FOUR

WAR, DEATH, AND ANCIENT CHINESE COSMOLOGY

Thinking through the Thickness of Culture

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During the several centuries leading up to the state of Qin's consolidation of power on the central plains of present-day China, the ferocity and horror of internecine warfare rose exponentially. Indeed, death itself had become a way of life. What, then, did the infantryman on the killing field and his mother think about and feel when they reflected on the former's mortality, that is, on the very real possibility that the day may be his last? How were these people of ancient China culturally disposed to think about dying—their own death and, perhaps even more heartrending, the loss of someone they loved?

In this chapter, I will argue that the intensity of warfare has been a defining human activity in the articulation of the distinctive correlative worldview of ancient China. We must not undervalue the impact that the trauma of perennial war has had on shaping Chinese culture in its formative period. Further, I will contest a resistance among contemporary scholars to thick cultural generalizations by insisting that an always-emerging cultural vocabulary is itself rooted in and grows out of a deep and relatively stable soil of unannounced assumptions sedimented over generations into the language, customs, and life forms of a living tradition.[1] I argue that the failure to acknowledge this fundamental character of cultural difference as

an erstwhile safeguard against the sins of either "essentialism" or "relativism" is not innocent. Indeed, like the preacher who, come Monday, commits the very sins he railed against the day before, this antagonism to cultural generalizations leads to the uncritical essentializing of our own contingent cultural assumptions and to the insinuating of them into our interpretations of other traditions.[2]

David Keightley, in his reflections on the meaning and value of death in the classical Chinese tradition, concludes that death in this culture is rather "unproblematic."[3] Of course, Keightley is not suggesting that the end of life was approached absent some real trepidation by Chinese soldiers and their mothers alike. He means, rather, that death was not considered unnatural, perverse, or horrible. Indeed, the concept of "natural" death in early China can readily be contrasted with the enormity of death in the Abrahamic traditions, in which "death" itself is a consequence of divine animus. In this latter tradition, "death" is the punishment meted out by an angry god to human beings for their hubris and disobedience—human beings who, in their prelapsarian state, had owned God's gift of immortality.

There is certainly an uneasiness in the early Chinese literature manifested in visions of the "Yellow Springs," a familiar name for the netherworld, but there is a marked absence of the morbidity and gloom we associate with the Greek, Roman, and medieval conceptions of death. In the classical Chinese world, there is a preponderant emphasis on "life," with little attention given over to the tragedy and poignancy of death familiar in classical Western sources. Rather than a gruesome portrayal of death, there seems to be a Chinese tolerance of the end of life as an inevitable and relatively unremarkable aspect of the human experience.[4]

Again, from the sparse remnants of the body of militarist literature circulating in pre-Qin China, we are able to make some compelling observations about the value of death in ancient Chinese culture as it pertains to the battlefield specifically. For example, the military texts begin generally from the *Sunzi*'s premise that warfare is always a losing proposition and that, as such, it should be embarked upon as "*budeyi* 不得已"—that is, only with the greatest reluctance and as an always wasteful, if sometimes unavoidable, last resort. From this premise we can understand why soldiery was historically accorded a low social status in this culture, and we might further speculate that, *sans* the vision of military glory promoted by the Spartans and Romans, the relentless agony of battle punctuating the Warring States period was little mitigated for the Chinese soldier by the spirit of a heroic—even romantic—death we find associated with warfare in our own classical Western narrative.[5] In order to dig deeper, and to understand the value of death within the cultural semantics of ancient China without overwriting its meaning with very different Western presuppositions, we must locate the phenomenon of death within the evolving correlative cosmology of its own tradition.

Nathan Sivin observes that "man's prodigious creativity seems to be based on the permutations and recastings of a rather small stock of ideas."[6] I will argue that the correlative thinking first described by Marcel Granet as *la pensée chinoise* seems to belong to this small but fertile inventory, and that it has had a long history of articulation in the Chinese cultural tradition that parallels the defining force of metaphysical realism in shaping the categories and grammar of the Western philosophical narrative.[7] What, then, is the vintage and the resilience of correlative thinking in the proto-Chinese world? What in the early Chinese lived-world, we might ask, propelled "the permutations and recastings" of the persistent correlative kind of thinking as it spread from centers of specific domains of knowledge to become an explanatory vocabulary in so many areas of ordinary Chinese activity—medical practices, *fengshui*, calligraphy and painting, architecture and gardens, literary tropes and style, mantic practices, culinary preparations, ritual performances, and so on? And more specifically, we might ask, to what extent was the passion, exhilaration, and terror of war a motivating factor as this dyadic way of thinking deepened, matured, and became explicit in the formative period of Chinese culture?

William James, himself a process thinker, provides us with his own reflections on cultural persistence. As a liberated, post-Darwinian pragmatist, he is determined to overcome our entrenched rationalist and empiricist ways of organizing the human experience, which he believes have saddled us philosophically with a "block universe"—his expression for a ready-made world devoid of any real novelty or spontaneity. By attempting to reinstate "process"—that is, the relevance of change, particularity, and the ongoing emergence of an always novel order—James is trying to take us beyond default assumptions about some foundational, permanent, and transcendent realities that have insinuated themselves over millennia into our language and worldview. But even in thus trying to escape the dead hand of permanence, James is keenly aware that a sensitivity to the reality of change must itself be qualified by cognizance of a persistence or "equilibrium" in human ways of rationalizing the life experience, which he calls "common sense." He offers us this observation: "My thesis now is this, *that our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time*. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of *common sense*."[8] James then goes on to rehearse what he takes to be the basic categories of this entrenched "common sense," this distilled wisdom passed on by our progenitors: "things, kinds, sameness or difference, minds, bodies, subjects and attributes, causal influence, the fancied, the real," and so on. Although we might be critical of James for taking the familiar categories of our own common sense—indeed, the default vocabulary of metaphysical realism—as defining of the entire human narrative without taking cultural specificity into account, his basic point about the thickness

of culture is still well taken.[9] Sedimented across the centuries into our ways of thinking and living is a persistent and deep stratum, an abiding internal impulse that grounds more apparent changes. To be sure, this "common sense" has itself always been vulnerable to the ineluctable process of change, but relatively speaking it is also resilient and enduring.

Nietzsche, aware that cultural specificity does make a difference in the formation and content of this deep stratum, describes it as a "philosophy of grammar" that is peculiar to different language groups. In reporting on the Indo-European languages, he observes:

> The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where there is an affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretation.[10]

Such observations as these by James and Nietzsche might occasion a reconsideration of our usual way of thinking about the contributions of our own great philosophers. Without slighting their defining persistence, to what extent in the "history of thought" are Plato and Aristotle, for example, constructing their philosophical systems out of whole cloth and to what extent are they—with penetrating insight, certainly—only making explicit what is already implicated in the structure and function of the language they have inherited from their ancestors? In what degree are they cultural archaeologists who are only "discovering" and "recovering" their legacy of "common sense," their own "philosophy of grammar?"

A corollary to the Nietzschean thesis that grammar to a real degree promotes and constrains patterns of thought is that disparate cultures are going to have different "philosophies of grammar." Indeed, the Cambridge rhetorician I. A. Richards, in reflecting on the difficulties of moving from one cultural "common sense" to another—from our own Western narrative to classical China, in his case—also worries that "analysis" as a methodology might well be smuggling in a worldview and way of thinking quite alien to the early Chinese corpus:

> Our Western tradition provides us with an elaborate apparatus of universals, particulars, substances, attributes, abstracts, concretes, generalities, specificities, properties, qualities, relations, complexes, accidents, essences, organic wholes, sums, classes, individuals, concrete universals, objects, events, forms, contents, etc. Mengzi . . . gets along without any of this and with nothing at all definite to take its place. Apart entirely from the metaphysics that we are only too likely to bring in with this machinery, the practical difficulty arises that by applying it we deform his thinking. . . . The danger to be guarded against is our tendency to force a structure, which our special kind of Western training (idealist, realist, positivist, Marxist, etc.) makes easiest for us to work with, upon modes of thinking which may very well not have any such structure at all—and which may not be capable of being analysed by means of this kind of logical machinery.[11]

Again, it is the familiar vocabulary of metaphysical realism assumed in the categories of "common sense" announced by James—a way of thinking that privileges "analysis" as a methodology—that Richards identifies as our own default apparatus that we unawares bring to our understanding of the classical Chinese corpus.

What, then, is the "common sense"—the deep cultural stratum, the uncommon assumptions—of the ancient Chinese worldview? In his lifetime study of Shang dynasty divinatory practices, Keightley claims that "the origins of much that is thought to be characteristically Chinese may be identified in the ethos and world view of its Bronze Age diviners."[12] Indeed, "it is possible for the modern historian to infer from the archaeological, artistic, and written records of the Shang some of the theoretical strategies and presuppositions by which the Bronze Age elite of the closing centuries of the second millennium BC ordered their existence."[13] Keightley would insist that certain presuppositions of Shang culture evolved to become further articulated in what we take to be the formative period of classical Chinese philosophy:

> The glimpse that the oracle-bones inscriptions afford us of metaphysical conceptions in the eleventh and tenth centuries BC suggests that the philosophical tensions that we associate primarily with the Taoism and Confucianism of Eastern Chou [Zhou] had already appeared, in different form, in the intellectual history of China, half a millennium earlier.[14]

Like Nietzsche, Keightley perceives the structure of language itself to be a resource that can be mined to reveal a vein of cultural assumptions and importances: "Without necessarily invoking the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, one can still imagine that the grammar of the Shang inscriptions has much to tell us about Shang conceptions of reality, particularly about the forces of nature."[15]

What, then, are these specific underlying assumptions that Keightley has identified and recovered in his archaeology of Shang dynasty culture?

Keightley contrasts a Chinese cosmology of ceaseless process with a classical Greek worldview in which a metaphysical transcendentalism guarantees an ideal reality:

> Put crudely, we find in classical Greece a Platonic metaphysics of certainties, ideal forms, and right answers, accompanied by complex, tragic, and insoluble tensions in the realm of ethics. The metaphysical foundations being firm, the moral problems were intensely real, and as inexplicable as reality itself. To the early Chinese, however, if reality was forever changeable, man could not assume a position of tragic grandeur and maintain his footing for long. The moral heroism of the Confucians of Eastern Chou [Zhou] was not articulated in terms of any tragic flaw in the nature of the world or man. This lack of articulation, I believe, may be related to a significant indifference to the metaphysical foundation of Confucian ethics.[16]

Positively, Keightley ascribes to these divinatory sources what is today being described by interpreters of classical China as a distinctively Chinese mode of "correlative thinking." According to his reading, oracle-bone divination subscribed to "a theology and metaphysics that conceived of a world of alternating modes, pessimistic at times, optimistic at others, but with the germs of one mode always inherent in the other. Shang metaphysics, at least as revealed in the complementary forms of the Wu Ting [Ding] inscriptions, was a metaphysics of yin and yang."[17] Keightley appeals to the *pien-hua* [*bianhua* 變化] understanding of this process of change as articulated in the "Great Commentary" to the *Yijing*—a rhythm of "alternation and transformation"—as a later expression of the modality of change already present in Shang dynasty metaphysics. This notion of change is articulated in the language of symbiotic bipolar opposites that entail each other and together constitute the whole.[18]

The origins of correlative thinking, which date back to at least the Shang dynasty, lie in a modality of thinking that advances in both complexity and explanatory force through a proliferation and aggregation of productive dyadic associations, novel metaphors, suggestive images, and evocative patterns, all of which are weighed, measured, and tested in ordinary experience. What, then, has been the role of warfare in the evolution and articulation of this correlative mode of thinking?

Given the temper of the late Eastern Zhou times, we should not be surprised to learn from the court bibliographies of the Han dynasty histories—a record the respect for which is enhanced by knowing it was kept under the auspices of literati who were not always sympathetic to their martial colleagues—that the military texts in circulation during this early period constituted a body of literature that, in its sheer quantity, far exceeded

the known Confucian corpus. We should also be sure to notice that almost all of the pre-Qin philosophical texts on occasion turn to often-substantial reflections on the role of warfare in defining the human experience.

The undisputable importance of these various military documents in their own time has recently led several distinguished scholars to trace the elaboration of seminal philosophical ideas—ideas that have conventionally been ascribed to the more-speculative philosophers of the period—back to these early martial texts, and then again back to the unending military conflicts that informed the content of these documents. As Plato tells us, "Necessity is the mother of invention."[19] One such redescription of the military texts' intellectual contribution was introduced by Li Zehou 李澤厚 and has more recently been endorsed and elaborated upon by He Bingdi 何炳棣. With the help of Li and He, we can seek answers to our two pressing questions: What, specifically, has been the role of warfare in the maturation of correlative thinking, and what has been the influence of correlative thinking on deeply held assumptions about death and dying?

Li argues first that the terms of the distinctive correlative dialectic we have come to associate with pre-Qin thinking have their origins and found their development in close observation of the character of everyday experience and actual life circumstances rather than in some more abstract and rarified theoretical or linguistic discourse. Second, rehearsing the myriad battles that are associated with cultural heroes and that are remembered throughout historical texts, Li insists that the scourge of war has been an integral and persistent aspect of Chinese life from earliest times. On Li's measure, it was this intense drama of war more than any other dimension of the human experience, with survival itself always in the balance, that brought a vital urgency to the investigation of our lived world's correlative character. Indeed, it is the complementarity of life-and-death itself—perhaps the most fundamental among the increasingly complex manifold of bipolar dyads appealed to in the correlative dialectics of ancient China—that in the opening lines of the *Sunzi* sets the frame of reference for the entire text: "War is a vital matter of state. It is the field on which life or death (*sisheng* 死生) is determined and the road that leads to either survival or ruin (*cunwang* 存亡), and must be examined with the greatest care."[20]

In the extant military texts, we discover a distinctive and elaborate correlative dialectic that, in its immediate appeal to the unadorned detail of concrete circumstances, reveals little patience for more-abstract and inconclusive hypotheticals. In the planning and execution of war, there is a general prohibition against those speculative religious and mythological considerations that would distract attention from empirical detail and promote unfounded expectations. The shifting dynamic of battlefield experience revealed to its participants the mutuality and complementarity of opposites and, through trial, reflection, refinement, and application, evolved

a growing insight into the correlative logic of actual experience as well as a growing confidence that such insight can be crucial in determining a successful outcome.[21]

What, then, is this correlative thinking? Stated simply, correlative thinking begins by unraveling the relational tensions that obtain among things and events—"thises and thats"—in an attempt to fully understand the prevailing circumstances. Then, on the basis of this concrete information, it attempts through productive correlations to take optimum advantage of the creative possibilities inherent in that particular situation. Correlative thinking, thus, is the use of one's imagination to coordinate what is local, immediate, and actual with the productive possibilities that can be discerned through the application of dyadic images. Joseph Needham describes the cosmological assumptions behind this correlative thinking in the following terms:

> In coordinative thinking, conceptions are not subsumed under one another, but placed side by side in a *pattern*, and things influence one another not by acts of mechanical causation, but by a kind of "inductance." . . . The key word in Chinese thought is *Order* and above all *Pattern* (and, if I may whisper it for the first time, *Organism*). The symbolic correlations or correspondences all formed part of one colossal pattern. Things behaved in particular ways not necessarily because of prior actions or impulsions of other things, but because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such that they were endowed with intrinsic natures which made that behaviour inevitable for them. If they did not behave in those particular ways they would lose their relational positions in the whole (which made them what they were), and turn into something other than themselves. They were thus parts in existential dependence upon the whole world-organism. And they reacted upon one another not so much by mechanical impulsion or causation as by a kind of mysterious resonance.[22]

By contrast with this Chinese cosmology, the preassigned teleological design that we might associate with either external "Nature" or internal (but externally endowed) "nature" makes causality retrospective, necessary, and linear, a process that entails closure and satisfaction. When we apply inductive or deductive reasoning, we are attempting to abstract the logical relations governing a particular situation and evaluate their truth value through a process of logical inference. The motivation, presumably, is to discern the causal laws determining a particular situation with scientific clarity and, on that basis, anticipate the outcome. Correlative thinking does not exclude the reductionistic thinking of scientific explanation, but

rather offers imagination as its complement. Said another way, science is much more than the application of rational structures. As Angus Graham describes the function of correlative thinking in the *Yijing*, "An openness to chance influences loosing thought from preconceptions is indispensable to creative thinking. In responding to new and complex situations it is a practical necessity to shake up habitual schemes and wake to new correlations of similarities and connexions."[23] To be clear, the *Yijing*—as a text that advocates the importance of correlative thinking as an antidote to "the hardening of the categories"—provides us with an opportunity to think outside the proverbial box. As Graham further observes: "Plainly the *Yi* is relevant, not to scientific explanation, but to the unexpected insight into a similarity or connexion which sparks off discovery, in the sciences as elsewhere."[24]

Correlative thinking is the application of what David Hall and I have called *ars contexualis*—"the art of contextualizing"—to a given situation in pursuit of a prospective harmony, which seeks to maximize its creative possibilities. This holistic process entails continuing disclosure and builds toward consummation.[25] Idealities, instead of being predetermined and programmed, are "ideas" or "possibilities" pregnant within the concrete, actual circumstances; they can be discerned with imagination and can be animated and made real with effort. Each "thing" or "event" is focal as a configuration of unique relations, relations that are also constitutive of other "things" and "events" when entertained from different foci.

We might augment Li Zehou's claim about the importance of war in defining the philosophical terms of art by reflecting on militarist assumptions about causality. Central to military philosophy is the perception that any particular event is sponsored by a fluid calculus of factors captured in the idea termed *shi* 勢, which defies translation into the linear causality that predominates within the English language. *Shi* describes the continuing dynamic of all the factors that are at play in any particular situation—circumstances, configuration, momentum, authority, propensity, timing, force, leverage, weight, velocity, precision, a triggering device, and so on—and that can be coordinated to allow for relational advantage. Importantly, this notion of *shi* was initially a key military term connoting the strategic advantage or "purchase" that is achieved relative to the enemy through exploiting differentials in information, terrain, morale, training, logistics, supplies, weaponry, and so on.

In the military texts, *shi* has been captured with different images: the power of the crossbow bolt controlled by a tiny trigger but able to pierce an enemy from a distance that itself serves as protection; the unstoppable force of round logs and boulders thundering down a steep ravine; a bird of prey swooping downward and striking another animal out of the sky.[26] The term is subsequently appropriated in the later philosophical literature

wherein, for the Confucianism of Xunzi, for example, it is claimed that *shi* refers to a moral character that creates political advantage.[27]

Shi, a fundamentally aesthetic notion, is "compositional" in at least two senses. Self and enemy are coterminous and mutually entailing, thus making available the possibility of "com-positioning" and thereby reconfiguring the situation to one's advantage. We are able to redefine ourselves and the enemy by coordinating shared relations and replacing the present configuration of relations to precipitate an advantage on one side at the expense of the other.

To take an example, if our army is evenly matched by the enemy's, we can rehearse possible ways of compensating for this stalemate by reflecting on relevant holistic and complementary dyads that might be recalibrated to turn the always-fluid pattern of circumstances to our advantage. Strategically, we can seek inspiration in the reconfiguring dyads such as far and near (*jinyuan* 近遠), strong and weak (*qiangruo* 強弱), large and small (*daxiao* 大小), regular and irregular attacks (*zhengqi* 正奇), vital and tangential assets (*qingzhong* 輕重), arrogance and humility (*jiaobei* 驕卑), concentrated and dispersed (*zhuansan* 專散), offensive and defensive postures (*gongshou* 攻守), wisdom and stupidity (*zhiyu* 智愚), taking and giving (取予), victory and defeat (*shengbai* 勝敗), and so on.

In the opening chapter of the *Sun Bin*, the text's namesake provides Tian Ji—commander of the Qi forces—with advice based upon precisely these dyads, enabling the Qi troops ultimately to defeat Pang Juan, commander of the Wei army. At the time, the Qi and Wei armies were evenly matched in troop numbers. First, Sun Bin suggests feigning ineptitude in warfare by sacrificing Qi's expendable troops to embolden the Wei enemy. Dividing Qi's main forces into smaller units to conceal the army's full strength, Qi then provokes the now confident Wei enemy by first dispatching lightly armed chariots to attack the Wei capital at Daliang. The Qi army then falls immediately upon and destroys the main Wei army that, having been weakened by abandoning its supplies and artillery, is being force-marched home over a long distance in order to protect its heartland. By orchestrating a reconfiguration of these various dyads, Sun Bin is able to make far into near, strong into weak, tangential into vital, and so on, thereby guiding Qi to victory.[28]

This correlative strategy for understanding and influencing a situation is fundamentally aesthetic, requiring as a first step the full consideration of all the details that produce the totality of the present, actual effect. The military texts put less stress on precepts and more on acquiring and exploiting total information gained by any means and at any cost. A comprehensive understanding of the actual circumstances empowers the imagination to register and to take advantage of the full range of possibilities inherent

within the dynamics of the actual circumstances in order to orchestrate the production of welcome outcomes. This analogical mode of thinking is radically empirical in that it fundamentally respects particularity, ultimately requiring the adaptation of any abstract considerations to the specific details governing an always-unique situation.

Just to be clear, such an assertion about correlative thinking—one that emphasizes holistic aesthetic sensibilities, imagination, and a preoccupation with the concrete and practical—is holistic rather than exclusive. It does not (as the caricature of this position frequently asserts) preclude appeal to rationality, abstraction, inference, generalizations, or theoretical models, precisely those conditions of thinking that are often uncritically assumed by some to be the only kind of thinking. Rather, in correlative thinking, these more-abstractive considerations would be redefined and revalorized as being functional assets or tools that can serve us best only when they are made ultimately responsible to the particular experiential context.

How does the imagination work here? Chinese cosmology begins from the autogenerative nature of transformation, without appeal to the conception of external causal laws. The energy of change lies within the pattern of relations that constitutes the world itself: the world is spontaneously so of itself (*ziran* 自然). The dyadic tensions through which the patterns of change are expressed are many and can be captured in a contingent range of images. By first identifying and appreciating these tensions, we can find the latitude in them that enables us to orchestrate an everyday circumstance—relating to the family, the community, or the battlefield—into its most productive configuration.

In the *Sunzi*, we find a proliferation of images that define actual circumstances and that provide a potential handle on the dynamics of change. Li Zehou argues that a truly extensive pattern of dyads originates in a reflection upon the concrete details of military affairs. When we turn to the *Daodejing*, there is both a sustained reflection on the use of the military that in large degree echoes the militarist texts, and a considerable terminological overlap with them. However, there is also an extension of these bipolar dyads—often more conceptual and abstract—that has a broader political and cosmological application.[29] In addition, there is a concerted challenge to many conventional correlations associated with mainstream political philosophy that the *Daodejing* takes as the ultimate source of war and conflict—for example, the assumed relationship between hard and soft, full and empty, sagacity and stupidity, life and death, law and chaos, knowledge and speech, war and peace, ruling and being ruled, and so on.

Probing deeper into this correlative cosmology as a source of the prevailing cultural assumptions with respect to death, we discover in ancient

China a concerted focus on life in the here-and-now rather than speculation on the conditions beyond the grave. As Tang Junyi observes:

> When Chinese philosophers speak of the world, they are thinking of the world that we are living in. There is no world beyond or outside of the one we are experiencing. . . . They are not referencing "*a* world" or "*the* world" but are simply saying "world as such" without putting any indefinite or definite article in front of it.[30]

Without appeal to the concept of an immortal soul that belongs to some higher reality beyond this world, the naturalistic default position is to make the most of what is available in this world. Without the kind of teleology that promises a predetermined future existence, participation in and achievement of a sustained, usually local harmony in this world remains the ultimate focus of life.

Tang, in searching for language to characterize this early Chinese cosmology, captures the pervasive sense of continuity in his proposition of "the inseparability of the one and the many, of uniqueness and multivalence, of continuity and multiplicity, of integrity and integration (*yiduo bufenguan* 一多不分觀)."[31] What he means by this expression is that if we begin our reflection on the emergence of cosmic order from the wholeness of lived experience, we can view this experience in terms of both its dynamic continuities and its manifold multiplicity, as both a processual flow and an ongoing series of distinct consummatory events. This is one more example of the mutual implication of binaries that characterizes all phenomena in the natural world—in this case, particularity and totality. That is, any particular phenomenon in our field of experience can be focused in different ways: on the one hand, it is a unique and persistent particular; on the other, it has the entire cosmos and all that is happening implicated within its own intrinsic pattern of relationships. This person is uniquely who she is as distinct from other people, yet her relational magnitude is such that in giving a full accounting of the social, natural, and cultural relationships that constitute her, we must exhaust the cosmos.

A process worldview is one of radical contextuality, wherein the embedded particular and its context are at once continuous and distinct. This focus-field relationship is captured in the language of *daode* 道德—the field of experience (*dao*) and the myriad insistent particulars (*de*) that constitute it—as another way to express the inseparability of the one and the many. In the *Yijing*, this sense of the mutuality of oneness and manyness is captured in the image of the four seasons that are at once distinct from one another and yet continuous: "In their flux (*bian* 變) and their continuity (*tong* 通) the processes of nature are a counterpart to the four seasons."[32] This notion of the inseparability of continuity and multiplicity is

necessary to understand the claim we find throughout the early philosophical literature about the "oneness" of things, or of becoming "one" with things, often stated as a kind of achievement.

The contemporary philosopher Pang Pu provides us with language that clarifies this notion of cosmological continuity. In his explanation of this process of ceaseless "procreating (*sheng* 生)" captured in the *Yijing* as "*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息," he makes an illuminating distinction. "*Paisheng* 派生" is authoring, birthing, originating in the sense that one thing creates something as an independent existent, like a hen producing an egg or an oak tree producing an acorn. "*Huasheng* 化生," on the other hand, is one thing transforming into something else, like summer becoming autumn or a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. In the *paisheng* "derivation" sensibility, the egg goes on to become another hen, and the acorn to become another oak tree, whereas in the *huasheng* "transmutation" sensibility, most eggs become omelets and most acorns become squirrels.

A *creatio ex nihilo* variation on the *paisheng* derivation sensibility has predominated in our own persistent, Aristotelian cosmological assumptions—the hen reproduces its own essence or, in the human case, the child has its own soul, an essential identity independent of the parent. Knowledge, therefore, lies in being able to identify and categorize the progeny: to say what it essentially "is" (L. *esse*). In the Chinese *qi* cosmology, on the hand, these two senses of "procreating" qualify each other. Importantly, the putative discreteness and independence entailed by *paisheng* is qualified by the processual and contextual assumptions of *huasheng*; the processual continuity of *huasheng* is punctuated as unique "events" by the consummatory nature of *paisheng*. Expressed concretely in the metaphor of family that is pervasive within the Chinese cosmological order, neither uniqueness nor continuity will yield to the other. The notion of intrinsic relationality that allows for the uniqueness and distinctiveness of particular members of the family on the one hand, and for the continuity that obtains among them on the other, disqualifies part-whole analysis and requires instead a gestalt shift to focus-field thinking—a nonanalytic mode in which "part" and "totality" are respective foregrounding and backgrounding perspectives on the same phenomenon.

In pursuing this distinction between "derivation" and "transformation," Pang is alerting us to a further refinement in our understanding of the relationship between what comes before and what follows in the ongoing processes of life and death. Whereas we might be inclined to understand the progenitor/progeny genealogy as a series in which there is quite literally an "essential" independence of the latter from the former, early Chinese cosmology on reflection is clearly a combination of both *paisheng* and *huasheng*, taking the progenitor as giving way to *this* unique progeny but at the same time as proliferating and living on within its progeny. In this cosmology,

there is a strong sense of genealogical continuity wherein the progeny is to be understood as the foregrounding of this unique person in a continuing flow of procreation—a unique and particular current in a particular stream.

We might look at naming conventions for illustration. A "proper" name is by definition "one's own" name (*paisheng*), but in a Chinese world one's complex of names is profoundly relational and processual (*huasheng*). One's family name is the first and continuing source of identity, whereas one's given name (*ming* 名) proliferates with assumed style names (*zi* 字), sobriquets (*hao* 號), and a web of specific family designations (such as "uncle number two" [*ershu* 二叔] and "auntie number three" [*sanzhou* 三妯]) and professional titles (such as "teacher" [*laoshi* 老師] or "director" [*zhuren* 主任]) even in the course of one's lifetime and with posthumous titles (*shi* 謚) after it, reflecting the unfolding contribution one has been able to make to family and community over time.

For someone who lives within this correlative sensibility, several assumptions about death and dying are commonsensical. In the ceaseless process of transformation, death is both natural and inevitable. At the same time, the trauma of death is attenuated in degree by a strong sense of continuity within the constitutive web of family and community relations. This sense of persistence is much in evidence from the funerary material culture in which a powerful belief seems to be that life after death is a direct extension of life in this world—that is, death is not a release from, but a continuation of, the social, political, and economic conditions that govern the life we are presently living. In the tombs excavated over the past generation or so, we discover that buried with those deceased who enjoy a well-provided death are articles used in everyday living: clothing and jewelry, combs and mirrors, utensils and lacquerware dishes, foodstuffs, and, indeed, an abundance of reading material for the journey to I-know-not-where. The deceased were being provided with an environment as close to that of the living as possible. As Mu-chou Poo points out, "Since the burials differ only in the degree of material richness, not in fundamental conception and structure, it stands to reason that we assume a more or less homogeneous religious belief among the rich and the poor in society."[illegible]

The persisting structure of ancestor worship also seems to make the continuity of this parallel afterlife dependent—in important degree—upon the sacrificial activities of the living who continue to remember their dead. This memory is made tangible in a never-ending stream of food and "money" transmitted by the living to the ancestral world through regular ritual practices. After all, the dead, like the living, occupied a place within a bureaucratically structured world that paralleled the world of the living and as such had to pay their taxes and take care of avaricious officials.[illegible] According to Poo, "for the dead in the nether world, happiness meant a life abundant with all the necessities of life."[illegible]

Indeed, important for understanding death in this culture is the cognate relationship between "perishing" *wang* 亡 and "forgetting" *wang* 忘, a relationship made explicit in the *Daodejing*. There is a strong sense that death occurs not when one dies but when one is forgotten. In a cultural tradition in which persons are understood to be constituted by the pattern of roles and relationships configured throughout the narrative of their lives, the answer to the question of what is lost and what is left is an important one. As long as a person is remembered, he or she has a place and a life. The emphasis on genealogical continuity, the ethic of family reverence, the cultural requisite of returning the body to the ancestors intact, the elaborate structure of Chinese funerary rites, and the role of ancestor worship as the primary religious observance are all an expression of this social memory. On the contrary, "not being around," "being exiled," and "disappearing" are all ways of dying while still being otherwise alive. Hence, the interchangeability of "to perish" *wang* 亡 and "to be forgotten" *wang* 忘 is found in the alternative Wang Bi and Mawangdui redactions of *Daodejing* 33, respectively:

> 不失其所者久
> 死而不亡（忘）者壽。
> Not losing one's place is to be long enduring;
> Dying and yet not perishing [or "not being forgotten"] is to be long-lived.

The acceptability of the variants here among scholars would suggest that "perishing" and "being forgotten" are not contradictory, and that the line can be read either way because of this immediate connection between being alive and being remembered, and perishing and being forgotten.[36] What I mean is that "dead" people can continue to live on (such as in the cases of the cultural heroes Kongzi and Laozi), and "living" people can be the walking "dead"—people who are banished or whose ancestral lineage is broken or who are erased from court records for their crimes.

There is an important corollary to the connection between perishing and being forgotten. If we turn this conjunction the other way around, death can be vanquished, in some degree, through living a life that is memorable and will be celebrated by generations of both ancestors and progeny. By making the most of the opportunities that life brings with it and by bringing distinction to one's family and community, one is reinforcing a persistence that keeps death at bay. Certainly, this would be paramount in the mind of the soldier, who is risking his life to protect the continuity of his own ancestral lineage.

However, living life fully is not to be confused with an excessive and detrimental preoccupation with life. In looking at death from a classical Daoist point of view that shares an intimate relationship with the militarist texts, *Daodejing* 50 is frequently cited:

出生入死，生之徒，十有三，死之徒，十有三，而民生生動皆之死地，亦十有三。夫何故？以其生生也。

In the cycle of life and death,
About a third are the companions of life,
About a third are the companions of death,
And one third again are people who, because of their preoccupation with staying alive,
Move toward the execution ground with each and every step.
How so?
Simply because of their preoccupation with staying alive.

In the world that this classical Daoist text reports upon, people can be expected to divide into three fairly equal groups: those who live out their natural lives; those who succumb to an early death because of disease, famine, war, or some other unfortunate circumstance; and, finally, those who would belong to the first group but, because of their excessive preoccupation with staying alive, join the second group in meeting with a premature end. Excess is dangerous, and thus the sage spurns the extreme, the extravagant, and the excessive. Life and death, like all the correlative relationships that organize our world—including long and short, high and low, difficult and easy, old and young, and so on—are continuous and mutually entailing, so that being preoccupied with one at the expense of the other introduces an abnormality that challenges the natural balance and cadence of life. As *Daodejing* 75 reports, "it is precisely they who do not kill themselves in living who are more enlightened than they who treasure life."

Further, for the more reflective and philosophical persons living under the sway of this correlative cosmology—the authors of the *Zhuangzi* come immediately to mind—the ongoing processes of life and death are attended with a palpable optimism. There is an unannounced acknowledgment that life could not be what it is if it were not for the anticipation of death. That is, without death in its broadest sense, life would be static, transparent, predictable, and tedious. Death is the indeterminate aspect attending the life experience that makes its process, change, complexity, and novelty possible and, as such, can be understood as a positive, enabling presence rather than as a negative, disabling absence. Death so understood does not inhibit or subvert life but stimulates and drives it, making it more intense, delicious, and poignant. Indeed, for those close to Zhuangzi, the only injunction would be, "Enjoy the ride!"[37]

NOTES

1. The discussion of "thick cultural generalizations" is further elaborated upon in my *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*, forthcoming from Chinese University Press.

2. One might argue that the bugbear of "essentialism" is itself a culturally specific worry. Essentialism arises from familiar classical Greek assumptions about ontology as "the science of being" and from the application of strict identity (or "essences") as the principle of individuation that follows from such an ontology. The well-intended and hugely erudite scholar Zhang Longxi 張隆溪 is concerned that the assertion of radical difference which he quite properly ascribes to my interpretation of Chinese language and culture leads to "relativism" and thus incommensurability. In promoting his alternative version of cultural translation, he insists:

> Against such an overemphasis on difference and cultural uniqueness, however, I would like to argue for the basic translatability of languages and cultures. . . . Only when we acknowledge different peoples and nations as equal in their ability to think, to express, to communicate, and to create values, we may then rid ourselves of ethnocentric biases. ("Translating Cultures: China and the West," *Chinese Thought in a Global Context: A Dialogue between Chinese and Western Philosophical Approaches*, ed. Karl-Heinz Pohl [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 46)

The claim about being "equal" in the ability to think might sound inclusive and liberating, but in reality it is anything but innocent. Why would we assume that the possibility other traditions have culturally specific modalities of thinking entails a claim that that they do not know how to think, unless we believe that our way of thinking is, in fact, the only way? Further, the uncritical assumption that other cultures must think the same way that I do is for me the very definition of ethnocentrism. I would argue that it is precisely the recognition and appreciation of the degree of difference obtaining among cultures that properly motivates cultural translation in the first place and that ultimately rewards the effort. Indeed, arguing that there are culturally contingent modalities of thinking can be pluralistic rather than relativistic and accommodating rather than condescending. At the very least, we must strive with imagination to take other cultures on their own terms if comparative studies is to provide us with the mutual enrichment that it promises.

3. David N. Keightley, "Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How It Became Chinese," in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 33.

4. A. C. Graham makes this same point. The *Zhuangzi*'s discussion of confronting the problem of death "is quite without the morbidity of the stress on corruptibility in the late-Medieval art of Europe, which reminds of the horrors of mortality for the good of our souls." See Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 203.

5. In Ruan Ji's 阮籍 *Essay on Music* 樂論, written in the third century, following the fall of the Han dyansty, we read that "the custom of the states of Chu and Yue was to esteem military bravery, and thus their habit was to treat death lightly." But again from the perspective of the central states, this was the attitude of southern barbarians who did not have the benefit of the sages and their proper Confucian civilization. See Reed Andrew Criddle, "Rectifying Lasciviousness through Mystical Learning: An Exposition and Translation of Ruan Ji's *Essay on Music*," *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2007): 55.

6. Nathan Sivin, Foreword to Manfred Porkert, *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), xi.

7. Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1934).

8. William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin, 2000), 76.

9. John Dewey, in rehearsing the pre-Darwinian history of Western philosophy, claims that "few words in our language foreshorten intellectual history as much as does the word species" ("The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," in *The Essential Dewey*, ed. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998] 1:40)—that is, the notion of *eidos* rendered "idea" or "form" in Plato and "species" in Aristotle. Unfortunately, Dewey, like his mentor James, fails to take cultural differences into account when he universalizes the metaphysical realism that follows from this notion of *eidos* as a kind of *human* common sense: "The *human mind*, deliberately as it were, exhausted the logic of the changeless, the final and the transcendent, before it essayed adventure on the pathless wastes of generation and transformation" (41; emphasis mine).

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 20.

11. I. A. Richards, *Mencius on the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1932), 89, 91–92.

12. David N. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," *Philosophy East and West* 38.4 (October 1988): 389. Keightley here is positing a position shared by several of our most distinguished interpreters of the Shang dynasty, including Kwang-chih Chang, "Some Dualistic Phenomena in Shang Society," *Journal of Asian Studies* 24.1 (November 1964): 45–61, and Marcel Granet, "Right and Left in China," in *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, ed. Rodney Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

13. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 367.

14. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 388.

15. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 389, n. 1.

16. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 376.

17. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 377.

18. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 374–375.

19. *The Republic* Book II 369c. Mark Twain's revision has it that "necessity is the mother of taking chances."

20. Roger T. Ames, trans., *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), 103.

21. Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Zhongguo gudai sixiang shilun* 中國古代思想史論 [A history of ancient Chinese thought], rev. ed. (Taipei: Fongyun shidai chuban gongsi, 1990), 90–95.

22. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 2:280–281.

23. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 368.

24. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 369.

25, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 39–43, 111–112.

26. Ames, *Sun-tzu*, 118–121.

27. John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2:221ff, 241ff.

28. D. C. Lau and Roger T. Ames, trans., *Sun Bin: The Art of Warfare* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 91–93.

29. He Bingdi 何炳棣 wants to take this relationship between the two texts—the *Sunzi* and the *Daodejing*—a step further in mounting a substantial textual argument that the *Daodejing* in many places is derivative of the *Sunzi* and thus should be dated after it (*Youguan Sunzi Laozi de sanpian kaozheng* 有關孫子老子的三篇考證 [Three evidential studies on the *Sunzi* and *Laozi*; Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jidaishi yanjiusuo], 2002, 1–35).

30. Tang Junyi 唐君毅, "Zhongguo zhexuezhong ziran yuzhouguan zhi tezhi 中國哲學中自然宇宙觀之特質 [The distinctive features of natural cosmology in Chinese philosophy]," *Zhongguo zhexue sixiang zhi bijiaolun wenji* 中國哲學思想之比較論文集 [Collected essays on the comparison between Chinese and Western philosophical thought] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1988), 101–103.

31. Tang, "Zhongguo zhexuezhong ziran yuzhouguan zhi tezhi," 16.

32. *Great Commentary* A6.

33. Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 22.

34. There is a detailed discussion of these assumptions in Kang Yunmei 康韻梅, *Zhongguo gudai siwangguan zhi tanjiu* 中国古代死亡觀之探究 [An exploration of the ancient Chinese view of death] (Taipei: Guoli Taiwandaxue wenshi congkan), 1990.

35. Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 214.

36. Robert G. Henricks, trans., *Lao-tzu: Te-tao Ching* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 274, n. 162; Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Laozi gujin* 老子古今 [The *Laozi* past and present] (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2006), 348.

37. See Roger T. Ames, "Death as Transformation in Classical Daoism," in *Death and Philosophy*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (London: Routledge, 1998), for a discussion of death as exhilarating transformation in the *Zhuangzi*.

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