practices), Rosalind Thomas (1992: 62–63) also notes that “Writing might preserve and perhaps exaggerate earlier customs.” In the early Chinese case, even in the absence of sure knowledge of who the intended readers of inscriptions and other investiture texts were, or of what administrative and religious purposes the texts served, it is clear that one of writing’s functions was to underline and frame the words of the king, which appear normally to have been uttered aloud during the ceremony. In a few inscriptions, it appears that these written versions of the *ming* were prepared beforehand, were uttered (or read?) aloud as the king’s spoken command, and were then presented as a gift to the recipient of the command (Chen Hanping 1986: 306–307). In other cases, it seems possible that texts were produced in the course of the ceremony (Von Falkenhausen 1993: 162–163). Just as the casting of an investiture inscription served to glorify the event after the fact, so the presence of a record keeper with written charge or writing materials in hand would have served to focus attention on the language of the charge as it was uttered.

Some of the characteristics writing acquired as an adjunct to early Chinese ritual speech are apparent even earlier in the oracle bone inscriptions, generally recognized as the oldest remains of the Chinese written language.¹⁵ As in Greece and other societies that acquired literacy, writing was incorporated into an existing rite.¹⁶ Given the nature of the evidence, it cannot be known how speech was used in the preliterate divination ritual, but

the presence of what appears to be quoted speech in inscriptions from all periods strongly suggests that the function of this writing, like the Greek recording of oaths, was patterned after the function of speech in the ritual. Yet the inscriptions do not end with the representation of ritual speech. From the first they include material that presumably could not have been uttered aloud in the course of the ceremony. This narrative material, which provides a setting and a cast of characters for the ritual of divination, and in many cases recounts events that occurred days afterward, apparently serves to import the rite's conditions of validity into writing. The words of the divinatory charge are intelligible and valid only when they are framed by a knowledge of the conditions of their utterance. As a generic rule, inscriptions compensate for their separation from the occasion of utterance (the separation that critics of writing have always decried) with a set of guarantees. These include the day notation, names of participants, sometimes a quoted prognostication by the king, and sometimes the verification, with its reference to relevant later events. Nondivinatory inscriptions occasionally included on the bones also relate directly to the circumstances of divination, though more distantly (Keightley 1978: 15, 28–44).

The focus of any oracle bone inscription is the passage that records the main divinatory utterance. At least since the early Zhou, and very possibly also during the heyday of scapulimancy in the middle and late Shang, this utterance has been referred to as *ming*, “the charge” (Keightley 1978: 33). Because in the inscriptions it is always introduced by the verb “*zhen*” 貞, which can mean “to ask,” the utterance itself has been understood by some scholars as a question put to the spirits. Chinese and Western scholars now agree that it is best interpreted as a statement. Nivison defines *zhen* as to “officially certify the correctness of the results of divination about’ the following sentence, whether that sentence be a question, a statement, or a wish.” The following sentence is normally a statement, and *zhen* can usually be translated “verify” (Nivison 1989: 125).

That the statement introduced by *zhen* is elsewhere referred to as *ming* reflects both the semantic possibilities of the term “*ming*” and assumptions about what happens in divination. As command, the *ming* seems to be addressed to the shell or bone itself, since one assumes that ancestors and other numinous entities are superior to the kings and their diviners, and commands are almost never addressed to superiors.¹⁷ In English, commands are not issued to abstractions, inanimate objects, or insensible beings, and the act of commanding presumes a responsive awareness. *Ming* presumes something slightly different. Assigning a name *ming* 名, whether to a newborn, an event, or a place, is *ming* 命. It is an authoritative pronouncement which, through the magic of a word, enrolls the named entity in some existing system of

differentiations.¹⁸ A *ming* addressed to a tortoise shell is similar in that it, too, is speech (and later writing) that fixes the parameters of meaning the crack might have. In the texts that first use the phrase *ming gui* 命龜 (or *linggui* 令龜), some of which are mentioned by Keightley, it is quite clear that certain divination procedures, including the handling of the bone or shell, may be left to a specialist employee, but the act of pronouncing the *ming* aloud is reserved for the socially qualified individual whose prestige and wealth make the ceremony possible.¹⁹ To recall the associations Boltz draws around the graph 命, *ming* may refer specifically to the authoritative enunciation or calling-aloud that precedes the crack making and that determines in advance a framework for the interpretation of the crack. The response to this calling-aloud comes partly in the form of sound, the *pok* of the 卜-shaped crack as it spreads.²⁰

Most *ming* are addressed, not to inanimate objects, but to human beings, from whom they elicit speech, a response in kind. Just as the words spoken before divination establish the possibilities of meaning for the sign that is to be elicited from bone or stalks, so the commands pronounced by Heaven, by a king, or by any other superior fix a framework according to which events are to be interpreted. In an investiture ceremony, and likely in other less well-documented protocols of command, the words of the *ming* were framed and foregrounded by actions, just as they were in divination ritual. The gestures of command and response would have proceeded according to ritual prescriptions: on a certain day, the king goes to the place of the ceremony and, accompanied by the necessary personnel and gifts, positions himself facing south; the recipient of the command stands before him, facing north; the king utters the words of his command; the recipient bows in response to the command and the other gifts; later he casts a vessel, perhaps inscribing upon it a record of the event (Yoshimoto 1991: 43–44; Cook 1997: 280). The inscription records much that could not have been spoken during the ceremony and much that could not have been included in a written text of the command *lingshu* 令書 itself. As in the case of the oracle bone inscriptions, this narrative material serves to reproduce some of the validating activity of the ritual in the medium of writing. That this narrative frame normally records the time and place and names some participants in the rite, but rarely specifies the king, may be explained in two ways. First, there was no provision in Chinese ritual language for naming a living king. Kings did have personal names, but it appears that only they and their family elders used them. Until he received a posthumous title, the word for him was the word for all kings, and he was indistinguishable, at least on the level of language and ideals, from that generalized role. Second, as Kominami (1992: 8–9) argues, the investiture ceremony, because it is a reassertion of familial *de*,

transcends history and does not require that the king be identified. Since commanding itself is an attempt to impose generalized language on particular persons and decisions, the king and his utterances are, in the inscriptions, stereotyped, while unique details seem to attach to the receiver of the command and to his encounter with the command.

Ming as Formulaic Language

Bronze inscriptions would seem to have emerged as one form of written adjunct to the ceremony of investiture. Like oracle bone inscriptions, they were designed to frame and preserve authoritative utterances. Because the success of a command depended in part upon its adherence to existing practice, and therefore upon the consistency and predictability of the prescriptions offered, the language of *ming* is highly formulaic. The language of the inscriptions, including the framing narratives, is also formulaic, and for similar reasons. In making the inscription, the caster transforms the *ming* that he has received from the king into a *ming* for his descendants, using such phrases as *zizi sunsun yong bao yong* 子子孫孫永寶用 (“let sons’ sons and grandsons’ grandsons long treasure it”) to emphasize that this latter, transferred *ming* has the support of gifts.²¹ The formulaic phrases and sentences that appear in utterances explicitly identified as *ming* indicate linguistic and stylistic links not only between bronze inscriptions and *ming* reported elsewhere, but also between *ming* as such and a broader range of ceremonial pronouncements. The language of command extends well beyond inscriptions and their isolated commissions.

Scholars, especially those interested in demonstrating the antiquity of received texts, have often pointed to passages and chapters in these texts that closely parallel the descriptions of investiture ceremonies and the quotation of *ming* in bronze inscriptions. Shaughnessy discusses “Wen hou zhi ming” 文侯之命 in the *Shu*, “Jiang Han” 江漢 in the *Shi*, and King Xiang’s 襄 (r. 651–619) command to Duke Wen 文 of Jin (r. 636–628) in the *Zuozhuan* (Shaughnessy 1991: 73–76). Drawing on Chen Hanping’s (1986: 12–19) review of references to *ming* in pre-Han and Han texts, one might add to Shaughnessy’s list the “Chang mai” 嘗麥 chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (Huang et al. 1995.2: 768–801) and the prescriptive narrative included in the “Jin li” 覲禮 chapter of the *Yili* (Ruan Yuan [1816] 1980.1: 1088). All of these texts reflect some of the old morphology of the investiture inscription and reproduce some of its formulas. “Wen hou zhi ming” repeats the gift list. “Jiang Han” repeats common phrases describing the obeisance of the *ming* recipient and quotes the recipient’s response. The *Zuozhuan* passage also quotes the recipient’s response and lists gifts. None of the texts echoes every part of the old morphology, and none of the texts echoes exactly the

same parts. In no case do the texts reproduce the most characteristic formulas of the bronze inscriptions, the formulas that recount the casting of the vessel and entrust it to the descendants.²² What every one of the texts does include, and what is patently the centerpiece of each of them, is the utterance of the king.

The words of the *ming* itself, although they show a good deal more variation than the closing words of the framing narrative, tend nevertheless to be built from formulaic phrases and are arranged in conventional ways. Chen Hanping has discussed some of these in his review of key words in investiture commands (1986: 132–163). As his list indicates, the language of the *ming* constitutes a “mimetic vocabulary” (Schaberg 2001: 59) revolving around issues of memory, fidelity, and imitation and employs a large set of terms relating to these themes. The inscription on a tureen cast by a certain lord *bo* 伯 of Lu 鲁 named Dong 董, perhaps during the reign of King Mu 穆 (r. 954–918) (Shirakawa 1962–1984.17: 209–223), shows how some of the language of the *ming* worked:



Inscription on a tureen cast perhaps from the reign of King Mu (r. 954–918 BCE).

In the first month of our king, on the day *gengyin*, the king spoke to the effect: “Dong, Lord of Lu, hark! Following your forebears, their deeds for the Zhou state, their help in laying open the four quarters, and their grand extension of Heaven’s command, you have succeeded them without failing.

“I present you with one goblet of black millet brew and a bronze-fitted chariot with decorated side-rails, decorated hand-grips, crimson leather front-bar cover, scarlet-lined dust-guards of tiger skin, bronze jingle-bells, painted hide bindings, metal yokes, painted hide straps, a four-team of horses, and bits and bridles.”²³

I, Dong, Lord of Lu, presumed to bow with my hands and touched my head to the ground, glorifying in response the illustrious bounty of the Son of Heaven, and herewith made a treasured sacrificial vessel for my father King Xi. May we treasure and use it for ten thousand years, and may my sons’ sons and grandsons’ grandsons follow the standard and receive this bounty.²⁴

In many ways the inscription and the king’s utterance are typical. Kings frequently refer to casters’ achievements, for instance, although such references normally follow a renewal or change of orders, something that is lacking here. The gift list is also quite regularly presented in the king’s words, preceded by the words *si ru* 易女(=賜汝), “I present you with . . .,” and normally serving as the conclusion of the king’s statement. Here the gifts are relatively sumptuous, although they still do not rival such magnificent awards as the one made to Mao Gong 毛公 (Shaughnessy 1991: 81). In general, the longest and richest gift lists are also the ones most likely to be reported in the quoted speech of the king. Thus the use of direct discourse, the level of detail, and the glory of the remembered occasion apparently varied in direct proportion.

Another typical aspect of the king’s address in this inscription is his extended reference to Dong’s ancestors and to the way Dong himself carries on their work. The king’s utterance is special in that it is both implicitly performative and highly formulaic. Nothing distinguishes his narrative from prescription. Dong is identified with his ancestors through his repetition of their services to the royal house, and in his quoted speech the king seeks to secure the continuation of those services. The quoted words of authority, like the words pronounced before divination, demand a response and establish terms of interpretation for that response. Dong’s bow, his casting of an inscribed vessel, and his prayer are responses that signify acceptance of the command and its terms of judgment. The words “follow the standard and receive this bounty” 其帥井(=型)、受茲休, which are not formulaic in the closing of an inscription, focus attention on the link between receiving gifts and maintaining pattern.

Finally, in diction and in phraseology, as in form, the king’s pronouncement is conventional and is echoed in numerous other bronze inscriptions and early traditional texts. His first word is probably equivalent to

you 猷; this particle and others, often used at the beginning of a speech, appear to have had an emphatic or exclamatory force (Shirakawa 1962–1984.17: 211–212).²⁵ Kings' commands regularly begin with, or otherwise include, a reference to the caster's ancestors, whose achievements he is enjoined to recall and emulate. The phrase *zi nai zu kao* 自乃且(=祖)考, "following your forebears," is a variation on the common injunction *geng nai zukao* 更乃且(=祖)考, "succeed your forebears" (Chen Hanping 1986: 147–148). Both *si fang* 四方, "the four quarters," and *tian ling* 天令 (or *tian ming* 天命), "Heaven's command" are also standard topoi in commands. With these words and phrases, the king and the caster invoke a whole political and ritual order hallowed by ceremony and made reproducible in language.

Sound Patterning

Conventions of prosody are at work here as well. To judge from the inscriptions collected and indexed in Shirakawa's *Kinbun tsūshaku*, *si fang* and *tian ling* are not freely disposable, but tend to come at the ends of four-character phrases (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 137, 154). It is not only that *si fang* and *tian ling* are normally the objects of verbs and are therefore pushed to the end of phrases. The beginnings of phrases containing these words vary far more than the ends; phrases seem to be designed to end in these words. Although the king's reference to *zhou bang* 周邦 is unusual, its prosody is not; the more common compound *wan bang* 萬邦 regularly comes at the end of a phrase (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 247). This constitutes a prosodic feature rather than merely an aspect of conventional phraseology, because the special language shared by bronze inscriptions and the oldest Zhou songs appears to favor phrases ending in words with *-ng* finals, whether or not these words make for rhymes. Words that rhyme in the *yang* 陽 (OC **-ang*), *dong* 東 (OC **-ong*), and *geng* 耕 (OC **-eng*) categories include many of the most important words in this special language, and account for a disproportionately large number of the rhymes in Western Zhou texts. In the *yang* group alone, for instance, one finds **kjang* 疆, **wang* 皇, **bmang* 荒, **khang* 康, **grang* 行, **wjang* 王, **xjang?* 饗, **mrjang* 明, **tsjang* 將, **k^wang* 光, **tjang* 章, **mjang* 忘, **pjang* 方.

Several writers have commented on the contrast between rhymes in *yang* and associated groups and rhymes in *zhi* 職 and associated groups. Haun Saussy, for instance, noting the predominance of *-ang* rhymes and *-ik* rhymes (including **tik* 德) in the older sections of the *Shijing*, has suggested that, in the "life of rhymes outside the poem, . . . the ability to invoke thematically appropriate rhyme-series would have been part of the equipment of any competent *Shijing* composer. Once the set had become familiar as a

phonetic and thematic unit, their very presence in a poem became consecrating: a poem about sagely kingship that did not include some members of the set would be found wanting.” He goes on to observe that the use of words in these rhymes, even in the absence of other patterning structures, would evoke the two rhyme sets’ associations (Saussy 1997: 538–541; also 2000: 213). Edward Shaughnessy (1997: 184) and Martin Kern (1997: 149) have noted similar phenomena. Wolfgang Behr’s tabulated analysis of 197 rhyming bronze inscriptions (1996: 472–476) confirms the prevalence of rhymes ending in *-ng*, while his treatment of near-rhymes does not contradict the claims Saussy and others have made about the thematic associations of certain rhymes and the use of these rhymes in alternation with *-ng*.

One might narrow these observations and extend them for the case of *ming* language: the placement of words with these *finals* (not only these rhymes), at the ends of phrases (more than anywhere else) associated an utterance with the royal style and the style of command. It is one prosodic feature of the language of command, and possibly of all Western Zhou ceremonial language, that words with *-ng* finals, whatever their main vowels, form patterns by being placed at the ends of consecutive or proximate phrases. That is why, in the inscription translated above, the king’s pronouncement includes a series of three phrases ending in the words **prong* 邦, **pjang* 方, and **C-rjing(s)* 令, and may be why Dong, in his closing injunction, places **geng* 井(=型) at the end of a phrase.²⁶ This is not rhyme, but consonance (i.e., alliteration of finals); the pattern is the repetition of common phrases and *-ng* finals.²⁷ Words ending in *-n* were apparently drawn into this pattern as well: **C-rjing(s)* 令 is matched in near-rhyme with words of the *zhen* 真 group (OC **-in*) in several bronze inscriptions (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 64–65; 54: 163).²⁸ At the same time, words ending in *-k* and words ending in *-ʔ* appear to form a separate consonance pattern encompassing a number of ritually important words (e.g., Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 2–3, 3, 5, 13, 23–24). This observation may explain why a few of the very oldest *Shijing* pieces contain no apparent rhyme. It is not that texts lack literary patterning—that is unlikely for ritual language recorded near the beginning of a written tradition. Instead, they have a pattern based on clause consonance and the repetition of formulaic compounds.²⁹

Early Western Zhou ceremonial speech apparently did not make a primary distinction between verse (regularly rhymed, metrically determined) and prose (unrhymed, metrically undetermined). The more important distinction was between (1) texts or portions of texts that do not use commonplace compounds and consonance; and (2) texts or portions of texts, typically quoted or sung speech, that do show those features, with or without regular rhyme. The former style is appropriate to notation and narrative, including

some parts of framing narratives; the latter is a marked language of command and prayer. There are indeed texts with perfectly regular rhyme, in the “Daya” and even in the “Zhou song.”³⁰ But these are best seen as extreme examples, distillations and regularizations of possibilities inherent in ceremonial speech. If China’s early literary history resembles that of other parts of the world, types of literary patterning (including rhyme and regular tetrasyllables) did not appear from nowhere, as contentless forms to be filled with words plucked from the ordinary lexicon. Instead, patterning grew out of habits of special language, including its themes and its commonplaces (Behr 1996: 419–423). As Gregory Nagy has put the matter in a discussion of Indo-European poetics and the Homeric formula: “meter is diachronically generated by formula rather than vice versa” (Nagy 1990a: 29). The remnants of Western Zhou writing, which likely originated as adjuncts to ceremonial speech, preserve a picture of the diachronic development of meter and rhyme patterning from within that speech.

Sound patterning in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions can have different shapes. For the most part it concerns two categories of sounds: the *-ng* final words discussed above, and words in the *you* 幽 and *zhi* 之 rhyme categories (Behr 1996: 472). In a large percentage of inscriptions, the only rhymes come in the closing lines, where the caster describes his response to the investiture command: in his obeisance he touches his head (**blju?* 首) to the ground and extols in response the kings’ gifts (**x(r)ju* 休). He may also offer a prayer for longevity (**mrjij *dju?* 眉壽) and refer to the treasure (**pu?* 寶) or tureen (**k^wrju?* 簋) he has cast. The regularity with which these *you*-group rhymes and their formulas appear may be regarded as a reflection of the crucial role the caster’s response plays in the transference of *ming* from king to family line. Since rhyme is an acoustic phenomenon, the patterning of this response may suggest that in temple uses the text inscribed upon a vessel was to be read aloud, with rhyme drawing attention to the response and its instructions to descendants. Sound patterning elsewhere in inscriptions is most common and most striking in quoted speech, especially that of the king. The example from Dong’s tureen represents one variety of patterning, the clause consonance in *-ng*, with their evocation of a whole set of key political and religious concepts. This is the set of concepts and sounds to which *ming* 命 / *ling* 令 belongs. Several of the longest and most famous speeches recorded in bronze inscriptions include sound patterning of this sort.³¹

Bronze inscriptions are connected with the larger field of Western Zhou ceremonial language both by a shared set of commonplaces and by the sound patterns that these commonplaces carry. In a work that follows leads first uncovered by Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), Jiang Kunwu 姜昆武

has compiled a list of 160 *chengci* 成詞 or “set compounds.” She defines these as two-syllable set phrases that recur in the *Shi* and the *Shu*, and suggests a link between their disyllabic form and the tetrasyllabic prosody of much early song and ceremonial speech (Jiang Kunwu 1989: 5–10). Many of the compounds she lists are familiar from investiture commands: *pi xian* 不(=丕)顯, “greatly illustrious” (of kings’ gifts and ancestors); *chun gu* 純嘏, “great” and related words; *zuo you* 左右, “to be at right and left: to attend”; *mingde* 明德, “bright virtue”; *wu jiang* 無疆, “without end” (usually of life); *dui yang* 對揚, “to extol in response”; *wan nian* 萬年, “ten thousand years” (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 132–133, 138, 197–198, 240, 251, 247, and 268). Her list is not exhaustive: among the shared compounds that she does not list are *si fang* 四方, “the four quarters”; *su ye* 夙夜, “day and night”; and—if it can be considered a compound by her definition—*wubu* 烏乎, “alas!” (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 154, 168, 220). Of the compounds I have listed here, several appear with some regularity at phrase-ends, both in the inscriptions and in the *Shi* and *Shu*, and would contribute to the patterning of sounds in the *yang* or *zhi* categories and associated categories.

Perhaps the most common of all patterning words in Western Zhou texts is the word *ming* 命. With its allograph or synonym *ling* 令, it rings through the epigraphic remains and the oldest of the received texts as a constant reminder of where these texts began and what they are. In epigraphy, *tian ming* 天命, “Heaven’s command,” is only one of several common phrase-ending compounds that include the word; others are *da ming* 大命, “great command”; *wang ming* 王命, “the king’s command”; *yong ming* 永命, “lasting command”; and *lu ming* 魯命, “great command” (Shirakawa 1962–1984.56: 137, 125, 146, 159, 262). All of the *Shu* chapters that are generally dated to the Western Zhou make multiple references to *ming*; most of these references are at phrase-ends and contribute to consonance patterns in *-ng*.³² If consonance is deemed too loose a standard for patterning, and therefore unfalsifiable, it is significant that where there are narrative frames for *Shu* speeches—that is, where writing represents language that is not ceremonial language—they include few phrase-ending references to *ming*, and no phrase-ending consonance.³³ Only in “Gu ming” 顧命 does narrative replicate some of the sounds of direct discourse; but this is in parallelistic descriptions of a king’s funeral that are stylistically unlike anything else in the early chapters.

Conventional language accumulated around the concept of *ming*, and the oldest chapters of the *Shu* form a stylistic unit partly because of the clichés they share. The notion that Yin had “let fall” (*zhu* 墜) its command and that Zhou must avoid doing the same is one such commonplace; variations on the sentence “Yin has already let fall its command” 殷既墜厥命 appear in

four chapters, and twice in one of these chapters.³⁴ Dropped by the Yin, it was picked up by King Wen, or by Kings Wen and Wu together. Reference to this event provides *ming* with one of its regular epithets: it is “the command received by King Wen” 文王受命 or “the command received by Wen and Wu” 文武受命.³⁵ “Heaven’s command is not easy” 天命不易;³⁶ “Heaven cannot be relied upon” 天棗忱辭, and “its command cannot be relied upon” 其命匪謚.³⁷ The theme of anxious attention that attaches itself to the command is one of the internal justifications for the speeches and for their preservation in writing.

Given the thematic and prosodic continuities that link quoted speech in bronze inscriptions and in chapters of the *Shu*, it is not surprising that the three texts that Shaughnessy identifies as received counterparts to investiture inscriptions—“Wen hou zhi ming,” “Jiang Han,” and the *Zuozhuan* command to Duke Wen—all show signs of consonance in *-ng* and in *-k/-ʔ*. What has attracted too little attention is the way these patterns develop in texts that correspond less precisely to investiture records. Several *Shi* songs, all of them quoting royal speech as *ming* 命, use consonance patterns and rhymes to draw the particular circumstances of a command into contact with the standard themes and sounds of commanding.³⁸

These songs commemorate the conventional gifts that accompanied the command to an individual and, like “Jia le,” translate the moment of command into something more lasting, a well-wrought text that can be remembered and repeated as long as it is supported by sufficient familial wealth or prestige.³⁹ Even more significant for the later development of Chinese civilization are the cultural commands that bound the adherents of the Zhou house together as successors to King Wen’s achievement. Commemorations of these commands are found elsewhere in the “*Daya*”: in “Wen Wang” (Mao 235), in “Da ming” (Mao 236), in “Huang yi” (Mao 241), in “Wen Wang you sheng” (Mao 244), and in “Dang” (Mao 255). Among these pieces—all of which mention *ming* one or more times—are the songs that were most frequently quoted in Eastern Zhou historical and philosophical writings, and that clearly represented for that age the core of early Zhou teachings. These were the songs that carried with them some of the Western Zhou aristocracy’s ideals of command, virtue, and reward, and that put all the resources of a ritually authorized mode of speech at the disposal of the idea of royal order.⁴⁰

Conclusion: Dead Language

To summarize, starting in the Shang dynasty, *ming* appears to have been the name for a special type of speech used in divination, in ceremonies of inves-

titure, and possibly in other rites. It is likely that *ming* was recognized as a distinct kind of utterance even before the use of writing in conjunction with these ceremonies; the practice of recording *ming* would have originated as a way of amplifying existing aspects of the rituals. In divinations, *ming* was the statement addressed to the bone, shell, or milfoil stalks, a statement that set up a framework of interpretation before results were obtained. In investiture, the *ming* as uttered by a king and accepted by his liegeman was likewise a means of establishing terms of response and interpretation. In contrast to *fatum*, which draws attention to the inescapability of a predetermined end, *ming* drew attention to the difficulty of performance and the anxiety that attended any attempt to obey or enforce a command. Conventional themes and sound patterns in the investiture inscriptions link *ming* as represented there to *ming* as embodied in received texts. The latter, whether they are loosely patterned prose texts like the early *Shu* chapters or tightly constructed *Shi* songs, are built largely from the same body of commonplaces and prosodic tendencies as the inscriptions, but are mainly concerned not with familial and parochial commands, but with the central, shared commands that defined Zhou culture. With the gradual formalization of curricula that attended the rise of independent philosophical groups in the Eastern Zhou, commands of this sort became the basis of a literary canon.

It remains to examine how the sense of *ming* discussed in the preceding pages relates to the sense that the advisers of Duke Wen of Zhu had in mind when they urged him not to move his capital. How is the command concerning the timing of an individual's death linked to the commands that a nobleman receives from his king, or that a king and his line receive from Heaven? To put the matter differently, how do the sources and content of the *ming* become obscure, and how did it happen that one could speak of a command whose origins and terms were unknown? It is not enough to say that *ming* as a decreed individual life span was a logical development from the collective commands that governed lineages and their shared culture. If that is the development that occurred, it is nonetheless necessary to explain why language has relatively little importance in this sort of *ming*, why this *ming* is so closely associated with death, and why it moves so far in the direction of ideas of predestination.

Despite Kominami's speculations (1992: 31) about ceremonies by which kings elicited the language of Heaven's commands, there was always in these commands an element of the unknown. Its perils were captured in the formulaic phrases concerning Heaven's unreliability and the difficulty of its commands. Although the king's own commands were designed to be remembered, quoted, transcribed, and consulted later, the precise language of

Heaven's command could not be examined. Even the songs that are about this command do not quote it. If the concept of Heaven's command originated in the Zhou rulers' need for legitimation, then it worked by projecting human procedures for establishing fealty into the extrahuman realm.⁴¹ But as projection it became a shadow attending the brightly lit commands of court: it was an image of social relations and powers that were not yet known or could not yet be brought into the determining relations of *ming*. One might speak of Heaven as the source of this command. One might equally well speak of the governed populace, whose allegiances were figured as the determining factor in changes of command. But finally, as the Zhou ruling elite would have learned from the pacification and inclusion of Shang loyalists, "Heaven's" command comes into being—and becomes language—only when a conquering power speaks to its new subjects. In this respect, the language of Heaven's command is unknown because it has not yet been pronounced.

There is in the *Zuozhuan* a type of archaizing and ceremonial utterance that ties together unknown social relations, the unknown language of a future command, and death. In the background of these utterances is one of the ordinary uses of the word *ming*, which can be applied in polite language to any request that passes between states; in diplomacy, the wishes and decisions of another state were spoken of as commands (e.g., Yang Bojun 1990: 588–589, 861–865). Here is part what a duke of Zheng is reported to have said when, stripped to the waist, he went forth to beg mercy from the king of Chu, whose army had taken the Zheng capital:

孤不天·不能事君·使君懷怒·以及敝邑·孤之罪也·敢不唯命是聽·其
 俘諸江南·以實海濱·亦唯命·其翦以賜諸侯·使臣妾之·亦唯命·
 Because I, orphaned one, did not have the aid of Heaven, and was not able
 to serve my lord, I have made my lord harbor wrath. That he has therefore
 come to this petty city is my fault: should I presume not to heed this and
 no other command? Should he make me a prisoner south of the Jiang,
 there to fill out the seacoast, indeed that would be nothing other than his
 command. Should he parcel us out to present us to the feudal lords,
 making us servants and concubines to them, indeed that would be nothing
 other than his command. . . . (Duke Xuan 12.1; Yang Bojun 1990: 719)⁴²

From this use of *ming* it is no great distance to the phrase *wen ming* 聞命, by which someone who is about to obey an unpalatable order signifies his submission. This submission often entails death:

將殺里克·公使謂之曰·微子則不及此·雖然·子弑二君與一大夫·為子君者·不亦難乎·對曰·不有廢也·君何以興·欲加之罪·其無辭乎·臣聞命矣·伏劍而死·

When he was ready to put Li Ke to death, the duke sent someone to say to him, “If it were not for you, I would not have reached this position.

Though that is so, you have murdered two rulers and one lower minister.

Is not one who is to act as your ruler in a position of difficulty?” He replied, “If there had not been something that was discarded, how could my lord have risen? But if you wish to incriminate me, could there be any lack of pretext? I have heard your command.” He fell on his sword and died. (Xi 10.2; Yang Bojun 1990: 333)⁴³

Significantly, in philosophical writing, the same phrase can signify the demise of a debater’s argument and his submission to a better account of the matter under discussion (*Mengzi* 5A.1, 5A.2, 5A.4; and compare 3A.5). Dialogue itself was conceived after the pattern of conquest and command.

Scholarly discussion of early philosophical notions of *ming* has focused on questions of predestination, chance, and moral determinism.⁴⁴ It has not given sufficient consideration to the historical associations of *ming* with ceremonial speech and reward. When Confucius comes to understand Heaven’s command, or speaks of the *ming* at work in Boniu’s 伯牛 illness and Yan Hui’s 顏回 death, or comments on the *ming* that determines whether the Way will succeed, he treats *ming* as a problem of knowledge and as a problem of just distribution (*Lunyu* 2.4, 6.3, 6.10, 11.7, 14.36). He is using a well-established trope: like speakers in the *Zuozhuan*, he signifies his acceptance of imposed difficulties by treating them as commands to himself. Like anyone else taking on a command, he does what he can to make the language his own.

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. The anecdote is retold in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑, with minor variants and no mention of the ruler’s death. See Xiang Zonglu 1987: 24.

2. See the treatment of *bao* 寶, “treasure,” at *Zuozhuan* Xiang 15.8 and Zhao 16.3 (Yang Bojun 1990: 1024; 1381–1382).

3. Citing bronze inscriptions as evidence, Robert Eno (1990: 125, 262n73) argues that “life span” or “personal decree” was “an early and important second meaning” of the term. The phrase *yongling* 永令 (in which, as often, 令 represents *ming* 命) was a formula in prayers for longevity (Shirakawa 1962–1984.20: 447; 56: 159).

4. The sense of predestination that Mohists understood in their rejection of *ming* is, in my view, an exaggeration of the sense of “commission” as it relates to the lasting power of ruling houses. One narrative passage that seems to share this exaggeration is *Zuozhuan* Xuan 3.3 (Yang Bojun 1990: 669–672), the famous discussion of the nine cauldrons; even here the speaker asserts that the key factor is the virtue of the ruling house, not the inevitable realization of an original command, which is in any case represented as changeable. For the case for *ming* as fate in *Zuozhuan* and pre-Qin philosophy, see Mu-chou Poo’s essay in this volume (Chap. 4).

5. I have made Sagart’s transcriptions typeable with two common substitutions: ə for schwa and -ng as digraph.

6. In citing the arguments of linguists I reproduce their own reconstructions of Old Chinese. Boltz’s system in this work is an adaptation of Li Fanggui’s 李方桂.

7. Throughout this essay, “formula” and “formulaic” are meant in the common sense of “conventional,” and not in the technical sense defined by oral-formulaic theory.

8. The following discussion is necessarily cursory. For a much more comprehensive account of *moira* and related Greek terms, see Lisa Raphals’ essay in this volume (Chap. 3). As Raphals demonstrates, allotment is among the root metaphors associated with terms for fate both in the Greek and in the Chinese context.

9. For the role of *moira* in religion, see Greene 1944 and Dietrich 1965.

10. The number indicates the poem’s place in the sequence of 305 poems established in the Western Han period commentary attributed to Mao Heng 毛亨 and Mao Chang 毛萇.

11. The song was traditionally read as an homage to King Cheng 成 of Zhou (r. 1042/35–1006) (Ruan Yuan 阮元 [1816] 1980.1: 540). (I adopt the dating of Western Zhou reigns given in Shaughnessy 1991: xix.) In his translation, Karlgren (1950: 204–206) divorces the piece from any particular occasion of praise. Yet in the second line of the last stanza, *yan ji pengyou* 燕及朋友—which Karlgren translates “the peace reaches to his friends”—the word *yan* 燕 suggests not an abstract tranquility, but the celebration of tranquility at a feast. For this meaning of *yan*, see, for instance, “Lu ming” 鹿鳴 (Mao 161), “Nan you jiayu” 南有嘉魚 (Mao 171), and “Fu yi” 鳧鷖 (Mao 248). Like many other *Sbi* songs, this one is recited at a banquet described in the *Zuozhuan*; see Wen 3.7 and Xiang 26.7 (Yang Bojun 1990: 531, 1116).

12. For other examples of *deyin* in praise poems, see “You nü tong ju” 有女同車 (Mao 83), “Xiao rong” 小戎 (Mao 128), “Lang ba” 狼跋 (Mao 160), “Lu ming” (Mao 161), “Nanshan you tai” 南山有臺 (Mao 172), “Xi sang” 隰桑 (Mao 228), and “Huang yi” 皇矣 (Mao 241). For blame, see “Ri yue” 日月 (Mao 29). In “Gu feng” 谷風 (Mao 35), the speaker in a blame poem claims that her own *deyin* is unswayed. See also the lost song quoted at *Zuozhuan* Zhao 12.11 (Yang Bojun 1990: 1341).

13. Boltz (1999: 98n49) notes the parallels between *fatum* and *ming* without suggesting that the concepts are identical.

14. It need not be stressed that “commanding”—speech that becomes authoritative under special circumstances—is the illocutionary act par excellence, and one so

readily recognized as such that the classic study of performative utterances (J. L. Austin 1962) all but neglects it in favor of more interesting acts.

15. Boltz (1994: 31–39) has explained in some detail why Neolithic pottery markings cannot properly be called “writing.”

16. Keightley (1978: 3) gives evidence of preliterate pyro-scapulimancy in China.

17. At *Zuozhuan* Xiang 26.7 (Yang Bojun 1990: 1116), a Jin minister commands his ruler to bow to the rulers of Qi and Zheng during a covenant ceremony. The special ritual and diplomatic circumstances that explain such commands are discussed below.

18. For the naming of children, sometimes in accordance with traditional prescriptions, see *Zuozhuan* Huan 2.8, Huan 6.6, and Xuan 4.3 (Yang Bojun 1990.92: 115–117, 683). For the naming of an event, see Xi 13.4 (Yang Bojun 1990: 345). For the naming of a place, see Sima Qian 1959: *juan* 66.2180. Naming, like commanding, sometimes takes place with the support and intervention of spirits: see *Zuozhuan* Zhao 1.12 and Zhao 7.15 (Yang Bojun 1990: 1218, 1297).

19. Keightley (1978: 33n21) cites *Shangshu*, “Jin teng” 金滕, *Zuozhuan*, *Zhouli* 周禮, and *Liji*. These passages (Yang Bojun 1990: 629, 1392; Ruan Yuan [1816] 1980.1: 802, 804; 2: 1151) all suggest that a socially qualified individual must pronounce the *ming*. Two *Yili* 儀禮 passages (Ruan Yuan [1816] 1980.1: 1142, 1179) not cited by Keightley give templates for the *ming* that such a qualified individual was to pronounce when divining by tortoise shell about the location of his father’s tomb, and when divining by milfoil stalks (*ming shi* 命筮) about the timing of an ancestral sacrifice.

20. Since Boltz links 鳴 with 命 and 名 by way of the phonophoric 口, it is possible that pronouncing a *ming* 命 over a shell is a way of making the shell “sing” (*ming* 鳴). The latter verb is attested in its causative sense at *Lunyu* 論語 11.17: *ming gu* 鳴鼓, “to beat a drum.”

21. The formulas of the framing material are examined exhaustively in Hayashi Minao 1983 and Emura 1989, 1991.

22. A possible exception is “Jiang Han,” with the emendation (**kvrju?* 薑 for **kbu?* 考) suggested by Waley and followed by Shaughnessy (1991: 74). Since the emendation would restore a rhyme pattern that appears in numerous inscriptions (**hlju?* 首—**x(r)ju* 休—**kvrju?* 薑—**dju?* 壽), it is conceivable that the received text represents an adjustment of formulaic language for a specifically noninscriptional medium. Compare the closing line of *Shu*, “Zicai” 梓材, where the most formulaic of inscriptional language appears in slightly adapted form: “May sons’ sons and grandsons’ grandsons long preserve the people” 子子孫孫永保民.

23. I have followed Shaughnessy (1991: 81) in translating caparison terms.

24. Shaughnessy (1991: 177–180) translates the inscription on a related vessel, the Dong gui (tureen). According to sources cited by Shirakawa, Lu was located in present-day Anhui. Other inscriptions in the set of vessels cast by Dong refer to incursions by the Yi tribes of the Huai region, Dong’s successful campaign against those tribes, and his attribution of that success to the aid of his deceased parents.

25. For a different interpretation of this graph, see Chen Hanping 1986: 134.
26. In **C-rjing(s)*, “C” signifies that an unidentified consonant precedes the -r- (Baxter 1992: 199).
27. Chen Shihui (1981: 176) argues that *bang* 邦 rhymed in the *yang* group, with *fang* 方, but the evidence suggests instead a looser association through the -ng final.
28. There may also be a rhyme with the *yuan* 元 group (OC **-jan*) (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 93).
29. Three of the six “Zhou song” pieces that are thought not to contain rhyme—“Qing miao” 清廟 (Mao 266), “Haotian you chengming” 昊天有成命 (Mao 271), “Wu” 武 (Mao 285)—use words with the -ng final at important phrase ends. The other three—“Shi mai” 時邁 (Mao 273), “Zhuo” 酌 (Mao 293), “Pan” 般 (Mao 296)—make less of the -ng final, but appear to be built around phrase-ending words with glottal stop and velar finals, and around an association of *zhou* 周 (**tjw*) with such words as *bao* 保 (**pu?*), *shou* 受 (**dju?*), *de* 德 (**tik*), and *yue* 嶽 (**-k* final; not reconstructed by Baxter). Karlgren (1935: 3–8) also emphasized the prevalence of -ng rhymes, including many apparently “poor” rhymes, in these poems.
30. In “Zhou song,” see “Yong” 雝 (Mao 282), with its repeated *abab* pattern.
31. See, for instance, the “Da Yu ding” 大盂鼎, the “Ye gui” 也簋, the “Ban gui” 班簋, and the “Mao Gong ding” 毛公鼎 (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 24–25, 34, 35–36, 94–96). Occasionally there are rhymes or other patterns in the opening lines of a bronze inscription, where the actions of the king are narrated; the “Da feng gui” 大豐簋 (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 1) is one example.
32. For the dating of the twelve oldest chapters of the *Shu*, see Shaughnessy 1993: 379.
33. See the prefaces to *Shu*, “Kang gao” 康誥, “Shao gao” 召誥, “Duo shi” 多士, and “Duo fang” 多方; and the conclusion of “Luo gao” 洛誥.
34. They are “Jin teng” 金縢, “Jiu gao” 酒誥, “Shao gao” (twice), and “Jun Shi” 君奭. A version of the phrase is also found on the “Da Yu ding” (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 24).
35. See *Shu*, “Luo gao,” “Wu yi” 無逸; *Sbi*, “Wen Wang you sheng” 文王有聲 (Mao 244), “Jiang Han” 江漢 (Mao 262); and the “Xun gui” 詢簋 (Shirakawa 1962–1984.53: 97).
36. See *Shu*, “Da gao,” “Jun Shi”; *Sbi*, “Wen Wang” 文王 (Mao 235), “Han yi” 韓奕 (Mao 261), “Jing zhi” 敬之 (Mao 288).
37. See *Shu*, “Da gao” (twice), “Kang gao”; *Sbi*, “Da ming” 大明 (Mao 236), “Dang” 蕩 (Mao 255).
38. The songs are “Song gao” 崧高 (Mao 259), “Zheng min” 烝民 (Mao 260), and “Han yi” 韓奕 (Mao 261). Key rhyme words are **prong* 邦, “state”; **kong* 功, “achievement”; **pu?* 保, “preservation”; **tik* 德, “virtue”; **mrjang* 明, “bright”; **ljek* 易, “easy” (in “not easy”); and **pjek* 辟, “governance.”
39. Two of the texts, “Song gao” and “Zheng min,” draw attention to this translation by closing with references to their composer (Jifu 吉甫) and genre (*song* 誦, “praise”; *shi* 詩 “song”). “Han yi” accomplishes something similar by depicting

the good cheer and generosity of a feast. “Chang wu” 常武 (Mao 263), which comes directly after “Jiang Han,” resembles these three songs in many respects. It should be noted here that the rhymes of “Jia le” itself (Baxter 1992: 707) tie it closely to the language of *ming*.

40. To cite one very distant echo of Western Zhou notions of command, the Ming-dynasty novel *Fengshen yanyi* may be said to have filled the old term “*tianming*” with new contents, transforming it into a transcendent force informing the actions of divine and human characters as they bring about the founding of the Zhou. See the analysis of the novel by P. Steven Sangren (Chap. 9) in this volume.

41. For one statement of the commonplace view that “Heaven’s command” was a Zhou legitimation device, see Creel 1970: 93–100. More recently, David Pan-kenier (1995: 161–162) has argued that the Zhou kings’ appeal to Heaven’s command resulted from their belief in an “interventionist sky god” and in their observance of a highly unusual planetary conjunction, thought to signal this god’s will, in 1059 BCE.

42. The phrase “wei ming shi ting” 唯命是聽 is used eight times in the *Zuo-zhuan*; seven of these are in quoted speech and involve submission to an unknown command.

43. Cf. Zhuang 14.2 and Xi 23.4 (Yang Bojun 1990: 198, 403).

44. See Slingerland 1996, Chen Ning 1997a, and 1997b. In Chapter 2 of this volume, Michael Puett focuses on the tension between Heaven’s role as a source both of beneficial patterns and of arbitrary, often harmful, commands. As he argues, the tension is one that becomes visible especially from the perspective of the Han, when writers like Dong Zhongshu made efforts to reconcile it. In drawing a distinction between commands enunciated and commands as yet unknown, I am approaching the same tension from the perspective of its prehistory, when the question of Heaven’s morality had not yet been raised.

2

Following the Commands of Heaven

The Notion of *Ming* in Early China

MICHAEL PUETT

Open with a quotation from one of Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) memorials to Han Wudi 漢武帝 on the topic of the mandate of Heaven:

天命之謂命，命非聖人不行。

Heaven's command I call the mandate *ming*; the mandate can only be put into practice by a sage. (*Hanshu* 漢書, Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 ed., 26: 2515)

The statement would appear to be a straightforward point concerning the relationship between Heaven and man: Heaven grants a mandate, and a sage must put it into practice. Heaven and man thus have a linked relationship, with man normatively putting in place what Heaven has ordained. Each, in a sense, needs the other; if there is to be order, then the sage must properly play his cosmic role, just as Heaven plays its role.

This memorial was written early in Han Wudi's reign as part of a critique of Han imperial rule. Dong Zhongshu, a scholar of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, was calling on the young ruler to institutionalize the study of the classics, and he was arguing that doing so would allow the Han finally to put into practice the mandate that had been given to them.

Ming here seems properly translated as “mandate”—but “mandate” in a particular sense. *Ming* does not appear to be something mandated in a deterministic sense—it is not that we are forced to do X, or that we are fated to do X. It is, rather, “mandate” in a more relational sense: we are mandated by Heaven to do X, and if we so do X then the order desired by both Heaven and man will be obtained.

At first glance, such a usage of *ming* would appear to be fairly typical for early texts. It is clearly linked, for example, to earlier statements in the literature—statements running back to the discussions of the mandate of Heaven in the early chapters of the Shangshu 尚書.

But first glances can be deceptive. In making this argument, Dong Zhongshu significantly reformulated earlier discussions of the heavenly mandate, as well as earlier discussions of the relationship between Heaven and man. Part of this story has been told often before, particularly the emergence in Dong's thought of a cosmological system not seen in earlier thinkers who would have identified themselves as Ruists. But I will make a stronger argument here: Dong Zhongshu's argument of an inherent linkage between man and Heaven involved a strong rereading (perhaps better: misreading) of earlier Confucian positions.

More explicitly, I wish to argue that the seemingly straightforward viewpoint expressed in the passage above—that Heaven grants a mandate and that man must then put it into practice—should not be read as representing an assumption in early China concerning an inherent linkage between man and Heaven. On the contrary, I will argue here that pre-Han Confucian texts presented a strong tension between Heaven and man, and that such a tension in fact constituted a crucial part of early Confucian thought. In order to demonstrate this, I will provide a brief discussion of the *Lunyu* 論語 and the *Mencius* 孟子 and then analyze how and why Dong Zhongshu took the position about *ming* that he did.

Debates about the Role of *Ming* in Early Confucianism

A large body of scholarship has developed on the notion of *ming* in the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius*. The central problem around which this scholarship revolves is the seeming ambivalence in usages of the term. Many of the passages present *ming* as having been sent down by Heaven. However, if we assume that Heaven is a moral deity, and if we assume that this moral deity would, in the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius*, be providing moral mandates that humans would then be asked to put into practice (the basic position that Dong Zhongshu will later articulate), then we have a great deal of difficulty in accounting for most of the passages in these two texts that use the word "*ming*." In several passages of the texts, *ming* is associated with seemingly random events that occur without any apparent ethical calculus whatsoever. Indeed, the term is even used to describe those events in which horrible occurrences befall clearly moral people. The problem for the scholarship on this issue has thus been to reconcile such usages of *ming* with the assumed vision of Heaven as a moral agent.

To explain this seeming ambivalence, Ning Chen has recently argued that, at least for the *Mencius*, we should distinguish between two separate meanings of *ming*. On the one hand, Ning Chen states, Mencius speaks of *ming* in the sense of “blind fate,” meaning one’s “fixed lot” (Chen Ning 1997a: 495); and, on the other, he speaks of *ming* in the sense of “moral determinism,” meaning that “happiness and misery are determined by a moral and personal god (or gods) who oversees human social and ethical conduct, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked” (Chen Ning 1997a: 495). Furthermore, as she observes, either or both meanings can appear in any one passage: “the *ming* employed by Mencius conveys at least two mutually related but different meanings—fixed fate and moral decree. Sometimes it refers to one of these, sometimes it involves both” (Chen Ning 1997a: 503). Indeed, Ning Chen argues that Mencius “often spoke of *ming* in different senses on the same occasion” (Chen Ning 1997a: 495). She points out that a similar ambivalence can be found in the *Lunyu* (Chen Ning 1997b: 514).

According to this reading, the seeming ambivalence in the texts can be explained as resulting from there being two distinct meanings of the term “*ming*”—moral commands on the one hand and blind fate on the other. And Ning Chen further maintains that Heaven itself is accordingly discussed in different ways in these texts—at times as an ethical deity, and at others as a fatalistic deity (Chen Ning 1997b: 514).

In Ning Chen’s view, the reason early Confucians wanted to develop the notion of blind fate is that it enabled them to focus on self-cultivation without any assumption that this would result in divine blessings: “Psychologically, it enables the Confucians to free themselves from, or at least reduce the degree of, frustration and anxiety generated by the problem of unwarranted suffering by providing them with an explanation that certain aspects of an individual person’s life are predetermined by a blind, impersonal power. . . . Now with the Confucians, moral conduct is no longer the means to obtain divine blessing . . .” (Chen Ning 1997b: 515).

Ted Slingerland has offered another interpretation of the usages of *ming* in the *Lunyu* and *Mencius*. Unlike Ning Chen, he argues that the concept of *ming* is consistent in early Confucian texts. The key, he claims, is that *ming* refers to an external realm, distinguished sharply from the internal:

Ming refers to forces that lie in the outer realm—that is, the realm beyond the bounds of proper human endeavor, or the area of life in which “seeking contributes to one’s getting it.” This external world is not the concern of the gentleman, whose efforts are to be concentrated on the self—the inner realm in which “seeking contributes to one’s getting it.” This is the arena in which the struggle for self-cultivation must be carried out. Once

one has achieved success there, the vicissitudes of the outside world—life and death, fame and disgrace, wealth and poverty—can be faced “without worry and without fear.” (Slingerland 1996: 568)

The seeming ambivalence concerning what Ning Chen saw as blind fate and moral mandates is thus explained away: both of these would simply be external, outside of our consideration. The fact that at times the mandates in this external realm will strike us as moral and at times as not should not concern us: the only thing humans should concern themselves with is the internal realm of self-cultivation.

Like Ning Chen, however, Slingerland sees the goal of such a view of *ming* in early Confucianism as being to force humans to focus on things that they can control—namely, their own self-cultivation—and to avoid thinking of things they cannot control. Therefore, matters such as wealth, life span, and career advancement are *ming*—outside the powers of what we can control, and thus outside the realm of what humans should concern themselves with: “The motivation informing these texts is the desire to change people’s views of what is and what is not important, to redirect people’s energy and efforts from the external realm (position, wealth, physical concerns) to the internal realm of self-cultivation. The conception of *ming* is employed in order to mark off, in effect, the outer boundaries of one’s proper realm of action” (Slingerland 1996: 576). Slingerland would thus read all usages of *ming* in these texts as part of an overall attempt to convince humans to focus on self-cultivation.

On this latter point—the point of agreement between Slingerland and Ning Chen—I will agree fully as well. As both of these scholars correctly attest, the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius* claim that one may act properly, but this does not mean one will live long or well. Thus, humans must simply cultivate themselves without hoping thereby to gain reward or recompense.

Nonetheless, I will also suggest that the seeming ambivalence in the usages of *ming* should be explicated in a different way than either Ning Chen or Slingerland have proposed. Unlike Ning Chen, I believe that the usages of *ming* in these two texts are consistent: positing two distinct meanings of *ming* is not necessary. On the contrary, *ming* is used quite consistently in the *Lunyu* and *Mencius* to refer to the mandates or commands sent down by Heaven.

But then what do we do about the fact that at times these commands seem to be morally based, and at times they do not? Unlike Slingerland, I do think this distinction is relevant to the texts. For, as I will argue, Heaven is also presented in these same texts as the origin of the normative patterns by which humans should cultivate themselves. In other words, it is not simply

that the good are not always rewarded and the bad not always punished (although that is certainly believed to be the case). It is, rather, that Heaven, though the source of the normative patterns of humanity, does not always seem to act in accord with such patterns. Indeed, Mencius will go so far as to argue that Heaven at times actively prevents humans from enacting the proper patterns—even though those patterns are traceable back to Heaven itself.

The issue, then, is not that there are two distinct meanings of *ming*, or that *ming* refers to a realm about which we need not concern ourselves. The issue lies in the relationship of Heaven and humanity—and it is a relationship that is seen as charged with tensions.

Indeed, if we thus avoid the attempt to resolve the seeming ambivalence in the ways suggested above, then the tensions in the text are rendered all the more powerful. If *ming* is consistently associated with the commands of Heaven, if these commands cannot always be associated with a moral calculus, and if humans are being called upon to act morally despite these commands from Heaven, then it would imply that the relations between man and Heaven are highly complex, and certainly very different from those seen later in Dong Zhongshu.

My argument is closer to that of Lee Yearley, who focuses his attention on what he calls “irresolvable but revelatory and productive tensions” (Yearley 1975: 433). In Mencius, Yearley finds a figure “at one pole the notion of a human potential whose realization depends on each individual’s effort; at the other, the notion of a sovereign power beyond man that creates the potential but also seems, in some way, to control and even frustrate its completion in most or all men” (Yearley 1975: 433). I will follow a similar argument here, but will take it a step further. For Mencius, it is not just that Heaven frustrates its completion; at times, Heaven actively works to prevent it. Why would early Confucians hold such a position? Until we can answer this question we may not be able to fully understand the ways they embraced the notion of *ming*.

Heaven and Man in the *Lunyu*

Confucius¹ strongly embraced the idea that humans must follow the mandates of Heaven.² Indeed, he argued that holding them in esteem was one of the points of difference between a gentleman and a lesser man:

孔子曰：「君子有三畏。畏天命，畏大人，畏聖人之言。小人不知天命而不也。」狎大人，侮聖人之言。

Confucius said, “As for the gentleman, there are three things he esteems.

He esteems the mandates (*ming*) of Heaven, he esteems great men, and he esteems the words of sages. A petty man, not understanding the mandate of Heaven, does not esteem it; he is disrespectful to great men, and ridicules the words of sages.” (*Lunyu* 16/8)

And Confucius famously defined understanding the mandates of Heaven as one of the goals of his life:

子曰：「吾十有五而志於學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

The master said, “At age fifteen, I set my intent on studying; at thirty I established myself; at forty I was no longer deluded; at fifty I understood the mandates of Heaven; at sixty my ear accorded; at seventy I followed what my heart desired without transgression.” (*Lunyu* 2/4)

However, the mandates of Heaven for Confucius involved neither a simple granting of moral norms nor a rewarding of the worthy and punishing of the unworthy. Although Sima Qian would later, in his biography of Bo Yi and Shu Qi (Sima Qian 1959, *juan* 61: 2124–2125), criticize Confucius for believing that the good are rewarded and the bad punished, Confucius in fact held no such position. Indeed, for Confucius, the mandates of Heaven appear to involve no ethical calculus whatsoever, and this presumably is a part of why it took him until age fifty to understand them.

For example, when his favorite disciple Yan Hui died young, Confucius exclaimed:

顏淵死。子曰：「噫！天喪予！天喪予！」

Yan Hui died. The master said, “Alas. Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me!” (*Lunyu* 11/9)

There is no sense here that Yan Hui had done anything to deserve dying young. On the contrary, Confucius’ response was to rail at Heaven, as it is Heaven that controls the mandates. But what Heaven has mandated for us must simply be accepted:

季康子問：「弟子孰為好學？」孔子對曰：「有顏回者好學，不幸短命死矣，今也則亡。」

Ji Kangzi asked, “Of your disciples, who loved learning?” Confucius responded, “There was Yan Hui who loved learning. Unfortunately he had a shortened mandate, and he died. Now there is no one.” (*Lunyu* 11/7; a similar statement appears in 6/3)

What is mandated is under the control of Heaven, and there is no ethical calculation involved.

Indeed, Confucius often emphasizes the degree to which events are out of the control of humans. Once, when a certain Gongbo Liao defamed someone, and Zifu Jingbo asked Confucius if he should have Gongbo Liao killed, Confucius responded thus:

子曰：「道之將行也與，命也；道之將廢也與，命也。公伯寮其如命何？」

The master said: "If the way is going to be put into practice, it is mandated (*ming*). If it is going to be discarded, that too is mandated. What does Gongbo Liao have to do with what is mandated?" (*Lunyu* 14/36)

So even the question of whether or not the way will prevail is out of human hands: humans striving to put the way into practice can succeed only if Heaven so wishes it. As with Confucius' statements about his best disciple dying young, the attitude here is simply that one must accept what Heaven has ordained.

Nonetheless, Confucius adheres strongly to the view that no one should resent Heaven:

子曰：「莫我知也夫！」子貢曰：「何為其莫知子也？」子曰：「不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達。知我者其天乎！」

The master said, "No one understands me." Zigong asked, "What does it mean to say no one understands you?" The master replied, "I do not resent Heaven nor bear a grudge against man. I study here and reach to what is above. Only Heaven understands me." (*Lunyu* 14/35)

Indeed, Confucius holds a much stronger position than just this. He argues that cultural patterns emerged when the initial sages modeled themselves upon Heaven and then brought those patterns to humanity:

子曰：「大哉堯之為君也！巍巍乎！唯天為大，唯堯則之。蕩蕩乎，民無能名焉。巍巍乎其有成功也，煥乎其有文章也！」

The master said: "Great indeed was the rulership of Yao. So majestic—only Heaven is great, and only Yao patterned himself upon it. So boundless, the people were not able to find a name for it. Majestic were his achievements. Illustrious are his patterned forms." (*Lunyu* 8/19)

Heaven is also seen as being responsible for the continuation of these patterns:

子畏於匡，曰：「文王既沒，文不在茲乎？天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之將未喪斯文也，匡人其如予何？」

When the master was in danger in Kuang, he said: “King Wen has died, but are his patterns not here? If Heaven had wanted to destroy these patterns, then those who died later would not have been able to participate in the patterns. Since Heaven has not destroyed these patterns, what can the people of Kuang do to me?” (*Lunyu* 9/5)

Heaven is thereby granted a normative role. The patterns of human culture emerged from Heaven, and it is Heaven that allows those patterns to continue.

Thus, the precepts that should guide human behavior are traceable back to Heaven—they are patterns observed by the sages and brought from Heaven to humanity. However, the commands of Heaven do not necessarily involve support for those who follow these patterns; and yet man must not resent Heaven for this, and indeed must strive to understand and even esteem these commands. Although the *Lunyu* does not work out the implications of this potential tension, they were indeed to play out in later writings within the tradition.

The Resignation of the Sage to the Order of Heaven: The *Mencius*

Like Confucius, Mencius calls on humans to accept the order of Heaven.³ As he bluntly states:

順天者存，逆天者亡。

He who accords with Heaven is preserved; he who opposes Heaven is destroyed. (*Mengzi* 4A/7)

A proper submission to the order of Heaven is, for Mencius, a crucial element of one’s path to sagehood.

Indeed, Mencius at times argues that cultivating oneself is precisely the means by which one fulfills one’s duty to Heaven. Preserving and nourishing the mind and nature endowed to us by Heaven are how one serves Heaven, and knowing one’s nature is how one knows Heaven. A crucial part of this acceptance of the order of Heaven means that one accepts whatever Heaven ordains without concern for living long or dying young:

孟子曰：「盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。夭壽不貳，脩身以俟之，所以立命也。」

Mencius said: “He who has fully used his mind knows his nature. If he knows his nature, he knows Heaven. Preserving his mind and nourishing his nature is the way that he serves Heaven. Dying young or living long are not two distinct things. He cultivates himself so as to await what is to come. This is the means by which he establishes his destiny (*ming*).”
(*Mengzi* 7A/1)

One establishes one’s destiny by cultivating oneself and accepting whatever Heaven mandates.

Mencius also holds that Heaven grants humans a nature that, if cultivated properly, will allow them to become fully moral. The patterns of Heaven are thus located in man’s mind:

君子所仁義禮智根於心。
The nature of the superior man is humaneness, propriety, ritual, and knowledge. They are rooted in his mind. (*Mengzi* 7A/21)

The potential for sagehood is rooted by Heaven in all humans.

But such a commitment means that the tension we found implicit in the *Lunyu* becomes all the more significant. If all humans have within themselves the potential to become a sage, but if Heaven, not man, decides whether or not order will prevail, then the potential conflict between Heaven and man deepens. Allow me to quote the full passage in which the statement with which I opened this section appears:

孟子曰：「天下有道，小德役大德，小賢役大賢。天下無道，小役大，弱役強。斯二者，天也。順天者存，逆天者亡。」
Mencius said, “If all under Heaven has the Way, those of small virtue serve those of great virtue, and the less worthy serve the greatly worthy. If all under Heaven lacks the Way, the small serve the big, and the weak serve the strong. These two are due to Heaven. He who accords with Heaven is preserved; he who opposes Heaven is destroyed.” (*Mengzi* 4A/7)

One must indeed accord with the wishes of Heaven or be destroyed. But Mencius does make moral judgments on periods of history, and he makes it quite clear that according with Heaven means, at times, accepting a state of affairs that runs counter to the normative way—a way that Heaven itself has given man the potential to bring about.

But what happens in such an event? Must humans simply resign themselves to a lack of order if such are the wishes of Heaven? This is a difficult question for Mencius to answer. The ultimate answer, of course, is that one

must indeed accept the order that Heaven ordains. But this does not for Mencius result in a simple resignation. As he argues explicitly:

孟子曰：「莫非命也，順受其正；是故知命者不立乎巖牆之下。盡其道而死者，正命也；桎梏死者，非正命也。」

Mencius said, “Everything is mandated (*ming*). One accords with what is correct. Therefore, one who understands what is mandated does not stand beneath a falling wall. One who dies after fulfilling his way has corrected his mandate. Dying in fetters is not a correct mandate.” (*Mengzi* 7A/2)

Everything may be mandated, but this should not lead to any lack of striving: the concern should rather be to correct one’s mandate by trying to fulfill one’s way.

But such an ethical stance opens several questions. Mencius’ formulations seem to imply that whatever is to come is not necessarily right, even if one must accept it. This potential conflict plays out forcefully in numerous places in Mencius’ work. One obvious problem, given Mencius’ political theology, is the issue of hereditary monarchy. If anyone has the potential to become a sage, then why is it not the case that, at any given time, the most cultivated person in the realm would be the king? Indeed, for Mencius, most of the greatest sages since the introduction of hereditary monarchy have not been kings: Yi Yin, the duke of Zhou, Confucius, and, perhaps, Mencius himself. Is hereditary monarchy therefore in opposition to the order of Heaven?

On the contrary. Mencius is committed to claiming that Heaven itself established the custom:

萬章問曰：「人有言，至於禹而德衰，不傳於賢，而傳於子。有諸？」孟子曰：「否，不然也；天與賢，則與賢；天與子，則與子。」

Wan Zhang asked: “Some people say that, when it came to the time of Yu, power (*de*) declined. He did not give power to the worthy but instead gave it to his son. Is this correct?” Mencius said, “No. It is not so. If Heaven had given it to a worthy, then it would have been given to a worthy. Since Heaven gave it to the son, it was given to the son.” (*Mengzi* 5A/6)

Mencius goes on to recount the history of the succession of Yao, Shun, and Yu, pointing out that, in each of these cases, the worthy man worked with the ruler for several years and the people grew to trust him. But this was not true of Yi, whom the people did not know well. Moreover, Qi, the son of Yu, was also worthy, whereas the sons of Yao and Shun were not. All of this, according to Mencius, was mandated by Heaven, and thus was not due to Yu:

皆天也，非人之所能為也。莫之為而為者，天也；莫之致而至者，命也。
All of this was due to Heaven. It is not something that man could have
done. If no one does it, and yet it is done, then it is Heaven. If no one
brings something about, and yet it is brought about, it is mandated.
(*Mengzi* 5A/6)

Mencius explains that, thereafter, hereditary monarchy became the norm: the kingship would always be handed down to the son. The only time this would ever be stopped would be if a ruler were truly horrible—as with Jie and Zhou. Otherwise, Heaven would not stop the succession. This for Mencius explains why Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou could never be kings: they lived at a time when their rulers were acceptable—even if not as sagely as Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou themselves.

But Mencius' argument begs the question. This may explain why Yu should not be criticized, but it hardly answers the larger point implied in Wan Zhang's query: even if Qi was a better prospective ruler than Yi, it does not follow that hereditary monarchy in general is a good thing. And, since Heaven chose the rulers, Heaven is responsible for the institution. Why, if Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou were more worthy, did they not become rulers? Or, to put the question more forcefully, why would Heaven have ordained hereditary monarchy to become the norm?

No answer to this is given. Of note here is the fact that Mencius makes no attempt to claim that hereditary monarchy is a moral institution, or even that Heaven had good practical reasons to maintain it. For Mencius, all we can say is simply that Heaven has mandated it, and we must therefore accept it.

What happens when the mandates of Heaven clearly conflict with the ethical stance of the sage? The most forceful and poignant example of this occurred near the end of Mencius' career. Mencius spent several years traveling from state to state, trying to convince one of the rulers to listen to his advice. He actually received a position at the court of Qi, and, if our text is to be believed, held audience with the king of Qi on several occasions. As several commentators have noted, Mencius clearly perceived himself to be the Yi Yin of his era: just as Yi Yin had counseled Tang on how to bring order to the world and establish the Shang dynasty, so would Mencius advise the ruler of Qi how to bring order to the world and start a new dynasty.⁴ However, the king did not follow Mencius' advice. Mencius did not become the next Yi Yin, and the world was not brought to order. His life project in failure, Mencius left the state of Qi:

孟子去齊，充虞路問曰：「夫子若有不豫色然。前日虞聞諸夫子曰：『君子不怨天，不尤人。』」曰：「彼一時，此一時也。五年必有王者興，其

間必有名世者。由周而來，七百有餘歲矣；以其數則過矣，以其時考之則可矣。夫天，未欲平治天下也，如欲平治天下，當今之世，舍我其誰也？吾何為不豫哉？」

When Mencius left Qi, Chong Yu asked him on the way, “Master, you seem to look displeased. A few days ago I heard you say that ‘a gentleman does not resent Heaven nor bears a grudge against men.’” Mencius responded, “That was one time, this is another time. Every five hundred years, it must be the case that a king will arise. In the interval there must arise one from which an age takes its name. From the Zhou until now, it has been more than seven hundred years. The mark has passed, and the time, if one examines it, is proper. Yet Heaven does not yet wish to bring order to all under Heaven. If Heaven wished to bring order to all under Heaven, who in the present generation is there other than me? How could I be displeased?” (*Mengzi* 2B/13)⁵

The statement to which Chong Yu refers was the one quoted above from the *Lunyu*. In general terms, the passage from the *Mencius* reveals a similar view as that expressed in the *Lunyu* quotation, but the sentiment of Mencius is clearly less accepting of the situation.⁶

Mencius states here that there is a proper, cyclical order, in which a king will arise every five hundred years, and in the interval there will arise a sage. This is a normative pattern in human history, and the proper moment for a sage to emerge has arrived. Moreover, Mencius clearly feels that he has cultivated himself to become such a sage. The time is proper, and he, the sage, has arisen.

So why has Mencius’ project ended in failure? The only reason that can be given is simply that Heaven does not wish for there to be order. There is no moral or practical reason for this state of affairs: in preventing order from arising, Heaven is acting against the normative pattern of human history and is blocking the path of a true sage. This is a much stronger claim than anything one can find in the *Lunyu*. Confucius did believe that Heaven was responsible for the way flourishing or not, and he did state that Heaven was destroying him for giving Yan Hui such a short life span. But Confucius never implied that such acts stood in opposition to some kind of normative order. In contrast, here Mencius is indeed positing a clear distinction between what is right according to the normative patterns of history and what Heaven actually does. Although it should be the case that the latter would always accord with the former, there are times, and Mencius clearly feels himself to be living in such a time, when no such accord exists.

For Mencius, then, there is a potential tension between the claims of Heaven and those of the sage. And yet, what can one do? The resolution of

such a tension is clear for him: if there is a disjunction between the normative patterns that a sage can understand and the actual decisions of Heaven, one must side with Heaven. According to Mencius' political theology, one must simply accept what Heaven ordains, and one must try to do so without resentment.

The commands of Heaven, therefore, do not necessarily correspond with the normative order that Heaven itself has given man the potential to realize. Sages have the potential to bring order to the world, but Heaven can, for no apparent reason, thwart such plans—even though it was Heaven that gave humans this potential in the first place. This is not to say that Heaven is unethical, but simply to say that, according to both Confucius and Mencius, ethical action on the part of humans is not enough. It is not the case that the most ethical person will necessarily become a king, or even the sage minister, and why Heaven has so mandated it is simply beyond our understanding. Although Confucianism is often portrayed as fundamentally optimistic, the argument of Mencius is actually based upon a very different type of cosmology. To call it “tragic” might be to go somewhat too far, but he clearly perceives a potential tension between Heaven and man.

If this analysis is correct, then we would have to conclude that the seeming ambivalence concerning *ming* is not based on distinct meanings of the term; rather, it concerns the conflicting visions in early Confucianism concerning the relative powers and positions of humans and Heaven. Although Heaven was perceived as the repository of the patterns that should guide humanity, it was not seen as necessarily supporting those humans who follow such patterns; indeed, Heaven would at times actively work to prevent the proper order from emerging. The *ming* of Heaven could thus be, from the point of view of humanity, either normative or destructive; one's goal was to correct it as best one could, and then ultimately resign oneself to it. Heaven is more powerful than man, and, ultimately, one must simply accept its *ming*.

The Practice of the Sage: Dong Zhongshu

I have presented these points to explicate some of the basic tensions that underlay early Confucianism. As Dong Zhongshu attempted to convince Wudi to accept the texts purportedly edited and authored by Confucius, he also reworked this earlier understanding of the relationship between Heaven and man.⁷ To understand this full argument, it will be helpful to look in detail at his memorials to Han Wudi at the beginning of the emperor's reign.⁸

For Dong, Heaven both generated and aligned the cosmos:

臣聞天者萬物之祖也，故遍覆包函而無所殊，建日月風雨以和之，經陰陽寒暑以成之。

I have heard that Heaven is the ancestor of the myriad things. Therefore, it completely covers, embraces, and envelops them, and nothing is treated differently. It established the sun and moon, wind and rain to harmonize them; it aligned (*jing*) yin and yang, hot and cold to complete them.

(*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

Heaven gave birth to the myriad things and then organized the cosmos to nourish them. The sages then modeled themselves upon this alignment:

故聖人法天而立道，亦溥愛而亡私，布德施仁以厚之，設誼立禮以導之。

Therefore, the sages modeled themselves on Heaven and established the Way. They cherished extensively and without selfishness, disseminated virtue and displayed humaneness to enrich them, and established propriety and set up rituals to guide them. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

This is an argument made by Confucius as well, but Dong takes it a step further: the sages modeling themselves upon Heaven was itself something mandated by Heaven.

人受命於天，固超然異於群生，入有父子兄弟之親，出有君臣上下之誼，會聚相遇，則有耆老長幼之施；粲然有文以相接，驩然有恩以相愛，此人之所以貴也。

Humans receive the mandate from Heaven. They are certainly superior in the way they differ from the other forms of life. Within they possess the relations of father and son, elder and younger brother. Outside they possess the propriety of ruler and minister, upper and lower. When gathering together they possess the arrays of seniority and age. Bright is the culture (*wen*) with which they meet each other; peaceful is the kindness with which they relate to each other. This is why humans are so noble. (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

What is distinctive about humans, and what makes them the most noble of creatures, is that Heaven has mandated them to possess hierarchy and distinctions. Moreover, they appropriate the rest of the natural world for their benefit:

生五穀以食之，桑麻以衣之，六畜以養之，服牛乘馬，圈豹檻虎，是其得天之靈，貴於物也。故孔子曰：「天地之人為貴。」

They grow the five grains to feed themselves, silk and hemp to clothe themselves, six domestic animals to nourish themselves; they yoke oxen and

harness horses, ensnare leopards and cage tigers. This is how they obtain the numinousness of Heaven, and why they are more lofty than other things. Therefore Confucius said, “As for the nature of Heaven and Earth, man is the most lofty.” (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

The appropriation and domestication of nature by man is the means by which humans obtain the numinousness of Heaven. And, ultimately, one can come to accord with the patterns of the world:

明於天，知自貴於物；知自貴於物，然後知仁誼；知仁誼，然後重禮節；重禮節，然後安處善；安處善，然後樂循理；樂循理，然後謂之君子。故孔子曰：「不知命，亡以為君子」，此之謂也。

If one is illuminated about the nature of Heaven, one understands oneself to be more noble than other things. Only if one understands oneself to be more noble than other things does he understand humaneness and propriety. Only if he understands humaneness and propriety does he value ritual and modulation. Only if he values ritual and modulation does he reside in goodness. Only if he resides in goodness will he delight in according with the patterns. Only if he delights in according with the patterns can he be called a gentleman. Therefore, Confucius said, “If you do not understand the mandate, you are without that with which to become a gentleman.” This is the meaning. (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

There is a teleology here in which humans are mandated by Heaven to appropriate nature, and, by doing so, they will come into accord with the patterns of the cosmos.

The cosmos, then, was set up by Heaven for the benefit of man. Nature was made such that man will be able to appropriate it and thereby thrive. The implication is that the cosmos will not be properly ordered unless humans make it an object of appropriation. And this, indeed, is a crucial part of understanding Heaven’s mandate.

And Dong continues: the cosmos itself requires that humans so bring order to the world.

故為人君者，正心以正朝，正朝以正官，正官以正萬民，正萬民以正四方。四方正，遠近莫敢不壹於正，而亡有邪氣奸其間者。是以陰陽調而風雨時，群生和而萬民殖，五穀孰而中木茂，天地之間被潤澤而大豐美，四海之內聞盛德而皆徠臣，諸福之物，可致之祥，莫不畢至，而王道終矣。 Therefore, the ruler rectifies his mind and thereby rectifies his court; he rectifies his court and thereby rectifies the hundred officials; he rectifies the hundred officials and thereby rectifies the myriad people; he rectifies

the myriad people and thereby rectifies the four quarters. Once the four quarters are rectified, no one, distant or near, would dare not unite with the rectification, and there would be no bad *qi* to corrupt those within. Because of this, yin and yang will mix and the wind and rain will be timely. The various forms of life will be harmonized and the myriad people will prosper, the five grains will ripen, and the grasses and trees will thrive. All within Heaven and Earth will be moistened and greatly abundant and splendid. Everyone within the four seas will hear of the flourishing virtue and come to serve. All the things of blessing and all the auspicious omens that can be summoned will arrive, and the kingly way will be achieved. (*Hanshu* 56: 2502–2503)

The ruler's rectification of himself begins the process whereby his court, the people, and ultimately the natural world will be brought to order and harmony.

Heaven, therefore, requires a human sage to complete the process of order. Heaven gives the mandate, but a sage must actually put it into practice:

天命之謂命，命非聖人不行；質樸之謂，非教化不成；人欲之謂情，情非度制不節。是故王者上謹於承天意，以順命也；下務明教化民，以成也；正法度之宜，別上下之序，以防欲也。

Heaven's command I call the mandate; the mandate can only be put into practice by a sage. One's substance I call nature; nature can only be completed through education. Human desire I call the disposition; the disposition can only be modulated through standards and regulations. It is for this reason that a king above is attentive to upholding the intent of Heaven so as to accord with the mandate, and below endeavors to clarify and educate the people so as to complete their nature. He corrects the appropriateness of the laws and standards and distinguishes the hierarchy of upper and lower so as to restrain their desires. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

Sagely action, again, is necessary in order for Heaven's commands to be realized.

As a consequence, the sage is granted extraordinary powers: not only does the order of the natural world depend upon him, but even the question of whether or not someone will be long-lived or die young depends upon his rule.

臣聞命者天之令也，者生之質也，情者人之欲也。或夭或壽，或仁或鄙，陶冶而成之，不能粹美，有治亂之所生，故不齊也。孔子曰：「君子

之德風(也)，小人之德中(也)，中上之風必偃。」故堯舜行德則民仁壽，桀紂行暴則民鄙夭。夫上之化下，下之從上，猶泥之在鈞，唯甄者之所為；猶金之在鎔，唯冶者之所鑄。

I have heard that the mandate is the command of Heaven, nature is the substance one is born with, and disposition is human desire. As for dying young or living long, being humane or licentious: once it is molded and completed, it cannot be purified or beautified. Order and disorder are generated; therefore things are unequal. Confucius said: "The virtue of a gentleman is like the wind; the virtue of a petty man is like the grass. If the wind blows above, [the grass] will invariably bend." Thus, when Yao and Shun practiced virtue, the people were humane and long-lived; and when Jie and Zhou practiced oppression, the people were licentious and died young. If what is above transforms what is below, what is below will follow what is above. This is like clay on a pottery wheel; only a potter can form it. Or like metal in a mold; only a smith can cast it. (*Hanshu* 56: 2501)

The order and life of both the human and natural worlds, therefore, depend upon the sages correctly utilizing and putting into practice the mandate of Heaven.

Such a cosmology differs in several significant ways from that seen in Confucius and Mencius. The potential conflict between Heaven and man—the conflict that so characterized early Confucian arguments—has here been replaced with an implicit teleology in which Heaven requires that man bring the cosmos into order. But if Dong has reformulated the cosmology of early Confucianism, how does he wrestle with the problems that so concerned Confucius and Mencius? In particular, how does he deal with the issue of theodicy? Or, more pointedly, how does he explain the fact that someone like Confucius was never crowned king, whereas the Qin and Han took power using (in Dong's view) immoral policies? Let us begin with Confucius.

For Dong Zhongshu, Confucius was in fact the last sage to have arisen. And the crucial act of Confucius modeling himself on Heaven occurred with the composition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*:

孔子作春秋，上揆之天道，下質諸人情，參之於古，考之於今。

Confucius created the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, above calculating it to the heavenly way, below making it substantive with the fundamentals of man; comparing it with antiquity, examining it with the present. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

The consequence of Confucius so following Heaven is that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* matches the alignment of Heaven and Earth themselves:

春秋大一統者，天地之常經，古今之通誼也。

The great unity of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is the enduring alignment (*jing*) of Heaven and Earth, the connecting propriety of the past and present. (*Hanshu* 56: 2523)

Since the text matches the alignment of the cosmos, it can be used in omenology: hidden in the text is the key to interpreting the cosmos and thus to guiding human action. For example, of a passage from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that records a flood Dong Zhongshu provided the following interpretation:

董仲舒以為夫人哀姜淫亂，逆陰氣，故大水也。

Dong Zhongshu took this to mean that the consort Ai Jiang was licentious and disorderly, acting contrary to the *yin qi*. Therefore there was a great flood. (*Hanshu* 27A: 1339)

Because the cosmos is based upon the interplay of yin and yang, similar things attract: yin will attract yin, and yang will attract yang.

Dong Zhongshu is thus arguing that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* provide the principles according to which omens can be properly understood. The implication of the argument is that only scholars trained in such works can be guides to the rulers, for only they can correctly interpret omens.

But why, if Confucius was such a sage that he was able to author a text matching the alignment of the cosmos, did he not himself start a new dynasty? The answer again lies with the mandate. Like Mencius, Dong emphasizes that the receipt of the mandate is something that comes from Heaven; human effort could not have brought it about.

臣聞天之所大奉使之王者，必有非人力所能致而自至者，此受命之符也。

I have heard that the king who has been charged by Heaven invariably possesses something that human effort could not bring about and yet it arrives nonetheless. This is the tally of the receipt of the mandate. (*Hanshu* 56: 2500)

Confucius, therefore, whatever his sagely qualities, could not start a dynasty:

孔子曰：「鳳鳥不至，河不出圖，吾已矣夫！」自悲可致此物，而身卑賤不得致也。

Confucius said: “The phoenix does not arrive, the River does not show forth the diagram. I am at my end!”⁹ Self-pity can summon these things;

but, because he held a low position, he was not able to summon them.
(*Hanshu* 56: 2503)

If, however, Heaven grants one the position of rulership, then one has the power to summon the basis for order:

今陛下貴為天子，富有四海，居得致之位，操可致之勢，又有能致之資，行高而恩厚，知明而意美，愛民而好士，可謂誼主矣。然而天地未應而美祥莫至者，何也？凡以教化不立而萬民不正也。

Now, your majesty, your noble position is as the Son of Heaven, your fortune possesses the four seas. You reside in the position from which you can summon, you control the authority to summon, and you possess the resources that can be used to summon. Your actions are lofty, and your kindness deep. Your knowledge is bright and your intentions splendid. You cherish the people and are fond of the officers. You can be called a proper ruler. And yet Heaven and Earth have not yet responded, and auspicious omens have not arrived. Why is this? Because education and transformation have not been established, and the myriad people have not been rectified. (*Hanshu* 56: 2503)

Dong's critique is that none of the Han rulers—those in position to bring order to the world—have succeeded in summoning the auspicious omens. Confucius properly modeled himself on Heaven, but Heaven had not granted him the position to summon the omens; the Han rulers have been granted the position to summon the omens, but they have failed to model themselves on Heaven.

The immediate solution to this problem, according to the way that Dong has set up the argument, is clear: the Han rulers need to follow the principles laid out in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. But there is a deeper problem if we follow Dong's full argument. Why, if Heaven mandates who will be in positions of power, and if Heaven needs a proper person to carry out the mandate and thereby bring order to the cosmos, did Heaven not put Confucius in power? Why wait more than two centuries, then allow the Qin and Han to take power—particularly if all that was required was simply for them to follow the principles laid out by Confucius so long before?

The question is quite similar to that seen earlier in Mencius: why is it that sages are not given the mandate by Heaven? But Dong's response to the problem is distinctive. Whereas Mencius answers this with a simple statement of resignation that one must accept the mandate and attempt to do so without resentment, Dong instead offers an institutional response: although

Confucius was not granted the kingship, he did author the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in order to guide humans in following the heavenly way. Dong's response, then, is that the ruler should institutionalize this by setting up a formal system in which people would be trained to understand the alignment of the cosmos and to guide the ruler accordingly.

This is, in a sense, an institutionalization of the degeneration implied in the *Mencius*. The implicit claim here would appear to be that rulers at this point need institutionalized scholars to guide them: sages like Confucius will understand the alignment of the cosmos, and scholars of the texts composed or edited by Confucius will guide the ruler properly.

For Dong Zhongshu, then, the goal of humans is to bring to the natural world the proper functioning that Heaven requires for it. Sages are called upon to discover the proper patterns from Heaven and then to bring those patterns to the human and natural worlds. Thus, neither the natural nor the human world can reach its potentiality for order without sagely guidance.

The manner in which Dong Zhongshu has articulated this position serves to deny the tensions that pervaded the cosmology of Mencius. Heaven is an agent within this cosmology, but it is not presented as potentially disrupting the moral patterns that should be guiding humanity. Indeed, Heaven is equated with the patterns, and the only issue for Dong Zhongshu is whether or not sages follow these heavenly patterns and thereby bring order to the world.

Accordingly, if there is a discrepancy between the proper patterns of Heaven and the actual functioning of the natural or human worlds, the responsibility lies squarely with the ruler: it is the ruler who must bring the patterns of Heaven to the world. And the solution to the question of why Heaven has not granted rulership to a sage is answered institutionally. For whatever reason, Heaven does not tend to grant the mandate to sages as it did in the time of Yao, Shun, and Yu; sages tend now to be ministers, not rulers. This may not be ideal, but, in Dong's view, it also need not result in a lack of order. It simply means that ministers must be properly trained in the classics so that they can guide the rulers. In other words, the fact that rulers are not sages simply requires an institutional response.

Conclusion

In early Confucianism, the mandates of Heaven were highly problematic, granting humans both great potentials and radical limitations. Far from assuming an inherent correlation between humans and Heaven, early Confucians saw a potentially agonistic relationship. Indeed, the reasons why Confucius and Mencius kept emphasizing that humans should esteem the

mandate and not become resentful of Heaven reveal the tensions that surrounded the notion of *ming*—tensions between Heaven as the source of the patterns that should guide humanity but also the source of seemingly arbitrary commands that can disrupt those very patterns.

The implication of this is that the famed notion of humans and Heaven existing in harmony—a view so often attributed to Dong Zhongshu—was not an assumption at all in early China. Rather, it was articulated in response to the political events of the time and as an alternative view to the vision proffered by Mencius almost two centuries before. Dong Zhongshu’s claim that sages are simply putting Heaven’s mandate into practice is not an assumption about the link between Heaven and humanity, but is offered as a possible solution to the tension that pervaded early Confucianism. That even a figure such as Dong Zhongshu—a figure so associated with asserting the interdependence of man and Heaven—marshaled his argument in response to such a tension concerning *ming* reveals just how pervasive that tension was.

Notes

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1. By “Confucius” I simply refer to the figure portrayed in the *Lunyu*. For an attempt to periodize the chapters of the *Lunyu* themselves, see Brooks and Taeko Brooks 1998.

2. For a fuller discussion of these issues in the *Lunyu*, see Puett 2002: 97–101, from which portions of this section have been excerpted.

3. Portions of this section also appear in Puett 2002: 134–140.

4. See, for example, Robert Eno’s discussion (1990: 261n60). The relevant passages on Yi Yin are *Mengzi* 5A/7 and 5B/1.

5. My translation of this passage is heavily indebted to that given by D. C. Lau, *Mencius* 1970: 94.

6. I am reading the passage as revealing a level of anger on the part of Mencius. For a somewhat different view of the passage, see Bloom 2003; Ivanhoe 1988; Yearley 1975.

7. For an excellent analysis of Dong Zhongshu, see Queen 1996. My interpretations have been aided greatly by her work.

8. A fuller exposition of Dong Zhongshu can be found in Puett 2002: 289–300, from which portions of this section have been excerpted.

9. The quotation is from *Lunyu*, 9/9.

3

Languages of Fate

Semantic Fields in Chinese and Greek

LISA RAPHALS

I begin with the anachronism of a science-fiction representation of linguistic incommensurability. A human linguist discovers that the seven-limbed “Heptapods” have two entirely different languages for spoken (“Heptapod A”) and written communication (“Heptapod B”). The total separation of spoken and written language makes possible a “semasiographic,” rather than “glottographic” writing system. The “words” of Heptapod B are not constrained by the order requirements of language spoken in time, and the entirely nonphonological written script of Heptapod B is not word-divided. As the narrator gains proficiency, she begins to understand the consequences of thinking in Heptapod B. Premises and conclusions are interchangeable. Humans interpret events causally and chronologically, but Heptapods select attributes that are meaningful only over time. Human notions of free will turn out to be incompatible with a Heptapod mode of consciousness that, by its very simultaneity, knows the future (Chiang 1999). The story’s very interesting attempt to use the metaphors of language and language acquisition to depict an “alien” sensibility offers an interesting reflection point for some of the important differences between Greek and Chinese views of the interrelations of fate and free will.

Questions on the nature of fate or destiny and how it could be realized, negotiated, or averted informed a wide range of reflective thought in both China and Greece. In many of the Chinese texts, understanding fate is the defining characteristic of a sage; classical Confucian authors made the understanding of *ming* a *prerequisite* for self-cultivation. Determinism was a central problem of post-Aristotelian philosophy, but with some exceptions the Hellenistic debate tended to eclipse questions of fate, fatalism, and necessity that engaged earlier Greek speculative thinkers since Homer. An initial obstacle to comparative study of beliefs in fate or fatalism is simply the modern tendency to give both short shrift as objects of serious consideration.

On the one hand, histories of religion have situated belief in fate (undistinguished from fatalism) as an early stage in a teleological evolution toward Christianity (Hastings, Selbie, and Gray [1875] 1955 and 1961: 774). Other treatments oppose belief in fate to free will, a cornerstone of modernity, and forget to distinguish fate and fatalism from determinism, the doctrine that every event has a cause (which implies neither fatalism nor that events can be predicted.)

From the *Fei Ming* 非命 chapters of the *Mobist Canon* to modern attacks on theological fatalism and scientific determinism, fatalism (as distinct from belief in fate) has a long history of disrepute. As a modern critic puts it:

If time confers respectability on philosophical problems, there are few issues in the history of philosophy with more right to be carefully and charitably considered than fatalism. Yet in the twentieth century, at least, this approach has certainly not been adopted. Contemporary discussions of fatalism have been scattered and perfunctory, almost always concluding with a summary dismissal of the fatalist's argument. Typically, the fatalist is seen as making some rather sophomoric blunder—mistaking a tautology for a substantive thesis about necessity, misunderstanding the scope of a “model operator,” misrepresenting facts about the future as facts about the past, and the like. (Mark H. Bernstein 1992: 1)¹

Several prevailing tendencies work against the serious consideration of fatalist arguments. One is the argument that new notions of risk and trust are distinctly modern developments that supplant earlier notions of fate, fortune, and *fortuna*: nowadays the unexpected comes, not from turns of fate or divine intervention, but from risk.² This approach universalizes and privileges the modern formulation, as does the “from religion to philosophy” paradigm so common in Classical approaches to fatalism (Greene 1944; Cornford 1957; Dietrich 1965; Doyle 1984). The truism that free will (and rationality) are peculiarly Greek and that Chinese philosophy is passive, quietistic, or fatalistic is a different kind of example of a confusion between belief in fatalism and belief in fate (Weber 1951; B. S. Turner 1996).³ If such generalities can be made at all, the label of fatalism may better fit the Greek evidence than the Chinese. Homer presents a fair consensus that fate cannot be gainsaid—whatever we make of the relation between Μοῖρα (Fate) and the will of Zeus. By contrast, the accounts of fate in pre-Buddhist texts share a slightly unnerving focus on strategy, efficacy, and “setup,” *shi* 勢.

By fate or destiny I mean the notion that there is a set or immutable pattern to the world. It may be understood as humanly knowable or ultimately inscrutable; personified as (or under the power of) a God or

independent of any divine will. At the level of individual agency, a conscious agent is apt to consider the “fate” she is “given” in life and ask what can be changed and what is unalterable. In this sense, the concept of fate can provide a way to categorize or discriminate what can and cannot be changed. The related epistemological question is foreknowledge: both about what is given (fate) and about what is alterable. Belief in fate (for the nonfatalist) may be closely connected to divination, as divination is based on the premise that fate can be controlled or at least influenced by conscious entities available to human contact.

Fatalism is the belief that events are fixed in advance and unchangeable by human agency. The idea that human action has no influence on events is readily confused with determinism, the doctrine that every event has a cause, either an earlier event or a natural law. Both are thus distinct from belief in fate. The strong fatalist believes that outcomes are set by what is “given,” with no significant scope for intervention; therefore, she has no practical need to distinguish which outcomes can be altered. (One can, of course, be fatalist about some things and not about others.) Nor does the fatalist have a practical epistemological problem; for her, the future, like the past, cannot be undone.

A considerable corpus of twentieth-century sinological scholarship, Chinese and otherwise, also has wielded the charge of fatalism, to various effects. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) and other Qing scholars attacked Song and Ming dynasty neo-Confucianism (Tang Junyi 1962: 197–198; Gu Jiegang et al. 1926–1935; Zhou Zuoren 1982). Some twentieth-century Chinese scholars portrayed Xia and Shang dynasty religion unfavorably as “primitive” in comparison to the Zhou (Chan 1967: 286–302; Xu Fuguan 1963: 54–55; Tang Junyi 1957: 7–18; cf. Chen 1997c). Attitudes toward fatalism have also been used as a basis for classifying Warring States thought (Chen Ning 1994a, 1994b, and 1997a).

In one of the most influential studies of the subject, Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1951), a student of Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), articulated five theories from the Eastern Zhou and Warring States: the theory that *ming* [“fate”] is fixed *ming ding lun* 命定論; the theory that *ming* rectifies *ming zheng lun* 命正論; the theory of awaiting *ming*, *si ming lun* 俟命論; the theory of *ming* as a wheel *ming yun lun* 命運論; and the contra-*ming* theory *fei ming lun* 非命論 (Fu Sinian 1952.3: 114; 1980.4: 253–258, as quoted in Q. Edward Wang 1996).⁴ Fu’s original study, and much later scholarship indebted to it, attest to the importance of the problem of fate in Warring States thought (Tang Junyi 1957, 1962, 1963, 1964; Miyazaki 1963; Graham 1967; Mori 1971; Tatenno 1983; Kanaya 1986; Nylan 1994; Chen 1994a). Recent studies have also shown its centrality to Han philosophy, especially in the *Taixuanjing* 太

玄經 of Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18 CE) 揚雄 and in the *Lunheng* 論衡 of Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) (Nylan 1994, 1997). Fu’s original terms also have been reinvented in the process of translation: *ming ding* as predeterminism, *ming zheng* as moral determinism, *ming yun* as fatalism, and *fei ming* as anti-fatalism (Chen Ning 1994a: 4–5). Such formulations do not tend to reveal contexts in which concepts of fate, fatalism, and necessity arose, the problems they were intended to address, the “work” they were intended to do, the systems of metaphors of which they were elements, and the systems of beliefs and practices toward which they stood in relations of contrast or opposition.

This chapter is a brief and comparative historical overview of the semantic fields of “fate” in Classical Greece and pre-Buddhist China. It is intended as a preamble to a more extended comparative treatment of inter-related complexes of concepts of fate, fortune, luck, and chance in ancient China and Greece, the two “Classical” cultures that have in many ways come to define East and West.

The first two sections describe key elements in the Chinese semantic field from the Warring States, Han, and the reinvention of the earlier lexicon in contemporary Chinese terms for such entirely modern concepts as risk, randomness, and (statistical) chance. I deliberately avoid Buddhist language because it warrants separate study. My account of the Greek semantic field focuses on Homer and the Διός Βουλή, Parmenides and the problem of fate and necessity, Plato and the role of daimons, a very brief treatment of the “On Fate” topos in Hellenistic Greece, and a discussion of the very specialized semantic field of Greek oracular discourse.

In a third section I attempt a very brief comparative metaphorology; metaphors for the action of fate included command, division, or allotment, and wheels or cycles of change. Against a history of being treated as a literary or rhetorical device, recent research has underscored the importance of metaphor as a basic principle of human cognition and understanding (Richards 1936: esp. 89–138; Black 1954–1955, 1977; Davidson 1978; Ricoeur 1975; Searle 1979; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1981; Johnson 1987). Recent research on Chinese root metaphors and comparative metaphorology have shown the possibility of and need for comparative study of the use of metaphor, and particularly its use in philosophy (Allan 1997; Reding 1996, 1997).

In presenting these semantic fields I seek to avoid the respective pitfalls of overgeneralizing (by ignoring differences in time, place, and context) and of projecting the concepts of one tradition onto the other (Detienne and Vernant 1978; Raphals 1992; Lloyd 1996: 3–6). To that end, I have avoided any attempts to classify theories of fate. Nonetheless, I have heuristically identified eight overlapping topoi that cover much of the theoretical range of

the semantic fields of fate in early China and Greece. I use them as a convenience to group similar expressions, not as a classification:

(1) Fate as divine “command” of one or more anthropomorphic gods, ancestors, spirits, or other divinities.

(2) Fate as something predetermined at birth or inception (whatever its scope). This topos does not imply determinism, insofar as “destiny” may operate in specific and limited ways, and not be the only factor that controls human life. The first of Fu Sinian’s five theories is an instructive example of the limited power of the range of interpretation of “fixed fate” to determine the actual unfolding of human lives:

命定論者，以天命為固定，不可改易者也。此等理解，在民間能成牢固不可破之信念，在學人口中實不為之辨護。

The theory that *ming* is fixed held that the command of heaven was something that was fixed and could not be altered. This was understood in different ways. The common people took it to mean that [*ming*] could be completed and secured but not gotten rid of. The learned took it to mean that [its] substance could not easily be changed or protected. (Fu 1952: 114)

(3) Fate as subject to the exercise of human choice and free will.

(4) Moral fate. Fu Sinian’s second and third theories of *ming* show the range of nuance possible, even when linking (some aspects of) destiny to virtuous conduct:

命正論者，謂天眷無常，依人之形事以降禍福

The theory that *ming* rectifies held that the affections of heaven was not constant, and that conduct toward others could bring down good fortune or calamity. (Fu 1952: 115)

俟命論者，謂上天之意在大體上是福善而禍淫，然亦有不齊者焉，賢者不必壽，不仁者不必不祿也。

The *si ming* theory holds that the intentions of highest heaven are in the main to bring good fortune to the good and calamity to the licentious, but that there are those whom it does not help. Those who are worthy are not necessarily long-lived, and those who are unbenevolent are not necessarily without emoluments. (Fu 1952: 116)

The theory of awaiting *ming* was the specifically Ruist view that heaven rewards virtue overall but unpredictably, with the implied recommendation to practice self-cultivation and await the mandate of Heaven.⁵ A moral heaven

rewards virtue: therefore people can affect destiny through making moral choices. To describe this view as moral determinism is to overstate the case.

(5) Fate as subject to random chance, luck, fortune, etc.

(6) Fate as predictable, whether construed as necessity, mechanical cycles, or the operation of laws of nature.

(7) The problem of transpersonal versus individual destiny.

(8) Explicit denial of “fate” or “fatalism,” whatever that is taken to mean.

Although there is tension between (3) and (4) and between (5) and (6), these orientations are not mutually exclusive, and each has many interpretations.

The Chinese Semantic Field

The earliest written records in China are the Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions. These nonnarrative divination records present the records of the reading of oracle bone “cracks.” Shang divination covered a wide variety of subject matter: sacrifice, military campaigns, hunting, excursions, calendrics, agriculture, weather, illness, childbirth, dreams, construction, tribute, and requests for divine or ancestral approval and assistance (Keightley 1978: 33–35). The oracle bone inscriptions use the graph *ling* 令, command or decree, in two arguably distinct senses: (1) command or decree and (2) the noun “*ming*,” possibly the name of a deity (Xia Lu 1980; Hong Jiayi 1983: 122). There is no separate graph for these two distinct concepts; they are separated through context. Although *ming* became the key term for fate or destiny, it always retained its close links with *ling* and command. In some inscriptions, *ming* was associated with the high god Di 帝, who has the preeminent power to issue commands.⁶ In the expression *Di ming* 帝命, “the decree of Di,” *ming* may have been the name of a deity to whom divinations were addressed.⁷

Shang beliefs about divine command were inseparable from divination. Most oracle texts were divinations about the future, whether assertive of human preference or interrogative toward divine will, but without the implication of fixed or blind fate or determinism. Thus, from the earliest times, the semantic fields for fate and destiny were intertwined with the practice of a range of techniques that furthered personal welfare through personal access to mantic knowledge. By the term “mantic access” I mean a range of techniques of prediction and divination, starting from the oracle bone records.⁸ A detailed description of these, their provenance, local variations, and so on, is beyond the scope of this discussion, but there is some evidence that mantic access was far greater in China than in Greece. It can be said with some certainty that the earliest Chinese beliefs about fate concerned the topos of

divine command; there is also considerable evidence that they presupposed some kind of notion of free will or human choice rather than a notion of predetermined lot, despite a variety of efforts to portray Shang religion as fatalistic.⁹

Ming in the Zhou and Warring States

In the late Zhou and Warring States we find both a broader semantic field for words concerned with fate, fatalism, and destiny and an increasingly complex range of *concepts* associated (and debated) with the word “*ming*.” The difficulties of the term “*ming*” are not simply problems of translation. There was no consensus on how to define the term, and rival thinkers tended to use it with different meanings, even within the same text. *Ming* also occurs in binomes that amplify or specify its meaning.¹⁰ The following are some of the most important Zhou and Warring States uses of *ming*, both singly and in compounds. Some are widely discussed in the scholarly literature; others are less well known (Fu Sinian 1952; Tang Junyi 1957: 1–33; Tang Junyi 1962; Mori 1971; Kanaya 1986; Nylan 1994: 35–39; Smith 1991: 35–37).

(1) *Ming* as decree, command, or mandate. Accounts of *ming* vary widely as to who or what did the decreeing.

(2) *Ming* as life and death, the extent of one’s life span, for example:

死生有命也，富貴在天

Life and death have their *ming*; wealth and honor reside in Heaven.

(*Analects* 12.5, Zixia quoting a saying he has heard)

死生命也

Life and death are decreed. (*Zhuangzi* 6: 241)¹¹

These first two meanings of *ming* correspond closely to the topoi of fate as divine command and fate as in some sense predetermined at birth or inception (topoi 1 and 2). Neither, however, precludes the operation of free will (topos 3) or the action of chance events (topos 5). *Ming* as command allows for, but does not require, the rewarding of virtue (topos 4) and the action of predictable regularities on the world (topos 6).

Ming as Command

(1) Si Ming 司命, the Director of Destinies (Waley, trans. 1955: *Da Si Ming* and *Shao Si Ming*; See Zhang Guorong 1991). Two chapters of the *Nine Songs* 九歌 within the *Songs of Chu* 楚辭 are titled “Da Si Ming” 大司命 and “Shao Si Ming” 少司命. A deity named Si Ming is the object of sacrifice in divination texts excavated at Baoshan and Fangmatan,¹² possibly an astral

divinity associated with the fourth star of the Wen Chang palace constellation in Ursa Major.

(2) *Tian ming* 天命, the mandate or decree of heaven, perhaps the most important sense of *ming* as “decree.” The *Odes* and *Documents* frequently repeat the idea that Heaven’s decree is not constant, meaning that a ruler cannot count on it unless he is worthy of it. The *Ode* of this title *Da ming* 大明 [Great brightness] refers to Heaven’s mandate devolving on King Wen:

有命自得，命此文王，于周于京。纘女維莘

There was a mandate from heaven; it mandated this King Wen in Zhou, in the capital, and the female successor a girl from Shen. (Mao 236)¹³

This passage also makes it clear that the decree worked through both men and women. In a passage in the *Documents*, the duke of Zhou tells Prince Shi that, even though the Shang dynasty has lost the mandate, he dare not rest assured of the mandate of the Lord on High *Shang Di ming* 上帝命 because:

天命不易，天難諶

Heaven’s mandate is not easy [to preserve]; Heaven is hard to depend on.

The attitude toward *ming* in the *Analects* is a subject of considerable disagreement. Confucius seems to have believed in it, at least in early life:

君子有三畏畏天命畏大人畏聖人之言

A *junzi* fears three things: the mandate of Heaven, great persons, and the words of sages. (*Analects* 16.8)

Ming ab Initio

(1) *Shou ming* 壽命, a “*ming* of longevity” or its opposite, early death. This phrase is associated with the meaning of *ming* as life span. Xunzi refers to soldiers who flee for their lives as literally “running toward their *ming*” (*ben ming* 奔命). This term assumes added importance in the *Lunbeng*.

(2) *Xing ming* 性命, [human] nature and fate, as the two overlapping factors that together determine life’s course. This term is particularly prevalent in the *Zhuangzi* (60 instances) and the *Lunbeng* (27 instances). It also appears in the *Lunyu* (2.4 and 9.18), *Huainanzi* (14 instances), and the *Lü Shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (12 instances). It does not occur in the *Mengzi*.

Choosing *Ming*

Several phrases describe attitudes and actions of acting with, conforming to, following, or actively completing or grasping *ming*. They all emphasize the exercise of free will through understanding and choice.

(1) *An ming* 安命, resting in *ming* or *an ming shun ming* 安命順命, resting in conformity with *ming*. Tang Junyi associates these phrases with *Zhuangzi*, but neither occurs in that text.¹⁴ *An ming* does occur in the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (*Baopuzi juan* 11: 177).

(2) *Cheng ming* 成命, completing *ming*.

According to the *Zhuangzi*, for someone who understands it, fate is a means to let things come to completion, for example, the adroit swimmer, who explains his skill to Confucius:

I begin with what is inborn, grow it by essential nature, and complete it by means of fate (*cheng bu ming* 成乎命) ... I don't know why I do what I do; that is fate! (*Zhuangzi* 19: 657–658)

By contrast, the *Ode* “Hao tian you cheng ming,” which describes King Wen and King Wu’s receipt of heaven’s mandate complete and entire, links “completing *ming*” to the moralized *ming* of the Mandate of Heaven (topos 4):

昊天有成命，二后受之
成王不敢康，夙夜基命

Great Heaven has complete mandate; two sovereigns received it.
Cheng Wang dared not be easy; morn and night he laid its ground. (Mao 271)

(3) *Da ming* 達命, grasping hold of *ming*. According to the *Zhuangzi*, fate is in part a matter of strategy; and the wise assess their times and decide how to act: those of penetrating insight do not trouble about what knowledge cannot remedy (*Zhuangzi* 19: 630):

達大命者隨
達小命者遭

to grasp great *ming* is true conformity;
to grasp small *ming* is happenstance. (*Zhuangzi* 30: 1059)

(4) *Fu ming* 復命, returning to *ming*, in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, for example,

復命搖作而以天師，人則從而命之。

Sages who return to *ming* and take Heaven as their teacher become models for others. (*Zhuangzi* 25: 880)

(5) *Li ming* 立命, establishing *ming* in Mencius (*Mengzi* 7A/1).

(6) *Shun ming* 順命, conforming to *ming*. According to Mencius:

莫非命也，順受其正。人物之生，吉凶禍福，皆天所命。

There is nothing that is not *ming* and one receives and conforms to one's own correct [one]. Good and bad fortune, prosperity or grief, in human life all these are as Heaven decrees. (*Mengzi* 7A2)

Conforming to *ming* includes ensuring that one follows one's correct destiny, a topic that recurs in several Han discussions.¹⁵ According to Xunzi, the *junzi*:

夫此順命，以慎其獨者也

conforms to *ming* and thereby preserves his authentic singularity. (*Xunzi* 3/30)

(7) *Sui ming* 遂命, following destiny. The *Zhuangzi* attributes to Huang Di the view that:

聖也者，達於情而遂於命也。

Sages are those who grasp true form and follow it according to *ming*. (*Zhuangzi* 14: 507)

(8) *Zhi ming* 知命, understanding *ming*, presents special difficulties and is discussed separately below. These few examples illustrate the point that these phrases were used in different texts to express a range of viewpoints, and cannot be identified with particular meanings of, or theories about, the word “*ming*.”

Moral *Ming*

The most important expression of moral *ming* was *tian ming*, the transpersonal, moral *ming* mandated by Heaven. Other notions of transpersonal *ming* do not necessarily link macrodestiny with virtue.

(9) *Shou ming* 受命, receiving the decree. Sometimes this formulation refers both to the receipt of a (human) command (e.g., at *Zhuangzi* 4: 153), but at other times it clearly refers to the decrees of fate:¹⁶

受命於地，唯松柏獨也在冬夏青青；受命於天，唯舜獨也正，幸能正生

Of those who receive their *ming* from earth, the pine and cypress stand alone; winter and summer they are fresh and green. Of those who receive their *ming* from heaven, Yao and Shun stand alone; they have the luck to be able to regulate their own lives. (*Zhuangzi* 5: 193)

This passage links receiving *ming* with self-determination (topos 3).

Chance and *Ming*

(1) *Shi ming* 時命, the fate of the times. The Warring States semantic field does not seem to contain explicit references to luck and chance (of the kind that are so prominent in the *Lunheng*). Warring States texts, do, however, frequently refer to the importance of “the times” one was born in as a key to human prospects, both in references to “the fate of the times” and in remarks on the importance of acting in accord with the opportune moment. These references differ in two ways from locutions for transpersonal *ming* concerned with the fate of states (*guo ming*) or individuals (*ren ming*) discussed below. First, they are not used as arguments for moral *ming*. Second, they involve notions of chance (topos 5), insofar as chance or luck determines when one will be born. (They also involve notions of regularity and causality [topos 6], insofar as the “regularities” of a given time are subject to study and prediction.)

Associations of *ming* and *shi* appear across the Warring States intellectual spectrum. A Mohist argument for the existence of ghosts and spirits refers to the rule of King Wen as a newly appointed mandate for Zhou, whose *ming* was newly appointed. By contrast, the Shang no longer held the mandate: the *ming* of Shang Di was not timely 帝命不時 (*Mozi* 31/62).

A *Zhuangzi* passage links the decline of *dao* and adverse fate of the times:

時命大謬也。當時命而大行乎天下

The fate of times was terribly wrong. Had time and *ming* been right, they might have done great deeds in the world. (*Zhuangzi* 16: 555)

According to Confucius and Xunzi (quoting *Analects* 12.5):

遇不遇者，時也；死生者命也。

Meeting with success or failure is a matter of the time; life and death are matters of *ming*. (*Xunzi* 28/39)

In the *Lienü zhuan* biography of the daughter of Wu, wife of Ling of Zhao, King Wuling of Zhao dreams of a girl who sings of a beautiful woman not yet born:

命兮命兮，逢天時而生

Oh Ming, Oh Ming, when she meets the time of Heaven she will be born.

(*Lienü zhuan*, *juan* 7, story 13.7: 10a)

In these, and in later Han examples, both personal and dynastic destiny are linked with the times and *shi* timeliness, doing the right thing at the right

time (*Zhuangzi* 17: 596; *Han Feizi* 8: 122; *Huainanzi*: 333 and 376; *Lü Shi chunqiu jian* 4.1: 186; *Shuo yuan* 1: 10b).

Predictable *Ming*

(1) *Zhi ming* 致命. This phrase has three distinct meanings arising from the meanings of *ming* as life span, fate, and command. It means “to sacrifice one’s life” at *Analects* 19.1: “A *shi* who perceives danger is prepared to deliver over his life” 士見危致命. *Zhuangzi* uses it in the sense of “cause” or “bring about” when he attributes to Confucius the advice that

莫若為致命。

Nothing is as good as realizing *ming*. (*Zhuangzi* 4: 160)

Here *ming* may be understood either as one’s life or one’s destiny. Realizing *ming* also refers to “carrying out a command,” for example, in Xunzi’s statement that Prince Fa was respectful in carrying out his charge (*zhi ming*) but obstinate in refusing reward.¹⁷

(2) *Zhi ming* 知命, “understanding *ming*.” “Understanding *ming*” meant several different things. It was most widely understood to signify the knowledge or acceptance of destiny as heaven’s decree¹⁸ and was strongly associated with sagacity in Ruist texts, for example:

不知命無以為君子也

whoever does not understand *ming* cannot become a *junzi*. (*Analects* 20.3)

自知者不怨人，知命者不怨天。

Those who understand themselves do not begrudge others; those who understand *ming* do not begrudge Heaven. (*Xunzi* 4/21)

The claim that *ming* could be understood does not strictly imply that *ming* is predictable.

Transpersonal *Ming*

(1) *Da ming* 大命, great *ming*. The *Ode* of this title (Mao 236, discussed above) makes it clear that it refers to the macrodestiny of a kingdom, not merely of an individual, insofar as the mandate applies to the entire Zhou kingdom. The *Han Feizi* also refers a “great *ming*” of both Heaven and humanity:

天有大命，人大命

Heaven has a great *ming*; humanity has a great *ming*. (*Han Feizi* 8: 121)

(2) *Xiao ming* 小命, or small *ming*.

(3) *Guo ming* 國命, the destiny of a state. Xunzi makes the distinction explicit:

人之命在天，國之命在禮。

A person's *ming* lies with Heaven; a state's *ming* lies in its rites. (*Xunzi* 16/4 and 17/43)

The *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant dew of the springs and autumns) directly links the *ming* of the entire populace of a state to whether or not its ruler conforms to the mandate of Heaven:

唯天子受命於天，天下受命於天子，一國則受命於君。君命順，則民有順命；君命逆，則民有逆命。

The ancients say: only the Son of Heaven receives the mandate from Heaven, the (people of) the empire receive the mandate from the Son of Heaven. A state receives its mandate as one from its lord, and if the lord conforms to it [the mandate of Heaven] then the people have a conforming *ming*. If the lord opposes it, then the people have a contrary *ming* [*ni ming*]. (*Chunqiu fanlu* 11.1: 283)

(4) *Ren ming* 人命, the fate of an individual, as distinguished from *guo ming*, the fate of a state.¹⁹

Transpersonal *ming* also emphasizes free will (the choices of King Wen and the girl from Shen) and the link between mandate to rule and moral rectitude.

Contra-Ming

(1) *Fei ming* 非命, the Mohist “against *ming*” doctrine. It is the title of chapters 35–37 of the Mohist Canon. It was historically linked to Mohist attacks on Ruists, for example, in the “Qiwu lun” (*Zhuangzi* 2) account of the *shi fei* 是非 of the Ruists and the Mohists. The Mohist arguments targeted a Ruist understanding of *ming* as predetermination (topos 2). More generally, however, any number of attacks on specific senses of *ming* might be described as “*fei ming*,” but most particularly Wang Chong’s attack on the notion of the course of life as predetermined.

(2) *You ming* 有命, the question of the existence of fate. The Mohists first take up the question of the doctrine of fatalism, the existence of fate:

[執]有命非命也，非執有命非命也。

[the doctrine that] *ming* exists is not *ming*, but to reject the doctrine that *ming* exists is to reject [the reality of] *ming*. (*Mozi* 46/20–21)²⁰

The skeptical thread in *Zhuangzi* asks whether we can know whether life is fated:

莫知其所終，若之何其無命也？莫知其所始，若之何其有命也？

Since we do not know the end of things, how can we say they have no *ming*? Since we do not know the beginning of things, how can we say they have *ming*? (*Zhuangzi* 27: 958)²¹

Other Terms

For all its lexical variety, *ming* was not the only term used in Warring States texts to describe notions of fate, destiny, and cause.

(1) *Fen* 分 were “allotments,” identified with *ming* and variously understood as life span, longevity, prosperity, or specific individual destiny, to be used and cherished, including by the force of human effort:

未形者有分，且然無閒，謂之命。

The formless had allotments (*fen*) but they were still not divided out, and they called them *ming*. (*Zhuangzi* 12: 424)

(2) *Jie* 節, fate as decree or opportunity, literally a nodal meeting, or “meeting over intervals.” Xunzi uses *jie*, literally a node or joint of bamboo, but more broadly unexpected circumstance or opportunity, to *define* fate:

性傷謂之病，節遇謂之命。

Harming one’s nature is called illness; meeting the node (*jie*) is called *ming*. (*Xunzi* 22/6)

(3) *Bian hua* 變化, change and transformation, including the cycles of life, death, and the seasons. In the *Zhuangzi* the sage Wang Tai “takes it as fated that things change” 命物之化 (*Zhuangzi* 5: 189).²² Elsewhere, the *Zhuangzi* has Lao Dan admonish Confucius that “*ming* cannot be transformed” 命不可變 (*Zhuangzi* 14: 532). Similarly, the *Zhuangzi* refers to the transformations of affairs as “the movements of destiny” 命之行 (*Zhuangzi* 5: 212).

(4) *Shi* 勢 configuration or “setup.”²³ A wide range of texts stress the importance of timeliness (*shi*) and configuration in response to one’s times

and to fate, by understanding whether or not the times or even more local strategic “configurations” of time and place held good or “malauspice.”

(5) *Sheng* 聖 or sagacity, the notion that the activities of the sage or *sheng ren* 聖人 prominently included understanding, and coming to some kind of accommodation with, fate. (What this meant varied widely.)

(6) *Ji xiong* 吉凶, and other terms for good and malauspice (discussed below).

All these concern the relations of *ming* to what might broadly be called “chance.” By contrast, the terms *yi* 義 duty (a form of command), links *ming* to moral duty. *Gu* 故 purpose or cause, and *chang* 常 constancy [in nature], emphasize notions of necessity or predictability (*gu* and *chang*).

Han Accounts of *Ming*

In a summary of Han meanings, Michael Nylan distinguishes twelve conceptually distinct meanings of *ming*: (1) fate or decree, (2) duty, (3) destiny, (4) predestination, (5) causal connections and their possibilities, (6) manifestation of Heaven’s will, (7) the inevitable, (8) empirical facts, (9) the created world, (10) life span, (11) objective circumstances, and (12) circumstances beyond human control (Nylan 1994: 35; Tang Junyi 1962: 214; Tang Junyi 1963: 42 and 48; Graham 1967: 215 and 255). The preceding discussion shows that many of them were already evident in Warring States texts. To the extent that Han rulers consolidated a new orthodoxy, Han Confucianism remained concerned with debates about *ming*, prominently including the idea that kings received the mandate of Heaven 帝王受天命.

The problem of fate reemerges as an important issue in Han debates, especially in the thought of Yang Xiong and Wang Chong.²⁴ Wang devotes some eighteen chapters of the *Lunheng* to variants of the claim that all or most aspects of human life are determined at birth (*Lunheng* 1–7, 9–12, 20–21, 42–43, and 53–55). Wang Chong’s targets were, on the one hand, the divination practices of his own time, and on the other, the Confucian moralism of both his own and earlier times, specifically the concept of moral *ming*, as described by both Warring States texts and Han Confucians.²⁵ An example of the latter is Ban Biao, who argued in the *Han shu* treatise “On the Destiny of Kings” (“Wang ming lun” 王命論) that Heaven selected upright rulers, specifically the Han founder Gaozu 漢高祖, for their virtue, by means of *tian ming* (*Han shu* 100A, 4207–4212). Wang’s attack on moral *ming* introduces new categorizations of kinds of fate and places a new emphasis on the role of chance as a factor in the outcome of human life. His arguments are not entirely consistent; they tend to cohere within, but not always between, chapters.²⁶ My purpose here is not to present a unified view of *ming* in the *Lunheng*, but rather to show how he extended the discourse on fate.

Wang Chong held that the unfolding of *ming* in both physical and political life was determined at three levels: the personal level of inborn nature and endowment, the interpersonal level of chance encounters, and the transpersonal level of time and common destiny (Loewe 1978: 681–682, 701–702, and 780–783). Wang distinguished three kinds of *ming*: favorable, neutral, and adverse. He argued that *ming* was not determined by a superhuman power and could not be changed (or predicted) by ethical behavior.

Ming and Fortune

(1) *Lu* 祿. In the chapter “Ming and Fortune” (“Ming lu”), Wang emphasizes that every individual, from king to commoner and from sage to ignoramus, has a *ming*:

有死生壽夭之命，亦有貴賤貧富之命。

There is a *ming* of life and death and of long or short life span; there is also a *ming* of honor or low rank and of wealth and poverty. (*Lunheng* 3: 20; cf. Forke [1911] 1962.1: 144ff.)

People’s fortunes rise and fall according to the wealth and honor decreed by *ming*, time, and circumstances, not as a result of their efforts to affect it:

是故才高行厚，未可保其必富貴；智寡德薄，未可信其必貧賤。或時才高行厚，命惡，窮而不進；知寡德薄，命善，興而踰。故夫臨事知愚，操行清濁，性與才也；仕宦貴賤，治產貧富，命與時也。

Therefore, great ability and estimable conduct never guarantee wealth and honor. Nor are limited knowledge and poor conduct reliable indicators of poverty and low status. Sometimes someone with great ability and estimable conduct has a bad *ming*; it weakens him so that he cannot come up to it. Someone with limited knowledge and poor conduct may have an auspicious *ming*; and soar and fly. Therefore, when considering circumstances, wisdom and stupidity and the exercise of pure or mean conduct are matters of innate nature (*xing*) and talent; high and low status in office and poverty and wealth in business are matters of *ming* and timing (*shi*). (*Lunheng* 3: 20)²⁷

The force of the argument is that it is better to await the right time than to exhaust oneself pursuing destiny. The *tian ming* exists, but is not knowable beforehand. When people exert themselves to acquire wealth and honor:

廢時失務，卻望富貴，不可得也。雖云有命，當須索之。

they go against the opportune moment and lose the matter at hand; they hope for wealth and honor but cannot obtain it. Although they say

that *ming* exists, they think that they have to search for it. (*Lunbeng* 3: 26)

The notions of a *ming* of longevity, *shou ming*, and the importance of the times, *shi*, will be familiar from the last section.

Ming ab Initio

(1) *Shan e* 善惡, *huofu* 禍福, *jixiong* 吉凶. The first level at which *ming* acted was the personal level of inborn nature, *xing*. The chapter “Initial Endowments,” *Chu bing* 初稟, defines *ming* as that which is received from Heaven at birth (Forke [1911] 1962.1: 30ff.). It argues that both *ming* and *xing* are received at birth, even though they may not be fully manifest until adulthood, or later. Wang argues that each person receives a destiny 凡人受命, and people all obtain an allotment of good and bad fortune 已得吉凶矣 at the time they receive *qi* 氣 from their parents at birth:

夫性與命異，或性善而命惡，或性惡而命善。操行善惡者，性也；禍福吉凶者，命也。

Now *xing* and *ming* may be at odds. In some cases, the *xing* is good but the *ming* is bad; in others, the *xing* is bad but the *ming* is good. Deliberate conduct and good and bad deeds are matters of *xing*; prosperity and good and malaspice are matters of *ming*. (*Lunbeng* 6: 51)

Wang argues that people receive *xing* and *ming* together at birth; *ming* manifests internally as *xing* and externally as the form of the body.²⁸ He also argues that these gradations of fate are inherent in the body before birth, just as the distinction between cocks and hens is inherent in the eggshell; the same is true of all animals, plants, and seeds (*Lunbeng* 12: 128). This account of *ming* is not deterministic. The example of genetic predisposition provides an apt analogy. One’s genetic heritage may make a particular illness all but inevitable. Nonetheless, individual choices may affect its severity and the extent to which it handicaps or shortens one’s life.

According to Wang Chong, *tian ming* is no exception to the principle of *ming* as endowed at birth. Dynastic founders may receive specific signs of the investiture of kingship as adults, at the time of their accession to the throne, but they receive the *tian ming* at birth. Wang also argues that kings have distinguishing marks. He even attributes to kings the ability to recognize the distinguishing marks of officials who have a *ming* of wealth and honor; this provides a new explanation for accounts of kings “recognizing talent” that first appear in the Warring States and continue well after the Han (Henry 1987; Raphals 1992).

Chance and Luck

(1) *Xing ou* 幸偶. The second level at which individual human destinies unfolded was the interpersonal level of chance meetings. The chapter “Chance and Luck,” *Xing ou*, describes the action of chance and luck as complicating factors that affect the action of *ming* (cf. Forke [1911] 1962.1: 151ff.). It argues that happiness is a matter of luck *xing*; reward and punishment are matters of (good or bad) fortune, *ou*. Yan Hui and Bo Niu, students of Confucius who died young, provide traditional examples to illustrate bad luck. Wang also adduces a set of examples of arbitrariness in nature: individual crickets and blades of grass survive not because they are virtuous but because they are lucky.²⁹

A Hierarchy of *Mings*

A third level at which fate acted was the transpersonal level of the times, *shi*, or fate held in common, *da ming, da yun* 大運. Wang’s “Meaning of Fate” (“Ming yi” 命義) chapter begins with a disagreement between Mohists and Ruists over whether the time of death is subject to *ming* (cf. Forke [1911] 1962.1: 136 ff.). The argument is not whether *ming* exists, but whether or not human life spans are subject to it. Both sides make arguments that are interestingly quantitative. The Mohists cite cases of mass death through war, epidemic, and natural catastrophe; they argue that so many people cannot have had the same *ming*. The Confucian response is also “statistical”: in light of the total population, these numbers are not impossibly large. They argue that, out of the total population, individuals with the same *ming* were inexorably drawn to those unfortunate locales. The next set of arguments claims that an improbably large number of lowborn people experience elevation of their fortunes.

This chapter articulates and resolves a tension between *ming* as strictly individual and the transpersonal *ming* of times and or states (topos 7):

故國命勝人命，壽命勝祿命。

the *ming* of the state (*guo ming*) takes precedence (literally, is victorious) over the *ming* of individuals (*ren ming*); the *ming* of longevity (*shou ming*) takes precedence over the *ming* of prosperity (*lu ming*). (*Lunheng* 6: 46)

The *ming* of a state is connected with the stars, whose good and malauspice changes as they revolve and wander. The rationale for the *ming* of life span is that life span is visible in, and determined by, the body, not by the stars. A strong or weak constitution determines life span:

故言【有命】，命則性也。

Therefore when we speak of *ming* existing, *ming* is inherent nature *xing*.
(*Lunheng* 6: 47)

The *ming* of wealth and honor, by contrast, is from the stars, and their signs are in Heaven: *zheng ming* 正命, *sui ming* 隨命, *zao ming* 遭命.

【正命】謂本稟之自得吉也。

Standard *ming* refers to the case where someone receives good fortune (*ji*) from his own basic endowment at birth. (*Lunheng* 6: 49)³⁰

In cases of standard *ming* the bones are good and the “fated” good fortune comes naturally and spontaneously, without effort. By contrast, consequent *ming* requires considerable effort:

【隨命】者，戮力操而吉福至，縱情施欲凶禍到。

In the case of consequent *ming*, good fortune and well-being come only by dint of effort and deliberate good conduct; if this person gives in to his inner nature and desires, malauspice and malaise will result. (*Lunheng* 6: 50)

Contrary *ming*, on the other hand, is irreparable:

【遭命】者，行善得惡。

In the case of *zao ming*, conduct is good and results are bad. (*Lunheng* 6: 50)

The combination of *xing* and *ming* presents a complex calculus that is very far from predestination by either *xing* or *ming*. The one exception seems to be adverse fate, against which there is no recourse. Wang goes on to address cases of persons with good natures but bad lives, people who should have obtained the benefits of contingent *ming* but achieved the disasters of contrary *ming*. He argues that contingent and contrary *ming* are mutually exclusive. He also introduces “three natures,” *san xing* 三性, that correspond to the three *ming*. A person of standard *xing* spontaneously has the five (constant) virtues 五常 from birth. Consequent *xing* follows the natures of the father and mother. This consideration leads Wang Chong to emphasize the importance of caution during pregnancy and to advocate strictures on the activities of pregnant women.

Wang thus articulates four overlapping influences: (1) *ming*; (2) *lu*, good fortune in the general sense of prosperity and the specific sense of emoluments; (3) *zao yu* 遭遇, adverse encounters; and (4) *xing ou* 性偶, chance and luck. These four distinct factors provide a nuanced, non-

deterministic explanation of the action of fate. *Ming* governs wealth and honor but luck waxes or wanes. If one's destiny is wealth and honor, luck thrives (and vice versa). Adverse encounter refers to extraordinary change *feichang zhi bian* 非常之變, such as a sage being imprisoned. A person with good *ming* and waxing luck may not be harmed by adverse encounter, but if this factor is great enough, it can overcome the influence of both *ming* and luck.

Chance refers to the good and bad luck that result from accidents: an innocent person falsely imprisoned or a guilty one who escapes (cf. Rescher 1995). Adverse encounter and chance and luck either tally with or go against destiny and luck. In the actual world, *xing* and *ming* are either auspicious or not, and good and bad fortune wax or wane; this depends on contingencies. People live or die according to chance, and few accomplish all their deeds and obtain their hearts' desires.

The operation of different kinds of *ming* also follows a descending hierarchy: state, *guo ming*, over individual, *ren ming*; survival and longevity (*sheng ming*, *shou ming*) over prosperity, honor, and wealth (*gui ming*, *fu ming*).

Innovations in the *Lunheng* discussion of *ming* focus on clusters of terms: the interrelations of *ming* and the opportune moment, *shi*, the embedding of *ming* in inner nature, *xing*, and the visible body, *ti* 體, and a new distinction between luck and chance. Terms for “luck” in the sense of good and malauspice include *lu* (good fortune, prosperity, emoluments), *jixiong* (good and malauspice), *shan e* (good and bad fortune), and *fu buo* (good fortune and calamity), all already discussed. By contrast, in modern parlance the terms *xing ou* and *zao yu* 遭遇, adverse encounters, really refer to chance rather than “luck,” the more usual translation. They refer to accidental or unpredictable events, *xing ou*, and to catastrophic and unpredictable change, *zao yu*. In a modern analysis, both would refer to chance.

Thus Wang Chong builds on the Warring States discourse on *ming*, but in a new and original way. He vehemently argues against most of the topoi presented above. He retains the notion of *ming*, but reformulates it as subject to chance. His new “embryological” emphasis on initial endowments introduces a “genetic” account of *ming* that gained prominence in Six Dynasties Daoist texts (cf. Bokenkamp, Chap. 6 of this volume).

A Contemporary Semantic Field

Specifically modern terms add to the semantic field of words for luck, fortune, chance, and risk.

(1) *Yun* 運 luck or fortune. The root meaning of is to carry, transport, or use, also to revolve. The derivative meaning is fortune, luck, fate—for

example, in the phrases *yun qi* 運氣 or luck *hao yun* 好運 or good luck. *Yun* was also part of a cycle metaphor, as in *tian yun* 天運, the (fortune-bearing) movement of the celestial bodies.

(2) *Xing* 幸 luck, good fortune, or happiness. These two senses of “lucky” combine in *xing yun* 幸運, very fortunate, or *xing yun’r* 幸運兒, “fortune’s favorite” and *xing yun zhi shen* 幸運之神, “Lady Luck” (Liang Shiqui et al. 1993: 424). *Xing* approaches the meaning of “chance” in the phrases *jiao xing* 僥幸, luckily or by a fluke, or *xing de* 幸得, to obtain by chance and *xing shi* 幸事, “something that happened out of sheer luck” (Liang Shiqui et al. 1993: 424).

(3) Terms for willfulness and risk taking. One group of Chinese translations for English “random” refer to the emotional disposition to be willful (e.g., *sui yi* 隨意, as one pleases, or *ren yi* 任意, willful or arbitrary). Similarly, several terms for risk taking in Chinese focus on willingness to put oneself in danger rather than in the statistical aspects of risk, for example, *mao xian* 冒險, to take risks.

(4) *Qiao* 巧 opportune, coincidental, fortuitous. This is the Chinese term that perhaps comes closest to the notion of chance in the sense of randomness or accident. Related compounds include *qiaobe* 巧合 (coincidental or serendipitous), *couqiao* 湊巧 (fortuitous), *qiao dang’r* 巧當兒 (opportune moment or coincidence), *qiao jin* 巧勁 (knack or coincidence), and *qiao shi* 巧事 (coincidence). The root meaning, however, seems to be opportunity, linked to *qiao*’s other meaning of skill or craft.

(5) *Sui ji* 隨機 random, stochastic. This term is used in a variety of technical terms referring to random or stochastic processes: randomness *sui ji* *xing* 隨機性, stochastic system *suiji xitong* 隨機系統, stochastic model *suiji moshi* 隨機模式, and so on. It is also used in the more traditional phrase *suiji yingbian* 隨機應變, “act according to circumstances.”

A Note on Divination

Conspicuously absent from the foregoing (and following) discussion is a detailed account of the language and practice of Greek and Chinese divination and other mantic techniques. Relevant religious practices included divination by various methods, the interpretation of signs (dreams, omens, anomalies, etc.), and the efforts of specialists (oracles, mediums, etc.) to ascertain divine commands.³¹ A central problem in both traditions was mantic access: *who* had access to this information and these techniques? Some techniques for mantic access focused on shamanism, including the activities of Chinese *wu* 巫 shamans and other shaman-officials and mediums, probably including practitioners at the popular level (Von Falkenhausen 1995; Poo 1998). Other techniques concerned the interpretation of omens, including

dreams and other signs and prodigies. In contrast to passive receipt of omens, specific divination methods allowed the diviner to actively seek answers and ascertain (or direct) the will of specific deities. Some techniques of prediction and divination were based on “reading” of the clouds and stars, *Yi jing* and milfoil divination, and the use of daybooks, such as those unearthed in the tombs at Shuihudi, to determine auspicious times for events such as marriages and campaigns (Maspéro 1924; Kalinowski 1991; Loewe 1979, 1981, 1982, 1988a, and 1988b; Yates 1997). Techniques for the prediction of individual destiny included physiognomy (including by mothers of their children), the interpretation of dreams and anomalies in nature, geomantic techniques such as *feng shui* 風水, horoscopes, divination boards, and the manipulation of personal names to avoid adverse fate.³² This range of beliefs and practices is also an important part of Chinese discourses on fate and fatalism, both early and late. Greek religion also included figures and techniques with special skills in divination and the interpretation of signs, including seers (*manteis*), omens, and oracles (Halliday 1913; Vernant 1974a). Some of these religious beliefs take fate as the command of one or more deities who can be petitioned or whose will can be ascertained. In this sense, belief in fate is inextricably connected with beliefs about mantic access. Again, these issues require separate treatment.

A Note on Women’s Fate

The absence of discussion of the *ming* of women is a striking lacuna in this otherwise detailed semantic range, especially in the *Lunbeng*. Wang Chong clearly believes that *ming* applies to individual women, since “Mandated Emoluments” begins with the assertion that anyone in the category of having a head, eyes, and blood in his or her veins has a *ming* (*Lunbeng* 3: 20). “Initial Endowments” shows a particular awareness of women as factors in transmitting *ming* to men, yet the ramifications of *ming* for women themselves is never discussed. Therefore it is of particular interest that a recently excavated text makes specific reference to “Women’s Fate” 婦命, but further details must await the publication of that text.³³

The Greek Semantic Field

Greek accounts of fate fall into two fairly distinct historical strata, before and after the fourth century BCE.³⁴ Pre-fourth-century texts, beginning with Homer, describe “fate” in several fairly distinct terms and metaphors: (1) μοῖρα or αἵσα, transparent metaphors of division, lots, or portions, of destiny, death, or of allotted life span. Over time, these were replaced by (2) metaphors of spinning and binding, in which fate is seen as a thread spun around

the “spindle” of each life. In later works, *moira* increasingly becomes personified as the “Spinners,” the Three Fates or Μοῖρα; (3) the attribution of misfortune to δαίμονες, who variously meted out misfortune or guided individual destinies; (4) the problem of the relation of fate and the gods, most specifically to the will of Zeus, king and most powerful of the gods.³⁵ To these we may add (5) the appearances of the Moirai or Fates as objects of cult as birth goddesses (Hesiod, Pausanias, etc.; in Latin, Parcae [“childbearing”] were equivalent to the Moirai). (6) After the fourth century, fate was viewed as a principle ruling both the world overall and the lives of individuals, expressed by the term εἰμαρμένη.

I shall sample three strata of the pre-fourth-century picture: Homer, Parmenides, and Plato. Each text defines one or more “problems of fate”; they precede, inform, and significantly differ from later uses of fate as a dramatic element in tragedy and Hellenistic debates on fate and fatalism. The Homeric corpus first poses, and conspicuously does not resolve, problems of fate and fatalism. The relation of fate to both the will of Zeus and the free will of mortals is ambiguous. Pre-Socratic philosophy “is divided into two halves by the name of Parmenides” (b. 515–510 BCE), who abandons cosmogony in favor of divine instruction on the “true” world of unchanging reality (including fate) and makes fate a vivid aspect of unchanging being. Fate figures in Plato’s (427–347 BCE) account of the soul and in the defense and self-representation of the Platonic Socrates. As an aspect of divination and discourses of prognostication, it is also an indirect issue in the history of Greek medicine, the “inquiry concerning nature,” and the creation of the category of rationality. These texts, images, and metaphors precede rejections of determinism by Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and Epicurus (341–270 BCE) and defenses of it by the Stoa, for whom fate assumed central prominence as a philosophical problem.³⁶

Fate in Homer

(1) *Moirai*. Just as a range of meanings informed Chinese *ming*, so a range of forms and meanings informs Greek *moira*. *Moirai*, μέρος (from μείρομαι, “to receive a portion”), and *aisa* were lots or portions of destiny, death, or allotted life span. These oldest terms for fate referred to a share, lot, or portion, most immediately of death, hence destiny as allotted life span (topos 2). These “shares” could refer to literal, material goods or to special destiny, to the anger of a specific god (topos 1), to a decree of fate beyond the will of the gods (topos 6), or to combinations of all of these. Thus Achilles tells Thetis that after he has killed Hector he will accept his own death at the hands of the gods because even Herakles was conquered by his fate (*moira*), and the anger of Hera; “and so, too, shall I lie, if a like fate (ὁμοίη μοῖρα) has

been worked for me when I die” (*Il.* 18.120–121). Its opposite was ἄμορος, ἄμοιρος, or ἄμορορος, to be bereft of a thing, unfortunate, or to be without a lot or share. Demosthenes refers to a piece of land as “no man’s land” (ἄμοροσίος).³⁷ Similarly, to be ἀμορία (or ἀμορορία) was to be “fate-less” in the sense of having no portion, for example, the statement that Zeus knows well “the portions and bereftnesses (μοῖραν τ’ ἀμορορίην) of mortals” (*Od.* 20.76). For the most part, *moira* occupied a place apart from social status, the share of wealth, rank, and privilege that results from birth, though *Iliad* 3 describes Agamemnon as “born of good *moira* (μοιρηγενές) and happy in [the protection of] a daimon (ὄλβιόδαϊμον, *Il.* 3.182).

Nor did *moira* result from the “just deserts” of virtuous or unvirtuous action (topos 4). It referred, rather, to sudden reversals and situations that threaten the order decreed by the gods (topos 5), as Hector boasts to Andromache that no man can kill him prematurely because fate is a power that cannot be gainsaid by god or man: “No man will hurl me to Hades beyond my portion (ὑπὲρ αἴσων), but fate (*moiran*) I say no one of mankind can flee” (*Il.* 6: 487–489).

Variants include κατὰ μοῖραν, “according to fate”; κατ’αἴσων, “according to measure”; ὑπὲρ μοῖραν, “beyond fate”; and ὑπὲρ αἴσων, “beyond measure.” The above passage raises the problem of how or whether action “beyond fate” could occur. The phrases *kata moiran* and *kat’ aisan* occur frequently in the Homeric corpus; *huper moiran* and *huper aisan* are relatively rare. More important, they are always in the counterfactual in one of several senses, with a range of meanings from physical to moral “impossibility” (topos 6).³⁸ The one instance of the phrase *huper moiran* in the Homeric corpus occurs when Poseidon intervenes to save Aeneas from Achilles, ostensibly to avoid the wrath of Zeus, since he is fated (μόριμον) to survive the war (*Il.* 20.301–302). Poseidon uses an appeal to destiny to deter him from any further encounter with Achilles: “lest, beyond fate (*huper moiran*), you go down to the house of Hades” (*Il.* 20.336). Similarly, Apollo intervenes to prevent the Argives from winning victory “beyond the portion of Zeus” (ὑπὲρ Διὸς αἴσων, *Il.* 17.321). We may read these instances in two ways. Taken at face value, the gods intervene to preserve the decreed order and prevent mortals from acting outside it. Read rhetorically, appeals to fate provide a powerful rationale for the gods to intervene according to their own wishes (presumably, within the limits of fate).

In battle, “beyond fate” or “beyond measure” clearly refers to premature and violent death (topos 2). In other contexts, “beyond measure” has the broader connotations of impropriety or even impiety (topos 4). On two occasions, Paris agrees that Hector’s reproaches are “according to measure” (*kat’ aisan*) and “not beyond measure” (*huper aisan*, *Il.* 3.59 and 6.333). Excess

also can verge on impiety. After a pitched battle, the Greeks prevailed “beyond measure” (*hyper aisan*), when they captured the body of Kebriones and stripped him of his armor (*Il.* 16.780). In these cases, “beyond measure” labels an act as morally, rather than physically, “impossible.”

In all these instances, it is noteworthy that *moira* does not seem to be linked either to divination—attempts to understand and perhaps conform to a fated future—or to μητις, the skills and wiles that Greek society so prized for dealing with unpredictable and rapidly shifting situations.³⁹ *Metis*, it appears, was not used to thwart the decrees of fate.

(2) The Διὸς βουλή or “Plan of Zeus,” the relation of fate to the will of Zeus, king and most powerful of the gods (topos 1). Homer never resolves the question of the relation of *moira* to the will of the gods, and they coexist ambiguously (e.g., *Il.* 1.5; *Od.* 11.297). Human affairs “lie on the knees of the gods” (*Od.* 1.267). The “destructive plan of the gods” θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλὰς causes the suffering of Oedipus (*Od.* 11.276), and “the will of the gods” θεῶν ἰότητι causes the death of Patroklos (*Il.* 19.9), the toils of Odysseus (*Od.* 7.214), and the Trojan War (*Od.* 12.190 and 17.119). Yet the gods acknowledge a fate beyond their power to alter. For example, Poseidon grudgingly admits that it is Odysseus’ *aisa* to escape death (*Od.* 5.288ff.).

While fate appears not to be a problem for the gods in general, it poses a more particular, and also unresolved, problem for the plan of Zeus (*Dios boulê*). As king of the gods, Zeus is more powerful than all the other gods combined, and his will has a unique status. The beginning of the *Iliad* makes it clear that the will of Zeus is brought to completion with the sack of Troy. In the *Odyssey*, he is more accommodating to the will of the other gods, for example, in the return of Odysseus. Nevertheless, Zeus has no more power than the other gods to determine the span of an individual life (topos 2). Zeus, as the “steward of war for mankind” (*Il.* 19.224), may weigh the fates of antagonists in battle, and may even attempt to defer the *moira* of a hero in battle (*Il.* 16.431–443, 22.167–181), but his will inevitably and seamlessly conforms to the fate of that individual. As Terence Irwin points out, Zeus and the Fates point to two distinct notions of (partial) order within the Homeric universe: the impersonal, inexorable, amoral (and usually inscrutable) order of the Fates (topos 6) and the intelligent, moral justice–based rulership of Zeus (topos 1) (Irwin 1989: 6–17). The moralizing retrospective accounts of Hesiod, Pindar, and Aeschylus (topos 4) linked the power of the Moirai with government of Zeus and led to the worship of Zeus as Μοιραγέτης, “leader of the Moirai” in the fifth century.

(3) Δαίμονες. Psychopompic daimons or guides of the soul (from the root da- δαίω, δατέομαι, to divide, especially to cut up portions of meat, in sacrifice) variously gave out misfortune or guided individual destinies.

Daimons were originally “sharers” who meted out allotments to humankind (topos 1). As such they are linked to the metaphor of apportionment that underlines the terms “*moira*” and “*aisa*.” Like them, they were powers beyond human will, older than the anthropomorphic Olympian gods and incomprehensible, δαιμόνιος (topos 6) (Greene 1944: 2). They are not major presences in Homer, where they usually cause illness (*Od.* 5.396) and such misfortunes as Odysseus’ imprisonment on Ogygia: “only my unhappy self did the daimon lead to her hearth” (*Od.* 7.248; cf. *Il.* 9.600; *Od.* 3.166, 5.396, and 12.295). To some extent, the activity of daimons can be contrasted to that of the gods (θεοί) as thwarting and aiding human purposes, respectively.

(4) Fate Personified, and the Metaphor of Spinning. Fate was personified as several goddesses who were linked to notions of destiny (topos 2), punishment, retribution, and justice (topos 6), typically revealed by oracles, omens, prodigies, and signs. They also pose the problem of the relation of fate and the gods: Themis or Δίκη (Justice), Ανάγκη (Necessity), Moira (Fate), and the Moirai (the Fates). The Three Fates were variously represented as handmaidens of Dike and as the “Spinners” of human destinies. The Moirai appear infrequently in Homer as three figures who spin the thread of destiny around each individual. Alkinoos describes the fates as “Heavy Spinners” Κλωθεες when he speaks of the unusual destiny (*aisa*) of Odysseus, who, once he returns safely to Ithaka: “will bear as much as his destiny and the Heavy Spinners spun for him at birth with thread, when his mother bore him” (*Od.* 7.197). This “spinning” takes place primarily at birth (topos 2), but also at marriage (*Od.* 4.207), where the Moirai could be bearers of good fortune and, in some accounts, sing for the bridal couple.⁴⁰ In Homer, the gods are also “spinners” of fate. In *Iliad* 24 “the gods spun life thus for afflicted mortals” (*Il.* 24.525). The *Odyssey* begins when “the gods had spun for him his return home” (*Od.* 1.17). The gods spun the destruction of Troy (*Od.* 3.208), the fate of Odysseus (*Od.* 11.139), and his beggar persona (*Od.* 16.64).

The division and personification of *Moira* into the Fates or Moirai who spin, weave, and cut off the thread of each life first appear in Hesiod (*Theog.* 904–906). Here the Fates are the daughters of Zeus and Themis: Clotho, Lachesis (“getting by lot”), and Atropos (from which one cannot turn), and only reappear together in Plato.

Parmenides

In the climactic passage of fragment 8, Parmenides uses specifically Homeric language and diction to describe “what-is” (ἔστίιν) and to frame the claim that the truly real is unchanging and immobile.⁴¹

For strong (κρατερή) Ananke holds it in bonds of chain (πείρατος ἐν δεσμοῖσι)
 that binds it all around (frag. 8, ll. 30–31)
 For [there is] nothing [that] exists or will exist
 other than what is, since Moira has fettered it (ἐπέδησεν)
 so as to be whole and immovable (frag. 8, ll. 36–38).

Here the powers of Moira and Ananke come together to bind reality in strongly Homeric diction: *krateros* (an epithet of Zeus), *peiratos en desmoisi*, and *epedêsen*.

In the poem of Parmenides, it is a beneficent daimon who guides the possibly shamanic journey of a young man toward discovery of truth.⁴² He reaches the gates of the paths of Night and Day, filled with huge doors, and Dike the avenger Δίκη πολύποινος holds the keys (l. 9) (Austin 1986: 156–157; Guthrie 1962–1981.2: 7–9). A goddess welcomes him and tells him to “Rejoice, for it is no ill Fate (Μοῖρα κακῆ) that sends you to travel here” (l. 26).

Plato

Plato’s fullest account of the Moirai is in the *Republic* (617b–621a), where they sing in harmony at a common task. Their activity is likened to Ananke and to the daimons that guide the fates of individuals (topos 7). Socrates explains how souls choose their lives in the order of the lots they draw. They are then brought before Lachesis, first of the Moirai, who “sends forth a daimon for each [soul] to guard his life and to bring to pass what he has chosen” (*Rep.* 620e). The daimon next leads the soul to Clotho. The turning of her spindle ratifies the destiny (*moiran*) the soul has chosen. Finally, the daimon leads the soul to Atropos, “she who cannot be turned,” who “fixes the web so as to be irreversible.” From there, with no look back, it goes beneath the seat of Necessity and finally to the Plain of Lethe (*Rep.* 621a).

Daimons also play a major role in the self-representation of the Platonic Socrates, who claimed repeatedly that a daimon guided his destiny, which he describes as unusual and remarkable (topos 7). His daimon also figures prominently in his self-defense in the *Apology*: “that something divine and daemonic (θεῖόν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον) would befall me . . . ever since my early childhood a voice of sorts would come to me, which, when it came, always turned me back from what I was intending to do, and turned me toward what I was not . . .” (*Apol.* 31d). He remarks to the jury that something marvelous (θαυμάσιον) had happened to him; that very morning he had met with the approval of: “the mantic voice of the daimon (μαντική ἢ τοῦ δαιμονίου), to which he had become accustomed, and who was always close at hand to op-

pose the smallest error (*Apol.* 40a). Socrates' account is reflected in the *Euthyphro's* quasi-humorous account of these charges and takes Socrates to task for the boast that something daimonic (τὸ δαιμόνιον) always attends him (*Euth.* 3b). The *Theaetetus* reiterates how Socrates' daimon attends to the finer details of his life. Its account of the midwifery of the soul describes how the daimonic presence forbids some associations and permits others (*Thet.* 151a). Daimons also appear as guides of the soul before birth and after death. Individual daimons appear as psychopompoi: after death each person is guided by the daimon who had charge of him during life (*Phaedo* 107d). The wise soul follows the guide, but a soul overly attached to the body lingers, and only with resistance, suffering, and force can it be led away to judgment by its guiding daimon (*Phaedo* 108b and 113d).

Greek philosophical reflection on fate moves away from the Homeric problem of the limits of the will of Zeus. As we have seen, Plato takes it up with the role of daimons and the destinies of individual souls (*Republic* and *Timaeus*). Aristotle treats it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *De Interpretatione*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Physics*. After the fourth century, the *Moirai* were increasingly replaced by the term “*heimarmenê*.” Fate was viewed as principle ruling both the world overall and the lives of individuals. It is well known that determinism (asserted and denied in both physical and ethical contexts) became a central concern of post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy. From the late second century BCE to the third century CE, discussions of fate became part of a philosophical repertoire common to all the philosophical schools. It was central to the Stoa for four hundred years, though no Stoic treatise on it has survived. Discussions of the topics of fate and providence appear in texts variously titled *On Fate*, *On Nature*, *On the Possible*, *On Providence*, and *On the Gods*. A surviving text entitled *On Fate* begins with Chrysippus of Soli (280–207 BCE), followed by Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Alexander of Aphrodisias (2d–3d century CE) (Cicero, *De Fato*; Sharples 1983; den Boeft 1970; Bobzien 1998). Surviving accounts refer to the views of Epicurus (341–270 BCE), the skeptic Carneades (214–129 BCE), and several figures associated with the Stoa: its founder, Zeno of Citium (335–263), Boethus of Sidon (2d century BCE), Posidonius (135–51 BCE), and Epictetus (ca. 55–135 CE) (Amand 1945; Cioffari 1935). Lost texts are attributed to the Platonist Plutarch (1st century CE), Tertullian (2d century CE), and second-century Peripatetics and Stoics. There were also fourth-century Christian works titled “Against Fate” by Gregory of Nyssa and Diodorus of Tarsus.

Aristotle separates himself from predecessors who did not recognize chance or luck (ἡ τύχη) or spontaneity (τὸ αὐτόματον) among the causes of events (love, strife, etc.). He addresses the relation of causation to chance and luck (topos 5) and argues that, even when a cause can be ascribed (as in the

determinist arguments he rejects), we speak of some things as happening by chance and others not (*Physics* 2.4).

The Vocabulary of Greek Oracular Discourse

The lexicon of Greek oracular discourse is closely connected to Greek accounts of fate because of the inherent connection between prediction and agency: predicting and causing an event. In Greece (as in China) divination was used to identify the extrahuman agency responsible for some adverse event, which could then be placated or exorcised. Throughout Greek mantic discourse, there is an unresolved tension between the idea of impersonal destiny removed from human influence and the belief that gods, accessible to human prayer, could alter the course of events. This tension is reflected in belief in the prophetic and causative powers of omens (χρησμοί) and the use of two broad methods of divination. One was to solicit revelations from the gods in human language; the other was to interpret material events as analogies or codes that revealed the future.

The vocabulary used for mantic activities reflects the Greek orientation toward oral divination. In some cases, everyday words had specific technical meanings in oracular discourse, for example, ἐπειροτάω (to interrogate), λέγω (to say), ὑποκρίνομαι (to give an [oracular] answer), and κελεύω (to order) (Crahay 1974: 203–206). The technical vocabulary reflects the tension between the oral and semiotic aspects of Greek divination.⁴³ Terms that reflected the oral basis of human–divine communication included ἀναιρέω (to prescribe something or emit a response), μαντεύω (utter mantic speech, along with μάντις and its other derivatives), θεσπίζω (to speak in divine words, linked to θεός, divine), and θεοπρόπιον (an oracle) and the related terms θεοπρόπος, one who announces the will of the gods, and θεοπροπέω (render an oracle), and δικάζω and δίκη (the moral interpretation of divine will). Terms that reflected the semiotic aspects of divination as the decoding of signs in nature included προσημαίνω (inform in advance by signs), πρόφαντος and προφαίνω (to manifest), Πυθία, the Pythia, derived from πύθω and πυυθάνομαι (to seek to know), and χράω and its many derivatives χρησμός, χρηστήριος, χρηστηριάζω, χρησμολόγος (consult an oracle, give an oracle, command by means of an oracle, etc.).

Attempts to know the will of the gods in Greece centered around the figure of the seer or *mantis* (Halliday 1913: 54–98; Bouché-Leclercq [1879] 1975: esp. 2.1: 5–61). Seers were intimately linked to the gods (*theoi*) who “possessed” them (θειάζειν or ἐνθειάζειν). Their unique “sight” allowed the interpretation of signs, for example, the seer Kalchas, who correctly interprets the anger of Apollo at the beginning of the *Iliad*. According to Homer, the *mantis* was welcome everywhere.⁴⁴ The broad functions of the *mantis*

over time became specialized into those of the bard, the diviner, and the physician. (Medicine, in turn, became increasingly specialized into the separate functions of the surgeon, trainer, and physician, and later sources also describe a range of diviners or χρησμολόγοι, often from the viewpoint of antidivination polemics). Iatromantic divination and even Homeric medicine were connected to magic. For example, a famous *Odyssey* passage (19.455–458) describes the scar of Odysseus, its origin in a hunt, and how the wound was tended by the sons of Autolykos who “knowingly bound it, and checked the black blood with an incantation” in a combination of magico-medical practices.⁴⁵ These diviners or μαντοσύνη were strongly connected with royalty, the weather, and the sun (see Halliday 1913: 66–67). Thebes was saved by the predictions of Oedipus the King, and Medea had magical control of the winds. Circe was descended from the sun, Prometheus stole fire from it, and in some sources Cassandra and Helenos gained the gift of prophecy by snakes licking their ears in the temple of Apollo. Other accounts of the acquisition of mantic skills include blindness, descent from a god, nymph, or *mantis*, inspiration by direct contact with a god, usually through sexual contact, for example, Cassandra and the Sibyl (e.g., Halliday 1913: 80–81). Mantic ability was also sometimes conferred through snakes (also connected with medicine), especially in dreams.⁴⁶

From the eighth century on, specific locales gained regional and even international prominence for omen interpretation and became established as oracles where individuals could go to seek counsel (often cryptic) from a particular god, for example, the oracle of Zeus at Dodona and the oracle at Klaros near Colophon (ascribed to Mopsos, grandson of the seer Teiresias). Several famous oracles were delivered through the medium of priestesses: the oracle of Apollo at Didyma (near Miletos), the Pythia priestess of Apollo in charge of the oracle of Pytho at Delphi, and sibyl oracles at Kyme (Cumae) and elsewhere.⁴⁷

Hellenistic Divination Terms

Hellenistic sources provide a large vocabulary of terms for specific divinatory techniques based on compounds ending in the elements μαντεία (-mancy), the vision of the seer or mantis, and σκοπία (-scopy), literally a lookout or watchtower, and the act of examination (σκοπός), still in widespread use to name techniques and instruments for scientific observation.

The broadest of these terms in scope was kledonomanicy, from the Greek κληδών or “omen,” the “reading” of signs, from a wide variety of animate and inanimate sources. These included the instinctive acts of birds, small mammals, reptiles, fish, insects, and humans. Perhaps most important was divination by the acts of birds (ὄρνιθομαντεία, ὄρνιθοσκοπία,

οἰωνομαντεία, οἰωνοσκοπία, etc.), including such specializations as ἀλεκτορομαντεία, divination by cocks. Kledonomanancy also included the interpretation of the “omens” of involuntary speech, or the signs caused by involuntary tremors or other body movements. Other omens came from the structure (rather than actions) of animate beings, for example, the examination of the entrails of animal or human sacrificial victims (ἱεροσκοπία, ἱερομαντεία) or physiognomic techniques for reading human destiny in: the traits of the face (μετωπισκοπία), the lines of the hands (χειροσκοπία), the form of the ears (ὄνυγομαντεία), the overall shape of the body (μορφοσκοπία), or its temperament (φυσιογνωμονία) (Bouché-Leclercq 1879.1: 124–175). Other techniques used objects without power of voluntary locomotion, including plants, stones, fire (ἐμπυρομαντεία), water (ὕδρομαντεία), and the movement of incense smoke (λιβανομαντεία). Κληρομαντεία (kleromanancy) was the casting of stones, lots, or dice to predict events (Bouché-Leclercq 1879.1: 176–197). These terms have persisted in both scholarly and popular treatments of divination. The richness of the Greek divinatory lexicon offers obvious advantages, but it also tends to obscure the differing contexts of divination, in particular the range of contexts in which omenological techniques could be used.

Oneiromancy (ὄνειρομαντεία, ὄνειροσκοπία) was the interpretation of dreams, which could occur spontaneously from the gods (θεόπεμπτος) or be solicited by various means and techniques for oneiroscopy, the observation of dreams. This art involved special difficulties because some dreams were deceptive and others true, but there was no set method for distinguishing between them (Homer, *Od.* 19.560; Cicero, *De Div.* 2.62). Some true dreams were theomatic (θεωρηματικά): direct representations that completed the action they presaged. Some were simple visions (ὄραμα); others, revelations in language (χρηματισμός). Allegorical dreams (ἀλληγορικά) provided symbols whose sense required interpretation. Oneiromancy was also connected with νεκρομαντεία or necromancy, revelation by the souls of the dead. The oldest account is the Nekyia of Odysseus (*Od.* 10.517–534), but the term is a later coinage; necromancy was not widely practiced in the Hellenistic world and was superseded by lekanomanancy and hydromancy (Bouché-Leclercq [1879] 1975.1: 336–343; Halliday 1913: 145–162).

Root Metaphors

There are several areas of common or contrasting metaphor between the semantic fields of Chinese *ming* and Greek *moira*. Some of these metaphors also reflect the *topoi* that have informed this discussion. The metaphor of fate as command appears prominently in both traditions as specifically divine commands (*topos* 1). Both traditions also contain accounts of the involve-

ment of divinities in human destiny, the relation of fate to the power of gods, the possibility of predictive divination, and the possibility of an impersonal fate beyond the power of gods to control. There were important differences in the purposes and techniques for divination and availability of mantic access. Chinese metaphors of divine command concern the division and allotment of shares according to the commands of the gods (or ancestors), whose orders had the force of fate. Greek metaphors of divine command shifted from sharers to spinners, who spun and bound the courses of individual human lives with the threads of fate. Other more general senses of fate, such as punishment, retribution, the fruit of past actions (in this and former lives), and more abstract notions of causality and constancy in nature, seem absent from both China and Greece.

In both traditions the topos of fate as an endowment (topos 2) appears in metaphors of division and allotment. Both *ming* and *moira* portray fate as a lot or allotment of life span and as an autonomous power of destiny. Both words partake of a root metaphor of division and allotment, from which it is tempting, but dangerous, to overgeneralize. What was apportioned, by whom, to whom, and to what end differed both between and within the two cultural contexts. The Greeks described the *moira* of epic heroes and dramatic figures. Homer tells us little about what commoners believed about fate. In contrast, Chinese *ming* appears in discussions of the lives of commoners, such as soldiers fleeing battle or as ordinary people trying to live out their life spans undisturbed; some discourses are even attributed to the commoners themselves, albeit in texts of elite authorship.

Root metaphors also associate fate with change or constancy in nature; some accounts of destiny as a wheel or cycle emphasize randomness or unpredictability (topos 5), others, the predictable behavior of regular cycles (topos 6). The Chinese notion of fate as a wheel or cycle (*yun*) partakes of a metaphor of wheels or cycles that are perfectly predictable insofar as they are both regular and repetitive. The cycle metaphor appears as *tian yun* 天運, the (fortune-bearing) movement of the celestial bodies and the notion that the cycles of fate correspond with the cycles of the stars, in Zou Yan, the *Lunheng*, and so on. Its most significant presence as the Buddhist wheel of reincarnation is beyond the scope of this discussion. The wheel or cycle metaphor is less prominent in non-Buddhist-influenced Chinese treatments of *ming*. The Wheel of Fortune that is such a powerful metaphor for luck in the West has a completely opposite direction (*sic*) from the Chinese metaphor. The Chinese “wheel of fate” is one in constant motion and regular recurrence. The Western Wheel of Fortune turns and then comes to rest; the force of this metaphor is the arbitrary and unknowable point at which the wheel will stop.

The specific association of fate with inevitable change seems particular to pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts, where *ming* includes life span, wealth, and fortune in explicitly changing times. Fate in this sense may apply to individuals, families, nations, empires, or polities. In contrast, Parmenides uses fate as a metaphor for the specifically unchanging and immobile nature of “what-is.” Other Greek thinkers associated change with the action of fate (in association with justice, necessity, and retribution), but in rhetorical and intellectual contexts very different from the Chinese. Anaximander describes a balance between coming into and passing out of being based on necessity and mutual “penalty and retribution” δίκην καὶ τίσιν, but it is based, not on fate, but on “the assessment of time” κατὰ τῆν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν (Kirk and Raven 1957: 103; Diehls and Kranz 1922: 12A9). Heraclitus speaks of all things “undergoing alteration” ἀλλοιοῦται, and of even the sun being subject to the retribution of the Fates, the handmaidens of Dike, but his focus is the integrity of the order of nature and the physical world (Kirk and Raven 1957: 207 and 229; Diehls and Kranz 1922: 22B90 and 94). References to the action of fate or justice became part of the rhetoric of appeals to Nature φύσις, expressed in legal and moral language, that appealed to a wide range of fifth-century Greeks. These were used to justify diverse positions.⁴⁸ Pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts, by contrast, include but do not emphasize notions of causality and constancy in nature.

Yet other systems of metaphor speak to questions of human choice and free will (topos 3), including ethical choices (topos 4). Both traditions took up the relations of fate, sagacity, and free will, but with very different results. Greek metaphors of spinning and binding tended to express human powerlessness. Chinese accounts take the understanding of and harmony with fate (according to very different formulae) as a defining characteristic of the sage and focus on the figure of the sage as someone who “understands” fate.

This preliminary Chinese and Greek evidence suggests some common notions of fate but very different attitudes toward fatalism. Pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts combine acceptance of fate with strong antifatalism and well-developed notions of strategy or maneuvering room within its decrees. Life span may be fated, but within it free will reigns. Change and resilience are the order of the day and open to human strategy and ingenuity. A wide range of texts stress the importance of timeliness (*shi*) and configuration or “setup” *shi* in response to one’s times and to one’s fate. Thus longevity and good auspice were fated and unknowable, but could be cherished and cultivated through knowledge and sagacity. In this sense, both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* take “strategic” attitudes toward omnipresent *ming*. Greek accounts of fate, on the other hand, contain a significant fatalist element. Greek fates were variously personified: as *Moirai*, the Moirai, the power of Themis

or Dike, the will of Zeus, or the activity of daimons. These divinities alternatively hold fate in their power and coexist with an autonomous “fate” beyond their control. The decrees and commands of Greek divinities and divine agencies were consistently portrayed as fixed, binding, and inexorable.

Notes

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1. See also Craig 1988, Doob 1988, Holm 1994, and B. S. Turner 1996.

2. Giddens 1990: 29–31. Giddens notes that “trust” appears frequently in everyday language, but some uses invoke deeper meanings of “faith” insofar as trust presupposes a relation to risk and the unanticipated results of action. Similar views of the concept of risk as a defining feature of modernity are expressed in Peter L. Bernstein 1996. See also Hacking 1975 and 1990.

3. Woelien Chong’s chapter in this volume takes up the absence of *ming* in the work of three contemporary Chinese philosophers. Perhaps their training in and orientation toward contemporary Western philosophy predisposed them against a view of *ming* as a worthy part of rational discourse.

4. An editor of the journal *Renaissance*, Fu pioneered the use of European philological methods as a new basis for historical research (he studied in Britain and Germany from 1920 to 1927).

5. Traditionally, *tianming* 天命 has been translated as “mandate of Heaven” in English, but Schaberg and Puett prefer the term “Heaven’s command” as more true to the Chinese. Please refer to their essays (Chaps. 1, 2) in this volume.

6. Di presided over lesser gods and royal ancestors, and was responsible for the welfare of the Shang kingdom. See Poo 1998: 224n37.

7. For example, 貞：不惟帝命作我田 (Yao 6746.1) in Yao Xiaosui and Xiao Ding 1989: 127b. Other examples of nominal uses of *ling* = *ming* occur at Yao 6928.1 *zheng*, 14295.1, and 34146.1. Xia Lu 1980: 86 takes the inscription 貞：帝于令(命)? (Yao 1239.1) to refer to *di*-sacrifice to *Ming*, presumably a different deity than the Si Ming or Director of Destinies who is accorded the power of fate in Zhou sources. See also Ding Shan 1988: 203.

8. Poo 1998: 3ff. and Chap. 4 in this volume.
9. For a particularly lucid presentation of this combination see Smith 1991: 13–14.
10. Some of those presented here are taken from a series of papers written between 1957 and 1962, originally published in Chinese and later published in English in *Philosophy East & West*. Tang Junyi used nine verb-object compounds to identify pre-Qin doctrines of *ming*, which, in his view, all originated in the Zhou religion of the *Odes* and *Documents*. They are: (1) the “understanding *ming*” of Confucius; (2) Mohist “against *ming*”; (3) Mengzi’s “establishing *ming*”; (4) Zhuangzi’s “resting in *ming*”; (5) “Returning to *ming*” in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*; (6) Xunzi’s “controlling” or “causing *ming*”; (7) Zou Yan’s “omen of receiving *ming*”; (8) the *Zhong yong*’s “what heaven has decreed is called nature” 天命之謂性; and (9) “arriving at [awareness of] *ming*” 至於命 in the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 commentary to the *Book of Changes* 易經 (*Zhou yi yinde* [1935] 1966: 49/Shuo/1). See Tang Junyi 1957: 1–2 and Tang Junyi 1962: 96–97. He does not identify specific passages or elaborate their contexts, and at least one of them is probably periphrastic.
11. Translations are my own unless otherwise specified. Throughout, I use the terms “*ming*,” “fate,” “decree,” and “mandate” in both nominal and verbal senses for *ming* to avoid a kind of cryptofatalism.
12. Several strips in the excavations from Baoshan recommend divinations and sacrifice to Si Ming. See *Baoshan Chujian*, strips 212–215, 236–238, and 242–244. Si Ming also appears as authority over life and death in a text discovered in a Qin tomb in Gansu. Here, the resurrection of a man named Tan was granted when Tan’s master argued to Si Ming that Tan did not deserve to die for a minor offense. See Peng Hao 1991; Poo 1998: 66; He Shuangqin 1989; Li Xueqin 1990; Harper 1994.
13. The number indicates the poem’s place in the sequence of 305 poems established in the Western Han period commentary attributed to Mao Heng and Mao Chang.
14. Tang Junyi 1962: 196–197 (English) and Tang Junyi 1957: 1 (Chinese), respectively. These phrases may be periphrastic for later Daoist notions of “resting in *ming*,” *an ming*, since this phrase does not appear in the *Zhuangzi*.
15. The passage continues: someone who understands *ming* does not stand under a wall that is about to collapse. Yang Xiong takes up this example in the *Fa yan* 法言 (6: 17). Wang Chong discusses “standard *ming*” in detail (discussed below).
16. Zou Yan’s “omen of receiving *ming*” 受命之符 is also an example of *shou ming*.
17. *Xunzi* 16/23. This is quite distinct from Tang Junyi’s reference to Xunzi’s “controlling” or “causing *ming*” in note 10, above.
18. Other understandings of the term included understanding or obeying either the orders of a ruler or the “orders” of heaven-decreed nature. Nylan 1994: 35n92; Mori 1971: 35–41; Kanaya 1986: 136–166.
19. Chen Ning 1997a has used the notions of transpersonal and individual *ming* as a way to resolve the internal inconsistencies in the *Mengzi*.
20. Cf. Graham 1978: 489–490. The *Lü Shi chunqiu* chapter “Living Out

One's Lot," *Jin shu* 盡數, provides an apt example of this argument. It describes how sages use knowledge of yin and yang to understand what benefits the myriad creatures and how to live out their allotted life spans without either augmenting or truncating them (*Lü Shi chungiu* 3.2).

21. The translation of this passage depends on whether we read 其所中 and 其所始 as referring to the cycles of heaven and earth described earlier in the passage or to the span of human lives. I have taken it in the former sense. In the latter sense the passage would read: "Since we do not know our ends, how can we say we are not fated [to die]; since we do not know how we began, how can we say we are fated?"

22. Graham takes *ming* as naming rather than as ordering destiny: "he does his own naming of the transformations of things" (Graham 1986: 76).

23. The semantic range of *shi* includes both static and dynamic elements, which Jullien respectively calls *disposition* (position, circumstances) and the more instrumental *dispositif* (power, potential), elegantly rendered by Janet Lloyd as "setup." See Jullien 1995: 11.

24. For the problem of fate in the *Taixuanjing*, see Nylan 1994.

25. For a more complex view of Han Confucianism, see Nylan 1999.

26. This point is argued persuasively in Nylan 1997.

27. Forke's translation is misleading because it inserts a notion of predestination that is not in the text. Later in the chapter he translates 命貧 as *ming pin*, literally someone with a *ming* of poverty, as "in the case of a person predestined for poverty" (Forke [1911] 1962.1: 49).

28. 王者一受命，內以為性，外以為體。 *Lunbeng* 12: 126.

29. Other examples of arbitrariness include: which pore a sore breaks out from, which insect the spider traps, which fish are caught in the net, who gets caught, response to calamity, being crushed by a wall or riverbank collapse.

30. Cf. *Lunbeng* 6: 49–50. Forke [1911] 1962.1: 138–139 translates these as "natural," "concomitant," and "adverse."

31. The *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (*yishu* 藝術, 47: 5681–7854) contains biographical entries for diviners under categories of: oracle bones and milfoil stalks *bushi* 卜筮, astrology *xingming* 性命, physiognomy *xiangshu* 相術, geomancy *kanyu* 堪輿, and computational arts *shushu* 數術.

32. For accounts of later techniques for the management of fate, see Chao 1946, Smith 1991, Topley 1973, and Yuan Shushan 1919, 1926, and 1947, and Chapter 5 by Robert Campany in this volume.

33. Conference on Excavated Texts, sponsored by the Luce Foundation, Dartmouth College, and Beijing University, Beijing, August 18–21, 2000.

34. These themes appear consistently in treatments of the subject in classics, history of philosophy, and religion. See Greene 1944; Guthrie 1962–1981; Irwin 1989: 16, 157, 171, and 180; and Burkert 1985: 129–130.

35. These include Themis or Dike. In addition to their later roles as deities of justice and punishment, Dike is associated with an orderly flow of time, as is *Moirai* with the orderly division of space and ἀνάγκη (Necessity), revealed by oracles, omens, prodigies, and signs.

36. For Parmenides' dates see Guthrie, vol. 2, pp. 1–2, based on Plato's (*Parm.* 127a–c) description of a meeting between the old Parmenides and the young Socrates. For the inquiry concerning nature, see Lloyd 1987: 1–4 and 38–49. Conspicuously absent from this preliminary study are medical and other scientific works. For discussion of fate as an area of speculation that offers “some of the greatest problems for, or the maximum resistance to, any scientific takeover,” see Lloyd 1987: 4 and 38–49. As he points out, much of the discourse on prediction in medicine and astronomy concerned prognosis of the course of disease or prediction of the positions of the sun, moon, and planets. These predictions did not significantly involve the operative notions of fate.

37. Demosthenes, *On the Halonnesus* 7.40.

38. Of the 101 instances of μοῖρα in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, only one is in the phrase *huper moiran*. *Uper aisan* occurs five times out of forty instances of *aisa*.

39. Detienne and Vernant 1978. For “metic intelligence” in China, see Raphals 1992.

40. For example, at the marriages of Peleus and Thetis and of Zeus and Themis.

41. Parmenides also wrote in Homeric hexameter and began his poem, in the Homeric manner, with a claim of divine inspiration.

42. *Parm. frag. 1: ll. 1–3*. Guthrie considers the daimon to be Helios, the sun; Austin takes her as “the goddess.”

43. Crahay 1974, to whom this discussion is indebted, classifies the technical vocabulary under the four rubrics of operative terms, psychological terms, terms of communication and information, and terms of will.

44. Homer (*Od.* 17.382) described three kinds of “craftsmen” or δημιουργοί: the carpenter, the bard, and the physician. See Halliday 1913: 58–63.

45. For discussion of this passage see Renehan 1992.

46. Examples include Cassandra, Helenos, Melampus, and the Argonaut seer Iamos. For other examples see Halliday 1913: 82–92.

47. The vast literature on Greek oracles includes Bouché-Leclercq [1879–1882] 1975; Flacelière 1965, and Lloyd-Jones 1976.

48. According to Greene (1944: 228), these included naive individualists, superpatriots (in defense of the state's right to exist), democrats (in defense of the status quo), aristocrats (in defense of a reactionary coup), and the Athenian empire itself (in defense of the conscription of Melian neutrals).

4

How to Steer through Life

Negotiating Fate in the *Daybook*

MU-CHOU POO

Fate and *Ming*

The problem of human destiny, or fate, is an essential element in the religious experience of many cultures. If religion can be understood as a form of communication with the powers that control human destiny, then the act of worshiping—whatever forms it may assume—constitutes an attempt to be aware of one's fate, or even to try to influence its course. The act of divination, a widespread phenomenon, is essentially an inquiry about one's fate, or what is fated to happen. Similarly, prayers to the gods are almost always, on some level, attempts to manipulate fate. If the gods have determined one's fate, a prayer could perhaps urge them to change it in response to one's sincerity, offerings, or worthy deeds. As I shall discuss later, there is an inherent logical problem here, namely, can we still use the term "fate" if it could somehow be changed? But first we should clarify the meaning of "fate" in the present study.

Let us begin with a dictionary for clues to the commonly accepted meaning of the word. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* gives several meanings of "fate": "(1) The principle, power, or agency by which events are unalterably predetermined from eternity. Often personified. (2) Mythology. *a.* The goddess of Fate; in Homer *Moirai*. (3) That which is fated to happen. (4) What will become of, or has become of (a person or thing); ultimate condition. *b.* Death, destruction, ruin" (*OED* 1971). The explanations boil down to one essential meaning: that which is destined to happen. Death and destruction, of course, are most certain to happen to human beings (and other living creatures); the power that causes this to happen is personified as Fate; and all these could be found already in Homer.

The Greek poets and philosophers of the Classical period encountered the problem of fate (*moira*) very early on. They tried various ways to explain the existence of fate, how fate brought both good and evil, and how human beings should or could choose to live a life that aspires to divine justice but nonetheless accepts evil fate (Greene 1944; Dietrich 1965).¹ It is possible, according to the narratives in Homer, that on rare occasions man can overcome the divine will by excessive courage and moral power, and thus momentarily transgress the limit of the fated life (Dietrich 1965: 284–288). Yet it seems that the Greeks had never speculated on the possibility that fate, the lot that human beings received from the gods, could be changed. For even if the gods had the power to change a person's fate, they would not do it because that would set the cosmological order off balance (Lawson 1994: 7–17). This, of course, is basically the realization of the poets and philosophers, who had come to terms with the nature of human situation in the world. For the common people, on the other hand, belief in fate did not necessarily prevent them from having the hope that divine help could be rendered. When Zeus was contemplating whether to save Hector, who was about to be slain by Achilles (*Il.* 22: 168ff.), his contemplation represented a human desire to change what was fated to happen. This human desire, nonetheless, was deterred by the warning of Athena, who represented the voice of the poet who understood fate.

Without going into further details such as the ultimate source of authority on fate (Lawson 1994: 14–17), suffice it to say that the Greek concept of fate has survived largely in modern English-language usage. Taking notice of the fact, of course, that in the modern usage, Fate as a personification of the power of destiny has largely become a metaphor, and that in people's daily language the use of "fate" does not necessarily imply a strictly deterministic attitude, the Western understanding serves as an interesting contrast when the Chinese side of the story is investigated.

The central issue of this study, then, is the concept of "fate," or whether there was such a concept, in the mind of the common people of pre-imperial China. The relationship between this concept and the term *ming* 命, moreover, is an intriguing question that deserves special attention. To elucidate the mentality of the commoners concerning fate, I shall concentrate on the information gleaned from the Qin bamboo text *Rishu* 日書 (Daybook) from Shuihudi 睡虎地.

The first problem that we encounter, again, is a translation-interpretation problem. If *moira* could be roughly translated as "fate," can we render *ming* likewise? In dealing with terms across time and cultures, it is better not to inquire too hastily what an ancient term means in the modern language, but to ask what can it mean among all the possibilities. Needless to say, pri-

ority should be given to the meaning that best suits the context. It is my finding that in the majority of the cases where *ming* appears in the traditional pre-Qin texts, there is a common agreement that *ming*, besides signifying the basic meanings of “life,” or “command,” usually refers to a person’s destiny, more or less the equivalent of modern English “fate,” that is, the unalterable life course allotted by Heaven, gods, or whatever powers. It is still the commonly assumed meaning of this word in Chinese today.² In the following, I shall select some examples from the pre-Qin traditional elite texts to illustrate this use of the word “*ming*.”

In the *Analects*, when Confucius’ disciple Bo Niu was ill, the Master said: “If he dies, that is but his fate!” 亡之，命矣夫 (*Lunyu zhusu*, 6: 4).³ On another occasion, he was heard to say, “Life and death are decided by one’s fate (*ming*), wealth and prestige are decided by Heaven” 死生有命，富貴在天 (*Lunyu zhusu*, 12: 2). The parallelism of this sentence indicates that, in this case at least, *ming* is understood as the will of Heaven, which cannot be changed. Mencius has a similar expression: “That which one did not do but was done, it was [the deed of] Heaven; that which one did not seek but was there, it was the fate (*ming*)” 莫之為而為者，天也；莫之致而至者，命也 (*Mengzi zhusu*, 9b: 4). Mencius also says: “Everything is but *ming*, and one should accept it with a positive manner. Therefore he who understands *ming* will not stand beneath a crumbling wall. He who dies after completing his way (*dao*), it is the proper *ming*. He who dies in prison, it is not the proper *ming*” 莫非命也，順受其正。是故知命者，不立乎巖牆之下。盡其道而死者，正命也。桎梏死者，非正命也 (*Mengzi zhusu*, 13a: 3). Here Mencius created a problem for himself: on the one hand, he claimed that everything is decided by *ming*, that is, unalterable fate; on the other hand, he seemed to suggest that human action could somehow affect one’s own fate, so that it could become “proper” or “not proper.” This directly contradicts what Mencius said above, that *ming* is “what one did not seek but was there.” Being a *Ruist* 儒者, however, it is only natural that Mencius, just as Confucius, was pro-action, especially moral action within one’s own power, despite his recognition of the power of *ming*. It is a notable feature in early Confucianism that different shades of meanings of *ming* are adopted in different situations without being considered logically inconsistent.⁴

In the book of *Zhuangzi* the word “*ming*” is also used in the sense of fate: “Life or death, existence or disappearance, distressed or prosperous, poor or rich, capable or incompetent, slander or praise, hungry or thirsty, cold or hot, these are the changes of events and the movement of fate (*ming*)” 死生，存亡，窮達，貧富，賢與不肖，毀譽，飢渴，寒暑，是事之變，命之行也 (Guo Qingfan 1975: 212). Here *Zhuangzi* maintains that every event and situation in one’s life is part of fate, which is not the concern

of one who has realized that life and death are but stages of the transformation of nature. The movement of fate (*ming*) is actually the movement of nature, for fate is nature. A similar expression in *Zhuangzi* that shows the parallel relation between *ming* and Heaven reads: “Life and death are [determined by] one’s fate (*ming*). As for the constant change of night and day, it is [the nature] of Heaven” 死生，命也，其有夜且之常，天也 (Guo Qingfan 1975: 241). *Ming* is not only compared with the way of Heaven as what is unchangeable, but is also seen as something that happens without our understanding: “That which had happened without my knowing why it had happened, that is *ming* (blind fate)” 不知吾所以然而然，命也 (Guo Qingfan 1975: 658). In other words, there is something unfathomable about fate. The same idea is expressed in a passage in the *Lüshi chunqiu*: “Fate (*ming*) is that which happens without one’s knowing why it happens, and that contrives of human wisdom and ingenuity could not be part of it. Thus fate (*ming*) is what one could not have if one approaches it, and one would not lose if one left it” (*Lüshi chunqiu* 20: 7).

Xunzi also sees human fate as determined by Heaven, although without the mystery: “Therefore the fate (*ming*) of a man is determined by Heaven, the fate of a country is determined by ritual (*li*)” 故人之命在天，國之命在禮 (Wang Xianqian 1981.11: 211). A more comprehensive survey of this meaning of *ming* is not necessary to establish that this equation of *ming* with fate, whatever its individual nuances, is ubiquitous in the pre-Qin texts.

In addition to this idea of *ming* as fate determined by whatever power or gods, there is also the idea of the mandate of Heaven, *tianming* 天命.⁵ In the *Shang shu*, or *Book of History*, as has been discussed frequently, the mandate of Heaven was expressed in the context of dynastic changes. The term “*tianming*,” “the mandate of Heaven,” here means the authority that Heaven bestowed on the ruler: “The Yin dynasty had received the mandate of Heaven for many years” 有殷受天命，惟有歷年 (*Shujing zhushu*, 15: 10). This idea of *tianming* was echoed in the bronze inscriptions of the early Zhou period, such as the Shihonggui 師匱簋: “The king says: Master Hong, the great and august king Wen and Wu had received the Mandate of Heaven *tianming*” 王若曰，師匱，不顯文武，孚受天命 (Guo Moruo 1957: fig. 132). The same use of *ming* is found in the *Book of Poetry* and is quoted by Mencius: “The *Poetry* says: Although Zhou is an old state, its Mandate (of Heaven) is still new” 詩云，周雖舊邦，其命維新 (*Mengzi zhushu*, 5a: 8).

In the *Yijing*, the term “*ming*” is used mostly in the sense of “mandate” as in “mandate of Heaven,” or in the sense of “command,” concerning specific subjects. For example, in the exegesis *tuan* 豕 to the hexagram heading *wuwang* 無妄 (*Zhouyi zhushu*, 3: 21), *ming* refers to the mandate of Heaven, but the “mandate” here should be understood in a narrower sense, concern-

ing whether it is auspicious to travel (“when the mandate of Heaven does not bless, could you still go” 天命不祐，行以哉？), instead of an overarching political or moral mandate that applies mostly to a ruler and less in the sense of a personal fate.

The idea of the mandate of Heaven is also present in the *Zuozhuan* in reference to the legitimacy of the Shang and Zhou dynastic power:

〈殷受命咸宜，百祿是荷，其是之謂乎！〉

“That the Yin dynasty received the mandate (*ming*) was beneficial to all, as it carried abundant fortune.” This must have been the meaning of it!

(*Zuozhuan zhushu*, 3: 8)

In another passage, it is said that

成王定鼎于郊，卜世三十，卜年七百，天所命也。周德雖衰。天命未改。

King Cheng established the capital at Jiayu, and divined that there were to be thirty generations of rulers and seven hundred years of reign to the dynasty, that was what Heaven had mandated. Although the virtue of Zhou has declined, the mandate of Heaven did not change. (*Zuozhuan zhushu*, 21: 16)

Here we find an appropriate explanation of the meaning of *tianming*, that is, “what Heaven had mandated” *tian suo ming ye* 天所命也。

The problem we are now facing is, since Heaven could bestow the mandate, presumably it could also take it back, assuming that Heaven is a supreme being with consciousness and moral will. Accordingly, the Xia and Shang dynasties lost their regime precisely because Heaven had retrieved its mandate. This idea is therefore compatible with the idea that “*ming*,” being a “command,” could be changed by whatever power first issued it. In fact, as Schaberg discusses in more detail in his essay (Chap. 1), the character *ming* was often written *ling* 令 in the early Zhou bronze inscriptions, and it is obvious that its meaning was closely related to *ling*, that is, to command. In the oracle bone inscriptions, moreover, the word “*ling*” was regularly used as the “command,” either of the king or of the deities.⁶ It is true that the mandate of Heaven is mainly a political term and should not be considered in the same sense as the fate of an ordinary person. However, when Confucius says in the *Analects*, “When I was fifty, I began to understand the mandate of Heaven (*tianming*)” 五十而知天命 (*Lunyu zhushu*, 2: 2), the term “*tianming*” here seems to refer to personal destiny prescribed by Heaven, although it cannot be ruled out that it could still refer to the mandate of Heaven in a

political sense (Chen Ning 1997b). In any case, the fact that the mandate of Heaven is alterable depending on the moral character of the political leader raises a conceptual problem: could the *ming* of a private person also be changed by Heaven or whatever power that determines one's *ming*?

There are indeed indications in our sources about a conception that a person's life course could be changed, and that the idea of an unalterable fate was not what people always upheld. In the oracle bone inscriptions, the Shang kings ask their ancestral spirits and gods a variety of questions, such as whether the next harvest would be good, or whether their wars against foreigners would be successful (Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999: 236–247). They expect to have answers, because they believe that the living, the dead, and the divine could communicate with each other, as the world of the living and the world of the divine constitute a continuous whole. In the earlier oracle bone inscriptions we do not see acts or prayers that are purported to influence the fate of the king or future events. The king merely wanted to know what would happen. Toward the end of the dynasty, in the so-called Period Five oracle bones, however, divination charges sometimes reveal a desire to appeal to the royal ancestors for help in certain matters. Thus the “divinatory” nature of the oracle bones had shifted toward “propitiation.” The charges of the kings regarding the outcome of the divination, for example, could come closer to a plea for good fortune (Keightley 1999: 243). Even if our reading of these oracle inscriptions is only provisional, the very fact that sacrifices of all scales of elaboration were offered to the royal ancestors and deities indicates a desire to incur the favor of those ancestors and deities, to obtain a better life, or at least to maintain the present order. The implication is that if the spirits were not satisfied, one's life course might be changed for the worse; hence sacrifice was an active way to influence one's life course. Consequently, there could be no real notion of “fate” in the sense of an unalterable life course whenever sacrifices or rituals were performed for the gods and spirits.

The concept that the *ming* of a person could be changed, moreover, is implied not only by the act of propitiation to the deities and ancestors performed by the kings, but also by mantic activities performed by a more general public. One poem in the *Book of Poetry* has the following lines, as the poet says to his betraying friend:

Now I use these three creatures for sacrifice,	出此三物，
In order to secure a curse on you,	以詛爾斯。
If you were a ghost or a short fox,	為鬼為蜮，
Then I could not get you.	則不可得。

(*Maoshi zhusu*, 12/3: 18)

In the *Zuozhuan*, there is also evidence that similar black magic was used to hurt people. After Ying Kaoshu 穎考叔 was killed, the duke of Zheng ordered that a pig, a dog, and chicken should be used to cast a curse upon the killers (*Zuozhuan zhusu*, 4: 24). The use of curse and magic, though itself not an act of propitiation to change one's own life course, was in a sense an act resorting to divine or demonic power to change the life of others. This shows that *ming* was not something that was fixed forever. These examples, though recorded in the elite texts, must have had a wider basis in society for them to be persuasive. It has to be pointed out, however, that, despite the implications pointing to the assumption, nowhere in the texts is the idea that *ming* can be changed explicitly mentioned.

What, then, is the meaning of *ming* and its relationship with fate? If “fate” is understood as the unavoidable and unalterable course of human life, as in modern English usage, then *ming* is not always exactly the same as fate. *Ming* could be understood according to its original meaning—that is, to command, or what has been commanded or prescribed, or prognosticated. It is therefore a kind of “prescribed” life course, which, theoretically, could be changed. In the majority of the elite texts mentioned above, however, *ming* is most often unalterable, except in connection with the idea of *tianming*, the employment of which implies, but does not explicitly spell out, that *ming* could be changed. It is through the study of such texts as the *Daybook* of Shuihudi that we can reach a further understanding of the seemingly paradoxical situation that, on the one hand, people seemed to have believed in an unchangeable fate, while, on the other hand, they tried to somehow avert what was fated to happen by using all sorts of mantic knowledge and exorcistic activities.

The *Daybook* of Shuihudi as a Handbook of Daily Actions

The *Daybook*, or *Rishu*, is the name given to a collection of texts aimed at providing a practical guide to everyday actions. So far the earliest versions are found at Shuihudi, Hubei Province, dated to 216 BCE.⁷ The term “*daybook*” refers to a genre of text the content of which was by no means fixed, as the simultaneous preservation of the two versions found at Shuihudi clearly indicates. In recent studies, the term “almanac” is applied to this text, which is appropriate in view of the content (Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999: 843–844).

In principle there are two broad types of individual texts in the *Daybook*. The first type is calendrical texts, usually in the form of tables that provide an overview of all the days in the entire year, enumerated by the stem-and-branch sexagenary system. Explanatory texts giving the nature of different kinds of days, again following the sexagenary system, usually accompany the

calendrical tables. Although the details of these calendrical tables may vary from one to another, and the explanatory texts also are different, their basic functions are the same—namely, to allow the reader an overview of all the available choices of dates, with reference to their auspiciousness concerning various activities. An analysis of these activities shows that the main users of the *Daybooks* were farmers, soldiers, craftsmen, and low-ranking government officials, suggesting that the *Daybook* could have represented the mentality of the lower-middle social stratum (Poo 1998: 89).

In addition to the calendrical texts of the general nature of days, the second type of texts provide detailed predictions regarding specific subjects, such as marriage, childbirth, building construction, travel, making garments, illness, burglary, farm works, audience with officials, dream divination, and so on. The predictions usually are given in relation to calendrical order. For example, in a text for identifying burglars, every stem and branch was said to represent a specific kind of burglar. If the burglary happened on a *Zi* 子-day, the text says:

子，鼠也。盜者兌口希須，善弄手，黑色，面有黑子焉，疵在耳，臧於垣內中糞蔡下。

Zi is the rat, the thief has a pointed mouth, with light mustache, is nimble in using hands. His (skin) color is black, with black moles on his face. He has a scar on the ear, and hides within the wall under the manure stack (?). (SHD 827 b)

One has only to follow the description given in the text to find the “thief of the day.”

From the above cursory analysis of the content of the *Daybook*, we can see that it serves the function of a map of human action, a map that can guide people through many pitfalls and dangers in life. The cosmological assumptions behind this map, however, are quite intriguing. The first assumption is that time, as calculated by the sexagenary system, is related to human destiny. Each day in this system is assigned a particular nature regarding a specific subject. It is either auspicious for traveling, or it is not. It is either good for making sacrifice to the ancestors, or it is not. The second assumption is that the varieties of the nature of days are confined to what is allowed by the sexagenary system. Meanings and significance are attached not to a linear sequence of days but to the cyclical pattern defined by the ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches. In other words, the *Daybook* allowed only a limited number of possibilities of human action; the possibilities may recur every ten, twelve, or at most sixty days. This much is clear. Yet why did

people believe that time is related to human affairs? So long as we do not really know the origin of the sexagenary system and therefore its connection with human destiny, we can only speculate. One possible origin of such belief might be mythological stories about certain divine actions at some particular dates in the remote past. The *Daybook* of Shuihudi happens to preserve some examples. One concerns travel:

凡是日赤奮恆以開臨下民，而降其英(殃)，不可具為百事，皆毋所利。
On all these [above-mentioned] days, the Red Emperor will always descend to the people and inflict calamities. One should not do anything, for they would not be beneficial. (SHD 857)⁸

The story concerning the descent of the Red Emperor was lost, but the disasters that he brought to the people remained in the collective memory. For another example:

五丑不可以巫，啻以殺巫滅(咸)。
One should not employ shamans on the five *chou* 丑 -days, [because on that day] the Emperor (*di*) killed Shaman Xian (Wu Xian). (SHD 756)⁹

Again, the conflict between the Di and Shaman Xian is unknown to us, but not necessarily to the people then. If we knew the story, we might be able to decipher the origins of some of the auspicious or inauspicious days. A more fortunate example concerns the story of King Yu 禹:

此所胃良山，禹之離日也，……離日不可以家(嫁)女取婦及入人民畜生，唯利以分異，離日不可以行，行必不反。
This day is the Genshan, King Yu's departure day. . . . On the Day of Departure one should not give one's daughter to marriage, take a wife, or take in servants and beasts; it is only good for separation. One should not travel on the Day of Departure, if he does, he shall never return. (SHD 776–782)

Another paragraph related to the legend of Yu states that

癸丑戊午己未，禹以取椽山之女日也，不棄必以子死。
Guichou, *wuwu*, and *jiwei* are the days when King Yu took the young girl of Tu Shan as his wife. If [the wife] is not deserted, she will surely die of childbirth. (SHD 894b)

The myth about King Yu and his project of controlling the flood is well known. The most famous episode in the story relates to his dedication to his work, so much as that in all the years while he worked on the flood, he never returned home even though he had passed by his house several times (Yuan Ke 1960: 221–231). This dedication, however, might be the origin of a family tragedy, as his wife was surely neglected and became unhappy, for he left home only four days after their marriage. According to another legend, King Yu's wife once, when sending lunch to him, happened to see him in his sacred form as a black bear during his work. She was frightened, fled from him, and finally changed into a rock (Yuan Ke 1960: 222–223). The two passages from the *Daybook* therefore seem to be an interpretation of the darker side of the otherwise heroic Yu myth. Anyone who gets married on the same day as King Yu did, accordingly, is likely to suffer the same fate: an unhappy marriage and a deserted wife. It is particularly interesting to see this “folk understanding” of the life story of one of the most revered sage kings. This difference between the images of a sage king and a bad husband gives us a vivid glimpse of the largely unknown world and mentality of the common people at this time.

I hope I have demonstrated that certain mythological stories or legends could have conjured up the special importance and meaning of certain dates related to the stories, and that these dates were subsequently incorporated into the divination system. But most of the time we could find no explanation. The entire calendrical structure of the web of meanings contained in the *Daybook* must have been the result of a long development of divinatory tradition. The Shang oracle bone inscriptions indicate that people then already believed that the event of a certain date in the future was predetermined and could be known before it happened. There is even a suggestion that the *Daybook* or similar texts existed already in the Shang period (Lian 1997). The *Yijing*, similarly, contains mythological or legendary explanations of the meanings of the hexagrams, which, although not built on a calendrical system, nevertheless reveals a similar structure and assumption—namely, human affairs could be categorized into a limited number of phenomena and explanations.

The *Daybook*, however, if it can be seen as a map, is not exactly a map of human fate. Fate is what is unavoidable in one's life. On the contrary, the *Daybook* is a guide to avoiding certain actions on the inauspicious days and to choose the right days to carry out desired activities. It is actually more like an optimistic handbook for a happy and secured life. Thus an idea of fate, in the sense of the predetermined and unalterable life course, did not seem to be present. One passage in a text concerning travel (*xing* 行) has the following revealing words:

凡是有為也，必先計月中閒日，句毋直赤畜臨日，它日雖有不吉之名，毋所大害。

Whenever one plans to do something [traveling], it is necessary to choose the leisure days within that month. As long as they are not the days for the descent of the Red Emperor, even if they may bear inauspicious names, there will be no great harm. (SHD 858–859)

This passage indicates that, for traveling purposes, one could simply ignore predictions given in other texts and pay attention to the special days of the descent of the Red Emperor. The compiler might have realized that there were inconsistencies in the various texts, so that a particular day might be auspicious according to one text but inauspicious according to another. For example, according to a text entitled “*Qinchu*” 秦除, the *wei* 未 -days of the first month are the “*zhi* 摯 -days,” which are not good for traveling 摯日不可行，以亡，必摯而入公而止 (SHD 743, 748). This might be one of the days that can be ignored according to the “Travel,” since, according to this text, the *wei* 未 -days in the first month ought to be safe to travel, because it is the *wu* 午 -days that are inauspicious 凡且有大行遠行，若飲食歌樂，聚畜生，及夫妻同衣，毋以正月上旬午 (SHD 856). Is this just a half-serious game? It certainly seems that, were the user of the *Daybook* determined always to find the most promising days to carry out his life, he would be most likely to succeed in the end. This inconsistency between different text units in the *Daybook*, one hastens to add, indicates its nature: it is most likely a collection of various divination texts, unedited by a conscious compiler.

We could have concluded that the *Daybook* is a practical guide for people to leading a happy and prosperous life. As the cosmological assumption behind it is that every day in the sexagenary system has an assigned nature, which is given in the *Daybook*, one has only to consult it in order to construct a life course that is most beneficial. In other words, everything seems to be within one’s control with a *Daybook* in hand; one could have control over one’s own fate, so to speak. The whole purpose of the *Daybook*, in fact, seems to have been a denial of the concept of fate—if one really believed in fate, why bother making choices? A small number of texts included in the *Daybook*, however, further complicate the matter.

The Idea of Fate in the *Daybook*

Given that the majority of the texts in the *Daybook* are in the genre of practical instruction for daily activities, two short texts entitled “Childbirth” *shengzi* 生子 and “Childbirth according to the character human” *renzi* 人字, respectively, deserve special attention. “Childbirth” is a text in the form of

the sexagenary table, that is, sixty days are listed according to the stem-and-branch order in a table, each with a description of the future of the child born on this day. Since the date of childbirth seems to be the one thing that man (or woman) had no control over, at least before the use of caesarian delivery, the text can be seen as a general picture of the fate of “mankind,” as there is no other option left. I shall first provide a translation of the text before making further comments. I have omitted the first four characters, which are invariably in the form of “x-x-*sbengzi*,”—“if a child is born on such and such day”—and give a translation of the descriptions of the child’s “fate” only (SHD 869–878; Liu Lexian 1994: 179–186).

He will be a person who eats and drinks in a hurry.	飲食急。
He will be happy and rich.	[穀]而富。
Inauspicious.	不吉。
He will be fond of speech, with a mole on his eye.	好言語，或生[書]於目。
He will leave his parents and go south.	去父母南。
He will leave his country.	去其邦。
He will be a womanizer.	好女子。
Auspicious, he will be rich.	吉而富。
He will be happy and warlike.	[穀]而武。
He will be tall and capable of making gains.	長大，善得。
He will be skillful and have a career.	巧，有身事。
He will be happy and love to play.	[穀]，好樂。
He will have a career.	有事。
He will be skillful in battle and be filial.	攻(=工)巧，孝。
He will leave his country and head north.	去其邦北。
He will be poor and sick.	貧而疾。
If it is a girl, she will become a merchant; if it is a boy, he will love dresses and decorations and become a man of high status <i>gui</i> 貴.	女為賈，男好衣佩而貴。
Auspicious, he will be happy.	吉及[穀]。
He will be warlike and fond of clothes and swords.	武而好衣劍。
He will be happy.	[穀]。
He will be warlike and strong but will be orphaned when young.	武有力，少孤。

He will be sick and become an orphan when young, then he will be rich.	有疾，少孤，後富。
He will love family.	好家室。
He will be alcoholic.	耆(=嗜)酒。
He will love the fields and houses.	好田野邑屋。
He will be happy.	[穀]。
He will become an orphan when young, and filthy.	少孤，污。
He will be successful.	有心冬(=終)。
Inauspicious, the girl will become a medicine-woman.	不女為醫，女子為也。
Inauspicious.	不吉。
He will be happy and warlike and beneficial to younger brothers.	[穀]，且武而利弟。
Auspicious.	吉。
He will be fond of wine, be sick, and then be rich.	耆(=嗜)酉(=酒)而疾，後富。
Inauspicious, he will have no mother, and will be imprisoned.	不吉，毋(=無)母，必賞(=嘗)[繫]囚。
He will be adored and serve the lord.	寵，事君。
He will be happy and have a business.	[穀]，有商。
He will be warlike and poor.	武而貧。
Inauspicious.	不吉。
He will be brave.	愬(=勇)。
He will love water, be sick when young, and will be a clerk <i>li</i> 吏.	好水，少疾，必為吏。
He will be a clerk.	必為吏。
He will not be able to raise his waist (stand straight).	要(=腰)不[翥]。
He will have a mole on his body and be brave.	有疵於體而愬(=勇)。
He will be happy and beautiful and be employed.	[穀]而美，有[秩]。
He will be fond of wine and hunting.	耆(=嗜)酉(=酒)及田獵(=獵)。
Auspicious.	吉。
He will be good.	良。
Inauspicious.	不吉。

He will be fond of family.	好家室。
He will be unsuccessful.	毋無冬(=終)。
He will be an orphan when young, and wear dirty clothes.	少孤，衣污。
He will be warlike and skillful in battle.	武以攻(=工)巧。
He will be warlike and become venerable.	武以聖。
He will not be able to stand upright, and will have a mole on his “front.” ¹⁰	不正，乃有疵前。
He will be adored.	有寵。
He will be ghostlike, ¹¹ and will surely become other people’s servant.	鬼，必為人臣妾。
He will be poor and powerful, but will die first.	貧，有力，先冬(=終)。
He will eat meat.	肉食。
He will be famous.	聞。
He will be unsuccessful.	先冬(=終)。

This catalogue of the possibilities of human life course seems remarkably simple: there are only sixty choices, and some of them are even identical or very similar.¹² It is revealing to see what kind of life was waiting for the sons and daughters of the people using the *Daybook*: the best one could hope for a bright future was to become rich, or become a “man with high status,” although both are relative terms. As for service in the government, it seems that no position higher than a common clerk, a *li*, was expected. Other predictions are suggestive of the social conditions at the end of the Warring States period, which has already been discussed elsewhere (Poo 1998: 76–79). These, of course, are not really all that people thought that would or could happen to a child. Yet even if these are selections of all the possibilities, they are significant by virtue of being selected.

In the text *Renzi* (Childbirth according to the character human), a different strategy is employed. The bodily positions of a simple sketch of a human being are identified with the various time units according to the twelve earth stems. The fate of the child born in the respective time period is then given in an explanatory text:

人字：其日在首，富難勝〔也〕。夾頸者貴。在奎者富。在掖(=腋)者愛。在手者巧。在足下者賤。在外者奔亡。

Renzi: When a child is born on the day that is on the head, he will become rich beyond comparison. If one is born on the day that is beside the neck,

he will be a man of status. If the day is on the arm, he will be rich. If the day is under the armpit, he will be loved. If the day is on the hand, he will be skillful in theft. If the day is under the foot, he will be inferior. If the day is outside, he will run away. (SHD 879–883; Liu Lexian 1994: 186–197)

Are these indications of an idea of fate? It seems that the messages in these two texts differ from those contained in most of the other texts in the *Daybook*: what is predicted in these two texts is the general nature and future life of the child, not daily actions. This implies that people believed that a person's nature and fortune were determined on the day of his/her birth. Thus one could say that here is an expression of the idea of fate, of a given destiny that was unalterable. In fact, if we read the *Daybook* in detail, it will soon become clear that an idea of fate was often inseparable from the general predictions contained in the calendrical texts. For example, in the section *Chu* 除, we have the following predictions:

結日，作事不成，以祭闔生，生子毋弟，有弟必死，以寄人，寄人必奪主室。

On *jie* 結 -day, it will be unsuccessful to conduct business. It will be inappropriate to make sacrifice. If a son is born, he will have no brother, if a brother is born, he [the brother] will surely die. If one takes in another person to live in his house, he [the person] will surely occupy the master's house. (SHD 731)

The various predictions contained in this paragraph include occurrences that could be avoided because one could choose not to conduct those businesses on that particular day. Only regarding the birth of a child does it become a prognostication of the fate of the child, assuming that one had no control over the date on which the child was born. Similar prognostications, although not as systematic as what is found in the “Childbirth” and *Renzi* texts, could be found in other paragraphs throughout the *Daybook* (SHD 736, 740, 741, 742, 761, 763, 766, 767, 769, 771, 773, 797–824).

However, it seems that people would not easily give up and submit to their fate, or to the fate of their children. They wished to change their children's fate by magical measures. One of the methods was the burying of the infant's placenta. In a text (in the form of a diagram) entitled *Yuzang* 禹藏 (Yu's [placenta]-burying method) discovered in the early Han dynasty tomb at Mawangdui, about half a century later than the Shuihudi text (Li Jianmin 1994), the mother was instructed first to locate the month of the child's birth on the diagram, then to bury the placenta in the direction indicated there.

The idea was that the placenta was thought to be part of the infant's personhood. When it was buried according to an appropriate direction, it was believed that the life of the child was protected by the related constellation and would be given a long life. This obviously was a practice that gained certain popularity, as later examples can be seen in a ninth-century collection of prescriptions (Tamba 1993: 374–376). We do not know if the user of the *Daybook* knew of this method, yet the general belief in the efficacy of sympathetic magic and the power of the constellations for human fate, as demonstrated by other texts in the *Daybook* (SHD 797–824), makes it very plausible that something similar was practiced.

This discussion shows that, indeed, people using the *Daybook* might have had an idea of fate, which they could find out in such texts as “Child-birth” and “The Birth of a Person,” or elsewhere in the *Daybook*. Yet this did not mean that they thought all the daily actions in people's lives were also determined, or that the fate of a person was indeed fixed from the day he/she was born. What seemed to be more important for them was to sort out how to choose the most auspicious days for their actions, and discover remedies for the child if he/she were born on an inauspicious day. For, even though everyone had an assigned fate, it was so general that no indication with regard to the daily activities were offered. One still had to make all kinds of decisions on a daily basis, and this was when the rest of the *Daybook* became useful. Thus, some of the texts in the *Daybook* prescribe the fate of a person, while others propose ways to avert misfortune and negotiate for a better life.

Conclusion

This study of the meaning of the word “*ming*” as it was used in the texts representing elite ideas indicates that it could have represented an idea of fate in most of the cases. On the other hand, examples in the *Daybook* indicate that, although the idea of fate was present, it was never represented by *ming*.¹³ We should perhaps best not assume that people at this time had a uniform conception of *ming* or fate. According to Mo Zi's view, there were people who believed in *ming* (understood as unalterable fate). They disrupted social stability, because they propagated an attitude of fatalism that left everything in a dysfunctional state (Sun Yirang [1976] 1986: 239; Watson 1967: 117). Mo Zi sounded as if these believers in fate were a special group of people, yet his words could have referred to a wider spectrum of social strata in his time. Whether the believers in fate would necessarily have concluded, as Mo Zi suggested, that nothing should be done because fate had already determined everything, however, cannot be confirmed by the elite texts, and certainly would have been refuted by the users of the more popular *Daybook*.

Furthermore, the appearance of the god of fate, or Si Ming 司命, at the end of the Warring States period indicates the dissemination of the idea that one's life, in regard to the allotted years, was under the control of a divine office, and that it was possible that the command issued from this office could be changed (Erkes 1940; Poo 1998: 66, 142). This was suggested by the resurrection story contained in a text found in the Tianshui Qin tomb (Harper 1994) and corroborated by a sacrificial record from Baoshan Chu bamboo slips (*Baoshan Erbao Chumu*: 260) and a story from Zhuangzi (Guo Qingfan 1975: 617). Of course, when pushing the logic to the extreme, the change that Si Ming could have wrought for a person was still strictly in accordance with the allotted life span. In fact, to bring back a person from death because his allotted life span had not yet expired indicates that no fundamental change of fate could be implemented. The function of Si Ming was merely to see to the just dispensation of each person's allotted fate. But this aspect was probably not what people had in mind when they began to worship Si Ming and to pray for a good fate (Poo 1998: 66, 142–143).¹⁴

In general, we can see that people of all walks of life in ancient China usually, though not always, believed in *ming* as unchangeable life course and attributed what had happened or was going to happen to their lives, especially those events over which they had no control, to be the workings of *ming*. Yet it was also true that people from different social strata had different understandings of the nature of *ming*. Given the nuances of the considerations on the agencies of moral Heaven or amoral nature, the attitude of the Chinese elites toward *ming*, similar to that of the Greek poets and philosophers toward *moira*, seems to be rather receptive in seeing *ming* as unalterable, blind fate. There was little attempt to negotiate with the divine power over one's *ming*, in this case appropriately translatable as "fate," as the use of *ming* in most of the pre-Qin elite texts indicates. The concept of the mandate of Heaven, on the other hand, brought in the connection of morality and *ming*, as the mandate was bestowed on morally just rulers. There was, therefore, an implicit reference to a negotiation between the ruler and Heaven, since whether a ruler will receive the mandate depends upon his moral behavior. The performance of rituals and sacrifices, moreover, also implies a desire to negotiate with the divine spirits. This aspect, however, seems to have been kept at an implicit level. Although the use of ritual and sacrifice as means to incur blessing from the deities was a common conception, the connection between propitiation to the deities and the possibility of changing one's *ming*, strangely, seems never to have been pointed out or recognized explicitly in the elite sources. In other words, the yearning for blessings was not perceived as an attempt to change *ming*, although logically the very fact of propitiation already denied the concept of *ming* as an unalterable fate.

It is only in the *Daybook* that we witnessed an obviously paradoxical situation: on the one hand, people believed that their life course was determined at the moment of their birth, as was stated in the “Childbirth” and other texts; on the other hand, they kept their hopes alive and tried to negotiate a better *ming*, so to speak, by consulting the *Daybook* and by performing such magical acts as the burying of the placenta. It is perhaps appropriate to mention the motto “Do whatever is humanly possible, and leave the rest to what is fated by Heaven” 盡人事，聽天命. When everything has been done to change one’s *ming*, the rest lies in the hands of fate. Such is the nature of popular religious mentality. Morality, the ever-present idea in the discussions of the relationship between fate and human behavior in ancient Greece, which also finds a place in the concept of the mandate of Heaven, seems never to have been an issue in the *Daybook*.

Notes

1. For a succinct survey of the meaning of fate in Classical literature, see also Hammond and Scullard 1970: 430–432. For a comparison of the semantic fields of *moira* and *ming*, see Raphals’ essay in this volume (Chap. 3).

2. See Harrell 1987: 90–109; S. J. Lin 1998: 551–563. Knight and Lupke elaborate on this in their essays in this volume (Chaps. 11, 12).

3. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. For a general discussion of the idea of *ming* in early Confucianism, see Slingerland 1996: 567–581; Chen Ning 1997b: 323–359. Chen Ning’s reading (347–348) of the phrase “*wangzhi*” 亡之 as “*wuzhi*,” meaning “there is no [cause for the disease]” is not convincing, as there is no compelling reason to read *wangzhi* to indicate that Confucius knew Bo Niu was going to die, as Chen assumes.

4. For a more detailed argument of this multiple approach to the concept of *ming*, see Chen Ning 1997a: 495–520; Chen Ning 1997b.

5. For a recent discussion, see Kominami 1992; Chen Xiaoyi 1994. For the meaning of *ming* as command and its ritual association, see also Schaberg’s essay in this volume (Chap. 1).

6. Cf. Kominami 1992. See also Chapter 1.

7. Yunmeng Shuihudi Qinmu Bianxie zu 1981. The slip numbers quoted are from this work, henceforth abbreviated as SHD. A new publication is *Shuibudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu* 1990. For a discussion of the use of the *Daybook*, see Poo 1992; Poo 1993: 69–92; Rao and Zeng 1982; Liu Lexian 1994; Loewe 1988a; Li Ling 1993: 39–43.

8. With respect to the “Red Emperor,” if it refers to Yandi 炎帝, we can find no reference to this episode in the mythological stories related to him (see Yuan Ke 1986: 194). Alternatively, one can also view it as one of the Five Emperors that corresponds to the Five Phases; see Rao and Zeng 1982: 23–25.

9. Again, there is no reference to the killing of Wu Xian in the traditional mythological literature; see Yuan Ke 1986: 192–193.

10. According to Liu Lexian (1994: 183), the word “*qian*” 前 refers to the front part of a person’s genitals.

11. Liu Lexian (1994: 183) reads the character *gui* 鬼 as *wei* 猥, meaning “shabby,” or “lowly.” I choose a more literal translation.

12. A Chinese character in brackets represents the equivalent writing of an obscure character no longer in common use. A character in parentheses preceded by an equal sign represents the equivalent meaning of the immediately preceding character.

13. The word “*ming*” indeed occurred in the *Daybook*, but it was used in the sense of “prognostication.” For example, “the Da Wu gate: the prognostication (*ming*) says: ‘auspicious’” 大午門命曰吉 (SHD 847).

14. It should be noted that the office of Si Ming was never a high one in the divine government. Thus it had no power to change one’s assigned years.



PART II

Escape Attempts from Finitude

Ming in the Later Han and Six Dynasties Period

5 Living off the Books

Fifty Ways to Dodge *Ming* in Early Medieval China

ROBERT FORD CAMPANY

For Robert M. Berchman

Consider the following fourth-century story and (probably) third-century procedural instruction.

The story: An orphan named Xu Tai 徐泰 is raised by his uncle Xu Wei. The uncle falls ill; Xu Tai cares for him. One night Xu Tai dreams that two men arrive by boat and carry a box to the head of his bed. In the box is a ledger book 簿書, which they remove; showing him an entry in it, they say, “Your uncle is due to die.” Xu Tai in his dream knocks his head on the ground and entreats them. The officers ask, “Is there anyone else with the same name and surname [as your uncle] in this district?” Xu Tai mulls it over, then answers, “There’s a Zhang Wei, but there is no one named Wei with the surname Xu.” “Very well, we can work with that” say the officers, “for we are mindful of your service to your uncle and it is appropriate to keep him alive for your sake.” The officers vanish; Xu Tai wakes up to find his uncle’s illness cured. This story did not need to spell out for its fourth-century readers a key implication: that the unfortunately named Zhang Wei must have died very soon after Xu Tai’s dream.¹

The procedure: The Yellow Thearch² said: “The Sovereign of Humanity 人皇 is familiar with all the registers of the living and the dead 生死之錄. He knows the names of the hundred ghosts and he records the surnames and bynames of the myriad spirits. If you seek a method of extending your years and increasing your longevity, you should prepare a brief 疏 to the Sovereign of Humanity, fully listing your own³ surname and given name, the year, month, and day of your birth anniversary, and the province, commandery, district, hamlet, village, sector, and earth-god shrine under whose jurisdiction you [are registered as] residing. Then, at the funeral of

your grandfather, place this brief in the tomb and incant 祝 as follows: ‘Whatever is born must die; *ming* accords with the registers. My name was not recorded in the Great Dark Storehouse 大幽藏, yet now I am already set to rest in Haoli. As I roam in the infernal realms, I wail over this in eternal vexation.’ Having completed [this incantation], return home. In addition, you must change your surname and byname; these must not be the same as before. Thereupon you will not die in a thousand autumns or a myriad years; for in the ledgers you have already been entered as dead, and your name will forever henceforth be erased⁴ 錄籍已定死名長滅.”⁵

This story, related in Gan Bao’s 干寶 (fl. 320) fourth-century *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Record of an inquest into the spirit realm), is one of several examples of anomaly accounts, *zhiguai* 志怪, from this period exhibiting Stith Thompson’s folklore motif number D1855.2, “Death postponed if substitute can be found,” which is often linked to an addition to Thompson’s rubrics that I would propose, namely *E187, “Resuscitation due to mistaken death-summons.”⁶ The procedure, outlined in a passage first noted by Angelika Cedzich several years ago, is prescribed in the *Grand Purity Scripture of the Divine Pneumas of Potable Gold*, one of the Taiqing 太清 scriptures dear to the apologist for arts of transcendence Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343),⁷ a contemporary of Gan Bao. It constitutes one among many methods of *shijie* 尸解 or (as we should now translate this term when such methods are involved) “escape by means of a simulated corpse,” a well-known hagiographic trope in which the adept seems to die, is encoffined and buried, but is later spotted alive, whereupon the tomb is opened and the coffin found to contain only an article of clothing, a talisman, or a sword.

The story and the procedure alike imply a bustling, normally unseen spirit-world system in which one’s regularly updated ledgers of merits and sins lengthen or shorten one’s preallotted life span (*ming*)—a system whose main working elements are already attested in a passage in the Shang section of the *Book of Documents* datable at least to the early Warring States period⁸ as well as in recently discovered archeological materials. But each passage holds out the possibility of dodging one’s death date by a seemingly rather underhanded manipulation of the system of record keeping. In the story, it is administrative spirits who do the manipulating, to reward merit; in the procedure, it is the adept himself who manipulates his own records. Crucially, in both cases another body must be provided to substitute for the body of the one due to die; this is because—as shown more clearly in other marvel tales—the soul-summoning spirits must return to their superiors with someone to fill their quotas.⁹ (This provision of a substitute body parallels the mortuary practice during and before this period of placing figurines in tombs

to do the same work.)¹⁰ Equally crucially, in both cases that substitute body must be made to bear the name (or at least an approximation of the name) of the one for whom it substitutes and should also reside nearby; this is because the otherworld ledger system, like the imperial system of census registration, keeps track of people by their names and their registered places of residence.¹¹

The ineluctability of the institutions of *ming*—*ming* not as an abstract idea but as an all too concrete, working administration staffed by all-seeing spirits to do the forbiddingly systematic reporting and recording—presented both a dilemma and an opportunity for the traditions (often lumped together as “Daoism” that promised varying degrees of longevity (whether pre- or postmortem) and biospiritual perfection to their adherents. *Ming* might be seen as one of the central problems—if not, in some cases, the central problem—that many early esoteric as well as later Daoist methods were created to solve.¹² As the oft-repeated credo of the esoteric longevity traditions known to Ge Hong had it, “My allotted life span resides with me; it does not reside with Heaven” 我命在我不在於天。

But methods for solving the problem of *ming* were many; their variety confuses. I want to suggest that, with respect to the stances they take on this system of otherworld record keeping, we can helpfully sort these methods (in early medieval times) into three main types.¹³ Along the way, I will also note links between these methods and certain images and ideas that were circulating more broadly in early medieval Chinese society, so that we can see more clearly what was and was not distinctive about the esoteric and the Daoist methods.

How Allotted Life Span Was Determined

But before examining in more detail how some practitioners proposed to solve the problem of *ming*, let us first survey what little is known about how, in early medieval times, it was thought to be determined. Why, and how, were individuals born with one *ming* and not another?

In his mid-first-century *Lunheng* 論衡 (Arguments weighed), Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) sketched what was probably a notion widely held in his day that individuals’ *ming* (in this case encompassing both the sense of allotted life span and the sense of predestined fortune or social position) was determined by the configuration of celestial pneumas 天氣 and astral essences 星精 at the moment of conception, when the fetus receives them.¹⁴ Wang Chong adopted a strong position on the fixity of *ming*, allowing precious little scope for human agency.

It is essentially this same notion that Ge Hong elaborates on at greater

length in several passages in his *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Master who embraces simplicity: Inner chapters). In basic terms:

The length of *ming* in fact depends on what is met 所值 [i.e., is a matter of circumstance, to wit]: in the receiving of pneumas and the knotting together (?) of the fetus 受氣結胎, asterisms and lodgings come into play 各有星宿. . . . If one's *ming* falls under a life asterism 生星, one will surely be fond of the ways of transcendence; and if one is fond of the ways of transcendence, one will surely attain it if one seeks it. If one's *ming* falls under a death asterism, one will not have faith in the ways of transcendence, and, that being so, one will not be naturally inclined to cultivate their practices. What a person is fond of is determined by what he receives; it is not within Heaven's power to alter, grant, or remove. It may be likened to the smelting of metals and ores in the furnace or the firing of earthenware in the kiln: although one may have formed the shapes correctly 雖由之以成形, the sharpness or dullness of the resultant bronze or iron, the crookedness or straightness of the resultant jar or jug, is a matter of what is encountered 所遭 and is not the fault of the furnace or kiln. (Wang Ming [1980] 1985: 7/136; Ware [1966] 1981: 124)

Elsewhere Ge Hong quotes a section titled “Zhumingyuan” 主命原 (Controlling the sources of *ming*) of a weft text known as the *Yuqian jing* 玉鈐經 (Scripture of the jade seal) to the following effect; although here the *ming* outcomes in question involve both social status and life span, the mechanism is the same as that outlined above:

“A person's good or bad fortune is determined by [and/or on?] the day on which the fetus is knotted together and its pneumas received 制在結胎受氣之日, for in each case the fetus obtains from on high the essences of the arrayed lodgings 皆上得列宿之精. If it meets with 值 the sagehood lodging 聖宿, then [the person] will become a sage; if with the worthy lodging, a worthy; . . . if it meets with the longevity lodging, then the person will be long-lived; if it meets with the transcendent lodging, then the person will be a transcendent. . . .” [A further list follows; in this entire passage a total of twenty-two possibilities are named.] And thus it runs; I cannot record all the passage here, but its essentials are as indicated. It adds up to the fact that people's lives have fixed *ming* 定命. The story of Zhang Juzi 張車子 is a case in point. (Wang Ming [1980] 1985: 12/226; cf. Ware [1966] 1981: 203–204)

Fortunately for us, the delicious story of Zhang Juzi survives in the standard twenty-fascicle *Inquest into the Spirit-Realm*, Ge Hong's mention of

it here being an excellent example of the extent to which stories that found their way into collections of marvel accounts circulated as common cultural coin and were not (in most cases) the fictional fabrications of individual authors. The story goes that Zhou Lanze 周攬嘖 and his wife were poor but hard-working and loved the Dao. One night they dreamed that a passing celestial officer 天公 pitied them and ordered them provided for. The Director of Allotted Life Spans consulted his ledger books 司命按錄籍 and said: “Their physiognomies indicate poverty 此人相貧; their limits do not permit their surpassing this condition 限不過此. But there is a Zhang Juzi who is due to be awarded ten million cash; he is not yet born. I beg leave to borrow against this sum.” The celestial officer agreed. The couple spoke of their dream and subsequently worked very hard, until, after a time, they had amassed ten million cash. Meanwhile, a certain young woman surnamed Zhang 張, a servant of the family, gave birth to a child by an illicit union in the Zhou family carriage shed 車屋. When Zhou Lanze, taking food to her out of pity for her condition, asked what she would name the child, she replied, “Because he was born beneath the carriage shed, I dreamed that Heaven declared that he be named Juzi 車子 (Carriage-child).” Zhou had a realization and told her of his earlier dream, concluding, “The Zhang Juzi [in my dream] must be this child. The money should now revert to him” 財當歸之. From this day forward, the Zhous’ fortunes declined, and when Zhang Juzi had grown up his wealth exceeded that of the Zhous.¹⁵

The moral of the story seems to be that *ming*—here again imaged in ledgers consulted by a director—sets a fixed horizon around what a person may be or achieve or how long she may live. Destined to be poor, the Zhous may only be loaned money for a time; destined to be rich, the money’s rightful owner will eventually and inexorably receive it back. Within the limits of *ming*, the story suggests, adjustments and accommodations are possible, but the limits nevertheless remain operative.

On this notion I might also add as an aside that the vast majority of early medieval tales of true predictions and divinations by specialists, of which there are many, similarly seem to underscore the inexorability of *ming* as well, of course, as the specialist’s astonishing perspicacity in discerning it. These stories typically begin by narrating the prediction and its circumstances, then conclude by narrating the events that subsequently bore the prediction out. A variation has protagonists finding self-referential writings predicting their own eventual discovery, decades or centuries hence, by the person who has just found them.¹⁶ In almost all such stories it is emphatically and precisely not the case that people use accurate predictions of events in order to elude or alter their *ming*; rather, much as in the story of Zhang Juzi, the prediction identifies the limits within which their agency must remain circumscribed.¹⁷

It is against this background that we must view the various esoteric and Daoist attempts to dodge or modify *ming*. I now turn to one characteristic method for doing so.

Living off the Books: Administrative Deception and Body Substitution

In the second fascicle of the *Lingbao wufu xu* 靈寶五符序 (Scripture of the five talismans of the numinous treasure) (see Bokenkamp 1997: 394n1; Bokenkamp 1986; Kaltenmark 1982; Yamada 1989; Robinet 1984.1: 27ff.), much of which text predates Ge Hong, we find a procedure by which adepts may obtain “earthbound transcendence,” which is here acknowledged to be a relatively low-ranking attainment but which nevertheless enables one to “come to an end only when Heaven and Earth do.” One is first to ingest an elixir, the recipe for which is given, and then to write out a talisman (also given) called the Numinous Treasure Talisman of the Grand Mystery for Living in Hiding 靈寶太玄陰生之符. (The talisman design includes graphs recognizable as *bingsi* 病死 “died of illness.”) On a particular day in the calendrical cycle, the adept is to recline with his head to the west and “think of himself as a dead person” 思念自作死人. He is then to remove his clothes, leave them where he had been lying, and proceed directly into the mountains. Once he has reached a safely distant place, he is to change his surname and byname, and he is not to return home. Meanwhile, people back home will perceive that there is a dead person where he had lain; only later will this “corpse” suddenly disappear.¹⁸

Here, one creates a substitute body consisting of one’s clothing that has been activated by means of a talisman announcing that one has “died of illness” as well as by the meditatively generated illusion that one has died. This magically empowered decoy corpse deceives both living relatives (who begin the usual mortuary preparations) and the summoning and recording spirits; and the deception lasts just long enough to permit escape (yet also conveniently vanishes in time, it seems, to alert relatives to the fact that one has in fact safely dodged death). The subsequent fleeing to a distant place in the mountains (an unhabited area perhaps not policed, or not as carefully policed, by the spirit-world enforcers of life span), changing one’s name, and never returning home are clearly strategies for avoiding any further detection by the spirits; this is never explicitly stated because, to contemporary readers, it would not have needed to be.¹⁹

In the same scripture we find two other talismans meant, we are told, for “practitioners of *dao* who wish to liberate themselves by means of a corpse.” These two *shijie* talismans (one is for males, one for females) are to be written with a “spirit brush” 神筆²⁰ on any object made of plant material

or metal, or on any blade, and that object or blade “will forthwith act as a substitute human body and will [subsequently] die and depart” 即代為人形而死去矣。²¹

Such unusually frank passages help us to see what lay behind many (but not all—see below) of the “escape by means of a simulated corpse” narratives so ubiquitous in the early hagiographies, of which the following from Ge Hong’s *Shenxian zhuàn* 神仙傳 (Traditions of divine transcendents) may serve here as a brief exemplar:

Ling Shouguang 靈壽光 ... at the age of over seventy obtained a method for [making] “efflorescence of vermilion” pellets. These he synthesized and ingested, with the result that his appearance was that of a person in his twenties. <By the first year of the [Later] Han Jian’an period [196 CE]> he was already two hundred and twenty years old. Later, without having shown any signs of illness, he “died” at the home of Hu Gang in Jiangling. Over a hundred days after his funeral and burial, someone saw Ling in Xiaohuang. This person sent a letter to Hu Gang, who, upon receiving the letter, dug up the coffin and looked inside. It was empty except for an old shoe. <The coffin nails had not been removed.>²²

The intactness of the coffin nails serves to differentiate Ling’s type of escape from that of persons who really died temporarily, were buried, but were then permitted to return to life and thus had to be extricated or somehow extricate themselves from the tomb (see Harper 1994). (What was buried in Ling’s tomb was never his body to begin with, only a simulacrum.) The story suggests something that is elsewhere stated explicitly by Ge Hong and others: that the strictly medicinal plan for longevity cannot stave off the spirits of the registers system indefinitely, since herbs and minerals can only allow one to live out one’s full *ming*;²³ the adept must eventually address that system, whether directly (as seen below) or, as here apparently, by resort to the subterfuge of a substitute body. His name must somehow be erased from the registers—a result that Ge Hong and early esoteric scriptures claim for some elixirs.

The type of *shijie* narrative we see in Ling Shouguang’s case—by far the most common in the Han-period *Liexian zhuàn* 列仙傳, the *Shenxian zhuàn*, and other early narratives of long-lived adepts—exhibits features that can be explained by these adepts’ need to elude detection by the spirits of the *ming*-register system. These features, the rationales for which are never explained in the hagiographies themselves, include the following:

(1) Some adepts, when about to perform *shijie*, pretend to be ill and make a pronouncement to that effect. This can now be seen as motivated by

the need to make the “death” more believable—something necessary only if the staging of the death is meant to deceive.

(2) After his feigned death, when the adept is sighted alive, it is always at a distant place.

(3) When, after such sighting, the coffin is opened and found to lack a corpse, some other object is almost always found there—a talisman, a sword, a piece of clothing, or an entire outfit in the shape of a body. These objects are the substrata of the ritually and meditatively produced, illusory corpse that replaced the adept’s own body long enough for him to escape. They are, in fact, so many *shi* 尸—not in the sense of actual corpses, but in the sense of ritual impersonator of the dead in the old family mourning rites still practiced in (and after) this period.²⁴

(4) If, in the narrative, the adept ever returns home (and he often does not), he does so only after considerable time has passed—usually more than a generation.

(5) In some cases, the adept is said to have changed his names after performing *shijie*.

The deceptive character of this mode of *shijie* is also reflected in the low status allotted to it anytime writers set about to rank various methods of religious advancement. Even for Ge Hong, many of whose “divine transcendents” (even his own great-uncle) resort to it, “escape by means of a simulated corpse” is ranked lowest among three options, the other two being “celestial transcendence,” in which one ascends directly into the heavens, and “earthbound transcendence,” in which one remains on earth, wandering in mountains.²⁵

It was clearly a similar desire to elude the panoptical system of divine observation, reportage, and recording that generated methods for “expelling the three corpses.” The *Scripture of the Five Talismans of Numinous Treasure* contains several such prescriptions, one of which was probably the source for Ge Hong’s two detailed discussions of this strategy.²⁶ In one of these (*Traditions of Divine Transcendents*), the adept Liu Gen 劉根, receiving instruction from his teacher Han Zhong 韓終,²⁷ is told:

“If you desire long life, the first thing you must do is to expel the three corpses. Once the three corpses are expelled, you must fix your aim and your thought, eliminating sensual desires.” I then received from him five texts on divine[ly bestowed] esoteric methods [for this purpose].²⁸ He said, “The ambushing corpses 伏尸 always ascend to Heaven to report on people’s sins on the first, fifteenth, and last days of each month. The Director of Allotted Life Spans calculates people’s accounts 奪人算 and shortens people’s life spans. The gods within people’s bodies want to make

people live, but the corpses want to make them die. When people die, their gods disperse; the corpses, once in this bodiless state, become ghosts, and when people sacrifice to [the dead] these ghosts obtain the offering foods. This is why [the corpses] want people to die. When you dream of fighting with an evil person, this is [caused by] the corpses and the gods at war [inside you].”²⁹

The implication is that by ridding oneself of these uninvited internal auditors, one eludes the system of reporting sin of which they are a part. In his other major discussion of “expelling the three corpses,” Ge Hong links them with the stove god 竈神, who, he says, ascends to Heaven on the last night of each month to report on the household’s sins, resulting in life-span deductions graduated according to severity.³⁰ That the early accounts (in the *Shi ji* and elsewhere) of alchemical practices by the adept Li Shaojun connect offerings to the stove god with increased life span probably has as much to do with the god’s function of sin reporting as it does with his patronage of alchemical transformation.³¹

So far, the methods discussed involve escaping detection by the register-keeping spirits, often by subterfuge. Early on, however, some Daoists devised ways of dealing with *ming* that, though still bearing traces of their origins in esoteric stratagems of body substitution and record manipulation, sought to legitimize such attempts. I will here discuss two examples.

(1) The early Celestial Masters legitimized the manipulation of *ming* registers by couching it in the liturgical idiom of the petition 章, in which protocol-scripted requests are addressed to the deities responsible for the registers. In terms of the procedure’s rhetorical self-presentation at least, the requests are made not on the basis of offerings or trickery (though material and bureaucratic rewards are distributed upon completion of the rite), but on the basis of merit, confession, and repentance. Yet the very request to alter the ledgers, and certain other features of these liturgies, suggest their affinity with the subterfuges discussed above. The following case presents an especially clear example, as it involves changing names and using substitute bodies.

A procedure in the Celestial Master ritual manual *Master Redpine’s Almanac of Petitions* 赤松子章歷, which has been studied by Angelika Cedzich and Peter Nickerson,³² runs as follows. The client, X, is gravely ill.³³ (The illness would seem to be due to the fact that X has been summoned to the other world because his or her *ming* is about to expire, although this is nowhere explicitly stated.) The petition opens by confessing and asking pardon for all the manifold sins X has committed and all the prohibitions X has

violated since being formed as an embryo. It proceeds to invoke a large number of cosmic deities, many of them the same ones responsible in extra-Daoist lore for the registration of souls in the otherworld, such as Siming, the Lord of Mount Tai, and the Lord of the Northern Bourne. These deities are asked to remove X's name from the ledgers of those due to die and inscribe it instead on the ledgers of the living. Furthermore, the petition asks that the gods rejoin X's whitesouls and cloudsouls with his or her bodily form, that X's body be purged of all lingering effects of sin, and that the gods impregnate X's body with the pneumas of life 含生之氣 (9a5). The goods offered to the deities who assist in these procedures include "a golden statuette of a human form, and purple silk of a length corresponding to X's allotment of years" 金人一形紫紋若干尺隨年命. Throughout the petition, various groups of deities are requested to "congregate and descend to the golden statuette and purple silk which are offered as X's replacement-body" 一合來下某代形金人紫紋. In short, a multitude of spirits is repeatedly requested to (as the petition summarizes it) "trade names and exchange bodily forms" 貿名易形—that is, to alter the records of life and death in favor of the client and to accept the statuette and silk as a substitute body for the client's own. The result claimed for these procedures is "safe passage of the client through all coming periods of adversity and the extension of the client's allotted years" 災厄過度年命延長 (9b1).³⁴

(2) The *Sword Scripture*, now preserved only in quotations, claims itself superior to Grand Purity methods because no deception is involved; adepts who use it, the scripture says, need not change their names or stay on the move for fear of detection and detention by the spirits of the Three Bureaus. This is possible because a higher divine authority, the Grand Monad Taiyi 太一, is appealed to.³⁵ Yet the whole point of this method is, by means of a protracted series of meditations and procedures lasting many years, to empower a sword to substitute for one's own body. One inscribes it with talismans, enlivens it with one's mental concentration, and dresses it in one's clothes. Then, having ingested an elixir that is also daubed on the sword, one reclines and feigns illness. When Taiyi comes to carry one heavenward, the sword—now clearly rigged as a semblance of oneself—is left behind for the agents of the Three Bureaus to claim (since they must have something with which to satisfy the requirements of their registers system).³⁶

Long Life on the Books: Advancement by Merit Alone

I believe it was in direct response to attempts such as those reviewed so far—attempts to live long by getting oneself off the *ming* books in one way or another—that other prescribers of longevity practices insisted on the impos-

sibility of body substitution and administrative deception. To be sure, these writers, too, offered ways to improve *ming* and advance upward on a spiritual path toward everlasting life in the celestial regions. But they argued forcefully that this had to be done “on the books.” For them, the administrative system of the spirits was far too tightly run to permit of any mistakes, oversights, negotiations, or chicanery. We see hints of such stances in Ge Hong’s writings,³⁷ and of course one thinks of the Celestial Master emphasis on divine “law and order” in this connection.³⁸ But I want to point out a section of the extant *Taiping jing* 太平經 that addresses these issues head-on.

Whatever their date and provenance, fascicles 110 through 114 of the *Scripture of Great Peace*, which clearly form a rhetorical and ideological unit (Takahashi 1988), wage a sustained argument that the only way to long life, transcendence, and appointment to divine office lies through—never around—the system of registers of life, of merits and of sins. Longevity here depends solely on merit as recorded in the registers. The reporting spirits see all; their records are infallible; eluding their detection or otherwise concealing oneself or falsifying the records is impossible, and the attempt to do so only shows that one has broken faith *xin* 信 with Heaven’s commandments and is therefore to be lumped together with common evildoers. Life span is increased in response to good deeds, decreased in response to bad, and when one’s allotted life span (as thus continuously adjusted) runs out, one’s bodily form sinks into the earth, condemned to remain there among the unrighteous dead. Those who find themselves in this plight, the text says repeatedly, have no one to blame but themselves; they have no just cause to resent 怨³⁹ the Celestial Lord 天君 or his recording agents. These passages are clearly countering the right of the dead, copiously documented in Han grave-quelling texts, to file complaints in underworld courts and argue the injustice of their untimely deaths. In a larger sense, they are also trying to quell the widespread fear of the envious, resentful dead that underlay and was expressed in the notion and practice of such complaints. No, says the scripture: sins can be wiped from the ledgers only by confession and sincere repentance. Similarly, these fascicles condemn the quest for transcendence (when this involves leaving home and living in the wilds) and the making of excessive offerings as, alike, attempts to “force” or “coerce” 彊 one’s way into celestial long life.⁴⁰ The text also shows awareness of *shijie* and gives an account of how the adept uses his own essence to create an illusory corpse; but the passage in question implies that the longevity of *shijie* adepts is due to their merit, not to their trickery, and it is their fellow mortals—not the spirits—who are fooled by the deception. (*Shijie* achievers are also here coopted into the panoptical system of celestial bureaus by being made overseers of “people’s ghosts” 人鬼) (Wang Ming 1960: 111/553). The righteous, on the

other hand, upon recommendation by observant spirits, will be elevated to the heavens, where they will be installed in offices after their bodies have been purified and refined so as to comport with the purity of the “primal pneumas” 元氣 in those exalted regions.

In short, this section of the *Taiping jing* responds to attempts to dodge the *ming*-register and sin-ledger system, about which its authors were obviously well informed, by clearly expounding how the system works—and of how one may participate in it to one’s benefit—so that one may obtain longevity and blessing within it. Any attempt to circumvent the system is thus rendered pointless and exposed as dangerous.

Refinement, Embryology, and Rebirth: Creating a New Body with a New *Ming*

A third major type of solution to the problem of *ming* was to so refine oneself as to create an improved, embryonic version of oneself—a new being with, by implication at least, a new *ming*.⁴¹ This approach is characteristic of the Upper Purity (Shangqing) revelations (and is detailed in Stephen R. Bokenkamp’s contribution to this volume, Chap. 6), although I suggest that—not surprisingly—we find the seeds of it in earlier writings. Here, the role played by substitute bodies and simulated corpses in other methods is played by one’s own former body. That old body is now fully subject to the gross indignities of decomposition, described in harrowing detail; but that subjection is possible because the adept has created a purified replacement body in which to reside. This purifying refinement, which in older texts (such as the *Xiang'er zhu* 想爾注 and the *Taiping jing*) had been imagined as occurring in the other world, is here carried out by the adept in this world as a prelude to his transposition into divinity.⁴²

Among the pre-Shangqing precursors of this approach are, I believe, certain unusual cases of *shijie* in which it is a question not of body substitution and administrative deception but of a true bodily refinement into a new, purer state. Consider the case of Cai Jing 蔡經, an initially unlikely-seeming disciple of Wang Yuan, which must here serve as sole exemplar of a larger phenomenon:⁴³

Cai Jing was only a peasant, but his bones and physiognomy 骨相 indicated that he was fit for transcendence. [Wang] Yuan realized this, and that is why he went to his home. <Said Wang Yuan to Cai Jing: “By birth, you are destined 生命 . . . to transcend the world; you will be chosen as a replacement for an office. But your knowledge of the Way is scant; your

pneumas are few and you have much flesh. You cannot ascend [directly] in this condition, but must perform *shijie*. It's like passing through a dog's hole, that's all.">⁴⁴ Then Wang Yuan declared to Cai Jing the essential teachings, <and left him. Soon Cai felt his entire body grow hot as if on fire. He craved cold water to bathe himself in; his entire family brought water and poured it over him, and it was like making steam by pouring water over hot rocks. This went on for three days.⁴⁵ Then, once his bones had completely dissolved, he stood up, entered his room, and covered himself with a blanket. Suddenly he had vanished. When his family looked inside the blanket, only his outer skin was left, intact from head to foot, like a cidada shell.>⁴⁶

Cai Jing here performs on earth and (apparently) prior to death (or in lieu of death?) the sort of bodily refinement and purification that are represented in other, earlier scriptures as occurring (whether postmortem or not) in Grand Darkness Taiyin 太陰 or some other sector of the unseen world. The special attention to his bones and physiognomy is significant because it is here, as we know from texts at least as early as the Mawangdui medical manuscripts and Wang Chong's *Lunheng* (as discussed above), that the embryological keys to a new, purified self with an improved *ming* lie. In this case we must understand (and hence translate) *shijie*, not as "escape by means of a simulated corpse," but as something like "release from one's corpse"—but release, here as always, not into any merely spiritual, bodiless form but into a purer, refined body.

Conclusion

Much more research on the topics I have dealt with here is needed. But some preliminary conclusions are possible.

The whole point of *ming* was its ineluctability. The whole point of many esoteric and Daoist tenets and practices was to alter or circumvent *ming* nevertheless. By contrast to contemporary tales of resurrection due to mistaken summons and the like, which held out the passive possibility of temporary circumvention due to haphazard administrative lapses, texts of the sort surveyed here prescribed and portrayed methods for circumventing *ming* that were powerful because they placed the process in the adept's own control. Furthermore, by contrast to the notion of sepulchral plaints widely current from late Warring States times onward, esoteric and Daoist traditions offered methods for use before death and not from within the grave. Seen against the backdrop of broader cultural notions of *ming* and its inevitability

under all but the most unusual circumstances, the most striking and most characteristic features of all the esoteric and Daoist methods surveyed are two: that they confidently hold out the promise of dodging, altering, or manipulating *ming* (one's own or, as in the case of Celestial Master petitions and the story of Cai Jing, that of one's client or disciple), and that they place the tools for doing so squarely in the adept's own hands, however different their stances toward the system of registration and the spirit-officials who enforce it.

By the fourth century of the common era, Chinese culture had woven its images of the workings of *ming* from two main groups of metaphors. Borrowing a common Chinese metaphor to describe these metaphors, we might think of them as the warp strands that structured the fabric of discourse and practice concerning *ming*: on the one hand, those of administrative reporting, recording, and accounting—in a word, bureaucratic; and on the other hand, those of embryology, physiology, and, most fundamentally, the processes and configurations of *qi* 氣 (with connections to physiognomy and astronomy)—in a word, pneumatic.⁴⁷ The esoteric and Daoist methods for altering *ming* took the shapes they did because they were crafted upon these dominant metaphors. Texts deploying each of the three types of methods created their distinctive weft-thread patterns across the bureaucratic and pneumatic warp-thread *ming* metaphors of the larger culture. Focusing on these weft-thread patterns—on the variety of different ways in which different groups and their texts proposed to solve the problem of *ming*—affords us one way of charting the often puzzling profusion of longevity and soteriological techniques in fourth-century China as well as one way of discerning and describing profound differences in their respective religious styles.

To put this latter point another way, let me clearly summarize the function of *ming*-altering strategies as claims to social power and cultural prestige, as follows. One by-product of this analysis is to make clear that approaches to the task of altering *ming* were one important area in which rival esoteric and Daoist groups sought to differentiate themselves not only from the broader culture—for we should never forget that only a qualified, initiated, elite few were vouchsafed these methods, and that possessing them bestowed power and status and elevated one above others in society—but also *from each other*.⁴⁸

Most generally, I hope this essay has put beyond doubt a point that, although made in passing near the outset, I fear bears repetition and emphasis in closing, despite its obviousness in the wake of the materials surveyed here. It is tempting to treat *ming* as an abstraction. Doing so allows its easy subsumption under abstractions more familiar in the history of Western

philosophical, theological, and literary-critical discourses—abstractions such as fate, destiny, and freedom (including freedom of the will). Perhaps a case might be made that *ming* as deployed in certain Chinese texts of particular periods is best understood as functioning in this way to name an abstract concept. But I believe that in each instance the case should be made, not assumed; and I hazard that a surprising number of Chinese texts we might too easily take to be discussing something as abstract as “fate”—the sheer *idea* that events are inexorably foreordained (or however one cares to define it)—might in fact be discussing something more concrete. (Note also that *ming* as it is used in the textual traditions studied here by no means necessarily entails the notion that all events are foreordained or predetermined.) And, even if reading *ming* abstractly turns out to be justifiable in this or that case, we would do well always to recall the roots of the term in the all too concrete discourses of bureaucracy, physiology, and embryology. Certainly for all of the texts I have treated here—not only esoteric and Daoist texts prescribing ways of altering *ming* for the elite few, but also discussions of the methodical workings of *ming* determination and narratives of *ming*-related events that surely represent notions much more widely shared across large segments of Chinese society—*ming* was not an abstract concept at all but an aspect of culturally constituted lived reality. It was a horizon of limitation on our social station and our life, on how long we could hope to live and how high we could hope to rise. It was an aspect of our physiology formed at or shortly after conception, lodged in our very bones and hence legible in their configuration,⁴⁹ and it was also a limit enforced by a spirit-world administration that had all the fearsome traits of the imperial census system. It was an emblem of limitation and mortality, expressed as an aspect of our bodies and our selves that linked us to the stars and to the realm of spirits and—when it worked normally—ensured that we would join that realm soon enough. We might say that it was because it was thus constituted by metaphors bureaucratic and pneumatic, and lacked the apparent apodictic finality and hard, seamless edges of an abstract concept, that *ming* lent itself to the imagination and elaboration of techniques for altering it. For, as George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and others have demonstrated at great length, metaphors carry entailments and are guides to action.⁵⁰ If *ming* is first formed in the embryo, perhaps it might be altered by the creation by refinement of a new embryological version of ourselves; if it is lodged in the bones, perhaps it might be purged by their dissolution; if it is enforced by a spirit-bureaucracy, perhaps elaborate bureaucratic steps might be taken to change or expunge it. Strange-seeming measures all—but only because the metaphors are unfamiliar to us. Desperate measures all—but then the struggle was one of life and death.

Notes

1. This story appears as the last item in the tenth fascicle of the received, twenty-fascicle arrangement of *Sousben ji* by Gan Bao. It is anthologized, with small textual variations, in *Taiping yulan* 1992: 399/8b and in *Taiping yuangji* 1930: 161 and 276. A loose English translation may be found in DeWoskin and Crump 1996: 122. On the *Sousben ji*, see Company 1996: 55ff. and works cited there.
2. Sarah Allan (1997: 64–67 and 162) notes his dominion over the realm of the dead.
3. Reading 己 for 已.
4. Erased, presumably, from the ledger of those yet living who are therefore due to die.
5. *Taiqing jinyi*: 2/1a–b. This passage was known to Ge Hong, although in paraphrasing it he omits the crucial details about how it works (Wang Ming 1985: 19/337). My translation of the passage differs from Cedzich's (1996: 24) and has been improved by comments from Stephen Bokenkamp. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
6. The proposed rubric appears in my forthcoming motif-index to pre-Tang *zhiguai* texts.
7. Compare Ge Hong's statement in Wang Ming 1985: 19/337; Ware [1966] 1981: 315. He attributes this method to the *Sanhuang neiwen* 三皇內文 (Esoteric writ of the three sovereigns), and proceeds to note that this text further allows one who possesses it to summon celestial spirits, the Director of Allotted Life Spans (Siming), the God of the Year Star, the Gods of the Five Marchmounts, and lesser deities; they will all reveal their bodily forms and will convey information on the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness, safety or peril, of times to come. Compare the similar statement in Wang Ming 1985: 15/272–273; Ware [1966] 1981: 255: there, the *Sanhuang tianwen* is used to summon Siming, the gods of the five marchmounts, the six *ding* spirits of the time cycle, and other deities for questioning, allowing the adept to know the future.
8. The passage occurs in the *Gaozong rongri* section of *Shujing*, part of the “Documents of Shang.” Shaughnessy (1993: 378) dates it to “probably as late as the Warring States period, although [it does] seem to be based on records of actual events.” It is comprised in the “New Text” and not the “Old Text” *Shujing* material, and therefore is not among the parts of that book that were most likely forged in the fourth century CE. The passage reads: “Heaven, watching over the people below, keeps a record of their righteousness, accordingly bestowing on them many years or few. It is not Heaven that shortens people's allotted life spans, but the people themselves that bring this about” 惟天監下民，典厥義，降年有永有不永，非夭民，民中絕命。
9. For example, *Sousben ji* 17.10 (translated in DeGroot [1892–1910] 1982.5: 471, and loosely in DeWoskin and Crump 1996: 209–210): the Chen family of Donghai, “a hundred and some odd heads,” notices that water in their cauldron will

not boil; when they take the steamer off the stove (note this detail: the spirit involved may be the stove god, which would fit the dire, *ming*-related meaning of the omen) to examine it, a little old man pops out of the vessel. A diviner says that the omen pre-figures the entire family's imminent destruction. He directs the family to hurry home and pile weapons at the base of the wall through which the main door passes; this door should be bolted and guarded by everyone in the family. A military party, the diviner warns, will arrive by chariot and knock, but under no condition is the family to reply. They gather weapons ("over 100"—perhaps the implication is one per family member) and place them as directed. The soul-summoning party of spirit-officials arrives, knocks, and summons them, but no one in the family answers. The leader of the party orders his troops to enter by force, but when they look inside and notice the weapons, they report this to the leader, who scolds them: "I told you to hurry here, but you didn't, and now we haven't a single person to take away with us! How can we escape being charged with a crime? Eighty *li* north of here there are 103 persons whom we can seize to fill out our quota" 取以當之. Ten days later, everyone in this other family dies; their surname is also Chen. Compare also *Soushen ji* 16.4, translated in DeWoskin and Crump 1996: 184.

10. See Seidel 1985: 166–167, 170–171; Nickerson 1997: 245; Cedzich 1996: 19–20.

11. Hence, in some tales exhibiting the well-known motif of the mistaken summons, the reason for the mistake is the identicalness or similarity of names; for an example, see *Soushen ji* 15.3 (anthologized in *Taiping guangji* 1930: 386), the story of Jia Ou, translated in Campany 1990: 108–109. The more common reason given, however, is simply too early summons: a check of the records of the newly deceased soul reveals that his or her *ming* has not yet expired. In a few cases, we see Daoist or Buddhist adepts descending to the underworld and pleading their clients' cases. This entire system of record keeping as well as the possibility of return from death due to successful appeal was already in place by late Warring States times, as shown in the important article by Donald Harper (1994).

12. In these pages, I will characterize the secretly transmitted methods of longevity, the texts in which they were couched, and the adepts who received, practiced, and transmitted these methods and texts in the time period leading up to and including Ge Hong's time as "esoteric" in order to differentiate them from slightly later traditions, now regarded by most scholars as more properly and strictly "Daoist," that subsumed many elements of them but under different auspices. On the difficulty of nomenclature in this regard, see Campany 2002: pt. 1.

13. Only one of which I will document in detail; one requires further research, and one is amply documented in Stephen R. Bokenkamp's essay in this volume (Chap. 6) and in other recent research on the Shangqing tradition.

14. One key passage to this effect is found in Wang Chong 1990: 2/46–49 and is translated in Needham 1954.2: 384. In the surrounding pages Needham gives a good overall discussion of Wang Chong's ideas on *ming*. For another discussion of *ming* as represented in another text of early medieval times, Wang Fu's *Qianfu lun*, see Kinney 1991. On the physiological basis of *ming* as it was understood in Han and

early medieval times, see Harper 1998: 378–384, and the early section of Chapter 6 in this volume.

15. *Sousben ji* 10.4; a loose translation may be found in DeWoskin and Crump 1996: 119–120. My translations of most of the key phrases differ from theirs.

16. A complete listing of the stories exhibiting these motifs will appear in my forthcoming motif-index to early medieval accounts of anomalies.

17. I emphasize this point, as Poo Mu-chou suggests that the Shang people conducted divinations in order to “try to change their fate before it happened” (Poo 1998: 229). Stories of true predictions, at any rate, almost never envision the changing of *ming* but its inevitable fulfillment, and in the few stories in which people attempt to dodge what is fated to happen, they only play into a trap already laid for them, as it were, by the skein of events, as if in the process of *ming*'s fashioning their attempt at evasion had been anticipated and accounted for.

18. HY 388: 2/25a–26a. Cedzich (1996: 19) also briefly discusses this passage and gives a translation. Some of the following discussion overlaps with portions of Company 2002: 1. Texts in the *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 and the *Xu daoze jing* 續道藏經 are cited by the HY number assigned to them in Harvard-Yenching Sino-logical Index Series, no. 25, found under Wang Tu-chien 1925 in the Bibliography.

19. Such attempts to elude spirit detection by relocating and renaming oneself occasionally surface even in the dynastic histories. Harper (1994: 26) notes the case of one Mei Fu in *Hanshu buzhu* 67: a classical scholar, he devoted himself to “reciting books and nourishing his nature.” One morning during Wang Mang's reign he “abandoned his wife and children” and left home; “down to today he is reported to have become a transcendent. It is said that later someone saw Fu in Kuaiji, and that he had changed his name and surname and was serving as the gate guard of Wu City.”

20. This may just mean a brush empowered by the ritual procedures laid out for the preceding talisman, which are that the design is to be written in red on a white piece of silk five *cun* square, following which the adept is to purify himself (or herself) in retreat for one hundred days, then enter his (or her) oratory and swallow the talisman.

21. HY 388: 3/13a–14a. A third talisman is mentioned here as well, but whether it affects *shijie* is unclear, and it depends for its workings on the prevention of impure pneumas from entering the mouth. The first talisman of this series is titled *Jiutian taixuan yangsheng fu* and is thus associated with the Nine Heavens; the latter two are respectively titled *Santian taixuan yang* [and *yin*] *sheng fu*, and are associated with the Three Heavens. Note the presence in all three titles, as well as in the title of the talisman method discussed above, of the term Grand Mystery (Taixuan), an exalted celestial mountain on which august deities reside. In Ge Hong's list of talisman texts in his possession there appears an entry for “Taixuan talismans, three fascicles” as well as “Nine Heavens talismans” Wang Ming 1985: 19/335.

22. This translation is based on the version of Ling's *Shenxian zhuàn* hagiography quoted in HY 1026: 86/11b–12a. Other attestations of the story are cited and discussed in my *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*. Braces < > enclose material not attested before the Song in any of the various extant versions. The pellets of “efflo-

rescence of vermilion” *zhuying wan* 朱英丸 were apparently made from cinnabar, and perhaps other ingredients. In Wang Ming 1985: 3/52 (Ware [1966] 1981: 63), Ge Hong mentions *zhuying* as one of the rarefied, pure foods consumed by transcendents who have mounted the skies (along with blue mushrooms, liquor of jade, and potable gold).

23. This explains why many *fangshi* 方士 in narratives preserved in dynastic histories and in *zhiguai* collections, when practicing healing, can only do so within the limits of *ming*; unlike adepts with access to *ming*-dodging or -transcending methods, they are by no means able to extend their patients’ maximum preallotted life spans. An excellent example is the entry on the healer Hua Tuo 華佗 in the biographical collection titled *Fangji zhuan* 方技傳 in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (29/799–806). The various case narratives are at pains to demonstrate Hua’s wondrous diagnostic and curative skills, yet in no instance is he able to alter a patient’s allotted life span, merely to predict it accurately and to ensure that the patient lives it to the end. Nor can he alter his own—he dies at the hands of Cao Cao.

24. See the perceptive comments on *shi* and *bao* 保 in Kaltenmark 1960: 579. Use of a live impersonator or a lifelike image in Confucian-inspired ancestral rites, well attested in early ritual compendia such as the *Yili* and *Liji*, was to my knowledge first dropped by the manual *Kaiyuan li* in 732 CE (Ebrey 1991: xviii) and replaced by the *shenwei* 神位 or ancestral tablet.

25. Wang Ming 1985: 2/20 (cf. Ware [1966] 1981: 47): “According to scriptures on transcendence [or *The Scripture on Transcendence?*], superior practitioners who rise up in their bodies and ascend into the void are termed celestial transcendants. Middle-level practitioners who wander among noted mountains are termed earth-bound transcendants. Lesser practitioners who first die and then exuviate are termed *shijie* transcendants.” Note that this characterization makes no mention of name deception or body substitution and implies that the death is real, not staged.

26. HY 388, 2/10b10–14a7, 2/16a, 2/23b–24b (resembling Ge Hong’s wording), and 2/26a all deal with methods and rationales for “expelling the three corpses” from the body. Cf. *Wushang biyao* HY 1130: 66/3a ff.; Lagerwey 1981: 174; HY 1026: 82–83.

27. Han Zhong (whose name is sometimes written with alternate graphs) is a transcendent mentioned in several early texts; for details, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*.

28. *Shenfang wupian* 神方五篇; the same phrase appears in HY 1026: 82/10b1, where the context makes it clear that this text consisted of methods for expelling the three corpses from one’s body. There, the ensuing comments on “ambushing corpses” are presented as if quoted from this text itself. Note that in the *Taiping yulan* 1992: 662 version of this passage, the word *se* 色 follows *wu*, suggesting that perhaps the five sections (*pian* 篇) each dealt in a different symbolic color.

29. This translation from the *Shenxian zhuan* hagiography of Liu Gen is based on the version in *Taiping guangji* 1930: 10.2; other relevant sources are listed in Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*.

30. Wang Ming 1985: 6/125; Ware [1966] 1981: 115–116. Cf. the passage in

Ware [1966] 1981: 66 (NP 3) on the sin-deduction system as understood by Ge Hong; he also elsewhere mentions elixirs which carry the benefit (among others) of expelling the corpses from the ingestor. Also cf. the very similar passage in the Japanese *Ishinp* as translated in Yamada 1989: 110. The Celestial Masters, and some subsequent Daoist ritual schedules, had a three-times-yearly system of celestial reporting; on the “three primes,” see Bokenkamp 1997: 390. The Upper Clarity Daoists put the seven whitesouls of the body in the role of the three corpses: they, too, report one’s sins three times per month (as well as indulging in all manner of other polluting pursuits, such as mingling with blood-eaters and having sex with corpses). The Shangqing revelations similarly offered a means for controlling these spirits’ activities. See HY 639: 10a ff., and the translation in Bokenkamp 1997: 324 ff., a passage that will be returned to briefly below.

31. On the stove god, see Schafer 1975, which focuses on the god’s connections with alchemy and argues that the god may originally have been of the feminine gender. The connection between the stove god and sin reporting shows up in another early text not noted by Schafer but roughly contemporary with the *Shi ji* notices on Li Shaojun: namely, a citation in *Taiping yulan* 1992: 186/4a, from the now lost *Wanbi shu* of Liu An, which states: “The god of the stove returns to Heaven on the last day of every month to report on people’s sins” 竈神晦日歸天白人罪. On the two sets of Li Shaojun passages in *Shi ji* 12 and 28, see Needham 1954: 5.3: 29–32. The Daoist canon contains a very brief text on the stove god, *Taishang dongzhen an zao jing* HY 69, consisting of instructions for a short rite inviting the god to attend at the domestic altar; prayers are addressed to the god on behalf of the host’s household, asking for domestic harmony, protection from disasters, and long life. Siming is mentioned several times in the invocation, as are other deities (including the Five Thearchs and especially the Northern Thearch) often associated with the overseeing of life spans and the registration of the living and the dead. The stove god also figures, of course, in early sacrificial systems (including the *Li ji*) as one of a set of divine recipients of household offerings; these are also discussed in Wang Chong’s *Lunheng*, chaps. 12 and 25, and cf. Bodde 55.

32. *Chisongzi zhangli* (HY 615); the petition discussed here appears at 6/2b–9b. Many other petitions in this compendium are for the purpose of requesting the gods to alter the registers of the living and the dead, thus extending the client’s *ming* (see, for example, the “petition for receiving additional counts” 接算章 at 5/17b–19a [on *suan* as “counts” see Bokenkamp 1997: 55n107], the “petition for eliminating [clients’ names from] the registers of death at Mount Tai” 除泰山死籍章 at 5/5a–b, the “petition for declaring merit for the purpose of eliminating the registers of death at Mount Tai” 絕泰山死籍言功章 at 4/23b–24b [this one is especially significant for its use of the language of “left and right tallies” for the *ming* registers, reminiscent of the terminology used in the *Xiang’er zhu*—and there are many others). The example discussed in detail here is unusual in its use of an effigy of the client as a substitute body.

33. It even seems possible, given certain phrases of the petition, that the client has in fact already died or is feared dead.

34. Elsewhere in the petition text the resultant life span is characterized as limitless, as at 5b2–3. On the sense of the “jade calendar” *yuli* 玉曆 mentioned here and elsewhere in the petition, see Schipper 1979: 77.

35. In addition, a higher set of registers is appealed to: one result of the procedure is that the adept’s name is entered on the exalted “purple slips” 紫簡, thus effectively moving him out of Three Bureaus jurisdiction, trading registration in one system for registration in another, higher one. Compare the passage translated from HY 442 in Bokenkamp 1997: 359.

36. The *Sword Scripture* deserves more careful study. It is partially preserved in *Taiping yulan* 665 and is also quoted at points in *Zhen’gao*. Note the comments in Strickmann 1979 (though I would insist, contra Strickmann, on the sharp difference between this method and the Shangqing methods he treats, in that an adept following the *Sword Scripture* could expect to keep his own body and avoid death) and in Robinet 1984.2: 137–140 (who documents its place in the Shangqing patrimony but notes that it was revealed prior to Yang Xi’s visions). Cedzich 1996 and Bokenkamp 1989: 5–6, also discuss this text in passing. It is significant that the talisman named in the passage quoted at *Taiping yulan* 665/2a6–7 is identical to the one named at HY 388, 2/25a–26a.

37. To begin with, one can cite cases in Ge Hong’s corpus in which a large stock of merit alone is sufficient to win transcendence. One such is the *Shenxian zhuàn* hagiography of Shen Xi, who possessed only some lowly healing arts but whose “merit and integrity touched Heaven” so much that the Yellow Thearch and Lord Lao sent a spirit party down to welcome him directly to the heavens when his allotted life span was about to expire. Shen Xi, indeed, could not even read the documents granting this favor, but no matter: he was spirited upward anyhow. Furthermore, at several points Ge Hong insists that merit is a necessary (though usually not, for him, a sufficient) condition for attaining transcendence by any means, alchemical or otherwise (e.g., his citation from the *Yuqian jing* in NP 3 [Ware [1966] 1981: 66]). Then we read in Liu Jing’s *Shenxian zhuàn* hagiography that he was capable of increasing other people’s allotted life spans by making offerings to Heaven. Finally, at the end of some versions of Liu Gen’s hagiography we are told that he transmitted to disciple Wang Zhen a method for “confessing one’s transgressions and submitting one’s name on high” 謝過上名, a procedure—and a locution—that reflects Celestial Master and/or *Taiping jing* teachings.

38. A further example from the Shangqing patrimony is discussed in Chapter 6.

39. The term *yuan* 怨 here brings to mind the “vengeful spirits” 怨魂 that form the subject of a late medieval collection of tales (see Campany 1996: 90–91), as well as the complaints filed by the resentful dead in otherworld courts, resulting in harms to the living, documented from the Han period forward. Ghosts in ancient Greece behaved similarly: see Johnston 1999, to read which is to be struck by numerous Sino-Greek parallels.

40. E.g., the passage at 112/577: 錄籍所宜，慎勿強索，索之無益。

41. Since, as we saw above and as Bokenkamp’s essay in this volume makes clear, *ming* is fixed during the process of embryo formation.

42. The locus of such refinement in older texts—before its somaticization apparently first carried out by the Shangqing scriptures—is normally Taiyin 太陰; in the *Xiang'er Commentary*, for example, see the passages translated in Bokenkamp 1997: 102, 135, as well as his discussion of Taiyin in Chapter 6.

43. Embryology and self-refinement are for the most part strikingly absent from the works of Ge Hong (and, I believe, were primarily a Shangqing innovation), but adumbrations can be found not only in this type of *shijie* but also, perhaps, in the “oral teaching” Ge Hong received from his master on how to 守身鍊形, related at NP 6/128 (Ware [1966] 1981: 121). Compare the Shangqing text in HY 639, 11b10 ff., discussed in Bokenkamp 1997: 284–285, and translated at 327–328. (This entire section on “controlling the seven whitesouls” deserves more careful comparison with the materials discussed earlier in this essay. For one thing, the entire system of ledgers and registers—including both the reporting spirits and the offices to which they report—has now been somatically internalized.) Both passages strongly suggest the sublimation of once sexual practices; both feature the somatic sites known as the “Gate of Destiny” 命門 and the “Mystic Pass” 玄關 in HY 639, 幽關 in NP. Ge Hong mentions neither an embryo nor a deity who oversees this process (no equivalent, that is, to the Shangqing Peach Child), but the passage is nevertheless replete with reproductive imagery and takes place in the urogenital region of the body.

44. The *Taiping guangji* 1930 and HY 1026 texts both read: 如從狗竇中過耳.

45. On the significance of *three* days in this context, see the insightful remarks in Harper 1994: 21.

46. My translation is based on a comparison of the versions in *Taiping guangji* 7.3 and HY 1026: 109/10a–15a with quite a few earlier sources. See Company 2002 for full details on sources and variant versions.

47. For further analysis of the esoteric traditions of longevity into these two aspects, see Company 2002, pt. 1.

48. We can add the “approach-to-altering-*ming*” vector to the list of other vectors of self-differentiation, other typical modes for the advancement of rival texts and procedures, already familiar to recent researchers in Daoist traditions, notably those of vertical placement of the source of competing revelations in the heavens, understandings of sexuality, valuations of alchemy, and somaticization (or lack thereof).

49. As shown in detail in Chapter 6.

50. See Lakoff and Johnson 1980 and 1999.

6

Simple Twists of Fate

The Daoist Body and Its *Ming*

STEPHEN R. BOKENKAMP

Perhaps due to the extreme emphasis that Christian traditions place upon questions of individual free will versus predestination, modern accounts of the religious dimensions of *ming* overwhelmingly tend to place Chinese writers somewhere on the same continuum. Those writers who seem to proclaim a determinative role for *ming* in individual lives end up on the Calvinist end of the spectrum, while those who deny *ming* and attempts to foretell it can be placed near the Pelagianist end. Although words like “free will” or “predestination” sometimes figure in English-language discussions of *ming*, the intellectual heritage that directs our interests goes largely unrecognized.¹ Early Chinese thinkers did puzzle over moral cause and effect, over why bad things happened to good people, and so on, so our interest in how they stood on these issues is not misguided. Often, though, our concerns cause us to miss other features of the complex of issues surrounding *ming*.

In this chapter, I want to explore a few of the aspects of *ming* that tend to be invisible on the Calvinist/Pelagian scale. These features, I will argue, inform and, from our perspective, make sense of, certain medieval Daoist practices.

The ideas I will discuss are these:

(1) That *ming* was inborn and set at birth. Since *ming* is not quite “fate,” this did not mean that a specific life course was set at birth, but only that initial calibrations tending toward certain sorts of outcomes rather than others had been fixed.

(2) That, as a birthright, *ming* was often as much a property of families as of individuals.

(3) That, once in the social realm, *ming* was subject to social and political manipulation.

(4) That *ming* itself was thus seen as malleable.

Some Pre-Daoist Ideas of *Ming*

In the chapter “Initial Endowments” 初稟 of his *Lunbeng* 論衡, Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) writes: “*Ming* is that which is received [from heaven] at birth. . . . King Wen was endowed with *ming* in the body of his mother. As soon as the king received his *ming*, inwardly it formed his nature and outwardly [the shape of] his body. The body, appropriate to the arts of [divination] by face and bone, is received at birth” (Wang Chong 1990.1: 125–126). The destiny of humans, he argues, appears visibly 表見 in the face and body. In the case of King Wen, the auspicious destiny that awaited him was expressed in the fact that he had four nipples and a dragon countenance 四乳龍顏. How could such things as four nipples have appeared after birth? Thus, Wang reasons, King Wen’s *ming* must have been implanted while he was in his mother’s womb.

Wang Chong is well known for his revisionist, skeptical views of tradition, so we need to be cautious in taking his opinions as representative. Other roughly contemporary texts speak of *ming* using metaphors that seem to imply it is something outside the body. One typically “encounters” 遭 or “meets with” 逢/遇 *ming*. Such familiar ways of speaking about fate might lead us to conclude that the early Chinese conceptions of *ming* were fairly similar to our ideas of “fate,” “fortune,” or “luck.”

But we need to be precise. The work of Lakoff and Johnson has alerted us to the surprisingly contradictory metaphorical complexes we adopt in speaking of the self in English and has pointed out the ways in which each of these complexes direct and constrain thought (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999: 267–284).² Operating from our own metaphorical systems, we might too easily imagine that any *ming* that is encountered (遭, 逢, or 遇) must point to an individual’s specific experiences on the road of life. Yet even Wang Chong, with his vehement arguments against the standard notion that actions have any effect on fate at all, since *ming* is inborn, himself employs the “encountering fortune” metaphor.³ We need to notice that he places the external causation at the moment of conception, “as, for instance, when [the parents] encounter a sudden thunderstorm 或遭雷雨之變, so that the child grows up only to die early” (Wang Chong 1990.1: 52–53). What is “encountered,” then, are instances when the *ming* of an individual becomes operative in life, not *ming* itself.

Diverse practices that depended on the notion that *ming* was implanted in the womb ensure that inborn *ming* was not simply the hypothesis of Wang Chong. Discussions of *ming* in these contexts employ metaphors other than our familiar “meeting a stranger” trope. Instead, when they come to discuss how an individual’s *ming* is established, they often speak of it using plant

metaphors, as I have done in the first sentence of this paragraph. *Ming*, as a product of *qi* (pneuma), being physical in nature, is “planted” to “flourish” or “wither.” Eventually, Daoists (and Buddhist translators as well) will come to speak of the “roots of *ming*.” Other writers employ the language of metallurgy or pottery to describe the solidification of pneumas that shapes both the person and the inborn *ming*.

The technology on which Wang based his arguments, physiognomy, was widely practiced and depended, at least in part, on the idea that ontogeny recapitulates physiology. Wang Fu 王符, in his *Qianfu lun* 潜夫论, explains the technology in terms of the plant metaphor; specifically a tree in this case. While Wang does not overtly state it here, his choice of metaphor strongly implies that the *ming* read by the physiognomist was implanted at birth: “For humans, there is the bone method, just as there are categories and types for the myriad things. With wood, for instance, there is always suitability, so that the skillful carpenter need only base himself on its shape and in each case it will provide something. The twisted will be suitable for wheels; the straight for a carriage chassis . . .” (Wang Fu 1987: 27.131).

Wang Fu thus believes the sagely physiognomer able to judge the appropriate uses for humans based on physical signs that reveal their endowments with a morphological preciseness similar to that applicable to the rest of the natural world. What is native to a person, what makes up their substance or “timber” 才/材, is the primary locus of their *ming*.⁴

Another technology, that of obstetric medicine, likewise provides ample evidence for the notion that *ming* was implanted in the womb. Physicians and others who contemplated the natural order thought they could determine the precise moment in the process of gestation when individual fate became fixed. For these thinkers, gestation was an exact simulacrum of cosmogenesis (Harper 1998: 378–384). Both depended on the coalescence of yin and yang pneumas in a process likened to that of the formation and firing of pottery or the melding of metals in the ironworker’s furnace. The form of the fetus, the vessel into which various attributes could subsequently be poured, was only completed in the third month of gestation. Thus, during the third month, before the fetus achieved fixed shape, its gender could be changed by various procedures (Harper 1998: 378–382; Ma 1994: 641–652).⁵ From the third month on, after the fetus had already received its initial shape and nature, the character of the child could likewise be disciplined through the techniques known collectively as “fetal training” 胎教.⁶ Fetal training included both isolating the mother from inharmonious sights and sounds, and attempts to shape the character of the fetus through exposing it to the classics, proper musical sounds, and so on.

These technologies—physiognomy and obstetric medicine—betray

further aspects of *ming* that do not register on the determinism/free-will scale. Ming was often discussed in terms not of individuals but of families.⁷ The discovery of genes, chromosomes, and DNA lay in the future, but even the most casual observer might notice that the fates of families were often intertwined in inexplicable ways. Wang Chong, for example, states quite seriously that

When an entire family possesses the *ming* of wealth and honor, they consequently are entrusted with affairs of wealth and honor. Those [among them] whose physical form does not correspond according to the bone method will invariably leave [the family] or die and cannot participate in their good fortune for long. A family of wealth and honor will employ slaves and servants, raise cattle and horses, all of which will be quite out of the ordinary. Their slaves will have physiognomies indicative of long life; their livestock will have the inborn nature [性] to engender numerous offspring; their fields will possess fertile and quick-ripening grain; and their businesses will own good stock that sells rapidly. (Wang Chong 1990.1: 116)

Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852) made this familial aspect of *ming* the basis of his essay against the art of physiognomy. According to Du, the problem was not that the art is ineffective, but that the conclusions of the diviners were generally in error. For instance, a diviner had predicted that Yang Jian (541–604) would be emperor, glory of the Yang clan. He did indeed become emperor, but was he really the glory of his clan? The dynasty lasted only thirty-six years and the Yang clan was nearly destroyed as a result. Through Du Mu, we come to see how *ming* might be related to families, not because families were held to share the same natal destiny or star signs, but because their *ming* were somehow intertwined through birth relation.

The clan *ming* leads easily to a second aspect of *ming* and efforts directed toward its determination not often broached in scholarly discussions—its clear relationship to government and power. This is already implied in the wood metaphor employed by Wang Fu mentioned earlier. The art of physiognomy and, to a less acknowledged extent, mantic arts of *ming* determination, were used to judge humans and their suitability for political projects. The questions most often asked were such as these: Would this person make a trustworthy and capable official? Would that person be worth following in his bid to found a new empire? In fact, most of what we know about *ming* determinations in the lives of actual people from our histories revolves around just these issues.⁸

The problem of discernment in a corporate society like that of China

was intense. Trained from birth in ritual and conformity, people could “make their countenances thick,” masking their natures so that it became extremely difficult to judge what they were (Liu 629b). Liu Shao’s 劉劭 (ca. 240–250) work on physiognomy for assessing men for office, the *Renwu zhi* 人物志, provides one well-articulated system—and the only one of several known manuals of its type to survive—for judging people through their body shape, facial coloration, voice, actions, and other outward signs (Tang Yongtong 1983).⁹ The term *ming* seldom figures in the work. Rather, it is the inborn nature or predisposition 性 that forms the critical subject of investigation. Still, as the frequent appearance of the binom *xingming* 性命 implies, the two natal endowments were seen as closely linked.

The emphasis on physiognomy in judging people had broad consequences, only some of which are evident in the above statements by Wang Chong. The wealthy and well regarded did not possess the best slaves, livestock, and farmland by chance. Money and influence provided some of this, and the natural tendency of people to associate with the prosperous accounted for much of the rest. There is thus, as is often the case, a self-fulfilling aspect to determinations of *ming*, especially when prospects are made known through the work of a famous diviner or respected official.

This brings us to a reconsideration of the fact that *ming*, though held to be implanted at birth and somehow part of the somatic endowment of the individual, could be subject to adjustment, particularly before birth. As we have seen, it was commonly considered possible to alter fate in the most fundamental way by changing the sex of the fetus in the third month, to amend *ming* by fetal education or through correct burial of the afterbirth, or, most subtly, to determine the *ming* of a child through computing his or her birth signs. In the latter case, I use the verb “determine” in its full range of senses, since, as I have argued, the very complexity of these systems, together with their high valuation in the society, ensured that *ming* was manufactured more than assessed. It was, in short, the elite family that could afford the luxury of educating and protecting their daughters from inharmonious sights and sounds, that could hire and provide incentive for influential diviners, and that owned manuals explaining such measures. All of these rarely discussed aspects of early Chinese practices surrounding *ming* will come to the fore again in the Daoist texts examined below.

Daoism and *Ming*

Daoism, as we are often reminded in its scriptures, is the religion of life, concerned with extending life, altering human destiny, and avoiding death. In the major textual legacies of early Daoism—extending from works associated

with the early Celestial Masters through the Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures—the fact that Heaven’s decrees might limit the human life span is portrayed as a problem that has been solved. Fatalism of any sort could logically play no part in a religion that promoted its self-cultivation practices with promises of longevity and death avoidance. Early Daoists proscribed the mantic arts and severely criticized their practitioners.

From the beginnings of the organized religion, Celestial Master Daoists of the second and third centuries held that practice, including but not limited to confession of sins, various psychophysiological rituals, and the performance of good deeds, determined individual longevity and transcendence. Heaven did decree fate, but that decree could be altered through the accomplishment of such practices. Hosts of celestial record keepers were put into place to make certain that Daoist strivings were duly registered. Later Daoists were to modify the system, particularly with regard to popular mantic arts. As Peter Nickerson has fulsomely demonstrated, Daoists eventually reached accommodation with the most popular practices and entered into competition with fortune-tellers and the like for the provision of ritual services (Nickerson 1994; 1996: 453–536).

Despite such doctrinal slippage, the predominant medieval Daoist stance on the issue of *ming* would thus seem to be the third of the three Campany discusses. As one Shangqing scripture forthrightly states: “For registering the living and the dead, [celestial officials] have white records and black records, and rolls of slips in cinnabar and vermilion. They receive the records of the living, in proper order from beginning to end, as well as the records of the dead from first to last to compare with them. In total there are six thousand slips, all recording the fate of a single person. . . . It is not the case that [they] have ever mistakenly inscribed anyone’s name” (Bokenkamp 1997: 359–360).

There could thus be no error and no possibility of human fiddling with the records. The question of how the other two approaches Campany has mentioned—those involving subterfuge, body substitutes, and other forms of *shijie*—came to be accepted into Daoism, primarily through the agency of what Ge Hong called “Taiqing” belief, will not concern me here.¹⁰ What is important to the issues we are pursuing is that Daoists could—and did—declare themselves immune to *ming*, the natal life decrees that bound ordinary mortals. Daoists did of course die, but their deaths were “apparent” rather than actual, cloaked in technological explanations or in obscure religious metaphors, entered as evidence that they were not subject to fate or offered proudly to prove that they were in fact masters of it (Robinet 1979b; Cedzich 2001). Concern over fate might be highlighted to draw people to the religion, but once in possession of spirit registers and empowered by the

scriptures, people were to have no doubts on the matter. Daoists were those who could proclaim, “My destiny lies with me, and not in heaven!”¹¹

This self-assurance depended in large part on an understanding of the physiological bases of fate that we have examined in non-Daoist contexts. This may seem an odd claim. The “bureaucratic” nature of the Daoist religion is well studied; their claims of immunity to the fate awaiting the common run of folks are well known. We know that, from early times, all sorts of spirits, celestial bureaus, and a pantheon of scribbling record keepers were held to be in charge of the human books of life and death, comprising, as we have seen, over “six thousand slips” on the fate of each person. Daoists claimed special knowledge of (and influence with) this bureaucracy. But that is not the end of the story.

Studies of Daoism tend to focus on the judicial apparatus governing human destiny because this is the face the texts of the religion most often turned to the world. To distinguish their practice from the “disorder-creating” but cognate practices of common Chinese religion, Daoist texts stress cosmology and the overarching nature of their bureaucratic pantheon (Nickerson 1994, 1996). Nonetheless, Daoist control of life span also depended on a somatic locus of *ming* and deployed psychosomatic techniques to alter it.

This seems to have been true from the earliest days of the religion. For instance, the early third-century CE Celestial Master commentary to the *Laozi*, the *Xiang'er*, speaks of record-keeping spirits as the very ones who inhabit the body. These inner spirits might ascend to heaven to report the life-shortening misdeeds of the person or, if properly nourished with *qi*, might remain inside the body to provide long life and a safe passage through death (Bokenkamp 1997: 39–56).

While the ideas that inform the *Xiang'er* commentary are not fully explicated and are thus often less than clear to the modern researcher, later Daoist texts discuss in plain language the supposed makeup of the body and ways to extend life that depend on its physical makeup.

Now, we shall focus on several ritual and meditative techniques developed by Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–ca. 386) around 370 CE, or perhaps by slightly later imitators. These practices responded to contemporary belief, to scientific knowledge, and particularly to views of the human body with its inborn *ming*.

Daoist Embryology

Embryology was important to Daoist practitioners because they were in the business of re-creating their own embryonic selves through various

meditation techniques. Daoist techniques for the creation of the perfected embryo involved the ingestion of celestial emanations, the merging of these with bodily forces, and the accomplishment of generative tasks in key parts of the body, all accompanied by precise visualizations (Robinet 1993: 139–142 *inter alia*). In other words, excepting perhaps the nature of their visualizations, Daoists were to do precisely what their mothers had been enjoined to do before their birth. This is signaled in some of the texts we shall examine through their explicit comparisons of the Daoist work with that of normal gestation. And, even with regard to visualization, there are clear parallels with a mother's task. While Daoists were expected to envision the gods and colored *qi* that vivified their bodies, pregnant women were first and foremost cautioned to *avoid* disturbing sights—dwarves, hunchbacks, the ill, and so on—that might influence the development of the fetus, but also to surround themselves with pleasing sights and sounds.¹² The distance between fostering these sorts of pleasant visions and the guided meditations of our Daoist texts is not extreme.

Of the examples we might explore, the first method that will draw our attention here is that found in the *Central Scripture of the Nine Perfected* 九真中經, one of the scriptures of Yang Xi (Robinet 1979a; 1984.2: 67–76).¹³ According to the canonical version of this scripture (HY 1365), the Nine Perfected are the externalized cloudsouls of a celestial deity, the Yellow Lord Lao of the Center 中黃老君. At certain times in nine months of the year, the adept is to visualize this deity, together with another stellar god, Grand Unity, descending into his body to join with the five main bodily spirits. Together, these form a single deity, who should be guided by meditation into the appropriate part of the body in order to rejuvenate it.

The inner god formed by this method, the text claims, differs in type from those interior spirits like the three cloudsouls and seven whitesouls that are naturally born in a person through the *qi* provided by earthly parents. In fact, “Parents only know the beginnings of gestation, and are unaware of the arrival of the Lord Thearch and the Five Spirits.”¹⁴ By such claims, Daoists differentiated their practices from the more mundane work of prenatal care, claiming that the spirits with which they worked were inaccessible to human parents. Such claims of distinctiveness were made because there were commonalities between what elite parents were enjoined to do and the practices of elite Daoists. With certain anomalies, the nine parts of the body are the same as those we would expect from contemporary medical literature, but remade in an order the *reverse* of that found in texts on gestation. That is to say, the Daoist practice remakes the body in an order that brings it back to the moment of conception, finally leaving the practitioner with a more etherealized, “primordial” self (see Table 1.)¹⁵

TABLE 1. Accounts of Fetal Development

<i>Month</i>	<i>Taichan shu</i> 胎產書	<i>Wenzi</i> 文子	<i>Ishinpo</i> 醫心方	<i>Taijing zhongji</i> 胎景中記	<i>Jiuzhen zhongjing</i> 九真中經
1	flowing into form 流形	first shape/fat 初形 - 如膏脂	beginning shape 始形	muddy pellet (brain) 泥丸	heart 心 - 火
2	lard 膏	pulse 脈	lard 膏	viscera 腸	bones 骨
3	suet 脂	embryo 胚	fetus 胎	bones 骨	blood 血
4	water/blood 水 - 血	fetus 胎	water/blood 水 - 血脈	lungs 肺 - 金	liver 肝 - 木
5	fire/pneuma 火 - 氣	muscles 筋	fire/pneumas 火 - 氣	liver 肝 - 木	spleen 脾 - 土
6	metal/muscle 金 - 筋	bones 骨	metal/muscle, bones 金 - 筋骨	gall 膽	lungs 肺 - 金
7	wood/bone 木 - 骨	shape 形 (四肢)	wood/marrow 木 - 髓	spleen 脾 - 土	kidneys 腎 - 水
8	earth/skin 土 - 皮膚	first movement 動作	earth/skin 土 - 膚	kidneys 腎 - 水	gall 膽
9	stone/hairs 石 - 皮毛	activity 躁	stone/hair 石 - 皮毛	heart 心 - 火	muddy pellet (brain) 泥丸

One of the points at which the *Jiuzhen zhongjing* differs from the dominant medical view is in its placement of the bones near the end of gestation—that is, according to its reverse order, in the second month of practice. This is also the point at which the adept's new *ming* is discussed in the following terms:

At midnight, the time of life-giving *qi*, again practice [the above method].
On the days of the Nine Perfected, the Thearch Lord, Grand Unity, and

the Five Spirits will spontaneously merge into a single grand spirit, not waiting for you to first visualize them. [The spirit] will have the shape of an infant and should be [summoned] employing the same methods as for the Nine Perfected. On this occasion the nine cloudsouls and seven whitesouls will transform, the five Spirits will merge, the Thearch Lord will change nine times, and Grand Unity will establish himself in the three regions of the body. Together, they will grasp your tallies of life and fix the dark and clear in your registers [of fate], so that you will live long and ascend to the halls of heaven without dying. This way is a dark secret, treasured by the higher numinous powers. Those who do not already have records of Transcendence records will not hear of it; those who do not possess inborn affinity will never see it. (HY 1365: 1/4b3–5a3)

Thus, while the rejuvenation of the bones is placed almost correctly according to standard medical accounts (we would expect the third month), the implantation of *ming* is incorrectly timed. According to medical views of gestation, the *Jiuzhen zhongjing* should have timed the implantation of *ming* during the seventh or eighth month of its autogestation. It seems that in this case Yang Xi was influenced, not by medical belief, but by the art of physiognomy, since the bones are that feature of the body most closely associated with the determination of fate by physiognomy. In fact, early references to the art of physiognomy, such as those by Wang Chong and Wang Fu cited, call it “the method of the bones” 骨法 rather than “imaging” 相. It is this close association between *ming* and the skeletal structure of the body that we find foregrounded in this particular method of autogestation.

Through making such procedures into “dark secrets,” treasured by the higher numinous powers, Daoists conceptually integrated their fiddling with *ming* with their claims of access to a bureaucratic and orderly otherworld. It is not that the creation of a perfected embryo ever transgresses the system of celestial record keepers, but rather that any adept who is introduced to the practice has, by virtue of that fact alone, already achieved the “bones of a Transcendent.”

The second method for the creation of a perfected embryo that will draw our attention, found in the *Taijing zhongji*, has been described by Isabelle Robinet (1993: 140–143).¹⁶ It is a method for untying the “embryonic knots,” twelve sources of death that take root in the human body as it is being given life in the womb. The method, according to Robinet’s precise description:

consists in making the adept relive his embryonic life in relation to the divine and cosmic model. . . . Starting from the anniversary of his

conception, the adept will, therefore, relive his embryonic development by receiving, month by month, the breaths of the nine primordial heavens. During each of the nine monthly periods, the adept invokes the Original Father 元父 and Mysterious Mother 玄母 while visualizing, simultaneously, the King of the [appropriate] primordial heaven. . . . Having received the King's breath, the adept now reactualizes it. At the same time, the King descends into the [appropriate] bodily cavity (Robinet 1993: 141).

This meditation, as can be seen from Table 1, generally follows the standard medical accounts of fetal development.¹⁷ The most significant difference, again, is that the revivification of the bones is placed in the second and third months, rather than the seventh or eighth. In the incantations that accompany the monthly visualizations and describe in fanciful terms what is supposed to occur, we learn that these are the months during which the adept's *ming* is to be reestablished and recorded in the celestial books. The incantation for the second month charges deities resident in the palaces of the head to ready the records—"The Thearchical Lord orders the life records; Grand Unity inscribes the [forthcoming] birth" 帝君命籍，太一勒生. Then, in the third month, a celestial deity makes the new *ming* official—"The Director of Destinies inscribes the life records; In the [Palace of] Eastern Florescence [= Tai Shan], I am recorded as a Transcendent" 司命勒籍，東華記仙 (HY 1371: 18b–19a). Once again, it seems to be the close association of bones with *ming*, together with medical assurances that *ming* was fixed in the third month, that led to this rearrangement in the order of imagined fetal development.

Much more of importance could be gleaned from these two visualizations. We might, for instance, explore the ways in which they represent a continuation of the medical program of mapping the secrets of the female body by means of appropriating the potencies of the female gestational body to the male generative body.¹⁸ Yang Xi, after all, claimed to have received his texts from female divinities, with one of whom he was to merge in spirit-marriage (Bokenkamp 1996). In keeping with our more modest project, however, we might simply note that these procedures replicate the contributions of human mothers, but also of human fathers. Indeed, there are strong indications in these Shangqing texts that actual parents had little to contribute when it came to the sorts of *ming* that mattered most. According to the *Taijing zhongji*, the body that counted, together with its *ming*, comes from the Nine Heavens through the invocation of the Original Father and Mysterious Mother. The "birth scene" of the tenth month shows this clearly. Three times in the tenth month, the adept is to visualize the Original Father of the Nine Heavens entering his Muddy Pellet (the brain) and the Mysterious

Mother entering his Gate of Destiny (the area between the pubis and navel). Transforming respectively into green and yellow *qi*, these two deities will course through the body to join in the Scarlet Palace (the heart). Then:

The blue *qi* will transform into a newborn; the yellow into a phoenix. The phoenix will hold in its mouth the Flowing Essence of Nine Elixirs, the Talisman for Securing *Ming*, which it will place into the infant's suckling mouth. Having received the talisman, the infant will transform into a sun, returning to the top of the head. The phoenix will transform into the moon, descending into the Gate of Destiny 命門 (= storehouse of reproductive energy). The light of these two will shine upon one another brilliantly, reflecting throughout the body. (HY 1371: 25a1–5)

The scene is almost one of autoeroticism. Hidden and mysterious, yet a source of power and inner luminescence, the *ming* became something that the individual Daoist could create through merging the yin and yang elements within the body, and thus control.

The scriptures that have been our sources for these fascinating glimpses into the private meditation chambers of early Daoists do not reveal much of the social effects of such practices. The constant injunctions of the spirits that the letter of the practices should be kept secret and not disclosed to the profane on pain of wrecking the destinies of both the practitioner *and his or her family*¹⁹ reveal two things. First, Daoists were apt to let their light shine when it came to the benefits they hoped to gain from their practice—indeed, public knowledge that mysterious powers were moving in a person's life must have been one of the benefits. Second, families were implicated even in these very private procedures. We might expect more on the public face of Daoist *ming* practice from its encounters with the art of physiognomy.

Daoist Physiognomy

As I stated above, early Celestial Master Daoists seem to have regarded *ming* as provisional and mutable. In line with this, they specifically denied that destiny could be read from the appearance of the human body. Criticizing Confucian “sages” who “measure themselves only against chapter and verse” of their “deviant writings,” the *Xiang'er* commentary to the *Laozi* complains that “such sages say that Transcendents already have their fates [*ming*] inscribed on their bones and that this is not something that one might achieve through [good] deeds” (Bokenkamp 1997: 107). For the early Celestial Masters, somatic predestination acted as counterincentive to the physiological and social practices they wished to promote.²⁰

In the Shangqing scriptures of the second half of the fourth century, however, the principles of body divination acquire a new prominence. The best example of this is found in the *Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits* 靈書紫文, one of the scriptures composed by Yang Xi for his aristocratic patrons. The *Purple Texts* describe a list of “transcendent signs” 仙相 that provide sure indication that an individual’s celestial registers are kept in specific celestial palaces (Bokenkamp 1997: 355–366). This list is presented by Lord Azure Lad 青童君, the deity charged with descending to gather the elect into the heavens, saving them from the immanent cataclysms attendant on the end of the present world-age. Those possessing the signs given in the text are thus numbered among the saved.

Some of these physical signs of transcendence are comparable to those reported in non-Daoist sources as having distinguished the sage-kings of antiquity (Wang Chong 1990.1: 108–123). Shun 舜, for instance, was said by Wang Chong to have sported double pupils in each eye (Wang Chong 1990.1: 110), while the *Purple Texts* reports that those higher Transcendents whose names are transcribed in the palaces of Fangzhu have square pupils that seem to emit purple beams of light (Bokenkamp 1997: 356). Beyond such readily discernable physical signs—constellation-shaped markings, moles, strange protuberances, and other oddities of appearance—though, the Daoist text reports a number of physical characteristics that could only be known by those possessed of X-ray vision: hearts with nine orifices, azure livers with purple striations, hidden bones in the genitals, and even five-colored auras emanating from the top of the head.

Here we move beyond the domain of mundane physiognomy, which attempted to read the place of individual bodies in the ordered cosmos as one would read the five-phase correlations of planets through the outward evidence of their coloration, and into the realms of religious gnosis. For our present purposes, it is important to note that, while many members of Chinese society believed that fate could be seen in the form and face, Daoists, who laid claim to knowledge of the unseen, tended to relocate the art of physiognomy within their own realms of expertise. Outward signs prove only the barest of indications as to the wonderful mysteries enfolded by the perfected body.

The Daoist account transgresses the rules of mundane physiognomic science in yet another way. In the *Purple Texts*, the appearance of the body proves not to be determinative of one’s ultimate fate. Mundane physiognomy cannot be altered after birth. As we have seen, however, Daoist techniques included those that replicated what occurred in the womb, with even more marvelous results. So, then, it makes sense that physiognomic signs might be altered. But this is not what the author of the *Purple Texts* had in mind. The

account of Transcendent signs is preceded by Lord Azure Lad's statement that these markings are indications only of whether one is "blocked" 罷 or "urged on" 篤 by merit inherited from one's ancestors. As we know from this and other Shangqing texts, particularly important for one's ultimate *ming* were the deeds and misdeeds of one's ancestor in the seventh generation inclusive. Once again, then, *ming* turns out to have more to do with family than one might have supposed.

Still, blockages may be removed and, as the text makes particularly clear, the signs of Transcendence may be eradicated through one's failure to preserve the integrity of the body through practicing the psychosomatic meditations proffered in the scriptures. Why, then, mention signs at all if they are largely hidden and, at any rate, subject to alteration? The *Purple Texts* suggests an answer. Toward the end of its discussion of fortunate physiognomies, Lord Azure Lad declares:

If one lacks these signs and these actions, though he be a renowned hero whose aspiration is to swallow the Four Seas, or one of vast energy and boundless might whose influence overtops the clouds; though he be one of profound knowledge with flying brush and disputatious speech or one of exceptionally elegant action who might impose order on the unseen and clear away doubt, whose mouth speaks of Nothingness and whose eyes flash to the eight directions—still he does not have the qualities of a Transcendent. (Bokenkamp 1997: 361)

Included in this characterization are all those most valued in contemporary Jin society, men of fine families and extensive learning, generals, practitioners of "dark learning," and government officials and men who possessed the correct signs according to physiognomy and other conventional methods of character judgment (Tang 1955). It is not, I think, too much to imagine that Daoists might have thought to compete with these on the basis of their more mysterious physiognomic markings.

Conclusion

What are we to make of these Daoist accommodations with the physiological bases of fate? To what extent were Daoists prone to acknowledge that the physical body itself determined destiny—that ontogeny recapitulates physiology? The evidence is at first sight interestingly contradictory. The *Purple Texts* follows the art of physiognomy to reveal that the *ming* of the Daoist body, like that of other bodies, is inscribed in its form but then proceeds to bury those inscriptions so deeply that only another Daoist would know

where to look. The *Jiuzhen zhongjing* and the *Taijing zhongji* promise the total remaking of the Daoist body but then follow medical accounts to stipulate that *ming* must still be fixed at the correct, scientifically determined moment, even in autogestation.

These struggles with contemporary views of the human body started to occur within Daoism at precisely the time when the religion began to re-fashion itself so as to appeal to the upper classes of society (Strickmann 1977). The Celestial Masters of the third and early fourth centuries, from the evidence available to us, seem to have denied that *ming* was in any way inscribed into the body. But for those intent upon spreading the religion among the literati, who held precise, though equally mystical, views concerning the makeup of the body and their own Heaven-granted status, it was impossible to deny at least some features of the constellation of ideas concerning somatic *ming*.

Indeed, Daoists seem to have found *ming* and its manipulation useful in much the same ways it was useful in the society at large. The Daoist body might play host to the very deities who controlled human *ming*, but Shangqing Daoists found it necessary to speak of some of the ways their outward appearance might give evidence of their secret strivings. We have speculated on their reasons for doing so, reasons having to do with the adoption of the religion among higher social strata, and have seen some of the ways in which *ming* was implicated in the fate of families, even in what seem to have been wholly individual meditations. These latter two aspects would intensify in the years following the revelations to Yang Xi, with new Daoist scriptures that more fully incorporated Buddhist ideas. These texts would begin to speak of an “original *ming*” 本命 or the “roots of *ming*” 命根 that were implanted in one’s former lives and not, as in the case of the Shangqing scriptures, by one’s ancestors. Then, Daoist practitioners, who by virtue of their superior *ming* had come into contact with the scriptures, could turn this merit to good use for the salvation of their ancestors and families. But that is another chapter.

Notes

1. The exception close to hand is the excellent essay by Lisa Raphals (Chap. 3). Notice, however, that even someone as careful with words as Raphals can still quite unconsciously define fate as “the notion that there is a *set* or *immutable* pattern to the world” (emphasis mine), despite the fact that the teleological aspects of this definition do not fit comfortably with traditional Chinese accounts of *ming*, keyed as these latter are to constantly mutating patterns. Raphals herself demonstrates this where she

discusses the close connections of *ming* with change and “timeliness.” Daoists, as we shall see, relied heavily on concepts of endless cosmic mutation to fashion their *ming*.

2. While I shall employ some of Lakoff and Johnson’s insights and terminology, I will not generally discuss the far-ranging conclusions they draw, especially in the latter book. The “Japanese Examples” they adduce (1999: 284–287), for instance, are drawn from *modern* Japanese, a language already unmistakably and profoundly altered beginning in the Meiji period by the large influx of Western terminology and translations from Western languages. Further, I am reluctant to assume that similarly precise conclusions on human thought processes can be drawn from texts, especially classical Chinese texts that do not seem to represent the spoken language of the authors of those texts. Nonetheless, I find their approach to the functions of metaphor in spoken and written language insightful and useful.

3. Of the three types of *ming* proposed by contemporary thinkers—standard *ming* 正命, inborn fate that is not dependent on actions; consequent *ming* 隨命, good or bad fortune that does follow upon human actions; and encountered *ming* 遭命, that good or bad fortune which actually runs counter to good and bad deeds—Wang Chong (1990.1: 46–49), who disallows any role at all to deeds in fixing *ming*, accepts only the first type. Consequent *ming* is disproven by the numerous historical examples of those known for good or evil who did not receive their just deserts. To explain the apparent injustices of encountered *ming*, Wang holds that inherent predispositions 性 are also good or evil, so that, for example, an “evil person” who encounters good fortune might have evil predispositions but good natal *ming*. Finally, he concludes, supposed examples of “consequent *ming*” and “encountered *ming*” simply cancel one another out.

4. Wang Fu’s (1987: 130–132) account of physiognomy also betrays a nuanced understanding of *ming*. Human actions can influence fate in ways unpredictable to even the most skillful physiognomer. The noble can fail to fulfill their allotted fate, and those born under a bad sign can, through moral action, transform their endowments. “But in sum,” he writes, “the bone method is the main way [to determine *ming*] and configuration and coloration are its signs” 然其大要，骨法為主，氣色為侯. For an account of Wang Fu’s stances on *ming* and divination in general, see Kinney 1991.

5. Ma (1994) betrays a very critical attitude toward early Chinese embryological knowledge, but the theories on the stages of fetal development expressed by early Chinese medical practitioners are in fact very similar to those held by their counterparts in other parts of the world (Needham 1959: 18–74).

6. Former Han references to “fetal education” stress the activities to be undertaken during the seventh month of pregnancy, but hold that isolation of the pregnant mother from destructive sights and sounds should begin in the third month (see, for instance, the *Dadai Liji* 大戴禮記, chap. 3, and Jia Yi’s 賈誼 [201–168 BCE] *Xin shu* 新書, chap. 10). Later sources, perhaps under the influence of early embryological theories, state only that such training should begin in the third month. See, for instance, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 590) (1980: 25); Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (581–ca. 682) *Sun zhenren beiji qianjin yaofang* 孫真人備急千金藥方, HY 1155: 2/17a, and the

sources collected by Ma (1994: 652–654). Texts in the *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 and the *Xu daoze jing* 續道藏經 are cited by the HY number assigned to them in Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, no. 25, found under Wang Tu-chien 1925 in the Bibliography.

7. The *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) (1992.41: 131a), even extends this to the largest of all families, the kingdom, arguing that the *ming* of subjects derives from that of their lord.

8. Although he does not discuss the sociopolitical import of *ming*, that import is clear in the evidence presented by Hsu (1975).

9. A flawed but still useful translation of the *Renwu zhi* is Shryock (1937).

10. For more on these issues, see Chapter 5 in this volume.

11. That *ming* is subject to human control is the central argument of the first section of the *Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命祿 (HY 837: 1/1a–11b). Attributed to Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), this essay cites a variety of early sources and authorities to demonstrate the proposition that destiny is subject to human control. The proclamation cited here is attributed to a “Scripture of Transcendence” 仙經 (HY 837: 1/9b2–3). The same claim is also to be found in the *Xisheng jing* 西升經 (HY 666: 3/6a9) and the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (HY 1026: 59/9b3).

12. The importance accorded this task of fetal education, I suspect though I have not gathered evidence, is also one reason that elite families taught their daughters to read and write.

13. As Robinet (1984.2: 67–76) notes, the text that survives in the Daoist canon has clearly undergone revision, but the sections with which I will deal here are attested in the late-sixth-century Daoist collectanea, the *Wushang biyao*. Another version of the exercise, found in the Dunhuang manuscript, Pelliot no. 2751, is possibly a fragment of Tao Hongjing’s annotated collection of revealed material, the *Dengzhen yinjue*, originally comprised of twenty-four *juan* of which only three survive in the canon. Whatever its origin, the Dunhuang manuscript seems to be an expurgated version of the practice. While I will make some reference to the annotations found in the Dunhuang text, these can only be tentative, as the photographic reproductions of the manuscript to which I have access are very unclear and the manuscript is severely damaged.

14. HY 1365.1: 2b5–6. The Dunhuang manuscript P. 2751, l. 200ff., provides a simpler reading of this statement: “Father and mother know only the beginnings of gestation and do not sense the arrival of spirits in its midst.”

15. The medical texts of this period detailing the development of the embryo tend to follow the tradition of the Mawangdui manuscript studied by Harper (1998). In these accounts, the full human form replete with the five viscera is completed during the seventh month of gestation, but the development of various bodily constituents is associated with the five phases in the *xiangke* order (see Nakamura 1984: 193–194 for the relevant citations). While Daoist scriptures divide the creation of the five viscera into five separate months, the five-phase associations of the viscera nonetheless accord with medical accounts of the influence of the five phases in gestation. Among these various descriptions of embryological development, only the *Jiuzhen*

zhongjing departs from the *xiangke* order of the five phases found in the Mawangdui text. The *Jiuzhen zhongjing* gives the spleen, lungs, and kidneys in the *xiangsbeng* order. The heart is positioned in the first month since, by medical accounts as well as the *Taijing zhongji*, the consciousness and will are the last to be formed, resulting in fetal movement. I am unable to account at present for the *Jiuzhen zhongjing*'s placement of the liver in its process of deconstruction. Nonetheless, its goal of reversing the process of gestation is explicit. In addition to stating outright that, at the end of its procedures, the adept is to summon the god who forms the placenta (HY 1365.1: 8b–9a), the *Jiuzhen zhongjing* also places the creation of the bones in the second month, while the medical texts place this development as the final step of body creation in the seventh month.

16. It seems that this scripture, or a version of it, may have preceded the Shangqing revelations of Yang Xi. See Robinet (1984.2: 171–174).

17. There are, however, slight divergences. The initial stages of embryonic development, which the medical texts describe as lumps of fat, suet, and the like, are replaced in the *Taijing zhongji* by inchoate brain and visceral matter, important to Daoism by virtue of their association with Heaven and its primal pneumas. Second, while the *Taijing zhongji* follows the *xiangke* order of the five phases, as do standard medical texts, it associates each with one of the five organs and slightly rearranges them so that fire, and the heart, are produced in the ninth month. One supposes that this rearrangement is based on some notion that human cognition and will are the last to develop, though I have located no text that plainly so states.

18. The terms I employ here are adopted from Furth (1999). See especially her introduction to some of the issues (216–223).

19. This is a common injunction in Daoist scriptures, but a meaningful one nonetheless. For relevant statements in the scriptures under consideration here, see HY 1365: 2/17b3–9 and 1371: 27a4–7.

20. In this respect, they agreed with the Confucian philosopher Xunzi 荀子, who also argued that reliance on the art of physiognomy distracted from what was most important in moral education. See Knoblock (1988.1: 196–205). This minority view was expressed occasionally—see, for instance, Du Mu's "Lun xiang" 論相—though the art of physiognomy maintained its prestige in later times. See Smith (1991: 187–201) and Kohn (1986) for numerous later treatises and famous practitioners.

7

Multiple Vistas of *Ming* and Changing Visions of Life in the Works of Tao Qian

ZONG-QI CAI

Duke Wen of Zhu consulted the tortoise shell about changing his capital to Yi. The scribe said, “The removal will be advantageous to the people, but not their ruler.” The viscount of Zhu said, “If it be advantageous to the people, that will be advantageous to me. When Heaven produced people, it appointed for them rulers for their profit. Since the people are to get advantage [from the removal], I shall share in it.” His attendants said, “If your life (*ming* 命) may so be prolonged, why should you not do it?” He said, “My appointment (*ming*) is for the nourishing of the people; my death sooner or later has a [fixed] time. If the people are to be benefited, let us remove, and nothing can be more fortunate.” The capital was accordingly removed to Yi; and in the fifth month, Duke Wen of Zhu died. The gentleman says, “he knew *ming*.” (Ruan [1816] 1980.2: 1852; Legge, trans. 1960a: 264)¹

This story, recorded in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo commentary on the spring and autumn annals), Wengong 13 (613 BCE), is one of the earliest examples of the ancient Chinese contemplating important choices about their lives through multiple vistas of *ming*. The story ends with a pithy comment by the commentator: “The gentleman says, ‘He knew *ming*.’” This comment is undoubtedly intended to praise the duke’s wise decision based on his understanding of *ming*. But what is the *ming* that the duke was assumed to know? This the commentator does not tell us. In light of the contexts, however, we can discern four closely related meanings of *ming* in the story. The first is “demands.” The duke definitely had this meaning of *ming* in mind when he

spoke of his appointment by Heaven for the purpose of nourishing his people. The second is “life span,” about which his attendants were obviously thinking when they said “your life [*ming*] may so be prolonged, why should you not do it.” The third is “destiny,” the mysterious power that capriciously controls and decides the outcome of events in the future. By means of divination, the duke was hoping to pry open the secrets of “destiny” and foretell the result of his chosen course of action. The fourth is the “natural course” of things such as the biological process from life to death. When the duke spoke of the “fixed time” for the advent of death, he was obviously referring to the natural course from life to death. Judging by the ways in which the duke handled the four different meanings of *ming*, it seems safe for us to explain the gentleman’s comment, “He knew *ming*,” in this light: the duke not only knew the different meanings of *ming*, but also knew that he ought to set Heaven’s demands, the most important of those meanings in this case, over the others.²

Just as Duke Wen of Zhu did about eight hundred years before, so Tao Qian 陶潛 (ca. 365–427), one of the greatest Chinese poets, sought to contemplate the meaning of his life through the multiple views of *ming*.³ Of course, Tao Qian pursued his self-reflection under entirely different circumstances. The duke was forced by the exigencies of sociopolitical action to reflect on the meaning of his life on a public occasion. By contrast, Tao Qian habitually and privately reflected upon the meaning of his life amid the changing circumstances of his physical and spiritual existence. Indeed, the occasions for his self-reflection are all events or moments of his private life—the naming of his son, a journey to his official post, his farming routines, seasonal festivals, his begging for food, and so forth. On these occasions, he tended to look back on the decisions made at various points in his life—his temporary adventure into the political world, his decision to retire from public life, and his decision to become a hermit-farmer.

To discern the significance of these decisions, he invariably scrutinized them through the complex, changing vistas of *ming*. Of course, *ming* now provided much broader and more complex conceptual horizons for thinking about human life than it had done in the case of Duke Wen of Zhu. The four basic meanings of *ming* revealed in the story of the duke had each evolved into full-fledged theories: the “life span-obsessed” hedonist theory, “demands”-centered Confucian theories, “destiny”-centered Confucian theories, and “natural course”-centered theories of *ming* espoused by Daoists and the advocates of *xuanxue* 玄學 (Abstruse Learning). Examining his personal experiences within the conceptual horizons opened up by these theories, he constantly examined and reexamined, affirmed and negated, his various convictions about the meaning of his life and human life in general.

With the aid of poetic imagination, he transformed such reflective experiences into touching visions of life.

The Obsession with “Life Span”: The Hedonist Vision of Life

Contrary to his popular image as a carefree farmer-hermit, Tao Qian was given to melancholic brooding over human transience during different periods of his life. In many of his works, the central theme is “life span” *nianming* 年命, or the swift expenditure of one’s years, almost always treated from the perspective of the hedonist theory of *ming*. Obsessed with man’s life span, this theory of *ming* denies any possibility of meaning for human life outside of its finite bodily existence. It is most eloquently articulated in the “Yangzhu Chapter” 楊朱篇 of *Liezi* 列子:

Yang Zhu said: “The myriad creatures are different in life but the same in death. In life they may be worthy or stupid, honorable or humble. This is where they differ. In death they all stink, rot, disintegrate, and disappear. This is where they are the same. . . . The man of virtue and the sage die; the wicked and the stupid also die. In life they were Yao and Shun [sage-emperors]; in death they are rotten bones. In life they were Jie and Zhou [wicked kings]; in death they are rotten bones. Thus they all became rotten bones just the same. Who knows their difference? Let us enjoy our present life. Why should we worry about what comes after death?” (Yang Bojun 1979: 221)

Here we see three points central to the hedonist philosophy attributed to Yang Zhu 楊朱 (fl. third century BCE): (1) death is the final end for the existence of an individual; (2) death, the destruction of man’s physical form, cannot be overcome by something extraneous to his body such as fame and glory; and (3) given the preceding two points, man must enjoy the present to the extent that he forgets about death. Despite its outwardly jovial indulgence in bodily pleasures, this hedonist philosophy is the most pessimistic of all theories of *ming*. Its unbridled sensual pursuit only belies an extreme despair that borders on nihilism. It is not hard to see that such a theory would appeal to desolate souls caught in the throes of political strife or personal misfortune. Indeed, hedonist thought became prevalent during the cataclysmic final decades of the Han. Hedonistic lamentation over human transience, scarcely seen in earlier poetry, emerged to become the dominant theme in “Nineteen Ancient-Style Poems” and other pentasyllabic poems composed from the end of the Han down to Tao Qian’s time. It is true that many Wei-Jin poets like Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) and Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) no longer

lamented human transiency solely from the hedonist perspective, as the anonymous authors of the “Nineteen Ancient-Style Poems” had done. Nonetheless, they never ceased to look at their own lives from the hedonist point of view, especially in the time of their personal misfortunes.⁴ Like his contemporaries, Tao Qian was not impervious to this pervading practice of hedonistic lamentation. He left behind numerous poems and prose pieces written either completely or partially in this hedonistic vein. Moreover, he did not merely think about human life in hedonistic terms, but actually wrote a versified précis of the hedonistic theory of *ming*:

Body to Shadow:	形贈影
Forever endure heaven and earth,	天地長不沒
2 Never change mountains and streams.	山川無改時
Plants and trees follow a constant rhythm,	草木得常理
4 Frost and dew make them flourish and wither.	霜露榮悴之
Man is said to be most intelligent of all,	謂人最靈智
6 But how come he alone is not constant?	獨復不如茲
He happens to be here in the world;	適見在世中
8 Suddenly he is gone, and no more return.	奄去靡歸期
Who will notice the disappearance of one man?	奚覺無一人
10 Not even his family and friends will miss him.	親識豈相思
All that is left of him is things he once used,	但餘平生物
12 The sight of which brings grief and tears.	舉目情淒瀟
I do not have the art for ascension and change:	我無騰化術
14 So must be my fate, I will doubt no more.	必爾不復疑
I hope that you will take my word:	願君取吾言
16 When you are offered wine, don't casually refuse.	得酒莫苟辭

(Tao Qian 1996: 59)⁵

This is the first part of Tao's famous philosophical poem “Xing, Ying, Shen” 形影神 (Body, shadow, spirit). The poem is an allegorical work in which three personae, “Body,” “Shadow,” and “Spirit,” take turns presenting what they each believe is the best way to cope with man's finite *nianming*. What the first persona, Body, says is essentially a poetic rendition of the “Yang Zhu Chapter” passage discussed above. To underscore the ill fate of man, Body foregrounds the ironic contrast between the perpetual renewal of the insentient nature and the lonesome, terminal existence of man, the most intelligent creature (ll. 1–12). This contrast undoubtedly makes human transience much more poignantly felt than the statement “the myriad creatures are different in life but the same in death” in the “Yang Zhu Chapter.” For him, as

for Yang Zhu, there is no cure for human mortality, and the best man can do is seize every moment for sensuous enjoyment, symbolized here by wine drinking, while still living (ll. 13–16).⁶

It is important to note that Body's hedonist perspective is to be rejected twice, first by Shadow and then by Spirit, in the remainder of the poem. In the preface to the poem, Tao Qian implied that Spirit was the persona through whom he wished to demonstrate the misguided endeavors of both Body and Shadow. Judging by his harsh criticism of Body, Tao Qian apparently was not under the sway of the "life span-obsessed" theory of *ming* at the time of writing the poem.⁷ In the works written in his later years, however, there is a noticeable change of attitude toward the hedonist theory of *ming*. Once the joyful years of his farming life were over, Tao Qian waxed more and more reflective about the process of aging and his inevitable death. The older he grew the less confident he became about the possibility of immortality by establishing a great Confucian name or by integrating with the Dao. At any rate, in his later years he preoccupied himself with human transience as a burning issue in his own life and wrote about it striking an increasingly poignant note of personal sorrow.

To express his deep anguish over human ephemerality, he wrote a series of twelve "Zashi" 雜詩 (Miscellaneous poems), a subgenre of pentasyllabic poetry known for its generalized lamentation over human transience. Following the *zashi* convention of generality, Tao wore the mask of an impersonal poetic speaker and universalized his innermost sorrow through conventional poetic images and language. This generalizing tendency is particularly conspicuous in "Miscellaneous Poems," Nos. 1–4 and 7. To indicate the relentless passage of time, he depicted the most general aspects of temporality:

The bright sun sinks into the western slopes;	白日淪西河
The pale moon comes out from the eastern range.	素月出東嶺
("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 2, ll. 1–2, Tao Qian 1996: 291; Davis 1983.1: 129)	

The days and months are not able to linger;	日月不肯遲
The four seasons press upon one another.	四時相催迫
("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 7, ll. 1–2, Tao Qian 1996: 301; Davis 1983.1: 131)	

To show the unstoppable process of aging, Tao presented a stereotyped *zashi* speaker brooding over the weakening of his body:

My feeble constitution declines with time's passing;	弱質與運頹
The black hair on my temples is early white.	玄鬢早已白
Now the white sign is set upon my head.	素標插人頭

("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 7, ll. 5-7,
Tao Qian 1996: 301; Davis 1983.1: 131-132)

To underscore the evanescence of human life, he made stock comparisons of it to ephemeral phenomena:

Man's life is without any root,	人生無根蒂
Whirled like dust on the sand,	飄如陌上塵
Scattered at the wind's will,	分散逐風轉
For this is no abiding form.	此已非常身

("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 1,
ll. 1-4, Tao Qian 1996: 289;
Davis 1983.1: 129)

My home is an inn for a traveler;	家為逆旅舍
I am like a guest that must depart.	我如當去客

("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 7,
ll. 9-10, Tao Qian 1996: 301;
Davis 1983.1: 132)

To reveal the depth of despair over human transience, he depicted the standard insomniac symptoms of world-weary *zashi* speakers:

The air changes, makes me feel the season's turn.	氣變悟時易
I do not sleep and know the night's length.	不眠知夕永
I wish to speak but there is no one to answer;	欲言無予和
I raise my cup and urge my lonely shadow.	揮杯勸孤影

("Miscellaneous Poems," No. 2, ll. 7-10,
Tao Qian 1996: 291; Davis 1983.1: 129-130)

It is evident that Tao Qian deliberately effaced his literal self in these poems. There are no narrative details that might suggest an event in his life, nor even a single image that might give the slightest hint of a real locale. Through the generic impersonality of *zashi*, Tao apparently aimed to sublimate his personal emotions into a universal kind of artistic feeling.

There are times, however, when Tao empathized with his fictive speakers and pursued a surreptitious retrospection of his own life. In the fifth

poem of the series, for instance, he reflected on the joys of his youthful ambitions:

I recall the period of my youth and prime,	憶我少壯時
When with no pleasures, of myself I was joyful.	無樂自欣豫
My fierce ambition was loosed upon the world;	猛志逸四海
Raising my wings, I thought of distant flight.	騫翮思遠翥

(“Miscellaneous Poems,” No. 5, ll. 1–4,
Tao Qian 1996: 296; Davis 1983.1: 130–131)

In this poem we can assume an infusion of the poet’s experiential self into the speaker because the first-person account matches with the youthful life of the poet. In “Miscellaneous Poems,” No. 6, we can observe even clearer evidence of the poet’s own presence:

In the past when I heard my elders’ words,	昔聞長老言
2 I shut my ears and was always displeased.	掩耳每不喜
What did it avail? Now that I am fifty,	奈何五十年
4 Suddenly I am myself doing the same thing.	忽已親此事
Of seeking the pleasures of my prime	求我盛年歡
6 I have not the least thought any more.	一毫無復意
Oh, on, more and more my days draw away;	去去轉欲遠
8 Surely I shall not meet with this life again.	此生豈再值
Ruining my family, for a time I’ll make merry,	傾家持作樂
10 And use up these years and months’ swift course.	竟此歲月駛
Although I have sons, I shall not leave them money;	有子不留金
12 What use are arrangements for after my death.	何用身後置

(Tao Qian 1996: 299; Davis 1983.1: 131)

This speaker appears to be even less an impersonal speaker and more the poet himself. He claims to be fifty years old, which is believed to be the age of Tao Qian at the time he wrote the miscellaneous poems. Such mention of an exact age is rather uncommon in a conventional *zashi* poem and thus suggests the veracious presence of the poet grieving over his aging in a genuine personal voice. More important, the speaker goes through a process of retrospection far more sophisticated than we would see in a conventional *zashi* piece. He reminisces about the time of his youth when he disliked hearing elderly people’s reminiscences of departed ones. Through the lens of this double reminiscence, he cannot help seeing a refraction of his present life. Now he finds himself in the same place of those elders, talking about what he once loathed hearing of—the cruel ravages of time. Faced with this

dramatic change of position, he laments his inability to recapture his bygone youth and espouses *carpe diem* as the only sensible way to live his life. This interplay of past, the past of the past, and present reveals a psychological intensity that is to be found in a great poetic mind rather than in a conventional *zashi* practitioner.⁸ Moreover, the structural complexity that results from this mental process looks forward to the virtuosity of temporal manipulation in the finest of Tang poetry.

***Zhiming* (Knowing “Demands,” “Destiny,” or Both): Confucian Visions of Life**

Unlike the hedonist theory of *ming*, Confucian theories of *ming* are anything but monolithic. By the time of Tao Qian, early views of *ming* articulated by Confucius and Mencius had already evolved into full-fledged theories codified within different cosmological schemes. To prepare my discussion of Tao’s appropriation of these theories, I shall devote this section to a broad survey of their historical development.

The last chapter of Confucius’ *Analects* begins with this remark: “The Master said, ‘If one does not understand *ming*, one cannot be regarded as a gentleman’” (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 20/10). This assertion harks back to the statement “He knew *ming*,” referring to Duke Wen of Zhu, and heralds countless similar statements in later Confucian texts. Confucius and later Confucian thinkers attached paramount importance to *zhiming* 知命 (to know *ming*) as the basis for charting the course of human action. As they focused on different meanings of *ming*, they developed a complex array of theories about it. Broadly speaking, these theories are variously centered on “demands,” or “destiny,” or the tension between these two time-honored meanings of *ming*.

The sources of “demands”-centered Confucian theories of *ming* can be traced to two Confucian classics: *Shang shu* 尚書 (The book of documents) and *Shi jing* 詩經 (The book of poetry). In the accounts of the early Zhou events in these two texts, the term “*ming*” is used profusely to denote demands of all kinds. These demands range from *tianming* 天命 or “mandate of Heaven” (*Shang shu zhuzi suoyin*: 3/4/16; 37/32/24; 28/24/8), specific demands made by the Heaven *tian* 天 or the God on High *shangdi* 上帝 for particular actions to reward or punish particular rulers or peoples for their conduct,⁹ to the charge or orders issued by the kings and dukes.¹⁰ Only in tandem with these “demands” do we find the use of *ming* as “life span.” Most of such cases involve a plea by a ruler to Heaven or the God on High for the extension of life span of his people (*Shang shu zhuzi suoyin*: 19/19/13–14) or for the preservation of the life of particular individuals, including the ruler

himself (*Shang shu zhubi suoyin*: 25/22/17–18). Apparently, in the eye of the early Zhou people, “life span” was something dependent on or even derived from the “demand” issued from above. To them, the universe was a completely logical and moral one, with few things left to their own designs. All human affairs were governed by a strict moral law of cause and effect. For kings and commoners alike, good deeds begot reward and the evil conduct begot punishments. Heaven or the God on High, the master of this universe, assumed the role of a fair judge on man’s conduct according to a transparent set of moral principles—reverence for the spirits, concerns for people’s well-being, the avoidance of sensuous indulgence, and so forth.

The Spring and Autumn period witnessed a gradual loss of faith in a just, moral universe ruled by Heaven’s demands. Along the disintegration of ethical and sociopolitical orders, people began to doubt the verity of such demands and to reconceptualize *ming* in terms of “destiny,” a mysterious force of purposeless predetermination. In due course, this tension between demands and destiny erupted into a philosophical debate on *ming*. In this debate, the Moists emerged as the staunchest defenders of the old faith in an orderly moral universe. The “Fei Ming” 非命 chapter of *Mozi* 墨子 mounts a vigorous attack on “those who believe in ‘destiny’” 執有命者 (Sun Yirang 1986: 239–259). To the Moists, those believers in destiny should be held responsible for “toppling the righteousness or moral order of the world” 覆天下之義 (Sun Yirang 1986: 242), as they have misled people into giving up doing good for lack of reward and indulging in evil actions due to the absence of fear of punishment. While denouncing their views as “the horrific bane of the world” 天下之大害 (Sun Yirang 1986: 247), they seek to reaffirm the notion of preordained cosmic moral justice revealed through Heaven’s demands.

By contrast, Confucius’ understanding of *ming* is anything but clear-cut. On the one hand, he, like the Moists, cherished the old faith in Heaven as the ultimate judge of all human affairs (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 16/9/5). To him, *tianming* 天命 meant not only orders given by Heaven to kings and dukes but also general moral demands of Heaven to be obeyed by a gentleman 君子 like himself (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 34/16/8; 2/2/4). On the other hand, Confucius used the words *tian* 天 and *ming* 命 in the sense of unfathomable destiny. He had such destiny in the forefront of his mind when he thought of the arbitrary allotment of life span and wealth and rank (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 22/12/5), and when he spoke of the short life of Yan Hui, the most virtuous of his disciples (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 10/6/3; 20/11/7). It is apparent that the tragedy of Yan Hui and his own setbacks convinced Confucius to accept the existence of a destiny unresponsive to one’s moral endeavors. To him, the powerful force of destiny also predetermined the success or failure of a moral

cause like his (*Lunyu yinde* 1986: 29/14/36). In short, the tension between demands and destiny is truly pronounced in Confucius' conception of *ming*.

The Warring States period saw the emergence of two competing views of *ming* developed by Mencius and Xunzi 荀子, the two preeminent Confucians of the time. Like Confucius, Mencius spoke of the demands of the moral Heaven to be obeyed by all men, especially gentlemen, and frequently cited the examples of such demands in *Shi jing* and other ancient texts (*Mengzi yinde* 1986: 12/2A/4; 27/4A/8). In the meantime, he talked about the workings of destiny devoid of any moral intention (*Mengzi yinde* 1986: 37/5A/6). In the face of destiny, he believed, man is not completely helpless, as he has some limited freedom of choice about how to avoid calamities and live his life (*Mengzi yinde* 1986: 50/7A/2). Moreover, even though destiny arbitrarily predetermines the life span and wealth and rank of man, Mencius argued, one should not succumb to it and relinquish one's efforts toward moral cultivation (*Mengzi yinde* 1986: 50/7A/1; 58/7B/33). To him, to know *ming* means to know how to sort out the complex relations between demands and destiny, and decide to follow the former despite the latter.

Like Confucius and Mencius, Xunzi intently inquired about the nature of *ming*, but he arrived at an entirely different understanding of it. Speaking of *ming*, he stated, "The *ming* of man lies with *tian* (Heaven); and the *ming* of the state lies in *li* (rituals)" (Wang Xianqian 1988.2: 317). Because he explicitly related *ming* to *tian* here, we may be tempted to associate this statement with Confucius' and Mencius' views of *tian* and *ming*, either in the sense of Heaven's demands or destiny. Of course, it is not quite accurate to make such an association, because *tian* was reconceptualized by Xunzi as physical nature or heaven. In his treatise "Tian lun" 天論 (Discourse on heaven), he gave this new definition of *tian*: "Heaven's ways are constant. It does not prevail because of a sage like Yao; it does not cease to prevail because of a tyrant like Jie. Respond to it with good government, and good fortune will result; respond to it with disorder, and misfortune will result" (Wang Xianqian 1988.2: 307; Watson 1967: 79). To Xunzi, then, Heaven does not have the conscious will of a moral Heaven as envisioned in *Shang shu* and *Shi jing*, nor does it harbor the capricious and unfathomable intents of destiny as reckoned by Confucius and Mencius. It blesses the good only because they "respond to it with good government." Likewise, it brings misfortune to men only because they "respond to it with disorder." All misfortunes that were attributed to "destiny"—from natural disasters, premature deaths, to the fall of dynasties—were of man's own making. Thanks to this completely impartial and predictable *modus operandi* of physical nature or heaven, he believed, men need not plead for heaven's demands, nor fear destiny. Taking the initiative in their own hands, they can forestall misfor-

tune by not doing evil things. More important, they can actively work to guarantee good fortune for themselves by establishing and observing laws and rituals that respond to *tianming*. To Xun Zi, the *tianming* to which man should respond is none other than actual demands of physical nature. Indeed, he had such objective, impersonal demands in mind when he talked about “regulating heaven’s demands” *zhi tianming* 制天命 (Wang Xianqian 1988.2: 317). According to him, to passively observe these demands is not as good as to actively manage and tailor them (*cai zhi* 裁制, *cai zhi zhi* 裁制之) for the benefit of man.¹¹ “We exalt heaven and yearn for its bounty,” he remarks, “but isn’t better to nourish its living things and thereby regulate it? We obey heaven and sing hymns to it, but isn’t better to regulate its demands and thereby make use of it? (Wang Xianqian 1988.2: 317). In the light of these remarks, Xunzi undoubtedly understood the lofty Confucian task of *zhiming* 知命 (to know *ming*) in terms of or regulating and utilizing the demands of physical heaven.

During the Han, Confucian theories of *ming* continued to develop along the divergent paths of demands and destiny. Prevailing in the Former Han is Dong Zhongshu’s 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) “demands”-centered theory of *ming* systematically expounded in his “Ju xianliang duice” 舉賢良對策 (Answers [to Emperor Wu of Han] on the recommendation of the worthy and virtuous).¹² In a rather contradictory fashion, this theory simultaneously represents a “naturalization” and an “quasi-religious transformation” of the early views of *ming* expressed in *Shang shu* and *Shi jing*. Like Xunzi, Dong sought to codify *ming* and *tianming* within the grand modus operandi of nature. In so doing, however, he aimed to enhance and rationalize the authority of the demands of the conscious, moral Heaven. His investigation of nature is intended to reveal an exhaustive system of macro-microcosmic correspondences between nature and the human world, a system through which Heaven’s demands are purportedly delivered to men. Thanks to this system of correspondences, Dong believed, Heaven plays an even more active role in human affairs than depicted in *Shang shu* and *Shi jing*. Instead of merely passively rewarding or punishing men for their acts, Heaven seeks to guide them by sending its warnings in the form of natural disasters, *zai* 災, and anomalies, *yi* 異, and by giving approval through auspicious omens. Thus deeply involved in human affairs, Heaven even determines the “life spans” and fortunes of all men. For an emperor, to know *ming* (*zhiming*) means to know how to examine macro-microcosmic correspondences and discern Heaven’s specific demands concerning imperial institutions, sociopolitical hierarchies, and norms and rituals.

In developing his grand cosmology, Dong aimed to create an all-inclusive, vertical system of responsibility to obey the demands from above.

In the “Shun ming” 順命 (Obeying orders) chapter of his magnum opus *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant gems of the spring and autumn annals), he exhorted all other people to do their utmost to obey the demands of Heaven passed down through a rigid vertical chain of command from the monarch to the commoners (Su 1992: 410–414). By placing the emperor within this system and making him accountable to a higher authority for his actions, Dong hoped to keep his power in check and thereby ensure the continued stability and peace of the Han empire. However, such a system can be easily manipulated by an evil ruler to assume the absolute authority or by a challenger to legitimize a takeover of the empire. Since the Heaven’s demands are vested in certain abnormal natural phenomena, an evil ruler or a challenger to the throne can easily claim his receipt of the “mandate of Heaven” by having auspicious omens, *ruifu* 瑞符, fabricated by his followers. This is indeed an unintended consequence of Dong’s theory of *ming*. His views about natural disasters, anomalies, and other divine revelations helped to encourage the development of *chenwei* 讖緯, an occult practice of augury telling and apocrypha making, toward the end of the Former Han. This *chenwei* practice, in turn, was actively encouraged and used by Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) to facilitate and legitimize his overthrow of the Former Han.

In the Later Han, to counter the grave consequences of Dong’s socio-political theory and the widespread *chenwei* practice, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) went to all lengths to develop an opposing theory of *ming*. The first five chapters of his *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced inquiries) are entirely devoted to examining a broad range of issues centered on *ming*. The main goal of these chapters is to cleanse the word “*ming*” of any sense of divine demands and thereby undermine the foundations of Dong’s theory of *ming* and the *chenwei* practice. To achieve this goal, Wang apparently saw no better way than to reconceptualize *ming* as the natural, purposeless operation of destiny. In acknowledging the operation of destiny in the human world, Confucius and Mencius neither affirmed nor negated the presence of a supernatural consciousness as its ultimate master. This left the door open for seeing *ming* as an omnipresent being that willfully predetermined the vicissitudes of man’s life. To foreclose such an inference, Wang sought to reconceptualize destiny as a process that is physiologically determined and therefore completely natural.¹³ To him, destiny means the lots meted out by physical heaven at birth and realized in the course of one’s life.¹⁴ According to him, there are two kinds of lots received at birth. The first is what he calls “*ming*” or the allotment of one’s life span. It is largely determined by the amount of *qi* 氣 (vital breath) endowed at one’s birth. The second is what he calls *lu* 祿 or *luming* 祿命, which means the allotment of wealth and rank. This lot is determined

by the association of one's endowed *qi* with particular stars in the sky, or simply one's *xingqi* 星氣 (astral *qi*).¹⁵ When Wang turned to discuss the end results of these two lots, he mentioned three kinds of *ming*: *zhengming* 正命, *shunming* 順命, and *yuming* 遇命. *Zhengming* is the highest category of the three. Blessed with it, one is bound to obtain without effort a long life and wealth and rank, whatever adverse circumstances one may encounter. *Shunming* is a neutral, middle category. Born with *shunming*, one will obtain results consistent with one's efforts: if one strives for good, one will be rewarded with a long life as well as wealth and rank; conversely, if one is bent on doing evil things, one is punished with the opposite results. Finally, *yuming* is the lowest category. Born with it, one is bound to suffer a short life and poverty and humble status, no matter how virtuous, talented, and industrious one may be (Wang Chong 1990.1: 49–58). Judging by his descriptions of the two lots of man, Wang obviously considered destiny, an unfolding of predetermination, to be completely natural and devoid of consciousness.¹⁶ Like all things of nature, destiny is born of *qi* and develops by its internal necessity toward a predetermined end like a process of biological growth. Given this radical reconception of *ming* as a *naturalistic* destiny, one can easily imagine that “to know *ming*” would take on an entirely different meaning for Wang. To Wang, to “know *ming*” simply means knowing enough to be resigned to whatever life one is born to live. Indeed, Wang repeatedly articulated this idea of resignation and lamented the futility of any effort to alter the destiny to which one was born.

While accentuating the contrasts between Dong's demands-centered and Wang's destiny-centered theories of *ming*, we must not lose sight of some interesting overlapping of their views. Neither of them was impervious to the influence of the theories of *ming* they sought to invalidate. On the one hand, we observe Wang being carried away by his zealous quest after *yan* 驗 (empirical evidence) to search for the external manifestations of men's lots both in their physiognomies and in their astrological links to astral houses 星座. Ironically, these physiognomic and astrological inquiries, intended to aid Wang's dismissal of *ming* as divine demands, only led him to overstep the borderline of natural science to enter the realm of superstitious omens. On the other hand, we learn that Dong, despite his firm faith in the divine orderliness and justice in the cosmos, passionately lamented senseless destiny in a famous *fu* 賦, or rhapsody, entitled “Shi buyu fu” 士不遇賦 (Scholar-officials who did not meet with good fortune).¹⁷ In fact, this rhapsody became the model for similar plaintive rhapsodies by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) of the Former Han, the Wei writer Li Kang 李康 (fl. 227–240), Tao Qian, and Liu Jun 劉峻 (458–521).¹⁸

It is important to note that this coherent group of rhapsodies signifies a

new direction in the understanding of *ming*. In these works, the discussion of *ming* is no longer intended to provide theoretical guidance or justification for certain courses of sociopolitical action in a given time. Instead of a subject of abstract philosophical inquiry, *ming* becomes a real, existential issue to be grappled with by scholar-officials (*shi* 士) who seek to make sense of their own lives in the face of their political setbacks and misfortunes.¹⁹ Therefore, these rhapsodies feature few new philosophical formulations on *ming* but plenty of personal insights about how to deal with the willful destiny plaguing their individual lives. In my opinion, we can best discover these writers' personal insights into *ming* by examining how they developed *ming*-related motifs in their works.

Dong's "Scholar-Officials Who Did Not Meet with Good Fortune" employs a series of *ming*-related motifs: (1) sorrow over the swift passage of time and the waste of one's life span; (2) lamentation over being born into the wrong time and not being able to use one's talents; (3) condemnation of all opportunists taking advantage of sociopolitical upheaval to gain wealth and rank; (4) the sense of loneliness and desolation felt by those who refuse to join the ranks of opportunists; and (5) the resolve to endure poverty and humble station and to uphold one's lofty moral ideals. In "Bei shi buyu fu" 悲士不遇賦 (Sorrow over scholar-officials who did not meet with good fortune), Sima Qian adopts all five of these motifs and develops his argument more or less along the same line. Nonetheless, Sima's rhapsody displays three distinctive qualities of its own: a marked increase in emotional intensity, a repeated emphasis on the paramount importance of making a name while living, and above all a prominent intrusion of the author into the text.²⁰ Indeed, this rhapsody inevitably reminds us of his "Bao Ren Shaoqing shu" 報任少卿書 (Letter to Ren Shaoqing), an intensely personal and passionate lamentation over his own misfortunes (Xiao Tong 1977, *juan* 41: 576–581). In the letter, he told his friend that the greatest shame of his life was not the deprivation of his manhood by castration ordered by the emperor, but the deprivation of his chance to establish a great name by means of *ligong* 立功 (accomplishing great deeds, administrative or military) or *lide* 立德 (achieving great moral virtue). To avoid this greatest shame, he explained, he decided to live with the lesser shame of castration and strive to establish a name through the last means left available to him—*liyan* 立言 (producing great speeches or written works) or, in his case, the writing of the first comprehensive history of China. Comparing his rhapsody with this letter, we see that the speaker in the former text is undoubtedly identifiable with the author himself.

Li Kang's "Yunming lun" 運命論 (On fortune and destiny) is not quite as emotionally intense and personal as Sima's rhapsody (Xiao Tong 1977, *juan* 53: 730–735). Li refrained from lamenting the waste of one's "life span"

(first motif) or the ill match of one's talent with his times (second motif). Instead, he focused on examining the reasons for one's failure or success. Combining the demands-centered and destiny-centered notions of *ming*, he argued that one's achievement in life is not merely a matter of man's efforts. "It is Heaven that bestows it, the spirit that reveals it, and the opportune time (*yun* 運) that makes possible its completion" (Xiao 1977, *juan* 53: 730). Therefore, he maintained, a sage person "would delightfully follow heaven[']s course] and know *ming* 樂天知命 and would not lament it if he meets with misfortune" (Xiao Tong 1977, *juan* 53: 732). What is deemed misfortune—the deprivation of wealth and rank—cannot after all affect one's endeavors to achieve great moral virtues (*lide*). So, for Li, the meaning of "to know *ming*" (*zhiming*) was twofold: to be resigned to one's destiny and yet remain committed to fulfilling the demands for moral accomplishments.

Between Demands and Destiny: Tao Qian's Quest for a Great Name

To find the meaning of his life outside of its bodily existence, Tao Qian turned to various Confucian theories of *ming* at different times of his life. Like Sima Qian, the young Tao Qian entertained the belief that there is nothing more important in one's life than to fulfill the demand for each and every Confucian—to establish a great name for memory by the posterity. For Tao as for Sima, such a great name enables one to transcend one's corporeal existence and to "render one's 'life span' eternal," *yongnian* 永年, *yongming* 永命. Tao clearly articulated this belief in the transcending power of a great name in the second part of "Body, Shadow, Spirit":

Shadow to Body:	影答形
It is out of question to talk about eternal life,	存生不可言
2 When just to protect this life is so hard and trying.	衛生每苦拙
I would want to roam on Kunlun and Hua Mounts,	誠願遊崑華
4 But they are so far away and the road is lost.	邈然茲道絕
Ever since the time I met with you,	與子相遇來
6 We have never known any difference, in grief or joy.	未嘗異悲悅
Resting in the shade, we seem to have a brief separation.	憩蔭苦暫乖
8 Staying in the sun, we are never apart from each other.	止日終不別
Still, this union can hardly claim constancy,	此同既難常
10 Together we will disappear into darkness.	黯爾俱時滅
As the Body goes, so does the Fame.	身沒名亦盡
12 Thinking of this, I am burning with all my emotions.	念之五情熱
By doing good, you can leave your love to posterity.	立善有遺愛

14	So why don't you exert your utmost?	胡為不自竭
	Wine, it is said, can drive away care,	酒云能消憂
16	Yet, isn't it inferior to this?	方此詎不劣

(Tao Qian 1996: 62–63)

Through the mouth of Shadow, Tao delivered an injunction against the hedonist obsession with life span or bodily existence. He ridiculed such an obsession for two reasons. First, one cannot achieve physical immortality through drugs, alchemy, and other occult arts. Second, the dissolution of one's physical body is not the end of one's existence. After death, one can still continue to live in the collective memory of posterity if one, while living, established a great name for oneself through administrative, moral, and literary accomplishments.²¹

To establish a great immortal name is, to Tao Qian, not merely an abstract demand to be obeyed by all Confucians, but a sacred personal obligation to carry on his illustrious family line. On the occasion of the birth of his first son, he composed “Ming zi” 命子 (Naming my son), a long tetrasyllabic poem in which he traced his distinguished ancestry from the sage-king Yao down to his great-grandfather Tao Kan 陶侃, Lord of Changsha, and his grandfather Tao Mao 陶茂, Prefect of Wuchang.

The task of preserving this eminent family line is particularly urgent for Tao Qian. By the time he was born, the Taos had gone through a drastic decline from a powerful political family to a politically obscure, economically downtrodden family of a small land owner. While his grandfather Tao Kan had risen to a high-ranking post, his father led an obscure life on a farm and was not known to have held any government office. To make things worse, his father passed away when he was still very young, and two years later his stepmother too was gone. The family circumstances became such that the young Tao Qian had to shoulder the financial burden of the family and attend to his farm in the fields. The life of a farmer, however, was not what the poet had been taught to lead in his youthful days. The ideal life of a man, he was taught early on, was the life of a Confucian scholar-official committed to the establishment of an immortal.

Tao Qian himself sought to pursue the career of a scholar-official as he had been taught to, leaving behind his familiar farming life five times in the space of eleven years. When he was approaching thirty, he began his first official appointment as Provincial Libationer, but shortly afterward he resigned and returned home because he could not bear official duties.²² Then, after some time, he left home again to take up an official post in the capital Jiankang. He continued his service there until he came back home in 400. In the next year he once again left home to accept an appointment in Jiangling under the powerful general Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404). But in the winter of

401 his mother died, and he returned home and remained there in mourning for three years, as a filial son was then expected to do after the death of a parent. Probably late in the year of 404, Tao Qian left home for the fourth time to serve as an adviser to a general, probably Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), who had just suppressed the rebellion led by Huan Xuan and was to found his own dynasty of Song in 420. During the first half of 405, Tao served in the same capacity on the staff of another general and probably returned home soon afterward. At any rate, later that year he went to accept an official position for the fifth and the last time. But he did not have to go far this time, because his new post was magistrate of Pengze, a county only thirty miles from his home. Again, he did not stay long on the job, quitting it after merely eighty days or so.

In reading this biographical sketch of Tao Qian, this question inevitably arises in our mind: what motivated the poet to venture into the political world so frequently? In “Guiqulai xi ci xu” 歸去來兮辭序 (Preface to “returning home”), he gave these reasons for his last sojourn in the political world: “I was poor, and what I got from farming was not enough to support my family. The house was full of children, and the rice jar was empty, and I could not see any way to supply the necessities of life. Most of my relatives and friends urged me to become a magistrate. All of a sudden I embraced this idea but had no way to pursue it . . .” (Tao Qian 1996: 135). When looking back on his official careers, Tao Qian invariably emphasized that he had entered the political world out of dire economical need. In “Yin jiu” 飲酒 (Drinking wine), No. 19, he wrote, “In bygone days of long ago, driven by constant hunger, / I threw away my plow and went for learning and officialdom” (Tao Qian 1996: 246). On a different occasion, he wrote, “I was in dire straits in my youth. I was frequently driven by the poverty at home to rush east and west” (“To My Sons, Yan and the Others” 與子儼等疏; Tao Qian 1996: 441).

What Tao Qian said about the motivation for his pursuit of officialdom needs to be closely examined. It is true that he considered his official pursuits a waste of his life or a fall into what he called the “dust net.” But this is a retrospective view derived from years of his failed experience, rather than a forethought with which he set out on his path to officialdom. Considering all he told us about his admiration for his distinguished ancestors, his youthful ambitions, and his hopes for his sons’ future, it is hard for us to believe that he was not motivated in some degree by an aspiration for political achievement each time he left behind his familiar life on the farm. In fact, in “Rong Mu” 榮木 (Trees in blossom), probably written shortly before he left home to serve under Liu Yu in 404, he himself revealed how his youthful aspiration for a great name had spurred him to go afar in pursuit of an official career:

Grease my chariot of “name”;	脂我名車
Whip up my horses of “name.”	策我名驥
Although a thousand <i>li</i> is far,	千里雖遙
How dare I not go?	孰敢不至

(ll. 29–32, Tao Qian 1996: 13)

In my opinion, there is a deep moral and psychological reason for Tao Qian avoiding explicitly relating his failed official life to his youthful ambitions throughout his works. It is most likely that he did not want to let his own failures sully the Confucian ideal of establishing a great name that had given hope and direction to his early life. Moreover, by keeping this Confucian ideal alive in his heart, he could strive to find lofty moral meaning in his private life on the farm.

In fact, Tao Qian began to see himself joining the ranks of “scholar-officials who did not meet with good fortune” after he retired from public life and became a farmer-hermit. He wrote a rhapsody entitled “Gan shi buyu” 感士不遇賦 (Moved by scholar-officials who did not meet with good fortune), a self-conscious imitation of Dong Zhongshu’s and Sima Qian’s rhapsodies. In the preface, he explained that it was the reading of those rhapsodies that moved him to compose a rhapsody of his own on the same theme. Like Dong and Sima, he sought to come to grips with the willful destiny that had prevented him from achieving a great name as a scholar-official. In his rhapsody, he employed all the major motifs introduced by Sima Qian. Lamenting the swift passage of time and the lost opportunity to establish a great name, he wrote in the preface:

Alas, men lodge in the body for a hundred years and end in the twinkling of an eye. They have difficulty in establishing their conduct, but are not rewarded with a single city. (Tao Qian 1996: 365; Davis 1983.1: 177)

Expressing grievances about being born into a wrong time, he wrote:

Alas for scholars who do not meet with good fortune	哀哉士之不遇
And do not live in the age of Yandi and Di Kuei!	已不在炎帝帝魁之世
.....	...
They hope to promote their virtue to match the	庶進德以及時
time,	
But when the time comes, it does not prove	時既至而不惠
favourable	

(ll. 37–38, 41–42, Tao Qian 1996: 366;
Davis 1983.1: 178–179)

Condemning corrupt officials who slander and oppress virtuous and talented scholars, he wrote:

Oh! "Alike as thunderclaps," men censure the different;	雷同毀異
Creatures hate the superior among their number.	物惡其上
The excellent planner is called misguided;	妙算者謂迷
He who makes straight his way is called wild.	直道者云妄
If a man is completely open and without suspicion,	坦至公而無猜
In the end he will meet disgrace and suffer slander.	卒蒙恥以受謗

(ll. 29–34, Tao Qian 1996: 366; Davis 1983.1: 178)

Pondering over how unfathomable "destiny" overturns purported heavenly justice and makes sport of the virtuous and worthy, he wrote:

We have received the clear teaching of the Former Kings	承前王之請誨
That "the way of Heaven is without partiality."	曰天道之無親
Purely attaining unity, it serves as a mirror;	澄得一以作鑒
Constantly it supports goodness and aids virtue	恆輔善而佑仁
Yet Bo Yi came to old age and had continual anger,	夷投老以長飢
While Yan Hui died young and was poor besides.	回早夭而又貧

(ll. 57–62, Tao Qian 1996: 366; Davis 1983.1: 179–180)

Sighing over the unfathomable nature of destiny, he asked:

Why is the fair time so easily overturned?	悉良辰之易傾
How is the victory of mischief so speedy?	胡害勝其乃急
Azure Heaven is remote;	蒼昊遐緬
Man's affairs have no end;	人事無已
Sometimes moved, sometimes unaware,	有感有味
Who can measure its workings?	疇測其理

(ll. 81–86, Tao Qian 1996: 366–367;
Davis 1983.1: 181)

Expressing the resolve to endure poverty and hardship alone, he declared:

Better be "firm in adversity" and save one's ideals,	寧固窮以濟意
Than compromise and bring trouble to oneself.	不委曲而累己
When carriage and cap are no glory,	既軒冕之非榮
How should a hemp-quilted gown be shame?	豈緼袍之為恥

(ll. 87–90, Tao Qian 1996: 367; Davis 1983.1: 181)

Besides these motifs borrowed from Sima Qian, Tao Qian aptly appropriated the strategy developed by Li Kang to cope with destiny: to problematize wealth and rank capriciously bestowed by it. Since deprivation of wealth and distinction was the main instrument used by destiny to torment the virtuous and talented, Li Kang contended that the virtuous and talented could defiantly fight back by denying any relevance of wealth and rank to the lofty goals of their lives. Adopting the same strategy, Tao Qian ended his rhapsody by posing this question: “When carriage and cap are no glory, / How should a hemp-quilted gown be shame?”

By so proudly accepting poverty and hardship, Tao Qian conveyed an even stronger sense of defiance against destiny than Li Kang had done, and thereby made his rhapsody far less plaintive or despairing than Dong’s, Sima’s, and Li’s. Of course, such proud acceptance of poverty and hardship was anything but new. The brave endurance of poverty and hardship had long been praised by Confucians as an important character trait of virtuous people.²³ What was new in Tao Qian’s rhapsody was his projection of a farmer-hermit in the image of a moral paragon:

He may break the soil to delight himself,	或擊壤以自歡
Or he may bring great aid to mankind.	或大濟於蒼生
Since no “hiding or leaping forth” is not apportioned,	靡潛躍之非分
He will always act proudly in accord with his feeling.	常傲然以稱情

(ll. 5–8, Tao Qian 1996: 365; Davis 1983.1: 177)

It is important to point out that here Tao Qian placed a farmer-hermit who “break[s] the soil to delight himself” alongside a scholar-official who “bring[s] great aid to mankind.” By presenting the two figures in parallel, Tao apparently wanted to show that farming and public life provide equal means of establishing a great name. To him, whether one opted for “hiding or leaping forth” is in no small measure “apportioned” or predetermined by one’s in-born disposition. In choosing between the two options, he stressed, one had to “always act proudly in accord with his feeling.” In the meantime, he pointed out that in times of political upheaval the former choice was the preferred means of establishing a great name:

When fine nets are fashioned, the fish are frightened;	密網裁而魚駭
When large nets are made, birds are startled.	宏羅制而鳥驚
The excellent perception of the man of understanding	彼達人之善覺
Makes him flee from emolument and turn to farming.	乃逃祿而歸耕
The mountains with their height embrace his shadow;	山嶷嶷而懷影

The rivers by their breadth hide his voice.	川汪汪而藏聲
For the lords of Xuan [Yuan] and Tang he ever yearns;	望軒唐而永嘆
He delights in poverty and humbleness, renounces glory.	甘貧賤以辭榮

(ll. 11–18, Tao Qian 1996: 366; Davis 1983.1: 177)

Here Tao Qian shows us why “turning to farming” holds out the promise of establishing a great name to all virtuous and talented scholars who have not met with good fortune. First, it constitutes a defiant rejection of the dark political world and attests to one’s moral integrity. Such a conscientious act of dissension earned Bo Yi and Shu Qi great fame as moral paragons. Second, it represents a proud embrace of poverty and humble station and exhibits one’s moral strength and determination. Such a stolid acceptance of poverty and humble station gave Yan Hui a great name as a moralist. So, by turning to farming, Tao believed, one could aim to attain at once the two great moral virtues for which Bo Yi, Shu Qi, and Yan Hui were respectively remembered by posterity.

To project this ideal vision of farming was no easy task for Tao Qian. Bo Yi and Shu Qi never engaged themselves in farming throughout their self-imposed exile in the Shouyang mountains. Nor did Yan Hui take up farming as he endured the plight of “poverty and humbleness.” Moreover, not only did Confucius not praise farming, he actually made very uncomplimentary remarks about Chang Ju and Jie Nie, the two farmer-hermits (*Lunyu yinde*, 38/18/6). Taking their cues from these remarks, later Confucians tended to take a very dim view of farming. To change this entrenched derogatory view, Tao Qian frequently recast the images of Chang Ju and Jie Nie in a new positive light and even took issue with Confucius’ contempt for farming. By projecting farming as an alternative to public life for achieving a great name, he obviously aimed to vindicate the moral significance of his new life as a farmer-hermit. This personal concern came to the fore when he breached the conventional impersonality of a rhapsody and delivered these ending lines in his own voice: “Truly I am unlucky in my time and so choose simplicity; / Let me with gladness turn to a state of rest. / Cherishing my solitary feelings, I shall finish my years, / And decline a good price from court and marketplace” (ll. 91–94, Tao Qian 1996: 367; Davis 1983.1: 181). Unlike the endings of the three rhapsodies by Dong, Sima, and Li, these lines are not permeated with an air of despondency and helplessness. Rather, they convey a sense of ease and even triumph felt by someone who has turned the punishment of destiny into a new opportunity to fulfill the Confucian demands for a great name. Seen in a broad historical perspective, this rhapsody represents yet a new kind of destiny-centered Confucian theory of *ming*.

Trusting the Natural Course of Things (*Xinming*): Daoist and *Xuanxue* Visions of Life

In the rhyming dictionary *Pei wen yun fu* 佩文韻府, *ming* is defined as, among other things, “the Dao” 道 (Zhang Yushu 1983.3: 3260). Although this notion of *ming* lies at the core of theories of *ming* developed by Daoists and *xuanxue* advocates, it was probably not originally formulated by them. In the *Book of Changes*, we find that *ming*, apart from its primary sense of Heaven’s demands, is used to denote the Dao, the permanent course of physical nature or heaven. The “Commentary on the Judgments” *tuanzhuan* 彖傳, for the Qian Hexagram reads, “The change and transformation of the Dao of *Qian* in each instance keeps the *xing* and *ming* of things correct” 乾道變化。各正性命 (Kong [1816] 1980.1: 14; Lynn 1994: 129; trans. slightly modified). Paired together, *xing* and *ming* both refer to the innate qualities and tendencies of things endowed by physical nature and governed by the Dao of *Qian*, the cardinal principle of pure yang. It is noteworthy that the Dao of *Qian*, which “keeps *xing* and *ming* of things correct,” is itself spoken of as *tianming* 天命 or *tian zhi ming* 天之命 (heaven’s permanent course) in the “Commentary on Judgments” for two other hexagrams (Kong [1816] 1980.1: 39). The identification of *xing* and *ming* with the Dao is even more clearly set forth in the commentary “*Shuo gua*” 說卦 (Explaining the trigrams): “In the distant past, the way the sages made the *Changes* was as follows: it was to be used as a means to stay in accord with the principles of *xing* and *ming*. It was for this reason that they determined what the Dao of Heaven was, which they defined in terms of yin and yang, what the Dao of Earth was, which they defined in terms of hard and soft” (Kong [1816] 1980.1: 93; Lynn 1994: 120; trans. slightly modified).

Was Confucius thinking of *ming* along the same lines when he remarked, “Death and life are a matter of *ming*; wealth and rank depend on *tian*” (*Lunyu yinde*, 22/12/5)? Similarly, was Mencius thinking of *ming* in terms of the Dao, yin and yang, hard and soft, when he said, “No one has made it happen but it happens—this is *ming* [destiny]” (*Mengzi yinde*, 37/5A/6)? In both cases, it is very hard to answer yes. Instead of identifying *ming* with yin and yang, the permanent course of change, both Confucius and Mencius viewed it as a mysterious, incomprehensible force of predetermination, because it decided man’s allotment of life span and wealth and rank without any sense of moral justice. Neither of them espoused a positive view of *ming* as coterminous with the Dao, even though such a view is articulated in “Commentary on Judgments” and “Explaining the Trigrams.”²⁴ It is the Daoists and *xuanxue* advocates who unequivocally embraced this view and developed it into various Dao-centered theories of *ming*. In chapter 16 of

Daodejing, traditionally regarded as the earliest Daoist classic, Laozi defined *ming* as the principle of eternity (*chang* 常) to which all things return, and explained how one could become one with the Dao by observing this eternal principle:

Things in all their multitude:	夫物芸芸
Each one returns to its root.	各復歸其根
Return to the root means stillness.	歸根曰靜
Stillness means return to <i>ming</i> .	是謂復命
Return to <i>ming</i> means eternity.	復命曰常
Cognition of eternity means clarity.	知常曰明
If one does not recognize the eternal,	不知常
One falls into confusion and sin.	妄作凶
If one recognizes the eternal, one becomes forbearing.	知常容
Forbearance leads to justice.	容乃公
Justice leads to mastery.	公乃王
Mastery leads to heaven.	王乃天
Heaven leads to Dao.	天乃道
Dao leads to duration.	道乃久

(Gao 1996: 300–302; Wilhelm 1985: 33;
trans. slightly modified)

In “De chongfu” 德充符 (The sign of virtue complete), chapter 5 of *Zhuangzi*, we find a similar explanation of *ming*: “Life and death, existence and disappearance, failure and success, poverty and wealth, worthiness and unworthiness, denigration and fame, hunger and thirst, cold and heat are the alternations of things and the workings of *ming*” (Guo Qingfan 1961: 1/5/212). The workings of *ming* enumerated here are none other than the concrete manifestations of the yin-yang operation of the Dao. In “Da zongshi” 大宗師 (The great and venerable teacher), chapter 6 of *Zhuangzi*, *ming* is defined in the same way: “Life and death are *ming*. Constant as the succession of night and day, they are a matter of heaven” *tian* 天 (Guo Qingfan 1961: 1/6/241). In translating these two passages, Burton Watson renders the word “*ming*” as “fated” and “fate” (Watson 1968: 73–74, 80). This translation is apparently inaccurate. Completely predictable and constant, “the workings of *ming*,” or the alternation of the bipolar opposites, are anything but “fated” or “fate.” In both cases, the word “*ming*” does not indicate appointed lots determined by an unfathomable and capricious force as conceptualized by Confucius and Mencius. Instead, the word refers to the constant and eternal course of changes, just as it does in the *Daodejing* passage discussed. Considering this highly affirmative view of *ming*, it is little wonder

that Laozi, Zhuangzi, and other Daoists not only did not dread *ming* as a dark force but actually advocated the embracing of it in the hope of achieving integration with the Dao.

In *Liezi*, a Daoist text composed after *Zhuangzi*, a chapter entitled “Li ming” 力命 is devoted to explaining why and how we should embrace *ming* with ease, calm, and hope. Of the many tales told in this chapter, the first is a conversation between two fictitious characters, Li 力 (endeavor) and Ming 命 (the constant course of things). Li begins by claiming, “Whether a man lives long or dies young, succeeds or fails, has high rank or low, is poor or rich, all this is within the reach of my endeavor” (Yang Bojun 1979: 192; Graham 1990: 121). Ming rebukes this claim by saying: “When we say that a thing is called *ming*, how can there be anything that controls it? . . . Long life and short, failure and success, high rank and low, wealth and poverty, come about of themselves” (Yang Bojun 1979: 193; Graham 1990: 122; trans. slightly modified). In the original text, the author uses the adverb “*zi*” 自 (by themselves) five times to drive home this point: *ming* is a natural course of things that runs by its internal necessity and is not subject to any outside control. If one grasps this modus operandi of *ming*, one will realize that all things, either in nature or the human world, happen of themselves, not because of any external efforts. Therefore, to know *ming* is, for Daoists, to give up all striving and stop interfering with the alternation of life and death, success and failure, wealth and poverty. According to the author, if one surrenders one’s life to *ming* through nonaction, one can rise above all mundane attachments: “For man who trusts *ming* 信命, there is no difference between long life and short; for one who trusts the principles 信理, by which things happen, nothing to approve or reject; for one who trusts his mind 信心, nothing that is agreeable or offensive; for one who trusts his nature 信性, nothing that secures or endangers him” (Yang Bojun 1979: 206–207; Graham 1990: 130). Here the *ming* 命 and *xing* 性 are paired off in the same way they are in *Yi zhuang* passages discussed above, as they both mean the “inner tendencies” or the incipient, natural course of things to be trusted and followed. If there is a slight difference between the two, it may be in that the former accentuates the nature of external things and the latter human nature. Such a differentiation becomes obvious in the next pair of terms: the *li* 理 (principles) and *xin* 心 (heart-mind). These two terms respectively emphasize “inner tendencies” inherent in physical nature and in the human heart/mind. Apparently, in this passage, “*ming*” 命, “*li*” 理, “*xin*” 心, and “*xing*” 性 are essentially synonymous. So, in urging us to trust each of them, the author meant to repeat the same point: let the “inner tendencies” of one’s own nature run their own course without the slightest intent to approve or reject anything. In repeatedly using the adverb “*zi*” (by themselves) to characterize the devel-

opment of these “inner tendencies,” the author came very close to appropriating, as later *xuanxue* advocates would do, “*ziran*” 自然 (word Laozi used to characterize the modus operandi of the Dao) to describe this spontaneous, nonstriving approach to individual life.

As shown in *Yi zhuàn*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Liezi*, the word “*ming*” was already closely associated or even identified with the Dao by Han times. So, it is only natural that later Daoist-minded thinkers would go one step further and make this argument: if one spontaneously trusts to *ming* (*weiming* 委命),²⁵ one may not only overcome mundane attachments but actually integrate with the eternal Dao. Indeed, when developing his theory of *ziran* and *dubua* 獨化 (self-transformation), Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312) eloquently articulated his belief in such great promise of “trusting to *ming*.”

In annotating *Zhuangzi*, Guo Xiang elaborated on Laozi’s idea of *ziran* as the ultimate principle of “self-generation.” If Laozi had merely adumbrated that fundamental meaning of *ziran* in chapter 25 of *Daodejing*, Guo Xiang gave a lucid exposition of it in the following passage: “What is it that exists prior to things? I think that yin-yang is what comes before things. Then, if one conceives yin-yang to be a thing, what comes before it then? I think that *ziran* comes before it. *Ziran* is that which becomes itself as a thing . . . everything is self-generated and is not made what it is” (Guo Xiang [SBBY ed.], 7.29a–b). Here, Guo explored the meaning of *ziran* with respect to the existence of individual things. As each individual thing in the world is self-generated, he argued, it must of necessity have an independent existence of its own and follow its own course of growth. Consequently, to let each individual thing develop on its own is the right way of heaven and earth. He presented this argument in his annotation to “Xiaoyao You” 逍遙遊 (Transcendental roaming), the first chapter of *Zhuangzi*:

It is certain that the myriad things follow the right way of being naturally so. To be naturally so means that things become what they are without any effort. Like a great roc that soars high, a little quail that flies close to the ground, a great rose of Sharon that lives a long time, and the morning mushroom that lasts for a short time, all living things develop capacity of one kind or another by themselves—not with any effort. If things develop capacity of one kind or another without any effort, they follow the right way. Therefore, to follow the right way of heaven and earth is to let all things develop according to their own nature. (Guo Xiang, SBBY ed., 1.5a)

Central to Guo’s theory of *ziran* is the idea of nonaction, *wuwei* 無為, translated here as “without any effort.” For Guo, nonaction is not a matter of not doing anything, but of *only* doing what one is born to do. In other words,

nonaction means noninterference in the action of an individual who is following his *ming*, or “inner tendencies” of development. As long as a man follows his *ming*, he is actually abiding by the principle of nonaction regardless of whatever he does. So, one can be the most involved minister at court and yet remain a true man of nonaction, provided that one was born to lead the life of a minister.

Discussing *ziran* on a more metaphysical level, Guo went to great lengths to demonstrate the transcendental promise of a self-generating, self-transforming individual existence:

It is often said that obscure images rest upon Shadow, Shadow upon Body, and Body upon the Maker of things. Let me ask, “A Maker of things? Is there one or is there not?” If the answer is no, then how it is that things are made? If the answer is yes, then why is it that there are so many forms for one same thing? Only when we understand that the myriad forms are self-made can we begin to talk about the making of things. Among all phenomena in the world of things—no matter how obscure they seem—there is nothing that does not go through self-transformation (*dubua*) in the mysterious, invisible realm. (Guo Xiang, *SBBY* ed., 1.25a)

The transformation of life and death goes on and on, just as spring alternates with autumn, winter with summer, in the cycle of four seasons. . . . Although the living regards the state of being alive as life, the dead regards the state of being alive as death. So, there is no life to speak of. Conversely, while the living regards the state of being dead as death, the dead regards the state of being dead as life. So, there is no death to speak of, either. Thus, there is neither death nor life, neither possibility nor impossibility for either. (Guo Xiang, *SBBY* ed., 1.15a–b)

In the first passage, Guo told us that to follow one’s *ming* or fixed course of life is not merely to live out one’s life spontaneously, but to become one with the invisible process of self-transformation (*dubua* 獨化) itself in “the mysterious and invisible realm.” To him, the self-transformation of *one* particular thing is one and the same as the Dao, the eternal process of changes in *all* things. Thus, self-transformation, too, is cyclical and eternal, and transcends the boundaries of life and death. In the second passage, he elaborated on this transcendental significance of self-transformation. Once an individual person completely trusts to *ming* and follows the “inner tendencies” of his own life, Guo maintained, he will transcend the difference between life and death: “there is neither death nor life, neither possibility nor impossibility for either.” In other words, he will be able to ride on the Dao, the eternal process

of changes, and know no bounds of life and death. Guo regarded such a triumphant integration with the Dao as the ultimate promise of *ziran* and *dubua*.

Thanks to Guo's theory of *ziran* and *dubua*, Tao Qian could see his new farming life in an entirely new light and find much greater significance in it than he could by looking at it from the hedonist or Confucian perspective. Indeed, Guo's theory not only opened up a new mental horizon but actually furnished Tao with the very philosophical terms for depicting his sense of self-realization in the happiest moments of his farming life. Now let us consider how he appropriated the term "*ziran*" in one of his most famous poems:

Returning to Live on the Farm, No. 1	歸田園居
From early days I have been out of tune with worldly affairs,	少無適俗韻
2 My inborn disposition is to love hills and mountains. By mistake I got caught in the dust net,	性本愛丘山 誤落塵網中
4 Since I left home, ten years have gone by! A bird in confinement longs for the native grove,	一去已十年 羈鳥戀舊林
6 The fish in a pond thinks fondly of the former depths. I have opened up land on the border of the south wild:	池魚思故淵 開荒南畝際
8 Simple I will remain as I have returned to gardens and fields.	守拙歸園田
The square dwelling covers ten <i>mu</i> and more,	方宅十餘畝
10 The thatched house has eight or nine rooms. Elms and willows hide the rear eaves in the shade,	草屋八九間 榆柳蔭後簷
12 Peaches and plums grow orderly before the hall. Dim, dim is the view of the distant villages,	桃李羅堂前 曖曖遠人村
14 Thick, thick is the smoke rising from the houses. A dog is barking in the depth of a lane,	依依墟里煙 狗吠深巷中
16 A cock crows at the top of a mulberry tree. Inside my doors there is no dust or hubbub,	雞鳴桑樹顛 戶庭無塵雜
18 Within empty rooms I have found peace and leisure. For a long time I was prisoner in a cage,	虛室有餘閒 久在樊籠裏
20 Once again I could return to <i>ziran</i> .	復得返自然

(Tao Qian 1996: 73)

Tao ended this poem with the celebratory statement "Once again I could return to *ziran*." *Ziran* in this line is used in the sense defined by Guo Xiang: the development of an individual thing along its natural course. What the

poet most exulted in was not his physical return to fields and gardens, but his return to his own *ming* or the natural course of his life. This becomes indisputably clear when we relate the ending line to the two opening lines. There, he declared what his inner nature or tendencies were and how he had unwittingly been led astray and fallen into the trap of the worldly affairs. While bemoaning the loss of *ziran* in the first two lines and celebrating the regaining of it in the last two, Tao provided a few highly evocative details of rustic life in the intervening lines: gardens and fields, a thatched house, elms and willows, a dog, a cock, and a home unsoiled by worldly dust. All these images appear in neatly wrought couplets and without reference to specific time or place. Thus, one cannot say for sure whether these images are fragments of the poet's memory, his unmediated sense impression, or his ideal vision of a farmer-hermit's life. Probably born of a coalescence of memory, perception, and imagination, these images bring forth a symbolic vision of the life the poet believed he had been born to live.

The real spiritual significance of *ziran* seems to have been lost to some scholars who have rendered the term as "Nature" or "individual freedom."²⁶ Although Tao Qian did return to the midst of nature and enjoy a good measure of individual freedom after his retirement from public life, neither "Nature" nor "individual freedom" in and of itself is the ultimate goal of his return to the farm. In the preface to his rhapsody "Returning Home!" he made it clear that his return was simply a matter of following his natural course of life: "The disposition of my nature is to be what I am (*ziran*); it cannot not be forced and coerced. Although hunger and cold press me hard, to go against myself makes me sick" (Tao Qian 1996: 135). Like Guo Xiang, Tao Qian believed that following one's natural course of life would afford something much more profound and more rewarding than mere joys of gardens and fields or individual freedom. It would lead to a complete self-transformation and integration with the eternal process of change:

Returning Home!

歸去來兮辭

So riding on change, I shall return to my ultimate home.
Happy as I am with my destiny, how can I doubt any
more?

聊乘化以歸盡
樂夫天命復奚疑

(ll. 59–60, Tao Qian 1996: 391–392)

Like Guo, Tao regarded self-transformation as the ultimate promise of *ziran*, as it offers the most effective means of overcoming human transience. Nowhere did he make this point clearer than in the last section of "Body, Shadow, Spirit."

Spirit's Explanation:

神釋

	The Great Porter makes no partial effort:	大鈞無私力
2	All things grow in profusion by themselves.	萬理自森著
	Man joins Heaven and Earth as the Three Forces—	人為三才中
4	Is this not because of me?	豈不以我故
	Although you and I are not of the same kind,	與君雖異物
6	Being alive, we are bound together.	生而相依附
	Mutually dependent in good or bad times,	結託善惡同
8	How can I not share with you what I know:	安得不相語
	The Three August Ones were great saints,	三皇大聖人
10	But now who can tell their whereabouts?	今復在何處
	Pengzu was blessed with a long, long life,	彭祖愛永年
12	Yet he could not live forever even though he wanted to.	欲留不得住
	Old or young, death is the same,	老少同一死
14	Wise or foolish, there is no difference.	賢愚無復數
	Drunken day after day you may forget,	日醉或能忘
16	But won't it hasten the arrival of old age?	將非促齡具
	Doing good always brings joy to you,	立善常所欣
18	But who will be there to heap praises on you?	誰當為汝譽
	Too much thinking will harm my life,	甚念傷吾生
20	I will just trust myself to the course of destiny.	正宜委運去
	Give yourself to the cycles of the Great Change	縱浪大化中
22	With neither joy nor fear.	不喜亦不懼
	When you should go, you simply go,	應盡便須盡
24	Without much thought of it.	無復獨多慮

(Tao Qian 1996: 65)

In the first two lines, Spirit affirms the importance of “self-generation” and thus reveals itself to be the spokesman for *ziran*. Next, Spirit ridicules the inability of both Body (lines 15–16) and Shadow (lines 17–18) to cope with death. He introduces the “Great Change” *dabua* 大化, a term not dissimilar to Guo’s term “*dubua*” examined above, as a solution to death. Like Guo, Spirit believes that the Great Change constitutes the most effective negation of the finality of death. He argues that death as much as life itself is merely a phase in the eternal process of Great Change, and that thus it should not be dreaded and avoided. He urges people to embrace life and death alike, follow the natural course of their lives and deaths without fear or exultation, and thereby achieve an ultimate integration of the self with the everlasting Great Change. In many ways, this poem strikes us as an impassioned poetic version of Guo’s theory of *ziran* and *dubua*, as it begins by affirming the principle of

“self-transformation” and ends with the promise of an integration with the Great Change.²⁷ Indeed, while Guo used abstract terms like *ziran* and *dubua* to explain the transcendental promise of “trusting to *ming*,” Tao sought to demonstrate the same thing with his own lived experience as a scholar turned farmer-hermit.

Conclusion

“True poetry,” says Jouffrey, a phenomenologist thinker, “expresses one thing only, the torments of the human mind as it confronts the question of its destiny” (Jouffroy 1838: *Mélanges philosophiques*, 2d ed.: 417; cited in Poulet 1956: 28). This definition of “true poetry” is far from being sufficient to indicate the breadth, complexity, and transforming power of Tao Qian’s poetry.

What Tao Qian confronted is much broader than the question of destiny alone. The central themes of his poetry are the entangled questions of life span, demands, destiny, and natural course, all couched in the word “*ming*” but variously emphasized by the competing theories of *ming*. These theories provided for him multiple vantage points through which he constantly looked anew at his own life as well as human existence in general amid the changing circumstances of his life. Influenced by earlier writers of pentasyllabic poetry, Tao frequently brooded over the transience of human existence and endorsed *carpe diem* as the only sensible (non)solution to it. As old age gradually crept up on him, he became ever more attracted to the life-span-obsessed hedonist theory of *ming* and gave himself over to the most melancholy lamentation over aging and the inevitable end of his own life. But in his early life, he warmly embraced the demands-centered Confucian theory of *ming*, and he saw the meaning of his life in terms of fulfilling the demands made of a Confucian scholar: to establish a name through eminent accomplishments in public service. Later, when confronting his repeated failures to fulfill such demands, he often identified himself with the Confucian scholars who “did not meet with good fortune” and turned to the destiny-centered Confucian theory of *ming* as a source of consolation. Like Dong Zhongshu and Sima Qian, he sought to console himself with the thought that his failure had nothing to do with his endeavor, moral virtue, or talent, but the predestined untimeliness of his life—a bad time when the political world was ruled by corruption and injustice and in which a man of moral integrity could not thrive. When contemplating his new life as a hermit-farmer after he quit the political world, Tao sought to discern its spiritual significance in the light of the Daoist and *xuanxue* theories of *ming*. According to Guo Xiang, the natural course of each individual thing is a

process of self-transformation (*dubua*), which is one and the same as the cosmic Dao. In the light of Guo's theory, Tao perceived the transcendental promise for his return to his farming life. Believing that a hermit-farmer's life was what he had been born to live and was commensurate with his *xing* (inner nature), he considered his return to it as "*weiming*"—trusting himself to the natural course of his own life. As he went through this process of self-transformation, he believed that he would achieve a full realization of his inner nature and therefore an integration with the Dao itself.

Tao Qian's poetry is far more complex than just "torments of the human mind." As he contemplated his life through these multiple vistas of *ming*, he revealed to us an extraordinarily complex spectrum of inward experience: the high hopes of an ambitious youth, the deep disappointment of an upright official ill-adapted to a corrupt world, the elation of being freed from the travails of the political world, the "thoughtless and wordless" experience of a scholar turned farmer, unswerving moral faith in the face of poverty and hardship, universal lamentation and personal despair over the transience of human life, the agony of an introspective and retrospective soul, and the defiant merriment of the writer of a self-epitaph. The complexity of Tao's inward experience should also be understood in the light of the dramatic tension among the types of these inward experiences. Although Tao seemed to favor one particular vision of life over others in a given period of his time, it is wrong to assume that his changing views of life represent a unilinear progression, one replacing another. Quite to the contrary, we can observe him embracing all his conflicting views on life at different periods. Consequently, his feelings and moods engendered by these views are set in dramatic contrast to each other, and achieve the effect of mutual intensification. Such a dramatic change in feelings and moods reaches a fever pitch in "Twenty Poems after Drinking," where the poet altered his views of life and entered a different emotional state almost from poem to poem.

To understand fully the transforming power of Tao Qian's poetry, we must consider the interactive relationships between his interpretations of *ming* and his acts of envisioning human life. While diverse theories of *ming* opened up the interpretive horizons for Tao to examine his own life, his self-examination inevitably altered, in turn, all these interpretive horizons. In fact, the changes brought by Tao to the theories of *ming* are no less than profound. For instance, his depiction of poverty-stricken farmer as a Confucian moral paragon pointed a new direction for development of a destiny-centered Confucian theory of *ming* by providing scholars who did not meet with good fortune with an alternative way to establish their own moral virtues, *lide* 立德, in a private realm. By the same token, in appropriating Guo Xiang's notions of "self-so-ness" and "self-transformation," Tao discovered

transcendental significance in spontaneously following the course of life predetermined by one's innate nature and the cosmic Dao at large. By claiming transcendental promise of "*weiming*," he did not merely distill his lived experiences as a hermit-farmer into an enchanting vision of life; more important, in the process he remolded Daoist and *xuanxue* theories of *ming* into a practicable method of ultimate self-realization. Such a transformation of abstract theories of *ming* into an effective means of self-interpretation and self-realization speaks eloquently to the transforming power of Tao's poetry.

Notes

1. Translation modified. For a different translation, see David Schaberg's essay (Chap. 1). The term "Heaven" is capitalized when it refers to moral Heaven. For references to physical heaven, as in the Xunzi instances, lowercase is used. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. "Demands," "life span," "destiny," and "natural course" will be the focus of my attention in this essay. These four terms denote four different major meanings of the same Chinese word "*ming*."

3. For the rise of Tao Qian from an obscure hermit-poet in his own time to a towering figure in the Chinese literary canon, see Kang-i Sun Chang 2000.

4. I discuss at length the prominence of hedonist thought in Han and Wei-Jin poetry in my book on early pentasyllabic poetry (Zong-Qi Cai 1996). "Hedonistic" indicates one who displays the characteristics of a hedonist lifestyle while not necessarily being an exponent of the philosophy of hedonism; "hedonist" refers more strictly to an exponent of hedonism or its effects.

5. For previous translations of Tao Qian's works, see Chang and Sinclair 1953; Hightower 1970 (a complete translation of his poetical works); and Davis 1983 (a complete translation of both his prose and poetical works). For English-language studies of Tao Qian, see Kang-i Sun Chang 1970, 3–46; and Kwong 1994.

6. For a celebration of *carpe diem*, especially wine drinking, as a subtle form of social protest by earlier literary figures, see Xu Zhen'e 徐震堦 1984, especially the "Ren dan" 任誕 chapter (2: 390–410). Of course, wine drinking in Tao Qian's poems is often far more complex than a straightforward hedonistic expression. In his twenty-poem series entitled "Drinking Wine" 飲酒, for instance, the poet "used drinking as a mask for something deeper" (Kang-i Sun Chang 2000: 16). Kang-i Sun Chang's paper has traced the changing perceptions of Tao's wine drinking by Chinese critics.

7. This poem is generally believed to have been written around 413, probably as an afterthought to the philosophical discussion he allegedly had with Hui Yuan 慧遠 (334–416), the leading Buddhist master living on the nearby Lu Mountain. This dating of "Body, Shadow, Spirit" is probably correct, as the poem shares the features of his dated works of this period, being marked by a cheerful celebration of his farm life and an absence of the pessimistic lamentation over human transience.

8. In Tao's *Jishi shi* 即事詩 (Occasional poems), and his *Zengda shi* 贈答詩 (Poems of presentation and reply), written from 414 onward, we can observe an even more intensely personal note of pathos.

9. See, for instance, the charge to King Wen for establishing the Zhou and punishing the Shang in *Mao Shi* 毛詩 (The Mao text of the *Book of Poetry*), no. 236. ll. 35–42, Ruan Yuan [1816] 1980: 508.

10. See, for instance, the charge given by King Xuan of Zhou to the marquis of Han, in *Mao Shi*, no. 261, ll. 4–12, Ruan Yuan [1816] 1980: 508.

11. See the glosses of *zhi* 制 in C. H. Wang 1988.2: 317.

12. This work is collected in Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54) and Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) 1962: 8/56/2495–2528. The following summary of Dong's theory of *ming* is based on my study of this work. For a more detailed discussion of Dong's theory, see Michael Puett's essay (Chap. 2).

13. For a detailed discussion on physiognomy and *ming*, see Stephen R. Bokenkamp's essay (Chap. 6).

14. See his general discussion of *qi* and life span in “Qi shou pian” 氣壽篇 (On qi and long life) in Wang Chong 1990.1: 28–35.

15. See “Ming yi pian” 命義篇 (On the meanings of *ming*) in Wang Chong 1990.1: 45–48.

16. Wang talked about the *guoming* 國命 (the lots of state) in similar terms with the apparent intention of repudiating Dong Zhongshu's view of dynastic mandate. See “Ming yi pian” in Wang Chong 1990.1: 46–47.

17. This work is collected in Ouyang Xun 1965 *juan* 30.1: 541. For an English translation of this work, see Davis 1983.1: 181–184.

18. See Liu Jun's treatise “Bian ming lun” 辯命論 (Discourse on *ming*), collected in Xiao 1977, *juan* 54: 747–754. Due to space limitations, I shall not discuss this important work in this essay.

19. Although Confucius and Mencius mentioned the unjust, miserable fate of some individuals, they did not exclusively focus on it in their discussion of *ming* as these writers did. Moreover, in probing willful destiny, they did not primarily aim to chart a meaningful course of their personal lives in the face of it.

20. See this work in Ouyang Xun 1965, *juan* 30.1: 541. For an English translation of this work, see Davis 1983.1: 184–185.

21. In his rhapsody “Gan shi buyu fu” 感士不遇賦 (Moved by scholar-officials who did not meet with good fortune), Tao went so far as to argue that the quest for a great name is what sets man apart from all other creatures: “Oh, When the Great Mass receives breath, / Why is man alone in having intelligence? / Endowed with divine wisdom, he may hide his brilliance; / Grasping the ‘Three and the Five,’ he may hand down a name” (Tao Qian 1996: 365; Davis 1983.1: 177).

22. See Shen Yue 1974: 8/93/2287. There is no mention of this appointment in Tao's own works.

23. See, for instance, Confucius' praise of Bo Yi and Shu Qi, and Yan Hui for their endurance of poverty and hardship in *Lunyu yinde*: 10/16/11; 12/7/15; 12/7/16.

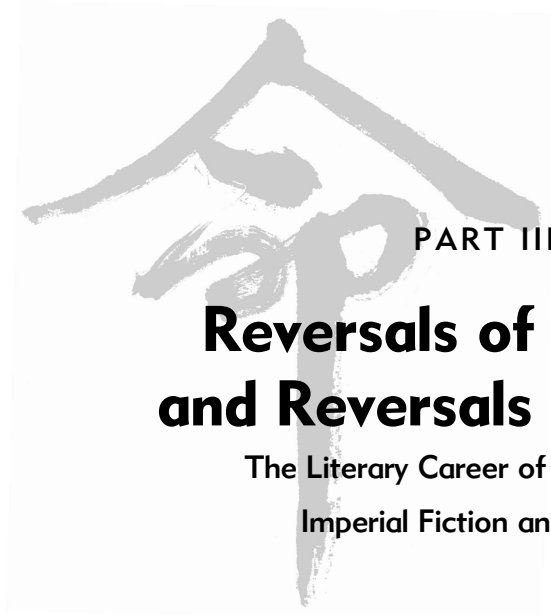
24. The *Commentaries on the Changes* (*Yi zhuan* 易傳), of which these two

commentaries are part, are generally believed to contain many Daoist ideas. The view of *ming* advanced in the two commentaries strikes us as rather Daoistic, as it truly resonates with Daoist views of *ming* to be examined below. The linkage of *xing* and *ming* with the cosmic Dao, however, was to become a central issue of inquiry in the writings of Tang and Song neo-Confucian thinkers.

25. *Xinning* 信命 (trusting *ming*) naturally leads to *weiming* 委命 (trusting to *ming* or entrusting oneself to *ming*).

26. For instance, *ziran* is translated as “nature” in Chang and Sinclair 1953: 30; as “my freedom” in Hightower 1970: 50; and as “Nature” in Davis 1983.1: 46.

27. Chen Yinke considers “Body, Shadow, Spirit” to be of crucial importance to our understanding not only of Tao Qian’s spiritual life and but also of the development of Wei-Jin thought in general. Chen identifies each of the three personae with the poet’s experiential self at a given stage of his life, and takes the sequence of Body, Shadow, Spirit as indicative of the history of his spiritual progress. Furthermore, Chen maintains that each of these three personae epitomizes a distinct school of Wei-Jin thought: Body represents the old theory of *ziran* advocated by the “Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove”; Shadow, the theory of *mingjiao* 名教 imposed by the Jin rulers; and Spirit, the new theory of *ziran* of Tao Qian. These opinions of Chen Yinke are certainly among the most original and insightful observations ever made in his time on Tao Qian and Wei-Jin thought. But today these views do seem rather schematic and oversimplified, especially with regard to Tao’s spiritual progress. Rather than a clear-cut linear progression of Body, Shadow, and Spirit, we find in Tao’s poems a steady intensification of the poet’s inward conflicts over the theories of *ming* embodied in these three personae. See Chen Yinke 1973.2: 381–407.



PART III

Reversals of Fortune and Reversals of Reality

The Literary Career of *Ming* in Late
Imperial Fiction and Drama

8

Turning Lethal Slander into Generative Instruction

Laws, Ledgers, and Changing Taxonomies
of Fictional Production in Late Imperial China

PATRICIA SIEBER

The posthumous comments surrounding the public beheading of one of the most visible literary critics of his day, Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1608–1661), tapped into a long-standing debate about how one’s literary talents, *cai* 才, affect various facets of what was encompassed by the late imperial notion of *ming* 命—that is, one’s public career, one’s longevity, one’s issue, and one’s posthumous reception. Alluding to a perennial opposition between fate and poetic talent, one sympathetic Qing critic observed that Jin’s annotations of Du Fu’s 杜甫 poetry had not only displayed his talent but, by incurring Heaven’s resentment, had precipitated his unfortunate death (Tan Fan 1992: 7). More frequently, however, critics singled out Jin’s commentaries on two of the most notorious vernacular works, the *Shuibu zhuàn* 水滸傳 and the *Xixiang jì* 西廂記, as the principal cause of his early demise. Pointing to the reputedly mendacious and licentious nature of such texts, one critic charged that “Jin Shengtan repeatedly commented on and printed the *Xixiang jì* and other such books and so in the end he came to an unfortunate end and died without issue” (Wang Liqi 1981: 373–374).¹

Conceived against the seventeenth-century boom in the printing of fiction and drama by literati, quasi-literati, and commercial publishers alike (Sieber 2003: 125–132), such censure draws attention to a new dimension of the discourse of *ming* in late imperial times, namely, its problematic relationship to the production and consumption of largely fictional vernacular works. Narrative and dramatic fictions were considered harmless neither for those who read them nor for those who wrote, edited, or printed them. A number of modern scholars have examined the presumed lethality of fiction

to readers, especially with regard to young women whose emotional excitability was thought to leave their health precariously defenseless in the face of the powerful stimulus of fictional love (Ko 1993: 99–103; Zeitlin 1994). This essay will shift the focus of inquiry to the site of production. It will examine what kinds of sociocultural forces shaped the notion that writing, commenting on, or publishing fiction could have an adverse effect on one's *ming*, as well as how the literary practices contested and transformed such punitive scenarios.

I will first investigate to what extent legal regulations, especially prohibitions that called for capital punishment, shaped the notion of lethal consequences for the production of fictional works. Second, I will explore the place of text-related activities in a body of works that expressly concerned themselves with *ming*, the so-called ledger literature. Third, I will look at the increasing blurring of the boundaries between “moral” and “immoral fictional” texts. Cognizant of the potential hazards of disseminating vernacular texts, literati nevertheless increasingly subsumed ever more risqué fictional texts under the rubric of ethically edifying texts with a view toward improving upon, rather than detracting from, their own *ming*. In particular, I will show how individual late Ming dynasty and post-Ming editions of one controversial fictional text, the *Xixiang ji*, negotiated the constraints of earlier punitive paradigms. Among the latter, I will pay special attention to Jin Shengtan's *Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji* 第六才子書西廂記 (Sixth book of genius, the story of the western wing), since it represents the most complex, sophisticated, and original reworking of the matrix of vernacular talent and *ming*-related outcomes. If the legal provisions and the ledger literature had stipulated that wanton production of vernacular texts resulted in death and absence of heirs, Jin phantasmagorically postulated just the opposite scenario for himself and his readers—namely, he laid claim to the literary and social immortality conventionally reserved for sages and their sagely classics.

The Legal Discourse on Drama in the Yuan and the Ming

With the emergence of dramatic performances in large urban theaters in the Song dynasty, concerns with falsehood began to govern the circulation of such public representations. By the Yuan dynasty, the central authorities issued decrees against the performed dissemination of fictional materials. Terms that recur in such documents include: “to compile wantonly” (*wangzhuo* 妄撰), “to slander people” (*wuren* 誣人), “to craft recklessly” (*luanzhi* 亂制), and “to speak wantonly and talk recklessly” (*wangshuo luanyan* 妄說亂言) (Wang Liqi 1981: 3–10). Many of these terms emphasize the fraudulent nature and deleterious effects of such textual and performative

productions. Not all documents spelt out what harm such fictional presentations were thought to entail, but those that did repeatedly singled out the gathering of crowds. Such gatherings in turn would facilitate the undesirable mingling of men and women, occasion potential altercations and subsequent lawsuits, and create a gullible audience for the selling of fake goods such as quack medicines. Accordingly, the propagation of dramatic fictions could be punishable by death, exile, and heavy beating (Wang Liqi 1981: 3). Enforcement, however, was, for all we know, quite lax (An 1992: 156–158).

The Ming dynasty heralded a turning point in the regulation of dramatic productions. Although the early Ming emperors were all theater aficionados themselves (Shen Guangren 1994: 14–32), they imposed strict rules on the consumption of theater for other people. They tolerated professional performance but regulated what could be portrayed on stage. Fearing satire, ridicule, and sedition, the authorities forbade the representation of imperial personages, officials, and historical figures on stage. Offenses against the statute were punishable by severe flogging (Wang Liqi 1981: 11).² Meanwhile, the Ming court was extraordinarily harsh when it came to theatrical performance by nonprofessionals. Idle commoners who were caught singing and dancing might be hung upside down from a tower and forced to drink water until they died (Wang Liqi 1981: 13). The authorities also forbade military personnel to learn how to sing, an offense punishable by having one's tongue cut off. As Guangren Shen has pointed out, anecdotal evidence shows that these draconian measures were in fact carried out (Shen Guangren 1994: 5–13).

Whereas Yuan edicts had been primarily directed against performers, early Ming legal rescripts also targeted those abetting the circulation of plays. Authority figures who condoned theatrical performances featuring the sort of illustrious personages mentioned above were subject to the same penalties as the actors themselves (Wang Liqi 1981: 13). Moreover, early Ming edicts not only forbade oral transmission but outlawed the reproduction of written versions as well:

If there are those who dare to collect and keep [dramatic works that are not sanctioned by the law], transmit them through recitation, or print them for sale, such people shall be apprehended immediately and sent to the judicial office for investigation and adjudication. . . . After official public notices have been posted, within five days one has to make a clean sweep of such songs and take them to the government offices to be burnt. If anyone dares retain such works in their collection, the entire household shall be killed. (Wang Liqi 1981: 14)

In this edict, printing of drama, especially with commercial motives, is, possibly for the first time in Chinese history, correlated with the death penalty. On the one hand, such castigation of commercial intent reflected and reinforced a long-standing Confucian opposition between morality and money. On the other hand, the singling out of printing not only pointed to an emergent market in dramatic texts (Chia 1996: 31) but also established a conceptual framework in which the printing of drama would result in premature death. Paradoxically, perhaps, such measures did not stop the court itself from collecting, transcribing, and printing songs and plays, even going so far as to include a play like the *Xixiang ji* in the early-fifteenth-century imperial encyclopedia *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典.³

The mid- and late Ming dynasty was considerably less restrictive about containing the presumed subversive impact of fiction and drama, but did not give up all surveillance. In the early sixteenth century, the power of fiction was such that the Jiajing emperor felt obliged to limit the use of language derived from fiction as well as from philosophical texts in the composition of memorials (Wang Liqi 1981: 15–16). Zealous local officials occasionally forbade theatricals, and officials had to refrain from associating with actresses and actors lest they be demoted. Although severe corporal punishment for theatricals was no longer enforced when some late Ming editors began to model their own drama-related activities on those of the Ming court (Sieber 2003: 83–122), the cultural memory of the foreshortening of one's life span due to the dissemination of fiction was nevertheless kept alive through the circulation of relevant anecdotes in influential miscellanies such as Shen Defu's 沈德符 (1578–1642) *Wanli yebuobian* 萬曆野獲編 (1606; Shen Defu 1997).

Yet for all the restrictive regulations, the Ming court also introduced the far-reaching distinction between forbidden and edifying plays. While penalizing plays about authority figures, Ming authorities encouraged the professional performance of plays that fostered virtuous behavior among ordinary people. Accordingly, plays about immortals, righteous husbands, virtuous wives, and filial children were all approved. From what we can reconstruct, this division of the theatrical corpus into “good” and “bad” plays dramatically reshaped the *zaju* repertoire; more important perhaps, in contrast to Yuan legislation that condemned various kinds of performances regardless of their content (Wang Liqi 1981: 3), the Ming edicts ascertained the positive didactic potential of drama.

Such a concern with the public dissemination of properly moral texts was not unique to the law. As Chün-fang Yü has insightfully observed, the classificatory schemes of ledger books often mirrored the categories of the penal code (Yü 1981: 129–134).⁴ However, such echoes might not always

coincide chronologically. For instance, the Song dynasty works of ledger literature are largely silent on the issue of vernacular literature. By contrast, late Ming ledgers, both new and updated, have a great deal to say about the dissemination of fiction and its adverse impact on one's *ming*. As I will examine in greater detail, in terms of substantive injunctions against fiction, the ledger literature reflects the principal concerns of penal law; at the same time, such works shift the concern with slander and sedition to questions of moral and sexual propriety.

***Ming* and Fictional Writings in Late Ming Ledger Literature**

In the seventeenth century, even literati whom we consider at the forefront of literary innovation allude to the *ming*-related effects of their print-related endeavors. When pondering whether or not to publish the manuscript version of the *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, Shen Defu decided to eschew publication out of fear of otherworldly retribution for corrupting other people (Shen Defu 1997: 652). Another famous proponent of fictional texts, the well-known playwright, publisher, and impresario Li Yu 李漁 (1610–1680), also alluded to the link between fate and specific textual production. In his usual jocular fashion, Li took his own longevity as a sign of the relative harmlessness of his literary endeavors (Hanan 1981: 207; Li Yu 1992: 11/5–8), even though one of Li Yu's detractors, his contemporary Dong Han 董含 (fl. 1630–1697), was certain that Li Yu's writings would land him in the tongue-plucking hell (Wang Liqi 1981: 375). By the seventeenth century, such serious or humorous caution was not principally a function of the legal punishment, but was arguably influenced by the unprecedented diffusion of the morality literature known as ledgers into Chinese elite and nonelite society.

As Robert Campany's chapter in this volume shows, the notion of heavenly ledgers dates back to at least the medieval period. However, although all major Chinese schools of belief—that is, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—had previously shared the assumption that the cosmos responded to human action, two Southern Song ledgers, the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Tract on action and response, ca. 1164) and a sectarian Daoist text entitled *Taiwei xianjun gongguo ge* 太微仙君功過格 (Ledger of merit and demerit of the Taiwei Immortal, 1171), were unprecedented in terms of the detail and comprehensiveness they conceived for human manipulation of the cosmic process (Brokaw 1991: 31). In original, expanded, and revised form, these two works were the most influential in shaping late Ming elaborations on *ming* (Brokaw 1991: 35).

These two texts paid differing amounts of attention to the production

and diffusion of writing. In the *Tract on Action and Response*, four Daoist gods are depicted as overseeing the records of a person's allotted life span, adding and subtracting from one's lifetime in accordance with a calculus of good and bad deeds outlined in the treatise itself (Yü 1981: 106–107). Interestingly, in the original treatise, neither writing nor bookmaking was explicitly mentioned (Yuan 1995: 3–6). By contrast, the *Taiwei Ledger* confronts the issue of writing and publication outright in several passages. In terms of merit, it notes that the diffusion, recitation, annotation, and publication of certain scriptures as well as the composition of writings extolling the Way are all meritorious. Moreover, it specifically excludes historical and romantic fiction from consideration (Yuan Xiaobo 1995: 176). At the same time, demerit is assigned to all forms of desultory writing and recitation (Yuan Xiaobo 1995: 180).

Whereas the issue of vernacular texts had been somewhat tangential in the Song version of these texts, their late Ming counterparts all address the writing, memorization, recitation, and print diffusion of vernacular texts. In the late Ming, the *Tract on Action and Response* itself, or versions thereof, was widely reprinted by figures as diverse as Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), the infamous iconoclast, and Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562–1626), the conservative leader of the Donglin faction (Yü 1981: 102).⁵ At the same time, these Ming editions were enlarged with pictures and illustrative stories. Even if the original text had been silent on the question of vernacular literature, these short stories addressed themselves directly to the issues of the content of writing, the handling of books, and book printing.⁶

With regard to texts, such stories depicted a largely predictable binary moral universe. Depending on the genre, content, moral intent, and audience, writing had vastly different effects. An aspiring student wrote an erotic poem about a goddess only to find himself hounded to death by her and her attendants. In contrast, the simple calligraphy of a virtuous man had the power to keep evil spirits away from a given locale. The handling of books also generated complementary outcomes. In one example, students at a district school used the sacred books stored in the school library as fuel, conduct which, due to the intervention of Daoist deities, resulted in them being unable to gain public recognition. Only the one student who had been a silent but uneasy bystander was able to pass the examinations, despite his lapse of not openly reprimanding his cohorts.⁷ Similarly, another man's fate was adversely affected by his and his students' careless handling of scraps of paper. Conversely, another young man, whose family had revered and recited a copy of the *Tract on Action and Response* for generations, and who treasured the book and vigorously practiced its teachings, ascended to heaven. In terms of bookmaking, contrary outcomes were also clearly delineated. A poor

scholar pawned his clothing in order to aid in the printing and distribution of the *Tract on Action and Response*. When he later came to official prominence, he was informed in a dream by Guandi, the god of war, that his success had resulted from his earlier act of generosity. Conversely, scholars who were said to have written “immoral books” were believed to be languishing in hell.⁸

One of the most influential Buddhist masters of the late Ming, Zhuhong Yunqi 雲棲祿宏 (1535–1615), produced a redaction of the *Taiwei Hsianjun gongguo ge* with a more explicitly Buddhist and Confucian slant in his own ledger, the *Zizhi lu* 自知錄 (The record of self-knowledge) (preface 1606; Yü 1981: 105). Rather than presenting his ledger as a panacea for all, he aimed it at a spiritual “middle class,” which was neither too evil to ignore all manner of instruction nor too advanced to have to rely on the relative distinctions outlined in the ledger itself.

In terms of book production, Zhuhong privileged the writing of certain religious commentaries, allotting a generous fifty points with a lifetime maximum of 1,500 points. Engraving, printing and distributing, reciting, or revering scriptures only earned one or two points. Corresponding demerits include the following: for every word that slandered Buddhist scriptures, ten demerits; for every one slandering Confucian texts, five demerits; forging texts, ten demerits; throwing paper with characters away, one demerit for every ten characters. A relatively high penalty was awarded to the production of fiction. Writing unofficial histories, novels, plays, or songs that defamed good and respectable people yielded twenty demerits. The penalty for writing romantic verses and prose, tales, and so on was only one demerit for each piece, with additional demerits being assigned to memorizing the piece (one) and transmitting it to another person (two) (Yuan 1995: 182–200).

Another syncretic reworking of the *Taiwei Hsianjun gongguo ge* and its associated beliefs and practices, the *Ledger of Merit and Demerit*, attributed to Yuan Huang 袁黃 (1533–1606), took a similarly dim view of vernacular productions. A newcomer to the bureaucratic elite, Yuan Huang edited the work, which assigned points to specific, largely secular actions, allowing one to quantify one’s moral progress. More important, in Yuan Huang’s view, such progress was not an end in itself, but was thought to yield both moral and material benefits in one’s own lifetime and/or in the lives of one’s descendants. In an essay entitled “Determining Your Fate” (*Liming pian* 立命篇, written in 1600, first published in 1607), Yuan Huang made the case that, although allotted a destiny at birth, a person could change this destiny through his or her own intervention (Brokaw 1991: 75–91). He offered his own life as a case in point. Convinced by a fortuneteller that he was doomed to die early, he had passively accepted his fate until a Chan monk had passed

him the twelfth-century ledger *Taiwei Xianjun gongguo ke*. Thanks to the concerted and continued implementation of his own moral rules, Yuan claimed that he had managed to pass the examination and produce a male heir (see also Yü 1973: 122–123).

For “the compilation of a licentious and filthy text,” the *Ledger* attributed to Yuan assigned a hundred demerits outright. Seeking profit from such publication involved further demerits based on the amount of money spent on production and earned on the sales. The more lavish the production and the more successful the sale, the greater the demerit. The evidential section cited the example of an unrepentant book merchant who published fiction and erotic prints. As a result, his wife engaged in adultery, his daughter was repeatedly divorced, and he was not only without a son but turned blind on both eyes. His blocks were destroyed in a fire, eventually leaving his family without any resources with which to conduct proper funeral rites. Most interesting, the explanatory section invoked another scholar who distinguished between moral and immoral fiction, thus echoing the earlier Ming dynasty legal provisions. According to this observer, although commonly compiled by contemporary literary families, *wenjia* 文家, and talented men of letters, *wenren caishi* 文人才士, in the name of supplying “felicitous tales about romance,” *fengliu jiahua* 風流佳話, he noted that licentious tales diminish the *ming* of compilers and readers alike. In contrast, he held that tales that inspired the standard Confucian virtues were an adequate vehicle for the expression of one’s literary talent (Yuan Huang 1717: 11/10a–b).

A minor late Ming official, Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645), created an explicitly Confucian ledger, partly in reaction to the alleged materialism and the heterodox Buddhist and Daoist influences found in other ledgers. Liu advocated that the strict observance of rites and absolute moral rules was the proper way “to fix fate” (*dingming* 定命). His ledger centered exclusively on faults and ruled out any notion of profit seeking (Brokaw 1991: 132–138). Liu Zongzhou’s ledger made clear that the consumption, production, and preservation of texts also had a bearing on “fixing one’s fate.” Among the one hundred miscellaneous taboos, he included the following activities: to be fond of books and paintings; to destroy texts; to read books without keeping to a sequence; to write calligraphy in a perfunctory fashion; to publish poems and prose frivolously (Liu Zhongzhou 1968.1: 177–179). Furthermore, given that private theatrical performances were extremely popular, he recommended that this “useless endeavor” be turned into an opportunity for performing morally sound plays. In addition, with apparent approval, he cited sources that advocated not writing any “obscene” or “erotic” songs (Wang Liqi 1981: 268–271).⁹

In sum, regardless of its particular religious or philosophical orien-

tation, the late Ming ledger literature reviewed here addressed questions of proper textual production, consolidating corollary associations between particular forms of writing and predictable allotments for oneself and even for one's family. Contrary to the tragic vision embodied in the Tang dynasty opposition of poetic talent and fate, much of late Ming ledger literature appeared to take a more mechanistic point of view: if one immersed oneself in the orthodox literature of the Confucian or Buddhist or Daoist variety, success and merit were sure to follow, resulting in the tangible betterment of one's fate. If, however, one was foolish enough to venture into the non-canonical terrain of fabrication, especially of the romantic sort, one ran the risk of jeopardizing one's fate. Moreover, as Yuan Huang and Zhuhong's charts of merits and demerits note, writing fiction was not nearly as harmful as distributing it to others, the demerit of the latter being proportionate to the size of the audience.

Still, despite the moral and legal injunctions against writing and disseminating fabrications, fiction was no longer considered to be purely harmful. Even among some staunch conservatives, it was no longer the rhetorical form of fiction that was suspect, but its content. Such a bifurcation of form and message actually harks back to the early Ming rescripts about drama mentioned above, which, as I will discuss in detail in the following section, inadvertently enabled the assimilation of previously objectionable rhetorical forms under the rubric of "morality." Thus what Katherine Carlitz has shown to be true at the level of material presentation in late Ming literati and commercial publications—that is, the visual convergence between morality tales and dramatic texts (Carlitz 1991)—had its conceptual roots in earlier court practices.

The Creation of a Moral Taxonomy for Dramatic Fiction

As mentioned earlier, in 1398 and again in 1413 the Ming court issued draconian proscriptions against the performance and the sponsoring of performances of the roles of emperors, consorts, and political worthies and instead encouraged the depiction of domestic virtues (Wang Liqi 1981: 11–13). With two notable exceptions, plays featuring emperors were excised from the textual *zaju* repertoire. Moreover, whole story cycles were supplanted by politically less sensitive story clusters. For instance, the previously popular cycle surrounding the founding of the Han dynasty by a commoner disappeared, presumably because the parallels to peasant upstart Taizu were too close for comfort (Idema 1990: 183–207). At the same time, however, the proscription created the category of "moral drama," a fact of at least equal consequence for the production of Northern and Southern drama alike.

For one thing, imperial relatives created examples of what such moral plays might look like. One Ming prince, Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378–1448), composed twelve *zaju* plays, two of which survive (Idema 1984: 83–95). Another prince, Zhu Youdun 朱有燾 (1379–1439), wrote no less than thirty-one *zaju* plays of his own. Apart from a large number of deliverance plays designed for birthday celebrations, many of Zhu’s plays turned the uproarious outlaws and defiant prostitutes of the Yuan corpus into moral exemplars of rectitude. These plays were printed during his lifetime under the title *Chengzhai Yuefu* 誠齋樂府 (Yuefu from the sincerity studio, ca. 1426–1449) (Idema 1985: 34–62). Designed for the lavish pageantry of court theater, Zhu’s plays were not only performed within the walls of the imperial compound but appear to have made their way into the performance repertoire in the world at large (Idema 1985: 234–235). Similarly, prominent scholar-officials such as Qiu Jun (1421–1495) piously extolled Confucian paragons in the Southern dramatic form, thereby incorporating the composition of drama among elite literary pursuits (Carlitz 1994: 101–124, and Sieber 2003).

Such a moral interpretation of drama also resonated among late-fifteenth-century figures who, while prominent at court at one point, ended up making their name as teachers, reformers, and philosophers. For instance, in partial violation of the letter of the imperial edicts, Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) recommended that actors perform plays about loyal ministers and filial sons in lieu of presenting supernatural and obscene tunes. Such plays then would in turn subconsciously induce ordinary people to feel and act upon their natural goodness (Wang Liqi 1981: 269).¹⁰ Yet vernacular works still played a relatively small part in the intellectual world of the first generation of late-fifteenth-century reformers.

Among the early-sixteenth-century reformers, Li Zhi (1527–1602) was one of the first to assimilate what had hitherto been considered “immoral fictional texts” to newly defined categories of morality. On the one hand, Li wrote his own version of the *Tract of Action and Response*, a work he entitled *Yingguo lu* 因果錄 (Record of karma). Professing to cater to the audience’s desire for novelty, he updated the earlier work principally with stories illustrating actions of people from different social backgrounds. Although *Record of Karma* touches upon the beneficial aspects of distributing the *Tract*, it is silent on the issue of the potential harm of vernacular literature. The text’s tacit disregard may indirectly point to Li Zhi’s most famous essay, “Essay on the Child’s Heart” 童心說. Dissatisfied with conventional morality, Li offered the notion of “authenticity,” *zhen* 真, for which he sought textual embodiments. In “Essay on the Child’s Heart,” he singled out fictional texts such as the *Shuibu zhuan* and *Xixiang ji* as instantiations of “genuine literature,” *zhenwen* 真文 (Li Zhi 1961: 97–99). In doing so, he radically shifted

the boundaries of what could be considered a moral play or a moral novel, opening up the possibility of a new literary and ethical taxonomy.

At the same time, Li Zhi's scandalous suicide in prison kept the issue of the potentially lethal nature of such unorthodox texts in the minds of seventeenth-century literati. Given that the *Xixiang ji* became the most widely printed play of the late Ming/early Qing, it affords an excellent case study of how particular editions and editors negotiated the injunctions against fiction as punishable lies with the increasingly widespread notion of fiction as a repository of genuine and didactically valuable sentiment. As we shall see, being situated in the discursive terrain between "slandering lies" and "affective instruction," those who read, edited, and published the *Xixiang ji* occupied various and ambiguous rhetorical positions.

Mid- to Late Ming *Xixiang jis*: Faint Echoes of Retribution

Some texts were more obviously vulnerable to the charge of being "lies" than others, perhaps none more so than the *Xixiang ji*. In the late Ming, the story circulated in three major guises, the Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇 tale, the Jin *zhugong diao* 諸宮調 chantefable, and the Yuan *zaju* play. Of these, the latter two were treated as parallel but separate works,¹¹ whereas the *chuanqi* and the *zaju* were often juxtaposed with each other as genealogically related but competing versions of the story. This was true not just at the level of generalized textual transmission, but was instantiated through late Ming publishing practices, where many *zaju* editions incorporated a rendition of the *chuanqi* tale most commonly entitled "Huizhen ji" 會真記 (The story of encountering a transcendent) among their introductory or supplementary materials. In literati editions of the *Xixiang ji*, in particular, a version of the *Huizhen ji* either prefaced the play or was appended to it.

As is well known, the two versions had radically different denouements: in the *chuanqi* tale, the two lovers end up marrying different people. The play, conversely, afforded them a happy ending. The widespread assumption that the author, Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), had written a thinly veiled autobiographical tale gave the *chuanqi* the authority of historical fact, an assumption seemingly corroborated by the mid-Ming discovery of a pertinent tomb inscription. In contrast, the play had to be understood as fiction. Some editions include texts that clearly highlight the fictional nature of the play and construe a punitive fate for the authors. Most common among such satirical materials were a series of anonymous *sanqu* 散曲, art songs ridiculing the two presumed authors, Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 and Wang Shifu 王實甫, for fabricating unwarranted and slanderous lies about the protagonists. The two reputed authors of the *Xixiang ji* were suspected to be languishing in the

hell where people had their tongues ripped out for having spread lies about the principal characters through the *Xixiang ji*.¹² However, given that such criticism was couched in the language of art song, a genre that often featured lighthearted satire, such songs are likely to be intended as a tongue-in-cheek game among literary cognoscenti rather than as a moralistic affirmation of a faith in retribution.

However, even if one were to take these songs at face value, reliable biographical information about either Guan or Wang was so scant that there were limits to how much they were invoked as cautionary examples; too few facts had been transmitted about their political station, longevity, manner of the death, the presence of male offspring, and posthumous literary fame for them to serve as reliable examples for the adverse effects of fictional production. In fact, many editions did not credit either Guan or Wang as authors of the play. Yet, whereas Guan and Wang were relatively obscure entities, much more was known about specific presumed editors of the *Xixiang ji*, most notably, the notorious Li Zhi.

Some *Xixiang ji* editions construed a punitive fate for specific commentators. As noted, Li Zhi had made a name for himself as a proponent of vernacular works, including the *Xixiang ji*. After his suicide in 1602, around 1610 commercial publishers seized upon his notoriety and issued a wide range of dramatic and fictional texts under his name.¹³ Starting with the Hangzhou publisher Rongyutang's 1610 *Xixiang ji*, at least four more such editions followed over the next decades, not including those in which Li was jointly credited with other late Ming literary luminaries (Jiang 1982: 88–103).

Although most of his contemporaries directed their venom against Li Zhi's unorthodox assessment of Confucian historical figures; the unfortunate circumstances of his death served to corroborate a seemingly verifiable, lethal link between premature death and fictional endeavors (see, e.g., Wang Liqi 1981: 214 and 369–371). Even critics who were generally sympathetic to drama held up Li Zhi as a liminal example from which to distance their own literary efforts. In his *Xixiang ji* commentary (1614), Wang Jide 王驥德 (d. 1623), the well-known drama critic, alluded, albeit in jest, to the retributive mechanism of the other world in response to the dissemination of fictional materials:

As of late, based on Li Zhi's favorable appraisal of the *Xixiang ji*, the *Pipa ji*, the *Baiyueting*, the *Hongfu ji*, and the *Yube ji* in [Li Zhi's] *Book for Burning* (*Fenshu*), actors perform these [plays] and thereby confound the order of the world (*dao*), and they pollute entire volumes [of Li Zhi's annotated versions of these plays] with performance notations and seek

profit by [posing as] blind performers. I said in jest to one of my guests, who laughed: “This is the retribution that the Avici Hell” [has meted out to Li Zhi]. (Wang Jide 1994: 6/58b–59a)

Despite his reservations about Li Zhi, Wang nevertheless went on to vindicate the play itself in light of its singular display of genuine passion. Echoing Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) preface to the other romantic classic of the day, the *Mudanting* 牡丹亭 (Peony pavilion), Wang noted in his celebratory *fu* rhapsody named for the play’s heroine, Cui Yingying: “Reason has bounds, but passion is boundless” (Wang Jide 1994: 6/55a). Through such redemptive emphasis on deep feeling as a moral force, Wang subsumed the play under the new categories of sensibility that Li Zhi had helped to pioneer.

In some editions, neither the issue of fictionality nor of authorship were major concerns. Instead, some versions affiliated the play with other discursive forms altogether. For instance, predominantly commercial or quasi-literati editions could present the play as prototype for potential romantic encounters for the prospective reader in a specific locale. In particular, such editions often contain a supplementary tale called “Qiantang meng” 錢塘夢 (The dream of Qiantang), a story of the dream encounter of an examination candidate with a beauty. The story represented both a literalization of the phrase found in the *Xixiang ji*, namely “the beauty found in books,” *shusuo-jian* 書所見, and a kind of “middle-class” version of the famed royal dream encounter celebrated in Song Yu’s 宋玉 “Gaotang Fu” 高唐賦 (Rhapsody of Gaotang).¹⁴ As if to hint that such beauties were no mere phantoms of a writer’s, editor’s, or publisher’s imagination, such editions include detailed descriptions of the famous sites in and around Hangzhou as well as maps of Hangzhou, thus offering themselves up as a travel guide to one of the famed sites of late Ming Jiangnan courtesan culture.¹⁵

In many late Ming editions of the *Xixiang ji*, the belief in retribution was only tangentially invoked, humorously inscribed, or pointedly ignored. However, if we turn to the version that was to eclipse all others, Jin Shengtan’s *Diliu caizi shu* (ca. 1656), we find that many of the moral and legal tropes discussed here insinuated themselves into Jin’s commentary. Since Jin’s commentary was composed after the Ming–Qing transition, an event that radically transformed the political and cultural landscape, his *Xixiang ji* arguably transformed the late Ming “bestseller” into a peculiarly early Qing phenomenon. Jin’s *Xixiang ji* revisited the questions of *ming* and *cai* with a paradoxical elan and renewed vigor, drawing on old and new punitive discourses in an attempt to rescue this most popular of texts from the perceived hazards of popularity and proscription. What may have been adumbrated by

Li Zhi and later commentators Jin's *Xixiang ji* took to its logical conclusion: thanks to the categorical transmutation from mere "licentious fiction" to one of six replacement classics, the so-called six books by and for geniuses, Jin was able to reconceive the play as an alternative form of family instruction. Through the creation of a miniature canon of new classics, the dehistoricization of talent, and the projection of an imaginary textual patriline, Jin would turn the notion of the *ming*-diminishing potential of vernacular literature inside out, assigning to it the corrective and replenishing moral force usually reserved for the conventional classics.

Outsmarting *Ming*, or Jin Shengtān's *Sixth Book of Genius*

Writing around 1671, Li Yu drew attention to Jin Shengtān's coinage of a special literary taxonomy for the two fictional works with which Jin's name became indelibly associated:

Ordinarily, people considered Shi Nai'an's 施耐安 *Shuibu* and Wang Shifu's *Xixiang ji* as a novel and as a play, respectively; only Jin Shengtān saw it fit to single them out with the designations of Fifth and Sixth Book of Genius, respectively. What was his intent? He was aggrieved that the world made light of the substance of these works and did not recognize that they were literary creations of the first order. Therefore, he chose these kinds of startling names in order to make his views known. (Li Yu 1992.11: 24)

Jin had coined the notion of "the six books of genius" in one of his prefaces to the *Shuibu zhuān*. There, Jin Shengtān had declared that there were "six books of genius," just as there used to be six classics.¹⁶ The six books encompassed the philosophical text of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the historical text of the *Shiji* 史記, and the poetic texts of *Lisao* 離騷 and of Du Fu as well as the fictional texts of the *Shuibu* and the *Xixiang ji*. Jin worked on all of these, but of the first four, only posthumously published fragments exist. The *Shuibu zhuān* and *Xixiang ji* were both published during Jin's lifetime, although of the latter no edition earlier than the 1660s survived. In addition, relatives and friends posthumously published Jin's annotations of Tang poetry and issued his comments on prose throughout the ages. These latter efforts were also subsumed under the rubric of "books of genius," a term that began to be applied to other vernacular classics such as the *Jin Ping Mei*, *Three Kingdoms* 三國演義, and the *Story of the Lute* 琵琶記 (Rolston 1997: 51–73).

Jin's lifelong attempts to redefine the contours of the literary canon drew upon the ideas of earlier generations of late and post-Ming literati. Al-

though deceptively similar to earlier lists, Jin's categorization bespoke at least one major innovation. He numerically correlated the texts in question, thus labeling *Zhuangzi*, *Shiji*, *Lisao*, Du Fu's poetry, *Shuibu zhuan*, and the *Xixiang ji* as the first through the sixth "book of genius."¹⁷ On the one hand, this sequence can be read in hierarchical terms, with the most canonical texts ranking at the top. In fact, in the preface to the *Shuibu zhuan*, Jin listed the respective talents of the authors of the first four and then proceeded to note "and going down from there, there was the talent of Shi Nai'an and that of Dong Jieyuan" 董解元 (Jin Shengtān 1985a: 1/4).¹⁸ On the other hand, a finite and numerically defined list correlated with a finite number of six canonical classics, to which he alluded in no uncertain terms in the preface to the *Shuibu zhuan*. In doing so, Jin openly defied earlier negative characterizations of the two fictional works.

Contrary to earlier notions that Heaven envied talent or punished those who produced slanderous fictions such as the *Xixiang ji*, Jin described the author of the *Xixiang ji* as an incarnation of heaven and earth. Insisting on the absolute irreproducibility of the moment of textual creation, Jin noted that many marvelous texts were lost because they could not be adequately captured by the person in question. At the same time, even if the same person were to rewrite a text after it had been burnt, it would be impossible to do so. In his view, textual production was a momentary instantiation of a unique pattern (Jin Shengtān 1985b: 4/14). Interestingly, then, Jin's vision of talent depersonalizes it, freeing the few geniuses who use it from legal, let alone retributive, repercussions.

Furthermore, in diametrical opposition to the idea that engagement with vernacular materials would deprive one of viable heirs, Jin presents his version of these texts as the privileged site for creating a textual patriline. As Wang Yunxi and Gu Xisheng have noted, Jin recommended that *Shuibu* and *Xixiang ji* be presented to one's male juniors at the age of ten and fourteen, respectively, in gross violation of customary practice (Wang and Gu 1996: 6/192). In the eyes of certain moralists, books such as *Shuibu* and *Xixiang ji* were "useless" reading for youngsters at best and "lethal reading" at worst.¹⁹ In contrast, Jin insisted that young men read his versions of these "books of genius" as a form of *education sentimentale* in their quest to become "geniuses" themselves. Jin Shengtān's assumption of the role of textual fatherhood creates a phantasmagoric inversion of the retributive scenario envisioned by the punitive discourse discussed earlier in this essay: far from dying without issue because of his books of genius, Jin projected the possibility of having an unlimited number of "textual sons."

Fictional production had certainly come a long way from the legal and moral regulation in the Yuan and Ming dynasties. Far from jeopardizing

one's life or diminishing one's merit, Jin envisioned the *Xixiang ji* as a mainstay for reproducing the kind of orthodox morality that these restrictive regulations had meant to safeguard. To his detractors, Jin's death proved that such an unconventional new canon was an entirely misguided enterprise. At the same time, the accuracy of Jin's prediction about the spectacular success of his *Shuibu* as well as his *Xixiang ji* in the centuries after his death shows that the taxonomies of fictional production, official pressures in opposition notwithstanding, had been irrevocably transformed.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine legal regulations, ledger literature, and their respective interaction with regard to the imagined and real place of composing and printing commentaried editions of drama and, to a lesser degree, fiction in late imperial China. I have investigated the place of fiction making in a body of morality literature that experienced a revival in the late Ming, the so-called ledger literature. In some cases, editors explicitly adopted the language of *ming*; in all cases, they correlated acts of behavior with long-term effects on one's standing in the world in this or in future lives. Depending on the particular ledger, the calculus of action and outcome followed a more or less mechanical scheme. Compared to the Song and Yuan versions of such texts, the late Ming texts more explicitly cautioned against the production and dissemination of fictional narrative and drama in particular. Such caution applied regardless of the religious or philosophical orientation of the ledgers. However, in some cases, the distinction between "good" and "bad" stories created a framework in which the merits and demerits of a given play or story could be argued on a case-by-case basis.

Such a particularistic approach to the production, performance, and print diffusion of plays also characterized the legal regulations of drama. Yuan edicts had potentially criminalized all drama, but enforcement was lax. By contrast, the heavy-handed moralism of the early Ming court had a paradoxical effect: it outlawed the possession, performance, and printing of plays about authority figures and enforced such restrictions with the death penalty. The cultural memory of these draconian measures lived on in late Ming and early Qing writing on the period, thus perpetuating a link between drama and the loss of life long after these regulations had ceased to be enforced. At the same time, these early Ming edicts introduced the possibility of "morally edifying" plays. Insofar as the target audience for such plays were ordinary people, such edicts authorized not only the production but also the dissemination of such plays, most notably by hereditary theater professionals.

The late Ming witnessed a relaxation of legal regulations against performance and print diffusion of fiction and drama. However, where legal regulations left off, the ledger literature as well as anecdotal evidence perpetuated the notion that the production of fiction of any genre could have adverse effects on the person producing it as well as his descendants. Given the simultaneous interest of many literati in morality literature as well as fiction, and the availability of all these cautionary materials in print, it is perhaps not so surprising that the punitive discourse attached to fictional authorship continued to insinuate itself into the writings of late Ming figures. In the case of out-and-out moralists such as Gao Panlong for example, the invocation of such tropes is not unexpected. More interestingly, we also find attenuated echoes of this type of thinking among literati at the forefront of the dissemination of fiction and drama, including Shen Defu, Wang Jide, and Li Yu. On the whole, the somewhat jocular fashion in which these figures made reference to the premature loss of life or to a fate in particular quarters of hell point to the diminished plausibility of such fatal correlations.

In examining individual late Ming editions of the *Xixiang ji*, one of the texts that conservatives consistently singled out as injurious to public morality, especially that of young people, we find that these often highly amalgamated texts allude only tangentially to the fact that either the *ming* of authors, the editors, or the public might be compromised on account of their involvement with the play. In part, such reticence might be due to the fact that many editions presented the *Xixiang ji* as something other than a “mere play.” Despite the fact that the play was clearly recognized as a “fictional fabrication” in conflict with the “historically and autobiographically accurate” *Huizhen ji*, the story about the two lovers could be construed in a variety of ways, such as satire, philology, or travelogue. Among the many editors, two names stood out, those of Li Zhi and Jin Shengtan, since they, more compellingly than anyone else, argued that the play, far from harming young readers, either constituted an unadulterated and genuine expression of a “child’s heart” or formed part of the obligatory curriculum for a “talented man in the making.”

During the Qing, insofar as the names of these two editors in particular began to overshadow those of Wang Shifu and Guan Hanqing, the obscure Yuan authors of the *Xixiang ji*, and insofar as the biographically oriented model of authorship began to dominate the reception of all literary drama, both Li Zhi’s and Jin Shengtan’s life stories rekindled the belief in a verifiable link between vernacular interests and premature death. Li and Jin had both been imprisoned, and both died a violent death, one by his own hand, the other at the hands of executioners. Given the intense paranoia of the

Qing establishment with regard to “lascivious” or “seditious” books, *yinsbu* 淫書, both Li and Jin seemed to offer themselves as excellent cautionary examples for why fictional commentary constituted a serious misuse of one’s talents that was sure to affect one’s fate adversely.

Yet no matter how hard the Qing authorities tried to contain the fictional genies that had been unleashed, they ultimately failed, at least with regard to Jin Shengtan’s *Xixiang ji*. As Tan Fan has noted, on the whole the Qing dynasty witnessed the publication of at least forty versions of Jin’s *Sixth Book of Genius*. The Qianlong era in particular was one of the periods in which a particularly large number of such versions were produced (Tan 1991: 38–39 and 129)—a high point in production that also happened to coincide with the most systematic campaign to eradicate fiction from the face of Chinese civilization. In the end, then, no matter how powerful and persuasive the moral and legal discourses that reinforced short *ming* and fictional *cai*, the taxonomies of and fictional production had been irrevocably altered.

Notes

Earlier drafts of this essay benefited from observations and suggestions made by Kimberly Besio, Wai-yee Li, Christopher Lupke, and Christopher A. Reed. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

1. The claim that Jin did not have an heir is patently false. Another famous case of an author whose progeny were said to have suffered on account of his fiction writing is Shi Nai’an, the reputed author of the *Shuibu zhuàn*. It was said that three generations of his descendants were mute. See Wang Liqi 1981: 368.

2. See also Shen Guangren 1994: 5–13. For a discussion of these issues, see also Richard J. Lynn n.d.

3. According to Zhang Chenshi, the *Yongle dadian* included *zaju* texts in volumes 20,737 through 20,757, and *xuwen* in volumes 13,965 through 13,991, of which only the last volume is extant. See Zhang Chenshi 1986: 28.

4. Yü points out that the deterrent function of criminal law might explain the emphasis on bad deeds in the ledger literature. The orderly arrangement of graduated punishments in the legal codes might serve as a model for the ledger literature’s assignment of merits and demerits; the minute differentiation between offenses in the legal codes could have inspired similarly fine distinctions in the ledgers.

5. For Gao’s conservative views on fiction and drama, see Wang Liqi 1981: 173.

6. I did not have access to an original Chinese Ming or early Qing edition. Instead, I am relying on Stanislas Julien’s translation of an early-seventeenth-century Chinese edition. See Julien 1835.

7. This story is personalized in the ledger attributed to Yuan Huang with Kang Hai, the famous statesman, poet, and playwright, as the uneasy but silent bystander. See Yuan Huang 1717: 11/12a. My thanks to Cynthia J. Brokaw for making this source available to me.

8. A Qing scholar, Yang Enshou, notes that he once saw a gloss to the *Taishang ganying pian* that claimed that, when someone visited hell, they saw Tang Xianzu being punished with twenty strokes whenever someone performed *Mudanting*; see Wang Liqi 1981: 372–373.

9. One of them involved the famous Song lyricist Huang Tingjian (1045–1105), who vowed to renounce the composition of erotic verse after being reprimanded by the Buddhist master Yunshi. This story was also cited with approval by Lang Ying 1984.2: 478.

10. Although echoing the early Ming proscription, Wang’s recommendation to perform plays about “loyal ministers” actually constitutes a violation of that edict. The remark was to be cited quite often in subsequent discussion of the subject. See, e.g., Wang Liqi 1981: 305.

11. The *zbugongdiao* was repeatedly published in the late Ming. To my knowledge, only Min Yuwu’s *Xixiang liubuang* (ca. 1640) published the play together with the chantefable form.

12. See the song on Guan Hanqing among the “Dapo Xixiang bayong” series found in the *Hongzhi* edition and reprinted in *Yuanben tiping Xixiang ji*. See also Wang Hongzhao’s and Qi Junjia’s comments in Wang Liqi 1981: 370–371 and 374. Other historical authors about whom similar legends were circulated included Tang Xianzu and Li Yu (see Wang Liqi 1981: 374–375).

13. As David Rolston has noted, a second stage of fiction commentary can be defined by a flood of bogus Li Zhi commentaries; see Rolston 1997: 3.

14. Some commentators made the connection explicit. See Han Qi in *Xixiang ji*, published in the Wanli area by Wang’s Wanhuxuan studio, Beijing National Library, Microfilm no. 16237, 29a.

15. The story was first included in the *Hongzhi* (1498) edition. For a description of the sites and the maps of Hangzhou, see, for example, the *Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Xixiang ji*, published by Shijiantang, Beijing Library, Microfilm no. 12422. For a map without description and *Yuanlin wumeng*, see *Chongkan Yuanben tiping yinshi Xixiang ji*, published by Liu Longtian, Beijing National Library, Microfilm no. SB 830. For a text, map, and *Yuanlin wumeng*, see *Quanxiang zhuzhi Xixiang ji*, Beijing National Library, Microfilm no. 765. For inclusion of this text as well as *Yuanlin wumeng*, see *Xinke Wei Zhongxue xiansheng pidian Xixiang ji*, Beijing National Library.

16. As both David Rolston and Robert Hegel observe, the term “*caizi shu*” is most likely deliberately ambiguous, that is, “books of/for geniuses.” See Rolston 1997: 48, and Hegel 1998: 52.

17. For Jin Yong’s title, see Sieber 2001: 36–56. The second book was published in 1677 under the title *Zengbu tianxia caizi bidushu*.

18. For a similar qualifying statement, see “Xu yi,” in Jin Shengtān 1985.1: 5: “Thus the books of Zhuāng Zhōu, Qū Píng, Sīmá Qiān, Dū Fū and even of Shī Nǎi’ān and Dōng Jiéyuán all came about through utmost exertion...”

19. For an assessment of the *Shuibu* as a “useless book” that youngsters should not read, see Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai*, 185; for a youngster from a famous Nanjing family who had read the *Xixiang ji* on the sly after becoming thoroughly conversant with the classics and history, and who died within seven days, see Wang Liqi 1981: 195. Both comments postdate Jin Shengtān’s lifetime, but similar opinions were current in the seventeenth century.

9

Fate and Transcendence in the Rhetoric of Myth and Ritual

P. STEVEN SANGREN

*T*ianming 天命 (or *tianshu* 天數) “fate”—or “heavenly command”—plays an explicit and important role in the Ming dynasty epic *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演義 (Investiture of the gods; hereafter *FSYY*).¹ Although other writers (Gong 1980; Wan 1987) have commented on the use of fate in the epic, before the conference that led to the publication of this volume I had not given much thought to the narrative function of fate.

In brief, my thesis is that there are enlightening parallels in the rhetorical structure of what, following Terence Turner (Sangren 1993; T. Turner 1977b), I term “transcendence” discernible in ritual, on the one hand, and in the narrative uses of fate in *FSYY*, on the other. I argue that in mythic narrative,² just as in ritual, “transcendence” constitutes in classic form the alienating structure of ideology. In other words, following Marx, transcendence in mythic narrative and in ritual represents the real relations between product and producer in inverted form. The productive agency constituted by individual and collective action is represented as though it were possessed by transcendent or supernatural entities that are in fact effects or products of narrative or ritual, and, thus, of human agency.

This framing shifts analysis from what I take to be more commonly invoked phenomenological or existential—in other words, more individual-focused—approaches to fate, emphasizing instead a more systemic sociological and representational logic. It also shifts focus from the function of fate as an organizing conceit in the construction of coherence in a text or narrative.³ Texts, of course, make sense only in contexts; as an anthropologist, I am concerned with how texts like *FSYY* can be read and understood with respect to the social and cultural contexts that produce them. Anthropologically speaking, narratives are of greatest interest for what they can reveal about the

contexts that produce them, especially when those contexts—linking individual desire and collective historical processes—are otherwise difficult to study. Although I shall not have time to discuss these contexts here, I have shown in other studies how an alienating structure of transcendence akin to that I discern in “fate” is intrinsic to productive processes more generally (Sangren 1991; Sangren 2000).

A familiar theme of history of religions studies is the perhaps universal tension between the human desire to control fate, on the one hand, and a human penchant to imagine that some more stable or moral ordering determines fate.⁴ In the Chinese case, this tension is evident in a popular contrast between *ming* (fate) 命 and *yun* (luck) 運—*ming* being immutable, *yun* manipulable by human, often ritual, intervention.⁵ I do not dispute interpreting myth and, more narrowly, narrative employments of “fate” as manifesting universal existential themes. However, my analysis suggests that such approaches may overlook some of the complexity of fate considered as an element of tropic structure. This complexity manifests itself in levels of transcendence or causality suggested when the rhetoric of mythic narrative is compared explicitly to that of ritual. Although other approaches occasionally interpret myth with reference to ritual (Campbell 1949; Campbell 1970; Eliade 1954; V. Turner 1969; V. Turner 1974), ritual is viewed mainly in broadly comparative or archetypal terms. Such approaches devote relatively little analytical emphasis to the structure of transcendence as an ideological trope linked to social production.

It is not my intention to launch a critique of existentially oriented exegeses here; instead, I focus more specifically on the use of fate as a mark of transcendence and examine its alienating structure. I do not propose to dispute the importance of existentially motivated desires and archetypes in mythic narrative. Nonetheless, I hazard to guess that cross-cultural commonalities evident in mythic narrative and ritual rhetoric can be better accounted for by referring to the role of objectification or alienation characteristic of ideological operations, in abstract terms, than directly from culturally unmediated individual human experience. Myth, in other words, is best analyzed as collectively produced speculation on how individual human desires take specific cultural form (Sangren 1997). I shall offer some additional speculations with respect to how desire is figured in *FSYY* in this regard.

In the context of this collection’s integrating theme, I should emphasize from the outset that I have not made any systematic studies of Chinese conceptions of fate per se, either in textual or ethnographic settings. Instead, my interest in the topic is linked to what I believe are striking similarities in the ways fate is employed in a key text that I have been studying for other rea-

sons and in a general model of ritual process. Whether or not the use of fate in *FSYY* is paralleled in other important texts remains an open question.

In earlier studies, based mainly on fieldwork in Taiwan (Sangren 1987; Sangren 2000), I approach ritual and cosmology as integral to “social production”—that is, to interlinked production of forms of individual subjectivity, community, and wider collectivities (including the state or imperium). Related to this research, for about the past ten years I have been working intermittently on analyses of Chinese legends about popular gods, particularly gods whose legends center on vexed family relationships (Sangren 1996; Sangren 1997). I am convinced that analysis of these materials can shed light on the social production of culturally specific forms of “subjectivity” and desire. One of the most spectacular of these legends is the story of Nezha 哪咤. Nezha’s persona is best known from *FSYY*, and it is because of Nezha that I became interested in the text.⁶

Nezha is widely worshiped in the temples of Taiwan’s popular religion. He is especially prominent in some spirit-possession cults, but is also a standard fixture as a guardian on divinity altars of most popular temples. By the same token, *FSYY*, both in its standard version and in many popular cultural adaptations, continues to be a widely appreciated story. My point is that although *FSYY* is a text produced in the Ming dynasty, it is nonetheless appropriate to consider it a vital element of contemporary culture too.

Fengshen Yanyi and the Story of Nezha

I should backtrack and say a bit more about *FSYY*. Generally described as a popular “novel,” *FSYY* is an epic of one hundred chapters similar in form to the *Journey to the West*. Its overall narrative concerns the fated loss of the mandate of Heaven by the evil emperor Zhou Wang 紂王, last of the Shang 商, and the battle led by Jiang Ziya 姜子牙 to install the righteous new Zhou 周 dynasty.⁷ Paralleling and interpenetrating the battles between earthly loyalists and rebels are battles between allied factions of gods, demons, Daoist immortals, and other supernatural figures. Transcending even these gods and demigods is the author’s⁸ use of fate. The overthrow of Zhou Wang is preordained; virtuous Shang loyalists—brave fighters, righteous officials—are portrayed sympathetically, but their efforts are ultimately as futile as are those of their evil allies. Not even the gods can withstand the immutability of this imperative stemming from a higher order. It is this use of heavenly command that inspires Gong’s argument and to which I shall return presently.

The events of the epic are set in motion when Zhou Wang incurs the wrath of the goddess Nüwa 女媧 after Zhou Wang, inspired by the beauty of

her temple image, addresses a lustful poem to her. In the thrall of the evil fox-demon seductress Su Daji 蘇妲己, sent by Nüwa to insure his downfall, Zhou Wang perpetrates luridly described outrages against loyal ministers and even his own family. Much of the body of the epic consists of lengthy descriptions of court intrigues and fantastic battle scenes in which earthly and supernatural adversaries insult and slaughter each other. The overall imagery anticipates that of martial arts movies of the 1960s and 1970s—it is filled with magic, Daoistic mysticism, and violence. These qualities no doubt account in part for why the epic, although extremely popular in late imperial times, has generally been viewed with disdain by China’s literati.⁹

The story of Nezha, comprising chapters 12, 13, and 14 of the epic’s one hundred chapters, is one of the epic’s most memorable episodes. Like Jiang Ziya, Nezha is sent down to earth from Kunlun 崑崙 Mountain to serve as Jiang Ziya’s vanguard warrior. A reincarnation of “Spirit Pearl” *lingzhu zi* 靈珠子, Nezha is an odd being indeed. His mother has been pregnant for three years and six months when, in a dream, she is visited by the Daoist immortal Taiyi Zhenren 太已真人 (Great unity perfected) who inserts the “Spirit Pearl” into her stomach. She awakens and immediately gives birth to a monstrous lump of flesh.¹⁰ Appalled, Nezha’s father, Li Jing 李靖, a general in the service of Zhou Wang, attacks the lump with his sword and Nezha springs forth. Soon thereafter Li Jing is visited by Taiyi, who gives Nezha a name and takes him on as an apprentice.

At age seven Nezha, endowed with supernatural powers, inadvertently disturbs the palace of Ao Guang 敖光, dragon-king of the sea. Subsequently, in a series of misadventures, Nezha kills first Ao Guang’s Yaksha commander, then his third son, Ao Bing 敖丙,¹¹ and finally subdues Ao Guang himself as the dragon attempts to report Nezha’s crimes to the Jade Emperor. Later, Nezha, again inadvertently, kills the apprentice of another high-ranking divinity, Shiji Niang Niang 石磯娘娘. In all of these episodes, Nezha is portrayed as an exuberant, though unruly, boy whose sense of justice is honest but misguided. His father, Li Jing, is portrayed as overly concerned with his own career and too little concerned for the well-being of his son. Conversely, Taiyi, Nezha’s supernatural godfather, consistently defends the boy, rescuing him and instructing him when he finds himself in trouble.

A climax in the Nezha story is reached when it becomes clear that the only way to save Nezha’s parents from the Jade Emperor’s justice is for Nezha to take his own life, thereby assuaging the anger of his victims.¹² He commits suicide, returning his body to his parents. His spirit flies to Taiyi’s mysterious cave in some misty, transcendent realm, where Taiyi instructs Nezha to ask his mother to build him a temple. Nezha visits his mother in her dreams demanding that she build him the altar, but upon hearing of this

demand, his father angrily forbids her to do so. Eventually succumbing to his insistent haunting of her dreams, Nezha's mother secretly complies.

The temple proves amazingly efficacious, soon attracting myriad worshippers, and eventually Li Jing's attention. In a rage, Li Jing destroys the altar and its images, and, once again, Nezha's spirit flies to Taiyi. Taiyi produces a new body for Nezha from parts of a lotus plant, a body endowed with three heads and six arms. Nezha's arsenal of supernatural weapons is also increased. Nezha flies off in a rage to avenge himself against Li Jing, who is saved only when Taiyi calls upon his immortal colleague, Randeng Daoren 然燈道人, to provide Li Jing with a magical pagoda which he can use to protect himself against Nezha.¹³ Against his will, Nezha is forced to recognize Li Jing as his father. Subsequently, both Li Jing and Nezha join with the rebel forces to defeat Zhou Wang.

Nezha's persona, like that of the similar Sun Wukong 孫悟空 in *Xiyou Ji* 西遊記, appears widely in popular culture and religion. In Taiwan, most temples of the popular religion include an image of Nezha placed center foremost among the images in front of the main altar. Usually called Taizi Ye 太子爺 or San Taizi 三太子, his official title is Zhongtan Yuanshuai 中壇元帥. He is immediately recognizable from his posture with one foot on his mode of cosmic conveyance, the "wind-fire wheel" *fenghuo lun* 風火輪, his spear, and his magical "heaven-and-earth ring" *qiankun quan* 乾坤圈. Although admired and worshiped, he belongs to an unorthodox category of gods insofar as his persona embodies rebellious willfulness and, most problematically, an unmentionable but ineradicable aura of attempted patricide.

Tianming in Fengshen Yanyi

Gong Pengcheng, author of an essay analyzing the role of Nezha in *FSYY*, argues that his perplexing and intriguing character is best explained with reference to the overarching role of fate in the structure of the epic (Gong 1980).¹⁴ In brief, it is Gong's view that Nezha is a pure instrument of heavenly command (given voice by Taiyi); his outrageous and unfilial behavior and sentiments are evidence, in Gong's view, that heavenly command supersedes human morality. In other words, Gong proposes that it is necessary for the author thoroughly to offend Chinese sensibilities on the issue of the sentiments proper to father and son and make a hero of Nezha precisely in order to show that heavenly command transcends earthly good and evil.¹⁵ Taiyi embodies heavenly command, in Gong's view, and Nezha is merely his puppet, having no authentic will of his own.

My own interpretation of the significance of Nezha differs from Gong's (Sangren 1996; Sangren 1997). Simply put, I believe that Nezha's popularity

stems precisely from the fact that he expresses complex filial sentiments, including resentment of the constraints imposed by patriarchal institutions and authority, which are widely intelligible to Chinese audiences, even though such sentiments are collectively repressed and officially abhorred (Ho 1988; Wan 1987).¹⁶ Whatever the author's intentions and whatever the logical or textual functions performed by fate, it is unlikely that the Nezha character would have so captivated the popular imagination in the absence of such identification. How else, then, may we account for the considerable textual evidence that Gong (see also Wan 1987) adduces to the author's frequent and explicit use of fate as ultimate cause or explanation for key episodes? To begin to address this question, let us turn to a discussion of transcendence in *FSYY* and in ritual processes.

In *FSYY*, fate corresponds explicitly with levels of transcendence embodied in various protagonists and implicitly (and this is my recasting of what I take to be Gong's argument), at the highest level, with what we might view as an authorial subject position (see also Wan 1987). We are reminded repeatedly by the narrator that the outcomes of the actions of the epic's characters, whatever their intentions and desires, are determined by fate. Some, like Nezha and Daji, are portrayed as active but often unconscious instruments of Heaven's higher purposes. At a higher level, figures like Jiang Ziya, although mortal, possess knowledge of fate's determinations and act to facilitate them. At roughly the same level are immortals like Taiyi Zhenren, Randeng Daoren, and (perhaps) Nüwa, who are at once interested participants in the epic's action but who also give voice to knowledge of Heaven's preordained intentions. At an even higher level of transcendence are figures like Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊, Taiyi's master and the initiator of Jiang Ziya's deployment to earth, who do not usually directly participate but are represented as the highest heavenly authorities.¹⁷

Hierarchy in terms of the conventional image of the Chinese pantheon as a celestial bureaucracy, although not absent in *FSYY*, takes a back seat to a hierarchy of levels of knowledge and ability to act as a conscious instrument of fate. The most powerful figures are, ultimately, those most closely identified as embodying and giving voice to heavenly command. Because the author himself occasionally intervenes as "omniscient narrator" (Wan 1987: 204) to foretell forthcoming events, he can be seen as occupying, implicitly, a yet higher level in this hierarchy of knowledge.

In sum, the power and status of *FSYY*'s characters are represented as corresponding to their knowledge of and relation to fate. Not only is the fate of the Shang and Zhou predetermined, so too are the individual destinies of all the characters in the form of the roster of the investiture signed by the three highest-ranking immortals prior to any of the epic's events. Against this image of rigidly determined predestiny, however, the author clearly allows a

degree of agency or efficacy to his characters with respect to how easily or with how much difficulty their respective fates will be realized.¹⁸

This hierarchy of power with respect to fate also clearly corresponds to a spatialized cosmology. Greater power is associated with mystics who dwell in caves or mountains in a misty but clearly higher realm. This cosmology, although populated with supernatural personages particular to *FSYY*, shares this general hierarchical imagery with that of Chinese popular religion. Among the manifestations of this general structure in popular culture are the arrangements of altars and divinities in both domestic and temple architecture, but perhaps most strikingly in the spatial representations evident in Daoist rituals (Lagerwey 1987; Sangren 1995; Saso 1972; Schipper 1993).

In the terms of my earlier analyses of *ling* 靈, “magical power,” these “levels” of cosmos stand to each other in relatively yin-yang 陰陽 (disorder-order) relationships—higher levels are yang with respect to lower ones. The characters who have the most “power” are those which operate on two or more levels—that is, those who “mediate” yin and yang. For example, Nezha, one of the epic’s most active and powerful figures, frequently flies back and forth between the transcendent realm of his godfather, Taiyi, and the mundane world of his father, Li Jing. Although represented as subordinate to (and, hence, less powerful than) “higher” figures like Yüanshi Tianzun and Taiyi Zhenren, demigods like Nezha are much more central to the epic’s action and more interesting to its readers. Similarly, in Chinese rituals Daoist priests, transactors who mediate the seen and unseen worlds, are themselves effectively more powerful than the abstract embodiments of the highest levels of their system, the “Three Pure Ones,” San Qing 三清 and “prior Heaven,” *xiantian* 先天, represented as the sources of their authority.

By the same token, the figures in *FSYY* who embody the highest levels of the hierarchy personify and give voice to fate. Fate, in turn, is linked explicitly to “heavenly command”—that is, to an abstract order represented as beyond human agency. Such figures, in other words, really have less “power” than their high rank in the hierarchy of transcendence would seem to indicate, if by “power” we understand possession of some will or agency of their own. Nezha, for example, is forced to submit to Randeng, Taiyi, and (through them) Li Jing, but Randeng and Taiyi are merely implementing *tianming*; it is Nezha who is represented as having desires and means of his own.¹⁹

Ritual, Transcendence, and Alienation

Terence Turner’s reformulation of van Gennep’s model of the structure of rites of passage, a complex argument that defies concise summary, is essential to the point I am attempting to make (T. Turner 1977b). In brief, Turner

argues that the “liminal” phase in van Gennep’s famous tripartite model (later elaborated in the influential works of Victor Turner [V. Turner 1969; V. Turner 1974]) is best understood with reference to a logic of transformative operations. The liminal phase stands in a relation to both beginning and ending states at a hierarchically encompassing or higher “level”: “The system of social relations within which the ritual process takes place is organized on a hierarchy of levels. . . . The lower levels of the system consist of specific states. . . . The upper levels of the system consist of transformations . . . of the specific configurations of features and relations comprising the lower levels of the system. The upper levels of the system thus comprise the generative principles and . . . the ‘common ground’ of the lower levels of the system” (T. Turner 1977b: 57). Further, “The upper level will . . . tend to be seen, from the standpoint of the lower level, as both the indispensable, generative ground of the system, a source of powers of a higher order, and at the same time as a domain of relatively uncontrollable and therefore dangerous powers” (T. Turner 1977b: 58).²⁰

“Transcendence” in Turner’s usage thus refers to relations of logical-typical difference between hierarchical “levels.”²¹ I propose that fate in *FSYY* is explicitly represented as corresponding to what amounts to the “upper level” of all that actually happens at the encompassed “lower levels” in the narrative.

“All that happens,” is of course quite different with respect to narrative episodes in a work like *FSYY*, on the one hand, and in social life, the relevant context of ritual, on the other. What, then, might account for the parallel emergence of representations of transcendence in ritual and in myth? A full consideration of this question exceeds the compass of this essay.²² Preliminarily, however, one useful way to approach *FSYY* is to emphasize its nature as an account of dynastic transition, itself arguably interpretable as a kind of ritual. More precisely, in a mythic narrative, dynastic transition is represented as though it were a kind of rite of passage. In *FSYY*, it is like a rite of passage in the sense that it entails transformations from a beginning state of being to a desired new one. In the classic rite of passage, for example, the uninitiated, unsocialized child is transformed into a socialized, fully effective adult. Similarly, in *FSYY*, a defiled, bankrupt, immoral dynasty is transformed into a legitimate, effective, moral dynasty. Most of the action of the epic can be considered to occur in the potent, transformative, liminal stages that intervene.

FSYY as a whole can thus be viewed as a narrative model of ritual transition in which fate occupies the highest-level articulation, the generative ground, of “all that happens” at the lower level constituted by “all under heaven” *tianxia* 天下. This view can account more directly (although more

abstractly) for many of the “ritualistic” elements that appear in the narrative (Gong 1980; Wan 1987) than do explanations that view such elements as eruptions of presumed mythic archetypes or as indications of necessary historical connections to pre-extant “myth cycles” from distant locales.²³

In Terence Turner’s analysis, the transformational power of higher-level operations is linked specifically to social reproduction—that is, society’s ability to produce both its constituent socialized members (who are, of course, also “society’s” producers) and its collective institutions. In short, ritual is directed toward social reproduction. Turner also notes that “the highest levels of structure of the system as a whole” “remain . . . to a degree beyond its power to formulate or control” (Turner 1977b: 65).²⁴ Not only do these highest-level principles remain beyond conscious formulation, they also tend to be represented in alienated form.²⁵ In the case of rituals of social reproduction, social collectivities invoke alienated representations of their own productive powers in the very process of realizing such self-productive agency by acting collectively in communal rituals (Sangren 2000). The collective action constituted by ritual thus plays a role in producing the collectivity in part by invoking an alienated representation of the same power manifested as this collective action. The recursive or dialectical structure of ritual-cum-social reproduction is veiled in the activity itself; ritual proceeds explicitly as if social life were an effect or product of powers (gods’ interventions) external to social life. And this proceeding-as-if, oddly, is an essential element of ritual’s real efficacy in reproducing social forms. But of course, representations of gods’ interventions and power are themselves the products of human action. In other words, the “highest levels of the structure” are represented in veiled or alienated form.

In parallel fashion, *FSYY*’s narrative explicitly attributes agency to fate. But of course, fate itself is obviously a fiction (that is, product) of the author’s imagination. Just as one might argue that the legitimacy of social arrangements—particularly, social authority and forms of exploitation—depends in part upon the fiction that such arrangements are natural or ordained by Heaven, so too does the coherence of *FSYY*’s narrative depend on the fiction that the author and his more hierarchically ascendant protagonists are merely giving voice to fate rather than authoring (that is, producing by asserting) it.

I shall attempt to clarify the foregoing points by summarizing briefly an earlier critique of Foucaultian conceptions of “power” with specific reference to Daoist *jiao* 教 rituals (Sangren 1995). I argue that there are interesting structural affinities between the use of “power” in Foucault’s writings and the construction of magical power (*ling* 靈, *lingyan* 靈驗, *lingying* 靈應) in Chinese ritual. Of particular relevance here is the fact that ritually invoked cosmological representations deny agency to the actual actors or producers of

human action and attribute agency to transcendent abstractions—in the Chinese case, to supernatural beings; in Foucault’s case, to a diffuse, metaphysically conceived notion of “power.”

In the Daoist *jiao*, a complex, mutually authenticating rhetoric links processes of production of communities (“collective subjects”), on the one hand, and the subject position of ritual producer, the Daoist, on the other. A striking characteristic of *jiao* is that spatial manipulation of images in the temple, the closing off of the temple from the community, and the positing of a kind of metatranscendence in the Daoist notion of “prior Heaven” *xiantian* 先天 combine to objectify in explicit representational form a hierarchical cosmology in which ascending levels of the cosmos are represented as increasingly “powerful” and effective with respect to changing or controlling “lower” ones. Just as the affairs of humankind are controlled by the gods in Heaven, so too (at least in Daoist cosmology) can Heaven be manipulated and controlled by the even higher powers of “prior Heaven.” The Daoist priest, an “official” in the bureaucracy of prior Heaven, constructs himself in the course of the ritual as having power over the relatively mundane gods that normally occupy the temple altar. He does this in part by temporarily displacing the temple’s gods by moving them to the opposite, yin, subordinate wall of the temple and placing representations of prior Heaven in the yang positions on the altar wall normally occupied by the temple gods. Having thus imagined into being a transcendent level or order, the Daoist thus empowers himself as the agent who conveys this power to “Heaven,” constructed in this representation as occupying a lower level of the system.

There is an intended irony in my describing the temple’s gods as “mundane”—at least from the point of view of the Daoist—but the ironic structure of ritual is not at all intended or, at least, is not explicit as far as its participants are concerned. Gods become “mundane” during the *jiao* in the sense that they temporarily lose their transcendence, that is, their definition as sources of ultimate productive efficacy or power above and beyond human ability to control.²⁶ The point of the *jiao* is, of course, precisely to control them and ensure that they orient their power toward the community’s purposes (broadly speaking, fertility and social reproduction). The details of the symbolic means by which *jiao* accomplishes this ideological operation are too complex to rehearse here; the main point of my earlier analysis is that communities—that is, territorial cults—and Daoists engage in mutually authenticating processes of self-production that depend on constructing alienated representations of the sources of their respective productive agencies. Moreover, these representations embody misrecognition with respect to the real agents of production—that is, Daoists on the one hand and (through their leaders or representatives) communities on the other.

Despite the abstraction of this formulation, I hope that the direction of my argument is beginning to become clearer. A multiplication of levels of transcendence similar to that evident in the *jiao* is also evident in the varying relations of *FSYY*'s characters to fate.²⁷ If we consider the author of *FSYY* to occupy the highest level in a continuum of transcendence with respect to fate (he is, after all, the immediate producer of the text who determines all that is represented), let us also consider the Daoist as the author of the cosmos he imagines into being in the *jiao*. In both cases, authorship of what is represented as the most encompassing "level" of being (*tianming*, in the case of *FSYY*; *xiantian* in the case of the *jiao*) is explicitly denied, even where it is most clearly manifest. The Daoist actively constructs, through manipulation of images, dance, and meditation, the structure of a cosmos that contains him; the narrative constructed by the author is represented as giving voice to "fate." Denial of authorship—a form of alienation insofar as the relationship between product and producer is represented in inverted form—of such transcendence is expedient for both the Daoist and the author of *FSYY*, allowing each to assume a "subject position" that asserts knowledge of and control over levels of being normally considered beyond human control. In the *jiao*, "gods" become mundane; in *FSYY*, immutable fate can be manipulated to the author's narrative ends.

Conclusion

Parallels in the rhetorical structures of ritual and fate stem from the fact that many if not all rituals explicitly intend to transform mundane realities by operating upon them at a higher, more abstract, more encompassing level. One sees the rhetorical production of such levels in the ritual positing of such transcendent realms as "Heaven" (and, in Daoist ritual, "prior Heaven," *xiantian*) and in categories of spirits such as gods and ancestors. Fate and Heaven are conceived in similarly transcendental fashion in *FSYY*, in part because the epic, like ritual, constitutes a model of transformation. In the case of many rituals, the transformations sought have to do with collectivities (as in communal "Rites of Cosmic Renewal") or individuals (rites of passage); in the case of *FSYY*, the story of Nezha entails elements in common with classic rites of passage, but the overarching transformation, one that frames the entire epic, is dynastic transition—transfer of the mandate of Heaven.

Veiled or alienated representation and consciousness characterize the structures of transcendence in both mythic and ritual rhetoric because both generic forms simultaneously model and participate in processes of individual and collective social reproduction. As "models of" social reproduction, myth and ritual produce representations of the principles by means of which social

life itself is produced. A crucial element of such a “model of” social life is that it invokes or imagines (“fictions”) the ultimate sources of productive power (*ling*; *tianming*) as emanating from an external or transcendent realm. In the latter sense, rituals and myths are also, as Geertz’s frequently quoted characterization puts it, “models for” human life (Geertz 1973b: 93–94).²⁸ But as social acts, mythic representations and ritual performances have effects of reproducing social circumstances (what Bourdieu would term “objective structures”) that are both intended and unintended (Bourdieu 1990). One of the most significant of unintended effects is precisely to reproduce the “alienation” or transcendentalization of human agency’s role in constructing or producing the social conditions of existence.²⁹

I would like to offer a particularly speculative suggestion that I hope to elaborate upon in the future, a suggestion that is my own candidate for explaining the aura of existential universality that seems to cling to many mythic narratives. Elsewhere I have argued that Nezha’s appeal to Chinese audiences rests in part on his assertion of absolute autonomy (Sangren 1997). He severs his earthly filial ties, acquires omnipotent power, and is free to do whatever he wants without accommodating others’ desires (until, that is, he is “subdued” and forced to recognize Li Jing). He is, in a word, pure egocentrism embodied.³⁰

In the Chinese case it is not surprising that socially imposed constraints to the free play of egocentric desire are figured in the father who, in psychoanalytic terms, represents the “Law.” What I wish to suggest here is that there is an interesting parallel between the fantasy of omnipotent autonomy portrayed in the story of Nezha, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the omnipotence and omnipresence evident in the implicit identification of fate with the voice of the *FSYY*’s omniscient author. Like the Daoist’s construction of a cosmos in which he implicitly becomes the supreme creator, *FSYY* is a universe in which the epic’s author, overtly he who gives voice to fate, is in fact its creator. When one takes into account this authorial identification with fate—that the author both directly and in the voice of his most hierarchically ascendant characters controls fate itself, at least within the ritualistic boundaries of the mythic narrative—this apparent subordination of all will and intention to an external/transcendent power veils what might be viewed equally as an authorial fantasy of omnipotence. I conclude by emphasizing the irony evident in the fact that—both in the cases of the mythic narrative of *FSYY* and in the rhetoric of ritual transcendence—the very act of constructing imaginary cosmologies that represent human beings as powerless products of transcendental forces like fate comes down to what I have just termed a “fantasy of human omnipotence.” If there are elements of “fatal-

ism” evident in the rhetoric of Chinese ritual and myth,³¹ it is thus an odd sort of fatalism complicated by a veiled but insistent hubris.³²

Notes

1. Chinese scholarship on *Fengshen Yanyi* has been concerned with the question of the text’s authorship. Liu’s pathbreaking study focuses on this issue (Liu Ts’un-yan 1962). A recent master’s thesis by Chen advances philological scholarship significantly (Chen Xiaoyi 1994). Until relatively recently, however, *Fengshen Yanyi* was considered by Chinese commentators to be of little genuine literary merit, even when compared to similar, roughly contemporary epics like *Xiyou Ji*. Interpretative works dealing with *Nezha* and *Fengshen Yanyi* are few, although interest seems to be growing. In Western languages, there is a partial translation into German by Grube (1912); a Ph.D. dissertation provides a chapter-by-chapter synopsis (Wan 1987); Gary Seaman translated thirty-seven chapters (including the *Nezha* story), which he has generously provided me; a complete English translation published in China became available in Gu 1992; and an illustrated, abbreviated edition in Chinese and English was recently published in Singapore (“Canonization of Deities” 1992). The edition I read originally was one of many available in mid-1980s Taiwan. Cornell University’s library lists twenty-eight editions; the earliest, dated 1755, is on microfilm.

2. I believe it appropriate to label *FSYY* a mythic text, even though it was written by a single author. I cannot fully justify this assertion here, but note that *FSYY* draws from a variety of religious and popular legends. Many of these stories are products of complex social processes associated with myth (Kleeman 1994; Sangren 1999; Seaman 1987). Moreover, the overt content of *FSYY* concerns cosmology and the origins of the world as it exists today.

3. Both Gong and Wan, for example, draw attention to the use of fate in *FSYY* as an authorial device to integrate the narrative (Gong 1980; Wan 1987).

4. Karma *yinguo* 因果, of course, constructs fate in terms of rewards and punishments for deeds. Elements of such thinking enter into *FSYY*—for example, in the notion that the gods and demigods must all lose their immortality as a punishment for having violated taboos against killing. However, karma is employed much less centrally than is *tianming*.

5. This distinction between *ming* and *yun* was pointed out to me in the context of spirit-medium sessions on several occasions during fieldwork in northern Taiwan conducted during the 1970s and 1980s. However, I do not suppose it to characterize all of Chinese thinking. By the same token, as Puett’s essay in this volume (Chap. 2) demonstrates, similar tensions are evident in different views of early Chinese philosophers with respect to *ming* itself.

6. Exactly how *Nezha* became established as a divinity in the popular pantheon and practices is murky. His name appears in early Buddhist texts, and there is some

evidence of cultic practices associated with him in medieval China. See Sangren 1997 for additional discussion and bibliographical references.

7. In the popular cult of Nezha, and more broadly in Taiwanese popular religion, *FSYY* is often treated as though it were a historical document. Of particular interest is the fact that the epic's depiction of the Shang–Zhou transition is taken as though it were a reliable account of events. I discuss some of the ramifications of this employment of “history” elsewhere (Sangren 1997). It should be emphasized, however, that the epic's use of fate conveys a late imperial view that should be distinguished from understandings current in early China (see Chaps. 1 and 2, this volume).

8. I shall leave the dispute over authorship to sinologists better qualified to address it (Gong 1980; Liu Ts'un-yan 1962; Wan 1987).

9. Wan notes that Lu Xun disliked it, but Hu Shi had more positive things to say (Wan 1987).

10. The lump of flesh evokes cosmic unity (Taiyi's name), a state of primordial lack of differentiation or chaotic potentiality, *buntun* 混沌 (Girardot 1983; Wan 1987: 334).

11. Zhou Wang, Ao Bing, and Nezha are all “third princes,” suggesting some intended degree of identification among them.

12. One might argue that the notion that Heaven would punish Nezha's parents for crimes that are elsewhere declared by Taiyi to have been preordained by Heaven amounts to an inconsistency in the narrative. But this inconsistency is significant only if one agrees with Gong and Wan 1987: 244 that the point not only of the Nezha story but of the epic as a whole is to illustrate the overarching power of fate. My view is that the interest of the narrative cannot be reduced to this algorithm, and that the “inconsistency” itself models the alienating structure of transcendence itself.

13. Wan argues that the pagoda is a symbol of fatherhood (Wan 1987: 344).

14. Wan also maintains that fate plays an important role in allowing the author to produce an overarching structure for *FSYY* (Wan 1987). Wan, however, does not follow Gong in holding that the explanatory role accorded fate erases the significance of human sentiments except insofar as they are asserted to be subordinate to Heaven's higher, apparently amoral, purposes. Wan explicitly acknowledges the oedipal overtones of the Nezha story, but elsewhere argues that the portrayal of human emotions in *FSYY* as a whole is lacking in complexity, the only consistently depicted sentiments being anger and desire for revenge. Although on the whole I agree with Wan, I would credit the author with an ability to convey through action, if not directly describe, more complexly figured emotions than merely those of anger and revenge. The case of the Nezha story, in particular, evokes quite nicely some of the complexities entailed in the father–son relationship (Sangren 1997).

15. Wan seems to agree, noting that:

Hongjun is the master of the three Hierarchs, the figure in the novel with the highest status. His image is of a merciful, moral, and superior being who possesses magical powers and has cultivated the Tao. He orders the action of investiture and

knows exactly what will occur in the procedure. He also knows that Yuanshi and Laozi will assist King Wu, the sage king, to bring peace to the world. But in opposition to this image, and possibly to the reader's expectation, he poisons his own closest disciples without distinguishing right from wrong. His action signals that there is no distinction between good and evil and that immortals are just like humans, imperfect and mean in action. (Wan 1987: 216)

16. According to Wan, for example:

This episode about Nezha, particularly the striking scene of the attempted father-killing, stands out by itself in the novel. Even when compared with other Chinese fictional works, it is very unique because of its serious violation of the Chinese morality of filial piety found in the Confucian tradition as well as in Buddhist doctrine. Many Chinese scholars have sought to explain away this morally offensive episode. They either refer to it as a political allegory, implying a father-son competition for political power in a real historical event, or interpret it as a reactionary action against the paternal authority in a feudal system. (Wan 1987: 340)

17. The highest levels of this cosmology, although broadly similar to Daoistic representations of the pantheon (Dean 1993; Lagerwey 1987; Schipper 1993), are peculiar to *FSYY*. Summarizing, Wan writes that “the names on the Investiture Roster have been determined and sealed by the three Hierarchs, a group including both the disciples in the Chan School . . . , headed by Hierarch Yuanshi and Laozi, and the Jie School . . . , headed by Hierarch Tongtian. . . . Hongjun is the master of the three Hierarchs, the figure in the novel with the highest status” (Wan 1987: 215–216). Note that the Chan and Jie “schools” are also fictions particular to *FSYY*, and do not correspond to historical schools of Daoism. Liu believes that the author may have modeled the schools on the Quanzhen and Zhengyi schools of Daoism (Liu Ts'un-yan 1962).

18. Jiang Ziya, for example, might have avoided the monumental travails he experiences had he heeded Yuanshi Tianzun's advice and refused to listen to anyone who called his name. Instead, Jiang Ziya heeds his old fellow disciple, Shen Gongbao, who subsequently orchestrates the opposition. But despite the resulting travails, the outcome is as preordained.

19. My reading here reverses that of Gong, who sees Nezha as a mere implement of Taiyi's will (Gong 1980). Figures like Nezha and Sun Wukong have a vastly greater popular appeal than do abstract and transcendent Daoist mystics like Taiyi precisely because they are portrayed as possessing what Hsia characterizes as the “libidinous,” “instinctual” self (Hsia 1968: 311). Moreover, they act out their desires. The fact that in both *Xiyou Ji* and *FSYY* Sun Wukong and Nezha submit to transcendent orderings does not extinguish the basis of their appeal, the exercise of desire-driven power. One manifestation of this appeal is their prominence in shamanistic possessions in present-day Taiwan (Sangren 1997).

20. Consistent with Turner's argument, I have elaborated upon transcendence

in an analysis of Taiwan's Mazu 媽祖 pilgrimages elsewhere (Sangren 1993: 564). In brief:

By prescribing travel outside pilgrims' native communities, the Ma Tsu pilgrimages of Taiwan define the sources of socially productive power as transcendent to both the individual and the community. . . . [P]ilgrimage ritual and rhetoric . . . constitute a multifaceted set of mutually authenticating representations of the self-productive power of various collective institutions and culturally constructed selves. The most encompassing horizons of social and cultural production in pilgrimage exceed overt or conscious representation in pilgrimage itself, a fact crucial to [this] article's attempt to link the spatially hierarchical social organization of pilgrimages to ideological qualities intrinsic to pilgrimage's representations of transcendent power. From an objective or "totalizing" analytical perspective, pilgrimages are logically transcendent or encompassing levels of social production, but they entail representations of transcendence that misrecognize the sociogenic nature of this transcendence.

21. For an elaboration of the analytical and philosophical uses of the concept of "logical types," see Bateson 1972 and 1979.

22. In a sense, anthropological analysis of ritual constitutes a narrative that attempts to construct a coherent narrative of "all that happens" in social life—or, at least, all that happens that is of significance to the continuation of social forms. In this regard, anthropological analysis could be viewed as competing with mythic narrative: both assume that a transcendent order exists that accounts for the events or patterns of social life opaque to its participants. Myth, however, attributes this pattern to external powers, while anthropological analysis views pattern as internal to social processes.

23. I do not wish to imply that mythic narrative possesses no significant structural differences from rituals. In Turner's account, ritual "iconically" embodies the real principles of social production and reproduction insofar as ritual is itself a primary means by which social life and social relations are not only represented but also produced. For a compelling account of imperial sacrifice and ancestor worship along similar lines, see Zito 1984 and 1987. Some myths, of course, are directly reproduced and employed in ritual performances. One would expect such myths to embody more directly the structures of which Turner writes. In a Chinese context, for example, the story of "Mulian Saves His Mother" 木蓮救母 is frequently performed as part of funerals for women, and Teiser links the story to shamanic initiation (Teiser 1988). *FSYY*, however, although it has inspired many popular dramas that are often performed in communal rituals, has a less direct pragmatic connection to ritual.

24. In his critique of Lévi-Strauss' "structuralist" analysis of the story of Oedipus, Terence Turner shows how a dialectic of transgressions finally reveals the power of structure to order and encompass (Oedipus ends up as a blind seer) or construct more powerful, more encompassing orders capable of "suspending" and integrating contradictory elements (T. Turner 1977a). His analyses both here and

elsewhere (T. Turner 1985) focus more on the details of narrative structure than on the structural parallels between myth and ritual. However, his treatments of ritual (T. Turner 1987; T. Turner 1977b) make clear the logical affinities of structure in the two domains.

25. Turner elsewhere makes it clear that alienation typically characterizes such representations (T. Turner 1985).

26. The relationship between gods of prior Heaven and temple gods parallels that which obtains between branch images of gods and those located in their home temples. The nexus of beliefs and rituals associated with pilgrimages entail the odd assumption that local representatives of a god (or goddess) must periodically be taken to higher-ranking cult centers where their efficacy (*ling*) can thereby be recharged. As agents of this recharging process, pilgrims implicitly become producers of their local god-images' powers (Sangren 1993).

27. Analogously, a similar multiplication of levels of transcendence takes concrete form in the nested hierarchy of territorial encompassment evident in pilgrimages (Sangren 1993).

28. Geertz specifically disputes the sense of ideology that I employ here, disallowing the productive efficacy of alienation or misrecognition a place in his understanding of "culture" (Geertz 1973a: 193–233).

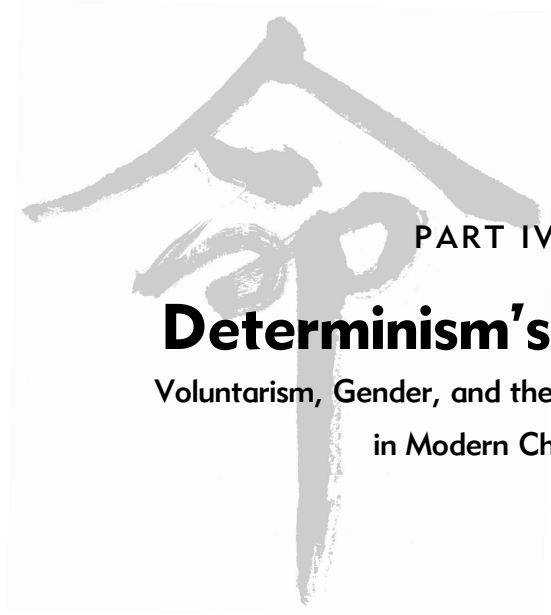
29. Note that my analysis here inverts one of the most common trajectories of deconstructive or poststructuralist analyses; I argue that delusion or mystification lies not in a neurotic affirmation of or attachment to subjective productive creativity, but in its denial.

30. It is important to recall that Nezha's radical autonomy is won only by his sacrificing himself and dying for mother and father. Through this act he produces himself as transcendent and frees himself from patriarchal authority. He can be both supremely filial and radically autonomous to the degree that he can voice his desire to kill his father; he can, in short, have things both ways.

31. For example, Yang (following Malinowski) views Chinese fatalism as serving psychosocial functions:

All these emotional impacts and social difficulties might be mitigated by introducing into the situation the concept of supernatural predeterminism, thereby preserving the individual's credit for honest effort which, given more favorable supernatural circumstances, might have brought success. If something else could be held responsible for the failure, one might not lose all confidence in one's own efforts or in the soundness of the social institution. One's dissatisfaction and despair were directed at fate, not at the family system and its traditionally treasured values. And the overpowering notion of fate tended to breed the attitude of resignation even under adverse circumstance, which was characteristic of the Chinese, instead of inspiring the people to challenge the social institution. (C. K. Yang 1961:188: 55)

32. This combination of hubris and "resignation" registers what Smith views as a persistent ambivalence with respect to human destiny (Smith 1991: 14).



PART IV

Determinism's Progress

Voluntarism, Gender, and the Fate of the Nation
in Modern China

10

Hubris in Chinese Thought

A Theme in Post-Mao Cultural Criticism

WOEI LIEN CHONG

According to a number of contemporary Chinese philosophers, it is not a belief in fate, *ming* 命, that characterizes modern Chinese political culture, but its diametrical opposite—the exaggerated belief in the efficacy of the human will, or hubris. Although they would not deny a proclivity in earlier ages for a belief in *ming*, the political catastrophes of the Maoist period have led them to reconsider the hitherto neglected importance of voluntarism in Chinese thought—the belief that the Superior Man’s purified moral will is capable of transforming both mental and physical reality and regulating the cosmic order.¹

Especially in response to the Cultural Revolution, the phenomenon of Maoism has triggered an acute interest in the activist and vitalist tendencies in Chinese culture, which has long been believed to be predominantly oriented toward social and cosmic harmony rather than conflict, struggle, and antagonism. The recent interest of a minority of Western sinologists in these phenomena also constitutes a departure from the traditional mainstream focus on the harmonistic cosmology of the Chinese literati elite.²

In China, the famous and controversial philosopher Li Zehou, a liberal Marxist, advanced the thesis that it was traditional Chinese voluntarism which formed one of the roots of Mao Zedong’s personality cult and the widespread initial support among all segments of the Chinese population for his program to modernize China by means of mass mobilization campaigns such as the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution,” as well as the failure to provide a viable scientific and technological infrastructure for the modernization process.

Li also traced the development of this ontology of the will from Han Confucianism to the neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming periods, culminating in the voluntarism of the neo-Confucian philosopher Wang

Yangming. According to Li, the disastrous results of Mao's policies were not simply due to his personal idiosyncracies or the influence of "bad" persons at the top, as some have suggested, but to the deeply ingrained misperception on the part of the Chinese people as a whole that reality can be changed merely by a heroic act of the purified moral will, without taking the constraints of the natural environment into account.³ Li regards this as an indigenous form of hubris⁴—not in the ancient Greek sense of arrogance toward the gods, but in the sense that in Chinese culture there is a long-standing belief that the purified human will and consciousness alone are sufficient to overcome the inertia of both untamed nature and deeply ingrained sociocultural habits and dispositions. This is why Maoist ideology held that the key to the ordering of the universe was moral education or the transformation of individual consciousness rather than labor and technology—a tenet which, according to Li, could be traced back directly to Confucianism.

Li Zehou was not the only one to criticize the Maoist period in terms of hubris. Liu Xiaofeng, a well-known Christian theologian trained in China and Switzerland, linked Mao's personality cult and the massacres during the Mao era to the absence in China of a belief in a transcendent God (cf. Chong 2002b: 230–246). Chinese thought and culture, Liu argues, have always been this-worldly, moving solely on a horizontal plane and lacking a vertical axis connecting the human being with an omnipotent and omniscient God. As a result, the Chinese have always tended to deify finite entities, such as political leaders, the state, history, and—in the modern era—science. Liu agrees with Li Zehou that Chinese culture is fundamentally "a culture of joy," pervaded by a thoroughly life-affirming attitude and entirely unburdened by the Christian concept of original sin.⁵ But while Li regards this as a source of strength and vitality, Liu Xiaofeng believes that it is a grave weakness (Liu Xiaofeng 1991; cf. Chong 2002b: 230–246). A people lacking awareness of the reality of sin tend to make the human being the center of the universe, and even absolutize humankind and its products and activities—a phenomenon that Liu calls "nihilism" and to which he applies Chinese equivalents of the term "hubris," *zida* 自大, *zijiao* 自驕. If there is no God, Liu states, there are no absolute moral values, which means that there is nothing to keep people from perpetrating one wave of atrocities after another and sacrificing living individuals on the altars of false collective gods. While Western culture has only become nihilistic in the modern period, in Liu's eyes, hubris (in the sense of deification of the finite) has always been a major characteristic of Chinese history and culture. Liu regards the atrocities in twentieth-century China during the Cultural Revolution as an integral part of the nihilistic crisis of human civilization that has enveloped the entire globe in the modern epoch, culminating in Europe in the terrors of the Holocaust.

Liu Xiaofeng's theological criticism of Chinese culture was echoed by Liu Xiaobo, a literary critic notorious for his fulminations against China's intellectual and literary establishment (see Martin 1992; Chong 1993; Liu Xiaobo 1994; and Gu Xin 1996). Liu is an existentialist of the Nietzschean school whose scathing statements about the bankruptcy of Chinese culture and the need for "total Westernization" have earned him an isolated position in China's intellectual landscape. He agrees with Liu Xiaofeng that the Chinese tend to deify the finite because of the absence in Chinese culture of a transcendent god.

So, the theme of hubris clearly plays a central role in the post-Mao cultural criticism of Li Zehou, Liu Xiaofeng, and Liu Xiaobo. Although they all, in very different ways, assign a major role to personal choice and human agency, they also stress, in response to Maoist voluntarism, that there are certain powers in the universe that cannot be controlled by the human will, without, however, ascribing these powers to the unfathomable workings of impersonal destiny. Li Zehou and Liu Xiaobo point to the objective trend of history and the power of the unconscious drives, habits, and instincts that are deeply embedded in everyday thought and behavior, precluding the instant realization of any social utopia. Liu Xiaofeng believes that the Chinese celebration of the human will is a grave error in view of the reality of sin, and that humankind needs the redeeming power of divine grace. Thus, we see that history, cultural psychology, the unconscious, and sin/grace function as correctives to what these thinkers regard as the hubris inherent in traditional Chinese culture that, or so they believe, led to the revolutionary fervor in early-twentieth-century Chinese politics, and later to Mao's personality cult and the atrocities perpetrated in his name during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, as stated above, in their efforts to provide a corrective to voluntarism, they do not return to the traditional concept of *ming*. In fact, none of the basic categories of traditional Chinese philosophy plays a constitutive role in their thought, which is in itself significant.

The reason lies in the fact that their philosophies are fundamentally based on certain forms of Western thought: Kant and Marx in Li Zehou's case, Nietzsche/Sartre in Liu Xiaobo's case, and Christianity in Liu Xiaofeng's case. Like the majority of Chinese intellectuals educated under Chinese Communism, they are no longer naturally embedded in Chinese tradition, but had to establish a relationship with it consciously and deliberately from a vantage point outside indigenous thought. When they discuss certain traditional Chinese concepts they do so on the basis of Western philosophical foundations. In the contemporary mainland, where a tremendous ontological divide has appeared between traditional Chinese and contemporary Western-inspired thought, Chinese philosophy and religion are

no longer accessible in an unproblematic way. This raises major hermeneutical questions in general about the possibility for contemporary Chinese to gain access to Chinese tradition across the barriers introduced in the twentieth century by Enlightenment, Marxist, and post-Marxist thought—questions that of course concern not only China but other civilizations as well, including the Western.

At this point, it may be useful to make explicit the methodology underlying this chapter. It is not my aim to present an overview of the treatment of *ming* in contemporary scholarly literature in China. In fact, Li, Liu, and Liu are very little concerned thematically with *ming*, since in their view, as pointed out above, it is not *ming* but its very opposite, the hubris of voluntarism that lies at the root of political violence in Mao's China. Therefore, I will not attempt to place their writings against the background of academic studies concerning the concept of *ming* in Chinese culture. Rather, my aim is to show the different valuation they allocate to individual willpower on the one hand, and objective factors transcending human volition on the other, in their efforts to determine the limits of human agency in reality as a whole. Since they undertake this effort on the basis of the Western ontologies they have adopted, I will place their analyses within the context of these.

The three individuals I shall discuss have lived through the ordeals of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, and their thought is a manifestation of their existential quest for personal and societal meaning and truth—for them, philosophy is not merely an academic exercise, but a way to diagnose the prejudices and pathologies of an entire society in order to contribute to the healing of the body politic. While Chinese modernizers at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries held that Chinese tradition lacked the virtues of activism and assertivity that were, in their view, necessary for modern nationhood, in the post-Mao period the conviction has arisen that it is precisely the unlimited faith in the efficacy of morally inspired activism that led to the misdirection of politics toward ideological propaganda and persecution. In this view, the strands in Chinese tradition that were most influential in shaping the Communist Chinese ethos do not suffer from too little but too much emphasis on human agency, leading to the illusion of the limitless malleability of both physical and social reality (hubris; see Munro 1977). It will be shown how Li Zehou, Liu Xiaobo, and Liu Xiaofeng, following three very different philosophical paths, have sought to determine the limits of human volition and to rehabilitate the transpersonal factors impeding easy human intervention in society and nature in order to counter the ontologization of the moral will in Chinese culture, and the concomitant belief in the limitless malleability of reality that they hold responsible for the political excesses of Maoism.

Li Zehou

Li Zehou (b. 1930, Changsha) is a liberal Marxist who, already in 1964, dissociated himself from Mao's doctrine of class struggle and revolution and became famous as "the leader of the Chinese Enlightenment" 新啟蒙 of the 1980s.⁶ A professor of philosophy at Beijing University and a member of the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences, he was castigated in the official press after the 1989 crackdown and accused of being a proponent of "bourgeois liberalism." Li left China in 1992 and currently teaches at the University of Colorado, Boulder. A specialist on the history of Chinese thought and aesthetics, he has been a guest professor at various Western universities and continues to publish academic writings, adding to his already voluminous collected works published in Taiwan a few years ago.⁷

One of Li's major contributions to the "culture debate" in 1980s China was his argument that Maoist voluntarism, with its exuberant belief in the cosmic efficacy of the purified human will, is based on an erroneous understanding of the relationship between humankind and nature. At the same time, he was careful not to fall into the opposite mistake of mechanical determinism. According to Li, the truth lies in the middle: the human potential to mold reality is real, but so is the refractoriness of nature. While the latter was systematically neglected in Chinese thought, it was, Li emphasizes, central to the worldview of the European bourgeois Enlightenment. The great novelty and strength of modern Western thought since Descartes, Li holds, was its focus on the conquest of nature, which is defined as mere Newtonian matter (Li Zehou 1985f). The modern scientific worldview is based on the mechanization and mathematization of the world; it views reality as consisting of substances or essences that can be isolated from the whole for mathematical analysis and empirical experimentation. In contrast, Li continues, in China, both the Confucian mainstream and the countermovement inspired by Zhuangzi 莊子 never regarded the cosmos as a machine or clockwork whose individual parts can be studied in isolation, but as a system or organism that can only be contemplated as a whole, as a complex network of analogies, interactions, and "feedback processes." Because no ontological difference between mind and matter was thematized, the human world was supposed to be directly influenced by events in the natural world and vice versa—hence the persistent belief that the efficacy of the Superior Man's moral will extended, not only over society, but also over nature.

In his three-volume *Treatises on the History of Chinese Thought*, Li traced the history of this idea from pre-Qin philosophy via the ideas of the Han era thinker Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) and Song–Ming neo-Confucianism up to Mao and other twentieth-century Chinese modernizers.

When Marxism was imported into China, Li argues, it was amalgamated in the mind of the young Mao with the voluntarism of the neo-Confucian doctrine of Wang Yangming, which had been passed on to Mao by his teacher (and later father-in-law) Yang Changji 楊昌濟.⁸ As a result, Mao regarded the molding of the people's moral will as more important for social transformation than the conquest of nature through science and technology. Therefore, Li implies, in spite of its claims, Maoism is not a materialist doctrine at all, but a type of voluntarism that is to a great extent based on pre-modern Chinese misconceptions about the nature of human agency: the human being is thought to be capable of transforming both nature and society through the heroic exercise of his moral will, without the support of a technological infrastructure. This is the ultimate reason, in Li's eyes, why Mao was culturally more predisposed toward large-scale ideological campaigns and mass displays of revolutionary fervor than toward promoting science and technology as instruments for economic growth. The result was devastating economic chaos, famine, and the total failure of the modernization experiment.

Moreover, Li holds that Mao fatally underestimated not only the refractoriness of "external nature" but also the inertia of "internal nature"—the tenacity of traditional anticommercial and anticapitalist ideas and attitudes "sedimented" in the deepest layers of the Chinese mind. In line with most schools of traditional Chinese thought, Mao believed that behavioral change is primarily a matter of the purification of the subjective will, while according to Li Zehou the worldview of an entire people cannot be changed overnight, because it is based on the mode of production. Chinese culture is rooted in unconscious habits and values formed over millennia of social practice consisting of small-scale agriculture in a kinship context, which have "sedimented" in the individual brain as a kind of cultural-psychological a priori.⁹

The ideology of Chinese Communism, according to Li Zehou's analysis, was fundamentally shaped by the various schools of ancient Chinese thought in its tendency to idealize the so-called simplicity and authenticity of simple rural life in the ancestral village. When the Chinese Communists inherited this ideal from Confucianism and Mohism, they also inherited the concomitant concern with maintaining strict egalitarianism and preventing the rise of commercialism and industrialization.¹⁰ In the Song period, Li wrote, Confucianism protected the feudal order by advocating low consumption ("asceticism") and shared poverty. The root of these ideas, in his view, can already be found in Confucius himself, who propagated economic egalitarianism in order to protect the closed system of small-scale agriculture based on physical labor, and the ancestor cult that was connected with it.

Confucius feared that the accumulation of wealth and the ensuing income differentials would lead to a breakdown of clan society. Writing in the early 1980s, Li held that the Confucian ideal of egalitarianism continued to present a serious obstacle to China's industrialization and modernization. Ironically, he pointed out, though Confucianism was formally attacked after 1949, its ideals remained: under Mao and the "Gang of Four," shared poverty and moral self-cultivation were still regarded as more important than trying to increase economic production (Li Zehou 1985a: 8).

The Maoist obsession with moral self-cultivation, Li added, was just as much a product of Confucianism as the stress on shared poverty: the Confucian emphasis on the efficacy of the moral will was the main source of inspiration of Maoist voluntarism: Mao's program to focus on ideological education and propaganda as the key to social change. Confucius' historic achievement, Li stated, was his transformation of the shamanistic rituals of the primeval past into the internalized principle of benevolence, *ren* 仁 (Li Zehou 1985a: 18), a task continued by Mencius (*ibid.*: 22). The self-disciplining of the individual became more important than external social constraints (*ibid.*: 25). This stress on inner self-cultivation in terms of filial piety and respect toward one's elder brother gave rise to the formation of what Li calls the "typical cultural-psychological formation of Chinese consciousness," which was completed by Han times (*ibid.*: 16n1).

The Confucian doctrine of benevolence was aimed at the cultivation of the initiative and independence of the *junzi* 君子 or "Superior Man," the aristocrat who held a position in the clan hierarchy (Li Zehou 1985a: 25–26). His task was to cultivate his character in order to rule tribal society (*ibid.*: 27). While originally, the word "*junzi*" designated the warrior-aristocrat, Confucius transformed his martial qualities into moral ones (*ibid.*: 28n9). The doctrine of benevolence portrays the Superior Man as someone who cultivates his inner being and is willing to sacrifice himself in order to save the world. The order in the entire universe supposedly depends on his moral self-cultivation and grand sense of historical mission (*ibid.*: 27, 28). The doctrine of benevolence thus one-sidedly defines rulership in terms of subjective character building, and does not thematize the conquest of material nature. Moreover, Li pointed out, the Confucian view of character building is limited to the social duties the Superior Man must perform within the hierarchy of consanguineous clans and tribes. In contrast to the Western bourgeois idea of "subjectivity," Confucianism never encouraged an exclusive focus on the self in isolation from this hierarchical social context (*ibid.*: 31).

Dong Zhongshu, the founder of China's imperial ideology, synthesized various ideas from earlier Chinese thought into an intricate system of cosmological correspondences linking the world of nature and the world of

humankind (Li Zehou 1985c: 145–146). He combined the yin-yang and Five Phases doctrines, which deal with Heaven, with the Confucian doctrine of benevolence, which deals with human affairs. The result was his theory of the “correspondence between Heaven and humankind,” 天人合一 which merged politics and the heavenly phenomena into one all-compassing cosmological system (ibid.).

When Dong Zhongshu combined the yin-yang cosmology with Confucianism, Li continued, the nature of both doctrines changed profoundly. In the first place, while the yin-yang doctrine portrays humankind as powerless vis-à-vis the laws of nature, and passive in a world in which everything is already predetermined, Dong Zhongshu used the doctrine of benevolence to correct this passive image of humankind. Although his cosmology posits an objective structure in the universe, it also leaves a great deal of scope for human subjectivity. In comparison with the original yin-yang doctrine, Dong greatly elevated the position of humankind in the universe. Looking upward, he is “on a par with Heaven and Earth,” and looking downward, “he is the master over all things” (Li Zehou 1985c: 155).

The reason, according to Dong, is that humankind, although forming an organic unity with Heaven and Earth, plays a pivotal role in realizing the latent potentiality hidden in nature. It is Heaven that gives potentiality, but it is humankind that has the capacity of realizing this potentiality by means of its efforts. It is in this sense that Heaven is dependent on humankind, and that humankind can influence Heaven and help shape its own external circumstances. This is why there is said to be a “correspondence” between Heaven and humankind (Li Zehou 1985c: 156). As Michael Puett states in Chapter 2 of this volume, describing Dong Zhongshu’s cosmic vision: Heaven and man need each other; if there is to be order, then the sage must properly play his cosmic role, just as Heaven plays its role. The cosmos was set up by Heaven for the benefit of man. Nature was made such that man will be able to appropriate it and thereby thrive.

The result of Dong’s synthesis, according to Li Zehou, was that the power of the moral will early Confucianism had already vested in the human subject was now inflated to cosmic proportions. The ruler’s moral character was portrayed as being capable of controlling, not only human affairs, but also the affairs of nature and the entire cosmos, by realizing its vast hidden potential. Eventually, this belief in the transformative power of the moral will, the ability to “tap the power of the cosmos” (Thomas Metzger’s term; Metzger 1977: 85, 115, 119, 127) was brought to a culmination in the neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming periods, particularly in the philosophy of Wang Yangming, who would exercise a great influence on the young Mao.

A major characteristic of Wang's philosophy, Li wrote, was its heavy stress on the dynamic role of subjective practice, manifested in its doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action in moral behavior.¹¹ Wang Yangming held that humankind's essential being is attained in action that is based on "intuitive knowledge." The Wang school opposed the pursuit of objective knowledge as an end in itself and turned increasingly against the contemplative and quietistic ideals of the Cheng-Zhu school, striving instead after active participation and involvement in daily life (Li Zehou 1982: 48).

The activism of the Wang School, Li continued, is characterized by a highly individualistic militant spirit, even to the extent that the human will is regarded as capable of going against destiny. Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 strongly advocated an ethos of "being one's own master," "self-reliance and self-respect," questioning canonical authority, and the rejection of blind obedience. These tendencies became even stronger in Wang Yangming and his followers. Wang Gen 王艮, for example, literally called for "creating destiny," *zao ming* 造命, and "changing destiny," *yi ming* 易命, and Liu Zhongzhou also emphasized the power of the will, which he linked to the conviction that the essence of humankind contained only "the highest good, and not a trace of evil." The Wang school became entirely focused on the individual's sense of historical mission and moral self-consciousness rather than on the subjugation of nature (Li Zehou 1982: 48).

This emphasis on the power of the subjective will, Li continued, shaped the minds of many later intellectuals, including Kang Youwei 康有為, Tan Sitong 譚嗣同, the young Mao Zedong 毛澤東, and Guo Moruo 郭沫若, and gave them spiritual support in their battle against the old society. However, it was precisely this kind of voluntarism that would, according to Li, become China's undoing in the modern period: the incipient Enlightenment movement in early-twentieth-century China was overwhelmed by a wave of anti-foreign nationalism, which propagated precisely this kind of exaggerated belief in the efficacy of moral cultivation, the steeling of the will, and the fostering of a militant spirit (Li Zehou 1982: 48).

Although many Chinese intellectuals attacked neo-Confucianism for its feudal ideas, Li pointed out, its influence continues to haunt the Chinese mind until the present day—Chinese Marxism's enormous stress on frugality (low consumption) and its virulent attacks on "selfishness" being cases in point. Even more important, Chinese intellectuals never abandoned the conviction of the Wang school that the purified human will is the seat of heavenly principles, and therefore endowed with vast transformative powers (Li Zehou 1982: 50). In order to realize these transformative powers, however, the will must be incessantly monitored and cleansed of impure desires. As a result, political ideology in modern China became heavily focused on

the need for moral surveillance and purification. Thus, Li stated, there is no basic difference in the assumptions of neo-Confucianism and Liu Shaoqi's 劉少奇 "How to Be a Good Communist" despite the difference in content: they are both predominantly concerned with steeling the subjective will and sense of moral responsibility as motors of social change. This demonstrates, in Li's opinion, how neo-Confucianism shaped the Chinese character, with its emphasis on virtue, the control of reason over the emotions, self-discipline, and the spirit of militant resolve (*ibid.*: 51).¹²

In the twentieth century, both revolutionaries and conservatives, Li argued, were alike in their voluntaristic activism and militant social commitment and their neglect of science, technology, and industrial production. Combined with the external pressure of foreign aggression, this led to their premature and fatal abandonment of the project to bring enlightenment to China—that is, liberal and democratic ideas and institutions—rallying behind the call for "national salvation."¹³ Mao's own obsession with moral purification campaigns and the power of the subjective will was also fully in accord with traditional Chinese misconceptions about the transformation of reality (Li Zehou 1985e: 258).

In spite of his far-reaching analysis of the traditional Chinese roots of Maoist voluntarism, Li Zehou also believes that traditional Chinese thought may yet play a constructive role in the future postindustrial society. While he, on the one hand, emphasizes that bourgeois thought rightly built the ontology of modernity on the subject–object opposition, he also, on the other hand, holds that history is moving toward a point where these oppositions will be reconciled in reality. This is why he believes that traditional Chinese aesthetics, which is not founded on the subject–object and the related mind–matter opposition, can assist in the rise of a new mode of thought in the postindustrial world—a mode of thought that no longer treats humankind and nature as antagonists (Li Zehou 1985f). It is here that Chinese tradition may still make a major positive contribution to humankind in the postmodern era.

Li has explicitly abandoned the Marxist discourse of class struggle and revolution while reemphasizing the importance of the objective laws of history and the idea that human progress is only possible in gradual stages, not by violent interventions. Mao's gravest mistake, in Li's view, was that he tried to develop China by mass campaigns which mobilized popular willpower but totally ignored the objective laws of history. By contrast, Li holds that the course of history cannot be controlled by the human will. The role of the will is limited to selecting the right moment for social action on the basis of an understanding of the objective laws of historical development. To go against

these laws by trying to skip developmental stages and take a sudden leap from “feudalism” to socialism (Mao’s mistake, according to Li) is to invite disaster.

Clearly, Li’s own brand of Marxism is not revolutionary but evolutionary. His ameliorist, technology- and democracy-oriented interpretation of Marxism constitutes a decisive break from the militant voluntarism of the Cultural Revolution with its overwhelming focus on class struggle, revolution, and the ideological transformation of the people’s will. Li’s view of history is a conscious attempt to steer a course between the Scylla of Maoist voluntarism and Marx’s messianistic eschatology on the one hand, and the Charybdis of mechanical determinism on the other (cf. Chong 1999–2000b). Li holds, against determinism, that humankind is indeed to a great extent capable of taking its lot into its own hands and creating a better world for itself, but only—and this is aimed against voluntarism—within the limits of the objective constraints posed by nature and cultural psychology (“sedimentation”), both of which can only be transformed very gradually, in an evolutionary fashion, and never by means of violent revolution. Thus, it can be said that, in Li’s scheme of things, the objective laws of history, external nature, and cultural psychology have taken over the role of fate as transpersonal powers outside the influence of the human will that, next to human agency, codetermine the destiny of humankind.

Liu Xiaofeng

Liu Xiaofeng 劉小楓 (b. 1956), a Christian theologian, was also in the forefront of the “culture debates” of the 1980s (Lin Min 1994; Lin Min with Maria Galikowski 1999). Educated in China and Switzerland, and proficient in German, French, and English, he has a wide and intimate knowledge of both Chinese and European literature and thought.¹⁴ A professor of philosophy and culture studies at Shenzhen University since 1988, he studied theology at Basel University in Switzerland from 1989 to 1993, obtaining a Ph.D. in theology in 1993 with a German language study on Max Scheler (Liu Xiaofeng 1996).

Liu’s polemic thesis is that the basic attitude of Chinese philosophy (especially Zhuangzi) is “indifference,” both in the moral and the ontological sense. This he contrasts with the Christian faith in God as the source of love, compassion, and forgiveness (Liu Xiaofeng 1990a and 1990b). In the face of the terrible violence and human suffering in the twentieth century, Liu argues, the idea that traditional Chinese philosophy can once again provide a moral foothold, as suggested by Li Zehou and others, is mistaken. Chinese philosophy is more concerned with maintaining social order (Confucianism)

and the preservation of the authenticity and physical existence of the self (Zhuangzi) than with the pain and suffering of other individuals. Chinese thought lacks the belief in a transcendent, personal God that provides the believer with the certainty and strength needed to sacrifice the concern for self for the sake of love for one's fellow human beings. According to Liu, the dominant attitude toward life in China has been characterized for centuries by the spirit of *xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙游, the title of the first chapter of Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters. While James Legge, for example, translates this term as "enjoyment in untroubled ease," and Burton Watson as "free and easy wandering," Liu Xiaofeng interprets it largely as self-centered hedonism—the idea that one should live out one's natural life span by not becoming involved in other people's problems. Instead of risking life and limb for the sake of others, it is better to enjoy the moment and live a carefree life. Thus, in Liu's view, there is not much difference between Zhuangzi and the hedonism of Yang Zhu 楊朱 as described by Zong-qi Cai in Chapter 7 of this volume.¹⁵

According to Liu Xiaofeng, both traditional Chinese philosophy and Li Zehou entertain an unquestioned belief in the self-sufficiency of the human subject—the idea that a human being does not need supernatural support in order to elevate him- or herself to a higher plane of existence. In Liu's view, the global catastrophes of the twentieth century have shown that this is not true. China should end its optimistic anthropocentrism and reflect on the realities of evil and sin. The meaning of human life can only be found outside the human realm, in the Christian God who transcends empirical reality and is the eternal, absolute, and indubitable foundation of all ethical values. Thus, Liu Xiaofeng consciously chooses to stand in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where there is a total rift between the realm of nature, which has no intrinsic meaning in itself, and God, who is the only source of meaning and moral value, standing completely outside nature. The realm of humankind and nature, when left to itself, is entirely devoid of purpose and meaning. According to Liu Xiaofeng, the failure to understand this on the part of both traditional Chinese thought and the modern Western philosophy of the subject ultimately led to the self-deification of the human being that is at the root of the worldwide catastrophes and genocides of the twentieth century. Humankind merely venerates itself in its worship of idols such as the state, history, political leaders, science, and art. None of these can provide the transcendent foundation for absolute moral values that humankind so desperately needs. The error both of traditional Chinese philosophy and the modern philosophy of the subject since Descartes and Kant, Liu holds, is that they ascribe moral self-sufficiency to the human being as if there were no need for a link between it and a transcendent God. This is the ultimate root of hubris.¹⁶

In Liu's theological worldview, God's will and divine grace serve as

ontological limits to the scope of human agency, just as the reality of sin provides a limit to the belief in human self-perfection. This is comparable to Li Zehou's use of "the objective laws of history" and "cultural-psychological sedimentation" as boundaries to what he regards as the traditional Chinese hubris in overestimating the transformative power of the moral will. However, Liu Xiaofeng regards Li Zehou's faith in history as yet another form of hubris because, in his view, this faith remains bogged down in the same deification of the human subject that characterized Maoist voluntarism.

Due to our hubris, Liu maintains, the belief that humankind can rely on itself and does not need supernatural assistance, we turn life into a hell for each other. For Liu Xiaofeng, heaven and hell are not realms in the afterlife, but conditions we create for each other every day, in the here and now. Hubris leads to the absolutization of the finite, such as history, science, and the state, which has caused untold misery in the twentieth century. Hell is nowhere but here, in the coldness of our hearts, our insensitivity toward each other, and the obstruction of love (Liu Xiaofeng 1990a: 146). The scourge of our epoch was, in particular, the attempt to create a heaven on earth via ideological terror and political mass campaigns, which ultimately led to the establishment of a living hell. The reference to the Cultural Revolution, and the reign of Communism in general, is clear.¹⁷

Heaven, for Liu, is not a realm that we can establish through some collective political scenario, but only through love and compassion, selfless service to one's fellow human beings and hence to God (Liu Xiaofeng 1990a: 38–40). Love, *ren'ai* 仁愛, has nothing to do with the state or society: it is something completely individual. Thus, Liu seeks to dissociate the words "*ren*" 仁 (humaneness) and "*ai*" 愛 (love) from Confucian and Communist concepts of duty according to which the role of the individual lies in conforming to social mores without experiencing any link to a transcendent personal God. The "heavenly kingdom," *tianguo* 天國, Liu explains, does not refer to a change in the sociopolitical status quo but to a revolution in the individual spirit, the resurrection of love, *aixin de fuhuo* 愛心的復活. "The heavenly kingdom" is an inner state, not some sociopolitical utopia as envisaged by Confucianism and Communism.

Through the resurrection of love, humankind is able to transcend its natural state, thus transforming historical time into divine time or meta-time. This may occur on more than one occasion in history. It is said in the Bible, Liu states, quoting Paul Tillich, that eternal happiness lies in an Eternal Now (Liu Xiaofeng 1990a: 146). Many twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals were captivated by the Hegelian-inspired vision of an ideal society appearing at the end of history via a dialectical development, at the cost of great human suffering. Liu, who regards the Cultural Revolution as a direct consequence

of the myth of history, rejects this master narrative. Eternal happiness and eternal life do not lie in some faraway future, but in the here and now, in our living with each other, for each other. The heavenly kingdom appears, not at the end of history, but in the present, in our love (Liu Xiaofeng 1990a: 38–40). Thus, Liu Xiaofeng criticizes the hubris originating from Hegelianism from a Christian viewpoint. Interestingly, Liu Xiaobo has done the same on the basis of atheist existentialism.

Liu Xiaobo

The literary critic Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波 (b. 1955) is a former lecturer in literature at Beijing Normal University who achieved worldwide fame for organizing a four-person hunger strike during the 1989 protest movement in Beijing.¹⁸ He is notorious for his acerbic attacks on Chinese culture and establishment intellectuals, antagonizing many people with his cynical remark that Chinese society has reached such a degree of bankruptcy that it is beyond all capacity for self-regeneration and could only be cured, like Hong Kong, by “three hundred years of foreign colonization” 三百年的殖民地.¹⁹

Liu has written books and articles in which he laments the decline of Chinese art and culture, contrasting them with what he regards as the superior achievements of the West (Liu Xiaobo 1989c, 1989d, 1989e, 1990, 1991, 1992; see also H. Martin 1992; Chong 1993; Liu Xiaobo 1994). He admires the great diversity of Western thought and the prominent place it accords to the individual and emotional life, as opposed to what he calls the “collectivism” and “rationalism” of both Chinese tradition and the contemporary Communist system. The leitmotiv of his writings is his insistence that Western literature and philosophy, because they reflect a persistent concern with freedom and individualism, are far superior to Chinese literature and philosophy, which, in his view, deal mainly with the problem of maintaining social order. In this respect, he sees an uninterrupted continuity between traditional Chinese culture and post-1949 Communist society. The aim of his writings is polemical: he uses Western history and philosophy to criticize Chinese tradition and Chinese Communism, both of which he regards as manifestations of “Chinese despotism.” The rise to power of the Chinese Communist party in 1949, in his view, did not constitute a break but a continuation of the empire’s autocratic political style.

Like Liu Xiaofeng, Liu Xiaobo is convinced that Western culture owes much of its strength and resilience to Christianity: he regards both the Kantian philosophy on the limits of human reason (which Liu greatly admires) and the idea of political democracy as being historically related to the religious concept of original sin. Democracy, he writes, is a political system

in which institutional precautions are taken against the consequences of human corruptibility. The most fundamental reason why the Chinese have never established democracy is that they lacked the concept of original sin: “Precisely because Western culture puts no trust in the human being, and questions it, doubting and criticizing it, could Western culture advance into the front ranks of world civilization” (Liu Xiaobo 1989f: 89).

Liu points out that, while the Chinese tend to deify their political leaders even during their lifetimes, Western culture started to separate the religious and political spheres from the Reformation onward. In the West, he states, the human being can never attain divine status, as only God is omniscient and omnipotent, and soars high above nature and human society: “Western culture recognizes three worlds: one of the spirit, *shen* 神, one of human beings, and one of nature. Each of these worlds is independent, possessing its own boundaries demarcating it from the others. The realm of the spirit is regarded as higher than that of human morals, and of greater value than humankind: in the eyes of God, the human being is eternally burdened with original sin, and therefore eternally imperfect” (Liu Xiaobo 1989f: 71). As a result, Liu holds, society and the state are not sacrosanct in the West, in contrast to China.²⁰ While for the Chinese, the deeds of humankind are of cosmic importance, Western man knows that he is but a speck of dust compared to God: “Precisely because of the light from heaven, the darkness of the human world becomes visible; precisely because there is the perfection of God, the imperfection of man becomes visible. If there is no God, the fall of man has no meaning. If there is no God, man does not even know that he has fallen: on the contrary, he then becomes blindly intoxicated with his own omniscience and omnipotence. A world with God is fearsome, but a world without God is even more fearsome” (Liu Xiaobo 1989h: 74; 1989g: 76). Here, the reference to the horrors during the Cultural Revolution is obvious. While Liu admires Nietzsche’s aristocratic heroism, he also differs from the German philosopher in that he regards the sense of sin as a positive and constructive element in Western culture: “The Westerners’ sense of original sin makes them confront the evils of their inner world, their weaknesses and criminal drives, while the optimism of the Chinese about human nature makes them unable to see their inner self in its true light.” To which he added: “Because Westerners have an absolute God, they are able to confess their sins, and atone for them. The Chinese have no God, and therefore they have never been capable of confession and atonement” (Liu Xiaobo 1989b: 35). Not coincidentally, Liu made this scathing remark in an article entitled “Hubris Will Be Punished by Heaven.”²¹

Liu believes that the Chinese grossly overestimate man’s ability to mold reality because they have never separated religion from politics, whereas in

the West, Luther's Reformation was aimed at enforcing this separation, making the decisive step in preparing for the process of democratization. While Christians possess conceptions of God and Truth that enable them to take a moral, spiritual, and intellectual stance independent of the secular powers, Liu stated, the Chinese continue to believe that mankind is best served if the individual supports the mighty. Chinese spirituality fostered submission to despotism, and thus did not, like Christianity, produce the seeds of individualism and political revolt (Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 129; 1988: 65).

Thus, while Li Zehou argued that the hubris of the Chinese concerning the transformative powers of the Superior Man led both to despotism and the neglect of science and technology, Liu Xiaobo solely emphasizes the link between hubris and despotism. Unlike Li, Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xiaofeng do not believe in the salvific potential of science and technology, because in the modern era science and technology have themselves become objects of deification. As Liu Xiaobo points out, they may easily lead to a new kind of bondage (Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 316, 408, 411, 413–414, 419–421, 422). Nevertheless, Liu Xiaobo fully agrees with Li Zehou that China has not yet reached the stage where the problems of advanced industrial society arise, as it is still a premodern, "feudal," and "small-peasant" society in which poverty and ignorance, not overconsumption and overinformation, are still the greatest problems. While Liu Xiaobo is deeply aware of the darker sides of modern welfare society, he fully supports China's economic and scientific development (see also Liu Xiaobo 1989c: 193).

In regard to the problem of hubris, however, Liu Xiaobo is on the side of Liu Xiaofeng and not on the side of Li Zehou, as he concurs with the former in stressing the central role of the concept of original sin in Western culture. This concept, Liu writes, gave rise to a profound sense of tragedy in Western culture that is totally lacking in China. The sense of sin, and the accompanying awareness that the human being is tragic, not only makes Western culture as a whole superior to Chinese culture, but has also bred greater personalities in religion, philosophy, and art. Compared to Western society, Liu finds life in China shallow and trivial, as it merely revolves around the "vulgar utilitarianism" of family interests and practical community life (Liu Xiaobo 1989b: 36).

This is a conscious reaction against Li Zehou's praise of Chinese culture as being "pragmatic," that is, totally this-worldly and focused on human affairs rather than on a transcendent world (Li Zehou 1985d). Li Zehou rejects all "two-worlds" metaphysics and denies that religion can play any constructive role in social life. As a Marxist, he is an atheist who interprets religion in psychological terms as an emotional response to failure in the sociopolitical sphere. It is when people find themselves utterly powerless to

change the social and political status quo, Li avers, that they tend to embrace religion as a kind of escapism.²² Liu Xiaobo, however, claims that it is precisely because Chinese ethics is preoccupied with the practical affairs of the family and society that it has led the Chinese to an unconditional compliance with the existing social order (Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 435). The Chinese are said to possess no idea of what it means to lead a life inspired by transcendent ideals: “It is not important whether or not humankind’s religious aspirations and desire for perfection and love can ultimately be attained, but what matters is that the life of a person who possesses such ideals is authentic” (Liu Xiaobo 1989b: 36). It is the loftiness of one’s ideals that counts, not whether or not they are beneficial to society (Liu Xiaobo 1989e: 33).

Liu Xiaobo has been heavily influenced by the atheist existentialism of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus.²³ Liu experiences existentialism as a liberation, because in his view it deliberately destroys the naive belief in grand collective narratives and social myths, which always tend to restrict individual freedom for the sake of some collective telos. Liu rejoices in the contingency of reality, the absence of collective meaning, and Sartre’s thesis that freedom in the ontological sense is absolute. On the other hand, he also maintains a strong belief in the objective trend of history. He argues that history is inexorably moving toward the growth of freedom in the sociopolitical sense, and regards democratization and humanization as objectively observable trends in Europe from the Renaissance through Luther to the Enlightenment. Liu regards European history as a linear process of progressive emancipation: Western culture, he holds, has gone through three phases of emancipation, while China “has not even completed the first.” China’s “development,” he suggests, has “stagnated” in a “primitive” stage, but may still continue if traditional value systems and patterns of behavior are demolished (Liu Xiaobo 1989e: 35, 55–56, 77, 92–96). This is obviously the language of one who believes in progress as a teleological process. Liu’s universe is thus clearly not as contingent as the early Sartre’s.²⁴

In the first phase, Liu explains, human beings emancipated themselves from their subjection to nature. They discovered that they could treat nature as an objective entity, and could learn to control the environment and make nature serve human purposes by penetrating its secrets. This process started with early Greek cosmologic speculation and culminated in the establishment of modern science and the philosophy of science (Liu Xiaobo 1989e: 92).

During the Renaissance and the Reformation, Liu writes, the West completed the second phase of emancipation, when the individual freed itself from society. The individual began to cast off the uniform modes of thought and behavior of the medieval community, and no longer accepted the absolute authority of the established Church. The harmonious worldview of the

Middle Ages was abandoned, and the reality of conflict as an ineradicable element of human society was fully and openly acknowledged, laying the ground for the political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke. These thinkers no longer viewed the social order as a divine creation, but as something man-made. Moreover, society was regarded as a means for the self-realization of individuals, not as an end in itself.²⁵

The third phase is that of the emancipation of the individual from other individuals. It was during this phase, Liu holds, that philosophy also formulated the conflict within each individual. In existentialism, the individual is cut off from all traditional certainties, as the possibility of deriving objective, preestablished goals and values from either nature or history is denied: the human being is thrown naked into a meaningless world. Existence becomes a battle for meaning and coherence that reality does not in itself offer. The only certainty in life is the inevitability of death. A person has no innate “essence,” and neither can he or she derive any identity from being a member of this or that group. One is absolutely nothing until one starts to become what one wants to be. The authentic life consists of making one’s own choices and taking full responsibility for them; hiding behind “the people,” “History,” “Reason,” and so on is self-deception (Sartre’s *mauvaise foi*) (Liu Xiaobo 1989e: 91).

Liu formulated the third and final stage of his view of history on the basis of Sartre (the ineradicable conflict between individuals) and Freud (the eternal conflict within each individual). Liu has observed the modern widening of the gap between oneself and other human beings as well as the internal disintegration of the personality, but far from considering this a pathological phenomenon, he regards it as a historic step toward a higher level of individual existence. Unlike Hegel and Marx, Liu does not view history as a process moving away from alienation toward reconciliation, but the other way round: the individual emancipates itself by discarding the hope of reconciliation and accepting the challenge of increasing alienation that modernity imposes on it. What Hegel and Marx call alienation, Liu calls progress. What Hegel and Marx call the antidote against alienation (the integrated life in the integrated community), Liu calls the individual’s alienation from itself. The true meaning of human existence cannot be found in the Communist or any other utopia, only in the unending battle for meaning that takes place within each individual. It is clear that a greater contrast with the views of Li Zehou is hardly possible.

What does one do when confronted with the “absurd,” that is, the absence of inherent meaning in human existence? Liu cites the three options presented by Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*.²⁶ Face to face with a reality that refuses to disclose itself to man’s quest for meaning, one may either

choose to extinguish consciousness by committing suicide (total refusal) or to escape by embracing a faith and seeking solace in optimism (total acceptance). Camus rejects these solutions in favor of a third option, which is to maintain both consciousness and the absurd: it is only in the tension between them that freedom arises. Freedom, according to Camus, is internal freedom from the established values and life patterns of one's environment. Only by acknowledging the absurdity of social mores (their complete arbitrariness) can one be mentally independent of them. Life must be a rebellion against the absurd, but this is only possible if no attempt is made to explain it away. This means that we also have to accept the existence of death as absurd, something incomprehensible. Our existence, even as rebellion, is without hope, because we must die.²⁷

Of Camus's three options, according to Liu, only the first two can be found in Chinese history: there is the facile optimism of Confucianism and Communism on the one hand, which denies the tragic, and, on the other, there is the Buddhist and Daoist tradition of the disappointed recluse who admits the tragic but reacts to it by withdrawing from the world, whether by a real or a symbolic death. Liu calls the first option "naive optimism" and the second "negative pessimism." He places Schopenhauer in the second category, as he entertained "an Oriental wish for Nirvana" (Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 301). In contrast, Liu calls his own attitude, which is inspired by Kant, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus, "positive pessimism," as he regards humanity's tragic fate not as an excuse for surrendering to nihilism but as a challenge to choose one's own individual existence until, as inevitably must happen, one is cut down by death. It is by refusing to escape from the tension between the meaninglessness of life and our desire for existence to be meaningful that we become authentic individuals.

Thus, for Liu Xiaobo, the highest ideal of personhood lies in authenticity, not in participating in the historic project of human progress as suggested by Li Zehou. The problem with Li Zehou and the myth of progress in general, in Liu's view, is that it regards reason, *lixing* 理性, as superior to feeling, *ganxing* 感性.²⁸ In contemporary China, Liu states, there is still an exaggerated belief in the powers of reason to serve as an instrument in the perfecting of man. Feeling is considered inferior to reason, and is seen as obstructing its proper functioning. Metaphysics and science are both held to be objective, rational systems of thought designed to find truth, in contrast to the blind arbitrariness of emotional life. Liu turns this idea upside-down, rejecting the exaltation of reason and advocating the liberation of man's pre-rational and nonrational faculties. Inspired by Freud, he holds that all fruits of the human spirit (philosophy, science, and art) are primarily products, not of reason, but of man's irrational drives: childhood experiences, the

unconscious, and the emotions. Reason and consciousness, he states, are only transformations of the life force that animates our biological organism (Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 5–6).

This argument is directly aimed at Li Zehou's view on human nature. According to Li, our biological and animal needs tie us to nature, though we should strive to rise above nature in order to conquer it and make it serve the building of human civilization. The human being is capable of overcoming its animal nature only by collective labor within the framework of social organization, which simultaneously enables it to overcome its natural environment. Taken in isolation from society, the individual is passive and noncreative. In contradiction to Li Zehou, Liu holds that civilization (he particularly refers to art and knowledge) is not at all a product of socialization and the imposing of moral norms, but of what Freud calls the sublimation of the emotions, and primitive drives and needs. Society can never control these primal forces that lie hidden in the innermost recesses of our beings. Conversely, the individual can dissolve the control of society over its mind by recognizing and accepting its own feelings and subconscious needs. This will arouse its desire to realize its own aspirations and bring it into conflict with the external world. It is in this creative battle that the individual's existence can find its only true fulfillment (Liu Xiaobo 1989e: 113, 119, 144).

At the same time, Liu Xiaobo is closer to Li than to Liu Xiaofeng when it comes to the redeeming role of history. Liu Xiaobo's heavy stress on the inevitability of choosing one's own identity is combined with a fundamental confidence in the progressive march of history toward authentic individuality. For both Li Zehou and Liu Xiaobo, history is a transpersonal power that, when viewed in the long term, can be seen to be working for the human good—although, as we have seen, they have diametrically opposed views of what the human good is. In this sense, it can be argued that for these two thinkers, the role of *ming* as a transpersonal force has been taken over by history. Liu Xiaofeng, by contrast, decidedly rejects this kind of ontologization of history. In his theological vision, the role of *ming* as destiny is taken over, not by history, but by God.

Hubris in Traditional Chinese Thought: A Closer Look at the Ontological Dimension

The catastrophes caused by the hubris of Maoist voluntarism has led the three thinkers we have discussed to reemphasize the reality of transindividual powers that codetermine the destiny of humankind next to human volition—be they nature, history, the burden of traditional culture, or God. In the case of Liu Xiaobo the existentialist, the fact that each human being is “thrown

into the world” (Heidegger’s *Geworfenheit*) is a very obvious expression of this. It could be argued that these concepts are used as a kind of functional equivalent to the traditional Chinese concept of *ming* in the sense of destiny. Still, it should be borne in mind that the ontologies of these three men—Marxist, Christian, and existentialist—are entirely and consistently Western, and that in this respect their ideas bear no relationship whatsoever to traditional Chinese discourses on *ming*. As we have seen, however, the fact that their ontologies are Western in origin does not mean that they are unable to view certain empirical aspects of Chinese tradition in a positive light.

This should be clarified a bit further. In this essay, I have used the word “ontology” in the Heideggerian sense—it refers to the metaphysical oppositions that determine the way in which reality as a whole appears, and the nature of truth. Far from being subject to critical reflection, these metaphysical oppositions are prior to critical reflection and provide the very framework for the latter. Thus, while Li Zehou regards certain elements of Chinese culture as potentially valuable for the postindustrial era, he does so, as he has stated himself, from the viewpoint of the modern ontology that Marx inherited from Descartes and Kant. While for Li, reality as a whole, prior to all thought and speech, is already organized according to Western (Cartesian, Kantian, or Marxian) categories, he can still regard certain aspects of Chinese culture as valuable in terms of these same Western categories. The fact that a Chinese philosopher’s thought is Western on the ontological (metaphysical) level still leaves open the possibility that he or she may have a positive appreciation of concrete aspects of Chinese culture and tradition on the ontic (physical) level. It is important to distinguish between these two levels in our analysis, also because this distinction enables us to understand the difference between Li Zehou’s view of Chinese hubris and Liu Xiaofeng’s.

First, let us look more closely at Li Zehou’s argument. In his view, China has still not been able to modernize because the Chinese conceive of reality in a premodern way no longer viable in the industrial age, notably in regard to the nature of knowledge and action. In his writings, Li has pointed to the great difference in these respects between the modern Cartesian and the traditional Chinese ontology. The former is based on the opposition between subject (*res cogitans*) and object (*res extensa*), two ontologically different substances the relationship between which is mediated and indirect, not direct. The mediated nature of the relationship between subject and object is expressed in the rise of modern epistemology and the concern with practice in the sense of labor (technology). In the modern worldview, as formulated by Kant, the subject can only have knowledge of an object via the mediation of the forms and categories of its own intellect: in fact, the application of

these forms and categories to the formless manifold of sense impressions actually constitutes the object. Thus, in the Kantian scheme, there can be no direct, intuitive knowledge of the object unmediated by the faculties of the mind itself, because what we perceive as an object is a product of the mind's own constructive activity. Moreover, we can only have knowledge of things insofar as they appear to us, as synthetic constructs, and we can have no knowledge of things as they are in themselves apart from the synthesizing activity of the mind.²⁹

On the basis of his psychocultural interpretation of Kant's epistemology, Li Zehou holds that so-called objective reality is in fact a construct of the human subject, in particular of a culture as a collective subject. The way in which reality as a whole appears is culturally construed. In laying such a strong emphasis on knowledge being mediated by culture ("sedimentation") (Li Zehou 1984: 118), Li made a decisive break both with the doctrinaire Communist "reflection" theory of knowledge and with Wang Yangming's 王陽明 belief in knowledge being based on direct intuition, which Li regarded as one of the roots of Maoist voluntarism.³⁰

Similarly, and here Li points specifically to Marx's teachings, as mind and matter are two ontologically different substances, the human agent can only transform matter indirectly, through practice (labor). Modern Western thought, Li holds, does not make the mistake of Wang Yangming and Mao Zedong in thinking that the key to the transformation of nature lies in the purification of the moral will. This mistake originated from the absence in traditional Chinese thought of any ontological difference between mind and matter; this holism and organicism encouraged the belief that the Superior Man's moral will, once purified, was equally efficacious in the realms of human affairs and nature.

What Wang Yangming passed on to Mao, Li argues, was not so much a concrete content as a fundamental ontology: the idea that both knowledge and action are direct and unmediated. For Wang, knowledge was a matter of direct intuition, unmediated by abstract theory, experiment, and mathematization; and action was a matter of the moral will, unmediated by labor and technology. Combined with the general failure in Chinese holism to acknowledge the passive inertia of material nature, this led to Mao's misguided idea that the whole of reality can be changed within a very short time span, directly and instantaneously, as long as the ideological conditions on the subject side are ripe. It was not a coincidence that he felt little need for the long-term, uninterrupted establishment of a viable scientific and technological infrastructure. Fundamental traditional fallacies about knowledge and action being unmediated, and matter infinitely malleable, reached their cul-

mination in Mao's erroneous belief that society could be altered by means of convulsive mobilizational campaigns aimed at changing people's ideology such as the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, rather than by piecemeal social engineering in a gradual, evolutionary process.

Thus, in Li's view, the hubris of Chinese thought consists in its failure to recognize the fact that all interactions between the human agent and objective nature are necessarily mediated. Just as there is no easy knowledge to be obtained through some kind of direct intuition, so in terms of action no easy transformation of matter can be achieved merely through the exercise of one's moral will. What is missing in Chinese thought is (*a*) the recognition that knowledge is always mediated by categories which are historically and culturally informed ("sedimentation"), and (*b*) that human agency can only be brought to bear upon material reality indirectly, via the medium of social labor and technology.

But while Li Zehou believes that the hubris of Chinese thought lies in its failure to appreciate the true relationship between mind and matter (the mediated nature both of knowledge and action), Liu Xiaofeng argues that it was not this, but rather the failure to recognize the ontological difference between the realm of the human and the realm of the divine that fostered the exaggerated Chinese belief in the transformative power of the Superior Man's purified moral will. Moreover, Liu Xiaofeng differs from Li Zehou not only in regard to the particular ontological origin of this belief, but also in regard to its effects. While Li Zehou blames it first and foremost for impeding the development of science and technology and thus the modern project of the transformation of nature, Liu Xiaofeng blames it primarily for fostering the tendency on the part of the Chinese to deify finite entities such as the state and political leaders. In modern China, in Liu's view, there was a catastrophic convergence of the traditional Chinese belief in the transformative power of the human will and the modern Western philosophy of the subject, which to an even greater extent regards the whole of reality as malleable and controllable by human design (cf. Chong, 2002b: 241–246). Since Li Zehou's Marxism, in Liu's eyes—modifications and all—is still an enlightenment creed based on Cartesian, Kantian, and Marxian categories, it belongs entirely to the modern philosophy of the subject. It is thus part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Destiny and Will

As the contributions by Sabina Knight and Christopher Lupke (Chaps. 11, 12) to this volume show, contemporary Chinese literature is preoccupied

with the theme of fatalism. How is it that in the work of at least three contemporary Chinese philosophers, it is not fatalism but its seeming opposite, voluntarism, that takes front stage?

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it may be argued that the difference is not as great as it seems. In response to the catastrophes caused by Maoist voluntarism, all three men have emphasized the fact that human existence is shaped by powers that cannot be controlled by the human will, such as history, external nature, deeply ingrained cultural habits, the drives and desires of the unconscious, original sin, and divine grace. These factors constitute part of human destiny and should be taken very seriously. At the same time, our individual and collective destiny also depends to an important extent on the conscious choices we make—the intervention of the will. As philosophers, these writers are much too sophisticated to formulate the problem of human existence in terms of a simple dichotomy between determinism and voluntarism. They all regard both facticity and freedom as real. Existence is neither absolutely determined nor absolutely free, but offers possibilities that the human being is free to realize or not realize.

Of all three men, only Li Zehou can be said to believe univocally in an intrinsic meaning or destiny of humankind. For him, history offers society the possibility to move forward, but this possibility can only be realized if society responds by adapting its mode of production. It is a matter of doing the right thing at the right moment, neither too early nor too late. In contrast, both Liu Xiaofeng and Liu Xiaobo maintain that individual existence is in itself devoid of all intrinsic meaning; any meaning has to be created by each person for him or herself. Thus, in this sense, there is no such thing as “human destiny” comprising the whole of humanity. For both Lius, each individual is thrown naked into a meaningless world—this is not a matter of choice. But precisely because reality has no intrinsic meaning or purpose, making a choice as to who one wants to be is a necessity—freedom and necessity converge.

According to Liu Xiaobo, following Camus, the individual can choose among three options: (1) suicide; (2) seeking shelter and comfort in an established collective narrative; or (3) holding on to life while standing in the field of tension between these options, never giving in to either of them, but also not perpetrating the falsehood of denying the intrinsic meaninglessness of existence. For the Christian thinker Liu Xiaofeng, the fact that humankind is tainted with original sin is a given, but we can make the choice of opening our hearts to God and obtaining grace, leaving our old selves behind and starting a new life full of love and compassion for our fellow human beings.

Thus, all three thinkers contend that the quality of being human does not depend on being completely able to mold and control all the factors

shaping our lives: freedom in that sense does not exist. But the quality of our humanity depends on how we deal with the givens that we confront. For Li Zehou the Marxist dialectician, this means being able to determine in what phase of history we live and what stage we are approaching so that we can contribute to the historic project of human progress, both materially and spiritually, toward the realm of freedom in which each individual is free from economic and political oppression. For Liu Xiaobo the existentialist, to be an authentic self means to make a purely individual choice about who one wants to be, mustering the courage to become who one is without any concern for utility or social convention.

For Liu Xiaofeng the Christian thinker, authenticity means something completely different. It has nothing to do either with promoting collective progress (as it is for Li Zehou) or with self-expression, self-assertion, and self-development (as it is for Liu Xiaobo), but, on the contrary, it means relinquishing all concern with self and surrendering to God's will, so that one can experience the transformation of one's whole being and the resurrection of one's capacity to love. Without the supernatural support of God's grace, this is not a goal any human being can achieve by him- or herself, and it goes without saying that it cannot be achieved by some collective socioeconomic reform program.

Thus, when it comes to the question of *ming* in the sense of destiny, we can conclude that these three philosophers recognize both the reality of givens that the individual cannot control and the possibility (in the case of Liu Xiaofeng and Liu Xiaobo, even the inevitable necessity) of making a personal choice. What we choose and how we choose is what matters. For Li Zehou, choice is a matter of reason. For Liu Xiaobo, it is courage. For Liu Xiaofeng, it is faith.

Notes

1. The word "voluntarism" derives from the Latin word *voluntas*, "will."
2. See, e.g., Wakeman 1973; Ter Haar 2000, 2002; and the bibliography on "Violence in Chinese Culture" compiled by Ter Haar on his website: <www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/violence.htm>.
3. For a detailed analysis of Li Zehou's philosophy, see Chong 1999a. Summaries can be found in Chong 1996, 1999b, 1999–2000b, and 2002b.
4. Li does not explicitly use the word "hubris" or any equivalent, but I believe the term is appropriate for the phenomenon he describes.
5. Li Zehou 1985d. For an English translation by Peter Wong Yih Jiun of important excerpts, see Chong 1999–2000a: 44–65.

6. A biographical profile can be found in Qi 1995. A shorter, German-language version of this article can be found in Qi Mo and Schilling 1995.

7. Li Zehou 1996. Li regards this edition as the most reliable to date. More recent works are Li Zehou 1998a, 1998b, 1999, and 2000. For a selection of excerpts translated into English, see Chong 1999–2000, with an introduction by the editor. This special issue also includes a bibliography of works by Li Zehou written in English or translated into Western languages, and a bibliography of Western-language sources containing discussions of Li Zehou.

8. See Li Zehou 1987c and 1982. Li's thesis on the close link between Wang Yangming and modern Chinese thought, particularly Mao's, is analyzed in Chong 1999a, chap. 7. Shorter versions can be found in Chong 1996 and 1999b. Li's thesis on Mao and Wang Yangming was anticipated by Shimada 1958: 1–80, and Wakeman 1973. I am indebted to William Theodore de Bary for the reference to Shimada.

9. Li Zehou's "sedimentation" theory gives a phylogenetic twist to Kant's doctrine of the a priori faculties of the understanding. For an analysis of Li's interpretation of the Kantian epistemology, see 1999a: chap. 4; Chong 1996: 147–153.

10. Mohism is the philosophy founded by Mozi, a thinker who lived some time after Confucius. For Li's view on the relationship between Mohism and Chinese Communism, see Li Zehou 1985b. My analysis of his arguments can be found in three places: Chong 1996: 158–159; 1999a: 209–210; and 1999b.

11. Li Zehou 1982; reprinted in Li Zehou 1985e: 220–266. The references in this section are to the 1982 edition. An English translation, containing many inaccuracies, appeared in *Social Sciences in China* 4 (1982): 155–189.

12. The similarity in this regard between neo-Confucianism and Chinese Communism has also been pointed out by Jacques Gernet (1994: 86).

13. Li Zehou 1987b, originally printed in *Zouxiang weilai* 走向未來 1 (1986). For an English translation by Peter Wong Yih Jiun of some excerpts, see Chong 1999–2000a: 40–43.

14. This section is based on Chong 2002b: 230–246.

15. For another extensive discussion of Zhuangzi, see also Lisa Raphals' essay in this volume (Chap. 3).

16. For an analysis of Liu's view on how modern Western philosophy since Descartes moved increasingly toward nihilism, see Chong 2002b: 241–245.

17. Liu Xiaofeng 1990a: 38–40. Li Zehou has also implicitly criticized the messianism in Maoism, and Chinese political culture in general, in his article on Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1812–1864) and the Taipings and their messianic ideal of "The Heavenly Kingdom" (see Li Zehou 1979: 7–30). For Li's explicit criticism of the Taipings, see Li Zehou: 1987a.

18. From the eyewitness account of Liu's actions in the square by a fellow hunger striker, see Chong, 1990: 12–15. See also Barmé 1990: 52–99.

19. The remark was made in the controversial interview with Hong Kong reporter Jin Zhong; see Jin Zhong 1988.

20. This sweeping statement obviously ignores the long history of the doctrine

of the divine right of kings in European history and the phenomenon of national churches.

21. Liu Xiaobo 1989b. The Chinese word *kuangwang* 狂妄 means arrogance, but Liu uses it as the translation of the Greek term “hubris,” which specifically means human arrogance (pride) toward the gods.

22. Li first expressed this view of religion in his freshman piece on Tan Sitong of 1955, and has upheld it ever since. See Chong 1999a: chap. 2, sec. 1.

23. But, as I have argued elsewhere (Chong 1993: 138–141), his thought also exhibits a strong influence of British liberalism in his appeal for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This point is often overlooked by Liu’s critics (e.g., Gu Xin 1996).

24. Sartre 1943: 578. Liu does not deal with the inquiry of the later Sartre, contained in Sartre 1960, into the question of whether or not history can be said to have a meaning.

25. Liu’s view of the European Middle Ages as a period of darkness and obscurantism is shared by many Chinese intellectuals today, and this image clearly serves a polemical objective. The Medieval Church is an analogy for the Communist party, and it is implied that China needs a Renaissance and Reformation of its own to end the present Dark Ages, that is to say, by emancipating the individual and establishing a separation between the realm of politics and that of culture and spiritual beliefs. See, e.g., Yan Jiaqi 1988: 21–30.

26. Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 294–295, 353, and elsewhere. The title of the Chinese translation of Camus’ essay *Le mythe de Sisyphe* is *Xixifusi de shenbua* 西西弗斯的神話.

27. Liu cites page 61 of the Chinese translation of *The Myth of Sisyphus* in Liu Xiaobo 1989d: 353.

28. For an analysis of how the dichotomy between reason and feeling plays an organizing role in Liu Xiaobo’s thought, see Chong 1993: 119–124.

29. Li Zehou explains Kant’s epistemology in detail in his commentary on the Kantian philosophy, Li Zehou 1984. For an analysis, see Chong 1999a: chap. 4.

30. Li points out that the traditional Confucian belief that some kind of direct, intuitive knowledge of reality is possible is continued in the modern neo-Confucianism of Mou Zongsan, who tried to overcome the subject–object dichotomy in Kant’s epistemology on the basis of Chinese philosophy, particularly Tiantai Buddhism (see Li Zehou 1985e: 260–261). His view of Mou Zongsan is summarized in Chong 1999a: 226–228. For Mou Zongsan’s use of Tiantai Buddhism, see Kantor 1999.

11

Gendered Fate

DEIRDRE SABINA KNIGHT

The essays in this volume raise an important question: What (and whose) interests are served by appeals to destiny? In this chapter, I explore one specific facet of this question: how does the deployment of *ming* 命 mystify the gender-based oppression of social practices and institutions and encourage belief in their inevitability? Looking at how notions of fate script narratives of desire, courtship, sexual exchange, marriage, and mothering, I ask how *ming* shapes the construction of female subjectivity and agency in twentieth-century Chinese fiction.

In her 1942 essay “San-ba jie yougan” 三八節有感 (Thoughts on March 8), Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986) regretfully observes that modern challenges to fatalistic conceptions can intensify women’s demoralization about gender inequalities:

於是她們不能免除〈落後〉的命運……但在舊社會裡她們或許會被稱為可憐，薄命，然而在今天，卻是自作孽，活該。

Under these [present conditions], they [women] cannot avoid this destiny of “backwardness.” . . . But whereas in the old society they would probably have been called pitiful and meagerly fated, today their tragedy is seen as self-inflicted sin, as what they deserve.¹

These remarks remind us of modern reformers’ great emphasis on self-determination. They also remind us that in confronting unwelcome barriers and frustrations, it can be useful to distinguish among limitations we place on ourselves, limitations imposed on us by others, and limitations that result from oppressive structures in the culture at large. Fatalistic discourses disempower us because they mask these three agents and so hinder us from thinking clearly about both internalized and external oppression.

It is also significant that Ding Ling makes these remarks in one of the earliest modern Chinese essays to advocate for “women,” *funü* 婦女, as a

political category.² While fatalistic discourses harm all people, they play a particular role in mystifying the oppression of women. A concept such as *ming* may appear to be indifferent along lines of gender, yet frames of reference, norms, values, ideals, and emotional patterns that the discourse of fate reproduces for woman differ systematically from those it allows for men. Moreover, since appeals to *ming* often imply that unequal relations between men and women are natural consequences of biological facts, they tend to deny the extent to which these inequalities are kept in place by human decisions, social practices, and institutions.

Appeals to *ming* are a salient symptom of women's oppression throughout twentieth-century Chinese fiction. When a man forced into an undesirable position blames *ming*, the point is often that this outcome had nothing to do with his talent, merit, or personal failure, but rather resulted from inexplicable forces beyond human control. When *ming* refers to a woman's fate, it is often no longer so inexplicable. It has to do with her membership in the category "woman," which is understood to be both a natural or physical category and a liability. To declare that a woman suffers a given fate often alerts us to the fact that she is a member of a group that is systematically marginalized and immobilized. The same is seldom true for men. Simply being a man does not tend to condemn one to certain fates.

To ask how *ming* shapes the construction and constriction of female subjectivity and agency in fictional works, it is important to examine how such discourses of inevitability change over time and reflect changes and continuities in beliefs about women's inferiority (beliefs evident in such common phrases as "to value men over women," *zhong nan qing nü* 重男輕女, and "to esteem men and treat women as inferior," *nan zun nü bei* 男尊女卑). If we view narrative as falling along a spectrum between impossible poles of absolute fatalism and unqualified freedom, why do narrative structures and discourses of inevitability that encourage women to acquiesce to their subordination dominate certain periods? It is also important to explore how fictional texts use the notion of fate as a strategy to organize the narrative and thus either promote or contest the characters' acceptance of their fate.

In much Chinese fiction, both traditional and modern, the logic of the narrative accepts one version or another of destiny as an unassailable force, and resignation to destiny blinds characters, and perhaps readers as well, to the extent to which humans trace and compose such concepts.³ Yet while they ostensibly profess the overriding role of fate, many traditional works employ a narrative structure or ironic undertone that subtly introduces the role of human decision. In this way, many premodern works treat *ming* as in David Schaberg's characterization: "In place of the foreclosure implied by predestination, then, *ming* assumes a limited openness, the openness of an

appeal.” Thus, in much classical literature, women characters challenge beliefs in Heaven’s will, whereas their presentation of fatalistic discourses in twentieth-century fiction often conveys more resignation. As a result, representations of women’s agency and moral decision are often more limited in twentieth-century Chinese fiction than in premodern Chinese fiction. This conclusion is surprising given the late Qing and early Republican reformers’ stated intentions to create a “modern” literature that would “modernize” readers’ consciousness, motivate “dynamism,” and in turn strengthen the nation. Yet despite the very “modern” attention to individual subjectivity, much twentieth-century Chinese fiction, from late Qing novels to May Fourth fiction to the experimental fiction of the 1980s, seems to contain little of the open-ended sense of moral decision present in many of the earlier texts.

To bring out the contrast with modern fiction, I shall begin by briefly citing two premodern examples in which women characters challenge beliefs in *ming*. I shall then closely read three twentieth-century works, all of which treat traumatic moments of Chinese history: the Boxer Uprising, the early 1930s, and the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. It is no accident that these works are all highly politicized, for turbulent historical periods often increase collective investments in defining systems of belief, including those concerning sexual economies and the status of women.

The Limits of Fatalism in Premodern Chinese Fiction

To recall the open-ended sense of moral decision in much traditional fiction, I turn first to a Tang dynasty *chuanqi* 傳奇 classical tale (literally, “transmitting the marvelous”) written by the poet Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) in the early ninth century. Perhaps the most celebrated Chinese love tale, “Yingying zhuan” 鶯鶯傳 (The story of Yingying, 804) describes a young scholar’s seduction and abandonment of a young woman named Cui Yingying. After an opening frame about the couple’s meeting and a middle segment describing Zhang’s impatient seduction of the resistant Yingying, the story’s final section recounts Zhang’s departure to the capital, Yingying’s suffering, and Zhang’s rationalization of his desertion. Zhang’s ultimate defense depends in part on his hypothesis about the inevitable workings of *ming*:

凡天之所命尤物也，不妖其身，必妖於人……予之德不足以勝妖孽，是用忍情。

If those destined by Heaven to be exquisite beings do not destroy themselves, then they will inevitably bring harm upon others. . . . My virtue is not sufficient to overcome such bewitching evil, thus I have repressed my feelings.

The implication here is twofold. First, Zhang implies that because of her extraordinary beauty Yingying is not entirely human and thus not fully deserving of moral concern. (The term translated as “bewitching evil,” *yaonie* 妖孽, was commonly used during this period to demonize beautiful women.) Second, Zhang’s appeal to inevitability denies his responsibility for his behavior. Yet while the narrator ostensibly endorses Zhang’s decision to sacrifice Yingying in order to privilege conventional Confucian obligations, the stirring portrayal of Yingying in the story betrays a commitment to the value of love and loyalty that disputes Zhang’s definition of virtue.

Moreover, although both characters invoke the power of fate and inevitability (the word *ming* appears nine times, *bi* 必 three times), many other elements in the story underscore the role of human decision. For example, the narrator implies a definite element of choice by noting Zhang’s friends’ initial alarm at his behavior—an alarm that implies disapproval—and then explaining, “Yet Zhang’s will was already decided.” The implication of moral responsibility becomes stronger yet in Yingying’s eloquent letter, the sending of which can be read as an attempt to control her destiny. Toward the beginning of her letter, Yingying invokes the notion of *ming* as if to interrogate the concept and thus emphasize its denial in what follows:

進修之道，固在便安。但恨僻陋之人，永以遐棄。命也如此，知復何言。
The path to progress in studies is firmly in convenience and not being
disturbed. Yet I resent that this distant and lowly person [that I am] will
forever by [your social role] be cast aside. But fate is like this. What more
is there to say?

Yingying’s alleged resignation here is quickly belied by the moral allegations she puts forth in the remainder of her long letter. The letter clearly charges that Zhang could have acted otherwise, and the implicit accusations further compel the reader to weigh Zhang’s actions. It is the force of this moral dilemma that makes the tale so memorable and worthy of its numerous later adaptations. Bearing out how convincingly the plausibility of an alternative ending adheres within the story, some of these retellings show Zhang marrying Yingying instead of rejecting her. The most famous of these adaptations, of course, is Wang Shifu’s 王實甫 masterpiece of Yuan dynasty *zaju* 雜劇 drama, *Xixiangji* 西廂記 (Story of the western wing).

The extent to which women characters profit from their exclusion from power to criticize Confucian ideological foundations is further borne out by Qian Nanxiu’s research into works about women in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 genre, *Shishuo ti* 世說體. For example, in writing of Li Qing’s 李清 (1602–1683) seventeenth-century *Nü Shishuo* 女世說 (Women’s tales of the

world), Qian analyzes a Korean girl's "distrust of Heaven's alleged ability to dispense fate justly" after the Korean ruler Li Na slaughters her family:

高愍女父彥昭降國，李納屠其家。時女七歲……母兄將被刑，以天神明，拜天待盡。女曰：“天如神明，豈使我家以忠義族滅？何知而拜之？”獨不拜，乃西向哭父……

Girl Gao, posthumously entitled “Min,” or the “Commiserated,” was seven years old when her father, Gao Yanzhao, surrendered to the state [of the Tang] and Li Na ordered her whole family slaughtered. . . . On the eve of their execution, her mother and brother, thinking that Heaven was divine and intelligent, worshiped Heaven before their last moment. The girl said, “If Heaven is indeed divine and intelligent, how can it allow my family for [the reasons of] loyalty and righteousness to be wiped out? What kind of wisdom [does Heaven have] that deserves our worship?” She alone would not pay respect [to Heaven] but, instead, cried to the west for her father. . . . (Qian 1999: 205; translation modified)

Admittedly, the possibility for Girl Gao to exercise agency here may be prohibitively slim, yet once a text admits a sliver of liberty, it also admits the principle. In facing such harrowing circumstances yet finding the courage to resist the available ideological justifications, Girl Gao exercises a creativity that also defines her as an independent subject.

Simply put, despite frequent mentions of the role played by Heaven's will, particularly in narrators' comments, many works of premodern fiction do not preclude the possibility that characters of either gender can challenge fate. There is the sense that, although bound by the antecedent conditions of one's existence, one can within limits redirect and redetermine both oneself and one's relationships in the world so as to become morally responsible for those things which one's thought and actions can influence.

Sea of Regret

Questions about the forces that limit or are thought to limit human freedom emerge as a major theme in the novels of the last decade and a half of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Many of these novels present specifically modern approaches to problems of human agency by depicting present times, expressing indignation about existing social conditions, and satirizing hypocrisy, “superstition,” and traditional conceptual schemes. At the same time, many of these works also portray the potentially debilitating effects of knowledge that destroys faith in traditional prescriptions. The question is to what extent these novels still subscribe to a worldview that posits an under-

lying order or locates the reality of that order in traditional concepts such as *ming*, and to what extent challenges to such orders promote or diminish the possibility of greater freedom for women.

As late-Qing intellectuals such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1871–1929) championed individual reason, initiative, dynamism, and the Western Enlightenment notion of progress, they expressly sought to promote fiction that would embody the revolutionary principle that people could be the architects of their own fortunes.⁴ The treatment of such issues in fiction, however, was generally much more ambiguous than in theoretical formulations. Not only were themes intended to promote freedom often presented within deterministic frameworks, but formal features and discourses intended to challenge fatalism frequently ceded such great weight to chance or larger historical forces that they undermined the meaningfulness of human action. Furthermore, as many modern writers made a fetish of inner experience, their fiction tended to consolidate the absence of agency and reaffirm the very discourses of fate or power of circumstance they sought to contest.

Wu Woyao's 吳沃堯 (Wu Jianren 吳趸人, 1866–1910) late-Qing novel *Hen hai* 恨海 (Sea of regret, 1906) tells the story of two couples whose arranged marriages fall through after Bohe 伯和, the husband-to-be of the first couple, dies from his opium addiction, and his brother's bride-to-be turns into a prostitute.⁵ While some scholars see the novel as the story of how social forces crush the individual (Doleželová-Velingerová 1980b: 52), I propose that Wu leaves open the question of whether it is the larger social context that destroys the characters or rather their own inability or unwillingness to change.⁶ This tension arises because, shorter and with a more unitary plot structure than many late-Qing novels, *Hen hai* focuses on characters' subjectivity and so underscores the possibility of rational agency.⁷ In particular, sustained attention to the thoughts of Bohe's fiancée, Dihua 棣華, in the end simply makes more absolute her allegiance to the rules of propriety and her inability to entertain alternatives to a tragedy that is largely self-inflicted.⁸

Although Dihua's parents help inculcate her fatalistic resignation,⁹ Dihua is even more ready than her parents to attribute her sorrows to fate. Whereas her father ends his account of Bohe's dissolute lifestyle and opium addiction with an expression of anger toward Bohe: "Doesn't it make your blood boil?" (63/184), Dihua counters that Bohe's demise has "been brought about because of your daughter's bitter fate" 這是女兒命苦所致, and she urges her father not to damage his health by being angry (63/185).¹⁰ Dihua appeals to the notion of predestination several more times in the story, even quoting nearly verbatim her mother's earlier words (33/145) that

“Everything that happens is foreordained” 天下事莫非前定 (68/192–193) and directly quoting from *Mengzi* (Mencius): “Whatever is done without man’s doing it is from Heaven; Whatever happens without man causing it is fate” 莫之為而為者，天也；莫之致而致者，命也 (69/193). Dihua comments on the last quotation: “All we can do is resign ourselves to our lot (*an ming*), not harbor resentment against others” 惟有自己安命，斷不敢有怨尤 (69/193).

Dihua’s conception of fate does not, however, keep her from blaming herself for events over which she clearly has little control. After her mother dies, for example, Dihua briefly questions her own superstitious attempt to save her mother, then chooses instead to blame herself:

暗想割股也不能療，莫非是古人欺我？但是欺人的說話，何以相傳了若干年，還不被人戳破？大約古人必不我欺，不過我心不誠罷了。

Perhaps her failure to cure her mother with a morsel of her own flesh showed that the ancients were lying, she thought. But how could lies have been passed down over so many years without anyone seeing through them? No doubt the ancients weren’t lying at all; it was her own heart that wasn’t sincere enough. (59/179)

Over and over, Dihua blames herself for events (31/129, 63/185, 66/188–189, 67/190) but invokes the role of fate to forgive those she loves, most notably her father and Bohe. Dihua blames her lack of sincerity (59/179, 67/190), her own personal fate (63/185), her excessive concern over what others might think (66/190), and her limited powers of expression (67/190). But when her father wants to assume the blame for having accepted Bohe’s parents’ marriage proposal, Dihua counters that everything is foreordained and that “All we can do is let matters take their course” 只有聽其自然罷了 (68/193).

Accounts of Bohe’s thoughts, although less sustained, show a similar refusal to resist a self-imposed tragedy. While Bohe’s early search for his lost companions demonstrates confidence in his ability to influence events as unlikely as finding his fiancée amid the chaos of the Boxer Uprising and the allied invasion, when it comes to his opium addiction, he exclaims that he will never be able to give up the drug: “Even if *my* father were alive again, I couldn’t give it up—it’s my life, *xingming* 性命!” (就是我老子復生，我這兩口煙是性命，不能戒的; 67/190). The narrator’s emphasis on the possibility of an alternative outcome, however, underscores Bohe’s role in determining his life: “Now, wouldn’t it have been wonderful if he had changed his ways, given up his opium habit, and married his fiancée?” (65/187–188).

An unstated question arises that the reader cannot help but ask: Wouldn't it be wonderful if Dihua could change her ways? But Dihua does not deign to consider alternatives to courses of action that lead to her suffering. Even once Bohe makes clear how little he cares about her, Dihua persists in her abject devotion to him. After he dies, she shaves her head and insists on becoming a nun, refusing to consider the options her father offers.¹¹ Significantly, Dihua sees her self-demeaning sacrifice to nurse Bohe on his deathbed and her decision to become a nun as fulfillments of fate rather than as commitments she has chosen. Yet her appeals to fate may be Wu Woyao's way of problematizing the concept and drawing attention to the unrealized possibility that Dihua might have avoided her self-defeating trajectory.

The novel's narrative structure reinforces the thematic determinism. Although only briefly sketched, the story of Bohe's younger brother, Zhong'ai 仲藹, and his fiancée, Juanjuan 娟娟, parallels the story of Dihua and Bohe, reversing the genders insofar as it is the woman, Juanjuan, who falls into prostitution and the man, Zhong'ai, who renounces the world rather than find another partner. The mirror nature of the two couples' stories not only makes *Hen bai* a heavily plotted novel, but also makes the plot line seem more natural and inevitable.

In light of this naturalizing effect, it is worth asking how appeals to destiny reinforce the unequal range of choices allowed to men and women. For it seems reasonable to assume that Juanjuan has far less choice in becoming a prostitute than Bohe does in becoming addicted to opium. Furthermore, since Wu Woyao calls his work a "novel of sentiment," *xie qing xiaoshuo* 寫情小說, the question arises as to how the perception of fate structures emotional responses and fixes emotional patterns.¹² For example, the presentation of Dihua, the woman character disappointed in love, differs markedly from that of Zhong'ai, the male character disappointed in love. Upon discovering that Juanjuan has become a prostitute, Zhong'ai's resolution of his own loss differs markedly from Dihua's resignation to fate. Zhong'ai makes a similar decision to withdraw from the world into the mountains, *ru shan* 入山, but for him the act is clearly a matter of choice. Having attended to his parents' funeral, his last worldly act is to give away his inheritance to needy friends and relatives (78/205). It is worth underscoring that the novel's women characters speak much more fatalistically than the men. Fate applies to Dihua, her mother, and the helpless Juanjuan, whereas Bohe, Zhong'ai, and Dihua's father all seem to enjoy a considerable measure of choice. At the same time, and in part because of her privileged social status, Dihua exercises considerably more choice than many of the later female characters of modern Chinese literature.

Yue'yar

As intellectuals of the New Culture Movement (ca. 1915–1925) sought to challenge what they viewed as the fatalism of traditional Chinese thought and the oppressive strictures of the traditional social order, the position of women became a major theme in the fiction of the May Fourth “literary revolution,” a late example of which is the subject of this section. I have elsewhere called Chinese fiction of the late 1920s and 1930s “social fiction” to stress its heightened concern with representing the social and historical context (Knight 1998: 4); for revolutionaries concern themselves with economic and political institutions out of the faith that, although it is no easy matter, these institutions can be changed in a way that a mystical fate cannot. In works by writers such as Rou Shi 柔石 (1901–1931), Lao She 老舍 (1889–1966), Zhang Tianyi 張天翼 (1906–1985), and Wu Zuxiang 吳祖湘 (1908–1994), the characters may be crushed by prevailing conditions created by men, but they are not condemned by some kind of logic built into the universe. Yet as this fiction opened more room for human determination, such freedom had to be reconciled with political theorists’ increasingly influential explanations of historical developments based on class struggle. As a result, the question arises as to whether new attention to social relations challenged fatalism or simply resulted in the substitutions of new forms of determinism for early ones.

In his 1935 story “Yue'yar” 月牙兒 (Crescent moon), Lao She presents a young woman’s account of her attempts to maintain a sense of agency even as she is forced into prostitution to survive.¹³ As she is coerced by economic necessity, seasoned by experience, and criminalized and jailed by a hostile legal system, the young women’s belief in *ming* plays an important role in helping her make sense of her conversion from a relatively competent, independent girl into a prostitute and criminal. The story’s attention to the protagonist’s perceptions of the moon also illustrates the extent to which the exercise of agency depends on a sense of time as open rather than as fated or cyclical.

The story begins by building up the wages of poverty. As a child, the girl is horrified to realize that her mother works as a prostitute, yet she loves her and attributes her actions to their need for food. She reasons that hunger has reduced them to desperate slaves and first expresses what will become her philosophy of life, “a hungry stomach is the truth that matters most” (125):

我們娘兒倆就像兩個沒人管的狗，為我們的嘴，我們得受著一切的苦處，好像我們身上沒有別的，只有一張嘴。為這張嘴，我們得把其餘一切的東西都賣了。

My mother and I, we were like two dogs without anyone to care for them. For the sake of our mouths, we had to suffer every kind of hardship. It was as if our bodies had nothing else, just mouths. For these mouths, we had to sell everything else. (115)

As the protagonist matures, however, she grows cynical, particularly about the lot of women. What makes her despair at turning to prostitution so compelling is that she first recounts periods in which she tries to better her life, such as when the kindly school director allows her to live and work at the school, or when she first begins work as a hostess. Until circumstances leave her no other option, she refuses to give up trying to live in another way, at times even in a moral way. For example, when the wife of the man supporting her begs her to leave him, she agrees out of sympathy for the woman. Another example is when she refuses to receive clients as the restaurant's "Number One" hostess does and therefore loses her job. Both decisions are complicated because the narrator has no other way to support herself and realizes that she may be giving up a bad situation for an even less savory one. Yet she continues to struggle: "I wasn't willing to take that road just yet, but I knew that it was waiting for me just around the corner" 我不肯馬上就往那麼走，可是知道它在不很遠的地方等著我呢 (122).

The numerous references to the moon, including the story's title, are indicative of how the protagonist's sense of time reinforces her fatalism regarding her life. Because the moon waxes and wanes in a cycle, it offers the bereft girl a stable reference point:

我又老沒看月牙兒了，不敢去看，雖然想看……微風彷彿會給那點微光吹到我的心上來，使我想起過去，更加重了眼前的悲哀。
Again it had been a long time since I saw the moon crescent. I didn't dare look at it, although I wanted to... The slight breeze seemed to make that little bit of light blow into my heart, making me recollect the past and making heavier my present tragic sorrow. (116-117)

Significantly, this point of reference does not help the protagonist develop a sense of time as dynamic or as a framework in which she might be able to achieve personal progress. Instead she views her descent into prostitution as the inevitable completion of a cycle. This outlook becomes particularly clear toward the end of the story, after her mother reappears. Remembering that her mother had turned to prostitution to provide for her when she was young, the narrator accepts her responsibility to support her mother as a fatality. She attributes their predicament to the fulfillment of a cycle of

mutual obligation, concluding that “Women’s profession is hereditary; it’s specialized!” 女人的職業是世襲的，是專門的！(128).

The story’s power derives from the conflict between (1) the protagonist’s cynical conviction that her fate is sealed because she is a woman in a society that leaves women little option and (2) her desperate attempts to put off her decline and nurture some measure of self-control even as she loses her youth, her health, and her freedom. As she relinquishes her self-respect and her sense of capacity or agency, the narrator-protagonist’s appeals to *ming* increase, and she stresses several times the extent to which she sees her fate as a gendered one:

〈萬不得已〉老在那兒等我們女人，我只能叫它多等幾天。這叫我咬牙切齒，叫我心中冒火，可是婦女的命運不在自己手裡。

An “if-all-else-fails” always awaits us women. At best I could make it wait a few more days. I could grind my teeth, I could feel anger in my heart. But a woman’s fate does not lie in her own hands. (123)

What is women’s fate in this story? First, the protagonist’s appeals to *ming* suggest that her gender is *the* major causal factor in her inability to achieve any semblance of economic power or self-determination, even the leisure to look at the moon. Second, part of fate here seems to be the notion that men naturally have a right to sexual access to women and that women must negotiate some way to survive by means of sexual relations. Simply being a woman condemns one to some form of prostitution. “However, if [you] truly cannot earn food to eat, a woman must recognize that she’s a woman; [she] must sell her flesh!” 可是，若真掙不上飯吃，女人得承認自己是女人，得賣肉！(123). As the story progresses, the protagonist’s grasp on sanity increasingly depends on her cynical appraisal of the cruel nature of transactions between men and women. Quickly realizing that she would starve if she continued to play with men in a “romantic” struggle for food, she decides to conduct straightforward business and details how she insists on her prices for different acts.

After she has been virtually annihilated as an agent, when she does regain a modicum of agency, it is at a remove from her own interests and self-preservation. She wants to believe that she exercises some degree of control, even if it may be explained at best in terms of a survival instinct and at worst in terms of vengeance:

門外又敲門了，找我的。好吧，我伺候他，我把病盡力地傳給他。我不覺得這對不起人，這根本不是我的過錯……有錢才能生活著，先吃飽再說別的吧。

Someone at the door again, looking for me. Fine. I'll serve him, I'll do my best to give him my disease. I don't feel that this is unfair to people. It simply isn't my fault. . . . You must have money to be able to live. Satisfy your hunger first, then think about other things. (128)

With the words "I'll do my best" 我盡力地 the question arises as to whether the narrator's decision to transmit her sickness stems completely from physical desperation, or whether it might also betray her psychological need to grasp a shred of power. A similar tension marks the narrator's reactions to her mother's practice of robbing the men who visit her. Her mother's behavior worries her, but she marvels at the immunity they enjoy as the men do not dare to return to make a fuss.

The last sections of the story literally deprive the narrator of her freedom, for she is placed in a reeducation center and then in prison. The brevity and rapidity of the narration of these events suggest the narrator's loss of control. She views the reeducation center as a cheap way to take advantage of women since the center's best results consist in having turned a dozen or so women into wives for men who paid the two-*yuan* processing fee. She thus refuses to be reeducated, noting that she already knows how to clean, cook, and sew: If she could have found work using those skills, she would not have been doing that "bitter business" in the first place (132). Her recalcitrance, including her act of spitting in the face of a high official, angers the authorities and they throw her in jail, where she writes: "Inside a jail is a great place. It firmly convinces you that humanity can never improve. Even in my dreams I never saw such a sordid thing. . . . [But] the world really does not have anything much better" (132). Then she notes seeing her old friend, the moon crescent. As she reflects on how long it has been since the last time she saw it, the reader's recognition that her last few months of "freedom" had permitted her not even this simple leisure helps to explain the protagonist's readiness to come to terms with her imprisonment. These lines also bring the story back to its opening section and cast new meaning on its comment that the moon awakens her memory: "It wakes up my memory as a night wind blows to pieces a flower that wishes to sleep" 它喚醒了我的記憶，像一陣晚風吹破一朵欲睡的花 (107).

This return to the opening image alerts the reader to the opening's foreshadowing of the narrator's fate. This foreshadowing arranges the narrative so as to increase structural and thematic unity, yet in so doing it reinforces the determinism inherent in any completed narrative design. The final invocation of the moon also highlights the story's sustained attention to the narrator's consciousness of time and suggests the extent to which the exercise of agency depends on a coherent and meaningful sense of it. For

example, near the beginning of the story, the narrator explains how her hunger and powerlessness deprived her of a sense of time when she was a little girl: “I could only concern myself with the present. I had no future, and I didn’t dare think about it seriously. When eating someone’s food, I knew that it was morning or evening, otherwise I simply didn’t think of time. Without hope, time does not exist” 我只能顧目前，沒有將來，也不敢深想。嚼著人家的飯，我知道那是晌午或晚上了，要不然我簡直想不起時間來；沒有希望，就沒有時間 (116).

The sense of alienation that pervades “Yue’yar” is fundamentally different from that plaguing Dihua in *Hen bai*. In *Hen bai*, a scrupulous but restricted focus on individual subjectivity renders Dihua unable to see alternatives to a tragedy she imposes on herself. By contrast, although the narration of “Yue’yar” consists almost entirely of the protagonist’s interior monologue (except for a few phrases of reported speech), the story demonstrates the effects of social and economic alienation and appears to place the blame on current social systems.

Combining a woman’s experience of prostitution with belief in *ming* is particularly revealing because prostitution is a category of exploitation that mainly specifies women. In emphasizing women’s limited options for employment, “Crescent Moon” could be read as denying the possibility of women’s freedom. Yet one could counter that Lao She’s story succeeds in making a case for the unrealized values of greater freedom and equality for women precisely because he depicts a woman who exercises moral agency despite nearly impossible obstacles. It is because free will is possible, yet the free will of a single individual insufficient, that the argument can be made for the need for collective action to address the condition of women.

Soft Is the Chain

The possibilities for self-determination in the face of superstition and oppressive social norms is a central theme in Dai Houying’s 戴厚英 (1938–1996) novella “Suolian, shi rouruan de” 瑣鏈，是柔軟的 (Soft is the chain, 1982), a work from the early post-Mao era sometimes referred to as the “Second Chinese Enlightenment.” Bolstering arguments and rhetoric reminiscent of the May Fourth era with readings of both liberal Enlightenment philosophy and contemporary Western theory, intellectuals of this period again questioned both fatalistic notions and dominant views of gender inherited from traditional Chinese thought. In her essay (Chap. 10), Woei Lien Chong contrasts Li Zehou’s argument for an exuberant belief in agency in early Chinese thought with literary critic Liu Xiaobo’s critique of the “bankruptcy” of Chinese ethics and his call for “total Westernization.”

Another contributor to these debates, literary critic Liu Zaifu, also reaffirmed China's need for human agency and, like Liu Xiaobo and against Li Zehou, condemned the passivity and disempowerment he viewed as the dominant legacies of traditional Chinese thought.¹⁴ Yet despite these vigorous philosophical debates, much of the new realist, roots-seeking, and experimental fiction of the 1980s seems to reinforce fatalistic conceptions of women's experience.

The Chinese character for *ming* appears thirty-two times in Dai Houying's short novella and is used to describe each turning point in the life of the protagonist, Wen Ruixia 文瑞霞.¹⁵ The first major event of the text concerns how Ruixia is widowed at the age of twenty-eight when her husband kills himself after he is wrongly accused of theft. Left with a five-year-old daughter and an unborn child, Ruixia invokes *ming* as she tries to come to terms with her husband's death: "I think everything is a result of fate. Hongzhong ran into a calamitous star this year. There was simply no way to avoid it" 我說一切都是命啊! 洪仲今年趕上了災星, 要躲也躲不掉啊! (174). The word "*ming*" also appears twice when Ruixia tells her brother-in-law that she wants to ask the security bureau chief to apply the death penalty to the real thief, forcing him to pay for her husband's death with his life: "compensate [with his] life for her husband's life" 給自己的丈夫抵命 (173).

The wide use of *ming* in the novella suggests its special power in establishing frameworks of interpretation. Not only does the character *ming* occur thirteen times in the quoted speech or reported thoughts of Ruixia herself, it also appears seven times in the third-person narration, and twelve times in the quoted speech, dreams, or reported thoughts of the novella's other characters. Significantly, in discussing Ruixia's desire to toady to the bureau chief who oversaw the penal harassment that led to her husband's suicide, the narrator judges that a more "cultured" person would have appealed more readily to the notion of *ming*: "If Wen Ruixia had a little more culture, she would have said, this bureau chief is intimately tied with my fate. At every juncture at which my fate changes, [I] always run into him" 如果文瑞霞有點文化, 她會說, 這位秦局長與我的命運有著密切的關係, 每當我的命運轉變的關頭, 總是要碰上他 (168). Such judgments testify to the fact that Ruixia's acceptance of the notion of *ming* is hardly individual, but rather one instance of a larger social response to unpredictable, and particularly ruinous, events.

Showing how belief in *ming* scripts the characters' conceptions of love, marriage, and mothering even before Ruixia's husband's tragic suicide, the novella goes on to recount Ruixia's difficult childhood and to suggest that her gender is the real cause of her fate: "As soon as Ruixia was born, her father

knit his brow. Why did she have to be a girl? And once three sisters followed in her footsteps, her father became even more convinced that she was a daughter with a 'hard fate,' ..." 父親更認定是個〈命硬〉的閨女了 (179). At the same time, although the young Ruixia herself despairs about having been born a girl, she also attempts to influence her fate by appealing to the "Hemp Stalk Maiden," *Majie gunian* 麻秸姑娘, a female celestial 仙女 supposedly concerned with the fate *mingyun* 命運 of young women. She does so by tying together seven stalks of hemp, standing them upright in the ashes in front of the stove, imploring the Hemp Stalk Maiden to let her marry into a good family, and kowtowing three times when the stalks do not topple over, a sign of the immortal's willingness to listen (180–181).

Ruixia's active attempt to direct the will of this deity recalls Lisa Raphals' point that beliefs about fate often intertwine with beliefs about access to mantic knowledge, as well as Mu-chou Poo's articulation of the paradox whereby people believe their birth dates determine their fate and yet try to improve upon this fate by consulting daybooks. Since Ruixia's appeals suggest her faith in having at least some chance of influencing the outcome of her betrothal, the fate in which she believes would appear not to be fixed once and for all, but to be at least potentially sympathetic to human longings. The range of human influence, however, is limited to changing one's particular lot within the existing social framework and never permits changing the conventions of that framework.

In this way, the concept of *ming* functions as one distinctive axis within a larger web of rationalizations for the existing social order. In the novella, *ming* circulates among less common but related concepts, most of which are also invoked to defend traditional marriage arrangements. For example, the word "*yun*" appears alone when the young Ruixia feels fortunate to have such a good husband: "She felt that she had met with good luck" 她覺得自己交上了好運 (183). Other evidence of Ruixia's submission to received opinions is presented in her acceptance of common sayings, such as "A good horse doesn't fit two saddles, a good woman doesn't marry a second husband" (204) and "No matter how the society changes, a family is still a family, a clan is still a clan" (204), the last two clauses of which are repeated a second and third time later in the novella (218, 219).

Returning to the account of Ruixia's life after her husband's death, the narrative explains the feudal injunction by which her rural society still abides: If Ruixia bears a son, she will remain in her husband's family; if she bears a daughter she can leave (204). Then the whole family gathers to "see if it's a boy or girl, for that would determine Ruixia's fate" 他們要等得嬰兒落地，看看是男是女，來決定瑞霞的命運 (205). When the baby turns out to

be a boy, the women in the family all cry and howl, for they realize that the baby's birth condemns Ruixia never to remarry (206): "This little life of not even 5 catties would be her . . . dictator for several decades. That's what the family's crying told her. Could Ruixia remarry? No. No. The family's cries were a command, *jiu shi mingling* 就是命令. She was determined to obey" (207).

As part of her compliance, Ruixia wears clothes like an older woman's, does not venture out of doors, keeps her gaze down, and speaks little (204). Despite her knowledge of the marriage law that would allow her to remarry, she never does, and on her fiftieth birthday, her family throws a party to honor her virtue and chastity.¹⁶ At this point she remembers Liu Si, a man who had helped her secure food for her children during the famine and who wanted to marry her. She tells herself that it was a good thing she refused to marry, since doing so would have made her a criminal (193):

要是她對人家說，曾經有過這個人，曾經有過這一段，人家還能像今天這麼尊重她嗎？大哥大嫂還會說她是金家的有功之臣嗎？唉，人啊！就是這樣的命，你要嘗到甜味，就得先吃盡苦頭。

If she were to tell anyone that there had been this man, that there had been this period, would everyone still respect her as they did today? Would her brother and sister-in-law still call her the Jin's family's meritorious official. Oh, humankind! This type of fate (*ming*) is simply your lot: you want to taste sweetness, first you have to eat your fill of bitterness. (199)

Regret does not haunt Ruixia until she realizes that times have changed and she cannot use her chastity to win good jobs and marriages for her children. When she wants to force her daughter to marry an official's son, the rest of the family insists that the daughter should make her own choice (212). The pain of this recognition regarding the meager rewards of her sacrifice is laid bare in Ruixia's refusal to buy eyeglasses: "She felt that it would be better not to see anything clearly after all. If she could see clearly, she would have seen that that old man was Liu Si. Wouldn't recognizing him just make her feel regret? . . . If she had known earlier that today would be like this, she would have realized that it would have been better to take that step. She didn't take it, whom did she have to blame?" (216).

Ruixia ostensibly blames herself, yet her bewilderment also stems from a sense that her community has changed the rules on her. In accepting that her family's definition of her fate was indeed her fate, and that by refusing Liu Si "Ruixia was still Ruixia" (208), she had proceeded on the assumption that these terms would remain stable and that she could justify her twenty-two

years of chastity by marrying her children well (165). Beyond her disappointment, Ruixia is thus thoroughly disoriented, and she likens herself to fallen, dried yellow leaves, without roots or branches (216). The world seems to stop at her feet, and on the last page of the novella her family judges that she has fallen into a “spiritual crisis,” *jingshen weiji* 精神危機 (227).

Dai Houying’s “Soft Is the Chain” underscores the protagonist’s realization that her submission to rules she took to be fated led to an empty virtue and unnecessary loneliness. Yet whether Ruixia should have chosen to abide by the feudal injunction not to remarry or to defy it in a gesture of individual freedom guaranteed by the Communist marriage law, the terms of her choice were clearly very restricted. In particular, her brother-in-law twice tells her that he and his wife would not blame her if she did remarry, but that she would have to leave her young son with them because he belongs to their family (217, 218). By sacrificing her own happiness and accepting what she decides is her fate to stay with her deceased husband’s family, Ruixia expects to share in their future decision making. Yet the influence she awaits is denied her when the rest of the family adapts their belief system to allow the next generation to choose their own marriage partners. Of course, Ruixia is also allowed to enjoy new modern liberties: unlike other women, she is permitted to smoke and drink (227), but these habits offer little consolation when her “only wish was to talk with someone” (224).

It is noteworthy that the character *ming*, so prevalent earlier, appears only once in the last twenty pages (almost the last third) of the novella, and only in Ruixia’s reminiscence that her in-laws hung a “long-life locket,” *changmingsuo* 長命鎖, on her baby son’s neck (218). With the attenuation of the force of *ming* in the narrative, Ruixia confronts questions of responsibility that in her own case can hardly but be demoralizing. Still condemned to suffer the injustices of gender inequalities, the modern woman blames herself for her “backwardness,” as Ding Ling’s essay foretold, and without the solace and pity that fatalistic explanations might have provided. But would Ruixia wish to condemn her daughter to a fate like her own? Is she unreasonable to resent that changes in her community’s mores leave her bereft both before and after? As she contemplates her bereavement, the novella’s presentation of her competing longings poses a question that marks many works of modern Chinese fiction and is especially pertinent to the issue of gendered fate: is the chain of the novella’s title her own submission to a fate imposed by feudal ethics, a chain others impose upon her, or both? If these works of fiction can teach by example, the difficulty of distinguishing individual from larger social beliefs should suggest the usefulness of exploring further how specific groups use and are used by *ming*.

Notes

1. Ding Ling 1983.4: 390. My translation draws on the one by Barlow in Ding Ling 1989: 319. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. Barlow makes this point about “the construction of ‘woman’ in political terms” in her introduction to Ding Ling’s essay (Ding Ling 1989: 316).

3. This formulation was inspired by Sangren 1991.

4. See Liang Qichao 1898, trans. in Denton 1996: 71–73, here 73. See also Liang Qichao 1902, trans. in Denton 1996: 74–81.

5. *Sea of Sin* appeared not as a serial, but as a book. Where one page number is given, it refers to Wang Xiaotian et al. 1984. Where two numbers are given, the second refers to Hanan 1995.

6. Although he does not develop the idea, Egan touches on the dialectic of freedom and determinism: “In a very modern way, freedom and causality are extremely important in *Sea of Woe*” (Egan 1980: 175).

7. Most of the social novels of the late Qing were written in the form of traditional *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 (novels in chapters), in which authors use suspense to link successive chapters but otherwise only loosely integrate the events. (Some scholars translate this term as “linked-chapter novels” to describe the way the beginning of each new chapter answers the suspense-producing ending of the preceding one. The rhetoric of the chapter beginnings and endings often suggests that the narrator is a storyteller addressing an audience rather than a novelist writing for solitary readers.) Insofar as this use of suspense depends on an open universe, or at least one that is not wholly predictable, like most traditional Chinese fiction these novels avoid the kind of unitary plot trajectory that produces a sense of inevitability in many nineteenth-century novels in the West. On the other hand, in many late-Qing novels, the anecdotes become so diffuse as to create the impression that anything might happen next. The sequence of events becomes so unpredictable and the cast of characters so vast that they severely compromise the possibility of rational human agency. For agency to be meaningful, there must be limits on the workings of chance and at least some possibility of predictable causal relations.

8. It should be mentioned that Dihua does take at least three steps to influence events. First, she writes a note to a doctor describing her mother’s symptoms (26). Second, after Bohe is separated from Dihua and her mother, Dihua writes notices to post along the docks and roads to inform Bohe of their whereabouts (42). Later, she goes to extraordinary lengths to nurse the dying Bohe (70–73). Yet, despite the initiative Dihua takes at these moments, she remains stubbornly blind to other opportunities to shape her life.

9. Dihua’s mother inculcates a fatalistic resignation when she tries to comfort Dihua with the idea that “Everything that happens is foreordained” (33/145), and her father at one point attributes Bohe’s tragedy to his daughter’s fate 女兒，這是你的命! (68/192).

10. I have emended Hanan's translation here to bring out the original *ming ku suo zhi*.

11. For a modern reader, the characters' resignation to circumstance is all the more bewildering insofar as they actually surmount many external obstacles in a rather unlikely way.

12. Wu uses the term "novel of sentiment" in the third sentence of the first chapter (1). Doleželová-Velingerová suggests that Wu's sentimental fiction may have prepared the way both for the popular "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" fiction of the following decade and for the psychological emphasis of the May Fourth stories.

13. "Yue'yar" was published in Lao She's collection *Yinghaiji* 櫻海集 (Cherries and the sea, 1935). Parenthetical page numbers refer to the story printed in Shu 1988: 107–132.

14. Liu Zaifu relies heavily on the term *zbutixing* 主體性, "subjectivity," but after translating one of his articles (Liu Zaifu 1988), I suspect he means something more like agency.

15. The novella runs just sixty-five pages in Dai's collection (Dai 1982: 163–227). Page references follow in the text, and all translations are my own.

16. Even the head of the woman's association flatters her, "If it were the old society, we could even give you a chastity plaque" (Dai 1982: 196).

12

Divi/Nation

Modern Literary Representations of the Chinese Imagined Community

CHRISTOPHER LUPKE

我不知道是不是命運把我推上這講壇，由種種機緣造成的這偶然，不妨稱之為命運。

I don't know whether or not it was fate that thrust me upon this stage, but as various lucky coincidences have created this opportunity I may as well call it fate. (Gao Xingjian 2001: 602/594)¹

[F]rom the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood... Seen as both a *historical* fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed... What limits one's access to other languages is not their imperviousness but one's own mortality... The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies... (Anderson 1983 and 1991: 145, 146, 148, 149)²

By the end of this volume, one thing should be clear: *ming* is a ubiquitous term in Chinese thought, history, and literature, even if the exact meaning of it in various historical contexts and texts may differ or shift somewhat. The term enjoys no less preeminence in contemporary Chinese discourse than it did prior to the twentieth century or even the Cultural Revolution. Gao Xingjian 高行健 (b. 1940), anointed as China's long-coveted first Nobel laureate in literature, is at least as influenced by the whole way of thinking, the invocations that *ming* has come to connote, as any other Chinese author. In the above quotation, whether from humility or a sincere belief, he seeks to deflect his own role in achieving what no other Chinese writer has done. While he certainly has produced a large literary corpus, including early pathbreaking literary criticism shortly after the

post-Mao cultural “thaw,” as well as many absurdist plays throughout the 1980s, it was Gao’s magnum opus, *Ling Shan* 靈山 (Soul mountain) that distinguished him from the others in the eyes of the Swedish Academy.

A sprawling work, *Soul Mountain* too is marked at key points by appeals to *ming*. Indeed, the impetus for writing the novel, or travelogue, if that is what you would call it, is directly connected to Gao’s pondering of the notion of *ming* first provoked by a near-death experience. In chapter 2, the first-person narrator, assumed to be Gao because of his autobiographical similarity, mentions how a doctor mistakenly reads his chest X-ray to indicate lung cancer. Gao, whose father died of the disease, assumes it will consume him as well. However, after careful comparison of two different X-rays, the doctor discovers that he is not stricken with cancer after all, and thus has “saved my life” 救了我的命 (Gao Xingjian 1990: 14/12). This causes Gao to wonder about the veracity of science, which throughout the twentieth century has been worshiped in China as a universal truth against the “superstition” of feudal society, *ming* being a part. Realizing his good fortune, Gao concludes, “I believe in science, and I believe in fate as well” 我相信科學，也相信命運 (Gao Xingjian 1990: 14/13).³ As Sabina Knight has indicated in her chapter on women in twentieth-century Chinese fiction, for modern intellectuals, particularly those most influenced by May Fourth, *ming* becomes a vestige, a marker of bygone days, wrapped up with the patriarchal logic of Confucianism, which, according to the critique, exploits women and peasants with superstitious methods of health care, and with all that is anti-modern, inward-looking, and backward. However, in this perhaps post-modern and obviously post-Mao work, the spectre of *ming* is embraced, and it is science which, though not exactly questioned, at least loses some of its absolutist varnish. In addition, Gao toys with the various modern meanings of *ming* here, using it in combinations such as *jiuming* to denote “save a human life,” *mingyun* “fate” or “fortune,” and *changming* 長命, “longevity,” which he even sets off in quotation marks to emphasize its centrality and to remind us that it is a special, auspicious phrase in the Chinese language used during birthdays, holidays, and such, to help effect that which it expresses—the ultimate in good fortune, a long life. *Ming* is not simply fate in modern Chinese; it is life and the life-giving force. When things go wrong or are out of one’s control, that is *ming*. But in fact everything is *ming*, because it is life, our lives, what constitutes human existence. As I hope to establish in the ensuing readings, *ming* is both more and less than Western notions of fate: it is specifically *ming*, not more, and thus not “law” or the personified “fates,” as Western notions may connote; but it is also more in the sense that it is not just determined events but life itself.

Gao adverts to this more extensively in chapter 12 of his novel when he

relates in greater detail his experience with the doctor and what it means. When he discovers the medical error and informs Gao of his new lease on life, the doctor simply goes back to his work and ignores Gao. Of course, Gao is shocked at the news and stands there in disbelief. When Gao presses the doctor for a more detailed explanation of how the mistake occurred, the doctor finally grows impatient and dismisses him thus: “‘Live life to its fullest, young one.’ He swivelled around in the chair, paying me no more mind” 〈好好活著吧，年輕人。〉他扭轉靠椅，對我不再理會 (Gao Xingjian 1990: 78/73). So the lesson of this encounter is to live life to the fullest, underscoring the connection between *ming* and life. The experience narrated in detail here, about one-fourth of the way into the novel, forms the basis for Gao’s further exploration of the connection between life and fate:

生命大抵是一團解不開恩怨的結，難道還有甚麼別的意義？……我不相信奇蹟如同我本不相信所謂命運，可當人處於絕境之中，唯一可以指望的不就只剩下奇蹟？

Life is basically an inextricable knot of gratitude and resentment. Is there any other significance to it? ... I didn’t believe in miracles just as I used to not believe in so-called fate: When you’re on your last leg, isn’t a miracle the only thing you can hope for? (Gao Xingjian 1990: 74/70)

命運就是這樣堅硬，人卻這般軟弱，在厄運面前人甚麼都不是。

Fate is just hard and solid like that, but people are frail and weak. People are nothing in the face of misfortune. (Gao Xingjian 1990: 76/72)

〈生命就是種奇妙東西。〉他說。〈一個純粹偶然的現象……〉

“Life is an intriguing thing,” he said. “A purely chance phenomenon.” (Gao Xingjian 1990: 78/74)

〈冥冥之中，自有命運！〉他說……我撿來的這條性命如何換個活法？

“Within the dark chaos, naturally there is fate!” he said... How should I change this life which I have just snatched back? (Gao Xingjian 1990: 79/74)

In this series of passages, Gao intricately plays on the various modern usages of *ming* and their connections alternatively with “fate” and “life.” The personal result is no less than a contemplation of the meaning of life itself; the collective result will be somewhat more evident in the final quotation from his book discussed below. It is clear that his encounter with what he thought to be death led him to ponder the meaning of his own life and what he should do with it. Whatever it is that arbitrarily has the power to extinguish

one's life, such as "misfortune," *e'ming* 厄命, is the reverse side of the same "coin," if you will, as shown in the term "life," *shengming* 生命 or *xingming* 性命. *Ming* is intimately entwined with the meaning of one's life even while it also indicates the ways in which one's life can be diminished, limited, or even ended.

What Gao does with his life is precisely to go about the writing of this book. *Ming* is no less relevant for this Nobel Prize winner than it was for Duke of Wen of Zhu as described in David Schaberg's essay (Chap. 1), the common people who struggled to read the daybooks of which Mu-chou Poo has written, or, for Jin Shengtian, writing his *juemingci* while facing certain execution. The question for Gao Xingjian, finding himself in the existential predicament of what to do now that his life is actually *not* over, is what he should do to inject meaning into it, to requite the courtesy, as it were, that *ming* has extended to him. This question is further contemplated by the narrator in a dream sequence in chapter 55:

我抽到了大王！真有手氣，不想走運的人總有運氣這就是命，喂，你相信命運嗎？命運專門捉弄人，讓命運見鬼去吧！……你幹什麼呢？要拯救祖國嗎？你只拯救你自己，一個不可救藥的個人主義者！

I've drawn a king! What luck, people who don't think about getting lucky are always lucky, that's fate, hey, do you believe in fate? Fate specializes in teasing people, to the devil with fate!... What the heck are you doing? You want to rescue the nation? You just want to save yourself, you incorrigible individualist! (Gao Xingjian 1990: 363/335)

Gao may not be sure what he wants to do, which is perhaps why at some acute points in the book he shifts to this sort of reverie that includes a second-person voice, that is, addressing either himself, the reader, or some unknown third party as "you." I would suggest this is an unsure side of his subjectivity. Just as one might tell others "I did this or that" but when addressing oneself in private thought switch to "you," here Gao is again asking himself what he is actually engaged in doing. One possible answer, at least, is that he would like to save the nation, China. Of course, he is not confident of that and sees himself very much as an individual apart from the crowd, a pariah or even an iconoclast like Lu Xun.

Nevertheless, the concern for the nation is always close to his heart. Gao Xingjian is full of paradoxes. He was supposed to have died from cancer but "miraculously" survived. He has been catapulted to fame as the Nobel Laureate Chinese writer, yet he lives in virtual exile in France and essentially has been "disowned" by the PRC. Not only the government, but ordinary people and even intellectuals are baffled by why he was chosen for this award

so desired by Chinese. Most have never heard of him, though this is at least in part due to his books being banned at home. The subject matter of his writings, nonetheless, is centrally and literally that of China, for it is a spiritual and physical excursion into the heart of China's central Yangtze River region, a search for the essence of China's meaning. Gao's work thus cannot be considered peripheral in subject matter. In fact, he perhaps even views himself as having been compelled to leave China to produce it. Yet, at the same time, he blurs the demarcations of the Chinese nation-state, seeking to deconstruct conventional and empirical notions of what defines it. Though he shuns mainland China, he is a frequent visitor to Taiwan, and the authorized publisher of his books resides there. So just as the duality of life and fate is a paradox, intertwined yet somehow contesting itself, Gao also is a paradoxical figure, someone living on the threshold of a divided nation, someone who is searching for the meaning of what his existence as a national subject is, someone who is engaged in *divi/nation*.

The status of Taiwan and its relationship to the PRC is a thorny issue that is sooner or later bound to thrust itself back on the geopolitical stage. It is critical to the diplomatic relationship of the United States and China, and it may be integral to the stability of the entire globe as well. In part, the peaceful resolution of Taiwan's future will determine this. One could say, then, that the "fate" of the (Chinese) nation is one of the prime issues of global security in our contemporary world. Much is written and said about this in the field of political science. This essay will explore one small aspect of it. The question is often raised as to whether Taiwan is culturally connected to mainland China. Some have referred to the accumulated identity of the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even perhaps Singapore and predominantly Chinese-speaking areas of Southeast Asia as "Greater China." Others have questioned this designation. There is a diversity of opinion on the subject. As Xueping Zhong has observed, for example, in discussing Sun Longji's "Chinese men," "though the sociological data he refers to were drawn from studies on men outside the PRC, his critique of 'Chinese men' *assumes* their counterparts on the mainland. Today, this assumption seems to coincide with the emerging geopolitical paradigm of the 'Greater China' enthusiastically mapped out by some Chinese elites in China and China specialists in the West. Still, I must point out, the different histories within are such that they should always caution us against generalizations" (Zhong Xueping 2000: 30).

This remonstrance against generalizations is sage advice, so what I intend to do in the bulk of this essay is to discuss some carefully selected literary examples that employ the singular term "*ming*" as a way of suggesting one profound cultural continuity between modern writers active in Taiwan and writers from the PRC. For while Zhong is right to urge care in this

matter, and although there are actually many in Taiwan who would rather emphasize the cultural differences between mainland and island, there are also many who feel the continuities outweigh the uniquenesses. In spite of the differences, some deeply rooted cultural affinities remain, at least in the form of discursive constructs. Xiaobing Tang has addressed this in a critique of Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie's reference book on modern Chinese literature:

By limiting their scope to mainland China, McDougall and Louie make their history much more manageable and coherent, but at the same time they effectively subject this literary history to the geopolitical stipulations of the modern nation-state. While historiographical expediency may call for such a clear demarcation, the invigorating ambiguity of "twentieth-century Chinese literature" stems from the fact that, when taken as an interconnected whole, this body of literature will always force us to critically reconsider our assumptions about what constitutes the identity of modern China. The concept of "Taiwan literature" and its relationship to the literature of China, in fact, are fascinating topics to ponder and investigate. To deny any relationship between these two entities is itself to postulate a relationship; to pit one against the other amounts to a more radical alternative; to see them as evolving from a common cultural heritage and absorbed in the same maelstrom of modernity points to yet another way of making sense of these two separate developments. (Tang Xiaobing 2000: 346–347)

What is at stake here, then, is in no small measure the question of the ultimate cultural continuity between mainland China and Taiwan. The political status of Taiwan is one of the most hotly contested issues on the current world stage. This essay addresses one particular aspect of this ethereal cultural continuity, the discussion over whether the ethnicity of the general Taiwan populace is indeed radically different from that of mainland Chinese, and how this question of ethnicity is connected to that of cultural production and aesthetic representation. My focus is on several contemporary works from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, all of which engage in one way or another the notion of *ming*. I intend to make the case that *ming*, while perhaps similar to the more ubiquitous term "fate" in world culture, is sufficiently specific to the referential system of Chinese discourse in which all these writers operate, yet also sufficiently broad, to constitute what could be referred to as a transcendent national marker. In the texts I have chosen, as well as many others, *ming* and its trappings figure prominently and even can serve as a means by which the narrative is developed. Certain characteristics

are shared throughout these texts, but these are not simply cases of “fate” or “fatalism.” The particular term “*ming*” is invoked in each, and characteristics such as divination, the circumstances under which *ming* is invoked, and how the notion is understood culturally are all closely related. Nevertheless, the creative intellect is such that in each case the author has used her or his unique ingenuity to effect textual resolutions to social problems, or in some cases to dismiss them. Thus, the distinctions one finds in literature are less ones that establish a clear sense of which literature is “Taiwanese” and which is “mainland Chinese” than they are a method of establishing the unique style and thematic concerns of particular individual authors who traffic within a cultural network marked by certain delimited cultural phenomena, *ming* being one of them.

Although the status of *ming* in modern China has changed, the way in which it is understood and referenced is still closely linked to traditional, classical usages: *ming* is one’s “lot” and one’s “life”; *ming* can be ascertained—*suanming* 算命; *ming* is also, ironically, a sort of “life-giving force”; and *ming* has a basis in language—it is not prelinguistic. But while it can be identified in language, its power is predicated on the imagining of it beyond language, beyond human control, in some subtextual form from which it is perceived to wield an awesome power. However, drawing on Steven Sangren’s argument that what humans do in cultural formations is actually to reverse cause and effect, attributing human destiny to some outside force—namely *ming*—which is a human construct, I suggest that *ming* as precisely such a notion is equally prevalent in narrative published in the PRC and that published in Taiwan. Note, however, that I say it is *imagined*: in general, I will leave the empirical problem of the connection between text and context, discourse and life, as it were, for others to pursue.⁴ What I am arguing in this chapter is that Chinese tend to imagine their lives in connection with *ming*, and that they do this in powerful and pervasive ways that are not inhibited by political boundaries.

May Fourth antitraditionalism often attached to the term “*ming*” a negative connotation, something that not only evokes circumscription but a whole way of contemplating one’s identity, something connected to a historical production of the subject position itself, a negative one that is viewed as feudal. It is so embedded in the thoughts and actions of subjects that it should really be considered a constitutive element of them. One cannot really conceive of a Chinese subject or self outside *ming*. *Ming* is a subjectifying principle that not only proscribes the actions of these people and their choices but contributes to the process that defines them *as* subjects. This defining principle of subjectivity is operative in Chinese texts produced both in and out of China proper. It is an overriding notion so indelible to the culture

that it transcends the particularities of locality and raises questions as to whether those particularities that tend to separate mainland Chinese culture from that of Taiwan are as important in literature or culture as are the similarities. In the establishment and maintenance of a national consciousness or “imagined community” (Anderson 1983 and 1991), writers have inscribed and reinscribed the term *ming*, referred to its popular uses in fortune-telling, and appealed to it as an inexorable force of reality in times of peril. These writers each possesses his or her own style of expression; that said, my goal herein has been to map the terrain beyond the “conventional geopolitical unit,” as Wendy Larson has opined in a trenchant observation of cross-strait cultural studies, to identify a cultural leitmotiv that “transcend[s] geopolitical boundaries” and thus to chart one notion in its specificity, but in its broad implications as well (Larson 2002: 1023–1024).

The main works I will discuss are the following: Bai Xianyong’s 白先勇 (b. 1937) novella “Youyuan jingmeng” 遊園驚夢 (Wandering in the garden, waking from a dream), first published in 1966 in *Xiandai wenxue* 現代文學 (Modern literature) and later collected in *Taibeiren* 台北人 (Taipei residents); Zhang Xinxin’s 張辛欣 (b. 1953) novella “Women zheige nianjide meng” 我們這個年紀的夢 (Dreams of our age), published in *Shoubuo* 收穫 (Harvest) 1982; Wang Wenxing’s 王文興 (b. 1937) novel *Beibaide ren* 背海的人 (Backed against the sea), published in 1981; and Yu Hua’s 余華 (b. 1960) *Huozhe* 活著 (To live), originally published in *Shoubuo* in 1992 and subsequently in book form. Bai Xianyong is a writer who though born in mainland China grew up in Taiwan, primarily publishes there and writes about it, but has lived in California for his entire professional life. Wang Wenxing lives in Taiwan. While Zhang Xinxin was born and raised in the PRC, she took up residence in the United States in the late 1980s. Yu Hua is one of the best known and most prolific of post-Mao writers in the PRC.⁵

***Ming* as Personal Foreclosure, *Ming* as Cultural Allusion**

“Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream” is a complicated text, woven together with layer upon layer of classical Chinese allusions.⁶ The story begins with a former Kunqu 昆曲 opera singer, Madame Qian 錢夫人, joining a reunion party with her old friends from mainland China of the 1940s. The party takes place at the Taipei residence of one of her wealthy friends from Nanjing, but Madame Qian is actually living out her days as a widow in reduced financial circumstances in southern Taiwan. Present among the guests is her younger sister Jiang Biyue 蔣碧月, who had snatched away Madame Qian’s fiancé when they were young. The action of the story involves Madame Qian being introduced to various guests, mostly old friends

but some new, leading up to her singing the aria “Waking from a Dream” 驚夢, for which she had become legendary back in Nanjing. The true significance of the story manifests itself, however, through a combination of the use of stream-of-consciousness narrative in a reverie episode of Madame Qian’s, repetition of key imagery in the text, and the piecing together of several classical allusions, most of which refer to trysts in Chinese literature—Cao Zhi’s 曹植 (192–232) *Luoshen fu* 洛神賦 (The Goddess of the Luo river), Li Shangyin’s (813–858) *Jinse* 錦瑟 (The ornamental zither), and Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550–1617) *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The peony pavilion), among others. The association of these various elements reveals that Madame Qian eventually was wedded to an elderly general but did not consummate the bond, that she had had a liaison with his aide-de-camp, leading to a single tryst, the only sexual experience of her life, and that she persecuted herself for this betrayal. As is the case with other texts under discussion, a defining moment for Madame Qian comes in the form of a divination.

When they were young, Madame Qian’s hand and arm were examined by a female diviner, *shiniang* 師娘, who determined that one bone was out of place.⁷ She predicted that Madame Qian, while achieving wealth and fame, would not obtain sexual or emotional fulfillment in this life. This, she suggested, was the result of a transgression in a past life known as *yuannie* 冤孽.

她還要希冀什麼？到底應了得月臺瞎子師娘那把鐵嘴：五姑娘，你們這種人只有嫁給年紀大的，當女兒一般疼惜算了。年青的，哪裡靠得住？可是瞎子師娘偏偏又捏了她的手，眨巴一雙青光眼嘆息道：榮華富貴你是享定了，藍田玉，只可惜妳長錯了一根骨頭，也是你前世的冤孽！不是冤孽還要什麼？

What else could she have expected? It had been fulfilled after all, that ironclad prophecy made by their *shiniang*, the blind woman who was their Master’s wife at the Terrace of the Captured Moon. Fifth, my girl, she told her, the best thing your sort of people can hope for is to get married to an older man who will love you like a daughter. As for the young fellows, can you trust them? As if that weren’t enough, *Shiniang*, blind as she was, had to go and take hold of her wrist and feel the bone, blinking her sightless eyes and adding with a sigh: worldly glory, wealth, and position—you shall enjoy them all, Bluefield Jade. Only it’s a pity you’ve got one bone in you that’s not quite right. It’s just your retribution from a previous life! What else was it, if not retribution? (Bai [1966] 1983: 221/157–158)

This first reference in the story to Madame Qian’s *ming* and her pre-ordained fate is inserted into the third-person omniscient narrative. As Yu Lihua, Ouyang Zi, and others have pointed out, here Bai Xianyong attempts

to penetrate the female psyche.⁸ He attempts to create a sense of pathos by getting inside the emotional world of a woman who, though beautiful and talented, is not of high-class origin. I have suggested elsewhere that he uses the character of Madame Qian as a sort of vessel for the subaltern status of Chinese national subjectivity.⁹ On the surface of his narrative, however, he is simply attempting to articulate what it is like to be a woman who has been denied essential human pleasures. As one learns from deciphering the narrative, highly encoded in allusion and intricately structured with interior monologue, not to mention complex dialogue between the characters, all of which fits within a context prior to the narrative present, Madame Qian suffers from a deeply guilty conscience for having had a one-time-only assignation with her husband's aide-de-camp. As with many modern Chinese texts in which the plight of the exploited woman is a dominant motif, *ming* is used to explain the unfortunate situation in which one finds oneself, but then its revelation is posited before the event so as to suggest the preordination thereof. That is to say, many narratives look back to the characters' pasts and select out a moment or instance in which their *ming* has been read and deemed to have led them to this point. Thus, instead of being a method of understanding and coming to terms with one's lot in life, the compelling power of *ming* is derived from the fact that it has been ascertained well before one's life has unfolded. One's "fate" is understood (or determined, to abide by the ideology of *ming*) by referring to the terms of *ming*, *yuannie*, and the activities of fortune-tellers and the like. There is only a certain set of possibilities and procedures for determining the grid of one's preordained life path, and the fact that these procedures are finite and specified fortifies a common notion of "self" or subjectivity among Chinese. This is a small portion of the manner in which cultural identity is produced.

Although Chinese writers refer to, appeal to, and grapple with this larger cultural metanarrative as a way of making sense of the vagaries of life, they tend to fear determinacy in their own writing above all else. Writers wish to be creative. That is their goal. If things are determined, however, then they are predictable. If they are predictable, then interest in literature is diminished. Writers strive for a sense of suspense, creativity, and uniqueness. Unfortunately, the difference between fictional representation and life is that discourse itself is in fact fixed once it is written, whereas one doesn't really know what will come next in life. Fiction tends to adhere to at least some essential conventions, for reasons of formal continuity if nothing else. Life, on the other hand, is not truly like a novel or film, for even when one dies, there are always others who live on, defying the conventional cadences and contours of narrative development in the novelistic world. Each writer, then, is challenged to discover a creative method of resolving the problem of

encapsulating life while still invoking tried-and-true literary methods. Bai Xianyong deals with this by creating a sort of ironic narrative that while about predestination is not easy to predict, that while highly allusive to classical Chinese literature is nevertheless unmistakably and remarkably modern. He does this by using stream of consciousness and by actually repeating over and over again certain key passages for dramatic and rhythmic effect. One of these is the above quotation from the *shiniang's* fortune-telling. The fortune exists prior to the narrative and is first brought into this narrative by the third-person narrator.

The *shiniang's* fortune is subsequently revisited in the interior monologue of the protagonist, Madame Qian. In this stream-of-consciousness reverie portion of the text, Madame Qian repeats a number of lines, including the following, supposedly from a conversation with her younger sister:

不是這樣說，妹子，不是姐姐不賞臉，實在為者他是命中的冤孽。瞎子師娘不是說過：榮華富貴——藍天玉，可惜你長錯了一根骨頭。冤孽呵。他可不就是命中招的冤孽了。懂嗎？妹子，冤孽。

Don't talk like that, Sis, it's not that Sister won't do you the honor, it's that really he's the retribution in your Sister's fate. Hadn't the blind woman, our *Shiniang*, said, Worldly glory, wealth, position—Bluefield Jade [Madame Qian's stage name], only it's a pity you've got one bone that's not quite right. Oh, my retribution. Isn't he the retribution in your Sister's fate? Understand? Sis, it's retribution. (Bai 1983: 231/165)

Madame Qian's life as a bereaved widow who never really experienced the pleasures of conjugal love in the first place due to the necessary fulfillment of this retribution, predicted by the soothsayer, hinges on the dual connotation of *ming* both as "fate," what in the West would be termed one's "lot," and as "life." *Mingyunde ming* and *shengmingde ming* are the same word in Chinese. I live my *ming*. I am my *ming*. I am no different from my *ming*. My body participates in determining my *ming*. And in "Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream," Madame Qian accepts her *ming*, as it is her life. Peeling back the complex array of allusions and networks of imagery in this text, one is left with an inexorable prime cause, that of the fulfillment of prophecy.

There are two other intriguing aspects to the way *ming* affects and inflects the text. The first is its structuring effect. The second is the way in which *ming* acts as a sort of cultural allusion, completing on a popular, non-literary level what the intricate set of literary allusions has begun for us on the elite level.¹⁰ Part of the allure of this text is the exploration of interior monologue itself, the stream of consciousness that seems to emerge, despite

herself, from Madame Qian's unconscious. And it seems that throughout she is haunted by the early prediction, this reading of her *ming*, that her life is no more than a fulfilling of it. *Ming* is somewhat constitutive in the development of her psyche. And the narrative development is perpetuated by the shifting back and forth between the room in which the party takes place and the issues of the past which these present images conjure for her in the psychological realm. As the images from the past emerge and reemerge in her mind, a certain recurrence creates a sort of lyrical or musical rhythm for the reader. In much the way as a modern poem might engender a feeling of rhythm and continuity in blank verse by the repetition of key phrases so that they cease simply to convey meaning and also begin to function as formal devices in the poem, Bai Xianyong's narrative builds on itself, working and reworking key events in the protagonist's life, returning to the soothsayer's observations as well as the key term *yuannie*, "retribution." The alleged evil deed she committed was to have a brief affair, but it is understood in the text as a realization of a fixed destiny inexorably set in motion by the "out-of-place" "bone" the soothsayer discovered. Thus, was Madame Qian really responsible for her behavior or really to blame for it? The rhythmic textual repetition also echoes textually the deterministic nature of *ming*, that which is "destined" to occur, as if *ming* simply performs in different or later form that which already has been determined.

Ming as cultural allusion functions as a way to absorb the text into the contextual realm of what could be called "the 'fate' of the Chinese nation," since China could be understood as "the nation of fate," or more precisely "the nation of *ming*." In fact, this is one of the major problems that Lu Xun has with traditional China: it seems that human action is fixed, according to Lu Xun, not contingent enough to allow for a sense of individual agency. But Bai Xianyong, writing a half-century after Lu Xun, actually exploits or employs the references to this grand cultural text as a further way of ensuring that his narrative will be understood within the cultural frame of China and not as something else—whether regional, diasporic, or whatever. Bai Xianyong is deathly afraid that his unavoidable existence on the political and geographical margins of China will disqualify him from being considered a member of the Chinese educated elite, *zhibishifenzi* 知識份子. Madame Qian's hypermarginal status—as the woman who lives in southern Taiwan and maintains no contact with her former friends, essentially the exile—is a constant reminder of the "lost generation" of Chinese intellectuals who fled mainland China in 1949. Yet although they are isolated from mainstream Chinese society and political life, the power of literature is such that by virtue of allusion they are still able to maintain and revivify their cultural identity. This takes place foremost through the use of literary allusion, but also, as a certain return of the repressed, through the resurgence of *ming* in the mem-

ory of Madame Qian. Thus, this way of coming to grips with her lot in life, accounting for the present circumstances by returning to a prediction of her fate—accomplished, ironically, post hoc—is also a way of suturing Madame Qian and the general intellectual project of Chinese in Taiwan back into the cultural fold of mainland China. In fact, as the story was written during the Cultural Revolution, a period that endeavored to accomplish a complete break with China’s cultural heritage, one could make the argument that the true continuity in Chinese culture proceeds through this line of development and not through that of mainland China. Divination, then, works to reconnect the divided nation.

The Private Space of *Ming*

Turning to a post-Mao text from the PRC will demonstrate how successful *ming* is in preserving a sense of cultural continuity that transcends moment and locality, and reconnects both Taiwan and pre-Cultural Revolution China with the present via the resumption of this cultural allusion. Zhang Xinxin’s “Dreams of Our Age” was written in the early 1980s. It emerged as a counterpoint both to the bathetic work of socialist realism and the prosaic, overwrought response to the Cultural Revolution of the “Wound and Scar Literature” 傷痕文學 from the late 1970s. The setting for it is concrete apartments and offices stripped bare, unadorned, populated by urban workers who are a far cry from the fanciful world of Bai Xianyong. The text is subtly written and dreamy. While it is not exactly a stream-of-consciousness narrative, it nevertheless could be considered interior monologue. The narrative voice shifts between first-, third-, and even second- (the accusative “you”) person points of view. The narrative follows throughout the thoughts and actions of the unnamed female protagonist. She laments her “fate,” or her *ming*, as an individual still trapped in the Maoist world where an attempt was made to obliterate individualism and install collectivism as the social ideal.

As with the previous text, “Dreams of Our Age” refers to a past in which the protagonist consulted a soothsayer. But in this case, she sought out two such readings. The first was given to her by a classmate while she was in the Production Construction Brigade 生產建設兵團, a Cultural Revolution organization for rusticated youth:

也有人跟她講過預言的，還是在生產建設兵團時看著手相的。而且，不只一個人給他看過手相。

〈明年，你就能回家了。你這個人，很有後福呢！〉第一個給她看相的女同學說，〈妳還有一個青梅竹馬的愛情，這個愛情不會成，也不會斷，它要很久很久跟著妳的生活走，甚至在妳結婚以後……〉

她本來虔誠的伸著右手，頓時愕然了。

在因電力不足，微弱得像燭光一樣的電燈下，那個白天，晚上總在一處的女同學熟識的臉，恍恍惚惚，彷彿變了，顯現出一些新的東西。似乎，透著股的確掌握未來的神祕的力量，似乎，摻著些他從未覺察的複雜的經驗。

青梅竹馬？！

她不記得。一點兒，一點兒，一點兒也不記得。

There was also someone who had told fortunes to her by reading her palm; that was when she was in the Production Construction Brigade. Moreover, it wasn't just one person who had read her palm.

“You'll be able to go home next year. You are destined to have good fortune!”

The first of her fellow female students to read her palm had said: “You still love a childhood sweetheart. This love will never succeed, nor will it be broken off; it will follow you through your life for a long, long time; even after you marry...”

She had been holding out her hand all this time with humble sincerity, and suddenly she was stunned.

The electric current was so feeble that the lamp was as faint as a candle. So familiar to her after days and nights constantly spent together, the face of her fellow student now almost imperceptibly, as though transformed, revealed something new. It seemed to show a mysterious power to genuinely grasp the future; it seemed fraught with some complicated experience of which she had never become aware.

Childhood sweetheart?!

She couldn't remember one. She didn't have the faintest recollection of one. (Zhang Xinxin 1988: 6-7/10-11)

Zhang Xinxin undercuts the socialist vision of China by presenting this disaffected woman who, like Bai Xianyong's heroine, cannot escape the fortune foretold that now returns to her in memory. The text implies that she sought the reading in order to ascertain when she would have a chance to leave the production brigade. This casts an indirectly negative pall on the Cultural Revolution and its endeavors, a move that prior to the 1980s would have been risky in China. Ironically, in the process of discovering when she can return home, the classmate reading her palm stumbles across the sign that she has had this childhood sweetheart, which she initially denies. As in other cases, *ming* has asserted itself, if only as a portent, even when one is not seeking it. It is acknowledged that she will return home soon, but more pertinent to the narrative is this portentous observation about her love life. The fear of this indeed coming true overwhelms the anticipation she feels about

returning home to the city. Her girlfriend says she will have good fortune but has a childhood sweetheart, a relationship that will supposedly haunt her forever.

The protagonist's girlfriend does not quite seem like a qualified medium for this kind of task. Yet, it turns out that, and this is reinforced by a reading of Wang Wenxing's text, while expertise may lead to a more reliable deciphering of one's *ming*, just "playing around" with the activities of fortune-telling can still lead to some uncannily accurate predictions. Perhaps, then, the power of *ming* and the ability to ascertain its direction, outweigh the need for expertise. The protagonist herself wonders, or hopes, for just such a thing, since she subsequently seeks another palm reading. If one can speculate that her original motivation to obtain a reading was to see when they would return home from this uncomfortable environment, then perhaps she seeks the second reading as a way of dispelling any possibility that her classmate could have been correct about her childhood sweetheart. The second palm reader had already read the *Hemp Clothes Physiognomy* 麻衣相書.

〈能回去。今年就能。不過以後生活很一般。〉

〈真的能回去嗎？〉

〈能。〉

...

〈求你說詳細一點兒，詳細點兒！真能看出什麼來嗎？〉

於是，他又抽了口煙，食指輕輕一落，指著他手掌中，跟那個女同學指的不同的另一條紋路，淡淡地說：〈看見了嗎？這條，是婚姻線，喏，就是這條，起得很早，始終不斷，這是你的青梅竹馬。怎麼樣，有吧？〉

〈什麼呀！沒有。根本就沒有！〉他一下子就大叫起來。

〈這手相上有。〉那男同學仍舊淡淡地，然而固執。怔了怔，她不自信起來：〈多惡心呢，...我，會這麼壞嗎？〉

〈你不壞，這是命。〉他溫和地說。

"You will be able to go home. This year you'll be able to. But from then on, you will lead a very ordinary life."

"Really? I will be able to go home?"

"You will."

.....

"Please tell me more, just a little more! Can you really see something?"

He took another drag on his cigarette. Gently his index finger dropped to where it was pointing at a line on her palm different from the one her female classmate had indicated, and in a bland tone of voice he said: "Do you see this? This one is the marriage line, and next to this line, there is a line, look, it's this one here, appearing very early, unbroken from

beginning to end. This is your “childhood sweetheart.” How about that, do you have one?”

“What! No, I don’t have one. I don’t have one at all!” she immediately cried out.

“This hand is showing one.” The male classmate was still unperturbed, but insistent.

Dumbfounded, she began to wonder about herself: “Disgusting . . . me, can I be that rotten?”

“You’re not rotten,” he gently continued, “this is fate.” (Zhang Xinxin 1988: 9/12–13)

He, too, identifies a line on her palm that suggests a childhood sweetheart, a line that goes from beginning to end running parallel to the marriage line. She then looks at the palm of her hand with disgust, as if to say this map of her life, this essence of her life, which is beyond her control, is revolting and repelling to her conscious side. The young fortune-teller then tries to calm her by saying, “You’re not rotten. It’s just fate” 你不壞·這是命. Much of the narrative is then taken up with trying to determine who this childhood sweetheart, this “he” 他 as the protagonist calls him, is.

The development of the narrative is perpetuated by an interesting play between the seeming determinacy of this fact and the indeterminacy of who “he” actually is. Since it is beyond her control, she may not even know who this star-crossed companion of hers is. It could hardly be her husband, whom she met through the conventional method of introduction. She fantasizes that it may be a colleague she meets who writes children’s stories. This man, Zhu Xiao 朱曉, represents a type of freedom for her. He suggests that she is able to construct endings to stories herself, undercutting the notion that a narrative is predetermined. But this possibility is deflated when late in the narrative he asserts that his own wife turns out to have been his “childhood sweetheart.” Another possibility for this “he” in the narrative, and in fact the most interestingly political one, is that “he” could be Mao himself. The narrative is in a sense a mildly dystopic critique of the identitylessness of socialist existence. Finally, she learns to her surprise, that the “he” might even be her neighbor, whom she loathes. It turns out that he had spent some time as a child at camp near the seashore. The narrator goes through a reverie sequence where she recalls being lost in a dark cave only to be saved by a young boy. The boy takes her hand and writes “I love you” on the palm. Her reaction is once again revulsion, and she flees to her tent. She also tries to rub the characters off the palm of her hand, but only succeeds in rubbing them further into it. When she appears the next morning his and all the other boy’s tents are gone. She never sees him again.

Zhang Xinxin's text uses *ming* as a method of narrative deployment and a way of constructing the subjectivity of this protagonist. It is also related to meaning and determinacy. Her job is proofreading, yet she cannot concentrate on her job unless she reads her texts backwards; otherwise, she gets caught up in the action of the text and is distracted from doing her job. Yet reading the text backwards gives an arbitrary and meaningless quality to the texts, and to life itself, which the texts aspire to represent, for at one point she even says that, when she finds a typographical error, it makes her question the referential meaning, not just the accuracy of the text. Finally, *ming* or "predestination," *zhuding* 注定, acts as a contributing force in insuring that the protagonist's life remains remarkably dull. She thinks back to her childhood, when she wrote essays on the topic of what she would do when she grew up. She thinks how awful it is that her career is fixed like this, that she is relegated to being a proofreader who cannot even "read the texts for meaning." The fixity of her life is not articulated as a tragedy in the way that some May Fourth characters suffer immutable fates—dying an awful death, being condemned by the community, for example. The tragedy of Zhang Xinxin's heroine is one of ennui.

"Screwing" *Ming*

Although Wang Wenxing, like the other authors in this study, has long been interested in the issue of fate, he is chiefly preoccupied with the tension between fate and contingency, as well as the will to subvert fate. Edward Gunn has argued that Wang's work labors against "the preordained," but that the alternative is a contingency in which no moral order exists and therefore no meaning to one's actions obtains (Gunn 1984: 31). One could add to this that contingency would also serve to undermine the notion of *ming* as a cultural signifier, an intertextual link both to the larger web of Chinese discourse in general and to these contemporary texts in particular. This quandary has been evident in Wang's work since the early short story "Mingyun de jixian" 命運的跡線 (Line of fate, 1963), in which a young boy attempts to lengthen his life by extending the life line on his palm with a blade.¹¹ Wang's *Backed against the Sea* is equally concerned with the issues of textual and existential fear of predictability, fixity, and boredom. Wang Wenxing uses this text to call into question the arbitrary quality of discursive referentiality itself. And more than most twentieth-century texts, *Backed against the Sea* is genuinely and unabashedly funny. The author struggles with the problem of how to design a narrative that reflects the spontaneity of life while simultaneously articulating or intimating the futility of the enterprise. In this text, the narrative is centered not on the one who receives the palm reading but on the

soothsayer himself, Wang's antihero protagonist. Throughout this text, the first-person narrator refers to himself as "Daddy" 爺, but in setting up shop as a fortune-teller, he takes the business name "Lonestar" 單星子 because of his one eye, a disability that supposedly wins him cachet in the fortune-telling trade and certifies his prescience. This text comes to us in the disjunct and self-referential form of interior monologue. "Daddy" presents a variety of story lines that both tell us why he is in this "God-forsaken place," a remote and impoverished fishing village (it is because he's fleeing a gambling debt from Taipei), and detail his life in this less than glamorous setting. The tension between chaos and determinacy is performed through the structure of the text itself, as it randomly and playfully shifts from subject to subject and back again. Wang illustrates a connection between contingency and referentiality in the way his language increasingly defies normal rhetorical and stylistic conventions, a peculiarity that has earned *Backed against the Sea* not just accolades from a few intellectuals but reactions ranging from puzzlement to condemnation.

One is tempted to read the work as part of the broader tradition of May Fourth antifeudal and antisuperstition cultural critique. Lonestar's self-parody and ridicule of the locals support this reading. Finding himself destitute and in need of an income, he poses as a soothsayer merely as a means of survival. He places no stock in the veracity of fortune-telling at all, whether it is palm reading, physiognomy, or trigram divination. But recognizing that the villagers are quite superstitious, he endeavors to hit them where it hurts. For this reason, "Daddy started up and set up a stand as a fortune-teller" 爺乃就開始了擺出攤子來為人論命斷相 (Wang 1981: 13/10).¹² The irreverence of Daddy's moneymaking scheme is quite evident, though since, as he says, he does not believe in fortune-telling, he considers it an utter joke, and even if there were any veracity to it he notes that there are so many different texts on which to base one's reading that no authority reigns at all. Finally, he is not even that prepared, but since he has some old, tattered reference books on the subject around, he reviews them and then seeks an immediate profit from his freshly resurrected knowledge as someone who wishes to "sell what is just bought!" 現買現賣 (Wang 1981: 13/10). The vulnerability of Chinese to this type of scheme is astutely preyed upon by Lonestar, as he realizes that if there is anything that will attract the attention of his compatriots, it is superstition: "It is precisely [superstition] which should be regarded as that wherein rests the principal reason whereby Daddy, having established myself as distinguished in professing to read fortunes, could occupy a position and maintain my place" 迷信···此即也就是所以本大爺在這裡設臺說相還可以一席之地尚能立足之宜居首要的原故 (Wang 1981: 20/15).

In spite of this lack of respect for the institutions of popular culture, Lonestar still cannot divorce himself from the desire to rely on some meta-

narrative for the meaning of life. As he schemes to read the *ming* of others, he also expresses some desire to rely on the preordained, metaphysical principles of meaning himself:

總之是至少是已經顯漏了出來在我們的這一個〈寰宇〉之中有那麼的個的一股子的個的〈神祕〉底力量業經被窺視到了，這麼的樣的個的一番情形即等於是印証顯現了出來幽幽迷迷的冥冥廣空之中底底確確然的確是有一骰子〈奪定一切〉，〈裁仲一切〉，可以証明出來在宇宙的大太虛之間原來是也有〈案形〉的，原來是也有〈草圖〉原也有〈打樣〉了的了的來了，——單單能毅知道上這一個些些就足足足足足足可以使人歡忻載樂興奮之至於之至致之無比無可以匹比的了的了了。

What's important is revealing at least that a "mysterious" force at work in our "world" has been **witnessed**, and that something like this verifies, reveals that a force determining fate that "settles all" and "decides all" really, **truly** exists in this gloomy gloomy dark vast bewildering vastness, and that can prove that in the great vacant emptiness of this universe there has all along been a "blueprint" and a "preliminary draft," and a "model" of some kind sort of, you know,—just to be able to **know** these things is enough, just this alone is more than enough, enough to thrill people with a delight beyond anything to compare it to it's so so supreme, it's so it's so incomparable it it it iz. (Wang 1981: 49–50/36)

This need for some ineluctable veracity beyond simple corporeal existence is satisfied by the culture-specific invention of a concept such as *ming*. Just like Gao Xingjian, through a logical process of neither committing himself to belief nor of renouncing his belief in fate—"I might as well call it fate"—Daddy seeks an explanation even while simultaneously poking fun at popular belief and attempting to capitalize on its adherents. The chaotic nature of the language coupled with its nevertheless still relentless ability to achieve referentiality performs for the reader precisely this paradoxical process of combined contingency and necessity that Gunn discusses in his article. Lonestar is a comical, self-parodied version of the young boy who once slashed his life line:

爺甚然的個的相信自己的〈生命線〉！——不知道為什麼：——爺就是相信爺本人，本大爺，自己的生命牠的個的會無需置加懷疑的獨其特別來了個長——。其實，其實這也是沒甚麼特特異異的理由，就僅僅止止是僅僅只只因為的個是〈虛榮心〉之所致！

I believe, very deeply, in the "life line" on my palm!—I don't know why:—For some reason it's my belief that I, myself, personally will undoubtedly have a particularly an especially long life, no reason to to doubt. Actually, it's not for any unusual, remarkable reason, it's just plain just out of sheer "vanity" that I think so. (Wang 1981: 50/36–37)

The notions of fate, fatalism, and the palm serve as a sort of unique road map of personal destiny, intertwined with the sense of selfhood, the subjective force that drives this protagonist and his jumbled narrative. Perhaps we have a contestation here between a traditional form of subjectivity and a more modern, anti-Confucian, more reified or atomized subjective force that takes the potential of freedom as its calling card. *Backed against the Sea* raises the issue to the ultimate in difficulty—referentiality—because referentiality requires determinacy. And determinacy is also an accomplice to narrative development. Yet for fiction to be interesting and “lifelike” it ironically must mimic the unpredictability of life. The narrative of *Backed against the Sea* becomes a battle between an interrogation of establishment institutions, articulated in somewhat indeterminate, random discourse, and the centripetal force of fatalism. And the reified subjectivity of the protagonist, who suffers a sort of psychological breakdown, raises the concomitant questions of individuality and agency.

Ming also functions as a vehicle for developing the narrative, for though we might not be able to affix meaning in the determination between contingency and necessity, the bizarre effort to at once make some money off of *ming* while also falling back on its reassuring certitude can make for quite some storytelling. After a few unsuccessful and aborted attempts, Lonestar gradually begins to develop a clientele and attracts several customers in a row. The exchange between Lonestar and his customers during this episode is rather amusing. Four customers come in to have their fortunes read. The scene is told in a highly comic fashion, interspersed with Lonestar’s habitual verbal apoplexies and insights into human behavior. In giving the first client a face reading, he discovers immediately that according to the books he’s been cramming lately this customer is facing “imminent death.” Lonestar has shocked himself, but does not want to upset the customer too much by immediately divulging this information, so he softens his prediction. However muted his suggestion may be that the customer “take a little extra care with things” (Wang 1981: 68/48), the client realizes that the prediction could not be favorable. The next reading, of a young, attractive man in a red jacket, is auspicious. The reading requested after that is a trigram divination of a stout man in a baseball cap who turns out to be the captain of a ship. Through Lonestar’s rambling interior monologue, we discover that it would be inappropriate for the captain to set sail (Wang 1981: 72/51). Curiously, the captain is determined to set sail anyway and so asks for a further reading, of his face. Lonestar settles for reading his palm, which portends disaster in the future but not imminently. Because the two readings do not correspond exactly, Lonestar is forced to lie to the captain in an effort to reconcile them. Ironically mouthing the sorts of comments one hears from within the ideol-

ogy of *ming*, Lonestar thus avers, “Fate, it’s something already laid out and fixed for good, it is, is” 命運牠已經都安排好了安排定固了來了了的 (Wang 1981: 72/51) before repeating the warning not to go to sea. By this time, Lonestar is exhausted and impatient with the seemingly interminable line of customers, so when the final one comes for his reading, Lonestar deals with him in summary fashion:

你〈死！〉 這一回我這麼的個的判〈死掉了他〉 這麼樣的個的的個判
決了他的個的的個的個。 而且〈即 死 ！〉 〈三天之中，三天
以內， 即死 ！ 〉 他聽了這麼樣的個的的個的的個的個的個的個生
氣：——〈幹你娘——幹你老母 ！——……〉 你看，你看，命運牠
一對的個的的的的他不好 起來，他就馬上登時頃當刻之片一付就要
來，立刻就個的開始要 〈操〉命運的個的了的個的的個的的個樣
子，——至少，他是要操 命運——決定他大巴掌上的紋線該得個的的個
的怎樣詳詮之，解釋之人——的他的個的 老娘她！

You’re “**dead!**” This time I decided to “kill him off,” and that’s just how
I announced my verdict, like, see, and “ dead soon, ”
“dead soon, in three days, within **three days!**” When he heard
that he was sorta, see, you know, he got I mean angry: “Fuck you, you
mutha fucka!—..” Look at that, just look at how as soon as fate started to,
like you see, to sorta go against him, right away on the spot in an
instant he immediately started right in wanting to “screw” fate like that,
see, like you know what I mean,—that is, he wanted to fuck him over—the
person who had undertaken to decide which **critical exegesis** was most
appropriate to like to like **explain** best the lines on his palm—wanted to
fuck him over and **his old lady too!** (Wang 1981: 74/53)

Wang Wenxing’s critical poignancy and comic genius shine in the description of this encounter, for the amusing gesture of trying to “screw” *ming*—to cast doubt upon the whole cultural apparatus and metadiscourse that reinforces notions of *ming* in Chinese culture—register on the higher level of cultural critique. One does not see such a shockingly iconoclastic passage as this often in Chinese writing, but not just by dint of its explicit language. In fact, the shock value stems from the author’s unabashed effort to debunk the paradigm of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness so central to popular Chinese thinking. In addition, this sort of mockery would complement a full-fledged interrogation of *ming* with all the implications for traditional Chinese culture, but such an interrogation could easily result in the type of inquisition carried out during the Cultural Revolution.

The final irony of this episode is that a few days later the captain, the one in the baseball cap, returns to report that Lonestar’s ill omens had come

true, at least in part, that the ship had taken on water and all three shipmates, including his son—the one who received the favorable prognostication—had died. What is this supposed to mean? Anything can happen. We live in a contingent world, but one may attempt to invest human actions and the actions of nature with meaning. The investments are often culturally inscribed, and part of this inscription in Chinese culture is *ming*. The episode ends on a note of pathos, for even after the captain returns to tell Lonestar of the calamity, and even though he believes in “the fate of his palm” even more than the very practitioner of the readings, he still is resigned to set sail again:

這一個船長，他對於的爺底〈命相預言〉比到起爺之對於牠的的的的的的來更還要來得個相信。他是捐荷着的到的了的個〈命運之大木枷〉踏步下到了這一條船上去……是爺卻沒的個的有任何之〈運命的大荷架〉壓加在爺的個的 肩膀頭頭擔載上。關於他，這一個〈船長〉，他的預言，——可得會印証証驗實現出來了的個的 嘛？——天知道！

Compared to me, the captain, you know he believed in my “fortune-telling predictions” more than I did, you see like. He had stepped onto this boat shouldering what was like I mean the “cross of fate.” ... I don’t have anything at all like this like “cross of fate” to carry on my shoulders weighing me down like that. And as for his, this “captain” his predicted fate, —Would some proof emerge to confirm and corroborate this, would it? **Heaven** only knows! (Wang 1981: 85–86/60)

The reader is left to speculate what has happened to the captain while Lonestar moves on in his desultory manner to lambaste other aspects of Chinese society. This segment of the narrative drains away, but in spite of the social satire and general good fun of this cultural critique, some pathos is involved as well. For even as Lonestar himself claims to put no stock in the machinations of *ming*, and certainly not in his ability to parse its signs, and even as the rigid determinacy of human action is undone through the play of random utterances, the power of Wang Wenxing’s writing, the craft of his dramatic expertise, leaves us with a sense of sorrow for the captain whose certain death in his own mind, since he believes in fate more than Lonestar, is not enough to prevent him from going back out to sea to earn a living. That is the irony of *ming*.¹³

The Attrition of Life

No other modern text makes *ming* so central to its plot structure and thematic unity as does Yu Hua’s novel *To Live*.¹⁴ In *To Live* (or “*Living*,” a

more literal though awkward translation of the title), the notions of *ming* as a life-giving force and as the unremitting tether that either causes or explains misfortune determine the trajectory and entire narrative course of the book, a trajectory described by one critic as “thematic repetition” (Yu Xian 1996: 12–15). The novel was written during the early post-Tiananmen era, but exhibits some similarities to the last legs of the “seeking roots,” *xungen* 尋根, movement in post-Mao China in its emphasis on ordinary Chinese lives in a somewhat historical frame away from the urban centers of Beijing and Shanghai. Though adapted for the screen in a rather different form, the novel has not garnered the scholarly attention as has Yu Hua’s earlier more experimental and less straightforward work. *To Live* is told by a first-person “secondary” narrator, Fugui 福貴 (whose name literally means good fortune and wealth), a peasant who is found tilling a modest plot of land. He is discovered by the primary narrator, someone who is going out into the countryside in search of folk stories to set to music. This narrator takes up limited space in the story and only serves in the peripheral capacity of framing the central narrative told by Fugui. The bittersweet link between *ming* as a life-giving force and *ming* as cruel fate is not fully demonstrated until the end of the book. In the end, we learn that Fugui is the lone surviving member of his family, much like the “end-of-the-liner” Fifth Grandfather in Wang Anyi’s 王安憶 (b. 1954) “seeking roots” classic *Xiaobaozhuang* 小鮑莊 (Baotown). Having outlasted them all, Fugui constructs an imaginary family consisting of the oxen he has “saved” from slaughter and other fictitious oxen he calls out to in order to trick the real one into working his plot of land. He not only has occasion to bemoan his lonely fate but also lives to tell his story. As the sole surviving member of a family that endured an excruciating fate, he becomes the one who puts it into words and testifies to the folk song gatherer. Having a long life and enduring fate have placed Fugui in the position of shaping the narrative of *To Live*. There is even some question, as Birgit Linder has wondered, as to whether this sort of minimal survival can be considered “living.”¹⁵

As a narrative of *ming*, *To Live* is as sustained a jeremiad on the life of the peasant in Chinese literature as anyone could imagine. Gone are the days of lionizing the peasant, but neither is s/he critiqued per se. In fact, one of the remarkable features of this work is the extent to which critique is really not that much of a factor in the forging of its tone, whether it be a critique of Maoism and the Communist party or of traditional Chinese culture. To be sure, this work has no spiritual kinship with socialist realism. There are no heroes; the revolution is not glorified, but rather looked upon as an inevitable cataclysmic event such as an earthquake or flood. Like the gambling episode that begins the novel and the various events that lead to the deaths of major characters, the civil war is a crisis from which the main character escapes with

his *ming*. The novel is decidedly less politically oriented than the film adaptation. Rather than a hagiography that emphasizes the benefits to the collective, as with socialist realism, or even the sort of antihero narratives of the 1980s, *To Live* becomes a refashioning of recent historical memory into the story of an individual and his immediate family. If the text is punctuated by major events such as the Civil War or the Cultural Revolution which serve as a basic scaffolding, the depiction of the events results in individual reflections and conclusions rather than much in the line of political commentary. Some of these punctuating crises are connected to major historical events and some are personal in nature. The one thing these crisis points have in common is how they ostensibly unfold according to *ming*, or, to go a step further, how they are interpreted according to the preset cultural understanding of *ming*.¹⁶

In the gambling scene that dominates the beginning of the novel, for example, Fugui appears as a ne'er-do-well, a “misbegotten” *niezi* 孽子 grown in the mold of his father. The two of them together have managed to deplete the family coffers and squander the family land holdings. Gambling is supposedly a game of chance, precisely the domain of *ming*. Zheng Chouyu 鄭愁予 (b. 1933), a poet who was educated in Taiwan and then moved to the United States, wrote a poem entitled “Mingyun” 命運 (Fate) which comments on the connection between gambling and fate:

I cannot request	我不能要求
That the pair of dice I cast	我擲下的兩個骰子
Turn up a red heart, or	是一顆紅心，或者
Thirteen black sesame dots.	是十三個黑色的麻點。
I only wish it wouldn't roll out from	只要他不滾出那隻
That bowl with countless rings around it,	無數曲線拱成的碗，
So that my tired hand	則我一朝疲倦的手
No longer need be cold and stiff from searching.	便不再因尋找而僵冷。

The melancholy expressed in this poem stems from the fatalism of futile hope in the face of events that are beyond one's control. Rolling dice is a game of chance; this we all know. Played fairly, the game cannot be controlled. Thus, what good is hoping or “requesting” that the dice be cast in one's favor? The author expresses a certain degree of pessimism by hoping that the dice will actually no longer roll out from the bowl—implying an end to the game, or perhaps an end, metaphorically, to life? We don't know. But we do know that the author has grown cold and weary with searching, the same sort of sentiment expressed in *To Live*. Can there be any end other than

ending the game? The rings that infinitely encircle the bowl suggest the ceaselessness of this process, like Yeats' winding gyre.

There is an end to Fugui's gambling, both in game and in behavior. It ends with his total loss of all property, after which, for what it's worth, he swears off gambling entirely. There is another difference as well. In Fugui's game, he learns after the fact, he is being cheated by Long Er 龍二, the person whom he gambled against and to whom he gambled away what remained of his property. What we find, though, is that one cannot cheat fate, for Long Er eventually pays for Fugui's loss, dying in his place: 〈福貴，我是替你死去啊〉“Fugui, I'm dying in your place” (Yu Hua 1994: 89). What is considered a game of chance, and thus up to fate, is cheated, and by the same token a life is taken. Though not explicitly stated as such, *ming* operates co-terminously, as fate that is tampered with and as life that is lost.

The way the Civil War is depicted in *To Live* is quite unlike either socialist realism or other post-Mao novels. The crux is not the status of war itself, or even this war. It is the near-death experience that awakens Fugui to the precious value of life. When contemplating desertion in the face of almost certain death, Fugui's war-seasoned friend Lao Quan advises him against it:

〈誰也逃不掉。〉

老全問我夜裡睡覺聽到槍聲沒有，我說聽到了，他說：

〈那就是打逃兵的，命大的不讓打死，也會被別的部隊抓去。〉

老全說得我心都寒了……

“No one can escape.”

Old Quan asked if I had heard the sound of bullets while I was sleeping.

I said I had. He continued:

“That was them shooting deserters. If you've got a long lease on life, you won't get shot, but then you'll be caught by another army.”¹⁷

My heart froze at Old Quan's words. (Yu Hua 1994: 69)

The likelihood is not great that one would have “a long lease on life” *ming da* 命大, as I have translated this. Realizing the futility of the situation, Fugui prepares to wait out the war with his newfound friends, Old Quan and Chunsheng 春生. There is no sense of the heroic in this war scene; it does not matter which side one fights for, or even that one fights. Clearly, this is in marked contrast not only to the socialist realism of the 1950s, which produced several “classic” war novels, but even to novels of the 1980s such as *Red Sorghum*, where a sense of the heroic and of who the enemy is remains. Old Quan, later killed, articulates the most powerful lesson learned on the battlefield, one of survival: 〈老子也打過幾十次仗了，每次我都對自己說：

老子死也要活著〉“I’ve been in several dozen battles and each time I say to myself, no matter what, I’ve got to live through this” (Yu Hua 1994: 78). This leads Fugui and Chunsheng to contemplate the value of life and conclude that death like this would be “unjust” 冤 (Yu Hua 1994: 81). Even the company commander “runs for his life” (which literally means to “escape one’s *ming*”: *taoming* 逃命; Yu Hua 1994: 80).

For Fugui, the experience of battle may not have been heroic, but this, coupled with his good fortune vis-à-vis Long Er’s demise, whose bullets taken on Fugui’s behalf would extinguish any possibly remaining *ming*, leads not simply to a new lease on life but a new attitude toward it as well:

我摸摸自己的臉，又摸摸自己的胳膊，都好好的，我想想自己是該死卻沒死，我從戰場撿了一條命回來，到了家龍二成了我的替死鬼，我家的祖墳埋對了地方，我對自己說：

〈這下可要好好活了。〉

I felt my face and arms and they were all right. I thought to myself that I should have died and yet didn’t. From the life I snatched back from the battlefield to Long Er becoming a sacrificial ghost on my behalf, my ancestral grave must be positioned correctly. I said to myself:

“From that moment on I had to live life to the fullest.” (Yu Hua 1994: 90)

The most uncanny aspect of this passage is the extent to which it echoes that of Gao Xingjian when his doctor informed him of his own mortal reprieve. But Fugui is less contemplative than Gao, for on the same page he continues: “Later I felt better about it, thinking that there was no reason to get myself upset about it. It’s all fate” 後來我就想開了，覺得也用不著自己嚇唬自己，這都是命 (Yu Hua 1994: 90). But though the lives of his wife and family do not improve, Fugui now shifts the emphasis from *ming* as “life” to *ming* as “fate.” This adjustment allows him to ease his mind as well, since things that are fated are outside one’s control anyway. Does this mean that life is precisely that which is outside one’s control?¹⁸ The revolutionaries who founded the People’s Republic of China, *gemingjia* 革命家, whose job it was literally to “transform” or “overturn” fate would clearly not agree. In this sense, Yu Hua’s novel is in part an attempt to recast the received history of revolutionary China, a potentially inflammatory move in a country that still clings to some vestige of socialist ideology, at least in official circles. The film adaptation domesticates this risky theme by molding the book into a critique most specifically of the radical aspects of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution, both of which have long since been safely reinterpreted out of the mainstream of Chinese socialism.

One of the key questions about *ming* has been whether it is something that truly is set, fatalistic, or whether one associates events with *ming* so as to mitigate the sense of responsibility, or even one's concern, as Fugui has done. One passage in *To Live* actually addresses this conundrum directly, raising questions but providing no answers. When deciding where to build a backyard steel furnace, the village leader summons a geomancer to choose an auspicious site. The geomancer first has his eyes on Fugui's house, but when Jiazhen comes outside, he recognizes her and passes it by. He then chooses a neighbor's house, which is promptly burned to the ground despite the protestations of its owner. That night, appreciating the close call they have just had, Jiazhen and Fugui consider the situation:

那晚上我和家珍都睡不踏實，要不是家珍認識城裡看風水的王先生，我這家人都不知道要到哪裡去了。想來想去這都是命，只是苦了老孫頭，家珍覺得這災禍是我們推到他身上去的，我想想也是這樣。我嘴上不這麼說，我說：

〈是災禍找到他，不能說是我們推給他的。〉

That night neither Jiazhen nor I slept very well. If Jiazhen hadn't known Mr. Wang, the geomancer from town, who knows where our family would have gone. If you think about it, it's fate. It's just too bad for Old Sun Tou. Jiazhen felt we had pushed this calamity over onto him, and I thought so too. But what came out of my mouth was something different. I said:

"The calamity found him; you can't say it was us who pushed it onto him" (Yu Hua 1994: 114).

Although the couple was indeed lucky in this one close call, they could easily have intervened and argued that it wasn't fair to single out Old Sun Tou's house for demolition. But attributing it to fate made it easier for them to live with the consequences and relieves any feelings of guilt.

From this point in the novel on, the notion of *ming* and the whole tenor of the novel shifts from the death-defying narrow escapes of Fugui to the unfortunate encounters with *ming* that his family members must face, one by one, as each dies. Sabina Knight has delineated in her essay in this volume (Chap. 11) how *ming* plays an especially acute role vis-à-vis the issue of gender. Gender and *ming* intersect in *To Live* as well, primarily in the character of Fengxia, Fugui's daughter. The "bitterness (of one's) fate" or "bitter life," depending on how one would translate *kuming* 苦命 or *mingku*, is a term usually reserved for characterizing the limitations put on women in the face of certain patriarchal preconditions in Chinese society, such as chaste widowhood, concubinage, and forced betrothal. But even in this context, there are some works in which, despite the "bitter fate" of the female characters,

the women are to an extent able to prevail. In *Baotown*, for example, agency is available to most of the women, though they must struggle to attain it. In fact, in an interesting encounter a male character who defies tradition by interloping into a single-surname village and moving in with a widow first identifies with her and develops a relationship with her based on their shared “bitter fates.”¹⁹

It is not always the case in Chinese discourse that certain avenues for women are necessarily foreclosed due to *ming* or that preordained behavior is “scripted” along gender lines. However, there seems to be deep ambivalence over this matter among writers from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Lin Haiyin 林海音 (1918–2001), a Taiwanese writer of Hakka ethnicity born in Japan and raised in Peking (Beiping at the time) who “returned” to Taiwan in the 1940s is an interesting case in point.²⁰ This writer, whose complex ethnic makeup and cultural background have created interesting language issues in her writing, addresses the problem of inevitability, fatalism, agency, and female/class exploitation in her highly regarded set of stories *Chengnan jushi* 城南舊事 (Memories of Peking: South side stories), written in Taiwan in the late 1950s and first published as a collection in 1960.²¹ In one short story, “Lü dagun” 驢打滾 (Donkey rolls), Song Ma 宋媽, the family wet nurse, learns that after several years working virtually as a bondservant (where a loan is made in exchange for an agreed-upon number of service years), her son has died and her daughter has been sold or given away. She blames these calamities on her ne’er-do-well husband. In determining what to do, the matriarch of the household surreptitiously has the maid’s husband summoned to their home to take Song Ma back to the countryside to have another “son.” (It is a given that girls are considered “worthless,” even though Song Ma mourns her daughter’s loss equally with that of the son.)

In persuading Song Ma to take this course of action, the matriarch states:

〈把你當家的叫來，信是我叫老爺偷著寫的，你跟他回去吧，明年生了兒子再回這兒來。是兒不死，是財不散，小拴子和丫頭子，活該命裡不歸你，有什麼辦法？你不能打這兒起就不生養了！〉

“Your husband has come because I asked the master to write him without telling you. Go home with him. Next year when you have a baby boy you can come back to us. The son that is yours will not die; the wealth that is yours will not be parted from you. It is fate that Little Bolt and the girl were not to be with you. What can you do? You cannot stop having children at your age.” (Lin Haiyin 1960: 168/142–143)

The pivotal linguistic conundrum in this passage occurs not with *ming*, with which we are now all too familiar, but with the term “*buogai*” 活該 which can

mean “inevitable” or “unavoidable” but now generally has become a term of approbation denoting “serves you right” or at least that whatever happens deserves to happen. Is there slippage in this passage between “it is fated” and “serves her right”? This is precisely the point of tension between oppressive discourses of inevitability and female agency in Chinese discourse. The translators deal with this linguistic complexity in an interesting fashion—by skipping over the term *buogai* when translating. Thus, in the English there is only “it is fate.” One could reason that in this case it does serve Song Ma right because she had extended her stay working as a wet nurse. The problem with this reasoning, though, is that it does not seem to jibe with the tone of the story, which is very sympathetic to her, nor with the demeanor of the matriarch, who empathizes with Song Ma; it would seem rather callous to blame her for the death of her children in this situation. Perhaps it points to the ambivalence in Chinese culture over responsibility and power with regard to women. Whatever the case, it is interesting that the matriarch practically commands Song Ma to return to this unsavory character in order to produce another *son*. Even though it is a modern work that owes at least some of its critical stance to the May Fourth spirit, Lin Haiyin’s story scripts a solution few women now would countenance. That said, for our purposes the story exemplifies the pervasiveness of appeals to *ming* in such instances and evinces a palpable cultural continuity between mainland China and Taiwan even as the text uses discourse to reinforce a broad spectrum of cultural attitudes and expectations to the Taiwan reading public.²²

Let us now return to *To Live* and investigate what happens to the daughter Fengxia throughout the novel. Fengxia is deaf and mute, a disability that limits her ability to find a mate. She is sent to work as a maid once, literally referred to as “adoption” *lingyang* 領養, but the situation turns out to be unsuitable and she returns home. As with female characters in other modern Chinese fiction, she is frequently referred to as having a “bitter fate.” This reference surfaces when her family is contemplating the forced removal from home (Yu Hua 1994: 94) and later when Fengxia is viewed in tandem with a fellow villager about to be married:

鳳霞在田裡，一看到這種場景，又看呆了，兩隻眼睛連眨都沒眨，鋤頭抱在懷裡，一動不動。我站在一旁看得心裡難受，心想她要看就讓她多看看吧。鳳霞命苦，他只有這麼一點看看別人出嫁的福份。

Fengxia was in the plot, and when she noticed the scene she simply froze. She didn’t bat a single eye, clutching her hoe to her breast, unmoving. Off to one side, it was difficult for me to watch. I thought to myself, let her watch awhile. Fengxia has a bitter life. Her only fortune is to see someone else get married. (Yu Hua 1994: 180)

Fengxia, clad in the ragged and mud-spattered clothes of a peasant, is pictured in contrast to the bride arrayed in her wedding garb. Indeed, she is *mingku*, and when she actually is set up with Wan Erxi 萬二喜, a model worker whose own disability causes his head to list to one side, Fengxia's parents urge him to splurge a bit precisely because of this. In the poignant scene in which Fengxia dies giving birth to a son, though the term "*ming*" does not appear, the suggestion of it is present in the whole way in which Fengxia personifies the evanescence of life. Jiazhen's illness, which is very lingering, also suggests the gradual dissipation of life, for she is first depicted as no longer being able to work, in northern Chinese referred to as "*ganbuo*" 幹活 (literally, "doing life"). The connection between *ming* and life still holds.

This association between *ming* and life in *To Live* is particularly evident in the final two scenes I will comment upon, the death of son Youqing 有慶, linked to Chunsheng's death, and the survival of Fugui to the end of the novel. Fugui and his family do not have much luck with the local hospital, since in addition to Fengxia they also lose their son Youqing there. While Fengxia's death can be attributed to risks involved in any childbirth in a Third World country, Youqing's death from donating blood was absolutely unnecessary and avoidable:

抽一點血就抽一點，醫院裡的人為了救縣長女人的命，一抽我兒子的血就不停了。抽著抽著有慶的臉就白了，他還硬挺著不說，後來嘴唇也白了，他才哆嗦著說：

〈我頭暈。〉

抽血的人對他說：

〈抽血都頭暈。〉

那時候有慶已經不行了，可出來個醫生說血還不夠用。抽血的是個烏龜王八蛋，把我兒子的血差不多都抽乾了。

If you're going to take blood, just take a little. But the hospital kept incessantly drawing my son's blood in order to save the life of the County Magistrate's wife. They kept drawing and drawing until Youqing's face was white. He was turning stiff but he didn't say anything. Then when his lips turned white he finally muttered:

"I'm dizzy."

The person drawing the blood responded:

"You always get dizzy when you give blood."

By that time it was already all over for Youqing, but a doctor came out and said it wasn't enough. That person drawing blood from my son was a rotten son of a bitch. He practically sucked my son dry. (Yu Hua 1994: 157)

Youqing loses his life to save the life *ming* of another. As Fugui says later, "His wife stole my son's life," 他女人奪了我兒子的命 (Yu Hua 1994: 162).

But then he finds out that, ironically, the County Magistrate is none other than his old war comrade Chunsheng, the one with the long lease on life, *ming da*. In upbraiding Chunsheng, Fugui intones: “You owe me a life. You have to pay it back in your next life” 你欠我一條命，下輩子再還給我吧 (Yu Hua 1994: 164). In these two scenes, first the blood donation then the interaction between Fugui and Chunsheng, the motif of fatalism takes a turn. First, it was not actually fated that Youqing should die in this manner, but was the fault of a callous lab technician and an overzealous doctor who valued the life of a ranking government official’s wife over that of a peasant. Second, while it may simply be a figure of speech, to seek repayment in one’s next life, a Buddhist notion, in a way circumvents the inexorability of *ming*. If one is doomed in this life, then the best one can do is to accept one’s fate and perform under its limitations, hoping for a reward that will come in the form of a better life cycle, or ideally an escape from the life cycle, in a subsequent incarnation. This is taught in the Bhagavad Gita as well as in subsequent Buddhist scriptures.

A twist occurs, though, which reveals another rather convenient dimension to *ming*. After this unfortunate event, Chunsheng is purged and suffers great humiliation. Out of desperation, he returns to Fugui for help. When Chunsheng tells him he does not have the will to go on, Fugui reminds him:

〈你的命是爹娘給的，你不要命了也得先去問問他們。〉……

〈你還欠我們一條命，你就拿自己的命來還吧。〉……

〈春生，你要答應我活著。〉……

〈我答應了。〉

春生還是沒答應我，一個多月後，我聽說城裡的劉縣長上吊死了。

一個人命再大，要是自己想死，那就怎麼也活不了。

“Your life was given to you by your mother and father. If you want to die, you must first ask them. . . .”

“You still owe us a life. Just use yours to repay us. . . .”

“Chunsheng, you must promise me you’ll go on living.”

“I promise.”

But Chunsheng didn’t keep his promise. A little more than a month later I heard that County Magistrate Liu from town had hung himself to death. No matter how long a lease one has on life, if one wants to die, then there’s no way to keep on living. (Yu Hua 1994: 208–209)

In the course of Fugui’s narration of Chunsheng’s death, a complex entanglement crops up between the life-giving *ming* and the desire to “live on” (*buozhe*) and survive. Fugui invokes all manner of techniques to persuade Chunsheng not to commit suicide. He reminds Chunsheng that his life is

inherited from his parents, a common Confucian belief. He also transforms his once embittered recrimination that Chunsheng owed him a life into an exhortation to keep on living. Finally, he reminds the reader that Chunsheng was the one with the “large *ming*” (long lease on life) but that even in that case one cannot go on living if one does not have the will to do so.

The will to live could perhaps be the essential theme of the novel, for it is quite dismal and depressing despite, as Chen Sihe 陳思和 has observed, its unusually simple and straightforward storytelling technique, particularly in contrast to Yu Hua’s previous work up to that point (Chen Sihe 2001: 397; see also Zhao 1991; Jones 1994; Wedell-Wedellsborg 1996; Chen Jianguo 1998; and Wagner 1999). In the final pages of the novel, Jiazhen eventually dies of her long debilitating illness. Erxi also dies rather abruptly in an accident at work; and even the grandson, named “Kugen” 苦根 (Bitterroot), as someone to “rely on” in the future (after one’s own death?), dies a bitter death: he had been nicknamed by Fugui “Minggenzi” 命根子 (literally, “the root of one’s life” or “lifeblood”), a common term of endearment for a most beloved child.²³

In fact, everyone in the family dies except Fugui; he, ironically, gets to tell the story to the folk-song collector. This is not the sort of material one would use to uplift the masses. Though it is certainly, in ways, a critique of the Communist Revolution (remember “revolution,” *geming* 革命 means to overturn *ming*), the critique is actually reasonably oblique and muted. Some events such as the Cultural Revolution are ostensibly not mentioned but are used as collectively understood backdrops to the personal tragedies that fill the pages of the novel. Of course, the depiction of the peasantry herein is not a flattering portrayal, not something of which the Communist party would be particularly fond. This would in part be due to the extremely impoverished conditions under which Fugui and his family labor, the root of much of their unfortunate fate. But it would also stem from the lack of a sense of heroism in the novel and the fact that Fugui and his family did not originate from peasant stock: it was simple luck that they stumbled on this freshly ennobled status. And Fugui’s final testimony to the collector is hardly the material of an exemplary hagiography. It is rather simply an indication that, in the end, it is the one who survives who gets to write the history.

The Fate of the Nation and the Nation of Fate

All this brings us back to the issue of cultural continuity between mainland China and Taiwan, at least as it is supported by manifestations of *ming* found in contemporary literature written in Chinese. And that returns us to Benedict Anderson’s influential work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (1983

and 1991). The works discussed in this chapter are all modern representations of the Chinese imagined community, though the nationalist element is not so pronounced or “conscious” as to call them national allegories per se. In that they all engage in a profound way the cultural practices and attitudes of *ming*, they are all unmistakably “Chinese” in their cultural frame of reference. Of course, they are all written in Chinese as well. What does it mean to say that *ming* is a constitutive element in the imagination of cultural and national identity? The continuity of *ming* transcends the political demarcations of the PRC and Taiwan. That it does so in practice is likely; that it does so in writing, and thus in the consciousness and preoccupations of Chinese, should now be evident. While there are surely many distinctions to be made politically, economically, and even culturally between mainland China and Taiwan, there are still some deep-seated similarities among these various groups of people, at least as manifest in literary texts, that reside in language (with specific reference to *ming*) and distinguish the people from other civilizations, languages, or nations. Thus, if one is going to suggest that the people of Taiwan and mainland China are fundamentally different in a cultural way, and thus possess different national identities and therefore should have separate national destinies, then one will have to look elsewhere than to the concept and term “*ming*” to support such a claim.

This does not necessarily mean that a society cannot determine its own national destiny or break from a dominant one or one that has exercised control over it for an extended period of time. Many cultures that are quite similar, such as Germany and Austria, the dominant white culture of the United States and (most of) Canada, or large areas of Latin America, exist in separate national frameworks and perhaps even different national imaginations while enjoying cultural affinities. Conversely, many countries with widely diversified cultures of significant populations, which may not even speak the same language, countries as large as India and as small as Switzerland, share a national identity. However, the elision of culture and nationalism is particularly palpable in contemporary Taiwan and, in some sectors, the PRC. This is why I have endeavored to isolate one aspect of cultural practice to illustrate the broad continuity with which it is deployed in literary texts, a fact that I doubt has occurred due to some conspiracy between the authors examined in this study.

The persuasiveness of Benedict Anderson’s study on nationalism rests not in his having built a detailed empirical argument for the existence of the nation-state supported by copious research; rather, he has conceived a blueprint indicating how the nation as a discursive unit is *imagined*. Equally, he has not pursued the tempting Foucaultian line to show the utter ubiquity of the nation as discourse, a discourse that exerts control in all spheres and

sectors. He has, instead, shown the material ways in which people have come to imagine themselves as part of the same “solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 1983 and 1991: 26). This is predicated as much on what is made part of the nation’s practice and memory as it is on what is crucially left out or forgotten. Let us not forget the power that *ming* asserts, or at least is imagined to assert, in the everyday lives of Chinese, nor the myriad instances in which one appeals to *ming*.

Ming is a discursive entity, but that does not mean it has no tangible status in the corporeal world. What it does mean is that *ming* foremost exists in language as a concept and that the term “*ming*” has several related meanings. “Fate” is still the most resilient of these meanings, though to suggest that this therefore leads to a fatalistic logic would be an ethnocentric conclusion. As fate, *ming* is discursive but necessarily imagined to exist prior to and in some more veritable state than language; for one appeals to *ming* because it supposedly is a force to contend with in one’s everyday life, beyond language. In fact, it is more than a force in life; it can be seen, as many such examples in these texts have shown, as a life-giving force: the energy of life itself. So, it is not simply the fate of one’s life, but life plus its destiny or trajectory. It figures into the trajectory of narrative as well. *Ming* has become the vehicle through which these narrative works have been organized, developed, and shaped. It is a structural element in the narratives even as it is a life force for the characters depicted in them. It also serves as a sort of constitutive principle of subjectivity in certain cases. When one thinks of the nameless heroine of Zhang Xinxin’s narrative, retracting her palm at points in the story, starved for private space, one can view her palm, the map of her *ming*, as a private space of individual subjectivity wrestling against the collective, the external manifestation of her internal self, a self that does not wish to be intruded upon or coopted by the state. Finally, *ming* is a nodal point for cultural allusions, connections between the texts under discussion and the larger body of Chinese literature—the literary tradition as it were. It is one conduit by which intertextual linkages are secured. And it is precisely these intertextual linkages that support, perhaps more than anything, the connections, affinities, and continuities that have ensured the destiny of the Chinese nation a further day as an ongoing cultural project in East Asia, imagined or otherwise.

Notes

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from Philip Williams in the audience, both of whose comments improved further drafts. At the subsequent conference, “Heaven’s Will and Life’s Lot” (May 2000), I particularly would like to express my gratitude to Geraldine Schneider and Mu-Chou Poo for their comments, which helped to bring this essay into its present form. An additional note of appreciation should go to Zhang Baosan 張寶三 in the Department of Chinese, National Taiwan University, for his helpful reflections on *ming* in modern Chinese literature. Needless to say, remaining infelicities, logical or factual, are solely my own.

1. This is the beginning of Gao Xingjian’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech “The Case for Literature,” presented to the Swedish Academy in 2000. References are to the version published by the MLA. The translation is based on Mabel Lee’s, which accompanied the Chinese in published form, with a few emendations in the text. Page references are made first to the Chinese version followed by that of the published translation, a convention that will hold throughout this article.

2. This quotation is woven together from several closely related paragraphs of Anderson’s in his chapter on patriotism and racism. I am indebted to Gopal Balakrishnan’s illuminating critique of Anderson, which highlights the connection in Anderson’s work between language, nationalism, and historical destiny or the fate of the nation. See Balakrishnan 1995: 64 and 67–68.

3. As Thomas Moran notes, “the narrator of *Soul Mountain* is only half-rationalist; he believes in science, but he also believes in fate” (Moran 2003: 228). Gao is offering a critique of the powerful May Fourth dichotomy between science, ultimately predicated on rationalist philosophy, and traditional “superstition,” as the May Fourth intellectuals would categorize *ming*; to them, the two are mutually exclusive. Moran’s insightful article on *Soul Mountain* investigates the way in which Gao establishes a sense of “Chineseness” while simultaneously writing *of* the essential heartland of China, in search of the elusive “primeval forest,” and writing *from* the remote periphery of his adopted French home.

4. The issue of *ming* as a popular notion in society has been pursued in detail by many China scholars. Steven Harrell, for example, found references to *ming* (actually, *miu* in Hoklo) to be quite abundant during his fieldwork research in Taiwan. In his archival research, he demonstrates that the concept is prevalent in mainland China as well, in places as far-flung as Guangdong Province and northern China; see Harrell 1987. Richard Smith has shown, in a detailed survey of divination practices and manuals throughout premodern China but emphasizing the Qing period, that *ming* has remained a durable “political and social force” throughout Chinese history and into the modern era, a force that transcends social class distinctions; see Smith 1986. In addition, both Harrell and Smith have demonstrated, using very different data and methodologies, that belief in *ming* does not necessarily oblige one to be fatalistic in her or his approach to life. Knowing one’s *ming*, as Harrell states, allows one to “employ all the resources at one’s disposal” (Harrell 1987: 100) and, according to Smith’s account, permits one to “devise a moral strategy for contending with predestined situations” (Smith 1986: 171). Their findings support Schaberg’s and Puett’s theses in the present volume that *ming* cannot simply be equated with fate or fatalism.

5. Many other authors could have been chosen, since the term and concept are virtually ubiquitous in modern Chinese literature, including that from Taiwan. Howard Goldblatt, for instance, has pointed out how fate works as “a recurring theme throughout” the work of Huang Chunming 黃春明 (b. 1935), another important writer from Taiwan; see Goldblatt 1980: 114 passim, 122, and 133n18. Note as well Huang’s own discussion of fatalism in his essay “Yige zuozhede beibi xinling” 一個作者的卑鄙心靈 (The base thoughts of a writer; Huang Chunming 1978: 60). A lesser-known Taiwanese writer named Hong Xingfu 洪醒夫 (1949–1982) also makes ample reference to *ming* in his short stories, such as “Heimian qingzai” 黑面慶仔 (Black-faced Kieng-ah), and these stories often rely upon *ming* for the structure of their narrative development; see Hong Xingfu 1978: 145–170/1–25.

6. Bai Xianyong uses Taiwan as the backdrop for all his stories in this collection and, in fact, for most of his work save some stories of the exilic life in the United States of Chinese who have come from Taiwan. Bai’s story brings to mind in particular a work by Wang Zhenhe 王禎和 (1940–1990) entitled “San chun ji” 三春記 (The story of three springs), which features the heroine Ajiao 阿嬌. Like Bai’s protagonist Madame Qian, Ajiao’s “present” life seems to have been predetermined in large part by the impact of a fortune-teller’s prediction early on in her life (narrated at the beginning in the form of a flashback) that she will be married three times—no more, no less. However, how she manages her “fate” is a study in contrasts when compared to the demure and ever dignified Madame Qian, for Ajiao displaces the profound limitations this prediction has exacted onto her third husband, Mr. Ou 區 (Wang Zhenhe 1980: 1–2/195–196 and passim). This method of displacement is similar in some ways to that employed by some of Zhang Ailing’s 張愛玲 (1920–1995) heroines. Considered in this light, there is a double layer of ironies in situating Wang Zhenhe and Bai Xianyong together with contemporary mainland Chinese authors. Wang and Bai are often considered to be in different literary camps (Nativist *xiangtu* 鄉土 and Modernist *xiandai* 現代, respectively), but they are both widely considered to be influenced by Zhang Ailing. In addition, they also tend to be casually differentiated from PRC authors such as Zhang Xinxin, whose work is discussed below, though it also has been suggested that Zhang Xinxin was influenced by Zhang Ailing. Zhang Xinxin’s novella features a heroine who similarly must deal with the early predictions of how her sexual life is determined. For connections between the Nativist writers and *ming* or “fate” in writings that go back as far as Mao Dun’s essays in the 1920s, see Haddon 1992: 25–26 and 324.

7. Stephen Bokenkamp’s essay in this volume (Chap. 6) provides a detailed description of such physiognomic divinations. In my essay, I have not made distinctions between various types of divinations or the concept of *ming* itself; however, Hsu Cho-yun, for example, has distinguished between *ming* and *xiang* 相 (divining by reading body features; see Hsu 1975: 53).

8. Yu Lihua was one of the first to lavish praise on Bai’s depiction of women for its realism and sympathy, arguing that “Wandering in the Garden” marked the “pinnacle of his art”; see Yu Lihua 1969: 148 and passim. Ouyang Zi’s painstaking study of *Taipei Residents* includes an extensive chapter on this story, but she does not touch upon the issue of *ming* or attendant notions of fatalism (Ouyang Zi 1976).

9. For a discussion of how allusion works in this story, see my “(En)gendering the Nation in Pai Hsien-yung’s ‘Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream’” (Lupke 1992).

10. Interestingly, the first usage of *ming* in the text is *zunming* 尊命, a military term meaning something like “I’m at your command.” Given Bai Xianyong’s familial connection with the military, as well as the way military imagery and themes tend to creep into his work and his fascination with classical allusion and culture, one possibly could surmise that he uses this sense of the term to remind erudite readers of the early connection between *ming* and “command” in Chinese discourse. See Schaberg’s and Puett’s essays (Chaps. 1, 2) for more on this.

11. As Gunn states, “the boy has defied both necessity and contingency, the one robbing him of choice, the other robbing him of the significance of choice, and thus together of any moral order. Yet his act of freeing himself from pre-ordained order and imposing pattern on contingency has led to the brink of self-destruction ...” (Gunn 1984: 31).

12. English references are made to Edward Gunn’s 1993 translation with a few slight changes. For instance, I have elected to translate *ye* literally as “Daddy” instead of as “I” to underscore the near preternatural quality of the original. Chen Lifen theorizes that *ye* is the logical next step in Wang Wenxing’s literary progression from the oedipal attack on the father in *Jiabian* 家變 (Family catastrophe) to the protagonist’s replacement of him in *Backed against the Sea*. This is why, in Chen’s reckoning, the narrator in the latter refers to himself as “Daddy.” The self has become its own father (Chen Lifen 2000: 62).

13. Chen Lifen has a somewhat different reading of the ironic connection between fate and language in *Backed against the Sea*. She suggests that the attempt on the young boy’s part to alter his own fate is belabored but futile, just as the elaborate manipulation of language in *Backed against the Sea* ends up having only a superficial effect. They both, then, result in dramatic irony. See Chen Lifen 2000: 67.

14. I have relied on the 1994 Taiwan version published by Maitian but have consulted both the original version published in *Shoubuo* 96 (1992): 4–42, and a mainland version published by Nanhai Press in 1996. Yu Hua undertook major revisions after the original publication, but the Nanhai version corresponds entirely to the Maitian one of 1994, indicating that the latter is a reliable text on which to base one’s reading. Although the style of *To Live* and other novels Yu Hua has written in the 1990s, such as *Xu Sanguan maixieji* 許三觀賣血記 (Xu Sanguan the blood seller), differs tremendously from his style of the 1980s, which was far more experimental and antirealistic, the theme of fatalism remains an abiding interest. As Marsha Wagner has noted, he created “a fictional world in which plot and events are irrevocably controlled by fate,” which “denies the possibility of heroic action, individual assertion, and social or political change.” She concludes that “Yu Hua’s work may reflect the generalized despair or cynicism felt by many members of his generation in the years 1987–1989” (Wagner 1999: 231). His fascination with despair and cynicism had not subsided in the 1990s.

15. See her discussion of Fugui’s “existential ... un-lived life” (Linder 1998: 69–77).

16. I say “ostensibly” and emphasize that it is how the events are interpreted rather than how they actually occur to distance myself from the ideology of *ming*. Yuan Zhenqin has cautioned the reader against overemphasizing the monotony and unremitting fatalistic logic of the narrative, since, she suggests, it in fact abounds with all manner of wild and unpredictable adventures; it is just that many end in disaster, especially the death of the family and friends of Fugui. When scrutinized, however, Yuan further argues, these deaths can be attributed to such factors as severe poverty and social neglect of the peasantry. Thus, she concludes, Fugui is not an individual human but more of a “sign,” a sign that stands for the Chinese peasantry and its arduous existence as a whole. That it is attributed to *ming* post hoc is more of a legitimating gesture. See Yuan Zhenqin 2000: 74–77.

17. These two sentences mentioning the shooting of deserters and *ming da* did not appear in the original version of the story; however, they do appear in both the 1994 Taiwan and the 1996 PRC monograph versions.

18. Another text that raises this question and clearly connects the fatalistic sense of *ming* with *ming* as a life-giving force is the Taiwanese writer Hong Xingfu’s “Black-Faced Kieng-ah.” This story narrates the life of an indigent man whose mentally retarded daughter becomes pregnant. The father of the child flees, and Black-Faced Kieng-ah, at a loss over what to do, decides it would be more merciful to murder his own daughter and grandson than to allow them to live and suffer the fate of a bastard son with a retarded mother:

... 怎麼可以因為自己在人世間受到困擾，就要他們的命？怎麼可以這樣？

但是，他拼命告訴自己，這是不得已的，嬰兒，你不幸生在這裡，不幸這樣出生，這是命，你只好認命了！我如果不這樣，我就無法平靜的過日子，你要生存，我也要生存，要怪，你去怪你那不負責的父親，你不要怪我！這都是命！

... How could he bring himself to take their lives on account of the hardships they would face? How?

He did all he could to convince himself there was nothing he could do, baby, unfortunately you’ve been born here, unfortunately you’ve been born this way. This is fate. All you can do is accept your fate. If I don’t do this, there’s no way I can go through life in peace. You want to survive and I want to survive too. If you want to blame someone, then go blame that irresponsible father of yours. Don’t blame me. This is fate! (Hong Xingfu 1978: 163/18–19)

Hong touches upon three different uses of the term “*ming*” in this crucial passage. Clearly, Black-Faced Kieng-ah is at his wit’s end, unable to envision a solution to this predicament in his family’s life. They are suffering a bad “fate.” His character is not as despicable as he would seem, however, when viewed within the short story as a whole. Kieng-ah loses his nerve and cannot go through with his bizarre plan of infanticide. He eventually decides to raise the boy as best he can and continue caring for his mentally incapacitated daughter as well. That he would contemplate such a solution is more indicative of the author’s critique of traditional Chinese rural values (May Fourth) than of Kieng-ah’s character. To contemplate “taking their lives” *yaoming*, in

particular reminds one of the life-giving force so prevalent in Yu Hua's novel. And the adverb "emphatically," *pimming de*, also appears in *To Live*. Finally, that this awful predicament is attributed to *ming* in the first place owes itself to the perception that "there is nothing he could do," a contextual translation of a phrase also used in Lao She's "Crescent Moon" (*wan budeyi*) and discussed by Sabina Knight in her essay (Chap. 11). This most Taiwanese of stories, then, is permeated with the notions of *ming* that are present in Chinese literature from the contemporary PRC as well as that of the Republican Period. (I have altered the translation considerably to convey the exact meaning of the original as best as possible.)

19. See Wang Anyi 1986: 291. In a fascinating linguistic move, this male character uses the discourse of *ming*, which conventionally has been pressed into the service of enforcing social limitations, especially on women, to effect a change that violates two traditional taboos at once—that of a male entering a single-surname village to select a mate, and that of a supposedly "chaste" widow forming a sexual bond with a male other than her departed husband. Another instance in this novella of traditional restrictions being circumvented is Little Jade's 小翠 success at coupling with Culture 文化子 after she had been, for all intents and purposes, betrothed to his older brother. However, there are also instances in which a "bitter fate" is insurmountable, such as the case of Bao Bingde's 鮑秉德 wife, who gives birth to a series of stillborn children, is beaten, goes insane, and eventually kills herself. With regard to the issue of *ming* and the proscriptions put on women and heterosexual bonding, this pithy text is one of the most complex in modern Chinese.

20. Lin Haiyin is a member of the group referred to in Taiwan as "half-mountain," *banshan* 半山. A *banshan* is a Taiwanese person or family who worked in mainland China during the Japanese occupation, usually in other Japanese occupied areas such as Peking or Shanghai, and returned to Taiwan after the Retrocession of 1945. These people are invariably Hoklo (Southern Min) or Hakka. The term derives from "people of Tang mountain" 唐山人, an epithet for mainland Chinese. Thus, if you are originally from Taiwan but have lived in mainland China, then you are "half-mountain" or "half-mainlander."

21. Quotations refer to the original book publication and authorized translation, with some emendations to the latter. See Lin Haiyin 1960: 151–171/127–145.

22. This work was subsequently made into a film in mainland China and has enjoyed wide popularity on both sides of the strait. Coincidentally, Cai Mingliang's 蔡明亮 (b. 1958) documentary of gay Taiwanese males with AIDS "Wo xin renshide pengyou" 我新認識的朋友 (My new friends; Cai Mingliang 1995) further illustrates the pervasiveness of *ming* in film. Cai asks his subject, whose face is always hidden from the camera, how he felt when he first realized he had AIDS and what he planned to do. The subject responds, "Chinese always say you must accept your fate" 中國人都說要認命. Cai, who is ethnic Hokla originally from Malaysia, has chosen Taipei as the backdrop for most of his film work. For Chinese, this comment indicates that not only does the reach of *ming* transcend political and ethnic boundaries, be they mainland China, Taiwan, or even Southeast Asia, but that even when it comes to social formations potentially subversive to the patriarchal order, such as gay subculture, the

ideological tentacles of *ming* already have a firm hold. The tactic of using *ming* to explain one's predicament regarding AIDS is quite influential and illustrates the power of this mind-set even in a subculture or countercultural setting.

Using *ming* to elucidate the identity of homosexuals is a rhetorical ploy used in Bai Xianyong's *Crystal Boys* 孽子 as well. As Lynn Kalinaukas has shown, "in trying to explain homosexuality, a narrator whom we can assume to be Bai Xianyong, addresses a letter to A-qing, *Crystal Boys*' central character. In this letter, A-qing is told that he has a different fate 命運 from others, that is, he is gay. Homosexuality, understood as the action of fate, cannot be avoided and must be faced or at least explained away" (Kalinaukas 1995: 173ff.). Actually, rather than being explained away, Bai's rhetorical move is designed to insinuate the practice and identity of homosexuality, antithetical to traditional patriarchal Confucian society, into Chinese discourse by way of a familiar and conventional marker, namely *ming*. Since one cannot do anything about one's *ming*, one likewise cannot do anything about one's homosexuality: it is just fate. By articulating it in a conventional manner, moreover, gay identity is to an extent domesticated into mainstream Chinese society, or at least legitimated to a certain extent.

23. See Bokenkamp's essay (Chap. 6) for a discussion of the term "*minggen*" as "the roots of *ming*' ... that were planted in one's former life."

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