

DIVINATION AND DEVIATION:
THE PROBLEM OF PREDICTION AND PERSONAL FREEDOM
IN EARLY CHINA

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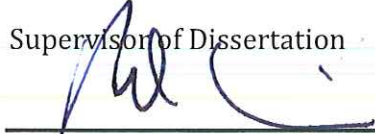
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To my dear daughter Pia

and all my beloved family

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ABSTRACT

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The question I address in my dissertation relates to the conundrum of the prediction of fate in early China. How did the early Chinese people predict the future, and to what degree did they believe that the predicted future is inevitable? I examine the history of divination from the Shang to the Han dynasties to show that the belief in the power of anthropomorphic spirits weakened, and the universe was gradually conceived of as working in regular cycles. The decreasing reliance on the power of spirits during the Shang period is reflected in changes in bone divination. And divination texts from the Warring States period come to describe the movements of spirits as being completely regulated by cosmic cycles. This changed conception of the universe contributed to the formation of the idea of a predetermined fate. My analysis of various philosophical literature of the Warring States period shows how the meaning of the term *ming* changed from unpredictable

events caused by superior powers to a predictable yet unalterable course of life. As a consequence of this changed meaning, Han dynasty scholars needed to address the problem of personal freedom. I show that while philosophers like Wang Chong argued for what is probably the most extreme case of fatalism in early China, many other thinkers of the time chose to believe that while there is a predetermined course of life for everyone, the course is always subject to change depending on circumstances.

The conclusion I draw from these analyses is that the idea of a completely predetermined fate did not gain wide acceptance in early China because strong fatalism conflicted with popular divination practices. Even though many acknowledged that people are born with a predetermined fate, they opted to believe that their fates could still change. Thus, various divination techniques available at the time could help them evade predicted misfortune.

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Introduction

My dissertation examines the prediction of fate and deviations from that predicted fate in early China. Specifically, how did the early Chinese people predict the future, and, if they had confidence in the accuracy of such forecasts, to what degree did they believe that the predicted future was inevitable? Put differently, how free did the early Chinese people think they were to shape their own future? I examine the history of divination from the Shang to the Han dynasties to highlight changes in the conceptions of the universe and the future. Then I analyze philosophical discourses on fate in the Warring States and Han periods (475 BCE – 220 CE) to assess how thinkers tried to address the problem of personal freedom while acknowledging the existence of predetermined fate.

In the Shang period, it is likely that there was no concept of fixed and inevitable fate. As Ning Chen argued, the “Shang amoral, polytheistic system, as such, could hardly generate belief in an impersonal, irrational and unapproachable force.”¹ In other words, for the people of Shang, there were always some ways to change the course of the future revealed through divination, whether by sacrifice or some other means.

Sources dating from the late Warring States and early Han, however, contain

¹ Chen, “The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China,” 151.

many stories in which an individual is predicted to meet calamities from the very beginning of his or her life, and, despite all efforts to avoid that fate, the prediction turns out to be true in the end.² I argue that this change in the perception of fate is related to changes in the conception of the universe. Gradually, some people started to perceive the universe as operating in predictable cycles rather than run by capricious anthropomorphic deities, and as the conviction in the validity of these cycles grew stronger, the course of a person's life came to be seen as more and more predictable. In general, early Chinese divination shows decreasing dependence on the power of spirits and growing reliance on cosmic cycles.

The body of scholarship on early Chinese divination has grown considerably in recent decades, mainly as a result of excavated materials. Thanks to the archaeological discoveries in the 20th century, we now have greater knowledge of various forms of divination that were practiced during the Warring States and Han periods. These include traditionally known methods like turtle shell and yarrow divination, but also lesser-known methods such as those by cosmic boards (*shi* 式), daybooks (*rishu* 日書), and other forms of charts and diagrams.

Naturally, the earliest scholarship on these newly discovered materials focused on identifying how the divination actually worked. My understanding of bone divination relies heavily on the works of David Keightley, and to a lesser extent on those of Zhang Bingquan and Qiu Xigui;³ in addition, works by Jao Tsung-I, Liu

² For a collection of examples of such cases in early China, see Hsu, "The Concept of Predetermination and Fate in the Han."

³ E.g. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*; Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, "Lun chengtao buci"; Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, "An Examination of Whether the Charges in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Are Questions."

Tseung-kuei, Mu-chou Poo, and Ethan Harkness have all helped me understand the principles behind various sections of daybooks.⁴ Also, Donald Harper, Christopher Cullen, Li Ling, and Marc Kalinowski have provided great insights on the use of *shi* boards.⁵ I make reference to their works and others when I analyze the implications of these various divination techniques.

On the basis of this previous scholarship, I compare the rationale behind various techniques to show how divination changed over time. In this sense, my dissertation stands in line with Michael Loewe's "China," which analyzed three types of popular divination in early China, namely by turtle-shell, yarrow, and geomancy, and identified a "general tendency for spontaneous and intuitive divination to be overtaken by processes of regularisation or standardisation, or by intellectual advances."⁶ Even though this article did not discuss any of the newly discovered divination methods,⁷ Loewe's observation about the standardization of divination remains valid. Had Loewe discussed the daybooks in his article, he would have

⁴ Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤 and Zeng Xiantong 曾憲通, *Yunmeng Qinjian rishu yanjiu*; Liu, "Taboos: An Aspect of Belief in the Qin and Han"; Poo, "How to Steer through Life"; Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian."

⁵ Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board (Shih 式)"; Cullen, "Some Further Points on the 'Shih'"; Li Ling 李零, "'Shi' yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi"; Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*."

⁶ Loewe, "China," 40. Although it is focused only on the change from bone divination to yarrow divination, Léon Vandermeersch has also argued for a process of "rationalization" in early Chinese divination. Vandermeersch, "De la tortue à l'achillée." His arguments will be more thoroughly discussed in the first chapter.

⁷ Even though this paper was published six years after the first discovery of daybook manuscripts from Shuihudi 睡虎地, in Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei 湖北 province in 1975, Loewe may not have had access to the Shuihudi daybooks when he was writing "China." A full survey of the daybooks by Zeng Xiantong and Jao Tsung-I comes out only a year after Loewe's work. Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤 and Zeng Xiantong 曾憲通, *Yunmeng Qinjian rishu yanjiu*. For Loewe, it is only in 1994 that he publishes an article on daybooks. Loewe, "The Almanacs (Jih-Shu) from Shui-Hu-Ti: A Preliminary Survey."

found that daybooks corroborate his argument about standardization of divination. More recently, Anna-Alexandra Fodde-Reguer has also argued that daybooks “standardize knowledge for capable readers... [and] mark a crucial departure from ancient China (c. 1600-c. 300 B.C.E.), when divination authority was invested in privileged individuals, whose skills were monopolized by the wealthy and powerful.”⁸

The emphasis of my dissertation, however, is not just that divination became standardized, but that the process of standardization of divination was deeply associated with the changes in understanding of the universe. Divination in the Shang period could be intuitive because it was essentially an interpretation of the intents of spirits. What these spirits planned to do in the future was revealed only to a few who either communicated with spirits through rituals and sacrifices or used specially prepared divinatory objects such as oracle bones. But with the new forms of divination that appeared in the Warring States period, anyone could make predictions about the future, as the efficacy relied on cosmic cycles, the knowledge of which was theoretically open to everyone. In other words, this process of standardization is only one aspect of the changes in divination during the time.

So far, however, there has not been another work like Loewe’s, which attempted to define a general trend in early Chinese divination. Several scholars have presented more comprehensive accounts of early Chinese divination, covering various excavated materials, but their approaches are different from that of Loewe.

⁸ Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy,” 1.

For example, Li Ling's *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中国方术考 is a monumental work with remarkable insights into almost all forms of divination in early China.⁹ But this book does not include a concluding chapter in which he could have presented a broader narrative of early Chinese divination. Thus, despite its immense value, the book appears to be a collection of works on individual divination methods rather than a monograph on early Chinese divination as a whole.

In the West, Lisa Raphals' most recent book, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Greece* presents an excellent survey of both early Chinese and Greek divination, but since her primary goal is a comparison between the two cultures, she inevitably tries to present a coherent and diachronically stable portrayal of the social and intellectual background of divination in early China.¹⁰ The goal of my dissertation is almost exactly the opposite: I try to emphasize how the social and intellectual implications of divination in the Han dynasty *differed* from those in the Neolithic period.

In the sense that my dissertation suggests the diminishing power of spirits in early China, it may be in line with Michael Puett's *To Become a God*. Although Puett does not discuss divination of the Warring States period, his argument that "visions of a purely spontaneous cosmos, in which natural phenomena are not under the power of spirits arose very late in the Warring States period" is in line with my view.¹¹ Where we differ is in the description of the changes associated with the

⁹ Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*.

¹⁰ Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*.

¹¹ Puett, *To Become a God*, 3.

appearance of this new vision. Focusing on the analysis of various Warring States texts, Puett argues that people were trying to become spirits themselves, but my analysis of contemporary mantic texts shows how spirits became subjected to the cosmic cycles. People came to predict the future on the basis of the spirits' behavioral patterns.

The changes in the way people predicted the future necessarily implies changing views about the future and fate. Some scholars have already discussed the problem of human autonomy in early China with reference to the newly excavated divination texts. Notably, Mu-chou Poo has described how some sections of daybooks may have strong fatalistic implications.¹² But elsewhere, he has argued that the general implication of daybooks is that human beings can be in control of their own fates even though daybooks imply a predetermined world in which the course of the future is a known fact. In his words, human beings "can still move freely within the fixed structure, as in playing a game of chess according to the rules."¹³ Raphals has expressed a similar view, claiming that "excavated mantic texts and prognostication records show ongoing interest in the management of personal fate."¹⁴ Their research, however, is usually tied to specific texts or specific times, and thus, they do not capture the changing understandings of fate reflected in early Chinese divination. A comparative analysis of various divination texts reveals how the diviners came to think of fate and the future as more and more predictable.

¹² Poo, "How to Steer through Life."

¹³ Poo, "Popular Religion in Pre-Imperial China," 237.

¹⁴ Raphals, "Divination and Autonomy," 219.

The list of scholars who have worked on fate in early China includes many different names. Notably, Ning Chen has published several articles on the emergence of the notion of fate in early China, focusing on the time frame between the Shang and the early Warring States periods.¹⁵ Several other scholars have focused on the use of the word *ming* in the Confucian tradition and explained how the concept fits into the large scheme of the Confucian teachings.¹⁶ And more recently, scholars like Franklin Perkins and Youngsun Back have discussed the concept of fate in early China by focusing on how the people of the time dealt with apparent injustice in the world.¹⁷

My approach to the problem of fate differs in that I am not interested in how the early Chinese people explained the unfairness of the world they lived in, but in how they explained the possibility of freedom when they already believed that fate is predetermined. My analysis shows that China indeed had a theory that comes close to complete determinism, and the problem of personal freedom was a real philosophical issue that Han-dynasty thinkers needed to address.

Some forty years ago, Cho-yun Hsu wrote an article about the concept of predetermination in the Han dynasty, in which he collected various tales surrounding personal fate from early Chinese sources.¹⁸ He also explained how

¹⁵ E.g. Chen, "The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China"; Chen, "The Concept of Fate in Mencius"; Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (Ming)."

¹⁶ E.g. Goldin, *Confucianism*; Slingerland, "The Conception of Ming in Early Confucian Thought"; Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*.

¹⁷ Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane*; Back, "Handling Fate."

¹⁸ Hsu, "The Concept of Predetermination and Fate in the Han."

some Han-dynasty scholars responded to the notion of fixed fate with the idea that there are different kinds of *ming*, but he did not present a coherent narrative that connects the diverse representations of fate shown in Han sources. My research elucidates many of the issues that Hsu left unexplained and presents a more vivid image of the discourse on the concept of predetermined fate in the Han dynasty.

Overall, my dissertation approaches the problem of fate and personal freedom from three different perspectives, namely, changes in the methods of divination, the elaboration of cosmology, and philosophical discussions surrounding *ming*.

In the first chapter, I discuss the changes in oracle-bone and yarrow divination, which are the oldest forms of divination known in China, and argue that the changes in the divination methods reflect a changing relationship between diviners and spirits. More specifically, I describe the changes in oracle-bone inscriptions and the way in which the bones were prepared to show that Shang diviners grew more confident in their powers to command the world and ultimately come to think that what made divination effective was not the power of spirits but the power of the implement of divination. The turtle shells and yarrow themselves were regarded as having the power to predict the future.

In the second chapter, I explain an increasing reliance on cosmic cycles as the basis of future predictions in the Warring States period. First, through an analysis of divination records in *Zuozhuan*, I show that there is no evidence of future predictions based on cycles in the Spring and Autumn period. But a fourth century

BCE text, the Chu Silk Manuscript, clearly presents a universe that works in cycles. In the text, each phase of a natural cycle is depicted as governed by an anthropomorphic spirit. And this relationship between cycles and spirits becomes reversed in subsequent periods, as divination manuals from the late Warring States and Han periods represented anthropomorphic spirits as moving in accordance with precise natural cycles.

In the third chapter, I show how the view that the universe operates in patterns, rather than as directed by anthropomorphic spirits, contributed to the emergence of the notion of predetermined fate. I analyze various philosophical texts of the time, including *Mozi*, *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Lüshi Chunqiu*, and discuss their use of *ming*. This analysis will show how the term *ming* changed from denoting unpredictable events caused by superior powers to denoting a predictable yet unalterable course of life.

In the final chapter, I show how Han thinkers tried to explain the possibility of personal freedom even after acknowledging that everyone is born with a predetermined fate. On one hand, I show how philosophers like Wang Chong argued that we have very little room to exercise our freedom, as he believed that our fate is completely fixed at birth. But many other thinkers of the time chose to believe that, while there is a predetermined course of life for everyone, the course is always subject to change depending on circumstances. This belief can be seen in the discussions of the three kinds of *ming*.

I show how the difference in the perception of personal freedom is related to

different attitudes toward divination. While both sides believe that the future is predictable, Wang Chong is more critical to various divination techniques of the time as he believes that one cannot change one's future by consulting these techniques. On the other hand, people who believe that the future is still subject to change can allow that various divination techniques can help a person to make the better of his/her own future.

The conclusion to be drawn from these analyses is that the concept of predetermined fate emerged and strengthened as the universe was seen as operating according to its inherent patterns. But the idea of a completely predetermined fate, which would practically nullify the purpose of predicting the future, did not gain wide acceptance. It was not that no one argued for such strong fatalism in early China, but many people opted to believe that the course of the future could still deviate from its originally planned path. The concept of the three kinds of *ming* provided a theoretical ground for this weaker version of predetermination. And thus, people could still rely on various techniques of future prediction to escape from misfortune lurking in various points of their lives.

Diminishing Power of Spirits in Divination – From Oracle Bone to Yarrow

In this chapter, I examine the two oldest methods of divination in China, namely bone divination *bu* 卜¹⁹ and yarrow divination *shi* 筮,²⁰ and discuss how their history reveals changes in diviners' attitude toward spirits. More than forty years ago, Léon Vandermeersch discussed the same issue but explained the changes in divination from “turtle to yarrow” as a process of rationalization.²¹ While many of his observations are insightful, I do not agree with his ultimate claim that the changes were a process of “rationalization.” It is not an “evolution,” and yarrow divination is certainly not at an “extreme end of divination” (p.51). Those who

¹⁹ The origin of bone divination in China goes back to no earlier than the Yangshao culture (c. 5000 – 3000 BCE) and no later than the Longshan culture (c. 3000 – 2000 BCE). Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Jiaguwen de faxian yu gubu xiguan de kaozheng,” 842. By the time of the late Longshan 龍山 culture, the practice was wide spread all over the central plains. Park Jaebok 朴載福, “Guanyu buyong jiagu qiyuan zhi tantao,” 21. For what may be the earliest pieces of evidence, a scorched ovine scapula was found at Xiawanggang 下王崗 site in Henan 河南 province, which is dated to be around 4000 BCE, and a few other scorched bones were also discovered at Fujiamen 傅家门 site in Gansu 甘肅 province. Excavation reports identify these bones as oracle bones. E.g. Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo changjiang liuyi guizhao bangongshi kaogudui Henan fendui 河南省文物研究所長江流域規劃辦公室考古隊河南分隊, *Xichuan Xiawanggang*, 200 fig. 53.8.; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo ganqing gongzuodui 中國社會科學院考古研究所甘青工作隊, “Gansu Wushan Fujiamen Shiqian Wenhua Yizhi Faju Jianbao,” 293, 295–96.

²⁰ The origin of yarrow divination will be discussed in detail in section 3, but some scholars claim that yarrow divination existed no later than the time of the King Wuding 武丁 of the Shang dynasty, or roughly around 13th century BCE. Zhang and Liu, “Some Observations about Milfoil Divination Based on Shang and Zhou Bagua Numerical Symbols,” 50.

²¹ Vandermeersch, “De la tortue à l’achillée.”

performed yarrow divination in the Han dynasty were not acting any more rationally than the diviners who performed bone divination in the Shang dynasty. Rather, the changes were in diviners' understanding of the source of the divinatory power. In short, I argue that the origin of yarrow divination lies in bone divination, and the change from bone to yarrow divination reflects a process in which spirits were deemed less and less powerful ultimately to a point in which they were regarded powerless. And in its place, the diviners came to believe that it was the tool of divination, i.e. bone or yarrow, that heeded their questions and requests.²² Through this change, diviners came to practically own the divinatory power that once belonged only to spirits.

1. Oracle bone and yarrow – the divinatory power of the divination tool

To emphasize just how much bone and yarrow divination in general changed through time, it is helpful to start by highlighting the most obvious difference between the two methods of divination. Yarrow divination as we know presupposes a cosmos that operates according to its inherent patterns, whereas bone divination presumes a universe in which willful spirits exercise their power on human beings.

Chinese bone divination, at the most fundamental level, requires diviners to

²² David Keightley uses the phrase “divination medium” to refer to oracle bones. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 10–11, 124. But to avoid the risk of confusion with the use of the word medium in reference to diviners, I refer to the bones as “divination tool.”

apply heat to animal bones and interpret the signs produced in the process.²³ It is not certain where this practice comes from, but it has been suggested that in the beginning, people who made sacrifices inspected the burnt marks in the bones of the victim to tell whether the spirit accepted the sacrifice or not. In other words, bone divination derives from a belief that bones of the sacrificed victims can convey messages from the spirits who received sacrifices.²⁴ In this regard, bone divination is essentially a form of communication with spirits.²⁵

On the other hand, if we read the manual for performing yarrow divination given in “Xicizhuan” 繫辭傳 (Commentaries on the Appended Statements), we see no such immediate reference to spirits or sacrifices.

大衍之數五十，其用四十有九。分而為二以象兩，掛一以象三，揲之以四以象四時，歸奇於扚以象閏。五歲再閏，故再扚而後掛。²⁶

The Number of the “Great Expansion” is 50, and 49 of them are used. Divide [the 49 stalks] into two to symbolize the pair, and stick one [between fingers] to symbolize the triad. Count [the stalks] by four to symbolize the four seasons, and keep the remainders between fingers to symbolize leap months. There are two leap months in five years, so keep

²³ For a detailed account of these procedures during the Shang dynasty, see Keightley, 12–27.

²⁴ Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, “In izen no ketsuen soshiki to shūkyō,” 256; Vandermeersch, “De la tortue à l’achillée,” 38; Loewe, “China,” 43.

²⁵ In precise contrast to this observation, Youngsun Back argues that “Shang divination was not a form of communication between human beings and spirits.” Back, “Who Answered the Shang Diviner?” 2. This observation, however, is about Shang divination, which is already quite different from how bone divination was practiced in the Longshan culture. There is room to argue that Shang divination is no longer a genuine communication, but this does not deny that bone divination was originally a “communication with the dead.” Keightley, “Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors,” 788–91. As David Keightley argued, “The possibility that it was the ancestors who were thought to make the *bu* 卜-shaped cracks in the bones seems, accordingly, to be strong.” (p.91) See also Keightley, “Art, Ancestors, and the Origins of Writing in China,” 72.

²⁶ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 328–30.

the remainders between fingers twice and then draw [a line of a hexagram.]

The exact basis of designating 50 as the initial number of divination is obscure, but it is closely related to the number 55, “the number of Heaven and Earth.”²⁷ Starting from the number that represents the universe, one divides and counts the stalks with other numbers representing various processes of the nature. Every step described here symbolizes a pattern in nature. A diviner must repeat above process six times to derive a hexagram.

What is noteworthy in this manual is that the entire process hardly presumes presence of spirits. On the contrary, it presupposes a universe that operates according to its patterns.²⁸ This makes yarrow divination distinct from bone divination. The diviner does not seek to communicate with spirits but obtains results by mimicking the natural processes of the universe.

Despite such apparent difference, however, many works of early Chinese literature regard these two methods as complementary and claim that they were often performed side by side.²⁹ Their close relationship was corroborated with

²⁷ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 331. “The Number of Heaven and Earth” *tiandizhishu* 天地之數 is derived from assigning odd numbers between one and ten to Heaven and even numbers to Earth. The sum of each five numbers, 25 and 30, represent the number of Heaven and Earth respectively, and the sum of the two numbers is the Number of Heaven and Earth. Some scholars argue that the Number of the Great Expansion should have been 55 as well but were corrupted during the transmission. E.g. Jin Jingfang 金景芳 and Lü Shaogang 吕绍纲, *Zhouyi quanjie*, 485–86; Chen Enlin 陈恩林 and Guo Shouxin 郭守信, “Guanyu Zhouyi ‘dayan zhi shu’ de wenti.” Many traditional commentators, however, tried to deduce the number 50 from 55 through various symbolic calculations. For a brief overview, see Nielsen, *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology*, 39–43.

²⁸ This is in line with the basic claim of the entire “Xicizhuan,” which is that *Yijing* is a replica of the natural processes, and that we can understand these processes by studying *Yijing*. Peterson, “Making Connections,” 85ff.; Puett, *To Become a God*, 188–96.

²⁹ E.g. *Erya zhushu*, 762–66; *Shangshu zhengyi*, 371–77; *Liji zhengyi*, 109; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 353–54.

discoveries of oracle bones with “number sets,”³⁰ as well as Warring States divination records containing results of both bone and yarrow divination.³¹

How could two divination methods that presuppose completely different worlds—one that is run by willful spirits and another run by natural patterns—be considered as a pair? Some scholars suggest a theoretical similarity between the two methods. For example, Li Ling categorizes these two methods as one type of divination and explains that their origin lies in an ancient custom of communicating with Heaven through the medium of “animal spirits” or “plant spirits.”³² Sources like the “Guice liezhuan” 龜策列傳 (The Biography of Turtles and Yarrow) chapter of *Shiji*, in which turtles and yarrows are described as having spiritual power, support his claim.

龜千歲乃遊蓮葉之上，蓍百莖共一根。又其所生，獸無虎狼，草無毒螫。³³

When a turtle lives for a thousand years, it swims above lotus leaves, and hundred stems of yarrow shares one root. And where these live, there are

³⁰ Number sets are the ancestral form of received hexagrams. (See section 3). The most striking example of this type is the piece number 02ZQIIA3H90:79 discovered from the Zhouyuan site. Three cases of divination were inscribed on this piece, and every inscription were accompanied with a number hexagram. See Cao Wei 曹玮, “Zhouyuan xinchu Xizhou jiaguwen yanjiu.” For a recent overview of general scholarship on number sets, see Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 251–70; Wang Huaping 王化平, “Shuzigua yu Zhouyi.”

³¹ For example, divinatory records from the tomb no.2 at Baoshan 包山 site, dated to be performed on 318-316 BCE, show how diviners repeated divination on same issues using both bone and yarrow methods. See Feng Hua 冯华, “Baoshan Chujian chengtao bushici zhong de ‘xibu’ yanjiu,” 7–9. The identification of these methods is based on the similarity of the language used between the Baoshan records and oracle bone inscriptions, and whether the particular case includes hexagrams as divination results. In general, the records that include hexagrams are regarded as records of yarrow divination, and those that are without as records of bone divination. Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 280.

³² Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 57.

³³ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5083, 5084.

no animals like tigers or wolves and no poisonous insects in the grass.

Liu Xiang (劉向, 77 – 6 BCE) also tells a similar tale.

龜千歲而靈，蓍百年而神，以其長久，故能辯吉凶也”³⁴

Turtles become numinous after a thousand years, and yarrow becomes divine after a hundred years. It is because of their longevity that they can discern fortune and misfortune.

However, some problems are immediately noticeable in this explanation.

First, they refer only to yarrow and turtles when we know that bones and shells of various other species were also used for divination for millennia before turtles were first used in the Shang dynasty.³⁵ If it was the longevity of these creatures that justified their divinatory power, how could have bones of other animals—such as cattle—with shorter lifespan serve as divination tools? Apparently, Han dynasty thinkers believed they could not have.

乾草枯骨，眾多非一，獨以灼龜何？此天地之間壽考之物，故問之也。

龜之為言久也。蓍之為言耆也。久長意也。³⁶

There are many kinds of dried weeds and bones and not just one, but why is it that we only scorch turtles? It is because they are creatures of longevity between Heaven and Earth. Therefore, we ask them. The word for turtle *gui* [means] longtime *jiu*, and the word for yarrow *shi* [means] old *qi*.³⁷ The meaning is being old and long living.

³⁴ *Liji zhengyi*, 104. See also n.33

³⁵ They were mostly bovid scapulae, but bones of other animals such as pigs and deer were also used. Park Jaebok 朴載福, “Guanyu buyong jiagu qiyuan zhi tantao.” also n.19 above. For the use of turtle shells in the Shang dynasty see, Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 6–11.

³⁶ Chen li 陳立, *Baihutong shuzheng*, 329. See also *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 999.

³⁷ These meanings are given on the basis of phonetic resemblance. According to Baxter and Sagart’s

In this passage, the divinatory power of turtles is explained precisely at the expense of other bones that were no longer used as a divination tool. The more serious problem with this explanation, however, is that they portray turtle shells and yarrow as having their own power. If bone divination really started as an inspection of burnt bones after sacrifices, it means that the first diviners regarded these bones as capable of conveying messages from spirits by virtue of being from a victim offered to those spirits. In other words, the divinatory power of the bones comes from the power of spirits and not the bones themselves. But by the Han dynasty, this original context was completely lost.

If we are to believe that such descriptions are a genuine reflection of the diviners' attitude in bone divination during the Han dynasty, there can be only one conclusion: there was a change in the way bone divination was understood when the oracle bones changed from bones of various animal to exclusively turtle shells. There is an interesting remark in “Guice liezhuan” that is related to this issue.

略聞夏、殷欲卜者，乃取蓍龜。已則棄去之。以為龜藏則不靈，蓍久則不神。至周室之卜官，常寶藏蓍龜。³⁸

I have vaguely heard that in the Xia and Shang dynasties, those who wanted to divine took turtles and yarrow, and after divination was finished, they threw it away. They believed that turtles are not numinous when stored, and yarrow is not divine when kept long. [But] when it came to the office of divination in the Zhou court, they always treasured

reconstruction of Old Chinese, *gui* (turtle) was pronounced *[k]^wə while *jiu* (longtime) was pronounced *[k]^wəʔ. *Shi* (yarrow) was pronounced *s-kij, while *qi* (old) was pronounced *[g]rij. Baxter and Sagart, “Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese Reconstruction, Version 1.1,” 38, 57, 86, 99.

³⁸ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5081.

and kept turtles and yarrow.

Obviously, this story is not an authentic account of the history of bone divination. For one thing, it assumes that turtle shells have always been the only divination tool. However, the unmistakable point in this story is that there was a change in the perceived degree of spiritual power of the turtle shells and yarrow. Before the Zhou, the divinatory power of the oracle bones was conceived as temporary, but eventually, it came to retain power that did not disappear with time. This means that the oracle bones were conceived as having power that is not contingent upon the power of another spirit, and a diviner could use a single turtle shell repeatedly for various divinations.

During the Shang dynasty, there was a change in the way bones were prepared, and it enabled the diviners to keep and reuse a bone or a shell for multiple occasions. The written inscriptions also testify that a single bone or shell was used for different divinations on different dates.³⁹ However, the very act of using a single bone or a shell repeatedly over multiple occasions imply a break in the immediate relationship between divination and sacrifice, the original source from which bones acquired their divinatory power in the first place. By using a bone that is precisely prepared for divination, and over multiple occasions, the diviners were acknowledging that the bones possessed their own divinatory power. The divinatory power of an oracle bone no longer relied on its direct relationship with a

³⁹ Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, "Yinxu bugui zhi buzhaoli ji qi youguan wenti," 228; Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, "Yindai 'xibu' he youguan zhanbu zhidu de yanjiu." This was made possible through the invention of hollows, which will be discussed more in detail below.

particular sacrifice.

This break in the direct relationship between divination and sacrifice is most conspicuous in the very choice of using a turtle shell as a divination tool. Unlike all other animals whose bones were used for divination, turtles were never offered in sacrifices.⁴⁰ Furthermore, most turtle shells used for divination during the Shang were not local products, but were imported from other areas, especially the south.⁴¹ In other words, turtles were chosen as a divination tool despite limited resource and lack of connection with sacrifice. In this way, turtle shells stand in direct contrast with other bones.

Some scholars argue that turtles were chosen as a divination tool because of their resemblance to the cosmos. The round carapace and flat bottom is reminiscent of the traditional Chinese cosmology of “round Heaven and square Earth” theory.⁴² Whether this type of thought was extant already in the Shang dynasty is difficult to prove, but it seems safe to believe that turtles indeed held some special meaning among early Chinese people in general.⁴³ Turtle is the only animal that we know of, after whose shape late Shang people casted a bronzeware.⁴⁴ And turtle shells found

⁴⁰ Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 59. Li Ling also notes that turtles were never particularly popular as a source of food, either.

⁴¹ Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, “Yindai bugui zhi lai yuan”; Song Zhenhao 宋镇豪, “Zaitan Yinxu buyong jiagu de lai yuan.”

⁴² Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*, 103–11; Vandermeersch, “De la torute à l’achillée,” 40–41. For a critique on Allan’s theory on turtles, see Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 93–96.

⁴³ Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, “In izen no ketsuen soshiki to shūkyō,” 257. Itō mentions how turtles are depicted in the contemporary jade ornaments and pottery vessels and suggests that turtles may have been already deemed as having some kind of magical power and were chosen as a divination tool because of that power.

⁴⁴ Lee Min-young 李旼玲, “Jakchaekbandongwon Myeongmun Yeongu 作冊般銅龜 銘文 研究,” 36. This

inside the tombs of Dawenkou (c. 4100 – 2600 BCE) sites also suggest that turtles were somehow deemed special already in the prehistoric times.⁴⁵ Then it may not be too outrageous to think that turtle shells derived their divinatory power from some other source than the spirits who received sacrifices.

The only problem with this explanation is, however, that the same explanation cannot be applied to yarrow divination. First, the belief in the divinatory power of yarrow, comparable to that of the turtle shells, is not as easy to testify as that of the turtles. In “Xicizhuan,” there are two instances where the spiritual power of yarrow is mentioned: once the virtue of yarrow is described as “round and divine” 圓而神, and another time it is said that there is nothing greater than turtles and yarrow for determining fortune and misfortune.⁴⁶ Yet, strangely enough, the tool that connects the diviner to the universe in the actual manual for the divination is not yarrow but numbers.⁴⁷ Technically, one can fulfill all the symbolic requirements of the divination with fifty sticks of any material.

This problem could be resolved if we consider the fact that yarrow divination as practiced in the Shang and the Western Zhou period was probably very different

object was obtained by the Chinese National Museum in 2003. It is in the form of a turtle hit with arrows. Lee further notes that while there are some other bronze vessels from the Western Zhou period that is in shapes of other animals, Zuoce Ban is unique in that it is not in a form of a vessel but in the proper shape of the animal.

⁴⁵ Gao Guangren 高广仁 and Shao Wangping 邵望平, “Zhongguo shiqian shidai de guiling yu quansheng.”

⁴⁶ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 337, 341.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Vandermeersch does not mention the spiritual significance of yarrow at all in his discussions. His analysis is entirely focused on “numeral symbols.” Vandermeersch, “De la tortue à l’achillée,” 46–50. See also Wang Huaping 王化平, “Shuzigua liangdian sikao.”

from what we know through “Xicizhuan.” The method included in “Xicizhuan” is attested only by the 1st century CE at the earliest,⁴⁸ and an excavated manuscript of “Xicizhuan” from a 2nd century BCE tomb at Mawangdui 馬王堆 site lacks this manual altogether.⁴⁹ More importantly, number sets recorded in oracle bones and other materials contain numbers that cannot be derived from this manual.⁵⁰ If these number sets were indeed derived from yarrow divination as they are generally believed to be,⁵¹ the method that produced these hexagrams may have relied on the power of yarrow.

A recently looted and published manuscript called “Jingjue” 荊決 (The Judgement of Vitex) could be read as evidence for this hypothesis. The “Jingjue” manuscript does not exactly show a divination method that can produce number sets found on oracle bones, but as I will analyze in detail in section 3, it shows characteristics that would belong to earlier yarrow type divination methods. Most notably “Jingjue” does not provide any cosmological justifications for the numbers employed, but argue for the superiority of the method and the divination tool, the vitex.

⁴⁸ *Lunheng*, of which the compilation date can be more or less firmly fixed to the 1st century CE, contains a citation of this manual. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 1001. For scholarly reference to date and authenticity of *Lunheng* see Pokora and Loewe, “Lun heng,” 309–12.

⁴⁹ Shaughnessy, *I Ching*, 187–212. This manuscript still contains the passages on the spirituality of yarrow.

⁵⁰ Shaughnessy, “Shi shifa haishi shifa,” 31.

⁵¹ I will discuss this matter in detail in section 3, but for the generally accepted understanding of the relationship between number sets and yarrow divination see Zhang Zhenglang’s seminal work, Chang, “An Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions on Early Chou Bronzes.”

Nevertheless, even if we are to believe that the original yarrow divination really relied on the divinatory power of yarrow, why Shang people would have ever come to think of yarrow or any other plants to have such powers is still a mystery. As discussed above, the idiosyncrasy of turtle shells in comparison to other bones can be shown with much evidence, and its introduction in bone divination can be smoothly explained in the context of its millennia old history. The same cannot be said of yarrow. Therefore, if plant stalks were ever regarded as having the same kind of spiritual power as turtle shells, it must have been after turtle shells were widely used and such power of the divination tool was already taken for granted.

One noteworthy fact is that the period from which the first number sets are discovered is roughly the same period when turtles became a popular choice for a divination tool. Then, there is reason to suspect that the introduction of yarrow as a divination tool is related to the significant change in bone divination. The abrupt appearance of yarrow in the history of Chinese divination can only be explained in relation to the changes in bone divination.

2. Changes in bone divination

2.1. Material changes

Exactly when turtle shells completely replaced other bones is uncertain, but at least during the Shang dynasty, animal scapulae were used just as much as turtle

shells, if not more.⁵² The period in which excavated turtle shells first outnumber other bones is the so-called People's Park period (ca. 13th century BCE), right before the beginning the late Shang dynasty.⁵³ Then, turtle shells were heavily favored during King Wuding's (武丁, late 13th century BCE) reign as well and at the very end of the dynasty, but for some periods in between, the situation was the reverse.⁵⁴

However, the periods in which the number of excavated turtle shells was less than others may not necessarily mean that its popularity was somehow compromised. As most of the turtles used during the Shang were imported from other regions,⁵⁵ some periods may have suffered supply issues. Furthermore, as Keightley suggests, "The fact that the diviners of the Royal Family group [in the late Shang dynasty] showed a preference for shell suggests that they may have valued plastrons and carapaces more than scapulas as a divination tool."⁵⁶

There is also evidence that turtle shells were treated differently from other bones during the Shang and the Western Zhou period. Excavations in Zhouyuan 周原, the old capital of the Zhou house before its conquest over the Shang, revealed a pile of oracle bones that consisted mostly of turtle plastrons.⁵⁷ Li Xueqin compares

⁵² See n.19 and n.35 above.

⁵³ *Zhengzhou Erligang* 鄭州二里岡, 38; Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 8 n.25. For the periodization of the People's Park period in relation to the late Shang dynasty at Yinxu, see Zhu Guanghua 朱光华, "Huanbei Shangcheng yu Xiaotun Yinxu," 34.

⁵⁴ For more information on the ratio between shells and bones in the late Shang periods, see Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 162–64; Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, "In izen no ketsuen soshiki to shūkyō," 251–52 T.3.

⁵⁵ See n.41 above.

⁵⁶ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 10.

⁵⁷ E.g. Wang Yuxin 王宇信, *Xizhou jiagu tanlun*, 159; Xu Xitai 徐錫臺, *Zhouyuan jiaguwen zongshu*, 149.

this discovery with the pit YH129 discovered in the Xiaotun 小屯 area in the old capital of Shang, from which about seventeen thousand turtle shells were found with only eight bovid scapulae, and concludes that turtle shells and other bones were stored separately during the time.⁵⁸

What should be noted, however, is that the rising popularity of turtle shells as a divination tool is only a part of the changes in bone divination during the Shang dynasty. During this period, there were other significant changes that showed how the method was being gradually separated from its original association with sacrifices.

One of the most significant changes in its history other than the introduction of turtle shells is the appearance of hollows.⁵⁹ In the early stage of bone divination, bones were used in their natural state. Animal scapulae excavated from the earliest layer of Chengziya 城子崖 site, which dates back to the Longshan period, shows no hollows or other signs of treatments done to the bones.⁶⁰ “This primitive, free-form scapulimancy continued to be practiced at least the early Shang.”⁶¹

But in the Shang dynasty, instead of burning a whole piece of bone or shell directly into fire, diviners prepared multiple hollows to which they could apply heat

⁵⁸ Li Xueqin 李学勤, “Xizhou jiagu de jidian yanjiu,” 9. And according to Li, we simply have not found other piles from the Zhou sites that contain other bones.

⁵⁹ In Lisa Raphals’s account, making these hollows in oracle bones was one of the three distinctive innovations of the Shang diviners. The other two are: introduction of turtle shells, and the use of written records. Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*, 129.

⁶⁰ Liu Yuanlin 劉淵臨, “Bugu de gongzhi zhishu yanjin guocheng zhi tantao,” 100–101.

⁶¹ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 123. See also Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, “In izen no ketsuen soshiki to shūkyō,” 257.

and produce cracks.⁶² In the late Shang period, the number of these hollows often reached dozens if not more than a hundred, and one oracle bone could be used as many times as the number of the available hollows.⁶³

The original motive for boring such hollows may not have been groundbreaking. In the beginning, the practice of preparing hollows—along with applying other treatments to oracle bones such as sawing, chopping, grinding, and polishing⁶⁴—may have derived from the desire to facilitate the divination process.⁶⁵ Grinding bones and boring hollows made bones thinner and thus easier to crack.⁶⁶

Yet, one of the most significant effect of these hollows was that, as mentioned above, it separated divination from sacrifice. A bone used for divination is no longer a bone that became particularly associated with a certain spirit through sacrifice, but one that is made for the specific purpose of divination. A bone, at this point, is regarded as having divinatory power of its own that was not directly bestowed upon

⁶² Liu Yuanlin 劉淵臨, “Bugu de gongzhi zhishu yanjin guocheng zhi tantao,” 110–12 Table 1.

⁶³ For example, Keightley notes that the turtle plastron on p.184 in *Yinwu wenzi bingpan* has 174 hollows. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 25.

⁶⁴ For information on oracle bones’ preparatory procedures, see Keightley, 12–15; Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Jiaguwen de faxian yu gubu xiguan de kaozheng,” 853f.

⁶⁵ Vandermeersch, “De la tortue à l’achillée,” 39. Vandermeersch even claims that this is indubitable. He suggests that hollows were first carved into oracle bones in order to “facilitate the execution” and to meet the growing demands for divination, but it resulted in the greater legibility of cracks.

⁶⁶ Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Jiaguwen de faxian yu gubu xiguan de kaozheng,” 854f.; Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 18. There is no doubt that the shape of hollows is deeply related to the thickness of the material, which implies that they were indeed prepared for the convenience of producing cracks. However, according to Keightley’s retelling of a few modern attempts to reenact the ancient bone divination, it seems that these preparations require great deal of effort, and producing a crack through a hollow is by no means easier or faster than burning a whole piece of bone. He tells that Takashima Kenichi 高嶋謙一 eventually gave up trying to produce a crack through a hollow and threw the bone directly into the fire. Also it took Zhang Guangyuan 張光遠 roughly thirty minutes to create one “double hollow” with a knife, and another half-hour to produce a crack with incenses. Keightley, 21f. n.93.

by spirits.⁶⁷

But aside from separating divination from sacrifice, there is another way that hollows served as a channel of changing relationship between diviners and spirits. If it was indeed the spirits who produced cracks on oracle bones, then through these hollows, Shang diviners came to control the way the spirits responded to them. At least, spirits had no longer the control of the location and the general shape of the cracks. And by the late Shang period, the shape of cracks that appeared on the opposite side of the hollows became essentially uniform: a short horizontal line attached to a longer vertical line, i.e. the shape of the *bu* 卜 character meaning bone divination.⁶⁸

The way hollows allowed Shang diviners to control the shape of cracks is twofold. First is by adjusting the heating point on a hollow. During the mid-Shang period, diviners started to apply heat not directly into the hollows but on their sides, thus creating a *bu* shaped crack.⁶⁹ The more effective way, however, was to control the shape of hollows, so that it would inevitably lead to the desire shape.

During the People's Park period, in which turtle shells first outnumber other

⁶⁷ Vandermeersch also notes the importance of the introduction of hollows, but his interpretation is extreme. He argues that since oracle bones are separated from their immediate relationship with the spirits that was once made through sacrifices, the source of their divinatory power was no longer the "transcendent divine will" but an "immanent dynamism" of the cosmos. According to him, this change marks the point of "rationalization" in the history of bone divination. Vandermeersch, "De la tortue à l'achillée," 38f.

⁶⁸ Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, "Jiaguwen de faxian yu gubu xiguan de kaozheng," 854. As Zhang notes hollows "had the effect of not only making the cracks appear more easily, but also of controlling the shape of the cracks."

⁶⁹ Park Jaebok 朴載福, "Sang junggi gabgol ui teugjing gwa geu hyeongseong gwajeong gochal," 10. Park's illustration of various styles of hollows and their relative heating points during the mid-Shang period is especially helpful in understanding the changes.

bones, the so-called double hollows make their first appearance.⁷⁰ These double hollows consist of a shallower round or oblong hollow connected to a deeper longer one, and due to the difference in their depth, the vertical line always cracks first and the horizontal line cracks slightly afterward. And because of the first crack, the second horizontal crack can never be formed separately from the first crack but must be attached to the vertical crack.⁷¹

Why would the diviners wanted to control the shape of cracks? The most intuitive answer would be that they wanted to control the answers of the spirits, so that they could induce favorable results.⁷² However, just as it took centuries for turtle shells to become the only divination tool, there is a gap of about two centuries between the standardization of crack shapes and that of prognostications. It is not until the very end of the Shang dynasty that all recorded prognostications become auspicious; in the meantime, oracle bone inscriptions show plenty of inauspicious prognostications.⁷³

The reason that inauspicious prognostications were still possible even after diviners were able to control crack shapes is that shapes were not the only criterion for determining the result of divination. According to Zhang Bingquan, there are cases in which crack shapes are identical in their angle, length, and even position on

⁷⁰ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 124.

⁷¹ Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, "Jiaguwen de faxian yu gubu xiguan de kaozheng," 854.

⁷² Park Jaebok 朴載福, "Sang junggi gabgol ui teugjing gwa geu hyeongseong gwajeong gochal," 12.

⁷³ Shima Kumio 島邦男, *Inkyo bokuji sōrui*, 308; Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 117f.; Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 381.

a shell or a bone while addressing same issues yet have different prognostications.⁷⁴ Hence, even after acknowledging that Shang diviners could manipulate the angle of *bu* cracks by shapes of hollows and the angle of fire brands, Keightley states that “it is far from certain that the rudimentary manipulation this allowed would have significantly altered the diviner's readings.”⁷⁵

The undeniable fact is, however, that at the end of Shang dynasty, records of inauspicious prognostications virtually disappear.⁷⁶ We cannot tell if this means that all divination necessarily produced favorable results or that diviners were simply choosing to record only the favorable ones because it is by no means the case that all cracks have prognostications written next to them. But even if it is the latter, it is still clear that diviners (or scribes) were interfering with the results of divination.⁷⁷ Such change in diviners' attitude cannot be unrelated to the significant transformations that the divination method went through throughout the Shang dynasty. Oracle bones became far removed from its original source of divinatory power, and crack shapes became standardized. Shang diviners were gradually increasing their control of the responses of the spirits.

⁷⁴ Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Yinxu bugui zhi buzhaoli ji qi youguan wenti,” 232. Zhang suggests that factors like the sound produced at the moment of the cracking, or the depth of cracks may also be the determining factor. But these suggestions are impossible to prove. On the other hand, it is also possible that there was no objective standard for reading cracks. Shaughnessy, “The Composition of the ‘Zhouyi,’” 68.

⁷⁵ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 24.

⁷⁶ This change has been confirmed with enough evidence that Keightley even suggests it as a criterion for dating the inscriptions. Keightley, 117.

⁷⁷ Keightley, 117 n.113.

2.2. Information from inscriptions

To fully understand the changing relationship between the Shang diviners and spirits, a survey of the changes in oracle bone inscriptions is necessary. Inscriptions first appear on oracle bones in the 13th century BCE, around the time of the King Wuding, and consisted of a preface noting the information like date, location, and the identity of the diviner, followed by a “charge” addressing the issue at hand. Following the charge, some inscriptions have a prognostication by the king proclaiming the result of divination, and sometimes a verification telling what really happened.⁷⁸

Now, it must be noted that although these inscriptions are the most accessible means that allows us to understand the minds of Shang diviners, we must be cautious in analyzing them because these inscriptions were not an essential part of bone divination. As Robert Bagley put it, “That divining did not require writing is abundantly clear from the fact that most bones and plastrons found at Anyang, not to mention all divination bones from earlier sites, have scorch marks and cracks but no inscriptions.”⁷⁹ These writings were, instead, a record of divination inscribed only after divination was complete.⁸⁰

But if they were not part of the divination itself, why were they inscribed in the first place? Some scholars argue that these inscriptions “constituted a kind of

⁷⁸ Keightley, 28.

⁷⁹ Bagley, “Anyang Writing and the Origin of Chinese Writing System,” 199.

⁸⁰ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 28.

royal archive, where records were kept for future reference.”⁸¹ Redouane Djamouri strongly supports this view and maintains that we must clearly distinguish the two different acts, i.e. writing and divination, which just happened to occur on the same medium.⁸² Other views suggest that the primary purpose of these inscriptions was display. This is based on the observation that inscriptions are often, especially during the King Wuding’s reign, “so painstakingly and beautifully executed.”⁸³ But the target audience is not certain.

Keightley, however, presents a very different purpose for these inscriptions. He argues that these inscriptions were written to influence the future and worked as a kind of magical charm. He says, “These charges were not primarily inquiries into the unknown. They were not genuine attempts to discover if there would be disasters; they were attempts to make sure that there would be no disasters.”⁸⁴ Considering how the recorded prognostications became consistently auspicious at the end of the Shang dynasty, this view is particularly interesting. According to this view, by inscribing the favorably predicted divination results, diviners were ensuring that the future would be as they desired.

There is a story in “Guice liezhuan,” which I will discuss more in detail below, that corroborates Keightley’s view. This is the story of King Yuan of Song 宋元王,

⁸¹ Postgate, Wang, and Wilkinson, “The Evidence for Early Writing,” 471.

⁸² Djamouri, “Écriture et divination sous les Shang,” 16.

⁸³ Bagley, “Anyang Writing and the Origin of Chinese Writing System,” 199. Bagley notes that while Keightley reserves the term “display” only for a special set of inscriptions in comparison to inscriptions for non-display purposes, he sees no reason to believe that the Shang diviners also made such distinctions.

⁸⁴ Keightley, “Shang Divination and Metaphysics,” 372.

who is told to have acquired a powerful turtle. A parallel version of the story in *Zhuangzi* ends with the turtle having bored seventy-two hollows, of which not one made wrong predictions. 七十二鑽而無遺策⁸⁵ But before the turtle even had the chance to prove its power, the king's faithful advisor Wei Ping 衛平, who strongly advised the king to kill the turtle and use its power, spoke not only of its marvelous predictive powers but also of its ability to control the course of events in the future.

龜者，是天下之寶也。先得此龜者為天子。且十言十當，十戰十勝。⁸⁶

Turtles are treasures of the world. The one who first obtains this turtle will be the Son of Heaven. If it says ten words, all ten words will be true, and if one wages ten wars [with this turtle] there will be ten victories.

The turtle will not just tell whether a war will be auspicious or not, but will guarantee that it will be victorious. In the words of Wei Ping, this powerful turtle shell indeed looks like a magical charm. Through the power of the turtle, its owner can change the future as one wishes.

There may be some objections to this view. First, if the uniform auspicious prognostications indicate that the diviners were trying to influence the future, what can we say about the times when prognostications were a random mixture of both auspicious and inauspicious? Also, some cases of divinations could not have been answered simply as auspicious or inauspicious, but had to be answered by the spirits. A particularly illuminating example is sickness divination.

⁸⁵ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 934.

⁸⁶ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5094.

貞疾齒，不佳（唯）父乙作囙。⁸⁷

Divined about illness in a tooth: It is not something caused by Father Yi.

(7) 貞父辛弗咎王。(8) 父辛其咎王。(9) 父乙弗咎王。(10) 父辛咎王。⁸⁸

Divined: Father Xin does not harm the king. Father Xin harms the king.

Father Yi does not harm the king. Father Yi harms the king. (Heji 371)

These are examples from the reign of King Wuding period. In the first quote, the diviner is trying to identify whether the king's current toothache is caused by a specific ancestral spirit called Father Yi. This type of divination asks for information about an uncertain matter, and the diviner is looking for a "yes" or "no" type of answer. Likewise, in the second quote, diviners are making successive inquiries to find out whether it is Father Xin or Father Yi who is causing harm to the king. Examples, like these, which is by no means rare, make it doubtful that inscriptions can truly be comparable to a magical charm.

Also, contrary to the widely accepted view that all inscriptions are written in the form of statements and not as questions,⁸⁹ some prominent Chinese scholars have pointed out that in earlier inscriptions, charges were indeed grammatically phrased in the form of questions.⁹⁰ For example, Qiu Xigui focuses on sentence final

⁸⁷ Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, "Yinren jibing kao," 424#16. Hu notes that Father Yi refers to Wuding's late father; king Xiaoyi 小乙.

⁸⁸ Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎 and Shen Jianhua 沈建華, *Jiaguwen jishi zongji*, 56.

⁸⁹ This may be the case only in the West. According to Zhang Yujin, many scholars in China still believe that oracle bone inscriptions are questions. Zhang Yujin 张玉金, *Jiagu buci yufa yanjiu*, 3. For a general overview on different interpretations on the grammatical nature of the oracle bone inscriptions, see Zhang Yujin 张玉金, 1–16. For the most recent discussions of this topic, see Wu Chengxi 巫称喜, "Jiagu buci de mingci"; Kong Xuyou 孔许友, "Zailun jiagu buci mingci de xingzhi."

⁹⁰ Li Xueqin 李学勤, "Guanyu Duizu buci de yixie wenti," 39ff.; Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, "An Examination of Whether the Charges in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Are Questions." For the seminal work on charges as statements, see Nivison et al., "The 'Question' Question." But even Nivison and Shuaghnnessy acknowledge the validity of the views presented by Qiu Xigui and Li Xueqin. Nivison et al., 118; Shuaghnnessy, "The Composition of

particles *yi* 抑 and *zhi* 執 and argues that “If one did not interpret the *yi* and *zhi* as final interrogative particles, it would be quite impossible to make any sense of the great majority of the” examples he provided.⁹¹ To cite a few here:

16. ... 貞：有咎抑，亡咎抑。

...divining:...is there misfortune? or is there not misfortune? (*Heji* 19784)

*21. 辛酉卜，貞：有至今日執，亡抑。亡。⁹²

Crack on *xinyou*, divining: Is there to be an arrival today, or not? There was not. (*Heji* 20377; see also *Kufang* 1194)

These examples seem to support the claim that some charges were indeed questions.⁹³ However, interestingly enough, charges that can be identified as questions seem to disappear completely over time. In the later periods, the people who recorded the oracle bone inscriptions deliberately chose to write charges as statements, even though they could have been written as questions.⁹⁴

Furthermore, the practice of writing charges in a form two contrasting sentences—positive and negative as seen in examples above—also disappeared. This was a common practice during the period of King Wuding, but by the end of

the “Zhouyi,” 53.

⁹¹ Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “An Examination of Whether the Charges in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Are Questions,” 83.

⁹² Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, 82, 83. As the article itself in *Early China*, the translation is by Edward Shaughnessy.

⁹³ However, Keightley wrote an extensive review on Qiu’s argument and concluded that there is “no firm reason to believe that any of the charges discussed by Qiu have to be taken as questions.” Nivison et al., “The ‘Question’ Question,” 144.

⁹⁴ Nivison et al., 118. Qiu Xigui also acknowledges that “there is no basis at present to deny the possibility that after the time of Wu Ding or Zu Geng interrogative charges were not used.” Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “An Examination of Whether the Charges in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Are Questions,” 111.

Shang dynasty it became extremely rare,⁹⁵ and the records of bone divination from the Chu tombs of the Warring States period have yet to show evidence of such practice.⁹⁶ Moreover, the type of sickness divination we saw above, which makes sense only when read as a genuine inquiry into the unknown, is found almost exclusively from the reign of King Wuding or earlier.⁹⁷

In fact, many other categories of divination also disappear from oracle bone inscriptions in the late Shang. In general, Shang diviners consulted divination in almost all aspects of human activities, from personal matters as causes of illness or birth of a new child to state affairs like warfare or building a new settlement.⁹⁸ Near the end of the Shang dynasty, however, the range of issues that Shang diviners addressed shrank drastically. As Keightley notes, “Divinations about the sacrificial schedule, the ten-day period and the night, and the hunt were still performed in great number, but dreams, sickness, enemy attacks, requests for harvest, the issuing of order, etc., were divined far less frequently than they had been in period I (King Wuding’s reign), if at all.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 120. Qiu Xigui, however, shows some examples of this type from the end of the Shang period. See, Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “An Examination of Whether the Charges in Shang Oracle-Bone Inscriptions Are Questions,” 113.

⁹⁶ Yu Chenglong 于成龙, “Zhangguo Chu zhanbu zhidu yu Shang zhanbu zhidu zhi bijiao.”

⁹⁷ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 178. See the Appendix 5 on pp.178-82 for more detailed description of the changes in topics and idioms in Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions.

⁹⁸ Keightley, 33–35. Keightley lists seventeen categories of divination according to their contents: matters on sacrifices, military campaigns, hunting expeditions, king’s excursions, routine incantations for the peace of coming ten-day week 旬, and that of coming day or night, weather, agriculture, sickness, childbirth, dreams, settlement building, orders for tasks, tribute payments, divine assistance or approval, and requests addressed to ancestral or nature powers.

⁹⁹ Keightley, “Late Shang Divination,” 19.

What is interesting about this change in topics is that the issues that were still being frequently addressed at the end of the dynasty functioned as more of a report of future action than an inquiry.

辛亥卜，貞：王田雚，往來亡咎？王固曰：“吉”。¹⁰⁰

Crack on a *xinhai* (no.10) day, divined: The king will hunt at Yong. There would not be a calamity while coming and going? The king prognosticated: “auspicious.”

In this example, the king is divining about whether there would be harm on the way to a hunting ground called Yong. But notice how the charge is stated only in the negative mode, as the diviner wants the future to be. And the fact that by this time, prognostications were almost uniformly auspicious makes us doubt that the diviner was genuinely inquiring about the uncertain future. Rather, the diviner was proposing that there should be no harm while the king is on his way, and the spirit (or perhaps the oracle bone itself at this point) is giving its approval.

What is truly insightful about Keightley’s observation, however, is that he further shows how the Shang diviners’ will to control the results of divination was already apparent even when charges were recorded in a pair of positive and negative modes. He says that inscriptions still emphasize the more favorable one by the use of modal particle *qi* 其, and there is “a tendency to record the undesirable charge in a form more abbreviated than that of the desirable one.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Qu Wanli 屈萬里, *Yinxu wenzi jia bian kaoshi*, 132#478. Qu follows Wang Guowei’s explanation and takes 雚 as Yong 雍.

¹⁰¹ Keightley, “Shang Divination and Metaphysics,” 372; Keightley, “Late Shang Divination,” 15–16. On the use of the word *qi* in oracle bone inscriptions, see also Shen Pei 沈培, *Yinxu jiagu buci yuxu yanjiu*, 35–56; Zhang Yujin 张玉金, *Jiaguwen yufaxue*, 35–40.

Further yet, even if the two charges could be exactly complementary, and even if diviners were not trying to appeal to spirits what is more favorable to them, Keightley sees that Shang diviners were already limiting the way spirits could answer their questions. In the Shang dynasty bone divination, “Man proposed his simple, pedestrian (i.e. human) alternatives; the supernatural could only choose between them.”¹⁰²

The way Keightley describes how the response of the spirits was limited by the options that diviners proposed is consistent with the way diviners controlled the shape of cracks. First, diviners began to control the location on which the spirits could produce cracks and ultimately the shape of cracks became controllable. Likewise, the inscriptions show that spirits could only choose between the options diviners proposed, then gradually those options too disappeared.

In the Western Zhou period, it could be said that the power relationship between the humans and spirits have completely overturned to the point where humans could “put the words of the expected blessing into the spirits' mouths.”¹⁰³ We see this phenomenon in bronze inscriptions that includes what is known as *guci* 嘏辭, which are blessings from the spirits read aloud by *shi* 尸 (the impersonator of the spirit) during sacrifices.¹⁰⁴ Strictly speaking, *guci* is different from *zhuci* 祝辭, words addressed to the spirits by the person who makes sacrifices, yet in practice

¹⁰² Keightley, “Late Shang Divination,” 13.

¹⁰³ Falkenhausen, “Issues in Western Zhou Studies,” 152.

¹⁰⁴ *Liji zhengyi*, 781ff.; *Yili zhushu*, 1066-67.

guci and *zhuci* are not clearly differentiated, and one could serve as both at the same time.¹⁰⁵ When these blessings were engraved into bronze vessels, that is before they were read aloud by the priests in place of spirits, spirits were practically made to speak those blessings.¹⁰⁶

2.3. The divination tool vs. the spirits

Although it is from a much later date, the story mentioned above of the King Yuan of Song in “Guice liezhuan” tell us much about this changing relationship between diviners and spirits. Obviously, it is difficult to take this story as a credible account of what actually occurred at the court of Song,¹⁰⁷ but it depicts a kind of conflict that could have occurred in a Shang or Zhou court, a power conflict between spirits and diviners.

The story starts with the King Yuan of Song’s dream of an old man who comes to him begging for help.¹⁰⁸ The old man claims that he is a messenger from the River Jiang 江 to the River He 河, but happened to be caught by a fisherman in a town named Quanyang 泉陽 in King Yuan’s territory. After waking up, the king

¹⁰⁵ Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒, “Jinwen guci shili,” 1f.

¹⁰⁶ Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 72f.; Kern, “‘Shi Jing’ Songs as Performance Texts,” 104.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the fact that he never even claimed the title of a “king,” the writing is late by about five centuries than the reign of the Lord Yuan of Song. The dates for the reign of the Lord Yuan of Song are 531 – 517 BCE, whereas the dates for Chu Shaosun, who is responsible the “Guice liezhuan,” lie in the second half of the first century BCE. See Hulsewé, A.F.P. “Shih chi,” 406.

¹⁰⁸ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5090–5105. A shorter parallel version of the story also exists in “Waiwu” chapter in *Zhuangzi*,

sends men to Quanyang and indeed finds a turtle caught in a river net.

Acknowledging the auspiciousness of the turtle, the king immediately decides to release it back into the water, only to be persuaded otherwise by a man named Wei Ping, who argues that this is a tremendous opportunity given by the Heavens.¹⁰⁹

The ostensible reason put forward by the King for refusing to kill the turtle is humanity. The turtle came to him because he is virtuous, but if he does not let it live, he would be immoral. However, the king's speech soon makes obvious that humanity is not the only reason why he abstains from taking of advantage of the turtle's power.

龜甚神靈，降于上天，陷於深淵，在患難中，以我為賢。德厚而忠信，故來告寡人。寡人若不遣也，是漁者也。漁者利其肉，寡人貪其力。下為不仁，上為無德，君臣無禮，何從有福。寡人不忍，奈何勿遣。...寡人聞之，暴得者必暴亡，彊取者必后無功。桀紂暴彊，身死國亡。今我聽子。是無仁義之名，而有暴彊之道。江河為湯武，我為桀紂。未見其利，恐離其咎。寡人狐疑，安事此寶，趣駕送龜，勿令久留。¹¹⁰

The turtle is divine and numinous, for it came down from the high Heaven and sank into the abyss. While it was in the middle of troubles, it thought I was worthy with great virtue and sincerity. Thus, it came to me to plead. If I do not let it go, it would be like being a fisherman. A fisherman craves its meat, whereas I would be coveting its power. When those below are inhumane, and those above are without virtue, and the lord and the ministers are disregard the rituals, whence would fortune

¹⁰⁹ He is not mentioned anywhere else, and in the parallel version of the story in *Zhuangzi*, his existence is altogether absent as well as the entire dialogue between him and the king. The long conversation that supposedly happened between him and the king is abbreviated in to a short description saying that the Lord Yuan twice thought about killing or releasing the turtle before finally killing it. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 934.

¹¹⁰ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5095f.

arise? It is unbearable. How can I not let it go? ... I have heard that one who gains in violence dies in violence, and one who takes by aggression never accrues any merit. Jie and Zhòu were violent and aggressive, and they both met death while their kingdoms fell. If I listen to you [Wei Ping] now, this would be giving up the name of humanity and righteousness, and taking the way of violence and aggression. The [spirits of] the River Jiang and the River He would be the Kings Tang and Wu, and I would be the Kings Jie and Zhòu. Without seeing its benefits, I will fearfully stay away from its harm. I am doubtful. How can I serve this treasure? Prepare a carriage and send back the turtle. Do not let it stay long.”

The king indeed talks of humanity and righteousness, but in his statement, he reveals that his commitment to humanity and virtue is deeply related to the fortunes of his state. He fears the calamities that will befall on his state, the revenge from the spirits of Jiang and He, if he kills the turtle. And because it would be he who first betrayed humanity, the king would have nowhere else to plead. By killing the turtle the king himself becomes equivalent of the infamous tyrants of the previous dynasties, and the river spirits become their conquerors. The consequences are inescapable.

One interesting point about this statement is that the king too recognizes the power of the turtle. The divinatory power of the turtle is almost as evident as the fact that it has flesh, yet he is not willing to take it because he fears the consequences. Wei Ping, therefore, addresses this very issue in his counterarguments and assures the king that there will be no harm even if the king takes possession of the turtle. On the contrary, there will be disasters if the king acts otherwise.

今至泉陽，漁者辱而囚之。王雖遣之，江河必怒，務求報仇。自以為侵，因神與謀。淫雨不霽，水不可治。若為枯旱，風而揚埃，蝗蟲暴生，百姓失時。王行仁義，其罰必來。此無佗故，其崇在龜。¹¹¹

Now, the turtle has reached Quanyang, and a fisherman has humiliated and incarcerated it. Even if the king sends it off, [the spirits] of Jiang and He will surely be angry and seek revenge. Feeling invaded, they will make plans with other spirits. Heavy rain will not stop, and waters will be uncontrollable. When there is drought, winds will stir up dust, and locusts will swarm, and people will miss their proper times. Even if the king acts with humanity and righteousness, its punishment will surely come. There will be no other cause. The curse will be from the turtle.

Wei Ping does not deny that natural spirits have power to cause calamities. He and the king agree that both the spirits and the turtle have special powers. The difference between the two, however, is that Wei Ping believes the power of the turtle to be greater than that of the natural spirits, who cannot harm the king if he takes the turtle for his own. Wei Ping further argues that even the spirits that are more powerful than those of rivers Jiang and He cannot do anything against those who take possession of their treasures; on the contrary, the one holds a great treasure becomes the Son of Heaven.

玉櫝隻雉，出於昆山；明月之珠，出於四海；鑄石拌蚌，傳賣於市。聖人得之，以為大寶。大寶所在，乃為天子。今王自以為暴。不如拌蚌於海也。自以為彊。不過鑄石於昆山也。取者無咎，寶者無患。...
河雖神賢，不如崑崙之山。江之源理，不如四海，而人尚奪取其寶，諸侯爭之，...故云取之以暴彊，而治以文理。無逆四時，必親賢士。與陰

¹¹¹ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5095–96.

陽化，鬼神為使，通於天地，與之為友。諸侯賓服，民眾殷喜，¹¹²

The jade caskets and pheasants come from the Mt. Kunlun, and the pearls of the Bright Moon comes from the Four Seas. One bores through rocks and splits clams [to obtain these treasures] and sell them in markets. Sages have obtained them and regarded them as great treasures, and the one who had great treasure became the Son of Heaven. Now, your majesty thinks of himself as violent, but it is not equal to splitting clams in the sea. Your majesty thinks of himself as aggressive, but it is not equal to boring through rocks in Mt. Kunlun. Those who take it bear no harm, and those who treasure it have no worries.... Even if [the spirit of] the River He is divine and worthy, it is not equal to [the spirit of] Mt. Kunlun, and [the vastness] of the River Jiang from its source to the mouth is not equal to that of the Four Seas. Yet, people still extort their treasures, and lords fight over them.... Therefore, it is said that [even if] one takes it with violence and aggression, [if] he governs with culture and principles, does not transgress the four seasons, always stays close to worthy gentlemen, in harmony with the yin and yang, has ghosts and spirits as messengers, and communicates with Heaven and Earth, and becomes friends with them, [then] all territorial lords will submit and the people will be greatly happy.

The treasures are taken away from Mt. Kunlun and the Four Seas in a far more violent and aggressive manner than what the king was going to do to the turtle. Yet those who take possession of those turtles remain unharmed. Thus, Wei Ping presents an obviously lopsided power balance between the spirits and the turtle. The spirits, despite their powers, cannot punish those who violate them once they get hold of their treasures. These treasures, on the contrary, enable their owners to

¹¹² *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5099, 5102.

be masters of the world. This tells that, in Wei Ping's worldview, the treasures have their own power, which is not dependent upon the spirits.

At the end of the story, the king is finally convinced and kills the turtle, and it is further stated that thanks to the power of this turtle, the state of Song became the strongest during his reign.¹¹³ This change of mind by the king is representative of the changes in bone divination itself. For the king, the divination tool is already seen as holding special power, but it was still the spirits who controlled the world. But Wei Ping, who finally convinced the king, saw the power of spirits to be limited to the point that he could disregard their power in divination. The role of spirits in divination virtually disappeared. The king interacts with the turtle directly, and the turtle answers and grants the king's requests. At this point, turtle shell divination is no longer a "communication with the dead."

3. From oracle bone to yarrow

3.1. Divinatory power of yarrow

Around this time when bone divination began to change from being a communication with spirits to a communication with the divination tool, number sets first appear in Chinese history. In short, number sets are staks of numbers

¹¹³ *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5105. However, he is not actually attributed with any great historical deeds in *Shiji*. On the contrary, his reign was told to be in continuous tumult from his struggles with his own ministers. *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 2367f.

recorded in a form similar to hexagrams and trigrams of *Yijing*, and are found in oracle bones, pottery vessels, and bronze vessels of the late Shang and early Zhou period. There is no indisputable proof that these number sets are indeed derived by counting yarrows as the modern hexagrams are derived,¹¹⁴ but they are generally accepted as strong evidence of yarrow divination.

Dates that put yarrow divination any earlier than the appearance of number sets are all problematic. There are even views that put yarrow divination to be just as old as bone divination. For example, Richard Rutt suggests that since one uses animal material and the other plant material, the two methods have been complementary from the beginning.¹¹⁵ But the perishable nature of yarrow makes such a claim almost impossible to prove.

The more widely accepted date is the reign of Wuding, which is, not coincidentally, when writing first appears in oracle bones. The basis of this claim is the reading of a graph *wu* (巫, shaman/diviner) to mean *shi* (筮, yarrow). The phrase “diviner speaks” (巫曰) appears several times in oracle bones, and many scholars read this as “yarrow speaks,” (筮曰) meaning a prognostication is made based on yarrow divination.¹¹⁶ However, even if the substitution of 巫 for 筮 could be proven,

¹¹⁴ After all, there is a chance that hexagrams were derived with dice even during the Han period. See Lewis, “Dicing and Divination in Early China,” 4. For the excavation report of the dice, see Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 荆州地区博物馆, “Jiangling Wangjiatai 15 hao Qinmu,” 42. Also, the practice of using coins instead of yarrow is attested no later than the seventh century. “Huo Zhu Lin Fa” in Nielsen, *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology*, 121–22.

¹¹⁵ Rutt, *The Zhou Yi*, 148–49.

¹¹⁶ Scholars who take this view include: Jao Tsung-I, Zhang Yachu, Liu Yu, and Chao Fulin. See Zhang and Liu, “Some Observations about Milfoil Divination Based on Shang and Zhou Bagua Numerical Symbols,” 49; Chao Fulin 晁福林, “Shangdai yigua shifa chutan,” 62; Yu Xingwu 于省吾, *Jiagu wenzi gulin*, 2922.

in no way does it justify the reading of all *wu* graphs to mean *shi*. The mere existence of the phrase “diviner speaks” can hardly serve as evidence of the existence of yarrow divination.

The reason that number sets can be strong evidence for the existence of yarrow divination is their association with the received *Yijing*. Number sets are found even in excavated Warring States and Han period manuscripts with proven connections with the received *Yijing*.¹¹⁷ Therefore, number sets found on oracle bones were also probably derived with some form of divination method that is closely related to the received yarrow divination.

The problem is, however, even if we do believe that late Shang is the *terminus post quem* for yarrow divination, we are still left with mysteries. For example, why did Shang diviners start using numbers to signify divination results, and why did they think that counting yarrow stalks can tell anything about the future? Plants that are deemed as capable of empowering diviners to communicate with spirits is not uncommon in other cultures, but many of such cases are explained by their hallucinogenic qualities.¹¹⁸ Yarrow is not one of those plants, nor is it possible to induce hallucination simply by counting stalks.

Richard Rutt suggests that yarrow could have been deemed special because

¹¹⁷ For example, hexagrams with number lines appear in manuscripts from Baoshan, Wangjiatai, and Tianxiangguan. More importantly, however, a recently looted and published manuscript “Shifa” (筮法, Methods of Yarrow Divination) from Qinghua university collection gives a detailed explanation of how to interpret trigrams and hexagrams, but their lines are clearly numbers. See Li Xueqin 李学勤, “Qinghuajian shifa yu shuzigua wenti.”

¹¹⁸ Sobiecki, “A Review of Plants Used in Divination in Southern Africa and Their Psychoactive Effects”; Jain and Kapoor, “Divine Botany-Universal and Useful but under Explored Traditions”; De Feo, “Ethnomedical Field Study in Northern Peruvian Andes with Particular Reference to Divination Practices”; Winslow and Mahendran, “From Divination to Madness.”

of its healing powers.¹¹⁹ In the west, yarrow's herbal use can be traced back to the ancient Greek period,¹²⁰ and Rutt reports that yarrow is used for divination even in modern England.¹²¹ But contrary to Rutt's suggestion, no early Chinese source testifies herbal use of yarrow. The earliest Chinese materia medica *Shennong bencao* 神農本草經 (*The Classic of Divine Farmer's Herbal Medicine*), datable to the Later Han period at the earliest, does not even have an entry on yarrow.¹²²

Also, the use of yarrow in divination in England seems to have little connection with the qualities of yarrow itself. Yarrow divination is used only for love divination, but love divination using various plants is common in England especially during festivals.¹²³ It is not easy to provide a convincing rationale for the choice all the plants used in these divinations, but the fact that these divinations were performed during festivals suggests that the plants' divinatory power is related to special times of year and to patron saints of the festivals. For example, St. John the Baptist's Day (June 24th) is near the summer solstice, and divination during this festival uses a plant called St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*).¹²⁴ In short,

¹¹⁹ Rutt, *The Zhou Yi*, 151.

¹²⁰ Applequist and Moerman, "Yarrow (*Achillea Millefolium* L.)," 210.

¹²¹ Prior, *On the Popular Names of British Plants, Being an Explanation of the Origin and Meaning of the Names of Our Indigenous and Most Commonly Cultivated Species*, 166; Opie and Tatem, "YARROW."

¹²² Yang, *The Divine Farmer's Materia Medica*, iii. *Bencao gangmu*, the famous materia medica compiled in the 16th century certainly has an entry on yarrow and lists various medical effects of the plant. *Zhongyi dacidian zhongyao fenge*, 377. However, as Applequist and Moerman pointed out, "the independence of these uses from European influence is perhaps uncertain." Applequist and Moerman, "Yarrow (*Achillea Millefolium* L.)," 212.

¹²³ Drury, "English Love Divinations Using Plants."

¹²⁴ Drury, 212f.

the plants used in divinations seemed to have acquired their role by being associated with other things that are already deemed special.

Yarrow divination in China must have emerged through a similar process. In other words, yarrow acquired its divinatory meaning in divination by being associated with something else that was already deemed special, i.e. oracle bones. We do not know how the original yarrow divination was exactly performed, but there are grounds to delineate some of its characteristics. In particular, the recently published manuscript “Jingjue” sheds some light on how the early form of yarrow divination may have looked. This manuscript shows a divination method similar to that described in “Xicizhuan,” yet it does not make any reference to cosmological patterns of the universe. Instead, the manuscript suggests that, just as bone divination relies on the power of oracle bones, the divinatory power of the method comes from the material, vitex. In texts roughly contemporary to looted “Jingjue,” vitex is sometimes mentioned as the material by which diviners scorch the turtle.¹²⁵ We cannot know if vitex has always been the choice for the firebrand, but the divinatory power of plant stalks in general may have first derived from their use as firebrand.

Furthermore, there is great similarity between the fundamentals of yarrow divination and a practice called *xibu* (習卜, repeated divination) in bone divination.¹²⁶ Admittedly, this similarity is not sufficient to prove that Shang

¹²⁵ E.g. “Guice liezhuan” *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5112; “Shisangli” *Erya zhushu*, 829–31.

¹²⁶ The exact definition of the term “xibu” may differ between scholars, but they all agree that it is related to the practice of divining multiple times on a single issue. The most convincing argument is that, as Song Zhenhao explained, “xibu” simply refers to divining multiple times on a single issue, whether it would be on a

diviners actually used the *xibu* practice to derive number sets seen on oracle bones, but it shows that the two types of divination methods are not as distinct as they seem to be. And more importantly, it can give a partial rationale for why yarrow divination came to be performed as it is performed now.

3.2. “Jingjue” and the original yarrow divination

Although “Jingjue” (荊決, Judgement of Vitex) has only recently been published, the contents of the method was known to us for some while as it is virtually the same method as that described in a Dunhuang 敦煌 manuscript titled *Zhougong bufa* 周公卜法 (*The Duke of Zhou’s Method of Divination*). Interestingly, in Zhang Zhenglang’s seminal article on number sets, this *Zhougong bufa* served as the basis of his reconstruction of the lost method of yarrow divination.¹²⁷ Zhang never explained why a method recorded in “a text of Middle Antiquity ... may date from from a comparatively ancient period,”¹²⁸ but with the discovery of “Jingjue,” his hypothesis that the method is closer to the original yarrow divination deserves serious reconsideration.

The divination described according to “Jingjue” is performed as follows.

鑄 (鑄) 龜告筮，不如荊決。若陰若陽，若短若長。所卜毋方，所占毋

same day or different day, whether on a same bone or different bone, etc. Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, “Yindai ‘xibu’ he youguan zhanbu zhidu de yanjiu.”

¹²⁷ Chang, “An Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions on Early Chou Bronzes,” 85f.

¹²⁸ Chang, 85.

良，必察以明。卅筭以卜其事，若吉若凶，唯筭所從。左手持書，右手操筭，必東面。用卅筭，分以為三分，其上分衡（橫），中分從（縱），下分衡（橫）。四四而除之，不盈者勿除。¹²⁹

Boring hollows on turtles or reporting to yarrows is not as good as the judgment of vitex. It could be yin; it could be yang; it could be short; it could be long. Do not frame [the results] for what is divined, and do not [make] auspicious [results] for what is prognosticated. One must investigate with insight. Use thirty stalks to divine about an issue. It could be auspicious; it could be ominous. Just follow the stalks. Hold the book with the left hand and manipulate the stalks with the right hand. One must face east. Using thirty stalks, divide them into three piles. The top part is placed horizontally, the middle part vertically, and the lower part horizontally. Remove the stalks [from each pile] four by four and put them aside, but do not put away the remainder.

There may be a few reasons to see this method as not being so old. The first is the date of the manuscript. It is dated to the period between the reign of Emperor Wu (141 – 87 BCE) and the reign of Emperor Xuan (74 – 49 BCE) in the Han dynasty,¹³⁰ which is only slightly earlier than the earliest traceable date of the “Xicizhuan” method for yarrow divination. The second and perhaps the more serious problem is that they do not yield the “right” numbers. While “Jingjue” uses numbers from one to four, numbers two, three, and four never appear in number sets from Shang and Zhou period.¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Beijing daxue cang Xihan zhushu*, 5:171.

¹³⁰ Li Ling 李零, “Beida Hanjian zhong de shushushu,” 80.

¹³¹ In fact, number sets may not even be using number one. Recent scholarship showed that what appears to be number one is probably another way of writing number seven. See Jia Lianxiang 贾连翔, “Qinghuajian ‘Shifa’ yu Chudi shuzigua yansuan fangfa de tuiqiu,” 58. One and seven almost never appear on a same number set, hence Li Xueqin once argued that there must have two different kinds of yarrow divination

When Zhang Zhenglang suggested that this method was more ancient than the “Xicizhuan” method, he suggested some amendments to the method so that it would produce the right numbers. For example, he assumed that the original method counted stalks by eight rather than four, and if the results fell between two and four, diviners would have replaced them with either one or six to avoid ambiguity (as a three 三 written below a one 一 would be practically indistinguishable with a four 四 in oracle bone inscriptions).¹³² Although Zhang makes too many unfounded assumptions that undermine the credibility of his final reconstruction, it still shows that the apparent incongruity between the numbers used in two systems is not enough to dismiss the possibility that “Jingjue” is closer to the original yarrow divination. And despite these problems, there are a few clues that support Zhang’s intuition that this method is from an earlier date.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two methods is that, unlike “Xicizhuan,” “Jingjue” provides no cosmological explanation for the numbers employed. Despite sharing the same process, the grounds for using the numbers three and four are completely unexplained in “Jingjue.” It may have been the case that the total number of stalks was not even completely fixed, not to mention a cosmological justification. A comparison between “Jingjue” and *Zhougong bufa* shows that, instead of thirty, *Zhougong bufa* requires total of thirty-four stalks, a

methods. Li Xueqin 李学勤, “Xin faxian xizhou shishu de yanjiu.” But this observation seems no longer persuasive.

¹³² Chang, “An Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions on Early Chou Bronzes,” 84.

number that is likewise unexplained.¹³³

Admittedly, there are passages in “Jingjue” that refer to cosmological concepts like *yin* and *yang*, but there is doubt as to how philosophical these terms are. These words appear only twice in the main text, but both can be interpreted in the more concrete sense of the terms regarding sunlight.

戌，三 | 二。冥冥之海，吾獨得其光。雷電大陰，[吾]蜀（獨）得陽。

Xu (3-1-2): In the midst of dark seas, I alone obtain light. In the midst of great *yin* with thunders and lightning. I alone obtain *yang*.

未，二 |||| 三。... 愛愛（靄靄）者雲，作（乍）陰作（乍）陽，¹³⁴

Wei (2-4-4): ... What is dense is the clouds. Suddenly it is *yin*, and suddenly it is *yang*.

It is not impossible to interpret *yin* and *yang* here as abstract philosophical concepts, but both retain strong association with the qualities of brightness and darkness.¹³⁵ Especially in the second quote, the reference to sunlight is unmistakable. Other than these two cases, no passage in the manual refers to similar cosmological concepts, and the manual makes no claim that the efficacy of this method is based on a cosmological pattern.

On the contrary, specific prognostications include many references to ghosts and spirits, as thirteen out of sixteen trigrams end with a note on where and from

¹³³ For a detailed comparison, see Zhou Xiaoyu 周小鈺, “Shilun Beida Hanjian ‘Jingjue’ yu Dunhuang ‘Zhougong bufa’, ‘Guan Gongming bufa’ de guanxi.”

¹³⁴ *Beijing daxue cang Xihan zhushu*, 5:172, 175.

¹³⁵ This is in common with “Shifa.” Constance 1 and Zhao Lu notes that “In the *Shifa*, the *relationship* of the individual trigrams within the pattern of four trigrams, or the *movement* of lines within the trigrams in the patterns, might be termed as *yin* or *yang*, but this is rare. *Yin* tended to be used in the classical sense of overcast weather.” Cook and Lu, *Stalk Divination*, 17.

whom a curse (*sui* 祟) will be.¹³⁶ For example, the *zi* trigram ends with a line saying that “the curse is from the god of lifespan” 祟在司命, and the *mao* trigram ends with a line saying that “the curse is from the gods of travel and the kitchen 祟行、竈.”¹³⁷ In short, the method retains clear reference to the power of spirits while making virtually no claim about cosmological principles.

This point is further associated with the source of divinatory power for the method. As the manuscript makes no cosmological claims, the source of the divinatory power cannot be the patterns of the cosmos as in the “Xicizhuan” method. Then what makes the author of this manual believe that this method is superior to other methods? In fact, this point is already revealed by the the name of the manuscript itself, which shows that it is the vitex that makes “judgements.” The way the manuscript compares “Jingjue” with other methods further reveals this point. “Boring hollows on turtles” or “reporting to yarrows” are not names of other divination methods but methods by which diviners communicate with their respective divination tools. Hence, this method called “Jingjue” can literally mean “judgements of vitex.”

Another clue that shows how the “Jingjue” method could be a prototype of the “Xicizhuan” method is the fact that former is a much simpler version of the latter. This is probably the reason why Zhang Zhenglang based his reconstruction on this method. The two methods require a different total number of stalks (“Jingjue”

¹³⁶ It is interesting that “Shifa” also has a section on curse, but it is more abstract than what is shown in “Jingjue,” because curses are only associated with the trigrams names. Cook and Lu, 136–39.

¹³⁷ *Beijing daxue cang Xihan zhushu*, 5:174, 175.

requires thirty while “Xicizhuan” requires fifty), but at the most fundamental level, all these methods divide a pile of stalks into three and count them by four. Basically, “Xicizhuan” requires the diviner to repeat the processes described in “Jingjue” eighteen times in order to complete one divination.¹³⁸

But besides the number of repetitions, there is another crucial difference between the “Xicizhuan” method and “Jingjue.” In both methods, a single round of stalk counting produces a sequence of three numbers ranging from one to four. These are numbers of remaining stalks in each pile with four being the number when the remainder is zero. But while “Jingjue” applies meaning to all cases that can be derived from this process, “Xicizhuan” combines all these numbers and interprets only the total number of the remaining stalks.

For example, after a round of counting stalks according to the “Jingjue” method, a diviner can end up with one stalk remaining from the first pile, another stalk from the second pile, and four stalks from the last pile. In this case, the result would be recorded as — | ≡ (1-1-4), and interpreted as the *yi* 乙 trigram. On the other hand, if a diviner ended up with exactly same numbers but in a different order, that is, if the number four came from the second pile and not the third pile, then it would have been recorded as — |||— (1-4-1), and interpreted as the *chou* (丑) trigram. *Yi* trigram is rather auspicious, but *chou* trigram is not so auspicious.¹³⁹

In contrast, in the “Xicizhuan” method, the difference in the order of these

¹³⁸ There are some minor differences. For example, the “Xicizhuan” method fixate the result of the first pile to one, and it does not require the diviner to place remaining stalks in certain positions.

¹³⁹ *Beijing daxue cang Xihan zhushu*, 5:171, 174.

numbers do not make any difference because a diviner only takes note of the combined number of remaining stalks from the three piles. For example, if a diviner ended up with three remainders like 1-1-3 or 1-3-1 after the first round of counting stalks according to the “Xicizhuan,” both results would only signify that the diviner obtained a number five, a *yang* sign. In the “Xicizhuan” method, the result of a single stalks counting is always a binary result, which is five or nine in the initial round, and four or eight in the second and third rounds.¹⁴⁰ If combined, “Jingjue” also produces a binary result, which is either six or ten, but this number is not interpreted in “Jingjue.” This difference signifies that individual remainders of the three piles are only a vestigial part of the divination in the “Xicizhuan” method.

These early characteristics of the “Jingjue” method allow us to postulate at least two different characteristics of the ancient method of plant stalk divination. First, a diviner is required to produce three distinct numbers, each of which constituted a meaningful part of the final result. Second, the divinatory power of the method was derived not from numbers or cosmological patterns but from the divination tool.

There is no doubt that the second characteristic is in common with bone divination. Just as bone divination came to rely on the power of the oracle bones for

¹⁴⁰ The numbers from the initial round differ with those from the second and third rounds because the total number of stalks used in subsequent rounds differ from the initial round. The diviner starts with a total of forty-nine stalks, which is a number that is greater by one than a multiple of four. Hence, when counted by four stalks each, the remainder must also be a number that is greater by one than a multiple of four. In subsequent rounds, this remainder from the initial round is removed from the total pile, which means that one uses a pile of stalks whose total number is a multiple of four. Thus, one ends up with remainders that are also multiples of four. This is also the reason that the “Jingjue” produces six or ten as the total number of the remainders. Because thirty is a number that is greater by two than a multiple of four, the remainder is also a number that is greater by two than a multiple of four, i.e. six or ten.

its efficacy, plant stalk divination also relies on the power of plants. And as mentioned above, this is probably the influence of bone divination on plants. This influence could have been, as the example of vitex suggests, a result of plants stalks being used as the firebrands in bone divination.

The first characteristic, on the other hand, seems to be a unique feature of plant stalks divination and cannot be shared with bone divination. Li Xueqin's claim that number sets cannot be results of bone divination is precisely on this point.¹⁴¹ Li gives two reasons for his claim. One, most number sets from Shang sites are not on oracle bones but on other materials such as pottery vessels. Two, it is impossible to derive six numbers from a crack shape. The first point is valid. While it is not impossible that Shang diviners recorded hexagrams derived from bone divination on pottery vessels, it is unlikely that this practice was the norm. But the second point is not accurate. While deriving six numbers from a single crack may be impossible, a set of cracks may be used to produce something similar with "repeated divination."

3.3. Repeated divination and yarrow divination

We know that Shang diviners burnt several cracks when divining for a single issue since they marked the order of cracks that were divined together. These cracks may be on a single oracle bone or different bones, but the identity of the inscriptions

¹⁴¹ Li Xueqin 李学勤, "Xizhou jiagu de jidian yanjiu," 11.

indicates that they were indeed divinations on a single issue.¹⁴² A set of such numbered cracks is commonly referred to as *chengtao* 成套. “divination sets.”

The connection between these crack numbers and yarrow divination was already suggested by Vandermeersch, even though he did not know that the ancestral form of hexagrams and trigrams used numbers instead of binary signs.¹⁴³ His hypothesis was that the association between numbers and cracks would have allowed the Shang diviners to codify various crack shapes, and then diviners could use other methods to produce numerical results that refer to these codes.¹⁴⁴ I agree with his insight that the yarrow type divination methods are results of trying to replicate the results of bone divination, but the process of “codification” of crack shapes seems to be an unnecessary extra step. Repeated divination and yarrow divination have enough similarities to suppose a direct relationship.

First, it must be noted that like yarrow divination, a standardized form of “repeated divination” requires the diviner to produce three divination results. A record from *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuàn* (春秋公羊傳, *Spring and Autumn Annals with Commentaries of Gongyang*) purportedly dated to 629 BCE states that three

¹⁴² Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 36–40. The accompanying inscriptions may be repeated after each crack or written just once for all numbered cracks. *Bingbian* #5 and #131 are examples in which inscriptions are repeated, and #8 and #130 are examples in which inscriptions are written only once. Zhang Bingquan explains that the difference is related to the size of the oracle bone. Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Lun chengtao buci,” 392.

¹⁴³ Vandermeersch, “De la tortue à l’achillée,” 46. Vandermeersch mentions that crack numbers are definite signs that links bone divination with yarrow divination.

¹⁴⁴ The basis of Vandermeersch’s claim is the passage in *Zhouli*, which he interprets as saying that there are 120 categories and 1,200 varieties of crack shapes. “其經兆之體，皆百有二十，其頌皆千有二百。” *Erya zhushu*, 747.

repetition of bone divination is in conformity with the rites.

三卜禮也，四卜非禮也。三卜何以禮？四卜何以非禮？求吉之道三。¹⁴⁵

Divining three times is proper to the rites, [but] divining four times is against the rites. Why is divining three times [in conformity with] the rites? And why is divining four times against the rites? [It is because] the way of seeking auspiciousness is in three.

This rule of threefold repetition has not always been the norm, and during the reign of Wuding, diviners divined up to twenty times for a single issue. For example, *bingbian* #49 contains inscriptions with various pairs of crack numbers ranging up to four, seven, eight, nine, and ten.¹⁴⁶ Repeated divination at this stage probably had little to do with the yarrow divination or number sets. The fact that they divined so many times, and in such random number of times, suggests that the diviners may have been repeating divination until the desired result was obtained, which is a common feature in many different divination methods.¹⁴⁷ Keightley does not necessarily argue that this practice is a result of such desire to obtain a positive result, but he also claims that “As with tossing a coin, not once but many times, the use of sets presumably gave a certain weight and authority to the eventual

¹⁴⁵ *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan zhushu*, 310. Thirty-first year of the Lord Xi 僖.

¹⁴⁶ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 38. A marked crack number would almost never exceed the number ten, but with charges addressed in a pair of positive and negative modes, the total number of cracks per issue is doubled.

¹⁴⁷ For example, in a contemporary Taiwanese divination named *jiaobei* 筊杯, a diviner is allowed to throw divining blocks as many times as one wishes by only slightly rephrasing the original question until one is content with the result. See Graham, “Faith and Temple Tradition, Researching the Utilitarian Nature of Popular Religion in Taiwan,” 179.

reading.”¹⁴⁸

After the period of Wuding, however, the seemingly random number of repetition becomes standardized. At first, it was five cracks per divination,¹⁴⁹ and at the end of the Shang and early Zhou, it was again reduced to three.¹⁵⁰ This standardization in numbers of repetition signifies that diviners were no longer repeating divination to receive favorable prognostications. If they were, there would have been no reason to invent a practice that forbids divination after a certain number of tries.¹⁵¹

This standardization suggests that Shang diviners started interpreting results from an entire set of cracks. For example, a diviner could burn five cracks in a row and count how many cracks showed auspicious signs. In general, it is easy to assume that a streak of five auspicious cracks would have been more favorably interpreted than a set of mixed results.

However, the way Shang diviners marked the crack numbers shows that they may have been looking at more than just the total number of auspicious and

¹⁴⁸ Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Keightley, 120.

¹⁵⁰ For evidence of threefold divination *sanbu* 三卜 practice during the late Shang and early Zhou period, see Guo Moruo 郭沫若, “Anyang xin chutu de niujiagu ji qi keci,” 3; Song Zhenhao 宋镇豪, “Zailun Yin-Shang wangchao jiagu zhanbu zhidu,” 19–24; Cao Wei 曹玮, “Zhouyuan xinchu Xizhou jiaguwen yanjiu.”

¹⁵¹ Perhaps one could argue for an economic explanation. As discussed above, these oracle bones require an arduous preparation, and supply of turtle shells, the preferred choice as a divination tool, relied heavily on import from remote places. It is possible to imagine that Shang diviners were not allowed splurge too many of them on a single issue. However, archaeological remains show that, in general, late Shang diviners enjoyed an abundant supply of oracle bones. There are many examples of oracle bones in which large percentage of the prepared hollows are left. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 25–26; Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Yinxu bugui zhi buzhaoli ji qi youguan wenti,” 225. And as Keightley notes, *bingbian* #184 burned only 43 out of 174 prepared hollows.

inauspicious cracks. Shang diviners put great effort into marking the correct sequence of cracks. As Keightley says, “We know it was important to record the crack numbers accurately because wrong crack numbers were frequently erased and corrected.... The attention the Shang paid to crack numbers suggests that a particular crack’s place in the sequence of cracks which formed a set affected the way the cracks were prognosticated.”¹⁵² This observation means that, a set in which two auspicious signs follow an initial inauspicious sign would have been interpreted differently from a set in which an inauspicious sign comes between two auspicious signs.

What is interesting about this observation is that, if we assume that a single crack of an oracle bone produces a fundamentally binary result (i.e. auspicious or inauspicious), a set of three cracks (which is the norm for *xibu* according to *Gongyangzhuan*) would produce a result that is essentially the same as one of the eight trigrams, which is basically three rows of binary signs. In fact, this principle of interpreting a combination of three randomly created binary results is what Wang Ningsheng suggested as the “origin of trigrams.”

In 1976 Wang Ningsheng published an article titled “Bagua qiyuan” (The Origin of Trigrams), and described a divination method named *Leifuzi* 雷夫孜, practiced by the Yi 彝 people in China.¹⁵³ In this method, the diviner (called *bimo* 毕摩) prepares a bunch of thin bamboo sticks or plant stems and holds it in his left

¹⁵² Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 37.

¹⁵³ Wang Ningsheng 汪宁生, “Bagua qiyuan,” 243.

hand. Then the diviner removes a part of it with the right hand and sees whether the number of sticks remaining in the left hand is odd or even. The diviner repeats this procedure three times. Alternatively, the diviner would use a small knife and make random marks on a piece of woodblock. Then, the block would be divided into three pieces, and the number of marks in each piece would be counted to see if it is odd or even. Either way, one ends up with one of eight different results. To illustrate a couple of examples here, Wang notes, “odd-even-even: a certain defeat in battle, loss will be great; even-odd-even: no great disadvantage in battle.”¹⁵⁴

Of course, we now know that a method like *Leifuzi* is probably not the true origin of trigrams since trigrams did not start out as a combination of binary results but as a set of numerals. However, the assumption that a set of three cracks can produce three consecutive binary results allows us to make an even more daring comparison, namely with the “Xicizhuan” method.

As described above, the “Xicizhuan” method basically produces three binary results to derive a line of a hexagram. This is also the reason that one could flip three coins to produce almost the same results, although with slightly different probability.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, in theory, if a crack can be read in a binary mode, three cracks on an oracle bone could be used just like three flipped coins.

Now, Shang diviners probably did not burn eighteen cracks to derive a

¹⁵⁴ Wang Ningsheng 汪宁生, 243.

¹⁵⁵ The probability of obtaining five against nine in the initial round is 3:1 whereas the probability of obtaining four against eight in subsequent rounds is 1:1. This lopsided probability in the initial round is due to the fact that the total number of stalks used is not a multiple of four. See n.140 If one used forty-eight stalks or fifty-two stalks instead, counting stalks would have produced the exact same results as flipping coins.

hexagram, and we cannot simply assume that cracks were necessarily read in such a simple binary mode, and such usage of cracks cannot produce a “number set” either.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the similarity between the basic process of yarrow divination and a theoretical use of the *xibu* practice is too neat to be disregarded as mere coincidence. More importantly, it fulfills, at least partly, the basic characteristics of the original yarrow divination introduced in the previous section. The divination method relies on the power of the divination tool, and it produces three individually meaningful divination results that could be interpreted as a part of a set.

The only problem with the *xibu* is that these crack results are not numbers. Nevertheless, it is at least possible that Shang diviners saw crack results as belonging to a limited number of varieties. Prognostications noted next to cracks vary from being simply “auspicious” (*ji* 吉), to “extremely auspicious” (*hongji* 弘吉), or “greatly auspicious” (*daji* 大吉), etc.¹⁵⁷ These are not numerical results, but if prognostications can indeed be categorized into a few cases, it is possible to imagine using other materials to replicate a similar variety.

If this was the case, plant stalks would have been a good candidate for this purpose. As Li Ling has shown, plant stalks may have been already used as counting

¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, it may be the case that the way we interpret the resulting hexagrams from the “Xicizhuan” method is also quite new. Edward Shaughnessy has quite convincingly showed that the instances of yarrow divination recorded in *Zuozhuan*, which were commonly taken as examples of “changed” hexagrams,

¹⁵⁷ Inauspicious prognostications were never marked, and exact words for auspicious crack notations may differ depending on the period in Shang. For a list of various crack notations during the Shang, see Table 28 in Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 221.

rods before they were used for divination. The way the numbers are written closely resembles the shapes of counting rods, and there is similarity in the use of counting rods and yarrow stalks for divination.¹⁵⁸ Of course, there is no way to prove that Shang diviners actually used numbers to symbolize the results of bone divination. But this hypothesis, which is based on a comparison of the simplest form of yarrow divination and the practice of “repeated divination,” can offer a reasonable explanation for the appearance of yarrow divination method during the late Shang, which is otherwise a complete mystery.¹⁵⁹

Why would Shang and Zhou diviners have thought that the practice of counting plant stalks can tell anything about the future? This question may be answered if we see yarrow divination as a kind of “spin-off” of bone divination. Yarrow stalks were originally only a tool for counting numbers, but because they were later used to replicate the results of bone divination, they were regarded as having the similar kind of divinatory power as turtle shells.

¹⁵⁸ Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 260.

¹⁵⁹ Previously, several scholars have attempted to reconstruct the ancient yarrow divination by making arbitrary changes to either “Xicizhuan” method or the *Zhougong bufa* method. E.g. Chang, “An Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions on Early Chou Bronzes,” 84–86; Cheng Hao 程浩, “‘Shifa’ zhanfa yu ‘dayanzhi shu’”; Jia Lianxiang 贾连翔, “Qinghuajian ‘Shifa’ yu Chudi shuzigua yansuan fangfa de tuiqiu.” Cheng’s reconstruction is the most faithful to the “Xicizhuan” method, but he still makes some unfounded assumptions. But what all these reconstructions aimed for was to make these known methods produce numbers found on number sets. And if the resulting numbers are the only criterion for a sound reconstruction, repeated divination can also be used to serve a similar purpose.

Conclusion

Bone divination originally started as a communication with spirits through bones of the animals that were offered as sacrifices. But as diviners began to prepare these bones to make it easier for them to divine, bone divination became gradually separated from its original source of divinatory power. Instead, bones were considered as having its own divinatory power. The most prominent incident in the history of bone divination that reflects this changed idea is the introduction of turtle shells, a species that was never offered as a sacrifice.

As diviners came to believe that it is the divination tool that held divinatory power, diviners tried to exercise more control on the answers that spirits gave through bones. The shapes of cracks, which used to be free form, were standardized, and the diviners started inscribing only the results that were favorably. The eventual consequence of this process was that spirits completely lost their place in bone divination, and bone divination was no longer seen as a communication with spirits.

The invention of yarrow divination method happened at this time. The methods like “Jingjue” shows that the original yarrow divination did not rely on cosmological patterns for its source of the divinatory power as the “Xicizhuan” method claims. Instead, it was the material, i.e. the divination tool, that was deemed as the source. The origin of this yarrow divination method is difficult to trace, but the similarity between the “Jingjue” method and the *xibu* practice strongly suggests that the new divination method of counting stalks is a byproduct of an attempt to

replicate the results of bone divination. Hence, both bone and yarrow is deemed as possessing divinatory power almost equal to that of turtles.

Prognostications Based on Cycles

The history of bone and yarrow divination in early China shows a trend in which the power of the spirits became less and less important in divination. There is another noticeable trend in Chinese divination through the Eastern Zhou (770 – 255 BCE) and Han (209 BCE – 220 CE) periods: increasing reliance on cyclical patterns as the basis of future prediction. These cycles may be those of real astronomical bodies, such as the planets of the solar system, but they could also be those of imaginary stars like Counter-Jupiter, which have no corresponding figures in the sky.¹⁶⁰

The most frequently used cycle was the sexagenary cycle, constructed by combining the “ten stems” 十干 and the “twelve branches” 十二支. The so-called “daybooks” 日書, excavated from various parts of China show that the practice of predicting the future based on the cycle of sixty days was widespread at the time.¹⁶¹ In a nutshell, these almanacs tell the reader what kind of things can happen on specific days, as well as auspicious and inauspicious times for certain activities like marriage or traveling. A typical example of a prognostication is as follows.

¹⁶⁰ The term “Counter-Jupiter” was coined by Joseph Needham. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China Vol.3*, 402. For a more detailed discussion of this star, see n.267 below.

¹⁶¹ The name “daybook” comes from the title, *rishu* 日書, which was written on one of the two manuscripts found in 1975 from a Qin dynasty tomb in Shuihudi 睡虎地, Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei 湖北 Province. These were the first excavated manuscripts of the kind, but there have been many more discoveries since then. For a detailed survey of various versions of daybooks excavated since 1975, see Harkness, “Cosmology and the Quotidian,” 13–47.

子，旦北吉，日中南得。丑，旦北吉。東必得。【寅，西】得，東凶，北毋行。... 戌，東南、西吉，南凶。毋以亥行。¹⁶²

Zi (1) days: In the early morning, north is auspicious. At midday, there is a gain in the south. *Chou* (2) days: In the early morning, north is auspicious. There is a certain gain in the east. *Yin* (3) days: There is a gain in the west, [but] east is inauspicious. Do not go north. ... *Xu* (11) days: Southeast and west are auspicious, [but] south is inauspicious. Do not move on *hai* (12) days.

As the structure of this quote shows, daybooks list days of a calendric cycle and provides prognostications on various aspects of daily life. In this particular case, the theme is traveling directions, and the cycle is that of the twelve branches. The earliest exemplar of such daybook is from the late Warring States period, excavated from a site at Jiudian 九店, in Hubei 湖北 province, China.¹⁶³ Although this manuscript is difficult to read due to its damaged status, the general content is not too different from that of later daybooks.¹⁶⁴ The rationale of these daybooks is that, as Mu-chou Poo summarized: “every phenomenon in the world has a one-to-one correlation with a certain day or hour, and the auspiciousness of the day or hour is a known fact.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Wu Xiaoqiang 吴小强, *Qinjian rishu jishi*, 98.

¹⁶³ Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖北省文物考古研究所 and Beijing daxue zhongwenxi 北京大學中文系, *Jiudian Chujian*, 162. This source does not provide exact dates but states that the tomb is from “the early part of the late Warring States period” 戰國晚期早段. In general, however, scholars provide late 4th to early 3rd century BCE dates. E.g. Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” 847 n.81; Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ Chen Wei 陳偉, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, 301.

¹⁶⁵ Poo, “Popular Religion in Pre-Imperial China,” 237. However, it must be noted that not all sections of daybooks necessarily fit this generalization. For example, a section titled “Jie” 詰 in Shuihudi A daybook lists various types of demonic harassments and ways to remedy them. For more information, see Harper, “A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B. C.”

What I plan to demonstrate in this chapter is how such new methods of divination came into being in the Eastern Zhou period. I argue that this type of future predicting methods was not popular in the Spring and Autumn period if it existed at all. Among numerous divination records preserved in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳 (Mr. Zuo's Commentaries to *Spring and Autumn*), prognostications made on the basis of cyclical patterns are extremely rare, and those rare cases are almost certainly not genuine records from the Spring and Autumn era.¹⁶⁶

In the 4th century BCE, however, we come to see an abundance of materials proving increasing tendency in predictions on the basis of cyclical patterns. Another manuscript dated to the period, the *Zidanku Chu Silk Manuscript* 子彈庫楚帛書, also contains information on taboos for certain days of the sexagenary cycle, and this text is particularly interesting because it shows how views about cycles of the universe were changing during the Warring States period. The text explains cosmic cycles as a collaboration of various deities; for every phase of a cycle, there is a deity in charge.

In the late Warring States and Han periods, it is no longer deities that justify the cosmic cycles, but cosmic cycles that regulate the movements of deities. The relationship between the deities and cycles became reverse. I will discuss two aspects of divination during these periods. One is divination by an asterism called Beidou 北斗 (Northern Dipper), and the other is divination by invisible stars. These discussions will show that the beliefs that the universe runs in rigid cycles and that

¹⁶⁶ Although *Zuozhuan* was compiled probably around the 4th century BCE, scholars agree that it contains genuine historical records from the Spring and Autumn period. See p.65 below.

we can use those cycles to predict the course of future events became firmly established in the Chinese culture by the Han.

1. Divination before the Warring States period

The idea that some days are more auspicious than others or vice versa may be as old as divination itself. As far as we can tell, even oracle-bone inscriptions show a certain degree of bias toward some days over others.¹⁶⁷ David Keightley noted: “A count of all the days identified in the prognostications and verifications of Period I [i.e. during the King Wuding’s reign] as “lucky, auspicious” (ji 吉), “good” (jia 嘉), or otherwise favorable to Shang wishes reveals that the Shang diviners found *geng*-, *yi*-, *xin*-, *ding*-, and *jia*- days to be significantly more auspicious than *wu*-, *ren*-, *bing*-, *ji*-, or *gui*- days.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, within the ten-day cycle, days 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 were deemed more auspicious than days 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10.

It is difficult to believe that this tendency reflects the same type of mentality seen in daybooks, however. As Keightley acknowledged, during the Shang period, “the quality of the days, lucky and unlucky, was mutable and in need of continual divination.”¹⁶⁹ This means that the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of each day

¹⁶⁷ Paul R. Goldin finds these tendencies as “Shang antecedents” of the later practice but states that “the principles underlying these discernible results remain scarcely understood.” Goldin, “Some Shang Antecedents of Later Chinese Ideology and Culture,” 124.

¹⁶⁸ Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Keightley, 33.

was not constant and had to be divined each time. Keightley's distinction between auspiciousness and inauspicious days in oracle bone inscriptions is only a result of statistical analysis. A diviner in the Shang period would not have believed that a *geng* day is automatically auspicious.

In daybooks, on the other hand, prognostications do not change between cycles, nor do they require further validation from other types of divination. If the book says that *geng* days are auspicious for travel, it means that every *geng* day is so even if one does not check the daybook every ten days. The auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of days is completely fixed to the cycle.

How far can we go back in history to find evidence of similar practices? If we examine the divination records in *Zuozhuan*, the answer to the question seems to be “not very far.” Despite much doubt on dates of its compilation, scholars agree that *Zuozhuan* contains genuine records from the Spring and Autumn period. David Schaberg notes: “No one claims that the works are raw transcriptions from an oral tradition. The office of the scribe was well established in the courts and aristocratic homes of the Spring and Autumn period. That the *Chunqiu* records such events as eclipses accurately, if selectively, indicates that it was always a written record.”¹⁷⁰

Within *Zuozhuan*, Marc Kalinowski identifies “132 accounts, anecdotes, or simple allusions in which various personages accomplish divinatory acts,” and categorizes them into six types: turtle (46), yarrow (18), dreams (26), omens (15),

¹⁷⁰ Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 319. See also Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 14–39. For specific examples of genuine records of divination from the Spring and Autumn era, see Wang He 王和, “Lun Zuozhuan yuyan.” See n.187 below.

astrology (19), and other various divinations (8).¹⁷¹ If we examine these categories, we can see that the majority of these divinations is difficult to associate with cyclical predictions in the first place. The book does not describe how diviners produced signs with turtle shells and yarrow stalks, but it is not until much later that yarrow divination becomes associated with cosmological cycles.¹⁷² Interpretations of dreams and other natural signs also do not require a cyclical understanding of the universe.¹⁷³

If there is one type of divination that may be categorically different from the others, it is astrology because celestial phenomena are by nature cyclical. However, of the nineteen astrological predictions preserved in *Zuozhuan*, very few truly utilize the cyclical pattern of a star or an asterism. Shiode Tadashi categorizes this kind of prediction as what Carl Jung called “synchronicity,” by which he means an inference of a future event based on the belief that same types of events are repeated when same types of phenomena occur. He identifies three cases.¹⁷⁴

In Zhao 8 (534 BCE), an astrologer called Shi Zhao 史趙 predicts the future of the Chen 陳 state on the basis of the Jovian cycle,¹⁷⁵ and two years later (Zhao 10), another diviner, Pi Zao 裨竈, predicts the death of the ruler of Jin 晉 on the basis of

¹⁷¹ Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou,” 346. Kalinowski includes a helpful table in p.347 which locates all these cases of divination within *Zuozhuan*.

¹⁷² See section 2 in the previous chapter.

¹⁷³ Some omens, such as solar eclipses, may be cyclical by nature, but Kalinowski places eclipses not in the category of “omens” but of “astrology.” Omens in Kalinowski’s classification are random events that “appear in the natural world in an accidental way.” Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou,” 362.

¹⁷⁴ Shiode Tadashi 塩出雅, “Saden no sensei kiji ni tsuite,” 78.

¹⁷⁵ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1454.

an observation of a star in the Jupiter station, Xuanxiao 玄枵 (Dark Hollow, around Aquarius).¹⁷⁶ But one the most vivid examples in *Zuozhuan* that shows a belief in the cyclical pattern of not just nature but also of human affairs is recorded in Zhao 11 (531 BCE).

景王問於萇弘曰：「今茲諸侯，何實吉？何實凶？」對曰：「蔡凶。此蔡侯般弑其君之歲也，歲在豕韋，弗過此矣。楚將有之，然壅也。歲及大梁，蔡復，楚凶，天之道也。」¹⁷⁷

King Jing of Zhou (r. 544 – 521 BCE) asked Chang Hong, “Among today’s many lords, for whom [are the conditions] truly auspicious and inauspicious?” Chang Hong replied, “It is inauspicious for Cai. This is the year in which the Marquis Ban of Cai murdered his lord, when the Sui (Year Star, i.e. Jupiter) is in Shiwei (Pig Skin) station. He will not survive the year. Chu will occupy Cai, but Chu has [also] accumulated [vices]. When Sui reaches Daliang (Big Bridge) station, Cai will be restored, and it will be inauspicious for Chu. This is the Way of Heaven.

The basis of Chang Hong’s prediction, in this case, is the Jovian sidereal orbit cycle. Jupiter was called the Year Star because its cycle was roughly twelve years, which coincided with the twelve-branch cycle.¹⁷⁸ The Jovian cycle is actually slightly

¹⁷⁶ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1469–70.

¹⁷⁷ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1478.

¹⁷⁸ Chen Jiujin 陈久金, “Cong Mawangdui ‘Wuxingzhan’ de chutu shitan woguo gudai de suixing jinian wenti,” 48. On the other hand, Edward Shaughnessy argued that the reason Jupiter is called the “Year Star” has less to do with its sidereal cycle but more with its synodic cycle. He says that “The synodic period of Jupiter (that is, the period between successive conjunctions with the sun) is 398.884 days; however, during about thirty-three days of this period, the planet is so near the sun that it is invisible. Thus the observable period of Jupiter is just over 365 days, a phenomenon that has led many different cultures to refer to the planet as the “year star.”” Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 99. While this is an interesting observation, the fact that *Zuozhuan*, which he acknowledges to be the earliest source that uses the name “Year” to refer to Jupiter, makes note of its sidereal period but not its synodic period makes Shaughnessy’s claim questionable.

shorter (approximately 11.86 years) than twelve years, but the belief that the planet circles around the celestial sphere in exactly twelve years persisted into the Han period.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, this tendency to idealize the Jovian cycle even led to a belief in an imaginary Counter-Jupiter star called Taiyin 太陰 (Great Shadow), which—contrary to the real Jupiter—moved in the same direction as the other stars and the sun.¹⁸⁰

In this anecdote, Chang Hong points out that Jupiter is in the same location as twelve years ago, the Shiwei station (around the modern constellation Pegasus),¹⁸¹ and the last time Jupiter was in that area, the current Marquis of Cai murdered his predecessor. According to Chang Hong, this signifies that the current Marquis will face a similar fate. Chang makes another prediction based on the same principle. In two years, Jupiter will be in Daliang station (around Taurus), and the last time Jupiter was in Daliang (which was ten years ago), the current ruler of Chu killed the previous ruler and took his position.

Thus, the two inauspicious predictions about the current rulers of Cai and Chu are based on a belief that similar events recur every time a cycle repeats. This is precisely the belief behind daybooks. For each day of the sexagenary cycle, we can

¹⁷⁹ Sima Qian tells that Jupiter moves roughly $1/12$ *du* each day, and $30\frac{7}{12}$ *du* a year, which amounts to 365.25 *du* in twelve years exactly. “Tianguanshu” *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 1837. One *du* corresponds to the average distance the Sun moves in a day relative to the stars, and since it was believed that a year was exactly 365.25 days, 365.25 *du* corresponds to a full orbit around the celestial sphere.

¹⁸⁰ Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China Vol.3*, 402. We will discuss this imaginary star in detail in section 3.2. See n.267 below for other names of this invisible star.

¹⁸¹ Constellation names given in parenthesis are those of the modern 88 constellations recognized by the International Astronomical Union. For a list of these constellations, see <https://www.iau.org/public/themes/constellations/>

expect similar things to occur. The famous section on robbers in the Shuihudi daybook even describes appearances of potential robbers as well as where to find them on the basis of the twelve-branch designation of the days.¹⁸² The assumption is that robbers will act in similar patterns every time the twelve-branch cycle repeats. Similarly, Chang Hong is assuming that people will act in similar fashion when Jupiter is in the same location.

The problem with this prediction, as well as with the other two made in preceding years, is that we cannot take them as representatives of divination during the Spring and Autumn period because they are almost certainly made in the 4th century BCE. The basis of this dating is the incongruence between the stated position of Jupiter in these predictions and the planet's actual position as derived by astronomical calculation. The only prediction among the three that is not based on the Jovian cycle (Zhao 10) also makes a claim about Jupiter's current position, but in all three of these cases, Jupiter did not arrive at the claimed asterisms until about two years later. In fact, there are about seven predictions in *Zuozhuan* that mention Jupiter's current position, and all are subject to this two-year error.¹⁸³ This consistent difference is the result of a writer from the 4th century BCE calculating back Jupiter's position in the 6th century BCE based on the belief that Jovian cycle is exactly twelve years.¹⁸⁴ The difference of roughly 0.14 years between this belief and

¹⁸² Wu Xiaoqiang 吴小强, *Qinjian rishu jishi*, 149–50. This section is famous because it is the earliest material in which the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac are associated with the twelve branches.

¹⁸³ These are clustered in the short period between Xiang 28 (545 BCE) and Zhao 11 (531 BCE) Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou," 366.

¹⁸⁴ The same can be said about records of Jupiter's positions in *Guoyu*. Saussure, "G. Le cycle de Jupiter,"

the real Jovian cycle causes the calculation to be off by one year per about eighty-six years. Thus, a two-year difference implies that someone was making the calculation about 172 years afterward.¹⁸⁵

Of course, this does not mean that Chinese people were unaware of the cyclical rotation of planets or other patterns of the sky during the Spring and Autumn period.¹⁸⁶ The earliest astrological prediction recorded in *Zuozhuan*, which occurs in Xi 僖 5 (655 BCE), already mentions some of the twelve Jupiter stations, and it is highly likely that this passage is a direct copy of a written record from Jin 晉.¹⁸⁷ What this record does not show, however, is a prediction based on “synchronicity.” Synchronicity is one of several models of explanation used by astrologers in *Zuozhuan*, but it is used only when interpreting the meaning of Jupiter’s position.¹⁸⁸

The more widely used model of astrological interpretation in *Zuozhuan* is

399–406.

¹⁸⁵ Saussure points out that Jupiter’s real position and the twelve-year cycle recorded in *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* starts to match as early as 400 BCE. Saussure, 410. See also, Shinjō Shinzō 新城新藏, *Dongyang tianwenxueshi yanjiu*, 384–92.

¹⁸⁶ Many scholars trace the history of astronomical observation in China as far as to the early 2nd millennium BCE. E.g. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, 17–80; Chen Meidong 陈美东, *Zhongguo kexue jishu shi*, 1–39. See also Saussure, “G. Le cycle de Jupiter,” 414ff.

¹⁸⁷ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 394–97. In this anecdote, a diviner named Bu Yan 卜偃 predicts the fall of Guo 虢 state to be between the ninth and the tenth month, but it is later recorded that the fall was on the twelfth month. According to Wang He, the difference between the prediction and the later record is due to different calendar system between Jin 晉 and Lu 魯. Jin used the so-called Xia calendar whereas Lu used the Zhou calendar, and the first month in the latter is the third month in the former. Hence, this anecdote shows a case in which a Lu historian was copying directly from Jin historical records. Wang He 王和, “Lun Zuozhuan yuyan,” 13–14. For an overview of the twelve Jupiter stations, see Saussure, “G. Le cycle de Jupiter,” 389–94.

¹⁸⁸ Shiode Tadashi lists five different models: *yinyang*, *wuxing*, analogy, *fenye*, and synchronicity. Shiode Tadashi 塩出雅, “Saden no sensei kiji ni tsuite,” 80. These models may be used simultaneously to interpret a single celestial phenomenon, but they do not account for all astrological predictions recorded in *Zuozhuan*.

fenye 分野 (field-allocation), which divides the area around the ecliptic into several parts and pairs them with different regions of China.¹⁸⁹ If a strange phenomenon is observed in a part of the sky, it was interpreted as a sign that some important event will follow in the corresponding states. At its developed form in the Han dynasty, *fenye* is a complicated theory that takes into account both the Chinese landscape as well as various asterisms in the sky.¹⁹⁰

However, as complex as the theory may be, the principles behind this method are not very different from those of other types of divination shown in *Zuozhuan*, most of which have been in practice at least since the Shang dynasty. Just as in dream divination or turtle shell divination, a diviner waits for a sign to appear and interprets it within a pre-existing context.¹⁹¹ Cyclical understanding of the universe is not always necessary. To give an example, in Zhao 7 (535 BCE), an astrologer named Shi Gai 士匄 predicts upcoming calamities in Wei 衛 and Lu 魯 on the basis of a solar eclipse that occurred in the corresponding fields.

¹⁸⁹ In the Han dynasty, the number of fields was standardized to twelve, matching precisely with the twelve Jupiter stations, but scholars disagree about the number before the standardization. Ojima Sukema argued that division into thirteen parts was more popular before the Former Han. Ojima Sukema 小島祐馬, "Bun'ya-setsu to Chūgoku kodaijin no shinkō," 49–55. However, David Pankenier argues that the number of fields has continually expanded from being four in the Shang period (matching the four cardinal directions), and then to nine in the Warring States period (matching the nine provinces), and finally to twelve in the Han dynasty. Pankenier, "Characteristics of Field Allocation (*Fenye*) Astrology in Early China," 503–6.

¹⁹⁰ Pankenier shows how the changed understanding of the Chinese landscape, which takes into account even the land of the non-Chinese peoples like *Xiongnu*, is incorporated in the *fenye* theory explained in *Shiji* but not that in *Huainanzi*. Pankenier, "The *Huainanzi*'s 'Heavenly Patterns' and the *Shiji*'s 'Treatise on the Celestial Offices,'" 213–14.

¹⁹¹ We do not know what was the exact method of interpreting signs in bone divination during the Shang and early Zhou, but we know it was very technical. The diviner was not a shaman who interpreted the signs through spiritual experience. For more detailed discussion, see Keightley, "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors."

夏，四月，甲辰，朔，日有食之。晉侯問於士文伯曰：「誰將當日食？」對曰：「魯、衛惡之，衛大魯小。」公曰：「何故？」對曰：「去衛地，如魯地。於是有災，魯實受之。其大咎，其衛君乎，魯將上卿。」¹⁹²

Summer, fourth month, *jiachen* (41) day, new moon: there was a solar eclipse. The Marquis of Jin asked Shi Gai; “Who will be affected by the eclipse?” [Shi Gai] replied: “Lu and Wei will suffer from it. [The effect will be] great for Wei and less for Lu.” The Duke asked: “What is the reason?” [Shi Gai] replied: “[The eclipse] started in the field of Wei and went into the field of Lu. Thus, when there is a disaster, Lu will surely be affected, but the greater harm will be done to the ruler of Wei, and for Lu, [the affected] will be high ministers.

In this divination, the interpreted phenomenon is a solar eclipse, which is in fact a cyclical phenomenon, but the people at this period did not know that fact.¹⁹³ And the more important point is that the association between the fields in the sky and their corresponding states do not take into account the rotation of the night sky. The field that represents Wei always represent Wei. The association is completely fixed as if the fields are actually a part of the states’ territories.¹⁹⁴ Compare this case with the following example given in Wen 16 (611 BCE).

有蛇自泉宮出，入于國，如先君之數。秋，八月，辛未，聲姜薨，毀泉臺。¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1428–29.

¹⁹³ Evidence of attempts to predict solar eclipses is not found even as late as in the Han dynasty. See Nakayama, “Characteristics of Chinese Astrology,” 445.

¹⁹⁴ When referring to the fields in the sky, *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* sometimes use the word *xu* 墟, which Ojima Sukema interprets as *xu* 墟, meaning “site” (as in *yinxu* 殷墟). E.g. Zhao 10, Zhao 17. Ojima argues that this is a reflection of a belief that these astral fields are actually where their ancestors reside. Ojima Sukema 小島祐馬, “Bun’ya-setsu to Chūgoku kodaijin no shinkō,” 65–67.

¹⁹⁵ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 648–49.

There were snakes, as many as the number of the former princes, coming out of the Quan Palace, and they entered into the capital. In fall, on the *xinwei* (8) day of the eighth month, Sheng Jiang passed away, and the [people of Lu] demolished the Quan Terrace.

Commentators to this passage interpret the appearance of snakes as an omen that signified the death of Sheng Jiang. In Wai-ye Li's analysis: "The portent is connected to the death of Sheng Jiang, mother of the reigning Lord Wen, possibly because of a perceived parallel between the movements of both Sheng Jiang and the snakes into the Lu house."¹⁹⁶

How different is this anecdote from the previous prediction by Shi Gai? Both refer to a phenomenon that occurred in a meaningful location of the respective states, and both of these phenomena are unpredictable anomalies. If we only accept the initial premise that certain parts of the night sky represent certain parts of the Chinese territory, *fenye* is just another model for interpreting omens.

There are some other models of explanation used in *Zuozhuan* that reflect more naturalistic thinking. For example, when an eclipse occurred in the summer of Zhao 24 (518 BCE), two contradictory predictions were made on the basis of the theory of *yin* and *yang*.

夏，五月，乙未，朔，日有食之。梓慎曰「將水」昭子曰：「旱也。日過分而陽猶不克，克必甚，能無旱乎？陽不克莫，將積聚也。」¹⁹⁷

Summer, fifth month, *yiwei* (32) day, new moon: there was a solar eclipse. Zi Shen said, "There will be a flood." Zhaozi said. "It will be drought. The

¹⁹⁶ Li, *The Readability of the Past*, 194.

¹⁹⁷ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1660.

sun has passed the point of [vernal] equinox, yet *yang* still has not triumphed. [Once it triumphs,] the triumph must be excessive. How can there not be a drought? *Yang* having not triumphed for a long time [means] that it is accumulating itself.

Zhaozi's prediction of drought here seems to reflect a cyclical thinking. In his understanding, *yin* and *yang* behave in a set pattern each year. *Yang* becomes more powerful between the winter solstice and the summer solstice at the expense of *yin*'s retreat, and vice versa in the other half of the year. The more interesting part of this conversation, however, is the reason for Zi Shen's contrary prediction. The basis of Zi Shen's prediction is seen in a speech belonging to Zhao 21, three years prior.

二至二分，日有食之，不為災。日月之行也，分，同道也，至，相過也。其他月則為災，陽不克也，故常為水。¹⁹⁸

[During the months of] the two equinoxes and the two solstices, [even if] there is an eclipse, it does not mean disaster. The movements of the sun and moon are such that during the equinox they are on the same path, and during the solstice, they pass each other. In other months, it means disaster because it means *yang* is not triumphing [over *yin*]. Therefore, there is always flooding.

Zi Shen's understanding of eclipses is the same as that of Zhaozi: *yang* is not triumphing over *yin*. However, his understanding of the movements of *yin* and *yang* is completely different. It is difficult to delineate how he sees their movements exactly, but at least one thing is certain. It is never good for *yang* to be less powerful than *yin*, regardless of seasons. In other words, Zi Shen sees no cyclical movement

¹⁹⁸ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1629–30.

between *yin* and *yang*.

Zi Shen's and Zaozi's different understandings of the movements of *yin* and *yang* suggest that the cyclical understanding of the universe was still not prevalent when these anecdotes were recorded. Sometimes, diviners in *Zuozhuan* make predictions based on the relationships between some of the Five Powers (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), but even in such cases, it is difficult to tell whether the relationship truly reflects a cyclical understanding of the cosmos.¹⁹⁹ Twice, Water is mentioned as being the partner of Fire rather than its conqueror,²⁰⁰ and we find no evidence of a full cyclical relationship between the Five Powers in *Zuozhuan*.²⁰¹ This situation changed in the 4th century BCE, the period when, as we know, predictions were made on the basis of the Jovian cycle.

2. Spirits of natural cycles in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*

One of the most significant documents from the 4th century BCE that profess a cyclical understanding of the universe is the *Chu Silk Manuscript* 楚帛書, which

¹⁹⁹ E.g. Zhao 9, 17, 18, 31, and Ai 9. See Liu Ying 刘瑛, *Zuozhuan, Guoyu fangshu yanjiu*, 191.

²⁰⁰ Fire is described as the “wife” of water (火, 水妃也) in Zhao 9, and water as the “male partner” of fire (水, 火之牡也) in Zhao 17. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1463, 1576.

²⁰¹ Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin describe this period as the first stage in the development of cosmological synthesis in early China. In this stage, “there were many fivefold groups, often inconsistent, among the numerical categories that court diviners and others were trying out. The fives tend to be as concrete as yin and yang, still largely shade and sunlight.” Lloyd and Sivin, *The Way and the Word*, 257. David Schaberg identifies one passage in *Zuozhuan* (Zhao 29) that presents a full set of five powers, but he notes that: “It is significant that this, the most comprehensive elaboration of the system of the Five Phases, is not part of a justification of a prediction or even a policy deliberation.” Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 109.

was looted in 1942 from a tomb in Zidanku 子彈庫, Changsha 長沙, Hunan 湖南 province.²⁰² This manuscript is not usually considered as a type of a daybook, but it too provides some instructions for certain days of the sexagenary cycle just like daybooks. More importantly, however, it explains why cycles exist in our universe and why they matter to us. It is because spirits who are responsible for running this world created the natural cycles, and they themselves move in the patterns that they created.

The manuscript can be divided into three parts. Two long passages are situated at the center, each written in the upside-down direction of the other. (The reader, therefore, always looks at the right-hand side of the manuscript when reading either of these two central passages.) The third part is written on the outer part of the manuscript, surrounding the inner two passages, and it is this third part that immediately draws the readers' attention.

This third part can again be divided into twelve sections, three on each side of the manuscript, with each section consisting of a short passage and a drawing. These rather bizarre-looking drawings are visual representations of twelve monthly spirits, and the contents within each section specify taboos for each month in a language that closely resembles that of daybooks.²⁰³ For example, for the second

²⁰² By routes that are not entirely clear, the *Chu Silk Manuscript* was moved to the United States, and it is currently held in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C. For a more detailed history of the object, see Barnard, *The Ch'u Silk Manuscript*, 1–18; Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 181–84.

²⁰³ Hayashi Minao has several articles analyzing the names and images of these monthly spirits in detail. E.g. Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, “Chōsa shutsudo Sohakusho no jūnishin no yurai”; Hayashi, “The Twelve Gods of the Chan-Kuo Period Silk Manuscript Excavated at Ch’ang-Sha.”

month, the manuscript gives the following instructions.²⁰⁴

曰：女（如），可以出币（師）斂（築）邑，不可以豢（嫁）女取臣妾，不夾（兼）旻（得）不咸（憾）。²⁰⁵

[The month] is called Ru. It is acceptable to lead military expeditions or build cities, [but] one should not marry off one's daughters or take in new slaves. Do not be sorry if you do not accomplish both.

The content of this part is remarkably similar to that of daybooks, and all twelve sections of this third part provide similar instructions on what can be done and should not be done in each month. But what is interesting about this section, or indeed of the entire manuscript, is that we can infer the rationale for the cycle. The fact that each of these sections is accompanied by a visual representation of a fantastic figure makes it unmistakable that these months are controlled by those deities. In other words, a natural cycle is explained in terms of a pantheon. This view that natural cycles work because of various spirits responsible for each phase of a cycle is more clearly explained in the central part of the manuscript, in which Baoxi and his wife Nüwa are said to have begotten four children who are in charge of the four seasons.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ The reason for choosing the second month as the example is its completeness. All characters in the section are clearly recognizable, which is not the case for many other parts of the manuscript. The identification of this section as the second month, as well as of all other months, is based on a list given in the “Shitian” 釋天 chapter in *Erya* 爾雅. Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Zailun boshu shi'er zhong,” 112–13; *Erya zhushu*, 188–89.

²⁰⁵ Li Ling 李零, *Changsha Zidanku Zhanguo Chu boshu yanjiu*, 75.

²⁰⁶ Nüwa is associated with creation in myths from other sources as well, but it is interesting to see that Baoxi is also described as a creator. Although his marriage to Nüwa is a well-known legend in Han dynasty sources, he is more commonly described as a kind of culture bearer. See p.81 below. See also Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, 44–47, 163–65.

是於乃取(娶), 婁□□子之子, 曰女媧(媧)。是生子四□, 是襄天壤
(踐), 是各(格)參朶(化)。... 四神相戈(隔), 乃步呂為成歲(歲)
。是佳(惟)四寺(時)。²⁰⁷

[Baoxi] married Nüwa, a daughter of [lacuna], who gave birth to four children. They aided the processes of Heaven and brought forth the changes. ... The four gods took turns in walking, thus completing a year. This is the four seasons.

In this passage, the four seasons are literally equated with the four gods, and it tells us that the reason we have the four seasons is that four gods take turns in order to complete a year. From this explanation, we can infer that the division of a year into twelve months is precisely the same. The twelve spirits, whose names and figures are explicitly given in the surrounding text, are the gods in charge of the twelve months, who also take turns to complete a year. In other words, it could be said that the manuscript is describing not just a mechanical cycle of the universe but rather characteristics of various temporal spirits.

When we acknowledge that the prescriptions associated with each month can also be seen as prescriptions related to natural spirits, the cosmological basis of this manuscript looks very similar to that of another ancient text, *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (The Classic of Mountains and Seas).²⁰⁸ While *Shanhaijing* tells us about the details of various spirits in different regions and what to expect when we get there,

²⁰⁷ Li Ling 李零, *Changsha Zidanku Zhanguo Chu boshu yanjiu*, 66.

²⁰⁸ The earliest reference to *Shanhaijing* appears in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, but some parts of the book, especially the part on mountains in the beginning, may come from much earlier sources. Richard Strassberg suggests that it may be as early as 4th century BCE, while some other scholar suggested even earlier dates. Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary*, 3; Riccardo, "Shan Hai Ching," 359–61.

the *Chu Silk Manuscript* prescribes ways to avoid harm while under influence of various temporal deities. Like the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, *Shanhaijing* presents a comprehensive scheme of the universe.²⁰⁹ The difference is that while the former presents a temporal scheme, the latter presents a spatial one.

The problem with this kind of explanation, however, is that while explaining the cyclical patterns of the universe in terms of shared duties of various deities could be effective in justifying the taboos and requirements associated with each phase of cycles, it simultaneously implies that the cyclical patterns are not really fixed. There is always a possibility that the anthropomorphic spirits deviate from their duties, especially if people do not show them proper respects. The manuscript provides a strict warning for such possible disruption in patterns.

佳(惟)□□四(?)月,則經(贏)紕不曼(得)元(其)棠(當)
;春顯(夏)昧(秋)晷(冬),□又(有)曼尚(常);月(日月)
星曆(辰)變(亂)避(逆)元(其)行。經(贏)紕避(逆)變(
?亂),卉木亡尚(常),是(?)[謂]突(妖)。天墜(地)乍(作)
羨(殃),天梧(梧)灋(將)乍(作)瀾(湯),降于元(其)[四]方
。山陵元(其)變(墮),又(有)泉卑澍(泉,汨),是胃(謂)李
。²¹⁰

It is when ... [average] months become too long or too short [and] do not obtain their proper [duration]; spring, summer, fall, and winter [do not] obtain their constant [duration]; the sun and the moon and the stars lose their [proper] paths [and fall into] chaos. Inconsistency in the lengths of duration and disorder [in the proper path lead] plants and trees to lose

²⁰⁹ Cf. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Conception of Terrestrial Organization in the Shan Hai Jing."

²¹⁰ Li Ling 李零, *Changsha Zidanku Zhanguo Chu boshu yanjiu*, 52.

their constancy. This is called "ill-omened." When Heaven and Earth create calamities, thundering heaven pours rain everywhere. Mountains and hills will collapse, and springs will gush forward. This is called "turmoil."

This passage could also be read as a warning about dangers of an inaccurate calendar.²¹¹ If the average length of lunation is wrongly calculated, the stars and seasons will seem to be moving in unexpected ways (even though they are not actually deviating from their patterns), affecting agriculture. However, the content of this passage goes beyond that level. It claims that these disruptions in patterns will even cause mountains to collapse. In the subsequent section, the manuscript even states that stars will lose brightness “星曆(辰)不同(炯).”²¹² The warning is, then, not just about the consequences of incongruence between the calendar and the permanent cycles, but about a real break in the cycles.²¹³

The relatively weak faith in the permanence of natural cycles in the *Chu Silk Manuscript* is more clearly noticeable if we compare the narrative model used in the manuscript with those of later materials that speak about the same subject. For example, in “Xicizhuan” the same hero, Baoxi, is said to have “observed” the patterns of the universe, instead of “created” them.

古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象于天，俯則觀法于地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，于是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類

²¹¹ Cook and Major, *Defining Chu*, 172.

²¹² Li Ling 李零, *Changsha Zidanku Zhanguo Chu boshu yanjiu*, 57.

²¹³ Li Ling’s interpretation of this passage is, “heaven will send down calamities and make the four seasons to lose order and the stars to move in disorder.” Li Ling 李零, 31.

萬物之情。²¹⁴

In the ancient times, when Baoxi was the king of all under heaven, he looked above to observe the images of the heaven and looked down to observe the laws of the earth. He observed the patterns of birds and beasts as well as properness of the earth. Near at hand, he took [things for consideration] from his own person, and from afar he took from the myriad things, and thus he first created the eight trigrams. With [the eight trigrams] he channeled the virtue of spiritual brilliance and categorized the natures of all things.

In this story, Baoxi is not a god but a human king, and he does not create natural cycles but observes them. The patterns exist permanently, independent of human recognition. In this kind of story, there always appears a sage like by Baoxi who observes these patterns for the first time and creates a system by which mundane people can utilize those patterns. Here, the system is the trigrams, but in the “Banfajie” 版法解 (The Explanation of the *Ban fa*) chapter of *Guanzi* 管子 it is the laws,²¹⁵ and in *Xunzi* 荀子 it is the rituals.²¹⁶ Different thinkers employed similar narrative models to argue that what they deem important is in fact grounded in the eternal patterns of heaven.

By comparison, the idea of natural cycles reflected in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*

²¹⁴ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 350–51.

²¹⁵ The very first sentence of the chapter (which Allyn Rickett dates to be written in the Han dynasty) states that “laws are modeled after the positions of Heaven and Earth and imitate the movements of the four seasons.” Rickett, *Guanzi*, 137. The text specifically explains that it is the sages who took these natural patterns as the model. “聖人法之” *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 1196.

²¹⁶ Xunzi states that rituals are markers 表 that help us navigate through the eternal patterns of nature. “Tianlun” *Xunzi jijie*, 318–19. In Paul R. Goldin’s summary, “rituals are not merely received practices, nor convenient social institutions; they are practicable forms in which the sages aimed to encapsulate the fundamental patterns of the universe.” Goldin, *Confucianism*, 84.

appears to be from an earlier period.²¹⁷ The importance of cyclical patterns is noticed, yet the universe is still seen as run by anthropomorphic spirits. There is an emphasis on the benefit derived from respecting and following the cyclical patterns, but the constancy of these patterns needs to be guaranteed by spirits who are in charge of the world.²¹⁸

Such partial belief in the rigidity of the cyclical patterns may be only natural, considering the level of scientific understanding, especially those of the celestial bodies, during the time. By the 4th century BCE, Chinese people had long been aware of the annual cycles of the sun and the stars in the night sky,²¹⁹ but they also thought that some celestial bodies move in unpredictable ways. A notorious example is Jupiter, which was sometimes observed as skipping its due station. This phenomenon, which is known as “overstepping a lodge” 超辰, was an inevitable consequence of the difference of 0.14 years between the actual Jovian period and the imperfect Chinese model of it.²²⁰ Furthermore, Mars is described as having no regular pattern of movement even in texts from the 2nd century BCE.²²¹

²¹⁷ Donald Harper points out that it is not just the contents but also the language that puts the manuscript to be of earlier date. Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” 847.

²¹⁸ In a way, the manuscript shows a transfer of power and authority from spirits to cyclical patterns. And according to Ojima Sukema’s theory, the transition of power from spirits to cyclical entities, or more specifically to asterisms, has occurred long before the Warring States period as he finds the origin of the *fenye* system in ancestral worship turning into astral worship. The evidence, in Ojima’s view, is the concept of *di* 帝, which originally meant high ancestors but later came to refer to asterisms in the sky. Ojima Sukema 小島祐馬, “Bun’ya-setsu to Chūgoku kodaijin no shinkō,” 55–72.

²¹⁹ See n.186 above.

²²⁰ See n.179 above. An example of this phenomenon is mentioned in Xiang 28. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 1230–32.

²²¹ Cullen, “Understanding the Planets in Ancient China,” 224–25.

Nevertheless, despite such inaccurate knowledge, there is little doubt that divination increasingly relied on cyclical patterns of the universe, and the patterns were thought to be much more rigid than how they were described in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*. Advances in astronomy during the Warring States and Han periods may be partially responsible for this trend;²²² as astrologers discovered more patterns in the night sky, the belief in the power of cycles became stronger. However, it could also have been the other way around. That is, the growing belief in cycles drove astrologers to look for more patterns in nature. If we examine contents of most excavated daybooks that date from Warring States and Han periods, the cycles used as the basis of their prognostications are almost never susceptible to disruption, and these cycles are not always necessarily based on natural phenomena either. In other words, the belief in eternal cycles of the universe and that we can make predictions about the future on the basis of those cycles existed before astrologers fully comprehended the patterns of the sky.²²³

²²² For detailed information on astronomy during the period, see Sun and Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky During the Han*; Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China*.

²²³ But one may say that, in pre-modern China, the sense of flexibility in patterns of the universe was never completely removed even with further advancement in astronomy. As Nakayama Shigeru observed, even when solar eclipses were understood as cyclical phenomena, when eclipses occurred (or did not occur) despite contrary predictions, such “Inaccuracies were attributed not necessarily to imperfections in scientific technique, but often to the indeterminacy of celestial motions — or, to put it more accurately, to their susceptibility to at least some control by human desires operating through ritual and magic.” Nakayama, “Characteristics of Chinese Astrology,” 447.

3. Permanent cycles of the universe

During the late Warring States and Han periods, there were two ways in which diviners postulated unchanging cycles as a basis for predictions. One was to focus on real cycles that are rather simple and therefore extremely unlikely to deviate from their predicted paths, and the other was to create imaginary bodies whose cycles could not, by definition, deviate from their predetermined paths. In both scenarios, we see an increased power of the cycles to the point that the natural spirits, who were the guarantors of the cycles in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, succumbed to the cyclical patterns and lose virtually all their spiritual powers.

The cycle that represents the first way is that of an asterism called Beidou 北斗 (The Northern Dipper, which comprises the seven brightest stars of Ursa Major). Divination by the cyclical pattern of this asterism is particularly interesting since it shows a linear connection between divination dependent on spiritual powers and divination dependent solely on cyclical patterns of the universe.

3.1. Beidou, The Northern Dipper

The importance of Beidou is attested to in many early sources, the most important of which is probably the drawing on the lid of a lacquered case found in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng 曾侯乙 (closed in the 5th century BCE). It has a figure of a dipper situated at the center of the twenty-eight stellar lodges 二十八宿.²²⁴ In

²²⁴ See Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," 833–36. The twenty-eight

reality, the asterism is not quite at the center, but its proximity to the North Pole and relative brightness of its component stars made it one of the most important asterisms in early Chinese culture.²²⁵ In Sima Qian's "Tianguanshu," the area around the North Pole is described as the court of the high god Di 帝 and the asterism Beidou as his chariot.²²⁶

Aside from its location and average brightness, another important characteristic of this asterism that played a decisive role in its becoming of an object of astrological interpretation was its shape. The more or less straight line that connects the "handle" part of this "dipper" would have helped any observer of the night sky to recognize its rotational movement. What is more, the cyclical movement of this asterism has practically no chance of deviating from its predicted path.²²⁷ In short, it had all the qualifications to be an astrologically important asterism. It was located in a naturally significant part of the sky, and its cyclical pattern was easy to detect as well as predict.

The earliest unequivocal evidence of the use of Beidou's cycle for divination appears in a daybook excavated from a late 3rd century BCE tomb in Zhoujia tai 周家

stellar lodges are Chinese asterisms situated more or less around the ecliptic. For more information, see Sun and Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky During the Han*, 113–19.

²²⁵ In the 5th century BCE, the star that was farthest from the North Pole (η UMa) was at about +62° while the closest (α UMa) was at about +72°, and the least bright of the seven stars (δ UMa) has the apparent magnitude of 3.3 while the brightest (ϵ UMa) has 1.75. The stars' declination in the 5th century BCE is calculated by Stellarium, an open source software downloadable at www.stellarium.org.

²²⁶ "Tianguanshu" *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 1803–10.

²²⁷ The only deviation that Beidou can make from its predicted path would be due to axial precession, which takes approximately 26,000 years for a full cycle. Due to its long period, however, its effect on the direction of the handle would have been hardly noticeable to a lay observer.

台, Sha 沙 city, Hubei province.²²⁸ The daybook marks the direction of Beidou with the series of the twenty-eight stellar lodges and lists prognostications for various topics of divination.²²⁹ For example, for a case when Beidou points due north, the following prognostications are given.

[虛：斗]乘虛，門有客，所言者虛故事，不害。占獄訟，解；占約結，不成（成，成）；占逐、追亡人，弗得；占病者，已。占²⁰⁷[行]者，已發；占來者，未至；占市旅者，不吉；占物，白、黑半；占斷（鬪），不合。²⁰⁸²³⁰

Xu: When Beidou is over Xu (Void), and if there is a guest at the door, whatever the guest says will be a made-up story, but will not be harmful. If one divines about imprisonment, there will be release. If one divines about a mutual contract, what could not be agreed upon will be agreed upon. If one divines about pursuing a lost person, you will not find the person. If one divines about sickness, the sickness will be healed. If one divines about departure, it is on the way. If one divines about arrival, it has not arrived yet. If one divines about business at the market, it is inauspicious. If one divines about color, it is half white and half black. If

²²⁸ Ethan Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 58–60, categorizes a divination method called *jianchu* 建除 (Establishment and Removal), which is found in the beginning section of many daybooks, including the earliest Jiudian manuscript, as a kind of "Dipper System." This is not groundless, as the branch designations for the days of "establishment" 建 in each month are identical to those for Beidou's monthly directions, which are known as "monthly establishment" 月建. See n.236 below. Zhang Peiyu 张培瑜, "Chutu Hanjian boshu shang de lizhu," 136–37, also mentions Beidou when explaining *jianchu*. Zhang Peiyu 张培瑜, "Chutu Hanjian boshu shang de lizhu," 136–37. However, it is probably not the case that the *jianchu* method started out as a kind of "Dipper System." The Shuihudi daybooks present two types of *jianchu*, of which only the "Qin system" 秦除 is identical with that given in the Kongjiapo daybook. The "Chu system" assigns different branches to the "establishment" days in each month, and it is this Chu system that is included in the earliest Jiudian daybook. See Kalinowski, "Les traités de Shuihudi," 199 n.76; Chen Wei 陳偉, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, 304.

²²⁹ The series of twenty-eight lodges must be understood here as referring to fixed directions since, in reality, Beidou cannot move its directions relative to other asterisms in the sky. Uses of the series of the twenty-eight lodges for other purposes was not uncommon during the time, see Kalinowski, "The Use of the Twenty-Eight Xiu as a Day-Count in Early China," 69–78.

²³⁰ Hubeisheng Jingzhoushi Zhouliangyuqiao yizhi bowuguan 湖北省荆州市周梁玉桥遗址博物馆, *Guanju Qin-Hanmu jiandu*, 113.

one divines about warfare, there will be no engagement.

The fact that the Xu lodge refers to the direction due north can be inferred from an attached diagram in the manuscript that coordinates the twenty-eight lodges with the spatial directions as well as the twenty-eight divisions of a day. And it also includes a brief instruction on how to determine the lodge over which Beidou currently lies.²³¹ Hence, there is no doubt that the basis of this divination method is the asterism's cyclical pattern.

There is something puzzling about these prognostications, however. The prognostications repeatedly use the phrase “if one divines about,” but what does “to divine” mean here? If there is any meaning in the act of “divining,” it must refer to the act of calculating Beidou's current direction, as that is the basis of prognostications. However, calculating Beidou's current direction is not the same type of act as throwing dice or drawing a card from a deck. The result is the calculation of a predetermined fact that cannot be affected by the diviner. So why do the prognostications begin with the phrase “if one divines about”? We might expect a simpler formula, such as “[when Beidou's handle lies due north] you will not find the lost person.” After all, this is how the prognostications for other calendric cycles are usually given in daybooks: e.g., “Zi (1) days: In the early morning, north is auspicious. At midday, there is a gain in the south.”²³²

This type of prognostication makes sense when the act of “divination”

²³¹ The diagram is on slips 156-181, and the instruction is on 243-44. Hubeisheng Jingzhoushi Zhouliangyuqiao yizhi bowuguan 湖北省荆州市周梁玉桥遗址博物馆, 107, 117.

²³² See n.162 above.

produces a sign that has to be interpreted. For example, in very similar language, “Guice liezhuan” also provides a list of prognostications regarding sickness, travel, imprisonment, etc. on the basis of shapes of cracks on turtle shells.²³³ The language makes sense in this case because the diviner does not know how the crack will turn out before heat is applied. Of course, a highly skilled diviner may have been able to control the shape, but even then, there would still have been a possibility of failure. It is different from a case in which the result is determined even before the divination is performed.

Thus, the only way to justify the use of the conditional phrase “if one divines about” is to assume that diviners were unaware of Beidou’s current direction at the time of divination. Only if the diviner is unaware of whether the handle is currently pointing, say, due east over Fang 房 (chamber), in which case it is stated the lost person will be caught, does it make sense to “perform a divination” about finding a lost person.²³⁴

If this manuscript really reflects how the divination on the basis of Beidou’s cycle was practiced in the 3rd century BCE, we may speculate that the creators of the Zhoujiatai manuscript were not so keen on figuring out Beidou’s directions. Even though they were aware that the asterism moves in a cycle, calculating the current

²³³ The resemblance is also noted by the editors of the Zhoujiatai manuscript. Hubeisheng Jingzhoushi Zhouliangyuqiao yizhi bowuguan 湖北省荆州市周梁玉桥遗址博物馆, *Guanju Qin-Hanmu jiandu*, 111. For sample translations of prognostications in “Guice liezhuan,” see Shaughnessy, “The Composition of the ‘Zhouyi,’” 64–65. However, this is probably not how bone divination was performed during the Shang. There are cases in which cracks are identical in shape but have different prognostications. Zhang Bingquan 張秉權, “Yinxu bugui zhi buzhaoli ji qi youguan wenti,” 232. See also n.74 in the previous chapter.

²³⁴ Hubeisheng Jingzhoushi Zhouliangyuqiao yizhi bowuguan 湖北省荆州市周梁玉桥遗址博物馆, *Guanju Qin-Hanmu jiandu*, 111.

direction of Beidou's handle required some effort.

By the 2nd century BCE, however, this could have no longer been the case. A daybook excavated in Kongjiapo 孔家坡, Suizhou 隨州 city, Hubei province includes a simple double-entry table, written across over just twelve bamboo slips, which conveniently shows Beidou's direction at any given time.²³⁵ From this table, which is arranged by months of a year and times of a day, one can easily read that, for example, the handle points due south at dusk in the 5th month (the month of the summer solstice) and due north at dusk in the 11th month (the month of the winter solstice).²³⁶

When ascertaining the direction becomes as easy as checking a simple table, the language of prognostications in the Zhoujia tai manuscript no longer makes much sense. A diviner who is familiar with this table could probably figure out the direction of Beidou's handle as soon as there was an occasion for divination, just as a reader of daybooks already knew each date in a sexagenary cycle. There is not much more that a diviner would need to do in order to "divine."

²³⁵ *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu jian du*, 136–37 Slips 78–89. See also Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 117–20.

²³⁶ The information also agrees with the description of "monthly establishment" 月建 given in "Tianwenxun." *Huainanzi jishi*, 208. However, the exact definition of the so-called "direction" is a little unclear or even misleading. If it was really referring to the extension of the more or less straight line created by the handle of Beidou, it would have pointed due North around midnight in the winter solstice, not dusk. As far as I can tell, the most consistent data that matches with these so-called "direction of the handle of the Dipper" is the position of the lodge Jiao 角 (Horn), which is in fact not a part of Beidou. However, in "Tianguanxu" it is stated that "the dipper's handle pulls the dragon's horn" 杓攜龍角. "Tianguanshu" *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 1809. Furthermore, the Jiao lodge is placed right next to the last star on the handle part of the Dipper on the heaven plate of a *shi* device, and according to a method called *zhidoufa* 指斗法 (Dipper Index Method), which is still preserved in the contemporary *liuren* tradition, the position of this lodge indicates the direction of Beidou. See Go Jucheol 高周鐵, *Yugim jeong'on*, 30–34. For another possible explanation about Beidou's direction, see Cullen, "Some Further Points on the 'Shih,'" 34 n.25.

Thus it is not surprising that the Kongjiapo daybook uses the cycle of Beidou completely differently from the Zhoujiatai daybook.

斗擊 (繫) : ^{129.3}直前者死 , ^{130.3}直後者不死。 ^{131.3}²³⁷

[When] Beidou strikes, those who are in its front will die, and those who are in its back will not die.

These slips do not provide tailored prognostications for each direction as in the Zhoujiatai daybook, but they state one basic principle: it is highly inauspicious for those who are in the direction that the handle points to, and the contrary for those who are in the opposite direction. A similar principle is recorded in *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Masters of Huainan), which says: “those who are struck by Beidou cannot stand against [their] enemies” 北斗所繫 , 不可與敵。²³⁸ This passage differs from those in the Zhoujiatai manuscript in that it no longer presupposes an act of inquiry but simply describes how the pattern is. Readers may utilize the pattern as they see fit.

Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Former Han dynasty) contains a record of a real-life application of this principle, in which Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9 – 23 CE), the usurper of the Han throne, is said to have relied on the power of Beidou to ward off the advancing Han armies.²³⁹

時莽紺衮服 , 帶璽韞 , 持虞帝匕首。天文郎桎梏於前 , 日時加某 , 莽旋

²³⁷ *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu jianpu*, 145. Slip numbers, which are originally marked in Chinese by the editors of the book, are changed to Arabic numbers here.

²³⁸ “Tianwenxun” *Huainanzi jishi*, 282.

²³⁹ Harper, “The Han Cosmic Board (Shih 式),” 4–5.

席隨斗柄而坐，曰：「天生德於予，漢兵其如予何！」²⁴⁰

At that time, Wang Mang dressed himself entirely in a dark blue robe, wore the thread of the imperial seal as a belt, and held the dagger of the Emperor Yu. Then an officer of astronomy placed a *shi* device in front of him, and he applied the hour and the season to it. Wang Mang turned his mat following [the direction] of the handle of Beidou, and said, “Heaven has engendered virtue in me. What can the Han armies do to me?”²⁴¹

The device that Wang Mang used to figure out Beidou’s direction at the moment is called *shi* 式, which is a rotating device consisting of two plates: a square plate at the bottom, commonly called the earth plate, and a round plate at the top, called the heaven plate.²⁴² A typical *shi* device from the Han period would have a drawing of Beidou at the center of the heaven plate, with markers for the twelve months and the names of the twenty-eight lodges 二十八宿 on the periphery.²⁴³ The

²⁴⁰ Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu*, 4190. J. 69.3 The exact meaning of the phrase “日時加某” is a little unclear although there is no mistake that it has something to do with adjustment of the device. I suspect if it is not a corruption of “月將加時” which is a term referring to the method of adjusting heaven and earth plates in *liuren* divination. The translation would be then, “he applied the monthly general to the hour [of the day].” See n.245 below.

²⁴¹ This last remark by Wang Mang alludes to what Confucius said in *Analects* 7:23, after a failed assassination attempt made by a high minister of Song, Huan Tui. The line in the *Analects* is: “Heaven has engendered virtue in me. What can Huan Tui do to me?” 天生德於予，桓魋其如予何。

²⁴² Currently, the earliest exemplar of this device comes from a 2nd-century BCE tomb of Marquis of Ruyin 汝陰侯 (d. 165 BCE) in Shuanggudui 雙古堆 near Fuyang 阜陽, Anhui 安徽 province. Anhuisheng wenwu gongzuodui 安徽省文物工作队, Fuyang diqu bowuguan 阜陽地區博物館, and Fuyangxian wenhuaju 阜陽縣文化局, “Fuyang Shuanggudui Xihan Ruyinhoumu faju jianbao.” An artifact from a tomb in Wangjiatai 王家台, dated to be from the 3rd century BCE was also identified as a *shi* device in the excavation report. Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 荊州地區博物館, “Jiangling Wangjiatai 15 hao Qinmu,” 42. However, as the report describes it (without an image), this is very different from other *shi* devices from the Han period as it does not even seem rotatable. It may indeed be an astrological device since it was found with so many other divination related objects, but its exact use is still unclear.

²⁴³ This resembles the drawing found in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, but not all surviving *shi* devices have the figure of the Northern Dipper at the center. Other types of *shi* devices were probably used for different divination methods. For a survey of currently surviving *shi* devices and their images, see Li Ling 李零, “Shi’ yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi,” 2–4.

earth plate would have the markers for the twelve earthly branches, which can represent times of day as well as spatial directions. There may have been more than one way of using this device,²⁴⁴ but by simply rotating it so that the current month on the heaven plate aligns with the current hour on the earth plate,²⁴⁵ a diviner could supposedly calculate Beidou's direction at any time.²⁴⁶

Yet more interesting is how Wang Mang utilized the information. He was not just trying to find out which direction is more auspicious at that time. He must have also believed that by positioning himself in the auspicious direction and putting his enemies on the opposite side, he could vanquish them. He may even have hoped that the ones who stood in the ominous direction would literally die, as the passage in

²⁴⁴ One other way that is recorded in the transmitted literature is to derive the time of year first by observing the direction of Beidou. *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5091 J.128. Marc Kalinowski calls this use of Beidou and that of Wang Mang's *a priori* and *a posteriori*, respectively (though this departs from the ordinary philosophical sense of those terms). He further suggests that the former is "much more hypothetical" in the context of the astronomical discoveries in the epoch. Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*," 351. But I do not think this is the case. In all of the discovered *shi* devices that has Beidou at the center, the asterism is represented "as if it is being observed from the outer surface of the imaginary dome of the sky; that is, it appears as it would on the surface of a celestial globe." Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board (Shih 式)," 4. This means the asterism on the device looks upside down from the shape that is observable in the sky. While this fact does not make the *a priori* use of the device impossible, it is inconvenient at the least. And this inconvenience suggests that the *a priori* use was probably never the primary function of the device.

²⁴⁵ This method is called "applying the monthly general to the hour" 月將加時, which is a term still used in the contemporary *liuren* 六壬 divination method. *Liuren* is a descendant of the ancient divination method using the *shi* devices. Although physical devices are no longer used today, one is still required to construct temporary earth and heaven plates (either by drawing them on a piece of paper or by projecting them onto one's four fingers), and make the adjustments according to the time of year (monthly general) and the time of day (hour). See Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*," 382–93; Yan Dunjie 严敦杰, "Ba liuren shipan," 21–22.

²⁴⁶ Christopher Cullen pointed out that this result would not be very accurate since "the nature of the Chinese lunisolar calendar meant in any case that the day of the solar year on which a particular month began could shift by up to thirty days." Cullen, "Some Further Points on the 'Shih,'" 43. This would be true during the Han period, but this problem was addressed in later *liuren* divination when "monthly generals" became completely detached from lunar months and are decided strictly in relation to the 24 seasonal nodes. See Xu Yiping 许颐平 and Guo Zailai 郭载来, *Tujie liuren daquan*, 1:72–74.

the Kongjiapo daybook says. In this sense, Wang Mang's use of the asterism's cycle may be better described as magical or talismanic rather than divinatory because he was not making an inquiry about the future. Rather, he was trying to rely on a supernatural power to help his cause. Instead of praying or making sacrifices, he was utilizing a known pattern of a spirit.

However, as powerful as Beidou may be, there is a remarkable difference in the degree of freedom attributed to Beidou and the spirits in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*. In the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, spirits could still deviate from their proper path if people did not show them proper respects, but nowhere can we find similar warnings about the movements of Beidou.²⁴⁷ By the same token, Beidou is not pictured as having intentions. It moves strictly according to its predetermined cycle and punishes those who are in front of it, regardless of who they are. In this sense, Donald Harper calls Beidou a "cosmic weapon."²⁴⁸ But in comparison to the spirits in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, a more suitable metaphor may be that of a completely harnessed beast. It retains its spiritual power but is without control over its uses. Only a practitioner who has full knowledge of its pattern can utilize that power as desired.

The uniqueness of the spiritual power of Beidou in the history of early Chinese divination can be further highlighted when we examine how this divination

²⁴⁷ We will see many other entities like Beidou in the following section, some of which have clearer origins as anthropomorphic spirits than Beidou does. See n.274 below. They are all similar in that they move in fixed patterns within calendric cycles and exert influence on various human activities. Kalinowski generically refers to them as "calendric spirits" *shensha* 神煞. Kalinowski, "The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui," 157.

²⁴⁸ Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board (Shih 式)," 5.

method changed in the subsequent periods. References to the spiritual power of the asterism in accounts of divination by means of *shi* devices disappear soon after the time of Wang Mang. *Shi* devices that are dated to later than the Han no longer has the asterism at the center.²⁴⁹ In the later periods, a diviner would still adjust the heaven and earth plates according to the month and the hour of the time of divination, but one would no longer look at Beidou's direction. Instead, a practitioner would calculate the "four schemes" 四課 on the basis of the sexagenary designation of the given day, and the result would be interpreted on the basis of the Five Phase relationship within the "four schemes."²⁵⁰ In other words, within the linear history of a single divination method, we see the principle of Five Phases replacing the mantic power of an asterism as the basis of future prediction.²⁵¹ The auspiciousness of a given moment became dependent entirely on the cycles of the sexagenary system and the Five Phases.

²⁴⁹ Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*," 368–74. Despite the absence of Beidou, the identity between the earlier and later devices is confirmed by other information inscribed on them, such as the names of the twelve monthly generals. On the other hand, the disappearance of Beidou's image on *shi* devices does not necessarily mean that Beidou itself lost its spirituality altogether after this period. Harper shows evidence of Beidou's apotropaic power still being harnessed in sources from the Six Dynasties period. Harper, "The Han Cosmic Board (Shih 式)," 5.

²⁵⁰ For a brief overview of this method in a Western language, see Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*," 382–94. For more detailed explanation, see Xu Yiping 许颐平 and Guo Zailai 郭载猷, *Tujie liuren daquan*, 1:70–113.

²⁵¹ The linear history is identifiable only for *liuren* divination. Not all *shi* devices were necessarily related to *liuren*, and *liuren* is not the only kind of divination methods referred to as *shi* in later periods. For a thorough analysis of various meanings of the term *shi* between the Han and later period, see Kalinowski, "The Notion of 'Shi' 式 and Some Related Terms in Qin-Han Calendrical Astrology."

3.2. Imagined patterns

While Beidou is an excellent example of a divination by a real permanent cycle, many of the prognostications listed in daybooks and other contemporary divination manuals rely on cyclical movements of various entities for which no real corresponding natural phenomena exist. One particularly interesting example is the cycle of the so-called Sui 歲 (Year) star.

As we have seen in *Zuozhuan*, Sui was another name of Jupiter, whose cycle was also used as a basis for future prediction.²⁵² But as confusing as it may sound, there was another star named Sui that moves in a pattern completely irrelevant to Jupiter. This is explained in a daybook excavated from Shuihudi 睡虎地, in Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei province.²⁵³

刑夷、八月、獻馬，歲在東方，以北大羊（祥），東旦亡，南遇英（殃），西數反其鄉。^{64F.1}夏夷、九月、中夕，歲在南方，以東大羊（祥），南旦亡，西禺（遇）英（殃），北數反其鄉。^{65F.1}紡月、十月、屈夕，歲在西方，以南大羊（祥），西旦亡，北禺（遇）英（殃），東數反其鄉。^{66F.1}七月、爨月、援夕，歲在北方，以西大羊（祥），北旦亡，東禺（遇）英（殃），南數反其鄉。^{67F.1}²⁵⁴

In the first, fifth, and ninth months, Sui resides in the East. North is greatly auspicious; East is completely lost; in the South one meets disaster; in the West many shall return to their homes. In the second,

²⁵² See n.177 above.

²⁵³ The excavation uncovered two separate manuscripts, which are commonly distinguished as A and B. For a more detailed information on these manuscripts, see Kalinowski, "Les livres des jours (rishu) des Qin et des Han."

²⁵⁴ Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian*, 190. Slip numbers are changed to Arabic numbers. F signifies front side and .1 means first register.

sixth, and tenth months, Sui resides in the South. East is greatly auspicious; South is completely lost; in the West one meets disaster; in the North many shall return to their homes. In the third, seventh, and eleventh months, Sui resides in the West. South is greatly auspicious; West is completely lost; in the North one meets disaster; in the East many shall return to their homes. In the fourth, eighth, and twelfth months, Sui resides in the North. West is greatly auspicious; North is completely lost; in the East one meets disaster; in the South many shall return to their homes.²⁵⁵

The basic pattern described in this passage shows that Sui makes three rotations per year in East-South-West-North order, residing at each cardinal point for one month. The direction in which Sui currently resides is the most inauspicious, whereas the direction to the left of Sui is the most auspicious. Some scholars initially identified this star as Jupiter because of the name,²⁵⁶ but it is indubitable that this Sui cannot refer to Jupiter. In fact, there is no real star whose movement corresponds to this cycle.

If are to look for a practical basis of this cycle, we should turn to sources like *Huainanzi*, in which this star is presented together with another imaginary star that makes one cycle per year through all of the twelve branches. Their names are differentiated as Taisui 太歲 (Great Year) and Xiaosui 小歲 (Little Year), respectively.

斗杓為小歲，正月建寅，月從左行十二辰。咸池為太歲，二月建卯，月

²⁵⁵ In the manuscript, the months are given by the names used in the Chu calendar. Based on Zeng Xiantong's identification, I translated these months as they correspond to the more common Xia calendar designations. See Zeng Xiantong 曾憲通, "Qinjian rishu suipian jiangshu," 72–81.

²⁵⁶ E.g. Zeng Xiantong 曾憲通, 68–69; Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian*, 190.

從右行四仲，終而複始。太歲迎者辱，背者強，左者衰，右者昌，小歲東南則生，西北則殺，不可迎也，而可背也，不可左也，而可右也，其此之謂也。²⁵⁷

The handle of the Dipper is Xiaosui, and in the first month, it is established in the *yin* direction (approx. ENE). Month by month, it moves to left (i.e. clockwise) through the twelve positions. Xianchi is Taisui, and in the second month, it is established in the *mao* direction (E). Month by month, it moves to the right (i.e. counter-clockwise) through the four cardinal directions, and [the cycle] starts over when finished. The meaning is that those who face Taisui will be violated while those who are situated opposite to it will be strong. Those that are to its left will decline, while those to its right will prosper. When Xiaosui is in the southeast, there is birth; when it is in the northwest there is death. One may not receive it but may stand against it, and one may not have it to one's left but may have it to one's right.

The cycles of these two imaginary stars seem to have been quite well known at the time as the same scheme also appears in the Kongjiapo daybook, with the names given as Dashi 大時 (Great Season) and Xiaoshi 小時 (Little Season).²⁵⁸ In this passage, Taisui is also called Xianchi, which John Major translates as the “Pool of [the shaman] Xian” understanding it as referring to an asterism.²⁵⁹ However, if it does refer to that asterism, the movements described in the passage have no affinity to that of the asterism. The cyclical pattern of Taisui given here is identical to that of Sui seen in the Shuihudi daybook.²⁶⁰ It moves counter-clockwise, stopping only at

²⁵⁷ “Tianwenxun” *Huainanzi jishi*, 219.

²⁵⁸ *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu jiandu*, 141. Slips 111.1–122.1

²⁵⁹ Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 199.

²⁶⁰ While the pattern is identical, there is a difference in its initial position during the first month. Sui is

the cardinal directions each month.

The cycle of Xiaosui, on the other hand, is based on a real natural cycle, i.e. that of Beidou. Each day, Beidou turns slightly more than 360 degrees. This means that if someone was observing the asterism at a fixed time every day, Beidou would seem to rotate slightly, making a full circle over the course of one year. Theoretically, the locations of Xiaosui presented in *Huainanzi* (which states that it is in the ENE in the first month, then in the East in the second month, and in the ESE in the third month, and so on) should correspond to the direction of Beidou's handle after sunset in respective months.²⁶¹

If we take the two cycles together and observe their collective cycle, we see that Taisui and Xiaosui reside in the same direction in the second, fifth, eighth, and eleventh months, which correspond to the times of solstices and equinoxes.²⁶² This means that, while the cycle of Taisui itself does not reflect any real cycle, its conjunction with that of Xiaosui does supervene on the real annual cycle.

said to reside in the East in the first month while Taisui is in the same direction only in the second month. As an explanation for this difference, several scholars suggested that "second month" in *Huainanzi* may be an error for the "first month." E.g. Zhang Peiyu 张培瑜, "Chutu Hanjian boshu shang de lizhu," 138; Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭, *Gudai wenshi yanjiu xintan*, 20–21; Hu Wenhui 胡文辉, *Zhongguo zaoqi fangshu yu wenxian congkao*, 97. But others have also suggested that there may have been more than one system using a similar cycle. E.g. Yan Changgui 晏昌贵, "Jianbo 'rishu' suipian hezheng," 76; Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 123–24. Without further evidence, both positions seem plausible.

²⁶¹ For a more detailed analysis of Beidou's directions, see n.236 above. My reference to the East-Northeast and the East-Southeast directions for the first and third months are only approximations to the directions indicated by *yin*(3) and *chen*(5). The former is based on the sixteen-division of the compass while the latter is based on twelve.

²⁶² Ethan Harkness suggests that this system, which categorizes this type of divination as a "binary system" and, is derived from the relationship between the sun and the moon. Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 60–62, 120–26. While this is an interesting opinion, Harkness does not provide any evidence to support this idea.

Interestingly, though, the cycle of Taisui, which has no practical basis when separated from that of the Xiaosui, was often presented on its own, as we have seen from the Shuihudi daybook. Furthermore, it was believed that this imaginary—or, for believers, simply invisible—star had a real effect on our lives. Two other sections in Shuihudi daybooks, namely “Moving” 遷徙 and “Marrying off one’s son” 嫁子刑, also give prognostications based on the same cycle,²⁶³ and accounts of the star’s influence on warfare are also found in various sources. For example, a dagger-ax (*ge* 戈) excavated at Jingmen 荊門, Hunan 湖南 Province, bears the name Bingbi Taisui 兵避太歲 (Taisui that repels troops),²⁶⁴ and several transmitted sources tell that when King Wu of Zhou was about to attack Shang, this Sui was in the East.²⁶⁵

What can we say about this weird case of divination by an imaginary star whose cycle bears only a faint connection to any real phenomenon? For one thing, we can be sure that divination by such imagined patterns was not unusual at the

²⁶³ Liu Lexian 刘乐贤, *Shuihudi Qinjian rishu yanjiu*, 86–91, 384–88.

²⁶⁴ The name of this weapon, which is sometimes mistranslated as “Weapon to Avoid Taisui” (e.g. Morgan, “Mercury and the Case for Plural Planetary Traditions in Early Imperial China,” 426 n.19.), derives from the depiction of a human-like figure on its blade, who is presumed to be the representation of the god Taisui. This presumption is based on the resemblance between the depiction of Taisui on the blade and that of the central figure in a Mawangdui silk manuscript, which Li Ling and others call it as *Taiyi bibing tu* 太一避兵圖 (The Picture of Taiyi Repelling Troops). Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 75–84. Furthermore, Li Xueqin clearly states that the meaning of the name of this weapon is that “one may not attack where Taisui resides” Li Xueqin 李学勤, “Bingbi taisui’ ge xinzheng,” 38.

²⁶⁵ E.g. “Ruxiao” *Xunzi jijie*, 134; “Binglüexun” *Huainanzi jishi*, 1065. Needless to say, this story cannot be true as the concept of Taisui cannot be traced back to the pre-Warring States period. The point of this narrative is that King Wu overcame bad omens. Previously, some scholars took this Sui to be either Jupiter or Counter-Jupiter, but Hu Wenhui has convincingly shown that it refers to Taisui mentioned in *Huainanzi*. Hu Wenhui 胡文辉, *Zhongguo zaoqi fangshu yu wenxian congkao*, 115–19. On the other hand, without making reference to these passages in *Xunzi* and *Huainanzi*, Pankenier has argued that Jupiter was actually in a field (*fenye*) corresponding to the Eastern regions during King Wu’s initial military campaign against Shang in 1059 BCE. King Wu withdrew from this campaign because of Jupiter’s location, and the final conquest was carried out two years later. Pankenier, “Early Chinese Astronomy and Cosmology,” 203–6.

time. In *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, we can see names of more than a dozen entities that are believed to move in cyclical patterns, but many of them cannot be identified with a real star.²⁶⁶ The question is then, how did people come to believe in these various fictitious cyclical entities?

One way people came to believe in these cyclical entities is by modifying real natural phenomena so that they fit perfectly with calendric cycles. We have seen one such example in Xiaosui, but the best-known example of such a star is Counter-Jupiter, called as Taiyin 太陰 (Great Shadow) or Suiyin 歲陰 (Jupiter Shadow), or even Taisui 太歲 (Great Year)—the same name that, in the texts discussed above, denoted the invisible star that makes three cycles around the sky in a single year.²⁶⁷ The relationship between this imaginary star and Jupiter, as well as its movements through the twelve branches, is explained in many early Chinese sources, but one of the clearest descriptions is found in a manuscript named *Wuxingzhan* 五星占 (Divination by the Five Planets) discovered in Mawangdui 馬王堆, Changsha 長沙 city, Hunan 湖南 province.

...歲星與大陰相應也。大陰居維辰一，歲星居維宿二。大陰居中辰一，歲星居中宿三...歲星居尾箕。大陰左徙，會於陰陽之界。皆十二歲而周

²⁶⁶ “Shixie” *Hanfeizi jijie*, 122. The cyclical patterns of these entities are not explicitly mentioned in *Hanfeizi*, but the list includes some entities whose pattern can be identified from other sources. For example, the cycle of Sui is presented in Shuihudi daybook (see n.254 above), and that of Fenglong is in Mawangdui Xingde manuscript. (see p.104 below) Additionally, Kalinowski notes that “Defining the positions of the spirits by using the terms in front of/behind (*xianhou* 先後) and left/right (*zuoyou* 左右) [in this passage] is also characteristic of *Xingde B*,” which presents cycles of several other invisible entities. Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” 181 n.136.

²⁶⁷ The name Taiyin is used in *Huainanzi* while Suiyin is used in *Shiji*. In *Hanshu*, the same entity is na, the “Great Year,” and has consequently become its best-known name, replacing the reference to another star that made three rotations per year. Chen Jiujin 陈久金, “Cong Mawangdui ‘Wuxingzhan’ de chutu shitan woguo gudai de suixing jinian wenti,” 51–53.

於天地。大陰居十二辰，從子...²⁶⁸

Jupiter and Dayin (i.e. Taiyin) mutually resonate. When Dayin resides in a corner-branch, Jupiter resides in two corner-lodges. When Dayin resides in a middle-branch (i.e. a cardinal direction), Jupiter resides in three middle-lodges... Jupiter resides in the lodges Wei 尾 (Tail) and Ji 箕 (Winnowing Basket). Dayin moves left (clockwise) and crosses [Jupiter] at the border between yin and yang. Both take twelve years to circle around heaven and earth. Dayin's residence among the twelve branches starts from *zi* (the first of the twelve branches)...

The ellipses in the passage denote *lacunae*, but the principle of Counter-Jupiter's movement is clear. The path of the Jupiter around heaven and earth is marked by the twenty-eight stellar lodges, which in turn are grouped into twelve Jupiter stations designated by the twelve branches.²⁶⁹ While the real Jupiter is described as moving through these twelve stations in the reverse order of the twelve branches, its counterpart, an invisible star, is described as moving in the regular order.

The movement of Jupiter given here is already an idealized version of Jupiter's real movement. Jupiter does not actually go through the twenty-eight lodges in the described manner, nor does it take exactly twelve years to make a full circle. And yet, another entity with an even more idealized version of the Jovian cycle was created, whose movement was so ideal that it fit perfectly with the

²⁶⁸ Kalinowski, "The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui," 148. See also Liu Lexian 刘乐贤, *Mawangdui tianwenshu kaoshi*, 42–43.

²⁶⁹ Jupiter stations that correspond to cardinal directions consist of three stellar lodges ($4 \times 3 = 12$) while those that correspond to non-cardinal directions consist of two lodges ($8 \times 2 = 16$). In this way, the twenty-eight ($12 + 16$) stellar lodges are more or less evenly distributed over the twelve Jupiter stations.

calendric system of the twelve branches. The most important characteristic of this new entity, however, was that it could never be observed to be deviating from its fixed cycle. Moreover, by stating that Jupiter is at a certain place when Taiyin is at another, the passage implies that the pattern of Taiyin is the norm from which the cycle of Jupiter is derived.²⁷⁰ The imaginary star defines the position of the real Jupiter. This makes it seem as if Jupiter itself is almost as fictitious—and as strict in its cycle—as Taiyin.

The case of Taiyin, however, is close to an exception, as most other invisible cyclical entities bear only a faint connection with real-world phenomena, if at all. The more common way to form imaginary cyclical entities seems to be prescribing cyclical patterns to already widely believed anthropomorphic spirits. The most interesting piece of evidence for this type of cyclical deities comes from a diagram included in a military divination text named *Xingde* 刑德 (Punishment and Virtue), also from Mawangdui.²⁷¹

In this manuscript, Xing and De refer to another type of invisible entities that mark auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of times and directions within the

²⁷⁰ For this reason, Kalinowski questions if the term “counter-Jupiter” is appropriate at all. Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” 154.

²⁷¹ John S. Major argued that, while “punishments” and “rewards” are apt translations for *xing* and *de* in many contexts, they should be translated as “recision” and “accretion” when they refer to cosmological principles. Major, “The Meaning of Hsing-Te.” However, I agree with Kalinowski that “recision” and “accretion” are inappropriate for *xing* and *de* in the Mawangdui manuscript as they are not cosmological principles. Kalinowski writes: “Here the shifts of Xing and De are not ruled by a natural process of the growth and shrinking of the yin and yang energies of the year but rest on arithmetic principles that underlie sexagenary hemerology. In addition, their functions are no different from those of other calendrical spirits such as the Bloody Branch (*xuezh* 血枝), the Day Spell (*riyan* 日厭), and the multitude of Yearly Miasmas (*niansha* 年煞) which were attached to calendars from as early as the Han.” Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” 157 n.75.

sexagenary cycle of days. The names Xing and De suggest that these entities derive not from astronomical cycles but from an anthropomorphic concept of Heaven.²⁷² The abundance created in nature during summer and fall was regarded as due to Heaven's virtue, and the harsh times caused by the winter and natural disasters would have been Heaven's punishment. In this text, however, the cycle of Xing and De retains little reference to the seasonal changes.²⁷³

But what is more interesting than Xing and De are the names of the other five cyclical entities that are described as following the cycle of Xing and De: Fenglong 豐隆 (Abundance, God of Lightning), Fengbo 風伯 (Earl of Wind), Dayin 大音 (Great Sound), Leigong 雷公 (Duke of Thunder), and Yushi 雨師 (Master of Rain). These names clearly suggest that many of these entities do not derive from any astronomical or other natural cycles, but from anthropomorphic spirits that were thought to be in charge of respective meteorological phenomena. They are mentioned in early Chinese literature and are also often depicted in human form in paintings.²⁷⁴ Yet, here they are attributed with cycles that have no apparent connection with referred phenomena.

²⁷² Kalinowski, "The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui," 155ff.

²⁷³ In "Tianwenxun," their movement is more clearly associated with a solar year. It describes the Seven Places 七舍 along which Xing and De move in and out in a course of one year. In the month of the summer solstice, De is at the outer most place while Xing is at the inner most, and vice versa in the month of the winter solstice. "Tianwenxun" *Huainanzi jishi*, 212–13. See also *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu jianpu*, 137–38 Slips 90–96.

²⁷⁴ These names appear in "Yuanyou" chapter of *Chuci*, as well as "Siyi" chapter in *Lunheng*. For more detailed analysis on textual reference to these deities, see Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤, "Mawangdui 'Xingde' yiben jiugongtu zhushen shi," 84. The exact identity of Dayin is still obscure, and Jao Tsung-I equates Dayin with Taiyin, the Counter-Jupiter star. However, he does not clearly explain how the cycle of Taiyin could be fit into a part of the sexagenary cycle. For reference to pictorial representations of these spirits, see Pirazzoli-T'Sertevens, "Death and the Dead," 984–85.

Days 37 – 42	N Days 19 – 24	Days 49 – 54
W Days 7 – 12	Days 25 – 30 Days 55 – 60	Days 31 – 36 E
Days 13 – 18	Days 43 – 48 S	Xing (1) Fenglong (2) Fengbo (3) Dayin (4) Leigong (5) Yushi (6)

Figure 1 A schematic representation of the movement of the six spirits around the Nine Residences

The movements of the six spirits are succinctly presented by a so-called Nine-Residence Diagram *jiugongtu* 九宮圖 (which is basically a 3x3 diagram) attached at the end of the manuscript.²⁷⁵ Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the diagram. Days of the sexagenary cycle are divided into ten groups of six days, and eight of them are distributed over the eight residences on the outside while the remaining two are placed at the center. Within each group of six days, each day is paired with a spirit, which suggests that these spirits are somehow “active” once

²⁷⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the movements of the six spirits along the nine residences, see Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” 185–91.

every six days while making their way through the nine residences in a cycle of sixty days.

There is no rationale for the association between each day and its spirit, but the movement of these spirits among the Nine Residences does have a logic. Alternating between a cardinal direction and an intercardinal direction, the group of six spirits moves from one residence to another following the reverse of the conquest order 所不勝 of the Five Phases: from Wood-East to Metal-West to Fire-South to Water-North to Earth-Center and back to Wood-East and so on.²⁷⁶ This order is arranged so that each phase is superseded by the phase that conquers the current phase, and it is the principle of dynastic changes described in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn of Mr. Lü).²⁷⁷ There, the dynastic changes are presented as evidence of the cosmic cycle.

Here, the movement of the six spirits is justified by the Five-Phase designations for the days of Xing and De, i.e. the first day of each of the ten six-day groups. They are days 1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, and 55. If we look at just the last digit in these numbers, we can notice that it rotates in the order of 1-7-3-9-5. These numbers correspond to the days *jia*, *geng*, *bing*, *ren*, and *wu* of the ten-stem cycle, and according to the traditional correlation system between ten stems and the Five Phases, this order precisely corresponds to the order of Wood-Metal-Fire-Water-

²⁷⁶ This is the reverse of the mutual conquest order, which is Wood-Earth-Water-Fire-Metal. Kalinowski, 162. This principle is explained in slips 7-13 of the Xingde B text. Chen Songchang 陈松长, *Mawangdui boshu "Xingde" yanjiu lungao*, 113-14.

²⁷⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*. Chap. 13:2, 682-683. See section 3.2. in the next chapter.

Earth.²⁷⁸ But this correlation works only with the stems of Xing and De days; the other five spirits are merely following the movements of Xing and De. In other words, they are like the entourage of Xing and De.

To summarize, this diagram shows an understanding of the universe in which spirits of meteorological phenomena follow the cycle of Xing and De that originally symbolized the annual cycle of proliferation and decline in nature. Xing and De, in turn, follow the non-conquest order of the Five Phases, which is the cycle of proliferation and decline of all things in time. This shows how strong the idea of a cyclical universe was in the 2nd century BCE China. Anthropomorphic spirits whose origins had nothing to do with cycles are now described as following cosmic cycles.

The image of natural spirits following predetermined cycles is reminiscent of the universe described in the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, but there is a marked difference between the two. The *Chu Silk Manuscript* tells that anthropomorphic spirits created natural cycles, and their constancy needs continuous support from the spirits. In the Xingde diagram, however, spirits are bound by abstract cycles that correspond to the principles of nature. Spirits follow these cycles, not for the sake of human beings but because it is the way of the universe. In belief that these cycles are eternal, diviners who relied on this *Xingde* text could make predictions about the future.

²⁷⁸ The correlation between the Five Phases and the ten stems follows the order of mutual generation (Wood-Fire-Earth-Metal-Water), assigning two consecutive stems per phase. So *jia*(1) *yi*(2) are Wood, and *bing*(3) *ding*(4) are fire and so on. This correlation is attested to even in *Zuozhuan*, in which the relationships between the five materials are not yet clearly described. Liu Ying 刘瑛, *Zuozhuan, Guoyu fangshu yanjiu*, 188–90.

Conclusion

This chapter does not furnish a comprehensive account of all divination methods existed at the time,²⁷⁹ but the above are illustrative examples that show how divination from the Eastern Zhou through the Han increasingly relied on cyclical patterns of the universe. If we look at *Zuozhuan*, we can hardly find any evidence of prognostication on the basis of cosmic cycles. The only cycle that is recorded as having been used as a basis for prognostication in *Zuozhuan* is the Jovian cycle, but it has been convincingly shown that those prognostications cannot be authentic records from the 6th century BCE. The discrepancy of roughly two years between the recorded position of Jupiter and that derived from astronomical calculations make it highly likely that the divinatory records were written in the 4th century BCE.

In the 4th century BCE, however, we find indubitable evidence of future predictions on the basis of cosmic cycles. The growing belief in the cyclical patterns of the universe during the Warring States period is well represented in texts like the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, which emphasizes the powers of natural cycles, but with an understanding that these cycles are the work of natural spirits and are always susceptible to disruption.

In the late Warring States and Han periods, cyclical patterns of the universe were no longer described as the work of various deities but as eternally valid

²⁷⁹ For more comprehensive accounts of various types of divination in the late Warring States and Han periods, see Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*; Liu Lexian 刘乐贤, *Jianbo shushu wenxian tanlun*.

principles on which diviners can rely. Diviners of the time utilized both real cycles, like that of Beidou, and on imagined cycles of various invisible entities to make prognostications about future events. As these cycles were applied to the sexagenary cycle of days, prognostications could be made about any day in the future.

The Emergence of the Notion of Predetermined Fate

This chapter aims to depict the emergence of the idea of predetermined fate in early China and how changes in cosmology affected this new concept. In describing these changes, I will focus on the changing meaning of the word *ming* 命 since the Shang (c. 1600 – 1046 BCE)²⁸⁰ to the Han periods (206 BCE – 220 CE) and explain how it is related to the changing conception of Heaven.

Already in the Warring States period (475 – 221 BCE), the word *ming* was used in a sense somewhat similar to that of “fate” in contemporary English. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines “fate” as “The development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power.”²⁸¹ In *Mencius*, *ming* is defined as “that which transpires although nothing has brought it about” 莫之致而至者 (5A:6),²⁸² and in *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 (*Mr. Lü's Spring and Autumn*), as “what is so without one' knowing why it is so” 不知所以然而然 (19:9).²⁸³ The notion of predetermination or complete inevitability is lacking,²⁸⁴ but

²⁸⁰ The tentative dates given is based on the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project. Li Xueqin, “The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project.” For critiques on these dates, see Nivison, “The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project”; Shaughnessy, “Chronologies of Ancient China: A Critique of the ‘Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology’ Project.”

²⁸¹ “fate, n.”. *Oxford Dictionary of English* Online. 2015. Oxford University Press. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fate> (accessed November 07, 2017).

²⁸² *Mengzi zhengyi*, 649.

²⁸³ *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 1356. This definition also appears in other sources. E.g. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 658; Yang Bojun 杨伯峻, *Liezi jishi*, 206.

all these definitions explain that *ming* is something beyond our control.

Like ‘fate,’ *ming* also bears a notion of supernatural influence. In oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty, the graph for *ming* is undifferentiated from the graph for *ling* 令, and had the fundamental meaning of ‘to cause’ or ‘to command.’²⁸⁵ The sense of fate that *ming* soon acquired was a derivative of this basic meaning in the sense that our life and death is ordered by supernatural powers.²⁸⁶

The notion of predetermination, however, did appear in the late Warring States. In this period, tales of people encountering foreordained misfortune began to appear,²⁸⁷ and *ming* was often described as being determined at birth.²⁸⁸ Also, that some people could live a long life despite evil deeds or vice versa became attributed to different kinds of *ming*.²⁸⁹ The appearance of this new concept cannot be

²⁸⁴ Precisely for this reason, Michael Nylan states that *ming* “does not refer to ‘destiny’ or ‘fate’ ... All or nearly all *ming* can be altered by judicious, timely action.” Nylan, “Academic Silos,” 99. I agree that *ming* cannot be blindly equated with fate because *ming* was often thought to be alterable. However, as I will show below, this does not necessarily negate the fact that it was also sometimes thought to be predetermined, and there are many aspects of *ming* that resembles the Western notion of fate.

²⁸⁵ Despite many different interpretations for this graph, Yu Xingwu, the editor of *Jiagu Wenzi Gulin*, follows Luo Zhenyu’s interpretation, and maintains that it refers “to gathering people and commanding them” 集中人而命令之. For more information see, Yu Xingwu 于省吾, *Jiagu wenzi gulin*, #332. The mouth radical *kou* 口 that functions as a “phonetic determinative” was added later for the word *ming* to specify the reading of the graph as *ming* as opposed to *ling*. Cf. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, 105 n.15.

²⁸⁶ Poo, “How to Steer through Life,” 109–10; Lin Meiling 林玫玲, *Xianqin zhexue de “minglun” sixiang*, 78–80. Robert Eno also describes the sense of ‘lifespan’ as an “early and important second meaning” of *ming*. Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 125.

²⁸⁷ E.g. *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 337–38; *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5024–25. For a collection of stories on predetermination in early China, see Hsu, “The Concept of Predetermination and Fate in the Han.”

²⁸⁸ E.g. *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 149–50; *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 46–49. It is also noteworthy that the ancestral form of the later popular divination technique, *liuren* 六壬, that predicted one’s *ming* based on the date and time of one’s birth first appears in this period. See Yan Dunjie 严敦杰, “Ba liuren shipan”; Kalinowski, “Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *Liu Ren*.”

²⁸⁹ E.g. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 49–55; *Mengzi zhengyi*, 879–80. This is one interpretation of the theory of three *ming* that was popular during the Han dynasty. Other interpretation implies that a person can have all three

explained without reference to the changes in cosmology of the time. I will argue that in the earlier periods, when the universe was conceived as run by spirits and deities, the future was always regarded as changeable according to their will.²⁹⁰ But as the belief in the power of spirits weakened,²⁹¹ and the universe was seen as operating according to inherent patterns, the attitude toward the future and one's fate had to change accordingly. The usage of the word *ming* in different early Chinese philosophical texts, with different views of Heaven and cosmos, reveals this changing relationship between human beings and the cosmos.

1. Fate and Predetermination

1.1. Fate in Shang and early Zhou society

In the oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty, the word *ming*, or *ling*, is often used in its most fundamental sense of “to command.” It appears in phrases like “the [god] Di commands 帝令,” “the king commands 王令,” or “to receive command. 受令”²⁹² But instances in which the character is used to mean something close to the notion of fate is more difficult to locate at this period.

kinds of *ming* in one life. Cf. Chen li 陳立, *Baihutong shuzheng*, 391–92.

²⁹⁰ Chen, “The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China”; Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 27–29.

²⁹¹ Based on the records of *Zuozhuan*, Yuri Pines has already shown that there was a clear trend during the Spring and Autumn period among the educated elite to believe less in the powers of deities and spirits and rely more on rational means to solve their problems. See Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 55–88.(Chapter 3)

²⁹² Shima Kumio 島邦男, *Inkyo bokuji sōrui*, 46.

The sense of ‘lifespan,’ which is one of the earliest derivative meaning of the word, is attested at the latest by the Western Zhou period (1046 – 771 BCE). Phrases like *yongling* 永令, which Shirakawa Shizuka interprets as “[wishing for] eternal life” appear in a number of bronze inscriptions.²⁹³ This usage was common enough that, based on this phrase, Chen Chusheng lists ‘life’ as one meaning of *ling* in his dictionary of bronze inscriptions.²⁹⁴ This phrase is not unseen in oracle bone inscriptions either, but its meaning much less clear.²⁹⁵

This sense of ‘life,’ however, is not exactly equivalent to “fate” if fate means what is completely beyond human control. The fact that a word meaning ‘to command’ comes to acquire a meaning of ‘life’ implies that early Chinese people probably saw one’s lifespan as being in the jurisdiction of deities. And if life and death was something ordered by deities, it also meant that the Shang people could try to affect their decision through various means, such as sacrifices and divination.

Some scholars argue that, even during the Shang dynasty, *ling* was used to refer to the god *Siming* 司命, who is known as the god in charge of individuals’ lifespan in later literature.²⁹⁶ The basis of their claim is phrases like *diyuming* 帝於

²⁹³ Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, vol. 20: 447.

²⁹⁴ Chen Chusheng 陈初生, *Jinwen changyong zidian*, 860.

²⁹⁵ E.g. *Heji* 31678正

²⁹⁶ In *Liji* this deity is described as having one of seven dedicated altars set by the Son of Heaven, and one of five for territorial lords. *Liji zhengyi*, 1521. Reference to this deity is not uncommon in the Warring States and Han literature. For example, it is mentioned in “Zhile” chapter in *Zhuangzi*, and a story of a man named Dan who came back to life after death, found in excavated manuscripts from Fangmatan, also mentions this deity. For a more detailed discussion of this deity, see Csikszentmihalyi, “Allotment and Death in Early China,” 178–80.

命 which may be translated as “[performing] *Di* 禘 sacrifice to [the god] *Siming*.”²⁹⁷

If this interpretation can be validated, it can serve as direct evidence that Shang people performed sacrifices to extend their lives.

Even if the culture of performing sacrifice to *Siming* cannot be proven at this early period, in general, the religious system of the Shang period seems incompatible with the concept of fate. Ning Chen, who defines the term ‘blind fate’ as “one’s fixed lot determined by an impersonal, unapproachable power,”²⁹⁸ argues that there was no ‘blind fate’ during the Shang. Although the Shang people believed in the existence of powers who were responsible for many aspects of their lives, “the ultimate determinant also resided in humans to the extent that the Shang kings and their associates could exercise their influence on the supernatural to ensure good fortune by means of divination, sacrificial offering, ritual performance, and witchcraft.”²⁹⁹

Chen does not claim that these means always brought desired results. Shang people too must have been baffled in the face of incongruity between one’s expectation and the reality. However, the polytheistic faith system of the Shang religion made possible for the Shang people to always look for different deities who

²⁹⁷ Xia Lu 夏淥, “Buci zhong de tian, shen, ming,” 86; Ding Shan 丁山, *Zhongguo gudai zongjiao yu shenhua kao*, 203. For oracle bone inscriptions containing this phrase see Shima Kumio 島邦男, *Inkyo bojuji sōrui*, 47.

²⁹⁸ Chen, “The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China,” 141.

²⁹⁹ Chen, 147. As examples of those means, Chen mentions *yu* 禦 and *gai* 改 sacrifices. These are kinds of “defensive” rituals that the Shang people performed in order to appease the supernatural being who were found to be responsible for various sufferings and misfortunes. The responsible beings were identified, as abundant evidence in the Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions shows, by repeating divination until answers were obtained.

can amend the situation. “They could turn to other deities, or rely on other means of communicating with the supernatural.”³⁰⁰ In other words, for the Shang people, there would have been always some means to change whatever that has been inflicted upon them. Chen’s argument seems reasonable, and similar view is shared by other scholars too.³⁰¹

Then, what has changed since the Shang dynasty that allowed the emergence of the notion of blind fate? According to Chen, it was the introduction of the concept of *tianming* 天命 (Heaven’s command or Mandate of Heaven). This concept, which the Zhou house introduced in an effort to justify its conquest over the Shang dynasty, claims that Heaven rewards the good and punishes the bad. In reality, though, the morally good are not necessarily rewarded or the bad punished. Therefore, it was inevitable that some people started doubting Heaven’s good will. Ultimately, a new concept for which they could blame what cannot be Heaven’s doing, i.e. blind fate, had to be born. In Chen’s explanation, this new concept explained that “misfortunes happening to a person are not the corollary of Heaven’s punishment on his previous immoral conduct but are the working of a blind, inscrutable force to which all men, good or evil, are subject, and hence, he should not bear any responsibility for what he has done.”³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Chen, 151.

³⁰¹ E.g. Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 28–29. He says that in the Shang dynasty, “people could try to change their fate before it happened.”

³⁰² Chen, “The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China,” 154. As evidence that the concept of blind fate was extant during the Western Zhou period, Chen finds examples from *Shijing* in which the narrator laments about meeting bad times.

The problem with Chen's explanation is that it alienates the concept of fate from actions and decisions of Heaven. Fate becomes an independent force unrelated to Heaven. If Chen's argument is right, how does one explain the phenomenon in which *ming* comes to mean fate? The process in which *ming* comes to acquire the sense of fate cannot be explained without taking into account the sense of being "commanded." *Ming* means fate because we take what seems to be beyond our control as being commanded by some supernatural force.³⁰³

The question we must ask is then, why did the same belief that some aspects of our lives are controlled by supernatural forces did not lead to the notion of blind fate during the Shang, but did in the later period? In short, it was the changes in the belief in the efficacy of the traditional means to affect the spirits and in the conception of the cosmos itself that affected the meaning of *ming*. In order to examine this process, we should start with an examination of one of the most important texts on fate and predetermination: the three chapters in *Mozi* titled "Feiming 非命," (Against Fatalism).³⁰⁴ The dispute on fatalism between the Confucians and Mohists captured in these chapters shows different understandings

³⁰³ Cf. Poo, "How to Steer through Life," 109. Mu-chou Poo explains that *ming* in the traditional pre-Qin texts usually refers to "the unalterable life course allotted by Heaven, gods, or whatever powers. [And] It is still the commonly assumed meaning of this word in Chinese today."

³⁰⁴ The exact dates of compilation of these chapters are unknown, but many scholars place them sometime between the time of Confucius and Mencius, i.e. circa 4th century BCE. For examples, see Itano Chōhachi 板野長八, "Bokushi No Himeisetsu"; Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, "Chūgoku kodai ni okeru mei to ten to tenmei no shisō--Kōshi kara Mōshi ni itaru kakumei shisō no hatten." However, others have argued for much later dates. Watanabe Takashi argued that these chapters must have been compiled during the late Warring States or even early Han periods, and scholars like Hanshimoto Junya accept his conclusions. See Watanabe Takashi 渡辺卓, "Bokushi shohen no chosaku nendai (1)"; Hashimoto Junya 橋元純也, "Bokushi himeiron to Kansho no jidaiso."

of *ming* between those who still believe in the power of spirits and those who moved away from this belief.

1.2 “Feiming” and the *Analects*

In “Feiming”, Mozi gives a vivid description of the fatalistic arguments put forward by a group of scholars whom Mozi designates as “those who uphold that there is *ming*” 執有命者, who are probably meant to be understood as Confucians.³⁰⁵ According to the descriptions in *Mozi*, the view of “those who uphold that there is *ming*” is as follows.

執有命者之言曰：「命富則富，命貧則貧，命眾則眾，命寡則寡，命治則治，命亂則亂，命壽則壽，命夭則夭。命，雖強勁，何益哉。」³⁰⁶

Those who uphold that there is *ming* say that, "If one's *ming* is to be wealthy, one will be wealthy, but if it is to be poor, one will be poor. If one's *ming* is to be numerous, one will be numerous, but if it is to be few, one will be few. If one's *ming* is to be in order, one will be in order, but if it is to be in chaos, one will be in chaos. If one's *ming* is to have a long life, one will have a long life, but if it is to die young, one will die young. When there is *ming*, though one struggles [against it], what would be the benefit?"

³⁰⁵ Not everyone agrees with this identification. Based on Watanabe's conclusion that these chapters were compiled at the end of the Warring States, Hashimoto Junya argues that the target was not necessarily the Confucians but the contemporary Daoist or the Huanglao thinkers. Hashimoto Junya 橋元純也, "Bokushi himeiron to Kansho no jidaiso." However, enough evidence supports this identification. Not only “those who uphold that there is *ming*” are explicitly identified as Confucians in the “Feiru” 非儒 chapters, but Franklin Perkins also showed that arguments portrayed in “Feiming” are similar enough to those in the *Analects* “that they probably reflect a common source.” See “Feiru xia,” *Mozi jiaozhu*, 437., Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane*, 57.

³⁰⁶ “Feiming shang,” *Mozi jiaozhu*, 400.

It seems that for “those who uphold that there is *ming*,” *ming* can be applied to both individuals and states. A person can have *ming* for longevity, and a state can have *ming* for prosperity. In any case, *ming* here unmistakably carries the sense of fixedness. There is no mention of when it is that one’s *ming* is decided, but whenever that occurs, it becomes fixed. From the perspective of moral philosophy, Mohists’ motives to refute these claim are not difficult to identify: such fatalistic teachings would discourage people from taking personal responsibility and might even encourage laziness.³⁰⁷ But two questions can be raised. First, can we trust Mohists to be giving a fair and accurate description of their rivals’ arguments? Second, could the Mohists have had other motives as well?

Indeed, the *Analects* contain passages that could be read as revealing a fatalistic attitude on the part of Confucius. When a disciple of his named Boniu 伯牛 is struck with a fatal illness, Confucius laments that his having such illness must be due to his *ming* 命矣夫.³⁰⁸ (6:10) Also, in a response to Gongbo Liao’s slandering of Zilu to Jisun, Confucius say: “Whether the Way is practiced or not is up to *ming*, and as to whether the Way is forsaken or not is also up to *ming*. What can Gongbo Liao do about *ming*? 道之將行也與，命也。道之將廢也與，命也。公伯寮其如命何？³⁰⁹ (14:36). This sounds similar to what Mozi described in the “Feiming” chapter. If something is decided as *ming*, any effort by Gongbo Liao to change it would be fruitless.

³⁰⁷ Perkins, “The Moist Criticism of the Confucian Use of Fate.”

³⁰⁸ *Lunyu jishi*, 383.

³⁰⁹ *Lunyu jishi*, 1024.

Another illuminating example is Confucius' reaction toward his predicament in Kuang.³¹⁰ (9:5) In the face of apparent danger and perhaps even death, Confucius expresses his firm belief that because he is invested with "this culture" 斯文, there is nothing that the people who appear to threaten his life can do. Regardless of the actions by the mob or Confucius himself, his life is determined by the heaven. Accordingly, the statement that Confucius came to "know Heaven's *ming*" 知天命 (2:4) at the age of fifty has been long understood by traditional commentators as his recognition of his fate.³¹¹

Such passages have presented a problem for many philosophers and commentators who doubt that Confucius would have said something like "When there is *ming*, though a man tries to be stern, what would be the benefit?"³¹² Mor typically, Confucius is described as someone who makes efforts despite knowing that it cannot be done.

Several modern scholars have worked on this apparent conflict between the concept of fate represented in *Analects* as well as *Mencius* and the general teachings of Confucianism, and by and large their solution touches on the frustrations of his political career. It need not necessarily be the actual Confucius who supposedly had a rather unfortunate political career despite his qualifications. The idea is that the concept of inevitable fate "enables the Confucians to free themselves from, or at

³¹⁰ *Lunyu jishi*, 576–79.

³¹¹ *Lunyu jishi*, 73–75. See also Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, *Shi to unmei*, 140–43.

³¹² *Lunyu jishi*, 1029. (14:38)

least reduce the degree of, frustration and anxiety generated by the problem of unwarranted suffering by providing them with an explanation that certain aspects of an individual person's life are predetermined by a blind, impersonal power.”³¹³ In a similar vein, Robert Eno explains Mencius’ concept of fate by his personal political failure seen in *Mencius*. He says that, “The effect of this doctrine was, as in the *Analects*, to align Confucian political failure with the teleological plan of Heaven. Its impact on the Confucian community was to help protect it against the negative philosophical implications of Mencius' political failure.”³¹⁴

Edward Slingerland would not phrase his position in such a way as to imply that the concept of blind fate is the result of an attempt to justify Confucius’ political failure, but he maintains that such notion of inevitable *ming* is a device to distinguish between the realm that is solely under one’s own control and the one that is not. He says that, “the concept of *ming* as being something outside human control is not a fatalistic excuse for retiring to a life of ritual, but rather an observation designed to redirect the student’s attention from the pursuit of external goals (official position, etc.) toward the project of self-cultivation.”³¹⁵

What these scholars all agree on is that the concept of inevitable and uncontrollable *ming* was an integral and original part of the teachings of the

³¹³ Chen, “The Concept of Fate in Mencius,” 515.

³¹⁴ Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 130. (For the sake of consistency, I replaced T’ien with Heaven, and Ruist with Confucian.)

³¹⁵ Slingerland, “The Conception of Ming in Early Confucian Thought,” 576–77. Paul Goldin’s understanding of Mencius’ concept of *ming* is similar to this. See Goldin, *Confucianism*, 55.

Confucian school.³¹⁶ They do not make the same accusations as the Mohists because they understand that the Confucian school's concept of fate does not apply to all aspects of our lives. Hence it does not necessarily undermine the value of personal effort. Even if Confucius or Mencius appears to express belief that we have no control over certain matters, he never claimed that everything in our lives is inevitably fixed.³¹⁷ In other words, the Confucian school never argued for the kind of absolute fatalism that Mohists' fatalists are depicted as arguing for.

Nevertheless, what the modern scholars discussed above and the authors of the "Feiming" chapters have in common is a view that at least some form of fatalism was a very important part of their teachings. Mohists noticed this importance and, instead of defending it, pointed out how dangerous such an idea can be to the society. This is an understandable conclusion for Mohists especially if one considers their utilitarian views.³¹⁸ It matters little whether Confucius argued that all things are fated or only some things are fated. Confucius argues that worldly success is not something one can control, despite one's moral qualities. (7:12) This is directly against the belief of Mohists that it is Heaven's will that good people are rewarded

³¹⁶ For a thorough review of modern scholarship on Confucius' view of fate, see Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (Ming)."

³¹⁷ For example, in 12:5 Confucius' disciple Zixia explains that despite the fact that we cannot control our longevity or fortune, we can still cultivate ourselves for our benefit. *Lunyu jishi*, 830.

³¹⁸ There is debate as to whether Mozi is truly a utilitarian or a divine will theorist. Agreeing or disagreeing with either one of these views is beyond the scope of this paper, but I freely use the term 'utilitarian' here in the sense that there is enough of a utilitarian aspect in Mozi to make a case for it. For discussions of Mozi's utilitarianism, see the seminal work, Ahern, "Is Mo Tzu a Utilitarian?" For a more recent discussion on the topic, see Johnson, "Mozi's Moral Theory: Breaking the Hermeneutical Stalemate." and Goldin, "Why Mozi Is Included in the Daoist Canon—Or, Why There Is More to Mohism Than Utilitarian Ethics."

and bad people are punished.³¹⁹ Arguing that worldly success is not directly linked to one's moral cultivation, yet that one should still cultivate morality, could only appear self-contradictory to them. In the "Gongmeng" chapter, Mozi explicitly points out the internal irony of the Confucians who advocate both the concept of fate and the necessity of learning.³²⁰ On one hand, Confucius urges people to exert themselves despite objective conditions, but on the other he claims that some things are decided by Heaven and there is nothing one can do about it. Confucians themselves may not be aware of the consequence that their teachings would discourage people from making any kind of effort in lives, whether for sociopolitical advancement or moral cultivation.³²¹

However, Mohists' representation of fatalistic views still differs from Confucius' position in one crucial respect. Confucius implied that some things are beyond our control, but never said that they were as fixed as Mohists' fatalists would claim. That the so-called fatalists' concept of fate is absolutely inevitable and unchangeable is evident from the Mohists' own counterarguments.³²² They argue that if the *ming* that those fatalists are arguing for is real, dynastic changes in history would not have been possible.

古者桀之所亂，湯受而治之；紂之所亂，武王受而治之。此世未易，民

³¹⁹ "Tianzhi," *Mozi jiaozhu*, 293–335.

³²⁰ "Gongmeng," *Mozi jiaozhu*, 704.

³²¹ Perkins, "The Moist Criticism of the Confucian Use of Fate," 427.

³²² Tang Junyi specifically points out that the idea that Mohists are arguing against in "Feiming" is the concept of predetermination 預定之命. Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun: daolun pian*, 335.

未渝，在於桀紂，則天下亂；在於湯武，則天下治，豈可謂有命哉！³²³

In the past, Tang received the chaos created by Jie and brought order to it, and King Wu took over the chaos created by Zhòu and brought order to it. The generation had not yet passed and the people have not yet changed, yet under Jie and Zhòu, the world was in chaos, and under Tang and Wu, the world was in order. How can one say that there is *ming*?

Franklin Perkins explains this passage as “a controlled experiment, where the external conditions (the timing and the people) remain the same yet the results diverge. The only difference in causes that explains the difference in effects is that Tāng worked hard for the good while Jié was lazy and bad. Implicit in the argument is that the time of Jié was one of the most extreme cases of the world abandoning the way —and yet even at that time, Tāng was able to bring order to the whole world.”³²⁴ In other words, what Tang did was a direct proof that there is no *ming* standing in the way of personal effort. In the Mohist account, history has already disproved the argument that *ming* is completely fixed.

In a note to his translation of this passage, Burton Watson commented: “this argument, needless to say, does not refute the claims of the fatalist, who can just as well assert that the decree of fate changed abruptly when the rule passed from Jie to Tang and from Zhòu to Wu.”³²⁵ However, this is precisely the point of Mohists’ counterargument. The so-called fatalists that Mozi was describing, at least according

³²³ “Feiming shang,” *Mozi jiaozhu*, 401.

³²⁴ Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane*, 58.

³²⁵ Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, 118n1. Romanizations of Chinese names are modified here.

to Mozi's understanding, could never say *ming* has changed. Once *ming* is fixed, not even Heaven itself, the giver of *ming*, would be able to change it.

In clear contrast to his view, the concept of *ming* shown in the *Analects* is very much susceptible to change, at least for Heaven's part.³²⁶ For example, what Confucius said to Gongbo Liao (14:36) is that there is nothing an individual can do to change *ming*, but by no means is this equivalent to saying that *ming* is fixed. In the midst of danger at Kuang, Confucius shows this idea unambiguously.

文王既沒，文不在茲乎？天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之未喪斯文也，匡人其如予何？³²⁷

King Wen has already passed way, and is not culture upon me now? If Heaven is to abolish this culture, those who are to come later will not be able to participate in it. If Heaven is not to abolish this culture, what can the people of Kuang do to me? (9:5)

In this passage, although it is clear which side Confucius believes in, we can read the fact that Heaven still holds the power to decide whether Confucius is to live or die. Confucius believes that there is no reason for Heaven to suddenly take culture away from the world. Hence, he should live, but if Heaven were to decide otherwise for whatever reason, Confucius would not live. In fact, Confucius' lament at the death of his most beloved disciple Yan Hui, that Heaven must be destroying

³²⁶ David Hall and Roger Ames have argued along the similar line saying that Confucius' *ming* is not "predetermined and inexorable." Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 208–16. However, in arguing against the interpretation that Confucius' *ming* is fixed, what they have tried to show was, contrary to what I argue, that *ming* is changeable through human efforts. Despite their claim, this view is not easy to support. A thorough review of this argument can be seen in Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (Ming)," 328–32.

³²⁷ *Lunyu jishi*, 578–79.

him (11:9), shows how Heaven can actually take an unanticipated path without any apparent reason.³²⁸ The case of Gongbo Liao is the same. Ultimately, there may be nothing individuals can do to change what Heaven has already decided or what *ming* has dictated, yet it is not the case that Heaven's hand is forced.

In the *Analects*, Confucius never explains why he did not believe that individuals can somehow change *ming*. However, in one exchange with his disciple Zilu, he gives hints as to his reasons.

子疾病，子路請禱。子曰：「有諸？」子路對曰：「有之。誄曰：『禱爾于上下神祇。』」子曰：「丘之禱久矣。」³²⁹

The Master was sick, and Zilu asked to perform a prayer. The master said, "Is there such a thing?" Zilu replied, "There is. The prayer goes as 'I pray for you to the gods above and below.'" Master said, "My prayer has been long."

The graveness of his sickness is not mentioned, but the fact that Zilu requested to make such a prayer could be an indication that the sickness was not minor. However, even at the moment of his possible death, Confucius is unwilling to rely on a conventional method of praying to change what Heaven must have already determined. This is not to say that Confucius did not believe that deities can change his time of death. Nevertheless, if there is any way to change it, it is not through

³²⁸ Cf. Csikszentmihalyi, "Allotment and Death in Early China," 180–85. Mark Csikszentmihalyi's discussion of this passage correctly shows how Heaven in the *Analects* holds power with regards to individuals' lifespan, but he further argues that this view is mutually exclusive with the concept of *ming* as one's allotment. I do not agree that this need necessarily be the case. Incomprehensible suffering and death of worthy people are all results of Heaven's will.

³²⁹ *Lunyu jishi*, 501. (7:35)

actions like prayers. This denial in the efficacy of existing practices is a strong hint as to the reason why he did not believe that individuals could change the course of *ming*. If prayer meant appealing to deities, then prayer is what he had been doing his whole life. Heaven should decide to let him live or die on the basis of actions of his entire life, not just a prayer. Any single or momentary act, whether reciting a prayer or making sacrifices, will not affect *ming*. This is why Confucius remarked in numerous places of how there is nothing he can do to (further) change the course of *ming*.

This point is crucial in understanding Mohists' motives for refuting the Confucian school's concept of *ming*, which they describe as being completely predetermined. Admittedly, Mohists never argued that one could change one's fate through prayers and sacrifices to ghosts.³³⁰ If anything brought about good or bad fortune to individuals, it would have been the consequences of their moral deeds. However, one of the profound differences between Mohists and the supposed fatalists lies in their understanding of the power of ghosts. While the former clearly believed that ghosts have the power to "reward the worthy and punish the wicked" 鬼神之能賞賢而罰暴,³³¹ the latter did not. The fatalists, in Mohists' description, argue that, "If fate decrees that a man will have long life, he will have a long life; if it decrees that he will die young, he will die young." For them, there is no place for ghosts to exercise their power. By contrast, the very first episode in the "Minggui" 明

³³⁰ Mohists, however, do claim that ghosts can punish those who are not reverent in sacrifices. E.g. "Minggui," *Mozi jiaozhu*, 338.

³³¹ "Minggui," *Mozi jiaozhu*, 336.

鬼 (Explaining Ghosts) chapter of *Mozi* is the story of how the ghost of Du Bo caused the death of King Xuan of Zhou. Subsequent episodes in the chapter are intended to establish the same point.³³² Clearly, in the universe of the Mohists, the fate of human beings is subject to change according to the will of spirits, as it was the case during the Shang dynasty.

Confucius never claimed that *ming* is predetermined, yet by questioning the possibility that human beings can alter their fate through sacrifices and prayers, he undermined the very ground for the belief that fate is alterable. This may be how Mohists came to describe Confucius' *ming* as completely predetermined. Although Confucius, as he is represented in the *Analects*, never argued for such a position, his positions toward ghosts and sacrifices were understood as a statement that *ming* cannot be changed.

2. From Heaven's command to a course of life

2.1. Alterable *ming* in the *Analects* and in the Western Zhou

The reason that Confucius held on to the belief that Heaven can change *ming* is not unrelated to the fact that Heaven in the *Analects* is often described as having personal characteristics.³³³ To borrow Kwong-loi Shun's summary, "the *Analects*

³³² "Minggui," *Mozi jiaozhu*, 336–39.

³³³ Heaven in the *Analects* cannot be clearly distinguished as being either a "personal" god or an "impersonal order," yet there are many passages which describes Heaven as having at least some kind of personal characteristics. Cf. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 122–23.

contains references to offending Heaven (3:13), Heaven using Confucius in a certain way (3:24), Heaven's curse on someone (6:28), Heaven intending culture to be destroyed (9:5), and Heaven having left someone bereft (11:9), as well as complaints about Heaven. (14:35)."³³⁴ These passages show that Heaven in the *Analects* possesses will and can personally relate with individuals.

Especially noteworthy is the way that Heaven relates with individual. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the relationship between the king and his lords in the Western Zhou society, which also uses the term *ming*. In this context, *ming* meant "to charge" others with the power and authority of the king. In a complex ritual, the king conferred his power and responsibility on the territorial lords by bestowing *ming* on them, together with precious material gifts, such as bronze vessels, in which the character *ming* was explicitly inscribed.³³⁵ This usage was, in fact, one of the most widely used senses of the term during the Western Zhou period.³³⁶

A very important characteristic relevant to our discussion is that *ming* bestowed through such rituals was never a permanent gift. This might seem strange, considering the symbolic meaning of inscribing the word on a precious material like a bronze vessel, but David Schaberg argues: "Although it is quite clearly associated with writing, *ming* does not take over from writing an image of irrevocability, as *fatum* does. Neither Heaven's commands to a royal line nor kings' commands to

³³⁴ Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 208.(with modification)

³³⁵ Cook, "Wealth and the Western Zhou," 260.

³³⁶ Kwong-loi Shun also notes that in the *Odes*, *ming* in the sense of political authority is more pervasive than that of events beyond human control. Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 17.

their nobles presume a particular, necessary end.”³³⁷ Virginia Kane also notes that although it may be tempting to consider this *ming* as one of many gifts bestowed by the ruler along with things like bronze vessels, albeit the most important one, categorizing it as a gift is inappropriate. The king can always take back that *ming* if he deems that the requisite services have not been rendered. “It was of the essence of Western Chou ethos that a Charge could be considered only temporary and might always be withdrawn or terminated, sometimes simply as a result of the natural order of things, as when the giver or the recipient died, but sometimes because of the superior’s dissatisfaction with the performance of the recipient.”³³⁸ In fact, without the right to withdraw that charge, the superior would no longer have authority over the inferior.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that this notion of impermanence of *ming* was more prominent in the Western Zhou than in later periods.³³⁹ Arguably the most famous passage about *ming* in early China would be: “Heaven’s *ming* is not constant” 天命靡常.³⁴⁰ This passage appears in Mao 235, *Wenwang* 文王, in which the narrator tries to glorify the work of King Wen of Zhou and justify the Zhou

³³⁷ Schaberg, “Command and the Content of Tradition,” 30.

³³⁸ Kane, “Aspects of Western Chou Appointment Inscriptions,” 15. Schaberg wrongly claims that Kane argued that *ming* is a gift. Schaberg, “Command and the Content of Tradition,” 27.

³³⁹ Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun: daolun pian*, 323–27. Tang Junyi describes the key characteristics of the concept of *ming* found in *Shijing* and *Shujing* as being changeable and its preservation being dependent on kings’ continuous cultivation of virtue.

³⁴⁰ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1127. This concept is “Heaven’s Mandate,” which Chen finds to be the source of the notion of blind fate in early China.

dynasty's dethroning of the Shang. This poem, which is also cited in *Mencius*,³⁴¹ makes numerous references to the concept of Heaven's *ming* 天命, and stating repeatedly that it is not unchanging. In fact, the whole point of the poem is to emphasize how the Shang kings lost their *ming* because of their vicious conduct, and the *ming* was consequently conferred on the Zhou dynasty for their virtue.³⁴² This shows that the alterability of *ming* was particularly emphasized in the midst of Zhou dynasty's justification for their sovereignty.

This impermanent relationship between king and his lords, or between Heaven and the Son of Heaven, is very similar to that between Heaven and Confucius. As Confucius clearly stated in midst of his predicament at Kuang, Heaven is solely responsible for decisions regarding his life. Confucius believes that Heaven will not let him die, but Heaven can always choose to do so if it so desires. Likewise, the king bestows *ming* upon his lords, and unless those lords do anything seriously wrong, the *ming* should stay with them. The king should not and would not change *ming* whimsically. However, it is entirely within the King's right to decide whether to let the lord keep it or to withdraw it. In short, although Confucius makes numerous remarks about how *ming* is inevitable, Confucius' concept of *ming* is far from fixed. It is actually closer to the opposite.³⁴³ This is an important difference

³⁴¹ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 496. (4A:7)

³⁴² Similar theme is also found in *Shujing* 書經. For example, in "Shagao" 召誥 (The Announcements of the Duke Shao), Duke Shao claims that the reason Xia and Yin suddenly lost their respective *ming* was that they did not revere the virtue 惟不敬厥德，乃早墜厥命. *Shangshu zhengyi*, 471.

³⁴³ This conclusion stands almost in direct opposition with Hall and Ames claim that "Confucius' understanding of *ming* and *t'ien ming* is much less conservative than has traditionally been believed." Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 215.

that sets *ming* apart from most Western conceptions of fate.

2.2. *Ming* and correct *ming* in Mencius

Mencius inherits from Confucius in the sense that he takes *ming* as denoting uncontrollable events in life. As mentioned above, Mencius describes *ming* as “that which transpires although nothing brings it about” 莫之致而至者 (5A:6). This definition comes from a passage in which Mencius responds to the argument that virtue weakened after the time of the Yu who passed his sovereignty not to a worthy person, as the previous sage kings Yao and Shun did, but to his son. Mencius’ reply to this argument is that it was not Yu who made the decision, but Heaven. In particular, he points out that whether one’s son will be a worthy person is not something one can control.³⁴⁴ Through this response, Mencius acknowledges that, for certain things in our lives, only Heaven is the cause, and we have no control over its decisions. That which has been brought about as the result of Heaven’s actions is what we call *ming*.

Mencius is similar to Confucius also in that he makes a distinction between things that are beyond our control and those that are entirely within our power. Mencius emphasizes this with a clear contrast.

孟子曰：「求則得之，舍則失之，是求有益於得也，求在我者也。求之

³⁴⁴ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 646–52. (5A:6) Pines points that in this and following passages, Heaven is described as manifesting its support in the form of the longevity of one’s tenure, the aptitude of the ruler’s son, and the people’s actions. Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 76.

有道，得之有命，是求無益於得也，求在外者也。」³⁴⁵

Mencius said, “If through seeking I get it while through neglect I lose it, such seeking is conducive to getting, for what I seek lies within myself. If, though my seeking is in accordance with the Way, yet getting depends on destiny, such seeking is not conducive to getting, for what I seek lies outside myself.”³⁴⁶ (7A:3)

We cannot control things that are dependent on external conditions. Even if we try, the desired result is not necessarily guaranteed because of *ming*.

Nevertheless, some things are dependent solely on ourselves. Although Mencius does not specify these here, the distinction between the “Human Title” (*renjue* 人爵) and “Heavenly Title” (*tianjue* 天爵) made in 6A:16 shows that what cannot be controlled is worldly success, but we can control cultivating morality.³⁴⁷ Therefore, Mencius, just like Confucius, can defend his concept of *ming* against Mohists’ accusations that belief in *ming* leads to laziness.

What is peculiar about Mencius’ concept of *ming*, though, is that despite having already argued for a distinction between the controllable and the uncontrollable, Mencius makes another claim that everything that happens in our lives are *ming*. This position, which seems contradictory to the view examined above, obviously cannot be stated as such; otherwise Mencius would be making exactly the kind of claim that Mohists’ fatalists would argue for. Therefore, he

³⁴⁵ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 882.

³⁴⁶ *Ivanhoe, Mencius*, 144.

³⁴⁷ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 796. “Human Title” refer to official ranks such as duke or sir, whereas “Heavenly Title” refers to moral qualities such as humanity or righteousness.

further claims that although everything that happens is *ming*, there is a difference between correct *ming* and non-correct *ming*:

莫非命也，順受其正。是故知命者，不立乎巖牆之下。盡其道而死者，正命也。桎梏死者，非正命也。³⁴⁸

There is nothing that is not *ming*, [but] one should compliantly receive the correct one. Therefore, one who understands *ming* does not stand underneath precipitous walls. Dying in fulfillment of one's way is the correct *ming*; [but] dying in shackles is not the correct *ming*. (7A:2)

Even after claiming that everything that happens is *ming*, by claiming that living a reckless and irresponsible life is not the way of the correct *ming*, Mencius is able to defend his idea from Mohists' criticism that the concept of *ming* makes people lazy. If someone died in shackles after committing crimes, one cannot blame it on *ming* and say one had no choice.

The interesting part, however, is that *ming* described in this passage seems to be precisely contradictory to *ming* seen in 5A:6, in which *ming* is defined as unexpected events to which neither I nor anything else has contributed. In comparison, 7A:2 explains that *ming* is the result of one's actions. In particular, "non-correct *ming*" is anything but that happens "although nothing has brought it about." It is precisely the consequences of one's irresponsible and immoral behavior. Also, for the realization of our correct *ming*, Mencius requires that we take every caution to avoid circumstances in which we may be vulnerable to external conditions. Compliantly receiving the correct *ming* does not mean waiting for things

³⁴⁸ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 879–80.

to happen on its own. One must make diligent efforts to receive it.

This apparent contradiction can only be understood if we apply what Kwong-loi Shun calls a heuristic distinction between the descriptive and normative dimensions of *ming*. The descriptive dimension of *ming* refers to the uncontrollable aspects of our lives, such as wealth, longevity, or worthiness of one's sons. It is a description of how our lives actually are. On the other hand, the normative dimension refers to how our lives should be.³⁴⁹ *Ming* in 5A:6 belongs to the former dimension, and correct *ming* to the latter.

Nevertheless, despite their difference, both dimensions are in fact closely linked to the original meaning of the word *ming*, "to cause" or "to command." Uncontrollable events are caused by Heaven, whereas the normative dimension is what Heaven has ordered us to do in our lives.³⁵⁰ These two dimensions are present in the sense of political charge, discussed in the previous section, as well. When the king confers *ming* to a lord, he is charging the lord with certain duties, such as protecting a rural state or bringing tributes, but the conferment and the withdrawal of this *ming* are not within the control of the lord.

As these two dimensions are rooted in the most fundamental sense of the term, cases of *ming* used in both senses are attested in other early sources.

Especially interesting is a story from *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Mr. Zuo's Commentaries to

³⁴⁹ Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 77–83. Shun emphasizes that this is only a heuristic device because these two dimensions are not clearly distinguished in the text and can even be coexisting in many occasions.

³⁵⁰ See also Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 125.

Spring and Autumn) set in 614 BCE, in which Lord Wen of Zhu 邾文公 the possibility of moving the capital with his entourage.³⁵¹ In this story, the lord and his entourage each defend a different understanding of *ming*, a duty assigned by Heaven to bring benefit to the people and the personal lifespan of the Lord Wen, respectively. In the words of the Lord Wen, “*ming* is in nurturing the people, and the length of life is a matter of time” 命在養民，死之短長，時也。³⁵²

In the *Analects*, such a vivid contrast cannot be found, but certain passages may be interpreted as evidence that Confucius saw *ming* as a kind of moral imperative.³⁵³ For example, in 11:19 Confucius speaks of his disciple Zigong 子貢, in a direct comparison with Yan Hui 顏回, as unwilling to “receive *ming*” 受命. Yan Hui is described as being “close to [the Way of the sages]” 回也其庶乎 yet poor, whereas Zigong who does not receive *ming* is rich.³⁵⁴ This contrast shows how receiving *ming* is closely related to cultivating one’s morality. Also, Confucius claims that “without understanding *ming*, there is no way to become a noble man 不知命，無以為君子” (20:3),³⁵⁵ and Song dynasty Neo-Confucian scholars interpreted the famous

³⁵¹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 627–29. 13th year of Lord Wen.

³⁵² In this story, despite defending the descriptive interpretation of *ming*, the lords’ entourage still believes that *ming* is alterable. They say, “[his] *ming* can be extended. 命可長也” This may be further evidence that *ming* was essentially deemed alterable before Confucius.

³⁵³ Because these passages are rather short and are presented without much context, different interpretation are possible in which *ming* does not necessarily mean a normative order from Heaven. But scholars like Tang Junyi believe that *ming* in the *Analects* could be interpreted primarily in the normative sense. See Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhixue yuanlun: daolun pian*, 330–34. Some scholars hold that one should distinguish between *ming* and Heaven’s *ming* in the *Analects*. While the former refers to the descriptive dimension, the latter refers to the normative. E.g. Lau, *The Analects*, xxvii–xxix.

³⁵⁴ *Lunyu jishi*, 779–85. The bracket follows the commentary of He Yan 何晏.

³⁵⁵ *Lunyu jishi*, 1375.

yet enigmatic passage that Confucius “understood Heaven’s *ming*” (2:4) not as a recognition of his fate but of his duty enjoined by Heaven.³⁵⁶ Different interpretations of these passages are possible,³⁵⁷ but these interpretations are not unreasonable. As Heaven confers *ming* upon us, we have a duty to live as Heaven commands us.

What sets Mencius apart from Confucius is that he not only stresses this normative dimension of *ming* much more strongly, but also incorporates it into his broader claims about human nature, a topic about which Confucius had little to say.³⁵⁸ In the passage immediately preceding the distinction between the correct and non-correct *ming*, Mencius states that living in accordance with our nature is the way to establish *ming*.

盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。夭壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。³⁵⁹

One who has exhausted one’s mind understands one’s nature. If one understands one’s nature, one understands Heaven. Preserving the mind and nourishing the nature is the way to serve Heaven. Being unswerving in the face of early death or long life and waiting for [events to unfold] is the way to establish *ming*. (7A:1)

³⁵⁶ *Lunyu jishi*, 73–75. See also Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, *Shi to unmei*, 138–39.

³⁵⁷ For example, He Yan interpreted *ming* in 11:19 simply as teachings of Confucius. *Lunyu jishi*, 781. And as discussed above, 2:4 has been long viewed as Confucius’ recognition of fate. Also, one might object that 20:3 is not an accurate reflection of Confucius’ view of *ming* since it comes from a section of which the authenticity has been long questioned. See below n.365

³⁵⁸ There is only one passage in the *Analects* where Confucius talks about human nature (17:2), and even that is also from a section with questionable authenticity.

³⁵⁹ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 877–79.

In order to better understand this passage, a brief summary of Mencius' theory on human nature (*xing* 性) is required.³⁶⁰ As Angus Graham had shown in his seminal study, the term *xing* in *Mencius* refers to "the course of life proper to man."³⁶¹ Just as an apple seed is supposed to grow into an apple tree under proper conditions, when adequate nourishment is provided, a person is supposed to live and grow to old age. Mencius took this idea further and argued that what is embedded in our natural tendency is not just physical attributes but also moral, and this moral tendency is visible through what he calls 'four beginnings' 四端 in our minds, which are seeds of humanity, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom (2A:6).³⁶² By preserving these four beginnings and expanding them, we provide nourishment for our moral tendencies, and by realizing our moral potentials we live a life decreed by Heaven. Hence, Mencius claims that this is the way to "serve Heaven." This is the way to establish our *ming*.

As a consequence of connecting the concept of *ming* with *xing*, however, the analogy of the political mandate that explained Confucius' concept of *ming* so well in the *Analects* loses much of its significance, and *ming* takes from *xing* the sense of "a course of life proper to man." We act morally not simply because we have been ordered to, but because we are meant to be good by our nature. To be sure, living a

³⁶⁰ For a detailed explanation on Mencius' theory of human nature and its connection with his theory on *ming*, see Goldin, *Confucianism*, 45–55.

³⁶¹ Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," 10. Graham draws from various early sources and shows that "the concept of *xing* begins as the course of a healthy human life, and comes to be translatable by 'nature' when its scope is extended to all things animate and inanimate and to all that characterizes them when they are developing or have developed along the courses proper to them." (p.11)

³⁶² *Mengzi zhengyi*, 232–36.

moral life is still what Heaven demands of us, because it is Heaven who has endowed us with these four beginning in the first place. Yet, the analogy of Heaven's power to take away *ming*, if it so desires, no longer works. If we do not live a life according to correct *ming*, it is not because Heaven changed its mind, but because we have chosen not to live that way.

3. *Ming* in a patterned universe

3.1. Heaven in *Mencius*

The reason that Mencius came to envision *ming* as a kind of “a course of life” rather than a command from Heaven is related to his understanding of Heaven. Mencius, like Confucius, portrays Heaven as a willful being, capable of making unexpected decisions. For example in one instance, Mencius' planned meeting with the Lord Ping of Lu 魯平公 was thwarted by interference from one of the lord's concubines, and Mencius claims that it was not the concubine, but Heaven, who stopped the meeting (1A:16).³⁶³ Mencius's view that an individual cannot affect the decisions of Heaven, and only Heaven is responsible for whether his teachings will be heard, is similar to what Confucius said about the Way in 14:36. For both Confucius and Mencius, only Heaven can bring order to the world, yet it is always free to act otherwise.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 170–71. Interpolation in brackets are based on Zhao Qi's commentaries.

³⁶⁴ Michael Puett points out that this contradictory aspect of Heaven is inherent in both the *Analects*

What distinguishes Mencius from Confucius, however, is that Mencius claims far more knowledge about the manner in which Heaven implements its will. In the *Analects*, Confucius makes hardly any descriptive claims about Heaven. He acknowledges that Heaven is great (8:19), and that Heaven has bestowed virtue on him (7:23). But a disciple of Confucius noted that he could not hear Confucius speak of the Way of Heaven (5:13). Only once does Confucius mention that Heaven conveys its message through the sequence of the four seasons and the generation of myriad things (17:19), but this passage comes from a section with questionable authenticity.³⁶⁵

In contrast, when Mencius discusses the cases of non-hereditary succession between the ancient sage kings, he describes in detail the conditions required for Heaven's approval of a new king and disapproval of the incumbent Son of Heaven.

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and in *Mencius*. He says that, "Although Heaven was perceived as the repository of the patterns that should guide humanity, it was not seen as necessarily supporting those humans who follow such patterns; indeed, Heaven would at times actively work to prevent the proper order from emerging." Puett, "Following the Commands of Heaven: The Notion of Ming in Early China," 61.

³⁶⁵ Despite controversies regarding the authenticity of the entire book of the *Analects*, I share views of scholars like Paul R. Goldin, Edward Slingerland, and D.C. Lau in taking first fifteen chapters as a faithful representation of his philosophy and later five chapters as later addition. Goldin, *Confucianism*, 11; Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, xiv–xv. For arguments doubting the authenticity of the entire *Analects*

as an early Warring States work, see Makeham, "The Formation of *Lunyu* as A Book"; Hunter, "Did Mencius Know the *Analects*?"

³⁶⁶ The reason Mencius stipulates these various conditions for non-hereditary succession of sovereignty is related to his political philosophy. Having personally observed the chaos that followed the non-hereditary succession in the state of Yan, Mencius wanted to make sure that these abdication stories of the ancient sage kings have minimal impact in the present. Cf. Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 71–76.

匹夫而有天下者，德必若舜禹。而又有天子薦之者。故仲尼不有天下。繼世以有天下。天之所廢，必若桀、紂者也。³⁶⁷

For an ordinary person to possess all under Heaven, his virtue must be like that of Shun and Yu, and he must also have recommendation from the Son of Heaven. Therefore, Confucius did not possess all under Heaven. When the possession of all under Heaven is passed on through hereditary succession, Heaven deposes only those who are like Jié and Zhòu. (5A:6)

Mencius stipulates two conditions by which Heaven grants suzerainty to an ordinary person. That person must have great virtue, like Shun and Yu, and have the incumbent Son of Heaven's recommendation. The only other possible case is if the incumbent Son of Heaven is as wicked as the last kings of previous dynasties. Then, Heaven would not wait for the recommendation. Furthermore, Mencius claims knowledge of how Heaven behaves when it decides to approve of non-hereditary succession. Most notably, he claims that Heaven manifests its will through the reaction of the people. (5A:5).³⁶⁸ In all these explanations, Mencius portrays Heaven as following protocols. His most famous claim about Heaven's behavior is the five-hundred-year cycle of dynastic changes.

孟子去齊。充虞路問曰：「夫子若有不豫色然。前日虞聞諸夫子曰：『君子不怨天，不尤人。』」曰：「彼一時，此一時也。五百年必有王者興，其間必有名世者。由周而來，七百有餘歲矣。以其數則過矣，以其時考之則可矣。夫天，未欲平治天下也。如欲平治天下，當今之世，舍我其誰也？吾何為不豫哉！」³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 649.

³⁶⁸ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 643–46. Similar interpretation is possible from 1B:10 *Mengzi zhengyi*, 150–52.

³⁶⁹ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 309–12. For a thorough examination on various translations and interpretations of

When Mencius was leaving from Qi, Chong Yu asked him on the road. “Master, you look as if you are not happy. Before, I heard from you that ‘a noble man does not resent Heaven nor blame others.’” Master said, “That was a time, and now is a [different] time. Every five hundred years, a king necessarily rises, and in between there are those who are famous among their generation. It has been over seven hundred years since the [rise of the] Zhou dynasty. By the numbers, it is already past due; if we think by [opportune] times [now] is the proper time. Heaven does not wish to pacify the world yet. If it did wish to pacify the world, then in our generation who else is there except me [to assist the process]? Why should I not be happy?” (2B:13)

Mencius claims that there is a certain pattern in history, in which a new king arises every five hundred years. What is notable is Mencius’ emotional distress caused by the apparent discrepancy between what Heaven ought to be doing (at least in Mencius’ belief) and what Heaven is actually doing. This attitude is unseen in the *Analects*. Philip J. Ivanhoe describes Mencius’ attitude here as being “impatient with Heaven’s failure to act.”³⁷⁰ Confucius in the *Analects* may express frustration with Heaven, but he never quite expresses such impatience. Also, Michael Puett points out that, between the rightful path of Heaven and its seemingly obstructive behavior, “Confucius never implied that such acts stood in opposition to some kind of normative order. In contrast, here Mencius is indeed positing a clear distinction between what is right according to the normative patterns of history and what

this passage, see Nivison, “On Translating Mencius,” 107–8; Ivanhoe, “A Question of Faith: A New Interpretation of Mencius 2B.13.” However, Ivanhoe later confesses that he is “not wholly satisfied with any of the interpretations of it that have been offered (including my own).” Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism,” 217 n.12.

³⁷⁰ Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism,” 217 n.12.

Heaven actually does.”³⁷¹

Admittedly, this cycle is not an ironclad law of the universe. Mencius provides no cosmological background behind the cycle,³⁷² and the fact that the rise of a new king is currently 200 years overdue because “Heaven does not wish to pacify the world yet” proves that this cycle has no restrictive power over Heaven’s decisions. “If there is (or was) a five-hundred-year cycle, it can only be because Heaven willed it.”³⁷³

³⁷¹ Puett, “Following the Commands of Heaven: The Notion of Ming in Early China,” 60.

³⁷² How Mencius derives this idea of a five-hundred-year cycle between dynasties is open to debate. David Pankenier has repeatedly argued that the basis of this claim by Mencius is the historical data of astronomical observations. He argues that in about every five hundred years or so, the five visible planets of the solar system, namely Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mercury come close to one another on the celestial sphere to make a spectacular sight even to lay observers of the antiquity. He further argues that this grouping of the five planets were actually the signs that the King Wen of Zhou saw and interpreted as the Mandate of Heaven being transferred to him. E.g. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, 5, 205. However, even with the problem of how such observation from 1953 BCE could have survived to Mencius’ time aside, which is more than a few centuries before the earliest evidence of writing in China, there is a further problem that the three astronomical phenomena that Pankenier mentions are not of the same magnitude. There has indeed been a rather spectacular grouping of the five planets in 1059 BCE and in 1953 BCE, in which the five planets are gathered within 7° and 4° of each other respectively. Nivison et al., “Astronomical Evidence for the *Bamboo Annals*” </i> *Chronicle of Early Xia*,” 98. However, there was no gathering of five planets in the intervening nine hundred years that resembles these two conjunctions. The gathering of the planets in 1576 BCE, which Pankenier mentions as one of three, was of only four planets, and Venus was more than 40° away from the rest of planets. Keenan, “Astro-Historiographic Chronologies of Early China Are Unfounded,” 63. In Pankenier’s defense, he has never really argued that the planetary conjunction of 1576 BCE is consisted of five planets. Pankenier, “Caveat Lector: Comments on Douglas J. Keenan, ‘Astro-Historiographic Chronologies of Early China Are Unfounded,’” 138. However, it is hard to deny that he never distinguishes that of 1576 BCE with the other two in terms of its astronomical significance or rarity, when it is in fact the case that the four planetary conjunctions occur much more frequently and, as Huang Yi-Long points out, were even seen by later Chinese observers as ominous. Keenan, “Defence of Planetary Conjunctions for Early Chinese Chronology Is Unmerited,” 143; Nivison et al., “Astronomical Evidence for the *Bamboo Annals*” </i> *Chronicle of Early Xia*,” 110. There is much ground to argue that at least for the Zhou conquest of Yin, it was some kind of celestial phenomenon that caused the Zhou king to think that he received the Mandate of Heaven, but the claim that such phenomenon repeats every five hundred years has little ground in astronomy. For another view of the relationship between Zhou dynasty’s Mandate of Heaven and celestial phenomena, see Allan, “On The Identity of Shang Di 上帝 And The Origin of The Concept of a Celestial Mandate (TIAN MING 天命).” For the problem concerning the possibility of an astronomical observation from 1953 BCE to be passed on to later generation and be included in historical records, see Barnard, “Astronomical Data from Ancient Chinese Records: The Requirements of Historical Research Methodology.”; Nivison, “The Key to the Chronology of the Three Dynasties.”

³⁷³ Goldin, “Responses to an Unjust Universe in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” 603.

However, this explanation applies to any of Mencius' descriptions about Heaven's behavior. There is no law that restricts Heaven from deposing only the likes of Jié and Zhòu or waiting until the incumbent Son of Heaven recommends a worthy person to approve of a non-hereditary succession. Yet, Mencius is claiming that this is the pattern Heaven follows because it has always done so in the past. By the same reasoning, even though Heaven may not be following the pattern of dynastic changes it has been following for thousands of years, Mencius believes that Heaven will eventually give rise to a new king again.³⁷⁴ That is why Mencius has no reason to be unhappy. When Heaven wishes to follow the correct path and bring order to this chaotic world, Mencius knows that he will be the minister to the new king.

In short, as was the case with human beings, Heaven is free to choose whatever path it desires, but Mencius sees that there is a proper pattern that Heaven should follow (even if that pattern may be the product of Heaven's own volition).

3.2. Fixed course of fate in a patterned universe

For Mencius, the proper pattern that Heaven should follow was, just like his idea of correct *ming*, only normative. However, in a work from within a century of

³⁷⁴ Ivanhoe, "A Question of Faith: A New Interpretation of Mencius 2B.13," 160. Ivanhoe states that "*Mencius* 2B.13 is a testament to Mencius's enduring faith in Heaven's plan."

Mencius' time, namely *Lüshi chunqiu*,³⁷⁵ the pattern of Heaven's behavior becomes not only normative but also descriptive, and is explained on the basis of the cycle of the five powers (*wude* 五德).

凡帝王者之將興也，天必先見祥乎下民。黃帝之時，天先見大蟻大螻，黃帝曰「土氣勝」，土氣勝，故其色尚黃，其事則土。及禹之時，天先見草木秋冬不殺，禹曰「木氣勝」，木氣勝，故其色尚青，其事則木。及湯之時，天先見金刃生於水，湯曰「金氣勝」，金氣勝，故其色尚白，其事則金。及文王之時，天先見火，赤烏銜丹書集於周社，文王曰「火氣勝」，火氣勝，故其色尚赤，其事則火。代火者必將水，天且先見水氣勝，水氣勝，故其色尚黑，其事則水。³⁷⁶

When an emperor is about to rise, Heaven necessarily shows sign to the people below. In the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven first showed big earthworm and big mole cricket. And the Yellow Emperor said, "The *qi* of Earth is triumphant." Because the *qi* of Earth is triumphant, it revered yellow as its color and modeled after Earth in its affairs. When it came to the time of Yu, Heaven first showed grass and trees not withering in fall and winter. And Yu said, "The *qi* of Tree is triumphant." Because the *qi* of Tree is triumphant, it revered green as its color and modeled after Tree in its affairs. When it came to the time of Tang, Heaven first showed a

³⁷⁵ The historical events and figures that appear in *Mencius* suggest that the dates of Mencius's teaching were around the end of 4th century BCE, whereas *Lüshi chunqiu* is attributed to Lü Buwei (291-235 BCE), who sponsored the scholars to compile the book. For a brief overview of the dates and authenticity of these texts, see Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 324–35.

³⁷⁶ "Yingtong," *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 682–83. Sima Qian actually attributes this theory, i.e. that of dynastic changes following the order of five powers of the universe, to a thinker named Zou Yan, who is said to be slightly later than Mencius. *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 3598–3604.(juan 74) However, there is no surviving work written either by himself or disciples, and *Lüshi chunqiu* never mentions his name. Surprisingly, though, there is little doubt among scholars regarding authenticity of this character and many do not hesitate to include his name in Chinese intellectual history when discussing the theory of Five Phases. E.g. Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, 6. What scholars do not agree is the exact nature of his philosophy. Joseph Needham calls him the founder of "naturalists" in China. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China Vol.2*, 238., whereas Angus Graham claims that Zou Yan is closer to a diviner than a philosopher. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*, 12. For a thorough review of these arguments, see Sivin, "The Myth of the Naturalists," 8–19. Sivin ultimately argues that Zou Yan was a philosopher of dynastic histories.

metal blade coming out of water. And Tang said, “The *qi* of Metal is triumphant.” Because the *qi* of Metal is triumphant, it revered white as its color and modeled after Metal in its affairs. When it came to the time of King Wen, Heaven first showed fire, and red crows with cinnabar documents in their beaks gathered around in the Zhou’s temple. And the King Wen said, “The *qi* of Fire is triumphant.” Because the *qi* of Fire is triumphant, it revered red as its color and modeled after Fire in its affairs. That which will replace Fire must be Water, and Heaven will first show that the *qi* of Water being triumphant. Because the *qi* of Water is triumphant, it [will] revere black as its color and model after Water in its affairs.

The cyclical pattern of the universe here is provided with historical proofs, and the description of a mechanical force that guides the course of human affairs is vivid. What is notable to our discussion are the further claims based on this cosmology. The author argues that, in this world, things of the same category naturally attract each other. If we understand this mechanism, there will be nothing left to surprise us.

類固相召，氣同則合，聲比則應。鼓宮而宮動，鼓角而角動。平地注水，水流溼。均薪施火，火就燥。山雲草莽，水雲魚麗，旱雲煙火，雨雲水波，無不皆類其所生以示人。故以龍致雨，以形逐影。師之所處，必生棘楚。禍福之所自來，眾人以為命，安知其所。³⁷⁷

[Things of the same] category truly attract each other, and if the *qi* is the same, they unite, and if the tones match, they resonate. When one strikes the *gong* tone, [a string tuned to the] *gong* tone responds, and when one strikes the *jue* tone, [a string tuned to the] *jue* tone responds. If one waters a flat land, the water flows to where it is wet, and if one sets fire

³⁷⁷ “Yingtong,” *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 683.

on evenly distributed firewood, the fire advances to where it is dry. Clouds above mountains [resemble] thick grass, and clouds above water [resemble] school of fish. Dry clouds [resemble] smoking fire, and rain clouds [resemble] waves in water. There is nothing that man sees that does not group together according to how it was generated. Therefore, one brings rain with dragons, and catches shadow with its form. Where an army has camped, there necessarily grows thorn bush. As for whence fortune and misfortune originate, many people deem it as *ming*. How can they know where they come from?

Not only is there a clear pattern in the universe according to which everything happens, but if one truly understands them, one can predict the consequences of the present in advance.³⁷⁸ The author's use of the word *ming* still follows its old definition. It is something that happens for reasons beyond human understanding. The important point is, however, that such things are rare, if they exist at all. What most people consider *ming* is actually a natural consequence of previous conditions. Everything can be explained if one knows the patterns of the universe.

The idea that things in this world happen as a result of the world's inherent patterns naturally leads to the idea of predetermination. If everything happens for a reason, the predictive power of someone who understands all these patterns should be limitless. A different chapter in *Lüshi chunqiu* named "Guanbiao" 觀表 (Observing the Exterior), contains a passage advancing this view. Beginning with a story of how some famous physiognomists could observe horses, it goes on to say that everything

³⁷⁸ Lin Meiling 林玫玲, "Wude zhongshilun de 'ming' sixiang," 98–99.

follows a similar pattern: there are signs that tell us about both the present and the future, and about not just animals, but everything, including human beings.

古之善相馬者……見馬之一徵也，而知節之高卑，足之滑易，材之堅脆，能之長短。非獨相馬然也，人亦有徵，事與國皆有徵。聖人上知千歲，下知千歲，非意之也，蓋有自云也。綠圖幡薄，從此生矣。³⁷⁹

In the old days, those who could do physiognomy on horses well ... would read a single sign on a horse and discern whether its joints would be high or low (i.e. whether it would be tall or short), whether its feet would be fast or slow, whether its physique would be strong or weak, as well as strength and weakness of its abilities. This is not just the case of physiognomy on horses. There are signs for human beings as well, and also for states and affairs. A sage knows a thousand years into the past and a thousand years into the future. This is not from guessing, but from what things themselves tell. Charts and diagrams [of divination] all derive from this.

The cosmological basis behind this claim is not too different from that of the previous passage. Everything in this world follows a course of events that is predictable in nature, and one who understands that pattern can predict the future. The question that must be raised here is to what degree such predictions are accurate? When one says that sages could see a thousand years into the future, is the future predicted through these means irreversibly fixed? If we do not believe that the course of future is more or less fixed, the claim that the sage can see the future would be utterly meaningless. Not coincidentally, for the first time in *Lüshi chunqiu*, we see a story of an infallible prediction about a person's life.

³⁷⁹ "Guanbiao," *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 1423.

夏后氏孔甲田于東陽蕢山，天大風晦盲，孔甲迷惑，入于民室，主人方乳，或曰「后來是良日也，之子是必大吉」，或曰「不勝也，之子是必有殃」。后乃取其子以歸，曰：「以為余子，誰敢殃之？」子長成人，幕動坼橑，斧斫斬其足，遂為守門者。孔甲曰：「嗚呼！有疾，命矣夫！」³⁸⁰

When Kongjia of the Xia dynasty was hunting at Mt. Fu in Dongyang, there was great wind and the sky became dark. Kongjia lost his way and entered a commoner's house, where the owner was just giving birth. Someone said, "The lord has come. This is a good day. This boy must be greatly fortunate." Someone else said, "He cannot bear it. This boy must have a great calamity." The lord then took the boy and headed back, saying, "I will make him my son. Who will dare cause calamity on him?" The boy grew up to be an adult. [But one day] a tent was shaking and its poles were shattered. Then an axe cut off his foot. In the end, he became a gatekeeper. Kongjia said, "Alas! That he is suffering must be his *ming*."

The most significant aspect of this story is that the boy's misfortune was predicted, and that this predicted fate was called *ming*. We find no such claim about *ming* either in the *Analects* or *Mencius*.³⁸¹ This story emphasizes that even a sovereign, with all his power, could not prevent the predicted misfortune. Kongjia's remark, "who will dare cause calamity on him?" stands in direct contrast to the boy's ultimate fate. *Ming* portrayed in this story is a predetermined and irreversible fate.

The story does not disclose whether the prediction was based on a particular

³⁸⁰ "Yinchu," *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 337–38. Kongjia's last remark that "it must be the boy's *ming*" is the exact verbatim of what Confucius said about the illness of his disciple Boniu in *Analects* 6:10.

³⁸¹ Stories of predictions are not rare in the literature from earlier periods, but never have those predictions pictured as inevitable or called as their *ming*. For a collection of tales containing future prediction from *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*, see Chen Xiaofang 陈筱芳, "Chunqiu xiangshu yu xiangshu yuyan."

understanding of the cosmos,³⁸² but an interesting point in the story is that it hints at the idea that the moment of one's birth plays a crucial role in determining one's fate. Why was it only the boy who was affected by the presence of the king, and not the others?

A contemporary source explicitly states this relationship between one's birth and fate. The Daybooks discovered in 1975 from the Qin-dynasty tomb at Shuihudi 睡虎地, Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei 湖北 Province contain sections titled "Shengzi" 生子 (Childbirth) and "Renzi" 人字 (Human birth), which explains how babies born on certain days of the sexagenary cycle will have certain fates in life.³⁸³ For example:

己巳生子，丑，必為人臣妾。庚午生子，貧，有力，無終。辛未生子，肉食。壬申生子，聞。癸酉生子，無終。³⁸⁴

A baby born on a Jisi (6) day will be ugly and will surely end up being

³⁸² However, the language used for the reasons behind predictions is notable. The person who made the wrong prediction about the boy's future claims that the king's presence at the boy's birth means it is a "good day." This term 'good day' *liangri* 良日 is a common vocabulary in Daybooks 日書, which reflect an understanding that the universe operates according to a cycle of sixty days. See Wu Xiaoqiang 吳小強, *Qinjian rishu jishi*, 28, 72–73, 163, 175, 191, 195–98. Furthermore, the person who correctly predicts the boy's misfortune claims that the boy cannot bear the presence of the king. The phrase he uses here is *busheng* 不勝 (lit. 'cannot win'), which in fact is the term that explains the relationship between the five powers described at the beginning of this section. Archaeological discoveries in the past decades showed that this principle was also applied in the contemporary divination manuals. See Kalinowski, "The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui," 162–63. It is unlikely that the identification of the boy's birthday as being a 'good day' is based on the reading of Daybooks since Kongjia's arrival has nothing to do with the sexagenary cycle, or that the correct prediction was based on the 'non-conquest' relationship of the five powers since the story mentions nothing about them. Still, vocabularies from divination methods that are based on mechanical understandings of the universe cannot be easily dismissed. The language makes us wonder if the author was not implying that prediction was based on a similar understanding of the relationship between natural forces.

³⁸³ For an extensive material analysis of the Shuihudi manuscript see Kalinowski, "Les traités de Shuihudi"; Kalinowski, "Les livres des jours (rishu) des Qin et des Han." They list names of days according to the Chinese traditional sexagenary cycle and give prescriptions on what to do or what to avoid. There have been many works published regarding religious implications of this text. E.g. Poo, "Popular Religion in Pre-Imperial China"; Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B. C."; Poo, "How to Steer through Life"; Kudō Motoo 工藤元男, "Unbo-suikochi shinkan nissho to dōkyō no shūzoku."

³⁸⁴ Wu Xiaoqiang 吳小強, *Qinjian rishu jishi*, 103.

someone else's subordinate or concubine. A baby born on a Gengwu (7) day will be poor, and, despite hard work, will not have success. A baby born on a Xinwei (8) day will be a meat-eater (i.e. a member of the elite). A baby born on a Renshen (9) day will be famous. A baby born on a Guiyou (10) day will have no success.³⁸⁵

It is evident that this method was not the basis of the prediction for Kongjia's adopted boy. In Kongjia's case, it was not the day of the birth according to the sexagenary cycle that was the decisive factor in determining the boy's fate. However, the implication that the moment of a person's birth has direct consequences on his or her lifelong fate is remarkably similar. Furthermore, since one's birthday is not something one can choose, this manual implies a view that "a person's nature and fortune were determined on the day of his/her birth."³⁸⁶

The underlying cosmological premise behind such a rigid relationship between one's birthday and one's fate is that a person becomes an inseparable part of the patterned cosmos at the very moment of his or her birth. In the 1st century CE, Wang Chong (27 – c. 100 CE) provides a concrete example of such an understanding.

天有百官，有眾星，天施氣而眾星布精，天所施氣，眾星之氣在其中矣。人稟氣而生，含氣而長，得貴則貴，得賤則賤。貴或秩有高下，富或貲有多少，皆星位尊卑小大之所授也。故天有百官，天有眾星，地有萬

³⁸⁵ Translation of the word *zhong* 終 as success follows the works of Wu Xiaoqiang 吳小強, 106., and Poo, "How to Steer through Life," 120.

³⁸⁶ Poo, "How to Steer through Life," 121. This implication, Poo argues, is quite different from what the rest of the book implies. The rest of the book provides a guidance on how to avoid misfortunes on certain days, not necessarily concrete predictions of what is going to happen. Hence, Liu Tseng-kuei argues that the purpose of these sections is not to foretell the future of new born babies but to "help decide whether or not to raise the child." Liu, "Taboos: An Aspect of Belief in the Qin and Han," 913. However, even if Liu's interpretation is right, there is no doubt that these sections still imply unalterable predetermined fates of new born babies.

民、五帝、三王之精。天有王梁、造父，人亦有之，稟受其氣，故巧於御。³⁸⁷

There are a hundred offices in Heaven as well as myriad stars. Heaven emits *qi* and the myriad stars disseminate their essence. In the *qi* that Heaven emits, *qi* of myriad stars is included. Endowed with that *qi*, human beings are born, and, by harboring that *qi*, they grow. Those who obtain [*qi*] of nobility becomes noble, and those who obtain [*qi*] of humbleness become humble. In being noble, there can be a difference in the upper limit of one's rank; in being wealthy, there can be a difference in the amount of one's fortune. This is all due to what one receives from the stars, whose positions differ in rank and magnitude. Therefore, [as] there are a hundred offices and myriad stars in Heaven, there are [strata such as] people, emperors, and kings on earth. Heaven also has [its own] Wang Liang and Zao Fu (famous charioteers in history) as they are among us. Because of *qi* that they were endowed with, they were good at riding chariots.

Wang Chong asserts that the moment of our birth dictates not only how much wealth and honor we will have, but even our occupation. We are born with *qi* from different stars, which have their respective positions in Heaven, and the amount of success we can achieve in this world is limited to the status of our corresponding stars. In Wang Chong's philosophy, our fate is decided by the movement of the stars.

In Wang Chong's defense, his philosophy does not necessarily lead to the view that everything is irreversibly fixed in our lives. For example, he believes that there are other factors, such as accidents (*zao* 遭), opportunities (*yu* 遇), luck (*xing*

³⁸⁷ *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 48.

幸), and chance (*ou* 偶) that interfere with the realization of our predetermined *ming*.³⁸⁸ But this leads to a whole new problem that we will discuss in the next chapter, namely the possibility of deviation from the predetermined fate. Suffice it to say here that, by the time of Wang Chong, *ming* had become a fixed course of life that is determined at the moment of birth. As Marc Kalinowski has summarized, for Wang Chong, "Fate is conferred to men at birth by heaven, and is instilled in them at the moment when they receive their vital breath, their *qi*. It cannot be changed or renewed in the course of its existence."³⁸⁹

Conclusion

The concept of a predetermined fate coalesced in early China as a consequence of changing views of the cosmos. During the Shang and early Zhou periods, Heaven was thought to have the power to change everyone's *ming*, and people thought they had power to affect the decisions of Heaven or any other deities on their lives through various means like sacrifice or prayer. However, as the idea of Heaven began to change, the concept of fate changed too. Confucius represents the attitude of the first thinkers who refrained from using previously commonplace means to affect the decisions of Heaven, and later thinkers began to think that *ming* itself is fixed and unalterable. In Mencius, *ming* acquired a sense of course of life,

³⁸⁸ *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 55–58.

³⁸⁹ Kalinowski, *Balance des discours*, LXXXIII.

which it had previously lacked. He used the word *ming* to describe what he believed is a normative course of life for human beings, a belief that was deeply associated with his view of Heaven. For both human beings and Heaven, there was a proper course to follow, although they still possess freedom to deviate from that path. By the late Warring States period, works like *Lüshi chunqiu* presented cosmologies in which these patterns are described as not only normative but also descriptive. As the universe was believed to follow inherent mechanistic patterns, the future was deemed more or less predictable. *Ming* at this point came to mean a fixed course of life.

Fate and Freedom in Han Thought

By Han times (206 BCE – 220 CE), the notion of predetermined fate was firmly established in China.³⁹⁰ But how did Han intellectuals address the problems of moral hazard and personal freedom after acknowledging that people are born with a fixed fate? I aim to answer this question through an examination of popular concepts formulated during the Han, namely the three kinds of *ming*.³⁹¹

The exact names for the three kinds of *ming* differ a little from source to source, but they are most commonly referred to as: “correct *ming*” 正命 or “great *ming*” 大命, “encountered *ming*” 遭命, and “ensuing *ming*” 隨命. During the Han period, there were two competing understandings of the three kinds of *ming*: one argued that each person was born with only one of these three, and the other

³⁹⁰ We see its evidence in various narratives as well as in philosophical discussions. Early Chinese philosophical discussions of predetermination can be found in “Feiming” chapter in *Mozi* as well as in “Mingyi” chapter in *Lunheng*. Also, the story of a man named Deng Tong 登通 of the Former Han dynasty shows a very similar narrative model with that of *Oedipus Rex*. Just like in the case of the King Oedipus, some of the actions that were intended to prevent the predicted misfortunes turn out to be their causes. “Ningxing liezhuan” *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 5024–25. For a philosophical analysis Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, see Dilman, *Free Will*, 21–34.

³⁹¹ In this chapter, I use the word “fate” to refer to the general idea of the unreachable power that controls various aspects of human lives, but not as a direct translation the Chinese word *ming* 命. While *ming* can indeed carry a sense very close to the Western notion of “fate” (especially in Wang Chong’s writings), often times *ming* is used in a much more restricted sense than that of “fate.” For example, *ming* can often mean specifically one’s fated lifespan, as seen in the famous phrase: “There is *ming* for life and death while wealth and nobility depend on Heaven” 死生有命，富貴在天. (*Analects* 12:5) Also, *ming* may refer to restrictions deriving from external forces as compared to what one is born with (and thus visible through physiognomy). E.g. “Li jiangjun liezhuan” *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 4488; Hsu, “The Concept of Predetermination and Fate in the Han,” 53. Thus, I continue to use “*ming*” whenever I refer to a specific Chinese concept.

claimed that everyone has all three kinds. In this chapter, I analyze the full implications of these two interpretations and show that, of these two, the latter allowed more freedom and responsibility for individuals, as it left more room for deviation from the originally endowed fate.³⁹²

1. Each with a different kind of *ming*

1.1. Correct and non-correct *ming*

By the 2nd century CE, the idea that there are three different kinds of *ming* seems to have been fairly widespread. This shared belief can be seen in Han dynasty scholars' interpretations of *Mencius* 7A:2, in which Mencius claims that there is a difference between correct and non-correct *ming*.

莫非命也，順受其正。是故知命者，不立乎巖牆之下。盡其道而死者，正命也。桎梏死者，非正命也。³⁹³

There is nothing that is not *ming*, [but] one should compliantly receive the correct one. Therefore, one who understands *ming* does not stand underneath precipitous walls. Dying in fulfillment of one's way is the correct *ming*; [but] dying in shackles is not the correct *ming*. (7A:2)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mencius' intent in this passage was not

³⁹² I will often refer to these two understandings of *ming* as "theories," but I use this term not in the sense that they are verifiable, but only in the sense that they are attempts to explain the world we live in. We often use the term theory in this sense. For instance, Aristotle's observations about categories of beings and causality are also incapable of making verifiable predictions, but they are nevertheless often referred to as "theories." E.g. Gracia and Newton, "Medieval Theories of the Categories."

³⁹³ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 879–80.

to imply that some people were born with correct *ming* whereas others are born with non-correct *ming*. The emphasis is on making efforts to live up to the correct one. Thus, correct *ming* for Mencius is a kind of goal in our life, “the exalted state that we are expected to attain through our own diligent effort.”³⁹⁴

Some Han dynasty scholars, however, interpreted Mencius’ distinction between correct and non-correct *ming* differently, thinking that the distinction depended upon social success and material well-being during one’s lifetime rather than in one’s attitude. For example, this is how the Later Han scholar Wang Chong 王充 (c. 27 – 97) criticized Mencius:

夫孟子之言，是謂人無觸值之命也。順操行者得正[命]，妄行苟為得非正，是天命於操行也。夫子不王，顏淵早夭，子夏失明，伯牛為癘，四者行不順與？何以不受正命？比干剖，子胥烹，子路菹，天下極戮，非徒桎梏也。必以桎梏效非正命，則比干、子胥行不順也。³⁹⁵

These words by Mencius state that there is no encountered fate (in which one is faced with unfitting consequences for one’s deeds). Those who are compliant in their deeds attain correct *ming*, and those who behave in absurd and careless ways attain non-correct *ming*. This is [to say] that one’s fate depends on one’s deeds. [However,] Confucius never became a king; Yan Yuan met an early death; Zixia lost his sight; and Boniu was infected by a plague. Were the deeds of these four people not compliant? Why did they not receive correct *ming*? [Furthermore,] Bigan had his [heart] extracted; Zixu was boiled to death; and Zilu’s body was [chopped into pieces] and pickled. In extreme cases of death, [misfortunes] are not limited to shackles. [But] if non-correct *ming* is necessarily proved

³⁹⁴ Goldin, *Confucianism*, 55. See also section 2.2. of the previous chapter.

³⁹⁵ “Cimeng,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 467–68.

through shackles, then the actions of Bigan and Zixu were not compliant.

The people mentioned in this passage are all famous figures in Chinese history who were much praised for their virtue yet were not rewarded for their deeds in their lives. Some of them were even punished despite their virtue. In Wang Chong's view, these cases disprove Mencius' claim about correct and non-correct *ming*.

Wang Chong's criticism reveals that he has a fundamentally different understanding of *ming*. *Ming* is not a kind of goal in our life, as Mencius intended. Rather, it refers to a determined course of life that concerns not just life and death but also whether one will become a king or be incarcerated.

About a century later, Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) commented on *Mencius* 7A:2 as follows.

人之終無非命也。命有三命，行善得善曰受命，行善得惡曰遭命，行惡得惡曰隨命。惟順受命為受其正也。³⁹⁶

There is no death that is not [due to] *ming*. There are three kinds of *ming*. When one's deeds are good and the consequences are good, this is called 'received *ming*'; when one's deeds are good but the consequences are bad, this is called 'encountered *ming*'; when one's deeds are bad and the consequences are bad, this is called 'ensuing *ming*.' To compliantly receive [one's] *ming* is to receive the correct *ming*.

According to Zhao Qi, there are three different kinds of *ming*: received *ming*, encountered *ming*, and ensuing *ming*.³⁹⁷ What distinguishes the three are, along

³⁹⁶ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 879.

³⁹⁷ It may seem odd that he does not provide a category for *ming* that brings fortunes to one whose

with one's moral deeds, the uncontrollable consequences of those deeds. Zhao Qi's interpretation seems to be more faithful to Mencius' original argument, since he at least acknowledges one's deeds as an important criterion for the distinction among various kinds of *ming*. Nevertheless, the fact that he also regards worldly rewards as relevant to the distinction puts him in a similar position with Wang Chong.

In the chapter titled “Mingyi” 命義 (Meaning of *ming*), Wang Chong shows that, just like Zhao Qi, he also subscribes to the three-way distinction of *ming*, but his definitions are slightly different from those of Zhao Qi.

正命者、至百而死。隨命者、五十而死。遭命者、初稟氣時遭凶惡也，
謂妊娠之時遭得惡[物]也，或遭雷雨之變，長大夭死。³⁹⁸

Those who have correct *ming* live up to a hundred years, and those who have ensuing *ming* live [only] up to fifty and die. Those who have encountered *ming* are those who have encountered evil when they were first receiving *qi*, [i.e. during birth]. It means that [their] mothers encountered evil things during pregnancy, maybe something like a disastrous thunderstorm. [These babies] will meet an early death after attaining adulthood.

Wang Chong chooses to explain the differences between the three kinds of *ming* solely in terms of longevity, without referring to the quality of one's deeds. This is because he believes that a person's *ming* is decided long before one has a

deeds were bad, but it should be noted that no one ever suggested a four-way distinction of *ming*. It is always three. See p.191 below to see another version of this theory that can explain all four types of life. “Mingyi,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 49–50. Also, it may be the case that Zhao Qi was simply quoting this explanation from another text. This exact explanation also appears in *Xiaojing Yuanshenqi*. Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Weishu jicheng*, 990–91. But we cannot rule out the possibility that Zhao Qi's remark got mixed into this text later.

³⁹⁸ “Mingyi,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 52–53.

chance to make any actions. For Wang Chong, everyone's *ming* is irreversibly fixed at birth. When the scope of *ming* is strictly limited to one's lifespan, Wang Chong's argument can begin to look more sensible.

死生者，無象在天，以性為主。稟得堅彊之性，則氣渥厚而體堅彊，堅彊則壽命長，壽命長則不夭死。稟性軟弱者，氣少泊而性(體)羸羸，羸羸則壽命短，短則蚤死。故言「有命」，命則性也。³⁹⁹

There are no signs for life and death in Heaven. They are subject to one's nature. The *qi* of those who are endowed with a hard and strong nature is thick, and their bodies are hard and strong. If [their bodies are] hard and strong, their lifespan is long, and they will not die early. The *qi* of those who are endowed with a soft and weak nature is thin, and their bodies are feeble and inferior. If [their bodies are] feeble and inferior, their lifespan is short, and they will die early. Therefore, it is said that "there is *ming* [in life and death]." (*Analects* 12:5) *Ming* refers to one's nature.

He argues that those who are born with thick *qi* are naturally healthier and thus able to live a long life, while those who are born with thin *qi* are naturally weak and can only live a short life. If by thick and thin *qi* Wang Chong means something analogous to DNA in today's world, he has a point. After all, there really are children who are born healthier than others, while some are born with genetic disorders that lead to premature death.

If we go back to the previous passage, however, Wang Chong seems to argue that what is decided at birth is not just one's physical constitution, but also whether one will face death by accidents. Correct *ming* and ensuing *ming* refer to the lives of

³⁹⁹ "Mingyi" *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 46–47. This theory is also expounded in the "Qishou" chapter.

the people who die naturally at the age predetermined by one's *qi* at birth. But there are also people who die at an early age even though they were born with healthy bodies. These are people with encountered *ming*. Thus, Wang Chong's explanation of three kinds of *ming* covers all possible potential human lives. Every human being is born with one of these three kinds of *ming*.

1.2. Opportunity as a part of *ming*

The three-way distinction of human fates examined in the previous section gives us a clue about the origin of the theory that each person has a different kind of *ming*. As Cho-yun Hsu has pointed out, the theory that human lives can be categorized into three kinds *ming* is remarkably similar to Lu Jia's 陸賈 (d. 170 BCE) description of the fate of trees.⁴⁰⁰

夫榱栢豫章、天下之名木，生於深山之中，產於溪谷之傍，立則為大山衆木之宗，仆則為萬世之用...商賈所不至，工匠所不窺，知者所不見，見者所不知，功棄而德亡，腐朽而枯傷，轉於百仞之壑，惕然而獨僵，當斯之時，不如道傍之枯楊。累累詰屈，委曲不同，然生於大都之廣地，近於大匠之名工，則材器制斷，規矩度量，堅者補朽，短者續長...彼則槁枯而遠棄，此則為宗廟之瑚璉者，通與不通也。人亦猶此。⁴⁰¹

Cedars and camphor trees are world-famous trees. They grow deep in the mountains and are produced on the sides of valleys. When they stand tall, they are heads of all trees in big mountains, and when they are felled, they are used for ten thousand generations.... [But when they grow in

⁴⁰⁰ Hsu, "The Concept of Predetermination and Fate in the Han," 54.

⁴⁰¹ "Zizhi," *Xinyu jiaozhu*, 101-2.

inaccessible places] which merchants cannot reach and carpenters cannot see, those who [know their value] do not get to see them, and those who see them do not know [their value]. Thus, their merit and value is lost, and they rot and wither away. They roll down high valleys or silently fall on their own. At this point, they are inferior to dried willows on roadsides. Their roots and branches are all bent and intertwined, and they are all differently shaped. But if they grow in large fields of major cities and are close to the masterly work of great carpenters, they are trimmed and measured with tools. [The carpenters] fill in the rotted spots [of the solid ones] and join [the shorter ones] to make them longer.... [The reason why] some [trees] wither away, abandoned in remote places, while others are made into sacrificial vessels used in ancestral shrines is the difference in accessibility. This is the same for human beings.

In this passage, Lu Jia presents three cases of trees' fates: excellent trees found in places accessible by merchants and carpenters, excellent trees found in inaccessible places, and inferior trees found on roadsides. It is noteworthy that, as in the description of the three kinds of *ming*, the fate of trees is decided at the very beginning of their existence. As soon as the seeds of these great trees sprouted in inaccessible places, they were already too far from a carpenter's lathe.

We cannot infer from this analogy that Lu Jia was also a fatalist like Wang Chong. The whole point of this treatise is that rulers must look for talented individuals who might be withering away because they remain unrecognized. Nevertheless, the remarkable resemblance between his analogy of trees and Wang Chong's three-*ming* theory suggests a general awareness in Han society that worldly

success depends on the circumstances that one is born into.⁴⁰²

If we are to trace the origin of this kind of thought, a text that is about a century earlier than Lu Jia shows a similar idea. A manuscript titled “Qiongda yi shi” 窮達以時 (Time as the cause of success and poverty) discovered in an early 3rd century BCE tomb in Guodian 郭店, Jingmen 荊門, Hubei 湖北 province, argues as follows:⁴⁰³

有天有人，天人有分。察天人之分，而知所行矣。有其人，無其世，雖賢弗行矣。苟有其世，何難之有哉？舜耕於歷山，陶澁於河澣，立而焉天子，遇堯也...遇不遇，天也...窮達以時。⁴⁰⁴

There is [that which is controlled by] Heaven, and there is [that which is within the power of] man, and each has its separate lot. Once one has examined the division between Heaven and man, one will know how to act. The right person, not in the right age, will be unable to act even though he be worthy. If given the right age, however, what difficulties would there be? Shun plowed in the fields of Mt. Li and molded pottery on the banks of the Yellow River, and yet he [eventually] took the throne as Son of Heaven—this is because he encountered [the Sovereign] Yao.... Whether or not [all the aforementioned men] encountered [an appreciative lord] was [a matter controlled by] Heaven.... Poverty and success is a matter of time.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Wang Chong also uses the analogy of trees to explain fate in the “Xingou” chapter. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 42.

⁴⁰³ On the basis of archaeological evidence, Asano Yūichi gives late fourth century BCE as *terminus ante quem* for “Qiongda yi shi.” Asano Yūichi 浅野裕一, “Kakuten Sokan ‘Kyūtatsu i ji’ no ‘ten jin no bun’ ni tsuite,” 22–24. Also, from the perspective of intellectual history, Paul R. Goldin points out that the idea represented in this text anticipates Xunzi’s philosophy. Goldin, *After Confucius*, 36–37, 49–50. For a thorough overview of the manuscript in comparison with its parallel texts, see Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 429–51.

⁴⁰⁴ Li Ling 李零, *Guodian Chujian jiaodui*, 111–12.

⁴⁰⁵ This translation is by Scott Cook but modified. Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 453–64.

The manuscript goes on to list more examples of famous figures in Chinese history who had suffered through hardships until they finally met someone who appreciated their worthiness. Just as in Lu Jia's analogy of trees, this manuscript emphasizes two factors that affects one's life: one's worthiness and the uncontrollable circumstances of one's environment. One's worthiness alone does not guarantee success in the world; it has to be paired with right opportunities to display one's talent.⁴⁰⁶

Even before the appearance of "Qiongda yi shi," Chinese people must have been long aware of the weak correlation between an individual's worthiness and opportunities. Complaints about seemingly unjust suffering are already visible in *Shijing*.⁴⁰⁷ The uniqueness of "Qiongda yi shi," however, is that it explains this phenomenon naturalistically. For example, *Mencius* 6B:15 explains the suffering of the same worthy people mentioned in "Qiongda yi shi" in terms of Heaven's plan to prepare them for important duties.

天將降大任於是人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，所以動心忍性，曾益其所不能。⁴⁰⁸

When Heaven is about to bestow a great duty upon someone, it first afflicts their mind and will, makes them toil with their bones and muscles, starves their flesh, impoverishes them, and obstructs their endeavors. By such means, it moves their hearts and controls their

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Asano Yūichi 浅野裕一, "Kakuten Sokan 'Kyūtatsu i ji' no 'ten jin no bun' ni tsuite," 27–32. Asano argues that "Qiongda yi shi" was written in order to explain Confucius' political failure.

⁴⁰⁷ E.g. "Xiaobian," *Maoshi zhengyi*, 873–82.; "Sangrou," 1383–1401. Cf. Chen, "The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China," 154–59.

⁴⁰⁸ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 864.

natural tendencies. Thus, it raises [their abilities] in areas where they were incompetent.

“Qiongda yi shi” also claims that Heaven is responsible for their suffering, but Heaven in this text is not a willful god who makes plans. In the claim that a worthy person living in the right age will have no difficulties, what Mencius would have attributed to Heaven is now more or less replaced by “the age” *shi* 世, which represents the objective conditions of the time.

Nevertheless, the idea reflected in “Qiongda yi shi” is still different from that seen in Lu Jia’s analogy of trees. “Qiongda yi shi” never implies a difference among individuals in their chances of encountering opportunities. All it says is that success is dependent upon external factors as well as on one’s abilities. In contrast, Lu Jia clearly acknowledges that some people are in a naturally better position to be recognized than others, even if they may be living in the same era. By the first century CE, the idea that different people have different chances of success became even more solidified, to the point that there were terms to describe different kinds of fate.

The question we must ask is then, when thinkers argue that everyone is born with a different kind of fate, to what extent do these different kinds of fate dictate our lives? In other words, how free are we within the parameters dictated by fate? We should look into Wang Chong’s answers to this question to examine the extent of Han dynasty fatalism.

2. Wang Chong's fatalism

In order to understand how Han dynasty intellectuals perceived problems related to the concept of fate, we must heavily rely on the writings of Wang Chong.⁴⁰⁹ Although Wang Chong may not have been the only person who argued that each person had a different kind of fate, his argument is best preserved. And while the view that each person had a different kind of fate does not necessarily imply that everyone's fate is irreversibly predetermined, Wang Chong's philosophy will show that it can lead to a strong case of fatalism.⁴¹⁰ Philosophically, he represents what is probably the most extreme end of fatalism among Han scholars. I will start with his concept of fate and continue to his understanding of moral freedom. Lastly, I will examine whether his philosophy can be described as a kind of determinism.

2.1. Fate

Wang Chong believes (like many people before him) that things like wealth,

⁴⁰⁹ Michael Nylan claims that Wang Chong's *Lunheng* cannot be a work of a single author, as it has too many internal contradictions. Nylan, "Academic Silos," 94. However, she never provides any concrete ground for her claim in the article. In her review of Nicolas Zufferey's book on Wang Chong, she does point out some examples of contradictions. Nylan, "Wang Chong (27-97?)," 523 n.10. But here, she does not claim that *Lunheng* is a work of multiple authors. There are various ways to defend apparent contradictions (for an example, see *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 693.), and other scholars generally accept *Lunheng* as an authentic work of Wang Chong (E.g. Pokora and Loewe, "Lun heng," 309–10; Li Weitai 李偉泰, *Han chu xueshu yu Wang Chong*, 191–232; Zufferey, *Wang Chong*, 92–93.). In order for her claim to be compelling, she must present a more thorough account of the contradictions in *Lunheng* and explain why they can never be a work of a single author.

⁴¹⁰ As factors that contributed to the formation of his fatalistic thought, some scholars find Wang Chong's personal hardship in the political career as well as his rejection to the theory of mutual resonance between Heaven and Humans. See Yoshida Teruko 吉田照子, "Ō Jū no seisetsu," 221–23; Shao Yiping 邵毅平, *Lunheng yanjiu*, 292.

nobility, and longevity are all controlled by one's *ming*. But he further argues that it is due to *ming* that one encounters opportunities for success or dangers that threaten one's status.

凡人遇偶及遭累害，皆由命也。有死生壽夭之命，亦有貴賤貧富之命。自王公逮庶人，聖賢及下愚，凡有首目之類，含血之屬，莫不有命。命當貧賤，雖富貴之，猶涉禍患，[失其富貴]矣；命當富貴，雖貧賤之，猶逢福善，[離其貧賤]矣。故命貴從賤地自達，命賤從富位自危。⁴¹¹

As a rule, people's meeting chances [of success] or encountering continuous disasters are all due to *ming*. There is *ming* that [governs] one's longevity, but there is also *ming* that [governs] one's nobility and wealth. From king and dukes to commoners, from sages and worthies to ignorant people, all those who have a head and [a pair of] eyes, all those that have blood [in their veins], have *ming*. If one's *ming* is to be poor and humble, then even if [someone] were to make that person rich and noble, that person would be involved in disasters and will lose that wealth and nobility. [Likewise,] if one's *ming* is to be wealthy and noble, even if [someone] were to make that person poor and humble, that person would find luck and depart from that poverty and humbleness. Therefore, when one's *ming* is to be noble, one will naturally rise from humble grounds, and when one's *ming* is to be humble, one will naturally face peril in a wealthy status.

Here, we see a part of Wang Chong's fundamentally fatalistic attitude. Wang Chong argues that wealth and nobility are independent of one's qualities or efforts. If one's *ming* is to be poor and humble, even if someone were to give that person money and honor, these will eventually slip away. Correspondingly, those who have

⁴¹¹ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 20.

ming to be wealthy will find wealth no matter what.

Does this imply that people with blissful *ming* can be lazy yet still attain wealth and nobility? He does argue along that line.

天命難知，人不耐審，雖有厚命，猶不自信，故必求之也。如自知，雖逃富避貴，終不得離。⁴¹²

One's *ming* given by Heaven is difficult to understand, and human beings cannot investigate it in detail. [Hence] even if one has *ming* to be rich, one cannot trust oneself [with that *ming*]. Thus, one must seek [fortune]. If one truly knows that [one has blissful *ming*], even if one tries to escape from wealth and nobility, they will never leave him/her.

The last sentence of this passage indicates that, in Wang Chong's belief, even lazy people can attain wealth if their destiny is to be rich. In fact, Wang Chong goes a step further and claims that even if one voluntarily chooses to stay poor, destiny will eventually find a way to make one rich. At the end of his discussions on fate and fortunes, Wang Chong brings up the story of King Yi of Yue 越王翳, who was smoked out of his cave by his people, who wanted to make him their king, a job that he never wanted.⁴¹³ So, for Wang Chong, becoming noble and rich is indeed independent of one's will.

At this point, it may already be apparent that Wang Chong's fatalism is more radical than that of his predecessors. The author(s) of "Qionгда yi shi" would have

⁴¹² "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 26.

⁴¹³ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 26. This story is also preserved in several other early sources. "Rangwang" *Zhuangzi jishi*, 968; "Guisheng" *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 75; "Yuandao xun" *Huainanzi jishi*, 45. The commentaries to *Lunheng* points out that Wang Chong must have read this story from *Huainanzi*, as he refers to the protagonist as King Yue of Yi. In the other two sources, he is referred to as the Prince Sou 王子搜.

agreed with Wang Chong that social success does not always follow talent and hard work, but it is doubtful that they would go so far as to agree that even those who are lazy and unwilling can still end up rich and noble. In “Qiongda yi shi,” it is still necessary to cultivate one’s virtue and talents in order to grasp the rare opportunities. Talent and hard work are necessary but not sufficient conditions for success. For Wang Chong, however, they are not conditions at all.

Many scholars categorize Wang Chong as a fatalist.⁴¹⁴ However, some still argue that Wang Chong’s view of *ming* is still in line with that seen in *Analects* and *Mencius*. They say that he emphasizes not that some things are determined at a level beyond our reach, but that we must focus on what can be controlled.⁴¹⁵ Indeed, there are times in which Wang Chong emphasizes the importance of hard work despite his fatalistic beliefs. As we have already seen, he argues that people can work hard because they cannot grasp their *ming*, but Wang Chong also displays a more traditional Confucian attitude.

有求而不得者矣，未必不求而得之者也。精學不求貴，貴自至矣；力作不求富，富自到矣。⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ E.g. Jin Chunfeng 金春峰, *Handai sixiang shi*, 499–505; Shing Jeongkeun 辛正根, “Gi cheolhagjadeul ui uyeonseong e daehan seongchal,” 312–18; Shao Yiping 邵毅平, *Lunheng yanjiu*, 292–326; Li Yongda 李詠達, “Wang Chong yu Wang Fu tianren guanxilun zhi bijiao,” 159–64.

⁴¹⁵ E.g. Yoshida Teruko 吉田照子, “Ô jû no seisetsu,” 219–20; Kalinowski, *Balance des discours*, LXXXVI. Marc Kalinowski’s statement is particularly clear about this point. He writes: “At the level of individual existences, this amorality of destiny does not lead to an impasse, to a form of *argos logos* inciting to laziness and rejection of any voluntary action. On the contrary, it allows philosophy to divert man from thirst for honors and profit to reorient him to an ethics of detachment, to an ideal of life which is at the heart of Confucian teaching.” (translated from French) For a philosophical analysis of *ming* in *Analects* and *Mencius*, see Slingerland, “The Conception of Ming in Early Confucian Thought,” 576–77; Goldin, *Confucianism*, 55. See also section 1.2 of the previous chapter.

⁴¹⁶ “Minglu,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 26.

There are cases in which people seek [to be rich] yet do not attain it, but this does not necessarily imply that one attains [wealth] without seeking it. When one devotes oneself to studies without seeking nobility, nobility will arrive on its own, and when one puts forth one's strength without seeking wealth, wealth will arrive on its own.

If this passage is taken as a true reflection of Wang Chong's idea of fate, then we could conclude that his philosophy is indeed in line with that of *Analects* and *Mencius*. His fatalism would not extend to the realm of moral cultivation, and when we exert our efforts on learning and stay diligent without aspiring to be rich and noble, success may come on its own.

But I cannot agree with this interpretation. Just before the sentences quoted above, Wang Chong compares the diligence of hard-working people to the physical attributes of a swift horse.

夫命富之人，筋力自彊，命貴之人，才智自高，若千里之馬，頭目蹄足自相副也。⁴¹⁷

The muscles of those whose *ming* is to be rich are naturally stronger, and the talent and intellect of those whose *ming* is to be noble are naturally superior. This is comparable to a swift horse [that can run a thousand *li* a day]: its head, eyes, feet, and legs are all naturally assist it.

Through this analogy, Wang Chong essentially claims that even the ability to exert effort, to seek fortune and honor, is decided by our *ming*.⁴¹⁸ Just as a swift

⁴¹⁷ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 26.

⁴¹⁸ Tian Fengtai's analysis of Wang Chong's position on individual effort is close to mine. He argues that Wang Chong's idea of fate ultimately leads to people being lazy and not making any efforts. Tian Fengtai 田鳳台, *Wang Chong sixiang xilun*, 64–66.

horse can naturally use its various body parts to run faster, people who are destined to be rich and noble are naturally excellent in some key qualities relevant to success. These qualities do not bring about success, and it is their *ming* that makes them successful. However, according to Wang Chong, if one's *ming* is to be wealthy, one will be born with stronger muscles that are conducive to working harder than others. Likewise, people who are destined to be noble will be born with the superior talent and intelligence that is necessary for attaining high office.

One might argue that even if the extent of one's talents, intelligence, and muscular strength are decided at birth, and even if those qualities can indeed affect one's eventual fortunes, this says nothing about one's ability to strive to be a better person. Even if one may be of inferior mind and body, nothing can hinder a person from cultivating morality.

However, Wang Chong does make a similarly fatalistic claim about our moral tendencies. Wang Chong argues that just as we all have different levels of talent, we have different "natures" (*xing* 性), which decide our moral tendencies.⁴¹⁹

實者、人性有善有惡，猶人才有高有下也，高不可下，下不可高。謂性無善惡，是謂人才無高下也。⁴²⁰

The truth is, the fact that some people have good nature while others have evil nature is like the fact that some people have superior talents

⁴¹⁹ The exact definition of *xing* can vary depending on scholars in the late Warring States period (for more information, see Goldin, *After Confucius*, 37–43.), but the translation "human nature" for *xing* in the sense of "The inherent dominating power or impulse in a person by which character or action is determined, directed, or controlled" may be appropriate in Wang Chong's case. "nature, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125353?rskey=l2DyeW&result=1> (accessed February 19, 2018). See n.469 below.

⁴²⁰ "Benxing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 142.

while others have inferior talents. Superior talent cannot be made inferior; inferior talent cannot be made superior. To say that there is no difference in good and evil in human nature is to say that there is no difference in superiority or inferiority in individual talent.

For Wang Chong, there is no question that such differences in human nature or talent are all predetermined at birth. A person's moral tendencies are determined by his or her nature, just as one's fortunes are determined by one's *ming*.

性自有善惡，命自有吉凶。使命吉之人，雖不行善，未必無福；凶命之人，雖勉操行，未必無禍。孟子曰：「求之有道，得之有命。」性善乃能求之，命善乃能得之。⁴²¹

Good and evil are inherent in one's nature while auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are inherent in one's *ming*. If a person has auspicious *ming*, even if his or her actions are not good, that does not necessarily prevent fortune. [In contrast,] if a person has inauspicious *ming*, even if his or her actions are earnest, that does not necessarily prevent misfortune. Mencius said: "In seeking [fortune], there is a proper way, but attaining it depends on *ming*." (*Mencius* 7A:3) [This means that] only those who are good by nature can seek [fortune], but only those who have good *ming* can attain it.

Here, Wang Chong makes a clear distinction between *xing* and *ming*: *ming* concerns the social aspect of our life, the aspect pertaining to one's fortune, while *xing* concerns our moral tendency. However, the two are actually alike in the sense that they are both predetermined at birth. For this reason, Wang Chong sometimes equates the two.⁴²² Wang Chong does not mention the existence of the ordinary

⁴²¹ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 50–51.

⁴²² E.g. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 26, 47, 49–50.

people 中人 here, but his argument that human nature can be categorized into three types, good, evil, and ordinary, is also reminiscent of his belief in three categories of *ming*.⁴²³

What Wang Chong tries to emphasize in the second passage is that being born with good nature does not necessarily guarantee success, or vice versa. Yet, in his unique interpretation of *Mencius* 7A:3, Wang Chong again reveals his belief that only those who are born with good nature can seek to attain fortune.⁴²⁴ This means that people who are born with an evil nature are not capable of seeking fortune themselves—even though they can still become rich and noble. In other words, in Wang Chong's thought, it is not only the realm of social success that is predetermined but also that of personal conduct, namely our will to do good and ability to strive for success.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ In one place, Wang Chong also uses the same names of the three kinds of *ming* to describe the three kinds of human nature: the correct 正, the encountered 遭, and the ensuing 隨. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 52.

⁴²⁴ By cropping the two clauses from the entire 7A:3, Wang Chong made it seem as if Mencius was making equal but separate claims about "seeking" and "attaining." In truth, however, they are both parts of a conditional clause of Mencius's statement on the external nature of social success. Compare this translation with other translations of *Mencius* 7A:3, such as that of Irene Bloom, which goes as: "If, though my seeking is in accordance with the Way, yet getting depends on destiny, such seeking is not conducive to getting, for what I seek lies outside myself." Ivanhoe, *Mencius*, 144.

⁴²⁵ Incidentally, this idea is remarkably reminiscent of John Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Calvin argues that God has already elected those who are to be raised to heaven and rejected those who are to be sent to hell, and his choices are purely based on his mercy and not on our faith or works. At the same time, however, he argues that faith is the instrumental cause of our salvation, by which God displays his mercy. This implies that, in Calvin's theory, only those who were pre-elected by God can have faith and perform works that are pleasing to God. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 389–406; Hesselink, "Calvin's Theology," 83–84.

2.2. Moral freedom

Wang Chong's theory of human nature is a direct counter-example against the claim that China never had a theory that questioned individuals' moral autonomy.⁴²⁶ Wang Chong states that people like King Zhòu 紂, the infamous last ruler of the Shang dynasty, was born evil and his eventual wickedness was only a natural development of his innate tendencies.

紂為孩子之時，微子睹其不善之性，性惡不出眾庶，長大為亂不變...紂之惡，在孩子之時...孩子始生，未與物接，誰令悖者？⁴²⁷

When Zhòu was [still] a child, the Viscount of Wei (Zhòu's older half-brother) observed the evilness of his nature. [Even though] the evilness of his nature did not stick out amongst ordinary people [when he was little], that he would cause chaos after growing up remained unchanged.... The evilness of King Zhòu was already there when he was a child.... When a child is born, he is yet to be in contact with [external] objects. What is it that makes him delinquent?

If Zhòu was born with evil tendencies, was it absolutely inevitable for him to become evil? It is one thing to say that a person can be born with evil tendencies and entirely another to say that it is inevitable for some people to become but evil. The former only implies that it is more difficult for some than others to become good, but not impossible.⁴²⁸ The latter, on the other hand, truly challenges one's freedom

⁴²⁶ Cf. Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (Ming)," 330. Ning Chen writes: "Never in ancient China is the idea established that Fate (in the sense of a blind force) can exercise its control over all aspects of man's life. To be moral or evil, for instance, is exclusively man's own choice, the freedom of man's moral will is never called into question."

⁴²⁷ "Benxing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 134–35.

⁴²⁸ This position may be close to Xunzi's view of human nature, who argues that while all human beings

to choose between good and evil.

Interestingly, there are passages in Wang Chong's writings that support both interpretations. For example, the "Shuaixing" 率性 (Guiding human nature) chapter, argues that even people born with an evil nature can be guided to goodness through education.

論人之性，定有善有惡。其善者，固自善矣；其惡者，故可教告率勉，使之為善。⁴²⁹

Speaking of human natures, some are fixed to be good while others fixed set to be evil. Those with good [nature] truly become good on their own, but those with evil [nature] are to be made to do good, as they can be educated, instructed, guided, and encouraged.

According to this passage, Wang Chong does not argue that one's moral tendencies are irreversibly predetermined. While some are certainly born in a way that is easier for them to turn to evil (hence more difficult to make them will good), it is not the case that they inevitably become evil.

Elsewhere, however, he argues that there are people who are born extremely evil or extremely good, and whose nature can never be changed. The possibility of moral transformation is reserved only for ordinary people.

孔子曰：「性相近也，習相遠也。」夫中人之性，在所習焉，習善而為善，習惡而為惡也。至於極善極惡，非復在習，故孔子曰：「惟上智與下愚不移。」性有善不善，聖化賢教，不能復移易也。⁴³⁰

have a natural tendency to fall into evil, everyone can be brought to goodness through self-cultivation and learning. *Xunzi jijie*, 63–65; Goldin, *Rituals of the Way*, 1–37.

⁴²⁹ "Shuaixing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 68.

⁴³⁰ "Benxing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 137.

Confucius said: “By nature [people] are alike, but by practice [they] become different” (*Analects* 17:2). The natures of those ordinary people depend on what they practice. If they practice good, they become good, but if they practice evil, they become evil. [But] for those who are extremely good or extremely evil, it no longer depends on practice. Therefore Confucius said: “The wisest and the most foolish do not change.” (*Analects* 17:3) When good and evil are in one’s nature, [even with] education from sages and worthy people, they cannot be changed again.

This appears to be a contradiction. Evil nature either can be guided to goodness or is permanently fixed.⁴³¹ As a matter of fact, if we look at Wang Chong’s instructions on how to transform a person’s nature, we can discover that, with respect to moral autonomy, he is actually quite consistent. Even when he argues that one’s nature can be changed, he does not say that human beings are capable of choosing between good or evil on their own.⁴³² Rather, the change is possible only through the effort of rulers and fathers who have carefully discerned their subjects’ and children’s nature, and guided them accordingly.

⁴³¹ Nicolas Zufferey’s explains this contradiction as a change in Wang Chong’s position in the course of his life. He says: “*Lunheng* was probably written over about thirty years. It is likely that over such a long period of time, Wang Chong’s thought may have evolved, which would explain some of the contradictions in his work.” (translated from French) Zufferey, *Wang Chong*, 317.

⁴³² Thus, I do not agree with scholars who emphasize Wang Chong’s statement on the possibility of moral transformation and argue that his philosophy is not a kind of moral determinism. E.g. Chen Zhengxiong 陳正雄, *Wang Chong xueshu sixiang shuping*, 114–16; Shao Yiping 邵毅平, *Lunheng yanjiu*, 295–97. Tian Fengtai also questions whether the so-called “extremely good” or “extremely bad” nature can really be exclusively good or evil, and whether such cases can really exist. Thus, he also emphasizes the possibility of moral transformation. Tian Fengtai 田鳳台, *Wang Chong sixiang xilun*, 72–73. Interestingly, Yoshida Teruko, who argued that Wang Chong’s *ming* was only a result of his rationalistic effort to reject mysticism, simultaneously acknowledges that Wang Chong’s theory on *xing* indeed poses threat to personal freedom. Yoshida Teruko 吉田照子, “Ō Jū no seisetsu,” 222–23.

凡人君父，審觀臣子之性，善則養育勸率，無令近惡；近惡則輔保禁防，令漸於善。善漸於惡，惡化於善，成為性行。⁴³³

As a rule, rulers and fathers [should] closely examine their subjects' and children's nature. If their nature is good, raise them and guide them without letting them near evil. If they are near evil, protect them and guard them while letting them be permeated by goodness. When goodness permeates evil, and evil is transformed by goodness, they can be made to do [good] as if by nature.

In this brief instruction, notice how all the attention is focused on exerting good influence upon children and subjects. The individual, the target of moral transformation, plays only a passive role in the process of moral transformation. Compare this position to that of Xunzi, who stipulates one's will as a necessary condition for moral transformation.

小人可以為君子而不肯為君子，君子可以為小人而不肯為小人。小人、君子者，未嘗不可以相為也，然而不相為者，可以而不可使也。⁴³⁴

A petty man can become a noble man, but he does not wish to be one; a noble man can become a petty man, but he does not wish to be one. There has never been a case in which either a petty man or a noble man was not able to become the other. But [the reason that] they do not become one another is that while it is possible, they cannot be forced to [change].

Of course, for Wang Chong, there is a theoretical problem in emphasizing one's will as a condition of moral transformation. If someone were to will oneself

⁴³³ "Shuaixing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 68.

⁴³⁴ "Xing'e," *Xunzi jijie*, 443. Also passages like *Analects* 7:3 may be used as evidence that Confucianism, in general, emphasize one's will as a condition of moral cultivation. E.g. Kyung-Sig Hwang, "Moral Luck, Self-Cultivation, and Responsibility," 6–7.

good on one's own, it would mean that one's nature was not completely evil in the first place. Therefore, the moment Wang Chong puts emphasis on one's will, he has to admit that those who are born evil are inevitably doomed to become evil.

But let us set aside the cases of extremely evil-natured people who may be rare, and turn to what Wang Chong calls the ordinary people, who have a mixture of good and evil in their nature. Theoretically, they should be able to choose between good and evil, as they were born with both tendencies.⁴³⁵ But even when Wang Chong is discussing ordinary people, his instructions on moral transformation do not change. The emphasis is still on the educator and not on the educated.

There is one place where Wang Chong uses a word that may be interpreted as an emphasis on one's will.

召公戒成[王]曰：「今王初服厥命，於戲！若生子，罔不在厥初生。」

「生子」謂十五子，初生意於善，終以善；初生意於惡，終以惡。⁴³⁶

The Duke of Shao adjured King Cheng, saying: "Now the king has received the mandate for the first time. Oh! You are like a child, [for whom] everything depends on the first years." ("Shaogao") By "child," he means a child of age fifteen (or under). When the intention is on good during one's first years, the child will be good to the end; but when the intention is on evil during one's first years, the child will be evil to the end.

Here, Wang Chong talks about the importance of intention *yi* 意, but the question is, whose intention is it? Is it really that of the child? When we examine this

⁴³⁵ On the basis of Wang Chong's description of the ordinary people, Park Jungyoon defines his position on moral freedom as "constrained freedom" within determinism. Park Jungyoon 박정윤, "Wang Chung ui myeongjeonglon."

⁴³⁶ "Shuaixing," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 68.

passage in connection with the following passage, it appears that the intention belongs to the child's father, not the child. Immediately after this passage, Wang Chong claims that the process of moral transformation in children is like the process of dying a sheet of silk. It absorbs the color of a pigment without any resistance.

十五之子，其猶絲也。其有所漸化為善惡，猶藍丹之染練絲，使之為青赤也。青赤一成，真色無異。⁴³⁷

Children of age fifteen (or under) are like silk. They can be gradually changed to goodness or evilness as dying a plain sheet of silk with indigo or cinnabar turns it into blue or red. Once they are turned blue or red, the colors are no different from the true colors of [indigo and cinnabar.]

The silk does not make a decision for itself to be red or blue, but simply absorbs the color chosen by the dyer. In this analogy, the dyer actually causes (*shi* 使) the silk to be of the color the dyer wants it to be. Notice that the verb *shi* used here is precisely what Xunzi used when he argued that one cannot “force” a petty man to become a noble man. For Wang Chong, not only can you force a person to become good, but it seems to be the only method.

Also noteworthy is how Wang Chong sets an age limit by which moral transformation is no longer possible. Wang Chong does not completely deny the possibility of moral transformation for adults. For example, he mentions how Confucius was able to guide and educate his disciple Zilu 子路, who was only nine years junior to Confucius but whose “evil was extremely severe” 惡至甚矣.⁴³⁸ (Note

⁴³⁷ “Shuaixing,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 70.

⁴³⁸ “Shuaixing,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 72–73.

that it was not Zilu who transformed himself with the teachings of Confucius, but Confucius who transformed Zilu.) But cases like these may be rare, and after all, this was the work of Confucius himself. For ordinary human beings, Wang Chong sees that even when one's moral tendency is not completely fixed toward either good or evil at birth, it will soon end up fixed as if they were born that way.

It may be the case that his defense for the possibility of moral transformation was a last-minute attempt to save his philosophy from complete moral determinism. He does not wish to say that our morality is irreversibly fixed from our birth, but he still thinks that the transformation is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, for some people. In any case, Wang Chong maintains that human beings do not have much freedom to choose between good and evil on their own.

There is one more question to be asked about moral freedom. Even if we cannot make choices about our own morality, are we at least free in changing the tendencies of other human beings? The question I want to raise is about general freedom in our actions. When so many things are decided at birth, including our moral tendencies and ability to strive for success, is there any part of our lives that is not predetermined at birth? Wang Chong makes claims that require reflection.

2.3. Wang Chong, a determinist?

Let us reexamine the case of Confucius and Zilu (d. 480 BCE) briefly mentioned above. After studying with Confucius, Zilu went to Wei 衛 and served the

house of Kong Kui 孔悝. But while he was in Wei, Kong Kui and Kui Kui 蒯聩 succeeded in a *coup d'état*, and Zilu was killed in the aftermath.⁴³⁹ For Wang Chong, there is no doubt that Zilu's death was predetermined by his *ming*.⁴⁴⁰ But had he not met Confucius, and had Confucius not transformed his evil nature, he probably would not have come to serve Kong Kui in the first place. Consequently, he would not have been affected by the *coup* in Wei. If Zilu's death in Wei was inevitable, is it not the case that Confucius' act of guiding Zilu to goodness was also inevitable?

In order to exempt Confucius's act from the inevitability of Zilu's *ming*, we need to postulate that Wang Chong's concept of *ming* does not concern *how* one dies, but only *when* one dies. So, we can say that even if Zilu was not serving the house of Kong at that particular time, he could have still died by some other cause. Even if the very people who killed Zilu had elected to act otherwise at the last minute, Zilu would probably have died soon after.⁴⁴¹

Wang Chong, however, does not endorse this limited definition of *ming*. He makes it explicit that *ming* concerns various aspects of our lives.

命，吉凶之主也，自然之道，適偶之數。⁴⁴²

Ming is the master of good and ill fortune, the path of spontaneity, and the order of chance and coincidence.

⁴³⁹ "Zhongni dizi liezhuan" *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 3355–56.

⁴⁴⁰ "Ouhui," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 100.

⁴⁴¹ Cases of people dying soon after surviving a tragic accident are often heard of. E.g. Serna, "Husband and Wife Who Survived Las Vegas Shooting Die in Car Crash."

⁴⁴² "Ouhui," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 99.

This claim is consistent with the position seen above, where Wang Chong said, “people’s meeting chances [of success] or encountering continuous disasters are all due to *ming*.” In Wang Chong’s view, *ming* does not just stay inactive until the moment of destiny, but continuously interferes with our lives.

Does this indeed mean that Confucius was not free when he “decided” to take Zilu as his disciple? Wang Chong’s answer to this question does not appear in his surviving works, but we may guess his answer through his remarks about similar cases, namely the deaths of Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 BCE) and Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340 – 278 BCE).

世謂子胥伏劍，屈原自沉，子蘭、宰嚭誣讒，吳、楚之君冤殺之也。偶二子命當絕，子蘭、宰嚭適為讒，而懷王、夫差適信姦也。君適不明，臣適為讒，二子之命，偶自不長，二偶三合，似若有之，其實自然，非他為也。⁴⁴³

What people say about Wu Zixu’s stabbing himself with the sword and Qu Yuan’s drowning himself [in a river] is that they were slandered by Minister Bo Pi and Zilan and were unjustly killed by the rulers of Wu and Chu, respectively. [However, the truth is that] the two reached [the time when] their lives were to be cut short, and Zilan and Bo Pi happened to slander them, and King Huai and Fucha happened to believe their deceitful [words]. Rulers happened to be dimwitted, and their subjects happened to slander [the two], and the lives of the two men came to a natural [point at which] they could not be extended further. It seems as if it was by chance that the two men came to [situations in which] the three [factors] merged, but the truth is that it was spontaneously so. There was nothing else that made it so.

⁴⁴³ “Ouhui,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 99.

What is noteworthy is Wang Chong's use of the word *di* 適 (happen to), instead of something like *bi* 必 (necessarily), to describe the actions of those who brought about to the deaths of Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan. Wang Chong seems to argue that they just "happened" to act in such ways when it was time for the two men's deaths. But saying that some people "happened" to act in a way can imply that they had an option to act in some way other than they actually did. Is this really how Wang Chong sees the actions of the slandered and dimwitted kings?

Shao Yiping argues that, for Wang Chong, the necessity of *ming* is completed through contingent events, which means he believes that the kings and slanderers indeed had the freedom to act otherwise.⁴⁴⁴ But Wang Chong claims that the whole chain of actions from the slandering of Bo Pi and Zilan to the deaths of Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan was made spontaneously, and it is already stated that the path of spontaneity is none other than *ming*. If *ming* encompasses all those events leading to its eventual realization, how can preceding events be any less inevitable than the final one?⁴⁴⁵ They may occur in the guise of coincidence, but in order for the events to be truly contingent, Wang Chong's concept of *ming* has to be the limited one that does not concern the means of death but only its time. This is not the case.

Perhaps Wang Chong chose to say that the slanderers and kings "happened"

⁴⁴⁴ Shao Yiping 邵毅平, *Lunheng yanjiu*, 302.

⁴⁴⁵ See Bernstein, "Fatalism," 66–67. The necessity of preceding events leading to the final fated event is well explained in Mark Bernstein's example of Jones's fate to meet his grandfather on Wednesday: "If it is true that Jones will meet his grandfather Wednesday, then no one has the power to prevent this meeting. If Jones's being killed Tuesday would prevent that meeting, then Jones is not capable (lacks the capacity) of being killed tonight." (p.67) In a similar manner, we may say that Zilu was not capable of being not transformed by Confucius.

to act as they did rather than that they “had” to, because he did not want to imply that they were not responsible for their actions.⁴⁴⁶ Although they happened to act in ways that contributed to the realization of the two people’s *ming*, they still acted on their own. No one, or no thing, forced Bo Pi and Zilan to slander Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan, and Heaven did not make the kings dimwitted just so that they would kill Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan. This is, in fact, the point that Wang Chong tries to convey in the “Ouhui” chapter as a whole: that there is no willful being that controls courses of events to bring about particular results. Events transpire on their own, but their combination leads to the realization of predetermined *ming*.

If this is indeed Wang Chong’s intention, we may place Wang Chong in the same group as classical compatibilists, who argue that if we define freedom as “the unencumbered ability of an agent to do what she wants,” a person can be said to have acted freely even when there were no alternate possibilities.⁴⁴⁷ A drug addict, for example, may feel a strong desire for drugs and willingly consume them without any remorse although he/she never really possessed an option to act otherwise.⁴⁴⁸ Likewise, Bo Pi and Zilan could have sincerely wanted to slander Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan and actually did so even though to act otherwise was impossible in the first

⁴⁴⁶ Many influential contemporary philosophers tried to show that our conception of moral responsibility is not necessarily dependent upon the freedom to act otherwise. E.g. Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”; Dennett, “I Could Not Have Done Otherwise—so What?” However, the fact that the debate is still going on suggests that the association between the two is not easy to deny in entirety. For more recent discussions on the topic, see Kane, *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*; Fischer et al., *Four Views on Free Will*.

⁴⁴⁷ McKenna and Coates, “Compatibilism.” See especially section 3

⁴⁴⁸ For a more detailed analysis of this example, see Fischer, “Responsibility and Control,” 27–28.

place. In this way, we may explain how Bo Pi and Zilan could have “happened” to act the ways they did while still being tied to the inevitability of Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan’s *ming*.

When we accept that the kings and slanderers were never free to act otherwise, we must ask how many of our own actions are truly free. According to Wang Chong, anything that has a head, eyes, and blood has *ming*.⁴⁴⁹ This obviously includes animals. Then, if a farmer killed a chicken for the family dinner one night, could one say that the farmer’s killing of the chicken was also predetermined by the chicken’s *ming*? Is there any event or action that is not a part of some *ming*? Innumerable instances of our actions must be a part of someone’s (or something’s) *ming*. In order to answer this question, we should revisit Wang Chong’s understanding of *ming*. To what extent does *ming* dictate our lives?

As strongly as Wang Chong believes in the irreversibility of *ming*, he admits that there are people who do not live exactly as predetermined by their *ming*. For example, if there is a war or a natural disaster, some people can die early, even though they were originally destined to live long.

歷陽之都，男女俱沒；長平之坑，老少並陷，萬數之中，必有長命未當死之人，遭時衰微，兵革並起，不得終其壽。⁴⁵⁰

In a city in Liyang (that turned into a lake overnight), men and women all drowned together, and in the pits of Changping (where the Qin general Bai Qi 白起 defeated the Zhao army in 260 BCE), old and young were all

⁴⁴⁹ “Minglu,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 20.

⁴⁵⁰ “Mingyi,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 44.

buried [alive]. Among the tens of thousands [who met sudden deaths], there must have been people who had *ming* to live long and were not supposed to die. However, they encountered a declining age, in which wars and revolutions rise simultaneously. [Hence,] they were unable to live up to their proper lifespan.

Wang Chong does not argue that the numerous people who died at Liyang and Changping all had the same fate to die there. Some must have had a better fate but encountered a declining age and were forced to deviate from their original fate. The strange part of this explanation is Wang Chong's use of the term "encounter" 遭. As we have seen, Wang Chong has argued that our encountering of chances of success or troubles and disasters are all controlled by our *ming*.⁴⁵¹ Those who are destined to be poor will face misfortunes even if someone were to grant him money and honor and vice versa. Yet here, he seems to be arguing that one can encounter events that can effectively thwart the realization of one's predetermined *ming*. Wang Chong has an explanation for this apparent contradiction.

命善祿盛，遭逢之禍不能害也。歷陽之都，長平之坑，其中必有命善祿盛之人，一宿同填而死，遭逢之禍大，命善祿盛不能卻也。譬猶水火相更也，水盛勝火，火盛勝水。⁴⁵²

When one's *ming* and fortunes are good and abundant, the disasters that one encounters cannot harm one. [Yet] among the people at the city in Liyang and in the pits of Changping, there must have been people whose *ming* and fortunes were good and abundant, but they were all buried and died overnight. When the disaster that one encounters is enormous, good

⁴⁵¹ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 20. See p.167 above.

⁴⁵² "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 57.

ming and abundant fortunes cannot repel it. This is like the mutually opposing [relationship] between water and fire. If water is abundant, it wins over a fire, and when a fire is strong, it wins over water.

In Wang Chong's view, anyone can encounter events that hinder the realization of one's original *ming*. Even in the passage where he uses the term "encounter" to explain events in life that ultimately redirect the course of one's life back in track with the predetermined *ming*, he is acknowledging the possibility that a person's life can deviate, at least temporarily, from one's original *ming*. When these events occur on a grand scale, however, they can be powerful enough to permanently overcome the original *ming*.

What is the provenance of these grand-scale events that undermine the power of individuals' fates? If Wang Chong believes that these events are contingent, then he may not even be a fatalist in the strict sense, as his concept of fate would not carry the sense of inevitability. But Wang Chong does not take this route. Instead, he explains these events as predetermined at a different level of *ming*.

人命有長短，時有盛衰，衰則疾病，被災蒙禍之驗也。宋、衛、陳、鄭
同日並災，四國之民，必有祿盛未當衰之人，然而俱災，國禍陵之也。
故國命勝人命，壽命勝祿命。...國命繫於眾星，列宿吉凶，國有禍福；
眾星推移，人有盛衰。⁴⁵³

Some people have *ming* for a long life while others have *ming* for a short life. Some ages flourish while other ages decline. When [the age] is in decline, [people] are ill. This is the result of experiencing disasters and suffering misfortune. There was a disaster in Song, Wei, Chen, and Zheng

⁴⁵³ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 45–46.

on the same day; among the people of the four states, there must have been people who were destined to be rich and were not supposed to face decline, but they were together in the disaster. This is because misfortunes of a state are above the [fates] of individuals. Therefore, the *ming* of a state overcomes the *ming* of an individual, and the *ming* of lifespan overcomes the *ming* of fortune.... The *ming* of a state is connected to the myriad stars. Depending on auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of various asterisms, a state can either have fortune or misfortune. Depending on the movements of the myriad stars, people flourish or decline.

Wang Chong presents a world with multiple layers of *ming* that govern courses of events on different levels. When *ming* of a higher hierarchy (e.g. that of a state) does not interfere with that of the lower level (e.g. that of an individual), the individual will live as predetermined by *ming* that he/she was born with. However, if the higher *ming* brings about events that involve a great number of people, events that were predetermined by the lesser *ming* will not be realized. In either case, however, the conclusion seems to be that “whatever happened had to happen,” and the deaths of the people at Changping and Liyang seem to have been predetermined at one level or another.⁴⁵⁴

At this point, it may seem that there is no event that is not caused by *ming*. Events that are conducive to the realization of my original *ming* are brought by my own *ming*, but events that hinder its realization may also be brought by different

⁴⁵⁴ The phrase in quotation mark follows Mark Bernstein’s definition of fatalism: “FATALISM is the thesis that whatever happens must happen; every event or state of affairs that occurs, must occur, while the nonoccurrence of every event and state of affairs is likewise necessitated.” Bernstein, “Fatalism,” 65.

ming. However, it is Wang Chong's theory of hierarchy of *ming* that actually opens up room for freedom in his fatalistic world.

The fact that our *ming* is realized when *ming* of a higher hierarchy does not interfere implies that higher *ming* does not dictate all courses of events. It concerns only a limited number of events that are necessary to bring about fated outcomes. In a similar manner, we can assume that *ming* of individuals does not dictate every event and every action in our lives. We are free to do what we will and desire in affairs that are not predetermined by our *ming*. Even in matters that are predetermined by our *ming*, it may be the case that *ming* does not dictate the course of events to the minute level. For instance, it may have been inevitable for Bo Pi and Zilan to slander Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan at that particular time, but it is probably not the case that their exact speeches were scripted by *ming*.

To summarize, even though *ming* may be "the path of spontaneity," it does not preside over every event of our lives. Wang Chong's world is not like the world of divine providence, in which "all events are governed by God's secret plan and that nothing takes place without his deliberation,"⁴⁵⁵ or like Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony, which states that all events occur according to a pre-established plan.⁴⁵⁶ *Ming*, as powerful as it may be, leaves room for us to act freely.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Deng Hong 登紅, "Ô Jū 'mei'ron shin'gi." The cited definition comes from Paul Helm's explanation of John Calvin's version of divine providence. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 96.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. Leslie, "Les théories de Wang Tch'ong sur la causalité," 184–86. Daniel Leslie inappropriately claims that there is no causality between the events described in the "Ouhui" chapter but only coincidence and compares Wang Chong's philosophy to Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony. But Wang Chong does not deny intersubstantial causation as does Leibniz. See Bobro, "Leibniz on Causation." While Wang Chong maintains that there are cases comparable to a fire being extinguished just as water is poured over the fire (no causation), he also accepts that water can indeed put out a fire. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 104. Even in the case of Wu Zixu and Qu Yuan, while no one purposefully made their kings dimwitted, the coincidentally dimwitted kings were indeed

It is undeniable, however, that within Wang Chong's thought, human beings have very limited freedom, and no one is capable of defying fate in the end. His philosophy represents an extreme interpretation of the view that people are born with different fates. Fate determines not only our longevity, but also wealth, social success, ability to strive for success, moral tendency, and etc. in different ways for different people.

3. The non-fatalistic world of a three-*ming* theory

3.1. Three kinds of *ming* for each person

Although Wang Chong believed that each person is born with fixed *ming*, he was undoubtedly aware of another theory, which held that a single person can have three kinds of *ming*.⁴⁵⁷ I will refer to this position as a "set theory," as its central argument is that the entire set of the three kinds of *ming* is available for everyone. He introduces this theory in the "Mingyi" chapter.

The definitions given by Wang Chong for the three kinds of *ming* are similar to those of Zhao Qi seen previously in that the standard of the distinction between

affected by the slanders they heard.

⁴⁵⁷ Lin Meiling correctly points out how Wang Chong's understanding of the three kinds of *ming* is different from that of the set theory, but she refers to Wang Chong's argument as "a criticism against the traditional three-*ming* theory" 傳統三命說的批判. Lin Meiling 林玫玲, *Xianqin zhexue de "minglun" sixiang*, 34–40. This means that she sees the set theory as the orthodox understanding of *ming*, to which Wang Chong is responding. But as I have shown in section 1, Wang Chong's position has its own tradition. Neither is more "traditional" than the other.

different kinds of *ming* is the relationship between one's deeds and one's worldly rewards.⁴⁵⁸ Correct *ming* is the course of life in which one receives fortunes due to one's inborn auspiciousness; ensuing *ming* is that in which one is rewarded or punished on account of one's deeds; and encountered *ming* is that in which one receives misfortunes despite good deeds.⁴⁵⁹

There are two main points that Wang Chong criticizes about this belief: one is the implication that different kinds of *ming* can coexist in a person, and the other is that *ming* is relevant to human effort. It should be noted that neither of these two points is directly implied by the definitions he provides. In fact, these definitions do not seem to differ much from that of Wang Chong's own when he defined the three kinds of *ming* in terms of longevity.⁴⁶⁰ All that these definitions imply is that a person's *ming* cannot be judged by just looking at how one dies, but must be further examined to see if that death was fitting for his/her deeds. Wang Chong's criticisms, however, actually touch upon the more fundamental difference between two different understandings of *ming*.

Let us first look at the criticism that the three kinds of *ming* as defined are mutually incompatible. He argues that if someone is born with encountered *ming*, then it cannot be the case that he/she also has ensuing *ming*, and vice versa.

⁴⁵⁸ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 879. See p.158 above. What Zhao Qi calls "received *ming*" is that which rewards a person for one's good deeds, which would be a kind of ensuing *ming* according to the definitions given by Wang Chong.

⁴⁵⁹ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 49–50.

⁴⁶⁰ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 52–53. See also p.5 above.

若顏淵、伯牛之徒，如何遭凶？顏淵、伯牛，行善者也，當得隨命，福祐隨至，何故遭凶？...行善當得隨命之福，乃觸遭命之禍，何哉？言隨命則無遭命，言遭命則無隨命，儒者三命之說，竟何所定？⁴⁶¹

Why did people like Yan Yuan of Boniu (who are disciples of Confucius) encounter misfortune? Yan Yuan and Boniu were people who practiced goodness. They should have obtained ensuing *ming*, and fortune [should have] followed [their deeds]. Why is that they encountered misfortune? ... By practicing goodness, one should obtain the fortune of ensuing *ming*, but why is it that some people face the misfortune of encountered *ming*? If one speaks of ensuing *ming*, there is no encountered *ming*, and if one speaks of encountered *ming*, there is no ensuing *ming*. Then what is the ultimate ground on which the Confucians' three-*ming* theory is established?⁴⁶²

Wang Chong is not denying the possibility of cases that may be described as encountered *ming* or ensuing *ming*. If he were, his own theory of *ming* would not stand.⁴⁶³ There are obviously people who seem to be rewarded for their deeds and those who seem to be undeservingly punished despite their deeds.

His point is that a person can have only one of these three kinds of *ming*. If it were the case that everyone had the three kinds, Yan Yuan must have had ensuing *ming* as well, but why was it that Yan Yuan was never rewarded for his deeds? Yan

⁴⁶¹ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 51–52.

⁴⁶² Despite arguments that the term *ru* 儒 should not be translated as "Confucian," I agree with scholars like Paul R. Goldin, John S. Major, and Sarah A. Queen in that "Confucian" is still an acceptable translation of the word, especially in comparison with other alternatives proposed such as "classicist" or even *ru* as untranslated. Goldin, *Confucianism*, 4–6; Queen and Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, 12–13. For the opposite arguments, see Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 1–6; Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 6–7.

⁴⁶³ His (erroneous) criticism of *Mencius* 7A:2 is precisely dependent upon his observation that some people face misfortunes despite deserving deeds. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 467–68. See p.157 above.

Yuan was not rewarded because he was born with encountered *ming*. And the fact that he was born with encountered *ming* means that he could never have had ensuing *ming*.

But when set theorists argue that a person can have three different kinds of *ming*, they do not mean that Yan Yuan's *ming* was both encountered *ming* and ensuing *ming* at the same time. Rather, we must understand the three kinds of *ming* as potentialities. Think of Mencius' claim that a person's death can be defined as either correct *ming* or non-correct *ming*. Mencius's argument was not that a person is born with one of the two. Everyone starts out with possibilities of both kinds of *ming* open to them, but only one of them is realized. Likewise, set theorists can reply to Wang Chong that Yan Yuan initially had the possibilities for all three kinds of *ming*, but his life ended up with encountered *ming*.

We may understand Wang Chong's second criticism as a response to this postulated reply from set theorists. If one argues that a person has the potential for different kinds of *ming* in the beginning, but only one of them is realized during the course of his or her life, it implies that *ming* is not really given at birth. It can also imply that to some extent, one's deeds affect what kind of *ming* one can end up with. Wang Chong does not agree with this kind of view, as he believes that a person's *ming* is irreversibly fixed at the time of birth.

且命在初生，骨表著見。今言隨操行而至，此命在末，不在本也；則富貴貧賤皆在初稟之時，不在長大之後隨操行而至也。⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ "Mingyi," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 51–52.

Also, *ming* is there since birth, and it is visible through one's frame and appearance. Now they say that [*ming*] comes in accordance with one's deeds. Then this *ming* is at the end, not in the beginning. Wealth, nobility, poverty, and humbleness are all there at the time of one's initial endowment. They do not come following one's deeds after one has grown up.

As with the first criticism, the conclusion that a person's *ming* is decided after one has performed one's deeds is not necessarily implied by the provided definitions. All they indicate is that people can be rewarded differently for their deeds, but this difference in rewards could still have been determined at birth. But if we think of set theorists' distinction of the three kinds of *ming* in terms of Mencius' distinction of correct and non-correct *ming*, we can understand how *ming* can be seen as being determined following one's deeds. For Mencius, non-correct *ming* is precisely the result of one's immoral deeds.

Another text from the Han dynasty, namely *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*The Luxuriant Dew of the Springs and Autumns*), presents the set theory in a way that more vividly resembles Mencius' distinction of correct and non-correct *ming*. The names of the three kinds of *ming* are all there, but the general scheme is dualistic. A person can live according to great *ming* or altered *ming*.

人始生有大命，是其體也。有變命存其間者，其政也。政不齊則人有忿怒之志，若將施危難之中，而時有隨、遭者，神明之所接，絕屬之符也

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⁴⁶⁵ "Zhongzheng," *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 149. This text is traditionally attributed to a Former Han scholar Dong Zhongshu (ca. 198 – 107 BCE), but there is much doubt about its authenticity. The chapter from which this passage is quoted is particularly problematic in that, despite its relatively short length, it discusses four unrelated topics. In other words, the chapter is probably a collage of originally unrelated writings. It is

Each person is born with great *ming*, which sets the basic framework [of his/her life]. That there is altered *ming* within that [great *ming*] is due to [bad] governance. When the governance is not in order, people can harbor rage and anger, like when they are in the middle of imminent danger and hardship, and sometimes there are ensuing [*ming*] and encountered [*ming*]. These [*ming*] are interventions by spirits corresponding with [one's life] being cut short or being prolonged.⁴⁶⁶

The descriptions of the three kinds of *ming* given in this passage are markedly different from those given by Wang Chong and Zhao Qi. If their definitions categorically divide all kinds of lives that a person can have with respect to rewards for one's deeds, the standard of distinction between different kinds of *ming* in this passage is whether the particular *ming* fits with the original *ming* that one was born with. This original *ming* is great *ming*.

Note that there is no implication that great *ming* is a kind of fate by which one continuously encounters one auspicious event after another. It is simply the course that is designated for one to follow throughout one's life. The other two *ming*, which are deviations from that course, may not necessarily be more auspicious or

practically impossible to accurately date this particular passage, but Michael Loewe points out that the ideas in this chapter are similar to those of the chapter 36 "Shixing," which are in turn similar to those found in *Baihutong*. Thus, he suggests that they may have originated from the discussions of the White Tiger Hall in 79 CE. Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 228, 341. See pp.338–341 for an overview of the problems related to the traditional attribution of Dong Zhongshu as the author of *Chunqiu fanlu*. For a brief summary of the modern debate on the dates of *Baihutong*, see Loewe, "Pai hu t'ung," 348–50.

⁴⁶⁶ The exact meaning of this last sentence is difficult to grasp, but the context seems to motivate translating *shenming* as spirits. *Shenming* need not always mean spiritual beings in Han texts. For example, Xunzi once explains that "mind is the master of *shenming*" 心者...神明之主, and here, *shenming* cannot mean spirits. "Jiebi," Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie*, 397. However, translating *shenming* as something like mind does not make the context of *Chunqiu fanlu* any clearer. For a survey of various meaning of the term *shenming*, see Szabó, "The Term *Shenming*."

inauspicious than the original course.

There is, however, a clear reason that great *ming* is sometimes equated with such an auspicious life. This is a remnant of Mencius' concept of correct *ming*. Admittedly, for Mencius, bad governance would have had no effect on whether I live according to the correct *ming* or not. His distinction of the two *ming* is not contingent upon external factors.⁴⁶⁷ However, like great *ming*, Mencius' correct *ming* carries a sense of properness. That is the proper course of life one should have, and even though the other course can be sought, it is not supposed to be actualized.

For Mencius, this sense of properness comes from his concept of human nature, which, according to Angus Graham, is rooted in the more ancient notion of *xing* 性, meaning the "proper course of development during its process of *sheng* (生). In the case of man it is primarily living to a ripe old age in good health, but also, we may assume, every other characteristic proper to man's formation, growth and decay."⁴⁶⁸ Thus, even for Mencius—even though his intention in the distinction of two kinds of *ming* was purely moralistic—there is room to associate the proper way of life with longevity and material well-being.

The proper course of life in *Chunqiu fanlu* can also be explained in terms of human nature.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ As Paul R. Goldin aptly summarized, for Mencius, "Our proper destiny is waiting for us, and if we fail to achieve it, we have only ourselves to blame." Goldin, *Confucianism*, 55. The connection between Mencius' theory of human nature and that of *ming* can be seen in *Mencius* 7A:1. *Mengzi zhengyi*, 877–79.

⁴⁶⁸ Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," 10. The Chinese character in the parenthesis is my addition. See also, section 2.2 of the previous chapter.

⁴⁶⁹ The word *xing* in *Chunqiu fanlu* is the same word that Wang Chong discusses when he talks about people's moral tendencies. But the two are in fact quite different in meaning. For Wang Chong, *xing* is a natural tendency that we can either accept or suppress. It is not something we work on to "complete" our potentials. In

善如米，性如禾。禾雖出米，而禾未可謂米也。性雖出善，而性未可謂善也。米與善，人之繼天而成於外也，非在天所為之內也。⁴⁷⁰

Goodness is comparable to rice crops, as human nature is comparable to rice plants. Although rice plants produce rice crops, you cannot call the plant the crop. Goodness comes from the human nature, but human nature cannot be called good yet. Rice and goodness are what humans complete from outside by continuing the [works] of Heaven. They are not inside of what Heaven has already made.

There is a slight difference in the emphasis between this claim about human nature and that about *ming* seen in the previous quote. Great *ming* is supposed to be actualized spontaneously when external factors do not interfere, but producing rice crops from rice plants requires active effort. Especially from the perspective of farmers, plants do not bear crops on their own. Nevertheless, the two may be comparable in the sense that the ability to become good or to bear crops is a potential that Heaven has endowed in humans and plants at birth, respectively. If this potential is not actualized, it is because outside circumstances were not conducive. In this sense, great *ming* or correct *ming* may indeed be explained as a kind of life in which one enjoys longevity and material well-being, because it is the kind of life in which we realize the best of our potential.

There can still be differences among individuals in their lifespan or wealth,

Chunqiu fanlu, however, *xing* is the basic character of a species, and it is also the basis of our morality. But despite the difference in meaning this latter sense may still be translated as “human nature” in the sense of “The basic character or disposition of mankind; humanity, humanness.” “nature, n.” OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125353?rskey=V33QtZ&result=1> (accessed April 03, 2018). See n.419 above.

⁴⁷⁰ “Shixing,” *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 311.

just as there are seeds that are capable of bearing more crops than others. For example, in a society where starvation is not a rare cause of death, many people could have thought that a person born in a wealthy family would live longer than someone born in a poor one. In this manner, people may have thought that each person's great *ming* can differ depending on the environment one was born into.

The defenders of the set theory would explain that if a person achieves wealth through hard work despite being born poor, that would be attributed to ensuing *ming*, because one seems to have overcome one's natural course of life through personal effort. And if a person lost all of his or her inherited wealth because of a war, that may be attributed to encountered *ming* because the misfortune seems to be fortuitous. Both of these cases would be examples of altered *ming*, the deviated course of life from the originally endowed one. This is how everyone has possibilities of all three kinds of *ming*.

3.2. *Ming* and extra-human powers

In contrast to the profoundly fatalistic world that Wang Chong's philosophy presents, the theory that a single person can have all three kinds of *ming* automatically implies a world in which human beings have much freedom to deviate from the course of life that was determined at birth. This disparity in the perceived rigidity of one's inborn fate is further connected to other important differences in conceptions of the universe.

Let us re-consider the concept of altered *ming*. I have explained that the origin of the concept of great *ming* is related to the concept of human nature expounded in *Chunqiu fanlu*. Great *ming* is the course of our life in which our best potential is realized. The analogy between *ming* and human nature stops, however, when we discuss the altered *ming*. When a person deviates from the proper course of life as defined by one's nature, the deviating course can no longer be described as "natural." Rice plants can die without bearing crops, but it is not in their nature to die that way. In contrast, it is argued that deviation from the path of great *ming* is also a kind of *ming*.

The reason why *ming* can refer to both proper and improper courses of life can be found in the history of the term *ming*. As discussed in the previous chapter, *ming* did not have the sense of a predetermined course of life until the late Warring States period.⁴⁷¹ But even before *ming* acquired this new sense, it had long been used to denote an unreachable power that affects our lives. For example, in the *Analects*, Confucius laments that it was due to his *ming* that his beloved disciple Yan Yuan died early (*Analects* 11:7). However, nowhere is there any implication that his *ming* was fixed at birth.⁴⁷²

In early Chinese texts, *ming* can sometimes refer exclusively to an external force that works upon a person's life. This use of the term *ming* referring to external

⁴⁷¹ The story of Kongjia in the "Yinchu" chapter of *Lüshi chunqiu* is probably the first use of *ming* to refer to a predetermined *ming* given at birth. *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi*, 337–38. See also section 3.2 of the previous chapter.

⁴⁷² For more detailed discussion on this theme, see section 1.2 of the previous chapter.

forces, as compared to the fate that one is born with, can be vividly seen in a remark by the Han-dynasty general Li Guang 李廣 (d. 119 BCE), who complained about not being properly rewarded for his services to the throne.

豈吾相不當侯邪。且固命也。⁴⁷³

Is it [due to] my physiognomy that I cannot become a marquis? Or is it truly *ming*?

In Li Guang's remark, we see a clear contrast between two kinds of inexorable power. One is the inborn potential determined by one's physiognomy, and the other is *ming*, an external force. It should be noted that this kind of contrast between *ming* and physiognomy would be utterly impossible for Wang Chong, since he believes that both are given at birth, as in the following.

人曰命難知。命甚易知，知之何用？用之骨體。人命稟於天，則有表候於體。察表候以知命，猶察斗斛以知容矣。表候者，骨法之謂也。⁴⁷⁴

People say that *ming* is difficult to understand, but [in fact] *ming* is very easy to understand. By what means does one understand it? By [examining a person's] frame and body. As a person's *ming* is endowed from Heaven, there are apparent signs on one's body. Understanding a person's *ming* by examining these apparent signs is like understanding the volume [of a substance] by examining [the numbers of] pints and gallons. The apparent signs refer to the structure of one's bones.

Despite Wang Chong's claim, Li Guang's use of the term *ming* to refer to an external force is probably closer to the original sense of the word, meaning "to

⁴⁷³ "Li jiangjun liezhuan," *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 4488.

⁴⁷⁴ "Guxiang," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 108.

command” or “to cause.”⁴⁷⁵ In the world in which people believed in the existence of various extra-human powers, unexpected and inexplicable sufferings or fortunes in our lives could have been easily perceived as extra-human works.⁴⁷⁶ These events are *ming* because they are “caused” by extra-human powers. In this sense, the deviation from a proper course of life can also be called *ming*.

If we recall the passage about altered *ming* from *Chunqiu fanlu*, it explained encountered *ming* and ensuing *ming* as “interventions by spirits.” 神明之所接. Also, the Tang-dynasty commentator Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574 – 648) makes reference to the set theory when he comments on the god of lifespan *Siming* 司命.

命有三科，有受命以保慶，有遭命以謫暴，有隨命以督行。⁴⁷⁷

There are three kinds of *ming*. There is received *ming*, which promises auspicious occasions; there is encountered *ming*, which displays violence; and there is ensuing *ming*, which supervises [people’s] behaviors.

This comment appears in *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (*The Correct Meaning of Records of Rites*), where the text stipulates the numbers of altars to be set up for kings and lords’ sacrifices. It shows that, at least in Kong Yingda’s view, the three

⁴⁷⁵ Yu Xingwu 于省吾, *Jiagu wenzi gulin*, #332. See also n.6 of the previous chapter.

⁴⁷⁶ For an explanation of the concept of “extra-human powers” in Chinese religion, see Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 27–28.

⁴⁷⁷ “Jifa,” *Liji zhengyi*, 1562. Kong Yingda is citing this passage from another later Han text *Xiaojing Yuanshenqi* 孝經援神契 (The Seal of the Guidance of Spirits in Accordance with the Classic of Filial Piety), which may not have existed during Wang Chong’s time, but it is, nonetheless, likely to be a Later Han text. See Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Weishu jicheng*, 54. A parallel version of this passage also appears in *Baihutong* 白虎通 (A Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall). “Shouming,” *Baihutong shuzheng*, 391.

kinds of *ming* were associated with the actions of a god who can enjoy sacrifices.

The point I wish to emphasize is not that altered *ming* is always conceived of as works of spirits and deities, but that the set theory can permit the existence of these extra-human powers as well as their ability to affect the lives of human beings. This point is particularly noticeable in contrasting remarks about shamans and ghosts by Wang Chong and another Later Han scholar, Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 82 – 167 CE). As a defender of the set theory, Wang Fu argues as follows.⁴⁷⁸

凡人吉凶，以行為主，以命為決。行者、己之質也，命者、天之制也。在於己者，固可為也；在於天者，不可知也。巫覡祝請，亦其助也，然非德不行。巫史祈祝者，蓋所以交鬼神而救細微爾，至於大命，末如之何。⁴⁷⁹

As a rule, the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of a person's [life] are mainly [affected by] one's behavior, but they are determined by *ming*. One's behavior is [dependent on] one's qualities, and *ming* is Heaven's regulations. For what is dependent on oneself, one can indeed exert effort, but one cannot understand what is dependent on Heaven. Prayers and requests by shamans can also be helpful, but if one is without virtue, they will not work. What shamans do by praying is that they communicate with ghosts and spirits so that they can be of help with little things. [But] when it comes to great *ming*, there is nothing they can do.

⁴⁷⁸ Anne Behnke Kinney claims that Wang Fu "fails to mention" correct *ming* and only discusses encountered *ming* and ensuing *ming*. Kinney, "Predestination and Prognostication in the Ch'ien-Fu Lun," 30. But the following passage clearly shows that Wang Fu accepts the existence of great *ming*. He simply did not use the term "correct *ming*," as Wang Chong did. And in the chapter on turtle shell divination, Wang Fu remarks that "there are ensuing and encountered *ming*" 命有遭隨. "Bulie," *Qianfulun jianjiao*, 291. Thus, he makes reference to all three kinds of *ming* in his writings.

⁴⁷⁹ "Wulie," *Qianfulun jianjiao*, 301.

There are several assertions in this passage with which Wang Chong would not have agreed. Most obviously, Wang Chong would never have accepted the claim that auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are affected by one's behavior. But equally vehemently, he would have criticized Wang Fu's explanation of ghosts and shamans. Wang Fu explicitly states that ghosts and shamans cannot change great *ming*, but he still acknowledges that they have some power to affect our lives. And for Wang Fu, there is no doubt that these ghosts are anthropomorphic beings, not merely natural principles. He says:

且人有爵位，鬼神有尊卑。⁴⁸⁰

As there are titles and positions among human beings, among ghosts and spirits there is also [a distinction] between the noble and the humble.

To this kind of claim, Wang Chong would have said that there is no such thing as ghosts, at least not in the sense that they are spirits of dead people, and if there were such things as ghosts, they would be just a part of nature, without any will or desire.

凡天地之間有鬼，非人死精神為之也，皆人思念存想之所致也。⁴⁸¹

As a rule, the ghosts that exist between Heaven and Earth are not what has become of dead people's spirits. They are all results of people's thoughts and imagination.

天地之氣為妖者，太陽之氣也。妖與毒同，氣中傷人者謂之毒，氣變化者謂之妖。...鬼、陽氣也，時藏時見。...巫含陽氣...故巫之審者，能處

⁴⁸⁰ "Wulie," *Qianfulun jianjiao*, 304.

⁴⁸¹ "Dinggui," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 931.

吉凶。⁴⁸²

Among the *qi* of Heaven and Earth, omens are *qi* of great *yang*. Omens are identical with poison in that *qi* that harms humans is called poison, and *qi* that is transfigured is called omens.... Ghosts are *yang qi*; they are sometimes hidden and sometimes visible.... Shamans contain *yang qi*.... Thus, seers among shamans can discern auspiciousness and inauspiciousness.

For Wang Chong, a ghost is either a product of pure imagination or, at best, a type of *qi*. It is never the spirit of a dead person. The reason why Wang Chong cannot simply deny the existence of ghosts is that there are stories of how the ghosts of some dead people actually killed people. An example that he sometimes cites is the story of Prince Shensheng 申生 (d. 655 BCE), who brought about the death of the Lord Hui of Jin 晉惠公 (r. 650 – 637 BCE).⁴⁸³ In Wang Chong's view, such accounts may not be entirely false, but it is not the case that the spirit of a dead person actually caused the death of a living person. What appears to be ghosts are merely a type of *yang qi*, which is the same kind of *qi* to which poison belongs. Thus, they can harm the living, but it is not the case that the dead have a will.

Wang Chong's denial of the existence of willful ghosts and their power to affect our *ming* tallies perfectly with his concept of *ming*. Since he argues that fortune and longevity are matters entirely dictated by *ming*, and that *ming* controls

⁴⁸² "Dinggui," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 942, 944.

⁴⁸³ The story is that after Shensheng died, Lord Hui of Jin disrespectfully moved his tomb. Angered by this act, his ghost appeared to a man named Hu Tu 狐突, and he tells that his pleading to god to punish Lord Hui of Jin was heard. Thus, he died. "Siwei," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 887–9; "Dinggui," 944–6. Other well-known stories of the time can be found in the "Minggui" chapter of *Mozi*. *Mozi jiaozhu*, 336–79.

even the chances of acquiring opportunities for success,⁴⁸⁴ there is absolutely no room for ghosts or shamans to exercise their powers. In contrast, in the world where deviation from the predetermined course is always a possibility, there is plenty of room for such powers to affect our lives.

3.3. Predicting the future

The difference between Wang Chong and Wang Fu in willingness to acknowledge powers that can interfere with the course of our lives is further associated with the difference in understanding of the future and the possibility of predicting the future. In Wang Chong's world, living creatures and polities all have predetermined *ming*, and there are no other powers that can affect the course of *ming*.⁴⁸⁵ This means that the future dictated by *ming* is fixed. And since he acknowledges the possibility of future prediction by means of physiognomy, there could be other divination methods that he regards as similarly effective. In contrast, someone like Wang Fu may not believe in the possibility of predicting the future, as he believes that the future is always changeable.

In practice, it is Wang Fu who shows more trust in various popular divination techniques, while Wang Chong rejects virtually all forms of divination other than physiognomy.⁴⁸⁶ Wang Chong wrote several chapters refuting various types of

⁴⁸⁴ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 20. See p.167 above.

⁴⁸⁵ "Minglu," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 20.

⁴⁸⁶ Kinney, "Predestination and Prognostication in the Ch'ien-Fu Lun," 33–36.

hemerology and geomancy, and explains in detail the unreliability of the principles behind these various techniques.⁴⁸⁷ And he states outright that dead turtles cannot answer the questions of living humans.⁴⁸⁸

The reason why physiognomy is an exception to his criticisms must be related to the fact that all other divination techniques imply a possibility of change in the future. For example, when one is performing a turtle-shell divination, there is an implicit understanding that one can choose to carry on or not to carry on with the proposed actions, depending on the results of the divination. Even more vividly, daybooks present a practical guide to evade harm and bring about fortune by selecting auspicious days.⁴⁸⁹ What is predicted by physiognomy, however, cannot be evaded (at least not in Wang Chong's view), and, if done right, physiognomy is almost infallible.⁴⁹⁰ If a prediction based on physiognomy ever turns out to be wrong, the fault probably lies with the physiognomist, not the art—even if the physiognomist was Confucius himself.

有傳孔子相澹臺子羽、唐舉占蔡澤不驗之文，此失之不審。何（相）隱

⁴⁸⁷ The chapters in which he argues against these various techniques are from ch.68 “Sihui” 四諱 (The Four Taboos) to ch.74 “Jieshu” 詰術 (Reproofs on techniques). For succinct summaries of these chapters, see Kalinowski, *Balance des discours*, CLXVIII–CLXXX.

⁴⁸⁸ “Bushì,” *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 1000.

⁴⁸⁹ Poo, “Popular Religion in Pre-Imperial China,” 236–41.

⁴⁹⁰ Zhu Ruikai argues that Wang Chong's stance on physiognomy is not as strong in the “Jiangrui” chapter, in which he states that sages all have different physical appearances, and even a sage like Yao and a person like Wang Mang can share a similar trait. Zhu Ruikai 祝瑞开, *Liang-Han sixiang shi*, 320. However, the point of “Jiangrui” chapter is that it is impossible to label a person a sage or an animal a unicorn merely on the basis of their physical similarities with some well-known descriptions. It does not mean that physiognomy is ineffective. If it implies anything about physiognomy, it is that the art is subtle, but he admits this fact even in the “Guxiang” chapter, as shown in the following citation.

匿微妙之表也。相或在內，或在外；或在形體，或在聲氣。察外者，遺其內；在形體者，亡其聲氣。⁴⁹¹

There are written accounts of how Confucius [incorrectly observed the] physiognomy of [his disciple] ha Ziyu, and how Tang Ju's predictions about Cai Ze were inaccurate.¹ These are errors that derive from inattention. Physiognomy [involves] external appearances of what is hidden and subtle. They can be inside or outside. They can be on one's physical body or in one's voice and breath. Those who inspect [only] the outside miss what is inside, and those who depend on the physical body forget about the voice and the breath.

This kind of absolute faith in physiognomy is impossible for the defenders of the set theory, as they believe that one can always deviate from the original course of life, depending on circumstances. Thus, even while agreeing with Wang Chong that physiognomy can indeed be a valid means of future prediction, Wang Fu argues that a predicted future is only a possibility, and is never inevitable.

凡相者，能期其所極，不能使之必至。十種之地，膏壤雖肥，弗耕不穫；千里之馬，骨法雖具，弗策不致。¹

As a rule, physiognomy can tell [only] the extreme [of inborn potential]. It cannot make the [predicted events] occur necessarily. In a field of ten kinds of crops, even if its soil is rich and fertile, if one does not plow, one cannot harvest. Even if a swift horse has all the [necessary] physical characteristics, if one does not whip it, it cannot attain [the right outcome].

⁴⁹¹ "Guxiang," *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 122–23.

⁴⁹² These anecdotes are recorded in "Zhongni dizi liezhuan" and "Fan Sui Cai Ze liezhan" of *Shiji*, respectively. *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, 3375–76, 3734–36.

⁴⁹³ "Xianglie," *Qianfulun jianjiao*, 312.

Wang Fu's analogy of the fertile land and the swift horse is reminiscent of the discussion of human nature in *Chunqiu fanlu*. Just as rice plants have the potential to bear rice crops, human beings are born with certain potentials, which can be recognized by physiognomy. But just as the crops need a farmer's work to be harvested, these potentials cannot be realized without effort. They do not actualize on their own. Thus, for Wang Fu, if a prediction based on physiognomy turns out to be wrong, the fault is not necessarily with the physiognomer, but probably with the art itself. Even if the physiognomer were telling the most likely course of the future, the prediction was never meant to be infallible. Wang Fu's acceptance of other divination techniques can be explained in a similar manner. All divination techniques are effective to a certain extent, but the important point is that effort is still required.¹

To summarize, at one extreme end of the theory that everyone is born with a different kind of *ming*, the future is seen as more or less fixed, and no personal will or anthropomorphic deity has the power to change what is predetermined. At the other end, according to the theory that there are three kinds of *ming* for everyone, even though everyone is born with a predetermined course of life, the future is always susceptible to change. In that world, not only can ghosts and spirits influence our lives, but we ourselves can shape the future through our will.

⁴⁹⁴ Kinney argues that Wang Fu actually rejects shamanism and the divination by the five tones on the basis of the negative remarks seen in the "Bulie" and "Wulie" chapters. Kinney, "Predestination and Prognostication in the Ch'ien-Fu Lun," 36–45. But while Wang Fu indeed cautions against excessive trust in these techniques, he does not say that these methods are entirely groundless. For a better explanation of Wang Fu's views about these mantic techniques, see Yahano Takao 矢野隆男, "Senpuron gotokusi hen ni miru Ō Fu no rekishi-kan," 167–71.

Conclusion

After the emergence of the notion of predetermined *ming* in the late Warring States, Han dynasty scholars advanced various opinions regarding the extent to which it dictates our lives. On one hand, there were scholars like Wang Chong, who argued that everyone is born with a different kind of *ming*. Some are born to die old, while some others are born to die young. And still others are born to die by some accident, even though they were born strong and healthy. He acknowledges cases in which the predetermined course of life is not realized, but this is not because a person's *ming* can be changed; rather, there is *ming* of a higher rank, which can overrule individuals' *ming*. The *ming* that one was born with does not change throughout the course of one's life.

Wang Chong's concept of a hierarchy of *ming*, however, implies that he does not view *ming* as a force that dictates every single event in the world. The fact that one's personal *ming* remains intact as long as it does not conflict with the *ming* of a state indicates that the scope of the latter *ming* is narrower than that of the former. Similarly, we can assume that one's personal *ming* does not cover all aspects of one's life. Wang Chong's philosophy presents a life in which we have limited freedom within a largely fatalistic world.

On the other hand, there were other scholars who believed that even if a person is born with a predetermined *ming*, that *ming* is still subject to change,

depending on circumstances in one's life. Our *ming* is predetermined at birth only in the sense that we are born with certain potentials. Just as a seed of a rice plant is born with a potential to be a full-grown plant and produce rice crops, everyone is born with a potential to live a long and blissful life. But just as seeds that sprout in different soils have different chances of bearing crops, people born in different families or times can differ in their potential for longevity and wealth.

When a person does not live up to his or her predetermined course of life, it could be attributed to two factors: unexpected events or transformative deeds. Even if a person is born in a rich family in peaceful times, he or she could still die early because of an accident. Cases like this may be explained by the concept of encountered *ming*, as the person seems to have encountered an unexpected event. In contrast, there may be people who are born poor yet achieve wealth through hard work. Fates of these people can be explained by the concept of ensuing *ming*, as the course of life that they lived appears to be result of their deeds rather than the natural consequence of the environment that they were born into. For those who believe that one's predetermined *ming* is alterable, these two scenarios are always open possibilities.

It is difficult to assess how these two different understandings of *ming* were received by the people in the Han dynasty.¹ Textual evidence suggests that the set

⁴⁹⁵ The social circumstances of the times could have affected popularity of one theory over the other. Yoshida Teruko opines that Wang Chong's fatalism reflects a stabilized hierarchical society. Yoshida Teruko 吉田照子, "Ô Jû no seisetsu," 219. While such statement can only be a speculation, Wang Chong indeed lived in relatively peaceful times between the turmoil of Xin 新 dynasty (8 – 23 CE) and the reign of Emperor He 和 (r. 88 – 105 CE), which historians describe as the start of Han dynasty's decline. Zufferey, *Wang Chong*, 73–74. At times when the society is stable and class mobility is limited, more people may have believed that people are born with irreversibly fixed fates. For a more thorough account of the social circumstances of the 1st century CE, see

theory seems to have won popular support. While Wang Chong's idea of fate is not shared by other contemporary works, there are at least three influential texts from more or less the same time period that subscribe to the set theory, namely *Chunqiu fanlu*, *Qianfulun*, and *Baihutong*. Also, it should not be forgotten that the Tang-dynasty commentator Kong Yingda also endorses the set theory. Overall, it may be said that many Chinese thinkers chose to believe that human beings are still free to shape their future despite acknowledging that we are born with a predetermined fate.

Conclusion

This dissertation started from an assumption that there is an intimate relationship between how people attempt to predict the future and how they perceive their fates. For example, someone who believes that burning an animal bone can be an effective means of knowing the future must also believe in the existence of spirits who communicate with human beings through the bones and exercise influence on our lives. To them, our future would always be subject to the wills of those spirits. On the other hand, someone who believes that one can predict the course of a person's future on the basis of the time of his/her birth would think that one's fate is decided at the time of birth. Even though one may rely on both practices at the same time, theoretically, the two presuppose mutually incompatible conceptions about fate and the future. The future can be mutable in the former, but the latter sees it as more or less fixed.

Interestingly, there is an abundance of evidence testifying to the popularity of both types of practices during the Warring States period. Transmitted texts such as "Guice liezhuan" tell that divination by turtle shells was widely practiced even into the Han dynasty.⁴⁹⁶ And bamboo slips discovered from the Baoshan tomb have provided us vivid examples of how a person in the 4th century BCE would offer

⁴⁹⁶ Shaughnessy, "The Composition of the 'Zhouyi,'" 64–65.

sacrifices to various spirits following divination by a turtle shell and yarrow stalks.⁴⁹⁷

On the other hand, archaeological discoveries in the recent decades have enabled us to examine various fortune-telling methods which we had little knowledge of until the 20th century. One of the most significant discoveries was daybooks, which showed how the early Chinese people made predictions about their daily lives on the basis of the sexagenary cycle of days. Some sections of daybooks, such as the “shengzi” section, even showed examples of crude predictions on the basis of the time of birth. They take account only of the days (and not the year, month, or time), but they explicitly foretell what kind of a life a person will have if he or she is born on a certain day.⁴⁹⁸

In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I explained that the appearance of this latter type of fortune-telling techniques is a result of a long trend that started from the Shang dynasty and continued until the Han period. During this time, the belief in the power of anthropomorphic spirits weakened, and the universe was gradually conceived of as working in regular patterns.

The diminishing power of spirits can be seen through changes in bone divination. Even though divination by turtle shells was practiced as late as in the Han period, the way it was practiced in the 2nd century BCE was markedly different from how it was done in the 20th century BCE. In the 20th century BCE, animal bones

⁴⁹⁷ For an English translation of these slips, see Cook, *Death in Ancient China the Tale of One Man's Journey*, 153–210.

⁴⁹⁸ Poo, “How to Steer through Life,” 117–22.

used for divination were not prepared in any special way.⁴⁹⁹ Diviners simply examined the cracks on burnt bones to interpret the messages from spirits. Scholars find the origin of this practice in sacrifices: after a sacrifice to a spirit, diviners would examine the bones of the victim to verify if the spirit accepted the sacrifice.

In the Shang period, however, diviners began to re-use a single piece of oracle bone multiple times by carving hollows and applying heat only to these hollows. The fact that an oracle bone could be re-used for divination without being offered as a sacrifice meant that oracle bones no longer needed to secure the divinatory power from spirits. Thus, divination became separated from sacrifice, and came to rely on the power of oracle bones rather than spirits. The key event that symbolizes this transition in the postulated source of power is the use of turtle shells instead of animal bones because turtles were never used for sacrifices.⁵⁰⁰

But aside from the choice of turtle shells as the divinatory tool, the way in which Shang diviners tried to control the shape of cracks on oracle bones, so that they would always form a shape of a *bu* 卜 character,⁵⁰¹ and how they addressed their topics of divination in statements rather than in questions, all reflect the increasing confidence of Shang diviners in their power to shape the future as they wanted.⁵⁰² Bone divination probably started as a genuine inquiry to spirits about the unknown, but in later times, it became a means of dictating the future through the

⁴⁹⁹ Liu Yuanlin 劉淵臨, "Bugu de gongzhi zhishu yanjin guocheng zhi tantao," 100–101.

⁵⁰⁰ Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, 59.

⁵⁰¹ Park Jaebok 朴載福, "Sang junggi gabgol ui teugjing gwa geu hyeongseong gwajeong gochal," 10.

⁵⁰² Nivison et al., "The 'Question' Question"; Keightley, "Late Shang Divination," 20–27.

power of turtle shells.

The diminishing power of spirits is further confirmed in the new forms of divination that appeared in the Eastern Zhou period. A 4th century BCE manuscript, commonly referred to as the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, still describes the universe as run by spirits, but these spirits are now depicted as responsible for the creation and management of cosmic cycles.⁵⁰³ For example, the manuscript tells that there are different deities in charge of the four seasons and the twelve months of a year.

In later divination texts, the relationship between spirits and cosmic cycles becomes precisely the reverse, and the movements of deities are completely regulated by cosmic cycles. In the “Xingde” text found in Mawangdui, spirits like the “Master of Rain” or “Earl of Wind,” which must have been originally conceived of as willful beings, are described as mechanically moving around the nine residences (*jiugong* 九宮) following a cycle of the Five Phases.

And just as spirits were regarded as having less power and freedom to command the world, we see an increasing belief in the rigidity of cosmic cycles. In the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, there is a strict warning about the possibility of disruptions to cycles. If people did not show proper respect to the deities, they would deviate from their normal patterns. This idea of possible disruptions to cosmic cycles may have been a natural consequence of imperfect scientific knowledge. For example, because the early Chinese people thought that Jupiter’s orbital cycle is twelve years (whereas the true period is slightly shorter, 11.86 years), they sometimes saw

⁵⁰³ For the most recent English translation of this entire manuscript, see Cook and Major, *Defining Chu*, 171–76.

Jupiter as skipping one of its waystations, a phenomenon referred to as *chaochen* 超辰 (overstepping a lodge). But when we examine divination texts from the late Warring States and Han periods, we find that the cycles used as the basis of divination could practically never err. The rigidity of these cycles was secured either by relying on a real but simple astronomical phenomenon, such as the rotation of the asterism Beidou 北斗 (The Northern Dipper), or by postulating imaginary stars, which could in principle never deviate from their predetermined cycles. Thus, the belief in the efficacy and rigidity of cosmic cycles seems to have outpaced scientific observation.

In the second part of the dissertation, I showed how the growing belief in the patterned universe contributed to the formation of the idea of predetermined fate, and how the problem of personal freedom was discussed in the Han dynasty. When people thought that the world was run by willful deities, they may have believed that tragic events were the results of whims of those deities, but they would have hardly believed that such tragedies were part of the allotment that they were born with, or that they could do nothing about it. The reason why early Shang diviners performed sacrifices and examined the bones of the victims was probably to make sure that deities were satisfied with their offerings and thus not cause any harm. In other words, the Shang people must have thought that they had the means to affect the decisions of deities.

However, as the conceptions of the universe changed in the Eastern Zhou period, there were also changes in how people perceived unexpected calamities. We

can notice the change in texts as early as the *Analects*: Confucius sometimes remarks that the death of his favorite disciple Yan Yuan and the illness of Boniu were caused by *ming*, a term that has been long interpreted to mean something like “allotment.” Confucius seems to have believed that there is nothing an individual can do to change *ming*.

But the concept of *ming* portrayed in the *Analects* has yet to carry the sense of absolute inevitability. In the *Analects*, the universe is still perceived as run by a willful god, Heaven, which retains the power to change *ming* whenever it so desires. What is new in *Analects* is Confucius’ disapproval of the conventional means of affecting Heaven’s decision, namely sacrifices and prayers. Even when he was seriously ill, Confucius is portrayed as unwilling to make prayers to extend his life. His reluctance to participate in these practices is consistent with his belief that there is nothing that an individual can do to change *ming*.

The sense of absolute inevitability appears in the Warring States period, when the word *ming* acquired a new meaning: one’s inborn course of life. Particularly noticeable is a story in *Lüshi chunqiu* of a boy who was predicted at his birth to encounter inescapable misfortune. The story, which refers to the boy’s tragic fate as *ming*, reflects two new ideas: that a person’s fate is decided at birth, and that the fate is predictable. A similar understanding of fate can be read from sections like “shengzi” and “renzi” of daybooks, where prognostications about people’s lives are given on the basis of their birthdays.

The appearance of this new sense of *ming* is associated with changes in the

conception of Heaven at the time. In *Mencius*, Heaven is still depicted as a willful god, but Mencius sees patterns in Heaven's behavior. Even though this pattern is not a kind of natural law which Heaven must obey, the recognition of patterns in the cosmos is a noticeable difference between *Mencius* and the *Analects*. And just as Heaven has a predetermined course that it should follow, Mencius argues that everyone has a proper path of life that we are supposed to follow. He refers to this path as "correct *ming*."

It is evident that Mencius did not think of "correct *ming*" as a kind of fate. Rather, correct *ming* is a kind of life that we must endeavor to achieve, not something that occurs inevitably. But in the Han dynasty, his distinction between correct and non-correct *ming* came to be interpreted as referring to different kinds of fates that one can have, and it became the basis of a new idea that explained people's lives in terms of three kinds of *ming*: correct *ming*, encountered *ming*, and ensuing *ming*. Correct *ming* is the fate of a person who lives a long life in wealth, while the other two kinds of *ming* refer to less fortunate fates.

In the Han dynasty, there were two competing understandings of the three kinds of *ming*. Some people saw that everyone was born with one of the three kinds of *ming*, while some others believed that the possibilities of all three kinds of *ming* coexisted in a person. The former view is thoroughly articulated by Wang Chong, who argued that everyone's *ming* is determined at birth and does not change in the course of one's life. His philosophy represents probably the most extreme case of fatalism in China. He not only believed that things like lifespan, wealth, occupation

and even moral tendencies are all predetermined, but further argued that *ming* controls even the process of its realization. Thus, for Wang Chong, when someone's action contributed to the realization of someone else's *ming*, that action had to have been preordained by *ming*. In this way, his philosophy does not leave much room for personal freedom.

Those who argued that a single person can have all three kinds of *ming* also claimed that a person's *ming* is determined at birth, but they did not believe that this *ming* is completely fixed, as Wang Chong did. The correct *ming*, or great *ming*, refers to the kind of life in which we maximize our potential for wealth and longevity, and the other two kinds of *ming* refer to deviation from great *ming*, which can result from unexpected changes in outside circumstances or from personal conduct. For example, despite being born healthy, those who live in times of a war, or those with harmful habits, can still die young. If the cause is the former, the changed fate is called encountered *ming*, and if the cause is the latter, it is called ensuing *ming*. In this way, the theory of three kinds of *ming* secures the possibility of personal freedom even after accepting the idea that everyone is born with a predetermined fate. The predetermined course is only a blueprint, and following it depends on our will.

The disparity in degrees of personal freedom postulated by the two views of *ming* leads to a difference in attitude toward divination. Scholars like Wang Chong, who believed that *ming* is absolutely predetermined and inevitable, regarded most of the popular fortune-telling techniques as spurious. The only method that he

believed to be a true means of predicting a persons' future was physiognomy. The reason why physiognomy could be an exception to his criticism has to be related to the fact that physiognomy offers no means of changing the predicted future. It is the only fortune-telling technique that does not contradict his philosophy, which is that the universe runs in a predetermined course, and no human beings can change that course. Thus, for Wang Chong, any technique that claims to help someone to direct the future to the way one desires would be arguing for what is impossible.

On the other hand, those who saw that the future is predetermined yet not completely immutable saw little harm in divination. Wang Fu warned against excessive belief in various divination techniques, but he accepted that they can be used for one's benefit. For him, the future is what we make of it, and if by relying on these techniques one can better navigate through one's life, there would be little reason to reject them.

At the end of the final chapter, I remarked that although it is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which the views of Wang Chong or Wang Fu were accepted by the Han people, textual evidence supports the prevalence of Wang Fu's view. Many influential texts of the Later Han dynasty, such as *Baihutong* and *Chunqiu fanlu*, share his view, and the fact that Wang Chong spent so much energy to criticize various divination practices of the time suggests that many people saw the future and the fate as alterable.

In hindsight, Wang Chong's philosophy appears to be a logical conclusion of the changes in the conceptions of the universe and fate that started from the early

Shang period. In Wang Chong's world, there are no ghosts and spirits who can influence a person's life, and a person's fate is entirely controlled by *ming*, which is in turn determined by the movements of the stars at the time of his/her birth. But interestingly enough, his idea of fate was incompatible with contemporary divination practices, which were another side of the same changes that led to his fatalism. And the view that human beings have practically no control over their future may have been too extreme to gain wide acceptance.

In this vein, the idea that there are three different kinds of *ming* in a single person may have been the practical endpoint of the changes discussed in this dissertation. Those who believed in this idea acknowledge that fates of individuals are more or less determined at birth, and therefore, they can make predictions about a person's future. But they also believed that the predetermined path is alterable. Thus, if a certain path is predicted to be inauspicious, they could always opt to take a different path to escape the harm.

To summarize, as the idea of the universe working in predictable patterns gained wider acceptance in the Warring States period, the idea of a predetermined fate appeared along with various new means of predicting the future. But this change in the conception of the universe never resulted in a complete determinism. The philosophy of Wang Chong, who argued that everyone is born with irreversible *ming*, probably represents the most extreme case of fatalism in China, but his thought does not seem to have won popular support. Instead, the idea of predetermination was widely accepted only at a level that did not contradict with

the practice of divination. The general belief of the Han period was that the future, including one's fate, is predictable, but the predicted future is always changeable.

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