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Disputers of the *Li*: Breakthroughs in the Concept of Ritual in Preimperial China

“Therefore, when the Way is lost, virtue appears, when
virtue is lost, benevolence appears, when benevolence is lost,
propriety 義 appears, when propriety is lost, ritual 禮 appears.”

Laozi 老子, sect. 38

“The Central States 中國 are the states of ritual 禮 and propriety 義.”

He Xiu, *Chungiu Gongyang zhuan*, j. 3 (Yin 7)

These two epigraphs are merely the epitome of what was a long and fruitful debate in early China over the meaning and function of *li* 禮 not only as a term in philosophical discourse but also as a system of society and politics. The Han-era scholar He Xiu (何休, 129–182 AD), living long after the time-period on which this article focuses, defined the term as a general, social axiom, and the fact that most modern scholars would certainly endorse this definition indicates the enduring importance of the field of study. This article builds upon various earlier subfields of research and analysis of *li* in early China – philosophy, the history of political thought, and archeology. It brings together a significant number of texts that can suggest a picture of the way the term changed in a formative period of Chinese intellectual tradition – the period that spans almost six centuries from the the end of Western Zhou 西周 (1045–772 BC), to the age of the so-called Hundred Schools (the sixth to third centuries BC), whose vibrant intellectual activities shaped many crucial aspects of the later Chinese imperial polity.

Throughout preimperial and imperial times *li* was a hallmark of Chinese civilization, a dividing line between Chinese and aliens, and often between elite and commoner. Rituals, often quite elaborate and articulated, permeated the social sphere, from sacrificial ceremonies to eating and drinking, from mourning to wedding, from court audiences to managing family affairs. Rituals not only regulated social life, but also were of paramount importance in the political realm both as the source of legitimacy and as the means of perpetuating the internal cohesiveness of the empire. Moreover, ritual was not merely a political instrument, but, as James Laid-

law aptly observes, it “*was* politics,” and to a significant extent politics were ritual.¹

The unique role played by ritual in Chinese society has drawn increasing attention. In recent decades a series of outstanding studies has contributed greatly to our understanding of specific rites, of ritual debates throughout Chinese history, as well as of the impact of ritual on social and political life.² Either implicitly or explicitly these studies raise some common questions: what are the reasons for the unprecedented role that ritual played in Chinese civilization over the course of millennia? Why and how did China become “the land of ritual and propriety?”

The sheer magnitude of the role of ritual in China’s history defies easy answers to these questions. Understandably, most scholars tend to confine their discussion to the analysis of the impact of specific rites on political and social life. Their explanatory framework is commonly, although not exclusively, rooted in modern Western theoretical approaches, sometimes supplemented with relevant quotations from Chinese classical and philosophical texts, such as *Xunzi* 荀子 and *Liji* 禮記. However, as Laidlaw convincingly shows, for this task the extant theoretical framework becomes inadequate.³

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¹ James Laidlaw, “On Theatre and Theory: Reflections on Ritual in Imperial Chinese Politics,” Joseph P. McDermott, ed., *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), p. 406 (italics in original); for further instances of ritual merging with politics, see, e.g., Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000).

² It is impossible to survey here even a small portion of the literature that deals with ritual in Chinese society. Useful collections of articles are McDermott, *State and Court Ritual*; L. S. Vasil’ev et al., eds., *Etika i ritual v traditsionnom Kitae* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988); James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1988); Liu Kwang-Ching, ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1990); Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎, ed., *Chūgoku kodai reisei kenkyū* 中國古代禮制研究 (Kyoto: Kyoto U.P., 1995). Other important studies are Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T’ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1985); Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1994); James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1995); Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1997). Many insightful comments on the importance of ritual for preserving the imperial state are scattered throughout Ray Huang’s 1587: *A Year of No Significance* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1981).

³ Laidlaw, “On Theatre,” pp. 399–416; cf. Hevia, *Cherishing*, pp. 15–25. For a convenient summary of Western theoretical approaches towards ritual, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Per-*

Also, many scholars who discuss the meaning of *li* in preimperial texts tend to focus on moral, esthetic, and religious aspects and pay little if any attention to the impact that the Zhou ritual system and its sociopolitical functions had on discourse.⁴ Yet for Chunqiu 春秋 and Zhanguo 戰國 thinkers, particularly those prior to Xunzi 荀子 (c. 310–218), *li* was not merely a philosophical concept, but primarily an extant reality – a set of rites, ceremonies, and sumptuary rules inherited from the early Zhou. Recent archeological studies greatly enhance our understanding of the nature of the Zhou ritual system and its political and social role.⁵ These studies help us to clarify the function of ritual in Chunqiu-Zhanguo society, supporting an insightful assertion by Benjamin Schwartz that *li* was “not only a ceremonial order – it [was] a sociopolitical order in the full sense of the term involving hierarchies, authority and power.”⁶

The present essay tries to address the question of ritual’s role in Chinese society from an internal perspective. It presents systematically the views of ritual (*li*) during the four centuries that preceded the imperial unification of 221 B.C. My aim is to historicize the concept of ritual by showing how successive generations of preimperial thinkers conceptualized *li*, and why they saw it as important (or not) for the proper functioning of society and state. Their answers, I believe, are highly relevant for the understanding of theoretical assumptions that underlie ritual practice and ritual discourse throughout the imperial age. I hope thus to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the political impact of ritual in traditional China.

Li is a multifaceted term that in different contexts means “rite,” “ritual,” “etiquette,” “politeness,” or “ritual norms.” The following discussion focuses on two major semantic fields of *li*. On the one hand, *li* referred to the rules and acts taken to perform rites and thus to an entire set of ritual

spectives and Dimensions (New York and Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1997).

⁴ See, for instance Antonio S. Cua, “Dimensions of *li* (Propriety): Reflections on an Aspect of Hsün Tzu’s Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West* 29.4 (1979), pp. 373–94; idem, “*Li* and Moral Justification: A Study in the *Li Chi*,” *Philosophy East and West* 33.1 (1983), pp. 1–16; Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989); Shun Kwong-loi, “*Jen* and *Li* in the *Analects*,” *Philosophy East and West* 3.3 (1993), pp. 457–79; Chong Kim-Chong 莊錦章, “The Aesthetic Moral Personality: *Li*, *Yi*, *Wen* and *Chih* in the *Analects*,” *MS 46* (1998), pp. 69–90.

⁵ For a convenient summary of these studies, see Jessica Rawson, “Western Zhou Archaeology,” and Lothar von Falkenhausen, “The Waning of the Bronze Age: Material Culture and Social Developments, 770–481 B.C.,” Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999 [hereafter, *CHAC*]), pp. 352–544.

⁶ Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard U.P., 1985), p. 68.

regulations. However, it also came to designate a more abstract mode of social and personal conduct that could serve thinkers analytically as a tool to address the concerns of social order and hierarchy. In what follows I try to preserve the distinction between these two broad definitions. In some cases, for convenience, I refer to a “normative ritual system,” or “ritual system” (covering the rather concrete semantic field that points to sets of regulations and actions), and, in others, to a conceptual field that implies “ritual-based conduct” and “sociopolitical order.” It is important to note, however, that in many cases, especially in the cited speeches and texts, both meanings were implied, thus where appropriate I elect to use the more neutral “ritual,” or *li*, without qualifiers.

My choice of time frame for the discussion is not fortuitous. The late Chunqiu (722–453 BC) and Zhanguo (453–221 BC) periods were an age of heated discussions about philosophical, political, and social issues, when rival thinkers laid the foundations of Chinese political culture. The nature of *li*, its social impact, and its relevance to political and social stability were among the pivotal questions. Moreover, preimperial debates are particularly interesting because this was the only age in Chinese intellectual history, prior to the twentieth century, when *li* was openly challenged by leading thinkers (for example, the *Laozi*, as reflected in the first epigraph), and when ritual was not automatically conceived of as either “orthodoxy” or “orthopraxy.”⁷

It might be useful to sketch the larger historical picture of the changes and breakthroughs in ritual that occurred in the chosen time period, beginning with an archeological background. Of course, this will be a simplified picture so as merely to help in the discussions that follow, and the terms used. In recent years many scholars have attempted to trace the origins of China’s ritualization to the very beginnings of Chinese history, and even back to the neolithic period.⁸ It is quite probable that some nascent ritual system appeared at the very early stages of organized society in China, and origins of ritual culture are traceable beyond doubt at least to the Shang

⁷ For the view of ritual as “orthopraxy” versus “orthodoxy,” see Evelyn S. Rawski, “A Historian’s Approach to Chinese Death Ritual,” Watson and Rawski, *Death Ritual*, pp. 20–34; Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 191–97.

⁸ E.g., see David N. Keightley, “Archaeology and Mentality: The Making of China,” *Representations* 18 (Spring 1987), pp. 91–128; Yang Qun 楊群, “Cong kaogu faxian kan li he lizhi de qi yuan yu fazhan” 從考古發現看禮和禮制的起源與發展, *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3 (1990), pp. 3–11; Chen Shengyong 陳乘勇, “Li de qi yuan, jian lun Liangzhu wenhua yu wenming qi yuan” 禮的起源兼論良渚文化與文明起源, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 17.1 (1999), pp. 49–77; and the recent articles by Christopher Fung, Anne P. Underhill, and Liu Li in *Journal of East Asian Archeology* 2.1–2 (2000), pp. 67–164.

period 商 (ca. 1600–1046).⁹ For the present discussion, however, the most important development is the establishment of the elaborate Zhou ritual system, which is depicted, albeit in an idealized form, in the Zhanguo and Han ritual compendia. Although traditionally its establishment was attributed to the Zhou dynastic founders, particularly the Duke of Zhou 周公 (d. ca. 1036), current research persuasively indicates that this system appeared much later, in the course of the so-called mid-Western Zhou ritual reform, beginning in around the late-tenth century BC.¹⁰

The ritual reform (or, in Jessica Rawson’s terms, ritual revolution) is not directly attested in the received texts, but it is observable from a profound change in mortuary practices. New sumptuary rules were adopted and rapidly promulgated throughout the Zhou realm. The hallmark of these rules is the so-called *lie ding* 列鼎 system, according to which members of each aristocratic rank were assigned a fixed number of *ding* tripods (and adjacent set of *gui* 簋 tureens) to be used in ancestral sacrifices and in the grave; similar, albeit apparently less rigid, gradation existed with regard to other mortuary objects and to the tomb’s size.¹¹ These archeologically observable changes in mortuary practices were accompanied in all likelihood

⁹ For aspects of Shang rituals, see, e.g., David N. Keightley, “The Shang: China’s First Historical Dynasty,” in *CHAC*, pp. 249–68.

¹⁰ The most comprehensive discussions of Western Zhou ritual reform, to which I owe much of the subsequent discussion, are by Lothar von Falkenhausen “The Western Zhou Ritual Reform and Its Reflections in Bronze Art,” unpublished paper presented at the University of Kansas, 1996; and idem, “Late Western Zhou Taste,” *Études Chinoises* 18.1–2 (2000), pp. 143–78; see also Rawson, “Western Zhou Archaeology,” pp. 433–40; Cao Wei 曹瑋, “Cong qingtongqi de yanhua shilun Xi Zhou qian hou qi zhi jiao de lizhi bianhua” 從青銅器的演化試論西周前後期之交的禮制變化, in *Zhou Qin wenhua yanjiu* 周秦文化研究化編委會, comp., *Zhou Qin wenhua yanjiu* 周秦文化研究 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 443–56; Vassily M. Kryukov, *Tekst i ritual: Opyt interpretatsii drevnekitaiskoi epigrafiki epokhi In’ Chzhou* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2000), pp. 132–37 and 284–87.

¹¹ For a brief discussion about the *lie ding* system and its social value, see Hsu Cho-yun and Katheryn M. Linduff, *Western Chou Civilization* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1988) pp. 172–77; Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Xi Zhou shi* 西周史 (Shanghai: Renmin, 1999), pp. 461–64; for a more detailed discussion, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, “The Mortuary Context of Warring States Manuscripts Finds,” forthcoming in the proceedings of the Tomb Text Workshop, Universität Hamburg, July 16–18, 2000. Lin Yun 林澐 warned that the *lie ding* system as seen from archeological excavations should not be mechanically correlated with textual data from the Zhanguo and the Han period (see his “Zhou dai yong ding zhidu shangque” 周代用鼎制度商榷, *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 3 [1990], pp. 12–23). Later, Yin Qun 印群 further suggested that although the *lie ding* system appeared already in the mid-Western Zhou period, it took its final shape only by the end of the Western Zhou – the beginning of the Chunqiu period; “Lun Zhou dai lieding zhidu de shanbian” 論周代列鼎制度的嬗變, *Liaoning daxue xuebao* 遼寧大學學報 4 (1999), pp. 45–46. These observations notwithstanding, we may conclude that the system of well pronounced sumptuary ranks, signified in particular by different numbers of tripods allowed to be used in the temple and the grave, had appeared in the course of the Western Zhou ritual reform.

by parallel changes in sacrificial rites, court ceremonies, and other aspects of ritual culture.¹² While new rank distinctions might have been less straightforward and unified than implied by later ritual compendia, the overall picture is nevertheless clear enough.¹³ The ritual reform strengthened hereditary divisions, effectively promulgating a society of graded lineages in which each aristocrat's position was determined primarily by his rank and seniority within the lineage. This system thus both reflected and solidified the hereditary hierarchy, and it evidently became the most powerful means in the hands of aristocrats to reaffirm their exalted position.

The Western Zhou ritual reform was designed both to reflect and to perpetuate inter- and intralinear hierarchy in Zhou society. Initially, ritual gradations might have reflected actual balance of power among major aristocratic lineages. Insofar as this system functioned in a viable way it was not theoretically conceptualized (or at least we have no hints of such debates in the Western Zhou and early-Chunqiu). The Zhou ritual system, however, was not designed to accommodate changes in these balances of power either among overlords (*zhuhou* 諸侯), or among aristocratic lineages within each state; and by the Chunqiu period a cleavage appeared between the actual (political, economical, military) and the ritual-oriented hierarchy. Thus, the ritual system came under pressure, as different social groups tried to improve their statuses by appropriating various privileges of their superiors. This constituted what I refer to below as a "challenge" to the system. This challenge induced Chunqiu statesmen to contemplate the ways to preserve the foundations of the Zhou ritual system and the entire sociopolitical order for the sake of which the system was created.

This article seeks to demonstrate that the problems that arose in the Zhou ritual system spurred unprecedented interest in the concept of *li* and in its social value. Chunqiu aristocrats were the first to make a breakthrough, distilling aspects of the normative system from its ceremonial framework. This process matured, after centuries of bitter controversies, in the writings of Xunzi, who raised the value of *li* to unprecedented philosophical heights. Chunqiu and Zhanguo ritual debates resulted in a complete reappraisal of

the term *li*, which became the designation of the hierarchic social order, on the one hand, and of rules of elite personal conduct, on the other. This redefinition renewed the appeal of *li* for the upper strata of Chinese society because newly reinterpreted principles of *li* were applicable to the new order and were no longer associated with the bygone Zhou age. Insofar as society remained hierarchic, and insofar as elite members were in need of fixed patterns of behavior to distinguish themselves from the commoners, *li* retained its social utility. The Zhou ritual system collapsed, but the concept of "rule by ritual" emerged from its ruins, and helped later to create new ritual systems. Thus, the demise of the ritual system inherited from the Western Zhou allowed many thinkers to distance themselves from extant ritual practice, and created fruitful conditions for theoretical reappraisal of the social role of *li*.¹⁴

DISTILLING THE ESSENCE OF *LI*: CHUNQIU RITUAL DISCOURSE

Since the beginning of the Chunqiu period a series of political and social developments challenged the Western Zhou ritual system.¹⁵ Confucius 孔子 (551–479) aptly depicted this process as the erosion of power and ritual authority from the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) to the overlords, from overlords to nobles (*dafu* 大夫), and finally from nobles to their retainers.¹⁶ The Zhou Sons of Heaven were indeed the first to lose their power. Despite their ritual supremacy, since the mid-seventh century the kings became de facto protégés of their nominal inferiors, the powerful overlords. A similar process occurred beginning in about the mid-Chunqiu period in most states of the Central Plain, where leading ministerial lineages

¹⁴ This peculiarity of late-preimperial ritual discourse is not noticed by Laidlaw, who argues that for Chinese scholar-officials discussing *li* and performing *li* were conceptually inseparable ("On Theatre," pp. 412–16; also Zito, *Of Body and Brush*, p. 52 ff). Zhanguo thinkers, unlike their imperial heirs, did not take ritual performance for granted, and they had to consider the social validity of the ritual system as a whole, not the relevance and nature of specific rites.

¹⁵ This section summarizes my earlier discussions of the Chunqiu views of *li*, for which see Yuri Pines, "Intellectual Change in the Chunqiu Period: The Reliability of the Speeches in the *Zuo zhuan* as Sources of Chunqiu Intellectual History," *Early China* 22 (1997), pp. 100–16; and idem, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., forthcoming 2002), chap. 3.

¹⁶ See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, trans. and annot., *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991) xvi/2 ("Ji shi" 季氏), p. 174. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 AD) suggested that this passage in the *Lunyu* succinctly summarizes Chunqiu history (see Li Jingde 黎靖德, comp., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Wang Xingxian 王星賢 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986] 93, pp. 2148–49).

¹² For an interesting attempt to trace the impact of ritual changes on Zhou odes and hymns, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou History," in *CHAC*, pp. 332–38.

¹³ Falkenhausen observes important spatial and temporal variations in funeral assemblages, which slightly differ from the rigid hierarchy prescribed by the ritual compendia (see his "Shangma. Demography and Social Differentiation in a Late Bronze Age Community in North China," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 3.3–4 [2001]; also Yin, "Lieding," pp. 45–46). These and other alterations notwithstanding, a general picture of rigidly applied rank hierarchy remains basically unchanged.

usurped the political, economic, and military power of the rulers and turned many of the overlords into mere figureheads. By the end of the Chunqiu period the situation was further aggravated when the lowest stratum of the ranked aristocracy, the *shi* 士, began competing with their former superiors, the high-ranking nobles, for positions at court.¹⁷

These developments gave birth to new international and domestic hierarchies, which no longer emphasized proximity to the ruling house, as implied by the normative ritual system, but the actual balance of power among both overlords and ministers. A further challenge to the ritual system came when high-ranked aristocrats began usurping the ritual prerogatives of their superiors, upgrading their privileges beyond what was assigned to their rank. These massive infractions gradually brought the entire ritual-based hereditary social order to the verge of collapse.¹⁸

Chunqiu statesmen did not fail to realize the implications of the ongoing infractions. These statesmen, who remained throughout the Chunqiu period the only intellectually active stratum, were in a delicate position. On the one hand, as leading ministers, they held the responsibility for maintaining sociopolitical order, which meant preserving and solidifying the hierarchy implicit in the ritual system. On the other hand, as heads of major aristocratic lineages, they benefited from appropriating the overlords' ritual privileges, and were disinclined to yield these new privileges to them. Furthermore, by the end of the Chunqiu period some far-sighted aristocrats became increasingly alarmed by the imminent ascendancy of the *shi* stratum, and sought to reinforce ritual-based divisions between the high-ranking nobles and their underlings in order to preserve the exalted posi-

¹⁷ For a good summary of Chunqiu social and political changes, see Hsu Cho-yun, *Ancient China in Transition* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1963).

¹⁸ Various aspects of usurpation of the superiors' ceremonial rights, particularly sumptuary privileges, are discussed by Emura Haruki 江村治樹, "Seidō reiki kara mita Shunji jidai shakai hendō" 青銅禮器から見た春秋時代社會變動, *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū* 名古屋大學文學部研究論集 34 (1988), pp. 79–82; Falkenhausen "Waning of the Bronze Age"; Chen Xuguo 陳戌國, *Xian Qin lizhi yanjiu* 先秦禮制研究 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1991), pp. 274–354. We should remember that the picture was far from monochromatic, and the degree of the infractions of ritual norms varied spatially and temporarily. Massive "upgrading" of the aristocrats' sumptuary privileges occurred mostly in the second half of the Chunqiu period (Yin, "Lieding," pp. 46–47), and it was largely confined to the upper echelons of the ranked aristocracy, with overlords usurping ritual prerogatives of the Son of Heaven, and high-ranking aristocrats appropriating overlords' rights. One of the most vivid manifestations of such ritual "usurpation" is the amazingly rich ruler-like tomb of the head of the Jin government by the end of the Chunqiu period, Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子 (d. 475) (see Tao Zhenggang 陶正剛, Hou Yi 侯毅, Qu Chuanfu 渠川福, *Taiyuan jinguo Zhaoqing mu* 太原晉國趙卿墓 [Beijing: Wenwu, 1996], pp. 237–41). The advance of persons of *shi* 士 rank was a relatively late phenomenon, dateable mostly to the end of the Chunqiu and the early-Zhanguo period (see the insightful discussion in Falkenhausen, "Mortuary Context").

tion of their lineages. To resolve this apparent conflict of interests, Chunqiu statesmen began the distilling of *li* from its ceremonial framework, as mentioned. Their evident motive was to accommodate certain infractions within the normative ritual system, while simultaneously preserving intact the essence of *li*, that is, the hereditary hierarchy.

Prior to the Chunqiu period the term *li* remained marginal in political discourse. In Western Zhou texts it refers primarily to sacrificial rites.¹⁹ The same texts frequently employ the terms "ceremonial decorum" (*yi* 儀) and "awe-inspiring ceremonies" (*weiyi* 威儀) as a broad designation for the proper conduct of the elite.²⁰ Both *yi* and *weiyi* were the precise, ordered performances of complicated ceremonies, in which each participant behaved according to his rank and lineage seniority. Preserving ceremonial decorum was essential for proper functioning of the Zhou ritual system, thus explaining why the two terms figure prominently in late-Western Zhou odes and in many contemporary bronze inscriptions.²¹

The ceremonial role of the ruler is strongly emphasized in the Western Zhou odes, suggesting that he held primary responsibility for maintaining ceremonial order, and in doing so he "manifested [his] virtue 明德."²² Contemporary thinkers apparently believed that if the ruler performed properly the ceremonies at court, in the temple, and elsewhere he would become a model for his subjects and thus inspire order and compliance. The "Yi"

¹⁹ For the religious origin of the term *li*, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxing lun shi* 中國人性論史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1984), pp. 41–43; Pines, "Intellectual Change," p. 101, nn. 84, 86. For the persistent importance of the religious dimension of *li* for its later development, see Wang Qifa 王啟法, "Li de zongjiao taiji" 禮的宗教胎記, *Zhongguo zhaxue* 22, *Jingxue jin quan chu bian* 中國哲學第二十二輯經學今詮初編 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), pp. 61–104.

²⁰ On *weiyi*, see Jiang Kunwu 姜昆武, "Xian Qin lizhi zhong de weiyi shuo" 先秦禮制中的威儀說, *Zhongguo gudaishi luncong* 中國古代史論叢 3 (1981), pp. 137–41. The term played a significant role in Western Zhou discourse; in *Shi jing* 詩經 *li* is mentioned only ten times, while *yi* 儀 and *weiyi* appear thirty-five.

²¹ For odes that emphasize the pivotal role of ceremonial decorum in preserving social order, see, e.g., "Yi" 抑 and "Jia le" 假樂 (Mao 256 and 249). Donors of many late Western Zhou vessels similarly praise their ancestors' ability to observe ceremonial decorum, and proclaim their determination to do the same (e.g., inscriptions on Xing 癸 *-gui* and Xing-zhong; Guoshu Lü 郭叔旅 *-zhong* and Shu Xiang Fuyu 叔向父禹 *-gui*; Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, *Kindun tsūshaku* 金文通釋 [Kobe: Hakutsuru bijutsukan, 1962–1984] 50 [add. #15, pp. 377 and 387]; 26 [#155], and 27 [#161]).

²² The "Yi" ode states: "Be cautious [performing] the awe-inspiring ceremonies, they are the counterpart of virtue!" *Shi jing* (SSJZS edn.) 18, p. 554 (Mao 256); see also "Jia le," *Shi jing* 17, p. 541 (Mao 249); and "Bin zhi chu yan" 賓之初筵, "Min lao" 民勞, "Ban" 板 (Mao 220, 253, 254), and the discussion by Onozawa Seiichi 小野澤精一, "Toku ron" 德論, Akatsuka Kiyoshi 赤塚忠 et al., eds., *Chūgoku bunka sōsho 2: Shisō gairon* 中國文化叢書 2 思想概論 (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1968), pp. 167–68.

抑 ode summarizes this: “Be reverent and cautious in awe-inspiring ceremonies; thus you would become a model for the people.”²³ This idea evidently remained intact into the early-Chunqiu period. The early classic of annalistic history titled *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, our major repository of Chunqiu history and thought,²⁴ contains two key speeches dated to the early-eighth century. In them, the Lu statesmen Zang Xibo 臧僖伯 and his son, Aibo 哀伯, explicated the importance of the ruler’s proper decorum for the maintenance of an orderly society.

Zang Aibo remonstrated against lord Huan of Lu 魯桓公 (r. 711–694), who violated proper decorum by deciding to place an illicitly obtained cauldron in the ancestral temple. Aibo explained that to perform properly his tasks, the ruler should consistently maintain ceremonial decorum, thereby manifesting his virtue (*de* 德). Thus, the ruler must display a certain public humility, seen as “frugality,” and also show the ritual perquisites and symbols that his rank requires. Aibo emphasized that such things as the ruler’s dress, carriages, banners, horses’ adornments, and so on require certain standards; they are used in appropriate quantities and manifest the ruler’s refinement and symbolic position. The ruler must furthermore employ proper sounds and display astral luminaries 明 to clarify his *de*. Aibo concluded:

Virtue, then, is frugality with standards 度 [of display]. [Ceremonial items] are commissioned and decommissioned in [specified] quantities 數; refinement 文 and symbols 物 regulate [them], and sounds 聲 and illumination 明 transmit [them]. In this way [the ruler] looms over his officials. Therefore, the officials are warned and fear; [they] dare not violate the regulations.²⁵

Zang Aibo’s views were akin to those expressed in the “Yi” ode. The ruler’s proper observance of ceremonial decorum would manifest his vir-

²³ *Shi jing* 18, p. 554 (Mao 256). For more about the Western Zhou concept of the ruler as a model, whom subjects must emulate, see Kim V. Vasil’ev, “Religiozno-magicheskaia interpretatsiia vlasti vana v zapadnochzhouskikh epigraficheskikh tekstakh,” in *Kitai: Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 10–11.

²⁴ For the reliability of the *Zuo zhuan* speeches as sources for Chunqiu intellectual history, see Pines, “Intellectual Change”; see also the modified arguments in *Foundations*, chap. 1, which are that most of the speeches were incorporated into *Zuo zhuan* from its primary sources – narrative histories produced by Chunqiu scribes. Although some of the speeches might have been heavily edited or even invented by the scribes, the evidence suggests that they basically reflect the Chunqiu intellectual milieu and that their content was not significantly distorted by the author (compiler) of *Zuo zhuan*.

²⁵ Yang Bojun, annot., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981; hereafter, *Zuo*) (Huan 2), pp. 86–89. For Zang Xibo’s speech, see *Zuo* (Yin 5), pp. 41–44.

tue, and this in turn would encourage the officials’ proper behavior, thereby promoting orderly rule. Significantly for our discussion, *li* is not mentioned in Zang’s speech, or in other contemporary discussions about the ways to ensure social stability. In the early-Chunqiu speeches *li* referred primarily to interstate etiquette, and, more broadly, to the proper handling of international relations.²⁶ Only by the sixth century, as internal turmoil in major states intensified, attention shifted toward *li* as a possible means to ensure domestic order.

An examination of *Zuo zhuan* shows that the interest of Chunqiu statesmen in *li* increased in direct proportion to the increase in infractions of ceremonial decorum. As thinkers became disillusioned with the possibility that “awe-inspiring ceremonies” ensure social stability, they pondered how to accommodate certain infractions of ceremony without endangering the very foundations of the hierarchic order. It was apparently in this context that Chunqiu thinkers began paying increasing attention to the multifaceted term *li*, which could be used not only with regard to specific ceremonies or rites of a sacrificial nature, but also in the broader context of the principles underlying the normative ritual system. It was reckoned that just as during ritual performances each participant had well-defined functions according to hereditary rank and lineage seniority, so also would social life be ordered by application of the principles of the concept of *li*. Each member of the ruling elite would perform properly the functions assigned to him by rank, leaving little room for the internal strife that plagued late-Chunqiu society. A newly interpreted normative ritual system, therefore, would preserve hierarchy, define tasks and ensure the smooth functioning of the state apparatus.

The eminent Jin 晉 minister Shi Hui 士會 inaugurated such an approach in 597, in a speech enumerating the advantages of Jin’s powerful adversary, king Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613–591):

When the ruler [king Zhuang] promotes [a new appointee], from the inner families he chooses the closest relatives, while from the outer families he chooses [sons of] the oldest [ministerial lineages].²⁷ When promoting

²⁶ For early-Chunqiu attempts to turn *li* into a proxy of international law, and their subsequent failure, see Pines, “The One that Pervades All” in Ancient Chinese Political Thought: Origins of ‘The Great Unity’ Paradigm,” *TP* 86.4–5 (2000), pp. 283–96; idem, *Foundations*, chap. 4.

²⁷ “Inner families” refer to the collateral branches of the ruling lineage; “outer” to other lineages (see Abe Michiko 安倍道子, “Guanyu Chunqiu shidai de Chu wangquan” 關於春秋時代的楚王權, Hubei sheng Chushi yanjiuhui 湖北省楚史研究會, ed., *Chu shi yanjiu zhuanji* 楚史研究專輯 [Wuhan, 1983], p. 250). For more on Chu administration, see Barry B. Blakeley “King, Clan, and Courtier in Ancient Chu,” *AM* 3d ser. 5.2 (1992), pp. 1–40.

he does not ignore virtue, when rewarding he does not ignore merit. He bestows kindness on old [servants] and provides lodging for newcomers. Superior and petty men are distinguished by differences in badge and clothing. Nobles enjoy constant honor, whereas the humble have degrees of authority. In all these, *li* is not violated.²⁸

This was an entirely new approach to ritual. Instead of discussing proper performance of sacrificial rites and court ceremonies, Shi Hui concentrated on administrative policy and Chu social order. A century earlier Zang Aibo had emphasized the difference between the ruler and the ruled; for Shi Hui, the distinction between nobles and commoners was much more important. He praised king Zhuang's adherence to *li* in following a conservative policy of selecting leading officials from either his close relatives or the oldest aristocratic lineages. Thus, the hierarchy among leading families was preserved, and Chu did not witness violent interlineage strife, which characterized the internal life in the state of Jin. Application of ritual principles to administrative policy was, therefore, the proper way to ensure social stability.

Starting in the mid-Chunqiu period, statesmen began applying *li* to a broad range of political activities, such as personnel policy, proper handling of rewards and punishments, and ensuring smooth functioning of the administration in general.²⁹ The ensuing expansion of the word's semantic field brought about a gradual reassessment of its relationship with ceremonial decorum. The *Zuo* speeches of the sixth century BC reflect a bifurcation: the traditional view of *li* as indistinguishable from "awe-inspiring ceremonies," and a radically new one that downgraded the importance of ceremonial decorum and interpreted *li* as a general designation of sociopolitical order.

The traditional view was best articulated in a speech by the Wei 衛 chancellor Beigong Wenzi 北宮文子. In 542, while criticizing the arrogant behavior of *lingyin* Wei 圍 of Chu (the future king Ling 楚靈王; r. 540–529), Beigong explained the importance of ceremonial decorum for social stability:

The *Shi [jing]* says: "Be respectful and mindful of awe-inspiring ceremonies, be a model to the people."³⁰ [...] If you have dignity that inspires awe, that is awe 威; if your ceremonial decorum inspires imitation, that is

ceremonial 儀. [If] the ruler has a ruler's awe-inspiring ceremonies, his ministers are in awe of him and love him, they make a model of him and imitate him, thus he is able to keep his state and his family, and his fame will last for generations. The minister has a minister's awe-inspiring ceremonies, his inferiors are in awe of him and love him; thus he is able to preserve his office, protect his kin and appropriately rule his family. When all the ruled comply with this, the superior and the inferior can fix their mutual positions...

Thus, when a superior man is in office, he can be held in awe; when bestowing favors, he is loved. His entrances and withdrawals can be made a standard 度; his motions can be modeled; his manners are to be observed; his deeds and actions can become a pattern; his virtuous actions can be imitated; his voice and air can become music; his movements contain refined culture 文; his utterances and sayings are ordered. With these [traits] he looms over his inferiors; that is called maintaining awe-inspiring ceremonies.³¹

Beigong Wenzi's speech is for all practical purposes the most explicit statement exemplifying the conservative trend of the late-Chunqiu years. Like many of his contemporaries, he sought a remedy for the growing turmoil and found it in the centuries-old concept of ceremonial decorum: in order to stabilize the mutual position of inferiors and superiors, the latter should adhere to ceremonial rules. Perfect implementation of ceremonies, including nuances such as outer appearance, voice, speech, and so on, should be a model for inferiors – thus would society be united by common behavior and everyone know his proper place. Such an ideal society would not be built on reciprocity between superior and inferior, but rather on imitation. Beigong's conservative manifesto resembles the speech of Zang Aibo a century and a half earlier. However, there is a significant difference. Aibo discussed ceremonial decorum with regard to the ruler, while Beigong Wenzi indicated the importance of a minister's decorum. This apparently reflected the rising position of the late Chunqiu ministerial stratum.

Beigong's concept of the indispensability of ceremonial decorum was shared by several other late-Chunqiu personalities, such as the Zhou minister lord Kang of Liu 劉康公 and the leading Jin statesman Shu Xiang 叔向.³² But the conservative appeal was not ultimately convincing. The ex-

²⁸ *Zuo* (Xuan 12), pp. 724–25.

²⁹ E.g. see *Zuo* (Cheng 3), p. 814; (Cheng 12), p. 858; (Xiang 26), pp. 1120–21; (Xiang 31), p. 1191.

³⁰ "Yi," *Shi jing* 18, p. 554 (Mao 256).

³¹ *Zuo* (Xiang 31), pp. 1193–95. I modify the translation by David C. Schaberg, *A Paternal Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 31–32.

³² See *Zuo* (Cheng 13), pp. 860–61; (Xiang 21), p. 1063; (Zhao 2), p. 1229; (Zhao 5), pp.

pectation that all members of society would follow ceremonial norms was a utopian vision in an age when deep social and political changes rendered many ancient ceremonies obsolete. While most, if not all, Chunqiu statesmen shared Beigong Wenzhi's hopes of restoring hierarchic order and clear delineation between superiors and inferiors, few believed that this could be achieved by advocating outdated ceremonies, a heritage of the long bygone Western Zhou age. Therefore, the most clear-sighted thinkers continued the process of redefining *li* as distinct from the ceremonies; the term referred now to the entire way of governing and was predicated on maintaining social stability. This new broad definition further elucidated the difference between *li* as an articulated, normative system and *yi* – ceremonial decorum. These differences were vividly expressed by a Jin official, Nü Shuqi 女叔齊 (Sima Hou 司馬侯). In 537, the visiting lord Zhao of Lu 魯昭公 (r. 541–510) impressed his host, lord Ping of Jin 晉平公 (r. 557–532), with the precise performance of complicated ceremonies. Nü Shuqi, however, was not impressed:

The lord of Jin told Nü Shuqi: “Is not the lord of Lu good in performing ritual?”

[Nü Shuqi] answered: “Does he really know ritual?”

The lord said: “What do you mean? From the reception ceremony at the outskirts of the capital and to the granting of departure gifts he did not violate ritual – why do you say that he does not know ritual?”

[Nü Shuqi] answered: “These are ceremonies (*yi*); you cannot call this ritual (*li*). By ritual he should protect his state, conduct his administration, and not lose his people. Yet nowadays the administration belongs to [great] families, and he is unable to take it back. He has [a man like] Zijia Ji 子家羈 but is unable to make use of him. He betrays alliances with great powers and tyrannically oppresses small states;³³ benefits from others' difficulties and disregards his own [problems]. The [property] of the lord's house is distributed into four parts.³⁴ The people get their food from others and do not think about their lord, but he does not contemplate his end. This is a ruler who is personally troubled, but he does not

worry about his position. These are the root and branches of the ritual, while fussing over exercising ceremonies is a trivial issue. To say that he is good in ritual – is it not an exaggeration?³⁵

Nü Shuqi's understanding of the essence of *li* differed greatly from that of the early-Chunqiu period in that he distinguished it from ceremonies, the proper performance of which was of little importance. What really mattered was implementation of what Nü Shuqi considered true *li*, namely the proper handling of domestic and foreign affairs, including the ruler's relations with the ruled, managing the balance of power with powerful aristocrats, efficiency of administration, and observance of the norms of interstate intercourse. *Li* thus evolved into an overall pattern of governing, and this meaning clearly overshadowed its ceremonial origins. This interpretation of *li* gained popularity in late Chunqiu discourse.³⁶

By the late-Chunqiu this expansion of *li*'s semantic field and its dissociation from the Zhou ceremonial framework resulted in the emergence of the concept of *li* as the functioning mode of the sociopolitical order as a whole. This view is crystallized by the Qi 齊 statesman Yan Ying 晏嬰. Yan was aware of the new political and social trends that had appeared in the late Chunqiu period and continued well into the Zhanguo age. His native state of Qi suffered from incessant struggles among powerful lineages, which occasionally rebelled against the lord's power as well. Four major lineages were exterminated in the conflicts of 546–532, and one, the Chen 陳 (Tian 田), emerged as the main power-holder, further threatening political and social stability. These events convinced Yan Ying that the only remedy would be the implementation of the most broadly conceived normative ritual system. In 516, in a dialogue with lord Jing 齊景公 (r. 547–490) he expressed fear of the probable Chen ascendancy and proposed a way to stop it:

[Yan Ying said]: “Only ritual (*li*) can prevent [the Chen ascendancy]. According to *li*, the family's favors do not exceed those of the state; the people do not drift; peasants do not move [to new lands], artisans and merchants do not change [their occupation], *shi* 士 do not overflow,³⁷

1266–67; (Zhao 11), pp. 1326–27; (Zhao 15), p. 1374. For more about Shu Xiang's conservative vision, see Yuri Pines, “The Search for Stability: Late Ch'un-ch'iu Thinkers,” *AM* 3d ser. 10.1–2 (1997), pp. 4–13.

³³ In 541 Lu invaded the state of Ju 莒 and seized the town of Yun 郟; this action violated Lu's obligations according to the peace agreement of 546.

³⁴ Earlier the same year three major aristocratic lineages – Jisun 季孫, Mengsun 孟孫, and Shusun 叔孫 – distributed the entire state revenues among themselves, virtually stripping the ruler of his economic power.

³⁵ *Zuo* (Zhao 5), p. 1266.

³⁶ E.g., see similar views expressed by Zi Chan 子產 (*Zuo* [Zhao 16], p. 1377); see also Yan Ying's speech cited later in my discussion.

³⁷ I disagree with Du Yu's 杜預 (222–284 AD) interpretation of *lan* 濫 as “[do not] lose office” (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義 [SSJZS edn.] 52, p. 2115); the context suggests that Yan Ying worried that the *shi* would “overflow” the high-ranking nobles (*dafu* 大夫). Note that Yan Ying himself belonged to the higher segment of the hereditary aristocracy.

officials do not exceed [their responsibilities],³⁸ and the nobles dare not seize the lord's profits."

The lord said: "Good! Yet, I am unable [to implement this]. Henceforth I know that *li* can be [used to govern] the state."

[Yan Ying] replied: "Since time immemorial, *li* has been capable [of use in governing] the state; it exists alongside Heaven and Earth. [When] the ruler commands, ministers are reverent, fathers are kind, sons filial, elder brothers loving, younger [brothers] respectful, husbands harmonious, wives gentle, mothers-in-law kind, daughters-in-law submissive – this is ritual. The ruler commands, and yet does not violate [rules], ministers are reverent and yet not two-faced, fathers are kind and yet educate [their sons], sons are filial and yet remonstrate, elder brothers are loving and amicable, younger brothers respectful and compliant, husbands are harmonious and yet act in proper way, wives are gentle and yet upright, mothers-in-law are kind and broad-hearted, daughters-in-law are submissive and tactful: *li* is best [for managing] affairs."

The lord said: "Good! Henceforth I understand why *li* is elevated."

[Yan Ying] replied: "The former kings received it from Heaven and Earth to rule their people, therefore it was elevated by the former kings."³⁹

Yan Ying's speech is the apotheosis of *li* and the synthesis of the intellectual achievements of his predecessors. The system that he advocated had little if anything to do with ceremonial restrictions or sacrificial rites;⁴⁰ it concentrated entirely on what Yan Ying and many of his contemporaries considered the essence of ritual, namely preserving hierarchic order. Like Beigong Wenzi, Yan Ying searched for a way to prevent social turmoil by upholding social hierarchy. Yet, instead of a simplistic belief in the inferior's blind obedience and imitation of the superior's behavior, Yan Ying suggested a far more elaborate vision of reciprocity. *Li*, according to Yan Ying, would stabilize all social positions, fix hereditary tasks, and thereby prevent potential contest. Furthermore, it would unite the family and the

³⁸ That is to say, officials do not usurp the power of their superiors, especially that of the lord. Again, I disagree with Du Yu's interpretation of *tao* 滔 as "being sluggish 慢."

³⁹ *Zuo* (Zhao 26), p. 1480.

⁴⁰ Note that if *Liji* 禮記 is to be trusted, Yan Ying himself was not a staunch supporter of ceremonial norms; hence he is criticized several times for neglect of ceremonial propriety; see Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jiyi* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996; hereafter, *Liji*) 10 ("Tan Gong, xia 禮弓下"), p. 267; and 14 ("Li qi 禮器"), p. 647. See also *Zuo* (Xiang 18), pp. 1033–34. Besides, the mid-Zhanguo *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 attributes to Yan Ying extremely critical statements concerning ceremonies (see Chen Tao 陳濤, *Yanzi chunqiu yizhu* 晏子春秋譯注 [Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1996] 8 ("Wai pian, xia" 外篇下), sect. 1, p. 367).

state, which, for pre-Confucian times, was a departure in thinking. Yan Ying was also the first known thinker to stipulate a metaphysical justification for *li*: ritual derived from Heaven and Earth.

In several respects, Yan Ying's concept of *li* differs markedly from that of Zhanguo-era Confucians (*ru* 儒),⁴¹ and these differences may serve as a convenient departure point for the discussion of Zhanguo views of *li*. First, Yan Ying sought to preserve not social hierarchy as such, but specifically hereditary hierarchy. Hence he enumerated the low position of the *shi* as one of the major advantages of the ritual system.⁴² Second, the Son of Heaven is conspicuously absent from Yan Ying's speech. Evidently, Yan Ying's patron, lord Jing, would not like being reminded of the ritual superiority of the Zhou monarch, since this would imply that the lord himself must cede sovereignty to the king. Furthermore, Yan Ying did not mention the moral aspects of *li* at all. *Li* as a means for moral self-cultivation, a topic firmly lodged in Zhanguo Confucian discourse, remained irrelevant for Chunqiu thinkers. Later generations of Confucians noticed this difference, but could not understand its reasons. Hence, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 AD) ironically mentioned Yan Ying's promise to prevent the ascendancy of the Chen lineage in Qi and added: "I don't understand how what he called *li* in those times could prevent this. Perhaps he had some recommendation..."⁴³

FROM A POLITICAL TO AN ETHICAL CATEGORY: THE *LI* OF CONFUCIUS

Yan Ying's speech crystallizes the dominant Chunqiu belief in *li* as the best means to preserve hereditary hierarchy. This function of *li* benefited Yan Ying's stratum of high-ranking aristocrats, whose position was thereby assured against the rise of the increasingly assertive *shi*. For the latter, however, preserving the ritual system might have been strongly disadvantageous. And yet the major speaker for the late-Chunqiu *shi*, Confucius, was a staunch adherent of *li*. Confucius not only considered proper ritual order as essential for fulfilling his dream of the Zhou restoration, but also based his personal career on a remarkable ritual expertise. Neither *Lunyu* 論語

⁴¹ Hereafter I refer to the Zhanguo "schools" of thought for purely heuristic purposes; it is not my intention here to discuss whether or not such "schools" existed in reality.

⁴² Yan Ying consistently expressed his dissatisfaction with the ascendancy of the *shi* (see Pines, "Search," p. 28).

⁴³ *Zhuzi yulei* 93, p. 2171.

nor any other Confucius-related Zhanguo text contains anything that might hint at the master's possible reservations about *li*.

Did this adherence to *li* mean that Confucius would be satisfied with the relatively low position assigned to his stratum by ritual regulations? Would he agree with Yan Ying's definition that ritual should prevent *shi* from "overflowing" the nobles? We cannot know of course whether or not Confucius was aware of Yan Ying's views, but it is unlikely that he ignored the negative personal consequences of strict implementation of ritually-based hereditary hierarchy. Confucius' awareness of the possible contradiction between the nature of the ritual system and the aspirations of *shi* might have encouraged him to downgrade hereditary aspects of *li*. Consequently, his *Lunyu* discussions give us a *li* that is primarily ethical rather than sociopolitical.⁴⁴

To be sure, Confucius did not deny the social and political functions of *li*. He evidently shared Yan Ying's conviction that only *li* could stop the disintegration of the political system. Thus, Confucius frequently insisted that the rulers adhere to *li* to encourage the compliance of the ruled, and argued that ritual should regulate ruler-minister relations.⁴⁵ He relentlessly opposed violations of sumptuary norms and usurpations of the superiors' ritual prerogatives by their underlings.⁴⁶ Moreover, he emphatically advocated preserving and strengthening the hierarchy based on the normative ritual system, which meant, unlike in the case of Yan Ying, restoring the political supremacy of the Zhou Son of Heaven.⁴⁷ Confucius' belief in the importance of hierarchic order is implicit in his concept of "rectification of names" (*zheng ming* 正名): "Let the ruler be ruler, the subject be subject, the father be father, the son be son."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See a brief but insightful discussion on Confucius' reinterpretation of *li* by Alexander S. Martynov, "Eshche raz o strukture ofitsial'noi ideologii v imperatorskom Kitae," Proceedings of the 24th Annual Conference "Obshchestvo i Gosudarstvo v Kitae" (Moscow: 1993) 1, pp. 50-53.

⁴⁵ See *Lunyu*, II/3 ("Wei zheng 為政"), p. 12; III/18-19 ("Ba yi 八佾"), p. 30; XIII/4 ("Zi Lu 子路"), p. 135; XIV/41 ("Xian wen 憲問"), p. 158. For more on the political implications of *li*, see IV/13 ("Li ren 里仁"), p. 33. Hereafter and unless specified otherwise, I refer to Zhanguo philosophical texts as if they authentically reflect the vision of their putative author.

⁴⁶ See *Lunyu*, III/1-2, pp. 23-24; III/6, pp. 24-25; III/22, p. 31 ("Ba yi").

⁴⁷ See *Lunyu*, XVI/2 ("Ji shi 季氏"), p. 174.

⁴⁸ *Lunyu*, XII/11 ("Yan Yuan 顏淵"), p. 128; for *zheng ming* see XIII/3 ("Zi Lu"), pp. 133-34, and the discussion in Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 23-25; for Confucius' insistence on clear-cut social distinctions, see also VIII/14 ("Tai Bo 泰伯"), p. 82; XIV/26 ("Xian wen 憲問"), pp. 154-55.

These instances are well known and do not require further discussion. What is more interesting, however, is the relative paucity of Confucius' pronouncements in favor of *li* as the guardian of social hierarchy. In marked contrast to his aristocratic predecessors cited in *Zuo zhuan*, Confucius concentrated on ethical aspects of *li* at the expense of its political functions. Over half of all *Lunyu* uses of *li* refer to ritual exclusively as a means of self-cultivation, self-restriction and proper conduct.⁴⁹ These topics are either nonexistent or marginal in *Zuo zhuan*, and may thus be considered Confucius' major innovation with regard to *li*.

Confucius' preoccupation with *li* as a behavioral code might have derived – like significant portions of his ethical discourse in general – from the conscious effort to develop appropriate conduct for the rising stratum of *shi*. Not surprisingly, such conduct was patterned after that of their superiors, the nobles (*dafu*), who adhered to ceremonial regulations. By emulating the nobles' ritual behavior, *shi* made a strong claim of equality. One who behaved in accord with *li* was becoming a "superior man" (*junzi*), that is, a legitimate member of the ruling elite.⁵⁰

Confucius' ethical reinterpretation of *li* had profound political consequences. Ritual behavior, instead of being an obstacle to *shi* aspirations became essential to their drive toward enhancing social status. Confucius skillfully seized *li* – a major weapon of hereditary aristocrats as represented by Yan Ying – and turned it into an instrument of obliterating the nobles' hereditary privileges. Thus Confucius contributed, even if unconsciously, to the demise of the very social order that *li* was supposed to preserve. His reinterpretation of the pivotal term of Chunqiu discourse concealed, therefore, the seeds of social revolution.

The ethical reinterpretation of *li* had, furthermore, profound consequences for the continuing discourse concerning ritual in the Zhanguo period. In an age when lineage-based political hierarchy was fading away, the normative ritual system largely lost its appeal as the means to preserve social gradation. However, ritual behavior, argued through the expanded concept of *li* and seen as a distinctive feature of "superior men," remained a powerful force distinguishing new elite members from the commoners.

⁴⁹ E.g., I/15 ("Xue er 學而"), p. 9; II/5 ("Wei zheng"), p. 13; VI/27 ("Yong ye 雍也"), p. 63; VIII/8 ("Tai Bo"), p. 81; IX/11 ("Zi han 子罕"), p. 90; XV/18 ("Wei Ling gong 衛靈公"), p. 166; XV/33, p. 169. For more about moral aspects of *li* in the *Lunyu*, see Shun, "Jen and Li"; Chong, "Aesthetic Moral Personality."

⁵⁰ For more on the importance of emulating superiors in Confucian ethical discourse, see William D. Savage, "Archetypes, Model Emulation and the Confucian Gentleman," *Early China* 17 (1992), pp. 1-25.

Thus, *li* continued, albeit in a less explicit way, to contribute to preserving the social hierarchy, and adherence to ritual became part and parcel of *shi* conduct. As discussed below, it was through ethical appeal that *li* perpetuated part of its “emotive force” in the centuries after Confucius’ death.⁵¹

THE DECAY OF RITUAL? ZHANGUO-ERA CRITICS OF LI

In the age of Confucius, adherence to *li* was almost universal, and open attacks on this revered social principle were unthinkable. A century later, however, the situation changed profoundly. The members of the *shi* stratum replaced representatives of the hereditary ministerial lineages at the top of the government apparatus and began dominating intellectual life as well. New generations of thinkers were no longer inclined to conceal negative views of hereditary hierarchy; on the contrary, many of them favored social mobility and rejected earlier status distinctions. Late in the sixth century BC, Yan Ying bitterly criticized lord Jing of Qi for allowing men from the “remote outskirts” to join his administration. A century later Mozi 墨子 (ca. 460–390) considered elevating worthy persons of humble origin as a hallmark of proper rule.⁵² The pedigree-based social order was fading away.

These new conditions challenged the very rationale of the Zhou ritual system. The society of genealogically graded lineages was on the verge of collapse, and it was only natural to expect that the ritual system, which was created by and for the sake of this society, would disappear as well. Of course, many aspects of ritual culture, such as sacrificial rites, for instance, remained intact;⁵³ but some crucial foundations of the ritual system were irreversibly damaged. Perhaps the most explicit manifestation of the formal collapse of the ritual hierarchy was the promotion in 403 of three powerful Jin ministers to the overlord rank by the Zhou king, and the subsequent recognition of the Tian family usurpation in the state of Qi in 386. For the first time in centuries a precedent was created according to which ritual hierarchy could be adjusted at its very top to reflect the real balance of

⁵¹ For the concept of the “emotive force” of *li* in Chunqiu discourse, see Carine Defoort, “Persuasive Definitions” of *li* in the *Zuo zhuan*, paper presented at the Thirteenth Conference of the Warring States Working Group (WSWG), Sept. 1999.

⁵² For Yan Ying’s views, see *Zuo* (Zhao 20), p. 1417; for Mozi’s views, see Wu Yujiang 吳毓江, annot., *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994), “Shang xian” 尚賢, *pian* 8–10, pp. 66–108.

⁵³ For aspects of Zhou ritual culture that were preserved in the Zhanguo age, and for those which were either abandoned or modified, see Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shi* 戰國史 (Shanghai: Renmin, 1998), pp. 269–77.

power. Symbolically, these events, followed in the second half of the fourth century by the usurpation of the royal title by powerful overlords, marked the demise of the Zhou ritual system. Socially, however, even more profound changes occurred at the lowest grades of the ritual hierarchy, as members of the *shi* stratum began appropriating the nobles’ ritual prerogatives. This development in turn severely undermined the *lie ding* system – the hallmark of the Western Zhou ritual reform. The diluted ritual system was no longer an effective means to preserve social stability.⁵⁴

These changes were promptly reflected in Zhanguo discourse. Chunqiu statesmen often violated specific ritual regulations but never questioned the desirability of the ritual system altogether. In the Zhanguo period, however, *li* began losing its paramount position not only in social but also in intellectual life. Even a sketchy overview of major Zhanguo philosophical texts indicates profound changes in views of *li* in that period. In marked distinction to the *Zuo zhuan* speeches, Zhanguo texts prior to the *Xunzi* contain few discussions about the meaning or importance of *li*, which may indicate the relative marginalization of this term in contemporary discourse. Most texts of this age replace *li* with the semantically related term *yi* 義 as a designation of proper behavior and the proper mode of social relations (see the discussion below). Furthermore, in contrast to the Chunqiu process of semantic expansion, the meaning of *li* in many pre-*Xunzi* texts is often contracted to purely ethical issues or rules of social intercourse, while its broad meaning as an overall pattern of social and political life is rarely mentioned. Moreover, again in contrast to the Chunqiu period, a negative attitude toward *li* is visible in many texts of the contending Hundred Schools. These changes signify an overall reappraisal of the role of *li* in social life, and a relative decline of *li*-related discourse.

⁵⁴ The enfeoffment of the heads of the Zhao 趙, Han 韓, and Wei 魏 in 403 by the Zhou king was widely considered in later generations as the manifestation of the formal collapse of the Zhou ritual system. For analyses of Zhanguo ritual decline by traditional scholars, see Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997) 1, pp. 2–6; Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, “Zhou mo fengsu” 周末風俗, in *Ri zhi lu jishi* 日知錄集釋, ed. Huang Rucheng 黃如成 (Changsha: Yuelu, 1994) 13, p. 467. For changes in Zhanguo mortuary practices and the resultant decay of Zhou sumptuary rules, see Falkenhausen, “Mortuary Context”; Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan 湖北省宜昌地區博物館 and Beijing Daxue kaogu xi 北京大學考古系, comps., *Dangyang Zhaojiahu Chu mu* 當陽趙家湖楚墓 (Beijing, Wenwu, 1992), p. 216. These changes did not necessarily derive from the neglect of ritual hierarchy, and some of them were motivated by religious transformation (see Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Sources of Taoism: Reflections on Archaeological Indications of Religious Change in Eastern Zhou China,” *Taoist Resources* 5.2 [1994], pp. 1–12), but their result, even if partly unintentional, was the demise of the *lie ding* system and the Zhou sumptuary hierarchy as a whole (Yin Qun, “Lieding,” pp. 47–49).

Mozi's writings discern all three of the above-mentioned trends. His views of *li* were somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, Mozi's egalitarian beliefs were incompatible with the principle of hereditary hierarchy, while his utilitarianism eventually led him to criticize ceremonial music and lavish burials, a hallmark of ritual culture. Nonetheless, Mozi's probable dissatisfaction with the ritual system did not lead him to attack *li* openly, but rather to avoid mentioning the term. In the work known as *Mozi*, *li* is conspicuously absent from the core chapters that in all likelihood are most closely related to Mozi's genuine thought; it appears only twice in these chapters – far less than any comparable political and ethical term.⁵⁵ Many of the core chapters, such as “Moderation in Burials” (“Jie zang 節葬”) and “Contra Music” (“Fei yue 非樂”), are highly critical of specific ritual activities, and by implication of the ritual system, but they never treat the term *li* negatively.

Mozi's conscious avoidance of the term *li* may reflect a problem for thinkers who shared a negative view of the ritual system but nevertheless refrained from criticizing the notion of *li* in general. *Li*, as a signifier of the social order of the older Zhou ritual system, offered two distinct directions in social thought: not just the Zhou set of ritual regulations, with their overt hereditary connotations, but also the hierarchic order in general. Mozi, like many others, was opposed to the concrete *li* – the normative ritual system – but was not necessarily disapproving of the abstract principles of social order embedded in this term. To avoid possible confusion he preferred abandoning the term *li* altogether; instead he adopted the semantically related term *yi* 義, as the designation of the rules of social intercourse, and of personal behavioral norms.⁵⁶ The semantic field of this term partly overlapped that of *li*: both designated proper behavior. Yet unlike *li*, *yi* was not directly associated with the Zhou ritual rules, and was apparently less hierarchically oriented. This semantic vagueness might have encouraged Mozi and later thinkers to replace *li*, with its burden of Zhou regulations,

⁵⁵ I adopt Wu Yujiang's opinion, according to which the so-called core chapters (8–39) generally represent Mozi's authentic views; “Mozi gepian zhenwei kao” 墨子各篇真偽考 in *Mozi jiaozhu*, pp. 1025–55). In the core chapters, *li* is mentioned once in a slightly positive and once in a slightly negative context (*Mozi jiaozhu*, “Shang tong, zhong” 尚同中, *pian* 12, p. 116; “Jie yong, zhong” 節用中, *pian* 21, p. 255).

⁵⁶ *Yi* was semantically close to *li* and it is likely that this term also originated from sacrificial rites (see William G. Boltz, “The Transmission from Paganry to Ritual Form and the Emergence of Confucian Ethics,” paper presented at the conference Text and Ritual in Early China, Princeton, October 2000). Both terms are often interchangeable, which also implies their semantic similarity (for details, see Alexander S. Martynov, “O dvukh riadakh terminov v kitaiskikh politicheskikh tekstakh,” *Pis'mennoye pamiatniki vostoka [istoriko-filologicheskoe issledovanie]* [1969], pp. 343–54).

with the more flexible *yi*, as the designation of social order and proper personal conduct.

Frequently, the approach to *li* in later Zhanguo texts resembles the ambivalence found in *Mozi*. For instance, the *Shang jun shu* 尚君書 attributed to Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338) criticizes specific rites, ritual regulations, ritual texts, and elaborate ceremonies promulgated by Confucius' followers, the *ru*. Yet this text never attacks the hierarchic principles embedded in the term *li*. Shang Yang skillfully combines philippics against ritual texts and ritual expertise with the notion of ritual's importance and usefulness.⁵⁷

Shang Yang's ambiguity reflects the cleavage between the two dimensions of *li*. On the one hand, he rejected the centuries-old hereditary order. He intended to deal a coup de grace to the Zhou system of inter-lineage hierarchy and to replace it with a new hierarchy based on personal (particularly military) merit. Hence, he rejected old ritual regulations, which served nothing but perpetuation of the *ancien régime*. However, Shang Yang was disinclined to abandon hierarchic principles embedded in the term *li*, hence he reassigned part of the functions of *li* to a term that would serve as the foundation of the social order – law (*fa* 法). The law was supposed to regulate social relations and to provide a framework for personal behavior, just as ritual did. The proximity of the two terms in Shang Yang's thought is indicated by his usage of the term “the law of ritual 禮之法,” which refers vaguely to the essence of the normative ritual system.⁵⁸ Ritual was not neglected, but it had to be modified; indeed, Shang Yang had created what may be designated a new ritual system.⁵⁹ Yet he refrained from employing the term *li* to designate it. Perhaps he felt that *li* was firmly appro-

⁵⁷ *Shang jun shu* frequently treats *li* with explicit contempt, designating it as a “louse” 蝨 and a “symptom of laxity and licentiousness” 淫佚之徵; the state engaged in ritual activities would be either defeated or impoverished. See Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻, annot., *Shang jun shu zhuizhi* 尚君書指指 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), *pian* 3 (“Nong zhan” 農戰), p. 23; *pian* 4 (“Qu qiang” 去疆), pp. 29–30; *pian* 5 (“Shuo min” 說民), p. 35; *pian* 13 (“Jin ling” 新令), p. 80. However, Shang Yang also estimates *li* positively, esp. his claims that *li* is aimed to “benefit undertakings” (*Shang jun shu*, *pian* 1, “Geng fa” 更法, p. 3; see also his assertion of the indispensability of *li* for human society in “Hua ce” 畫策, *pian* 18, p. 107).

⁵⁸ See *Shang jun shu*, “Suan di” 算地, *pian* 6, p. 45.

⁵⁹ For detailed discussion of Shang Yang's reforms, see Leonard S. Perelomov, *Kniga Pravitelia Oblasti Shan (Shang jun shu)* (Moscow: Ladimir, 1993), pp. 59–136. For the new social hierarchy created by Shang Yang, see Li Ling 李零, “Shang jun shu zhong de tudi renkou zhengce yu jue zhi” 尚君書中的土地人口政策與爵制, *Gujī zhengli yu yanjiu* 古籍整理與研究 6 (1991), pp. 26–30. For the reflections of the new structure of social hierarchy in the changing mortuary practices of that period, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Ahnenkult und Grabkult im Staat Qin: Der religiöse Hintergrund der Terrakotta-Armee,” Lothar Ledderose and Adele Schlombs, eds., *Jenseits der Großen Mauer: Der erste Kaiser von Qin und seine Terrakotta-Armee* (München: Bertelsmann Lexikonverlag, 1990), pp. 44–46.

priated by his opponents, the *ru*, who by then established sound hegemony in ritual discourse as specialists in Zhou rites. Shang Yang was evidently unable to dissociate *li* once and for all from its historical relation with the Zhou ritual system.⁶⁰

Both Shang Yang and Mozi rejected old ritual norms but hoped to establish a new hierarchic order; hence their ambiguity with regard to *li*. This ambiguity is absent, however, from the writings of those thinkers who rejected hierarchic society altogether, the so-called Daoists, of whom Zhuangzi 莊子 (d. ca. 280) is the best representative. Although scholars question the authenticity of several *li*-related passages in the *Zhuangzi*, the overall picture of his attitude toward *li* is quite clear: Zhuangzi treats *li* with explicit contempt.⁶¹ Contrary to Confucius and his followers, who regarded *li* as a hallmark of a superior man's behavior, the writings in *Zhuangzi* (and *Laozi*) claim that ritual behavior reflects degradation of the innate morality embedded in the adherence to the True Way. *Li* appears in these texts as either a "husk of loyalty and trustworthiness, the way of calamity", or, at best, "the blossom of the Way and beginning of calamity."⁶² Thus, either as a useless blossom or a disgusting husk, ritual reflected a loss of the Way.

Zhuangzi's opposition to *li* is twofold. First, he is highly critical of the ritual imperative for self-restriction, which was highly revered by Confucius and his followers. Passages in *Zhuangzi* ridicule ritual behavior as artificial norms of petty men.⁶³ More important for our discussion is the second

⁶⁰ Shang Yang remained unique among the so-called Legalist thinkers in his sharp criticism of *li*. Shen Dao 慎到 (fl. late-4th c.) considered *li* along with *fa* as manifestations of "public propriety" (*gong yi* 公義) (see P. M. Thompson, *The Shen Tzu Fragments* [Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1979], "Wei de" 威德, p. 240). Han Feizi 韓非子 (d. 233) mentioned *li*'s function as an instrument of upholding social hierarchy but remained skeptical as to its efficiency (Wang Xianshen 王先慎, comp., *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998], "Jie Lao" 解老 20, pp. 133-34). In *Han Feizi*, *li* mostly refers to polite treatment of others or to behavioral norms of the minister toward the ruler.

⁶¹ For the doubts regarding *li*-related passages of the *Zhuangzi*, see Chen Guying's 陳鼓應 glosses in idem, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994; hereafter, *Zhuangzi*), *pian* 6 ("Da zong shi" 大宗師), pp. 175-76, n. 27; *pian* 13 ("Tian Dao" 天道), pp. 342-43; *pian* 15 ("Shan xing" 繕性), pp. 402-3, n. 5. Criticism of *li* appears also in the *Laozi* (see Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996], sect. 38, p. 5, cited in the epigraph), but its attitude toward *li* is complex. The only unequivocal attack against *li* in the *Laozi*, cited in the epigraph, does not exist in the earliest, Guodian 郭店, version of this text, which may suggest that the passage is of later origin. Recently Chen Guying suggested a radical revision of traditional interpretations of the *Laozi*, arguing that the phrase in question views *li* positively, and that *Laozi*'s views of *li* are compatible with that of Confucius ("Xian Qin Daojia zhi li guan" 先秦道家之禮觀, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 [2000], pp. 2-4).

⁶² For the first saying, see epigraph; for the second, *Zhuangzi*, *pian* 22 ("Zhi bei you" 知北游), pp. 558-59.

⁶³ Zhuangzi argues that ritual behavior deviates from the "constant patterns" of human

dimension of the *Zhuangzi*'s anti-*li* polemics – its categorical rejection of the function of *li* as creator and perpetuator of social divisions. Whereas Confucius promulgated the notion of ritual behavior as a line dividing elite and commoner, the *Zhuangzi* considers this as the major fault of ritual, since ethical norms that divided society between superior and petty men laid the foundation for ongoing strife:

In the age of ultimate virtue, [the people] dwelt together with birds and beasts, were one family with myriad things. How could they know the distinctions between superior and petty men? Uniform in non-understanding, their virtue did not go astray; uniform in non-desiring, this was called plain simplicity; through plain simplicity the people obtained their nature. But then the sages arrived: they considered anxiousness as benevolence and restlessness as propriety, and All-under-Heaven began casting doubts. They considered self-indulgence as music, and fussiness as ritual, and All-under-Heaven began to be divided 分 (*fen*)... Unless the Way and virtue decayed, whence should you take benevolence and propriety; unless you abandoned your natural feelings, how would you use ritual and music? ... Damaging the Way and virtue to create benevolence and propriety is the crime of the sages.

[...] In the age of Mr. Hexu, the people dwelled in not-knowing what to do, and went to not-knowing where to go. They rejoiced filling their stomachs, drummed on their bellies and strolled about. These were their abilities. But then the sages arrived: they twisted ritual and music to straighten All under Heaven, dangled benevolence and propriety to calm the hearts of All-under-Heaven, and then the people began to compete for knowledge and contend for profit, and nobody could stop them. This is also a crime of the sages.⁶⁴

In these passages Zhuangzi goes beyond the usual accusation of *li* as artificial behavior that violates human nature. The adverse impact of *li* is not purely personal; rather it harms society by causing divisions (distinctions) (*fen* 分) between its members. Later Xunzi would hail *li* precisely for preserving the social divisions that were essential for the proper functioning of society. Zhuangzi, however, considered the divisive impact of *li* and separation between superior and petty men not as a remedy to social dis-

nature; it is the conduct of the "vulgar men of our age"; it is opposed to the true 真 way of life bestowed by Heaven; see *Zhuangzi*, *pian* 6 ("Da zong shi"), pp. 193-94; *pian* 8 ("Pian mu" 駢拇), pp. 237-38; *pian* 11 ("Zai you" 在宥), p. 271; *pian* 31 ("Yu fu" 漁父), p. 823-24.

⁶⁴ *Zhuangzi*, *pian* 9 ("Ma ti" 馬蹄), pp. 246-47.

ease but as a malady in itself. Ritual system, with its hierarchic gradations, created deep social cleavages and undermined the primeval harmony; it caused mutual strife, profit-seeking, and disorder. Zhuangzi rejected the very essence of *li* – perpetuating hierarchic social order, which he viewed as the decay, not the advancement of human society. The only thinker to deny political order altogether, Zhuangzi remained the only known Zhanguo philosopher to reject the social value of *li*, and his criticism would remain the most sweeping in later times.

PROTECTING LI: ZHANGUO CONFUCIANS BEFORE XUNZI

The diminishing appeal of *li* reflected in the texts surveyed above backfired on the followers of Confucius, the self-proclaimed guardians of *li*. Several Zhanguo texts contain sarcastic remarks about the useless *ru*, whose ritual expertise were seen as merely a cunning device to achieve emoluments by fooling naïve rulers.⁶⁵ The sarcasm may not be representative of the dominant Zhanguo mood, but its impact cannot be neglected. Xunzi, for instance, had a hard time at the Qin court, when king Zhao 秦昭王 (r. 306–250) blatantly asked him during an audience: “Are *ru* useless to the state?”⁶⁶ The markedly defensive stand adopted by Xunzi in response to the king’s challenge is reflective of the problems faced by the *ru* of his age.

How did the followers of Confucius react to this trend? We may discern two distinct approaches. One, of which Mencius 孟子 (ca. 379–304) may be representative, focused exclusively on moral aspects of *li*, downgrading to a significant extent its social role. Others, particularly those connected with ritual practice, continued to emphasize the social and political value of *li*, although their arguments evidently did not enjoy widespread popularity.

The trend seen in his writings, the *Mencius*, may be indicative of the problems faced by the followers of Confucius who sought to reassert the value of *li* in light of changing sociopolitical circumstances. Mencius could not possibly neglect the explicit contradiction between the Zhou ritual system and the widely approved principles of social mobility and of “elevating the worthy.”⁶⁷ A new type of social hierarchy emerged, and the Zhou

⁶⁵ These attacks against the *ru* appear in the “Contra *ru*” (“*Fei ru*” 非儒) chapter of *Mozi*, and also in *Yanzi chungqiu* (“*Wai pian*, xia” 8, sect. 1, p. 367). See also *Zhuangzi*, *pian* 26 (“*Wai wu*” 外物), p. 709; cf. *Zuo* (Ai 21), p. 1718.

⁶⁶ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, comp., *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992; hereafter, *Xunzi*), *pian* 8 (“*Ru xiao*” 儒效), p. 117.

⁶⁷ This contradiction was expressed by Shen Dao: “In the state, there are rituals of noble

ritual system was only partly applicable in the new conditions; in particular, the formerly strongly pronounced dividing line between the nobles and the *shi* was swiftly disappearing.⁶⁸ As the system lost its vitality, Mencius and his like preferred to focus on *li* primarily as a moral principle, as norms of interpersonal intercourse, but not necessarily as a foundation of social order.

Mencius brought to the extreme the reorientation of *li* from political to ethical discourse, which began in the *Lunyu*. Only once in his book is he cited as saying that “without ritual and propriety (righteousness) superiors and inferiors will be in turmoil,”⁶⁹ but *li* is never assigned the task of stabilizing the sociopolitical order. Except for a few passages which urge rulers to employ *li* to facilitate their rule, Mencius mentions *li* mostly in the context of politeness, appropriate treatment of others, and personal conduct. While Confucius evidently shared Yan Ying’s belief in *li* as the universal regulating force, Mencius might have been more than reluctant on this issue. For Mencius, good rule derived almost exclusively from the ruler’s morality, while adherence to the normative ritual system was apparently of secondary value.⁷⁰

In *Mencius*, *li* even as a moral value is relatively downgraded: it appears to be subordinate to other virtues, particularly to *yi*. Mencius states: “Propriety (righteousness) is the path; ritual is the gate.”⁷¹ And again:

and humble, not rituals of worthy and unworthy; there are rituals of adult and young, not rituals of bravery and cowardice; there are rituals of intimate and distant [relatives], not rituals of the loved and the hated” (Thompson, *Shen Tzu* p. 295). Ritual hierarchy reflected traditional status gradations, not personal merit.

⁶⁸ The diminishing difference between the high-ranking nobles and the lowest stratum of nobility (i.e., the *shi*) is vividly observable from changes in Zhanguo mortuary practices (for which see Falkenhausen, “Mortuary Context”). Textual evidence supports this observation. For instance, *Zuo zhuan* speakers constantly emphasize the rank differences between *shi* and *dafu* and never employ the term “superior man” (*junzi*) in an identifiable *shi* context. In *Mozi*, however, *shi* and *junzi* are used already as basically synonymous, albeit slightly different, terms. In the mid-4th c. BC “*Qu li*” 曲禮 chapter of *Liji*, *shi* and *dafu* similarly appear as closely related ranks. Finally, in some of the later texts, such as parts of *Guanzi* 管子 or the “*Qj yu*” 齊語 chapter of *Guoyu* 國語, *shi* appear to be the standard designation of the ruling elite in general. We may assume therefore, that in the course of Zhanguo history the distinctions between *shi* and *dafu* were largely blurred.

⁶⁹ Yang Bojun, annot. and trans., *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992; hereafter, *Mengzi*) 14 (sect. 12), “*Jin xin, xia*” 盡心下, p. 328.

⁷⁰ The meaning of *li* in *Mencius* is succinctly discussed by Shun Kwong-loi in *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), pp. 52–55. Interestingly, even when Mencius admits the importance of established social norms that should guide personal morality, he designates these as the vague “Way of the former kings” and not as *li* (*Mengzi* 7 [sect. 1], “*Li Lou, shang*” 離婁上, pp. 162–63).

⁷¹ *Mengzi* 10 (sect. 7), “*Wan Zhang, xia*” 萬章下, p. 248.

The essence of benevolence is in serving the parents. The essence of propriety (righteousness) is to follow the elder brother. The essence of wisdom is to understand these two and not to abandon them. The essence of ritual is to moderate and to refine these two.⁷²

Both sayings reflect the relatively low position of *li* in Mencius' thought. Ritual, once the powerful means of social stability, was relegated by this follower of Confucius to a position of a mere "gate" to the path of *yi*. *Li* was to "moderate and refine" the major virtues of benevolence and propriety, but to a significant extent it lost its independent value. Thus the mere comparison of Mencius with *Lunyu* shows a significant decline in ritual's appeal.⁷³

The major innovation of Mencius with regard to *li* was an attempt to turn it into internal virtue, part of the innate good nature of human beings. This internalization of *li* might have been derived from Mencius' attempt to respond to the Daoists' and perhaps also to Mozi's challenge. Confucius, albeit interpreting *li* as primarily an ethical principle, was perfectly aware of the apparent contradiction between ritual demands and human desires, as epitomized in his famous dictum: "Overcome yourself and return to ritual."⁷⁴ Mencius on the contrary stated: "The nature of the superior man is such that benevolence, propriety, wisdom, and ritual are rooted in his mind."⁷⁵ Elsewhere he explained:

Every man possesses the mind of pity and commiseration; every man possesses the mind of shame and aversion; every man possesses the mind of reverence and respect; every man possesses the mind that distinguishes right from wrong. The mind of pity and commiseration is benevolence; the mind of shame and aversion is propriety; the mind of reverence and respect is ritual; the mind of distinguishing right from wrong is wisdom. Benevolence, propriety, ritual and wisdom are not infused in us from without; we definitely possess them.⁷⁶

⁷² *Mengzi* 7 (sect. 27), "Li Lou, shang," p. 183.

⁷³ For more about relations between *yi* and *li* in the *Mengzi*, see Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 56–58; see also Chong, "Li, yi, wen and chih," pp. 82–83.

⁷⁴ This crucial passage is "克己復禮" (*Lunyu*, xii/1 ["Yan Yuan"], p. 123). Interpretation of it had been disputed by commentators from the Han dynasty on, with some suggesting that Confucius did not envision the act of self-restriction (see John Kieschnick, "Analects 12.1 and the Commentarial Tradition," *JASOS* 11.2.4 [1992], pp. 567–76). Yet insofar as the *Lunyu* self-exegesis is concerned, it is highly likely that self-restriction is implied, since Confucius further explains to his disciple that adherence to *li* means not to "look at, listen to, speak or act" in a way that departs from *li*.

⁷⁵ *Mengzi* 13 (sect. 21), "Jin xin, shang" 盡心上, p. 309.

⁷⁶ *Mengzi* 11 (sect. 6), "Gaozi, shang" 告子上, p. 259; see also 3 (sect. 6), "Gongsun Chou, shang" 公孫丑上, p. 80.

In this passage, Mencius responds to Daoists' attacks on *li*, explaining that it is not an artificial but an innate virtue, which is present in the mind of every human being. Yet if *li* is a purely innate mind of reverence and respect, then what is the meaning of the ritual system? Who then needs ritual regulations and minute rites? Should these be considered secondary or even superfluous? Or, alternatively, were they created by the untainted mind of the sages? Mencius refrained from discussing this point, leaving unresolved the issue of how *li*, inner virtue, is related to *li*, ritual system.⁷⁷ What is evident in any case, is that Mencius made relatively few efforts to propagate adherence to the Zhou rites.

The ethical interpretation of *li* and the emphasis on its innate nature is evident not only from Mencius' writings, but also from other contemporaneous Confucian texts, such as those recently discovered in the late-fourth-century BC Guodian 郭店 tomb. These texts generally share Mencius' vision of *li* as primarily an ethical norm, a behavioral pattern, or proper way of human intercourse. Similarly to Mencius, authors of the Guodian texts believe that *li* is an internal virtue, which is "born from the feelings."⁷⁸ Although some of these texts refer to *li* in its broader meaning as established rites or religious ceremonies, they pay little if any attention to its social functions.⁷⁹ We may suggest, therefore, that the Mencian interpretation of *li* reflects a significant trend in mid-Zhanguo Confucian thought.

Mencius' reductionist interpretation of *li* as a primarily ethical term was shared by many followers of Confucius, but it was not unanimously endorsed by the *ru*. Even before Xunzi's efforts to revitalize political *li*, we may already discern several texts that propagate *li* as a foundation of social

⁷⁷ It was Xunzi who noticed this contradiction in *Mencius*, and used it as an additional argument against his opponents' theory (*Xunzi pian* 23 ["Xing e" 性惡], pp. 439–40).

⁷⁸ 禮作於情 (*Guodian Chumu zhujian*, "Xing zi ming chu" 性自命出, slip 18, p. 179; also "Yu cong 諸叢 2," slip 1, p. 203; "Yu cong 1" slip 31, p. 194). Interestingly, in "Xing zi ming chu" *li* occasionally is written with the "heart" radical (slip 23, p. 180), which Pang Pu 龐朴 interprets as the author's attempt to emphasize its "internal" nature (see Pang Pu, "Ren zi yi duan, cong chutu wenxian kan ren zi guwen he ren'ai sixiang" 仁字臆斷從出土文獻看仁字古文和仁愛思想, at <www.bamboosilk.org/Wssf/Pangpu2.htm>).

⁷⁹ See *Guodian*, "Wu xing" 五行, "Zun de yi" 尊德義, "Liu de" 六德, and the rearrangement of these texts by Chen Wei 陳偉, "Guanyu Guodian Chujian Liu de zhupian bianlian de tiaozheng" 關於郭店楚簡六德諸篇編連的調整, Wuhan daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiuyuan 武漢大學中國文化研究院, *Guodian Chujian guoji xueshu yantao hui lunwenji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 64–74. For the analysis of the term *li* in the Guodian texts, see, for instance, Gong Jianping 龔建平, "Guodian Chujian zhong de rujia liyue sixiang shulue" 郭店楚簡中的儒家禮樂思想述略, *ibid.*, pp. 149–54; Peng Lin 彭林, "Shi zhe jin qing, zhong zhe jin yi, Zisi xuepai dui li de lilun quanshi" 始者近情終者近義子思學派對禮的理論詮釋, at <www.bamboosilk.org/Wssf/Penglin6.htm>.

order. Three major reasons may explain why despite the demise of the Zhou ritual system *li* did not completely lose its political appeal. First, as argued above, ever since Confucius, ritual as a code of behavior was a hallmark of *shi* conduct, an inalienable feature of the superior man, a major dividing line between elite and commoner. Enthusiastic supporters of such a code even declared it a dividing line between beasts and humans and/or between savage aliens and refined "Chinese."⁸⁰ These definitions, just like the categorical statement that "ritual does not descend to the commoners,"⁸¹ are certainly rhetorical exaggerations, but they indicate the unique position of *li* as predominantly a feature of the elite. Mastering *li* was a precondition for obtaining elite status, and discarding the proper behavior might have been unthinkable. This may explain the need of many thinkers to reinforce *li* as a mode of personal conduct even during the period of the decline of the ritual system.

Second, an important group of Zhanguo intellectuals had a strong personal interest in perpetuating ritual culture. Many of Confucius' followers made careers as ritual experts. As we have noticed above, while the Zhou ritual system gradually declined, aspects of traditional ritual culture remained intact. Thus, although ritual expertise was less valued late in the Zhanguo than in the early part, no court could entirely discard specialists on sacrificial or mourning rites. Understandably, it was in the direct interest of the *ru* to bolster their position at courts by propagating the importance of pious observances of rituals for the state's well-being.

Third, not every thinker shared the view that the collapse of the Zhou ritual system automatically rendered *li* irrelevant. The Zhanguo period was an age of incessant political and social turmoil that encouraged some thinkers to contemplate the virtues of the early Zhou. Although the number of thinkers who sought to restore the Zhou's glory was continuously dwindling, their impact did not fade away altogether. These thinkers believed that the

⁸⁰ See for instance the following saying: "The parrot can speak, but it does not leave [the category of] flying birds, the orangutan can speak, but it does not leave [the category of] birds and beasts. So, although a man who lacks ritual can speak, his heart is also one of a bird and a beast, is it not?" (*Liji* 1, "Qu li, shang" 曲禮上, pp. 8-11); for further examples see Liu Zehua 劉澤華, *Zhongguo chuandong zhengzhi siwei* 中國傳統政治思維 (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu, 1991), pp. 346-48. For ritual behavior as a dividing line between "Chinese" and "barbarians," see Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans? Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy," in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Mongols, Turks and Others* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

⁸¹ 禮不下庶人 (*Liji* 4, "Qu li, shang," p. 81). For a critical assessment of this passage, see Li Qiqian 李啟謙, "Zai yi li bu xia shu ren, Xing bu shang dafu" 再議禮不下庶人刑不上大夫, *Zhongguo gudaishi luncong* 中國古代史論叢 3 (1981), pp. 126-36. See also a similar statement in *Guodian*, "Zun de yi," slips 31-32, p. 174.

Zhou ritual system would be a valid solution to the current turmoil, and they sought to revitalize and strengthen, rather than dismantle, it.

Taken together, the three above factors provided a background for the creation of texts that promulgated ritual culture and restored the validity of *li* in political and social life. These texts are scattered throughout the ritual compendia created by the *ru*, particularly the *Liji* and *Yili* 儀禮. Furthermore, statements in favor of the social importance of *li* appear in the texts associated with the so-called Jixia 稷下 Academy, for example, *Guanzi* 管子 and *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋. The problematic dating of these texts and of their specific chapters makes it difficult to establish whether or not their views of ritual developed independently or were formed under the influence of Xunzi's thought.⁸² Therefore, to avoid methodological confusion, I concentrate on the text that in all likelihood precedes the *Xunzi*, namely "Qu li 曲禮," a chapter of *Liji* that was compiled in all likelihood in the mid-fourth century BC.⁸³ After several introductory remarks, this chapter begins with a major exaltation of *li*:

Ritual is what fixes the [positions of] relatives and strangers; resolves suspicions and doubts, separates similar from distinct, clarifies true and false. According to ritual, one does not spread rumors about others and does not talk nonsense. According to ritual, one does not transgress regulations, does not offend others, and does not behave impertinently. To rectify oneself and to carry out one's promise are called good behavior. To implement [self-] rectification and to speak about the Way is the essence of ritual. ...

The Way and virtue, benevolence and propriety, cannot be accomplished without ritual. Teaching, admonitions and proper customs cannot be prepared without ritual. Divisions, mutual strife, and litigations cannot be resolved without ritual. [Positions] of ruler and subject, superior and inferior, father and son, elder and younger brother, cannot be fixed without ritual. A pupil serving his master will not achieve intimacy [with the master] without ritual. Arranging people at court, ruling the army, supervising the officials and implementing laws will lack dignity without ritual. Prayers, sacrifices, and offerings to spirits and deities will lack sin-

⁸² For an interesting assertion that ritual specialists of the Jixia Academy preceded and influenced Xunzi, see Sato Masayuki, "Confucian State and Society of Li: A Study on the Political Thought of Xun Zi" (Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2001). Sato's analysis is certainly valuable, but it is difficult to whole-heartedly accept his conclusions before we can unequivocally resolve the issue of the dating of the texts related to the Jixia academy.

⁸³ For the dating of the "Qu li," see Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, "Kyökurei kō" 曲禮考, in *Chūgoku kodai reisei*, pp. 117-63.

cerity and solemnity without ritual. Therefore the superior man is respectful and reverent, modest and restrained, retreating and yielding – to illuminate ritual.⁸⁴

This passage restores *li* to the position of paramount importance it enjoyed during late-Chunqiu. Ritual is viewed as the major regulating force of political, social, religious, family, and private life; it is the most important of the virtues. Ritual allows for smooth functioning of government, and it validates sacrificial activities and stabilizes the social system as a whole. These functions resemble those enumerated in Yan Ying's speech, but there is a difference as well. The "Qu li" authors paid far greater attention to *li* as a norm of self-cultivation, and also placed its function as regulator of family life ahead of its social and political tasks. These introductory remarks resemble the entire structure that follows in "Qu li": first, discussing ritual in private and domestic life, then its role in broader social intercourse, then moving to court activities and then the rules of social and political hierarchy. This order is not fortuitous and may reflect the situation in which ethical functions of *li* became of primary importance, while its political tasks remained secondary.

The "Qu li" and several related texts reflect a complicated strategy of *li*-adherents in the mid-Zhanguo period. Their major task was explicating and reinforcing multiple ritual regulations, thereby perpetuating a ritual culture inherited from the Zhou age. As argued above, the insistence on pious and correct conduct by superior men was in itself a powerful means of solidifying social hierarchy. However, Zhanguo ritualists had further political goals. By reconstructing and sometimes inventing an ancient ritual system, they made a strong claim about what society ought to be, trying thereby to restore the political relevance of antiquity.⁸⁵

The political message in "Qu li" and other chapters of the *Liji* suggests that many *ru* were not going to cede easily the political importance of *li* and confine it to purely ethical aspects, as Mencius and his colleagues did. They continued to view *li* as the means to guard the political order and to preserve social hierarchy. Nonetheless, their theoretical sophistication was not sufficient to withstand attacks by their opponents nor to cope with the

⁸⁴ *Liji* 1, "Qu li, shang," pp. 6–9.

⁸⁵ Thus, Zhanguo chapters of the *Liji* emphasize the ritual superiority of the Son of Heaven. The aim of these passages is certainly not to bolster the position of the shadowy figure of the Zhou king, but rather to suggest an alternative of political (and ritual) unification to the current multi-state system. Zhanguo *ru* joined other thinkers in their attempt to stem political disintegration, and added a ritual dimension to the drive toward unified rule (see Pines, "The One that Pervades All," pp. 298–315).

increasing neglect by rulers and subjects alike of the ceremonies and the codes of conduct based in ritual. Indeed, even the "Qu li" passages cited above lack the clarity and persuasive power we find in the speech of Yan Ying. One of the major problems, one which remained unresolved by Zhanguo ritualists, was the obvious gap between the *li* advocated in their books and the actual demise of the ritual system inherited from the Zhou times. Frequent appeals in *Liji* to the sagacity of former kings who established ritual evidently remained unconvincing.⁸⁶ By the late-Zhanguo period, the authority of the former kings was not unanimously accepted, and in any case conflicting schools of thought sharply differed in their interpretation of the sage kings' legacy. The erosion of the Zhou normative ritual system, which had begun already in the Chunqiu period, resulted by late-Zhanguo in its collapse, and efforts by *ru* were insufficient to reverse the tide.

The failure of Zhanguo ritualists to restore the paramount position of *li* in contemporary discourse may be verified from the analysis of its terminological usage in certain late-Zhanguo texts that may be considered as reflecting broad preimperial intellectual consensus. Of these, the most interesting is the mid-third-century compendium titled *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. This multi-authored text attempts to synthesize major intellectual achievements of the Hundred Schools, and may be considered representative of late-Zhanguo thought.

Li appears altogether sixty-four times in *Lüshi chunqiu*, more than any other ethical category except *yi* 義. This may attest to the relatively high importance of ritual to the authors of the text. A closer reading, however, conveys a different picture. More than half of all the occurrences of *li* are confined to its verbal meaning "to treat somebody politely." In most other occurrences, *li* refers to sacrificial rites or to particular ceremonies. In the entire text – one of the largest preimperial compilations – *li* is never depicted as the pattern of social order. Only once does *Lüshi chunqiu* mention "the great *li*" which is crucial to proper rule, but the meaning of the passage is far from clear and the reference to "the great *li*" in the "Bu guang 不廣" chapter may well be a later interpolation or a misordering of bamboo slips.⁸⁷ In any case, it is clear that *li* completely lost its political relevance for the authors. Similarly, verbal usage of *li* prevails in most other late-Zhanguo texts, such as *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, and most

⁸⁶ For the frequent appeals to the former kings' ritual authority, see, e.g., *Liji* 7, "Tan Gong, shang," p. 182; 8, p. 189; 8, p. 205; 19 "Zengzi wen" 曾子問, p. 532.

⁸⁷ See Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, comp., *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1990) 15, sect. 6, "Bu guang 不廣," p. 918; see also Chen Qiyou's gloss 32 on p. 955.

of *Guanzi*.

The marginal role played by the term *li* in the texts of this time indicates the futility of *ru*-ist efforts to revitalize the concept of *li* as the foundation of the social order. In sharp contrast to the late-Chunqiu intellectual atmosphere, now ritual was seemingly losing its “emotive force,” and its political relevance was frequently doubted. And yet, shortly after the imperial unification, ritual regained its political prominence, and the term *li* was restored to its paramount position in intellectual discourse. This resurrection of *li* is evidently connected to the efforts undertaken by the major late-Zhanguo political thinker – Xunzi.

XUNZI AND THE RESURRECTION OF POLITICAL LI

Xunzi’s position in preimperial intellectual history and his role as an architect of the imperial political culture cannot be adequately dealt with in the present essay. Important for our discussion is Xunzi’s unique role in the contemporary discourse on ritual. He successfully synthesized the achievements of his predecessors in order to create a new theory of *li* – a theory convincing enough to encourage a renewed ritualization in many aspects of life.

Li plays a pivotal role in Xunzi’s thought, one that far overshadows other political and ethical concepts; in regard to it, the compendium of his writings known as *Xunzi* may be compared with the *Zuo zhuan*, although the scope of application of *li* in the *Xunzi* is even broader.⁸⁸ *Li* in the *Xunzi* is a multi-faceted term that refers to political, social, economic, military, ethical, religious, and educational spheres, to mention only a few.⁸⁹ Yet this richness of functions should not obscure the nature of *li* as primarily a sociopolitical term, a regulator of society and the state.

Xunzi’s theory is intrinsically linked with a concept of social and political order. In sharp opposition to Zhuangzi, he suggests that social hierarchy is essential to the well-being of humankind:

Fire and water have energy 氣 but no life. Plants and trees have life, but no awareness. Birds and beasts have awareness, but no sense of propriety (yi 義). Man has energy, life, awareness and moreover a sense of propri-

⁸⁸ This is not the only point of similarity between Xunzi and the *Zuo zhuan*, which may reflect Xunzi’s interest in and absorption of significant aspects of the Chunqiu intellectual legacy. This important topic, however, requires a separate discussion, and will not be dealt with here.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (La Salle: Open Court, 1999), pp. 55–81.

ety; therefore he is the most esteemed in the world. His force cannot be compared to an ox; his speed cannot be compared to a horse; but he makes use of both horses and oxen. Why is it so? I answer: because men are capable of association, while these [animals] are not. How are men capable of association? I answer: through divisions (distinctions) (*fen*). How are they able to implement divisions? I answer: through the sense of propriety. Therefore, when divisions are based on propriety, there is harmony. Harmony results in unity; unity results in plenty of force; plenty of force results in being strong; being strong enables one to subdue things; thereby palaces and houses can be acquired for human dwelling.⁹⁰

Association, namely establishing social organization, is in Xunzi’s view the only way for humankind to fulfill its destiny and to subdue nature. This organization should be based on divisions (*fen*) between members of society. *Fen* became an important term in Zhanguo political theory prior to Xunzi, as evident in such texts as *Zhuangzi*, *Shenzi* 慎子, and *Guanzi*, but it matured in Xunzi’s thought.⁹¹ In the *Xunzi* it has plural meanings such as distribution of goods, division of labor, distinction between right and wrong, and last but not least – social hierarchy. It is due to hierarchic order that human beings differ from the beasts and are able to subdue them. However, social divisions are not natural to human beings: they contradict their inborn greediness and the quest to satisfy limitless desires. To moderate these desires, and to prevent innate human covetousness from ruining society, an external regulatory force is needed. This function is performed by *li*:

Whence did ritual arise? I answer: People are born with desires; if they do not obtain the thing they desire, they cannot but seek it. Seeking without standard measures and dividing lines they cannot but contend; contention leads to turmoil; turmoil leads to poverty. The former kings hated this turmoil, and hence established norms of ritual and propriety to divide [the people], to nourish human desires and to grant what humans seek. This caused desires not to be deprived of the things, and things not to be depleted by the desires. The two support each other and grow: this is whence ritual arises.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Xunzi*, *pian* 9 (“Wang zhi” 王制), pp. 164–65.

⁹¹ For detailed discussion of the pre-Xunzi evolution of the concept of *fen* and its usage in the *Xunzi*, see Sato Masayuki, “The Development of Pre-Qin Conceptual Terms and Their Incorporation into Xunzi’s Thought,” in Jan A. M. de Meyer and Peter M. Engelfriet, eds., *Linked Faiths: Essays on Chinese Religions and Traditional Culture in Honor of Kristofer Schipper* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 27–31.

⁹² *Xunzi*, *pian* 19 (“Li lun” 禮論), p. 346. Modifying Goldin’s translation, *Rituals of the Way*, p. 68.

We shall not focus here on the issue of what Xunzi thought the origins of *li* to be. For the present discussion what is important is that ritual was created to enforce divisions on humankind and to enable it to enjoy limited resources without sinking into endless contention. But how does ritual achieve this task? Xunzi explains:

Ritual means that there should be ranks of noble and humble, differences between old and young, a balance of poverty and wealth, light and heavy. Hence, the Son of Heaven wears the crimson dragon robe with ceremonial cap, overlords wear the black robe with ceremonial cap, nobles wear a lesser robe with its cap, *shi* wear a white leather hat with their clothes. One's virtue must match his position; one's position must match his emoluments; one's emoluments must match his usefulness. From *shi* upwards all must be moderated through ritual and music; the commoners and the "hundred clans" must be restricted through law and methods [of rule].⁹³

This passage suggests a twofold impact of ritual on social life. First, ritual-based hierarchic rules determine the degrees of consumption appropriate to each social stratum thereby preventing contention for limited resources. These sumptuary rules allow ritual to become a major economic force that regulates expenses, responding thereby to Mozi's appeal to "moderate consumption 節用."⁹⁴ Elsewhere Xunzi further explains that ritual assigns each member of society his task, clarifying his rights and duties and allowing for the smooth functioning of the social order:

Rulers and subjects, superiors and inferiors, noble and humble, old and young down to commoners – all should consider this [ritual] as the pinnacle of rectitude. Then they should examine themselves within and devote attention to their duties (*fen* 分) – this is an identical [feature of] the reigns of the hundred kings, this is the axis of ritual and law. Subsequently, farmers would divide (*fen*) their fields and till them, merchants would divide (*fen*) commodities and trade them, craftsmen would divide (*fen*) tasks and encourage [each other], *shi* and nobles would divide (*fen*) offices and listen [to problems], rulers of the overlord states would divide (*fen*) territory and protect it, the Three Dukes would collect [the data] from all directions and deliberate upon it – then the Son of Heaven may simply respect himself and stop [acting]. With everything inside and outside acting like this, All-under-Heaven is utterly balanced and equalized, everything is ruled and managed – this is an identical [feature of] the reigns of the

hundred kings; these are the great divisions (*fen*) of ritual and law.⁹⁵

This passage curiously resembles Yan Ying's speech pronounced two-and-a-half centuries earlier. It conveys a sense of somewhat naïve hope for society as a perfect mechanism in which each person knows his proper place, his allotment (*fen*), and acts in accord with the duties assigned to him by ritual. This ideal social mechanism would allow the supreme ruler – the Son of Heaven – to dwell in blessed non-action (*wu wei* 無為).⁹⁶ It is through ensuring social divisions that ritual fulfils its task as a supreme regulator of social order. Thus, minute regulations – including the revered Zhou ritual system – are nothing but manifestations of the basic principles of an ultimate ritual, principles that remain unchanged throughout the dynasties and that are essential to any organized society. In this passage, Xunzi completes a centuries-long process of distilling the essence of *li* from the Zhou ritual system. Henceforth, particular rites could be – and would be – modified, but *li* would retain forever its paramount social role as the universal regulator.

Let us return, however, to the last sentence of the earlier passage. Aside from assigning each one his task and moderating social contention, ritual according to Xunzi further contributes to social stability through its ethical function. As ritual restrains personal desires and limits relentless profit-seeking, it encourages superior men to follow the way of modesty and yielding and to refrain from competition. This educational impact of ritual is limited, however, only to the superior men; the commoners, who lack ritual education and cannot impose self-restriction should be regulated by laws. Xunzi did not discard the major Legalist innovation – *fa* – but limited its applicability to the lower social strata. Law is important, but it should be complementary and subordinate to ritual. Lives of the elite should be regulated exclusively by *li*.

Xunzi therefore imbued ethical aspects of *li* with sociopolitical functions. Yet social implications of ritual behavior in Xunzi's thought were not confined to moderation in consumption. Xunzi went one step further than his predecessors, suggesting the conversion of ritual behavior from a de facto into a de jure qualifier of elite status. In a pivotal passages he states:

Although a man is the descendant of kings, lords, *shi*, and nobles, if he does not observe the norms of ritual and propriety, he must be relegated to the status of commoner; although he is a descendant of a commoner, if

⁹⁵ Xunzi, *pian* 7 ("Wang ba" 王霸), pp. 220–21.

⁹⁶ For the ideal of the ruler's non-action as the symbol of the perfect rule in different schools of thought, see Liu Zehua, *Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi siwei*, pp. 119–53.

⁹³ Xunzi, *pian* 10 ("Fu guo" 富國), p. 178.

⁹⁴ For parallels between Mozi's and Xunzi's views, see Sato, "Development," pp. 20–27.

he accumulates learning of the texts, rectifies his behavior, and is able to observe the norms of ritual and propriety – then he must be elevated to the rank of high ministers, *shi*, and nobles.⁹⁷

This passage marks the gap between Xunzi and Yan Ying and other Chunqiu thinkers. The latter hoped to implement ritual norms in order to prevent undesired social mobility. For Xunzi, on the contrary, ritual-based behavior should replace pedigree as the sole criterion of social status. Xunzi successfully merged ethical and sociopolitical functions of *li*, envisioning to a significant extent the future imperial social structure. Only he who behaves according to *li* is allowed to ascend the social ladder; and as all members of the upper strata would by definition become adherents of *li*, ritual would regulate elite life. Thus, ritual-based behavior was no longer a personal matter, as implied by Mencius, but became a cornerstone of social order.

Xunzi's successful combination of political and ethical aspects of *li* explains the unprecedented importance he assigns to ritual as the means of self-cultivation. Xunzi ceaselessly reiterates that the superior man is only he who "accumulated ritual and propriety," that the worthy would do nothing that deviates from ritual norms, and that a life without ritual is not a true life.⁹⁸ Of particular importance for Xunzi is ritual education. He unequivocally states that ritual is the pinnacle of learning:

Where does learning start? Where does it end? I answer: its method is to start with reciting the classics, and to end with reading ritual [texts]; its purpose 義 is to start with becoming a *shi* and to end with becoming a sage. Genuinely accumulating [knowledge] and forcefully persisting, you should enter [the gate of learning]. Learning continues until death and stops only then. Thus, though the method of learning has its end, its purpose cannot be abandoned even for an instant. One who pursues it is a man; one who abandons it is beast and bird.

Thus, the [*Book of Documents*] records government affairs; the [*Book of Songs*] is where the proper sounds stop; the [*Record of Rites*] embeds great divisions of the law; it is the guiding principle of morality. Therefore learning reaches ritual and stops there. This is called the ridgepole of Way and virtue.⁹⁹

Ritual thus exceeds all other aspects of education; it is the major goal of the

⁹⁷ *Xunzi, pian* 9 ("Wang zhi"), pp. 148–49.

⁹⁸ See respectively, *Xunzi, pian* 8 ("Ru xiao" 儒效), p. 144; *pian* 27 ("Da lue" 大略), p. 513; *pian* 2 ("Xiu shen" 修身), p. 23.

⁹⁹ *Xunzi, pian* 1 ("Quan xue" 勸學), pp. 12–13.

learning process – the final stop. Elsewhere Xunzi explains that he who exalts ritual, "though he may lack clear understanding, would still be a model *shi*."¹⁰⁰ Ritual is also the ontological criterion for truth, as "words that do not harmonize with those of former kings and do not comply with ritual and propriety are called licentious words."¹⁰¹ Hence, "a superior man who is acquainted with ritual cannot be fooled by deceit and fraud."¹⁰² Ritual is not only the supreme criterion for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, but is also the ultimate standard according to which all human actions are to be measured. Xunzi states:

As the plumb-line is the perfection of straightness, the balance is the perfection of equalness, the compass and the square are the perfection of square and roundness, so ritual is the ridgepole of the human Way. Those who neither model themselves after ritual, nor are satisfied with ritual, are called people without rules; those who model themselves after ritual and are satisfied with ritual are called *shi* who have rules.¹⁰³

Ritual therefore becomes the sole criterion of proper behavior, the supreme and immutable standard of correctness. But Xunzi still is not satisfied, and further promotes ritual, to supramundane importance:

Through it [ritual], heaven and earth are harmonized, the sun and moon shine, four seasons are ordered, the stars and constellations move in their courses, rivers flow, the myriad things prosper, liking and disliking are moderated, joy and anger occur appropriately. Being applied to inferiors it makes them obedient, being applied to superiors it makes them clear-sighted; myriad transformations are not disordered. One who deviates [from its course] would collapse. Is not ritual really perfect?¹⁰⁴

In this and other passages *li* achieves a cosmic dimension, becoming the terminological counterpart of the True Way – *dao*. Just like *dao* in the *Laozi*, ritual in the *Xunzi* is the supreme truth; the unique force applicable at the cosmic, social and individual level, the One that Pervades All.¹⁰⁵ At its highest level ritual is treated as an unchanging, unifying force of the universe. Xunzi's panegyrics of *li* surpass those of Yan Ying or of the "Qu li" authors, and are not matched by any other contemporary text.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ *Xunzi, pian* 5 ("Fei xiang" 非相), p. 83.

¹⁰² *Xunzi, pian* 19 ("Li lun"), p. 356.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁰⁵ For "ritual," Xunzi actually employs a phrase semantically close to "the One that Pervades the All," namely, "the One that Pervades the Way 道貫" (see *Xunzi, pian* 17 ["Tian lun" 天論], p. 318).

¹⁰⁶ Xunzi's panegyrics to *li* are closely paralleled by a speech recorded in *Zuo Zhuan* and

Xunzi's theory of ritual may be considered the single most important contribution of this outstanding thinker to imperial political culture. He successfully synthesized the achievements of his predecessors and added new dimensions to the ongoing discourse of ritual. First, he blended two major strands of *li*, which were by then largely separated – *li* as a sociopolitical force, the basis of social hierarchy, and *li* as ethical imperative, the mode of proper conduct. Second, Xunzi finally dissociated *li* from its ties to the Zhou ritual system. By distilling its pure essence – hierarchic social divisions – Xunzi established *li* as the “common thread” of the reign of the Hundred Kings, in other words the basic functioning principle of organized society throughout history. Third, Xunzi turned *li* into the supreme criterion of truth, establishing it as the solid foundation of intellectual social order, which could adequately replace the evasive and much disputed term, *dao*. Finally, Xunzi by far surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries by assigning *li* multiple tasks in the life of the state, ranking from economics to warfare, turning it into “One that Pervades All” to an extent unthinkable even to Yan Ying.¹⁰⁷

Xunzi's ideas had little impact on late-Zhanguo thought, but he triumphed *post mortem* soon after the imperial unification, particularly with the ascendancy of the Han dynasty 漢 (206 BC – 220 AD). While the ritualization of the early Chinese empire was a complicated process deserving separate study, it is worth noting the paramount role played by Xunzi and his intellectual successors in this process.¹⁰⁸ Their ideas of ritual, as the foundation of hierarchic social order, on the one hand, and as the behavioral code of the elite, on the other, became the cornerstone of Han and later imperial political culture. As the Zhou world faded, the new ritual system and ritual-based sociopolitical order emerged. Henceforth specific rites were to be altered and modified in accord with social and political changes, but the adherence to ritual as the guiding political, social, and ethical principle remained intact. Xunzi's vision was fulfilled.

attributed to the Zheng statesman Zi Taishu 子大叔 (Zhao 25), pp. 1457–59. This speech is definitely of much later origin than the bulk of the *Zuo* text, and it might have been interpolated by a person with strong ideological affiliations with Xunzi (for details, see Pines, “Intellectual Change,” pp. 129–32).

¹⁰⁷ See Goldin, *Rituals*.

¹⁰⁸ For the relatively negligible impact of Xunzi on late-Zhanguo thought, see Ma Jigao 馬積高, *Xunxue yuanshi* 荀學源流 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 179–92; for his importance in the Han period, see *ibid.*, pp. 193–216; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1988) 1, pp. 36–49.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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| <i>CHAC</i> | Loewe and Shaughnessy, eds., <i>The Cambridge History of Ancient China</i> |
| <i>Liji</i> | Sun Xidan 孫希旦, annot., <i>Liji jijie</i> 禮記集解 |
| <i>Mengzi</i> | Yang Bojun, annot. and trans., <i>Mengzi yizhu</i> 孟子譯注 |
| <i>Xunzi</i> | Wang Xianqian 王先謙, comp., <i>Xunzi jijie</i> 荀子集解 |
| <i>Zhuangzi</i> | Chen Guying 陳鼓應, <i>Zhuangzi jinzhuyin</i> 莊子今注今譯 |
| <i>Zuo</i> | Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, annot., <i>Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu</i> 春秋左傳注 |