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Philosophy in Western Han Dynasty China (206 BCE–9 CE)

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there are ample resources in the English-speaking academic community to enable philosophers who cannot read Chinese to work with material from the Western Han dynasty in their research or teaching. It discusses three kinds of resources, with the aim of developing a community of philosophers engaged in a sustained conversation about Western Han thought. These resources are (1) histories that describe various aspects of the Han dynasty, (2) translations of key texts, and (3) intellectual histories that examine specific thinkers or texts from the Han. This article also provides a detailed example of one way in which Western Han texts demonstrate the diversity of Chinese philosophy with regard to value conflicts.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there are ample resources in the English-speaking academic community to enable philosophers who cannot read Chinese to work with material from the Western Han dynasty in their research or teaching. Ideally, these resources come in the form of (1) histories that describe various aspects of the Han dynasty, (2) translations of key texts, (3) intellectual histories that examine specific thinkers or texts from the Han, and (4) a community of philosophers (specialists and non-specialists) engaged in a sustained conversation about the material. The historical work from resource one provides basic information to enable non-specialist scholars to speak or write knowledgably about the general contours of Han history that inform a particular text or thinker. The translations from resource two provide not only primary sources for interpretation, but further contextualize particular texts or thinkers by displaying the extent of conversations and debates within a specific context. Intellectual histories (resource three) add to the depth of the other resources by introducing non-specialists to otherwise inaccessible scholarship (e.g., Chinese or Japanese language scholarship) on a text or thinker. They also serve as part of resource four. While larger numbers of philosophers have focused on other periods of Chinese history, especially the Warring States (475–221 BCE), there are many reasons to believe that similar communities of philosophers are emerging and can be further established for the Han dynasty. As such, resource four is not sufficiently developed, but can be sufficiently developed in the near future.

The Han dynasty is usually described as starting in 206 BCE and ending in 220 CE. Historians often divide it into two periods – the Former and Later periods or the Western and Eastern periods (so named because the capital was relocated to the east). These two periods are divided by a short-lived Xin dynasty 新朝 (9 CE–25 CE), led by Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE), an official in the Han court who seized control of the empire, but could not stabilize it. Theoretically, my argument applies to more than the Western Han dynasty; however, I will focus on texts from the Western Han in order to demonstrate how thinkers and texts from that period provide interesting material for contemporary philosophers. I do not intend to define 'philosophy' except to note that the texts I describe are stylistically similar to texts often taken as representative of 'Chinese philosophy', including texts such as the *Analects*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Daodejing*.

The Cambridge History of China, Volume I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–220 A.D. (Twitchett and Loewe) was the most comprehensive source for Han history when it was published in 1986. Roughly 30 years later, it is still a remarkable source for learning about the Han dynasty and has since been complemented with general histories of the Han written by Anne Kinney and Grant Hardy (2005) and Mark Edward Lewis (2007).[1]

Numerous monographs and several edited volumes have been written on specific aspects of Han history; most within the last 25 years. I offer a list of these organized by topic (minus those that focus on the Eastern Han) in the appendix.

There are roughly two dozen texts of interest to philosophers written or compiled in the Western Han. Michael Loewe's edited volume, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, provides an overview of most of these texts, including discussions on textual composition and the publication of various editions.[2] Since its appearance in 1993, however, much more work has been done. In what follows, I provide an overview of each text and list translations and book-length studies on the texts or authors/redactors where available.[3] I organize the texts by historically accepted date of authorship or redaction. After this list, I provide a detailed example of one way in which these texts demonstrate the diversity of Chinese philosophy (in this case, Confucian views on value conflicts) and how they are relevant for contemporary philosophers (in this case, engaging debates about moral remainder and challenging perceptions about the lack of tragic value conflicts in Confucian thought). The example I provide does not fully represent the distinctive features of Western Han thought; and in some ways, earlier texts could be used to make a similar point. Yet I choose this example because of how lucidly Western Han texts illustrate my point and also because this example directly engages contemporary conversations in the field.

More broadly speaking, distinctive features of Western Han thought are best conceptualized in terms of canon formation and cosmology. While neither of these features are unique in the sense of being categories developed for the first time in the Western Han, what is unique is the concern thinkers in the Western Han had for these ideas that led to developments that did not take place with other forms of thought found in previous eras (e.g., logic). Many of the texts listed below were created in an attempt to establish aspects of the past as authoritative for the Han, and are hence tied to issues of hermeneutics, boundaries between schools of thought, and governance or political philosophy. As far as cosmology is concerned, figures in the Western Han built on terms that appeared in earlier texts, yet systematized, developed, or reformulated them in significant ways. These include notions of Yin-Yang 陰陽, the five phases (*wuxing* 五行), and *qi* 氣, with a particular concern as to how these theories relate to human health/medicine. Indeed, these foundational concepts gain an enduring form in the Western Han.

It is also worth noting that there is a long-standing position in the field of China studies, which claims that the Han dynasty was a 'philosophical dark age'. Chad Hansen, for instance, in his entry on 'Daoism' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states,

> The establishment of an authoritarian empire and the long-lived but philosophically dogmatic (Confucian) Han dynasty temporarily drained the vibrancy from Chinese philosophical thought. Classical Daoist philosophy was successfully extinguished by the imperial suppression of analytic thought. Confucian authoritarians like Xunzi argued that analysis of names leads to confusion and disorder. The substitution of the Qin ruler's superstitious search for long life through alchemy and his consequent fostering of Huang-Lao [thought] combined with suppression of dialectic thought initiated China's philosophical 'Dark Age'. The later substitution of Confucianism as the official orthodoxy during the Han cemented the intellectual stagnation firmly in place.

While much more could be said about this view (see Ing and McLeod), this article will instead pursue a contrary position where the texts below present a robust tradition of philosophical thought.

1. Western Han Philosophical Texts

(1) ***Gongyang Zhuan*《公羊傳》and *Guliang Zhuan*《穀梁傳》.** These two texts come to be understood as commentaries on the *Chunqiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals*) – a terse historical text attributed to Confucius and part of the Confucian canon organized in the Western Han. The *Gongyang Zhuan* was supposedly passed down orally from Confucius' disciple Zixia 子夏 and recorded by Gongyang Gao 公羊高 (or Gongyang Shou 公羊壽) in approximately 150 BCE. The *Guliang Zhuan* comes to be seen as a competing school of interpretation tracing its lineage to a disciple of Xunzi. Both texts were important for Han dynasty intellectuals, particularly those identifying as Confucians. They interpret historical episodes in an attempt to provide a hermeneutic for contemporary moral and governmental affairs. **Translations:** Gen (*Guliang Zhuan*); Malmqvist (partial translations of the *Gongyang* and *Guliang Zhuan*); and Miller (*Gongyang Zhuan*). **Studies:** Arbuckle 1987; Gentz 2005, 2009, 2012, 2015; Van Auken; and Yu.

(2) ***Xinyu*《新語》(lit. 'new discourses').** Traditionally accepted as the work of Lu Jia 陸賈 (c. 228–c. 140 BCE), and written at the request of the first emperor of the Han (r. 202–195 BCE) as an aid in governing, the *Xinyu* is divided into 12 chapters that promote Confucian values such as humaneness (*ren* 仁) and rightness (*yi* 義), the sages of antiquity and active engagement in society. **Translation:** Ku. **Studies:** Goldin 2007; Puett 2001, 152–176; and Puett 2002, 245–258.

(3) ***Xinshu*《新書》(lit. 'new writings').** The *Xinshu* is the work of Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE.), a political figure who largely advocated Confucian values. Like people such as Confucius and Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340–278 BCE), Jia Yi saw himself as someone marginalized by other officials in the court who cared more about themselves than the betterment of society. The *Xinshu* is organized into 58 chapters that contain Jia Yi's views on contemporary political issues (via memorials submitted to the emperor), his teachings to his disciples on topics such as ritual, and historical anecdotes likely used in teaching situations. The most famous portion of the text is the 'Guo Qin Lu' 過秦論 ('Discussing the Mistakes of the Qin Dynasty'), which highlights a way forward for the Han dynasty by stressing the mistakes of the previous dynasty. **Translation:** de Bary and Bloom, 228–231 (part of the 'Guo Qin Lun'). **Studies:** Sanft 2005; Svarverud.

(4) ***Han Shi Waizhuan*《韓詩外傳》.** The title literally means 'Han's Outer Commentary on the *Shijing*' (*Classic of Poetry*), which was a companion volume to an 'Inner Commentary' ('inner' meaning 'core teachings' and 'outer' referring to illustrations of core teachings; but the distinction is not always clear). The two were likely merged sometime during the Han dynasty, preserving the title 'Outer Commentary'. The text is associated with Confucianism and is divided into ten chapters that include over 300 anecdotes, each concluding with a line from the *Shijing*. The text likely served to teach readers how to use the *Shijing* in interpreting and judging historical (and by implication, contemporary) events. The *Han Shi Waizhuan* often draws from Warring States texts (some no longer extant) and serves as a source for later Han texts. It is attributed to Han Ying 韓嬰 (c. 200–c. 120 BCE), a counselor in the Han court and specialist of the *Shijing* and *Yijing* (*Classic of Change*). The *Han Shi Waizhuan* is particularly relevant for theories of learning, self-cultivation, and ethics. **Translation:** Hightower 1952. **Studies:** Hightower 1948.

(5) ***Huainanzi*《淮南子》.** The *Huainanzi* is the result of discussions among various scholars in the court of Liu An (c. 179–122 BCE), ruler of Huainan. According to tradition, Liu An invited scholars from around the kingdom in order to gather their knowledge into a single text, and then presented it to the emperor in 139 BCE. While the *Huainanzi* draws heavily from earlier texts (especially the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*), its 21 chapters provide unique insight into cosmology, self-cultivation, and governance. The text also claims to be the culmination of knowledge such that no other texts are necessary to study. **Translations:** Major, et al. Partial translations in Ames 1983; Cleary; Lau and Ames 1998; Le Blanc; Major; Morgan; and Wallacker. **Studies:** Queen and Puett; Roth 1992; Ryden 1998; and Vankeerberghen.

(6) ***Chunqiu Fanlu*《春秋繁露》.** The *Chunqiu Fanlu* is attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 179–c. 104 BCE), a scholar in the Han court traditionally credited with establishing Confucianism as the governing ideology of the Chinese state. The title suggests that the text contains lessons distilled from the *Chunqiu*, although some scholars argue that it is actually two separate texts since not all chapters appear to be in direct conversation with the *Chunqiu*. The received text, constituting 82 chapters, is long thought to be compiled over several generations and discusses cosmology, ritual, and politics. **Translation:** Queen and Major. **Studies:** Arbuckle 1991; Queen; and Loewe 2011.

(7) **Mawangdui 馬王堆 archeological finds**. In 1972–1974, Chinese scholars excavated three tombs in Changsha dating from the second century BCE. Among the items found were roughly two dozen texts written on silk. These texts discuss topics such as medicine/health, astronomy, history, and self-cultivation and included copies of received texts such as the *Laozi*, the *Yijing*, and the *Zhanguoce*. Attached to copies of the *Laozi* were the previously unseen texts that have come to be known as the *Wuxing*《五行》and the *Huangdi Sijing*《黃帝四經》, which are important sources for understanding Western Han theories of self-cultivation and cosmology. **Translations:** Chang and Feng (*Huangdi Sijing*); Gladding (*Laozi* and *Huangdi Sijing*); Harper (medical texts); Henricks (*Laozi*); Kim (*Laozi*); Ryden 1997 (*Huangdi Sijing*); Shaughnessy 1996 (*Yijing*); and Yates (*Huangdi Sijing* and an Yin-Yang text). **Studies:** Csikszentmihalyi; Peerenboom.

(8) ***Shiji*《史記》.** The *Shiji* was written by Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) and Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c.145–c.86 BCE) – father and son who held the position of chief astronomer in the Han court. The text is largely comprised of material dating from before the Han and provides historical narratives from the time of the earliest sages through the first century BCE. It is organized into five sections totaling 130 chapters, more than half of which are biographies of significant figures in Chinese history. The *Shiji* became a model for later historians, and the narratives served as resources for later Chinese thinkers to develop forms of political philosophy and ethics. **Translations:** Partial translations in Dawson; Watson 1969; Watson 1993a; Watson 1993b; and Yang and Yang. Full translation in progress in Nienhauser. **Studies:** Watson 1958; Durrant; Hardy; Hsu; and Meisterernst.

(9) ***Yantielun*《鹽鐵論》.** The *Yantielun* purports to record a debate in the Han court held in 81 BCE about the role of the state in addressing problems of the day, including the state's monopolies on salt (*yan* 鹽) and iron (*tie* 鐵). The text is set in the form of a dialogue between government officials and 'learned scholars' (*wenxue* 文學; scholars largely advocating Confucian values, and winners of the debate). It covers many ethical and political issues in its 60 chapters, including land use, care for one's family members, and the efficacy of Confucianism. The *Yantielun* was compiled by an official named Huan Kuan 桓寬 around 50 BCE. **Translation:** Partial translation (chapters 1–28) in Gale; full translation into French in Levi. **Studies:** Loewe 1974, 91–112; Wagner.

(10) ***Liji*《禮記》.** Usually translated as *The Book of Rites*, the *Liji* purports to contain the writings of Confucius and his immediate disciples on the importance of ritual. The text was likely compiled by Dai Sheng 戴聖 in the first century BCE and contains 49 chapters on topics including mourning rites, politics, and cosmology. Two of the chapters (*Daxue* or *Great Learning* and *Zhongyong* or *Doctrine of the Mean*) were singled out by later Confucians for their importance in understanding the Confucian Way (particularly for their focus on self-cultivation and the relationship between humans and the cosmic process of creativity). They remain two of the most studied pieces in Confucian literature. **Translations:** Legge. Translations of the *Daxue* and/or *Zhongyong* in Ames and Hall; Johnston and Wang; and Plaks. **Studies:** Bilsky; Ing 2012; Shaughnessy 2006; and Tu.

(11) ***Dadai Liji*《大戴禮記》.** Literally, 'The Elder Dai's Book of Rites' is a text attributed to the editorial hand of Dai De 戴德, the uncle of Dai Sheng (compiler of the *Liji*). It originally contained over 80 chapters, although the received edition has only 39, large portions of which overlap with the *Liji* and other early texts; some portions appear to be written after the *Liji*. The topics covered in the *Dadai Liji* include mourning rites, politics, and cosmology, among others. **Translation:** Grynpas (partial translation into French).

(12) ***Shuoyuan*《說苑》.** Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), an imperial librarian, collected and edited nearly 700 historical anecdotes to put together the *Shouyuan*. It is organized topically into 20 chapters, many of the chapters focusing on 'persuasions' (*shuo* 說), meaning how ministers ought to persuade rulers of their cause and how rulers ought to identify worthy ministers. The chapters also focus on particular Confucian virtues, when to use military force, and the importance of ritual performances. **Translation:** Henry forthcoming. **Studies:** Henry 2003; Loewe 2015; and Sanft 2011.

(13) ***Lienüzhuan*《列女傳》.** Organized into eight chapters on topics such as integrity, perspicacity, and wisdom, the *Lienüzhuan* is an anthology of stories about women. According to tradition, Liu Xiang collected and organized biographies of 125 women throughout Chinese history to encourage the emperor to recognize the differences between good and bad women. The format of the biographies and topical organization of the text is similar to the *Shuoyuan*. For philosophers, the *Lienüzhuan* is significant for exploring issues of gender and virtue, among others. **Translations:** Kinney; O'Hara. **Studies:** Raphals.

(14) ***Xinxu*《新序》.** Also compiled by Liu Xiang, the *Xinxu* contains 166 anecdotes, organized into ten chapters. It was presented to the emperor around 25 BCE. Some of the anecdotes parallel accounts found in other early Chinese texts, while others appear for the first time in the *Xinxu*. Topics covered by the *Xinxu* include integrity, courage, and the art of identifying good ministers and rulers. **Studies:** Sanft 2011.

(15) ***Guanzi*《管子》.** While edited by Liu Xiang, the *Guanzi* purports to be the teachings of Guan Zhong 管仲, a minister from the state of Qi in seventh century BCE. Its 76 chapters address topics such as government, law, the economy, the military, and correlative thought from Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist perspectives. The text undoubtedly contains material from the Warring States as well as material from the Han. **Translation:** Rickett; Roth 1999 (partial translation). **Studies:** McNeal; Roth 2015.

(16) ***Zhanguoce*《戰國策》.** The *Zhanguoce* (lit. 'plots of the warring states') is a text edited by Liu Xiang from various histories dating from before the Han. The text is organized geographically to recount the history of diplomatic interactions from the perspectives of roughly ten states over 245 years. The stories highlight the ways in which each state sought after power by means of warfare and manipulation. Liu Xiang believed this illustrated a chaotic world without Confucian values. **Translation:** Crump 1970. **Studies:** Crump 1964; Goldin 2005, 76–89.

(17) ***Taixuanjing*《太玄經》.** Composed by Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), and in dialogue with the *Yijing*, the *Taixuanjing* presents a synthesis of Daoist, correlative, and Confucian thought. Its goal is to provide a reading of the cosmos, enabling the reader to understand the limitations of his times and how to find sustainable happiness given those limitations. **Translation:** Nylan 1993. **Studies:** Knechtges 1976 and 1981 (On Yang Xiong).

(18) ***Fayan*《法言》(lit., 'model sayings').** The *Fayan* was written by Yang Xiong toward the end of his life. It is explicitly patterned after the *Analects* and addresses many of the same topics including self-cultivation and governance. It also addresses some of the topics Confucius 'did not speak of', including the role of spirits. It is organized into a dialogue format with 13 chapters and an introduction. **Translations:** Bullock; Nylan 2013. **Studies:** Nylan 2011.

(19) ***Fangyan*《方言》.** Also composed by Yang Xiong, the *Fangyan* is a glossography of roughly 9,000 Chinese characters that describes differing pronunciations of the characters in various states at the time. According to tradition, Yang Xiong spent 27 years assembling the text, which has now become a significant source in reconstructing Chinese language during the Han. **Studies:** Serruys.

(20) ***Huangdi Neijing*《黃帝內經》.** The *Huandi Neijing* is the earliest Chinese medical text. It purports to pass on the teachings of Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor), a pre-historic figure believed to possess knowledge and skill in preserving human life. Traditionally thought to be compiled in the Warring States, most scholars now argue that the *Huangdi Neijing* was put together in the Western Han. The text is divided into two sections – the *Suwen* 素問 and the *Lingshu* 靈樞; each have 81 chapters. The *Suwen* is more widely read and discusses topics such as *qi* 氣, Yin-Yang 陰陽, and specific ailments of the human body. **Translations:** The *Suwen* is translated in Unschuld and Tessenow. Partial translation in Veith. **Studies:** Unschuld; and Tessenow and Unschuld.

(21) **Recent archeological finds.** Along with the Mawangdui discovery in the 1970s, several other texts have been unearthed in the last 50 years. At Yinqueshan 銀雀山 (a tomb found in the 1970s), several military texts were discovered. At Dingzhou 定州, an early version of the *Analects* was found. And at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (unearthed in the 1980s), bamboo texts discussing calendars, law, and medicine were unearthed. Of particular importance at Zhangjiashan was the discovery of a text called the *Suanshushu*《筭數書》, which discusses mathematics. Previous to Mawangdui, nearly 10,000 bamboo strips were found at Juyan 居延, with another 20,000 discovered in the 1970s. These strips recorded governmental affairs in the Han, covering topics such as the military, agriculture, and commerce. Besides these finds, several discoveries of *Rishu* 日書, or 'Day Books', have been made, which provide valuable insight into the thought and practices of elites and non-elites with regard to the concepts of time and fate. **Translations:** Ames 1993 (the *Sunzi*《孫子》 from Yinqueshan); Ames and Rosemont (the *Analects* from Dingzhou); Barbieri-Low and Yates (legal texts from Zhangjiashan); Cullen (the *Suanshushu*); Lau and Ames 2003 (the *Sun Bin Bingfa*《孫臏兵法》 from Yinqueshan); and Loewe 1967 (texts from Juyan). **Studies:** Harper and Kalinowski (Day Books).

(22) ***Hanshu*《漢書》.** While edited in the Eastern Han around 100 CE, the *Hanshu* is an indispensible resource for understanding the Western Han. Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) began the work of compiling the text, which he modeled after the *Shiji*. Years after his death, his sister, Ban Zhao 班昭 (45–c. 116 CE), completed the *Hanshu*, bringing it to 100 chapters that provide historical narratives of the Western Han. Seventy of the chapters contain biographies of important figures from the Western Han, many of which include essays by

these figures on particular philosophical topics. **Translations:** Partial translations in Dubs; Hulsewé and Loewe; and Watson 1974. **Studies:** Clark; Swann 1932; Swann 1950; and Van der Sprenkel.

2. *Philosophical Analysis*

In his 2009 book *Sagehood*, Stephen Angle provides a thought-provoking discussion about value conflicts in Confucian thought.[4] Angle argues that when confronted with a situation where values are in tension with each other, Confucian sages find 'a harmonious solution in which all values are honored' (97). For Angle, this means that from a Confucian perspective, value conflicts are not resolved by trading values off against each other or by reducing all values to an ur-value in order to decide which value is more important. Rather, the imaginative moral agent finds a way to tend to all values at stake in a situation. In describing this, Angle uses the metaphor of cooking soup (in part coming from the *Zuozhuan*《左傳》):

> It is certainly true that a cook needs to take into account the amounts of pepper, broth, and so on in his soup as he decides how much salt to add. His goal, though, is an appropriate saltiness – the perfect contribution to the overall harmony – rather than maximizing the amount of salt he can put into the soup without compromising the other ingredients. Once he finds the harmony, we are not tempted to say that some saltiness was sacrificed in order to preserve the right amount of pepper (99).

Following Angle, the Confucian sage is like a cook who recognizes how to combine ingredients together in ways that give due attention to each ingredient; each part is appropriately situated to create a harmonious whole. Angle explains, '[With] adequate moral imagination, one can see a way to maximally realize all relevant values' (100).

An important point worth noting in Angle's interpretation is that value conflicts, in this view, are 'always only apparent' (100). In other words, values can conflict with regard to epistemology, but not ontology. When values conflict, and remain in conflict, it is due to our inability to effectively reason through a situation, not because of the limitations afforded by the world.

At the same time, this does not mean that Confucian sages do not encounter situations of sorrow. Angle explains that 'even the most harmonious possible solution is still one that leaves behind a residue of grief' (98). Confucian sages, in other words, can encounter unfortunate situations. They may witness the harm or neglect of some value. At the same time, however, Angle qualifies this sorrow, stating, '[While] grief is appropriate, regret is not' (103). In other words, the Confucian sage mourns the loss of value, but does not perform in such a way that he sees himself culpable for the misfortune. Angle continues, '[The] sage does not wallow in guilt, cease to care about others (because it hurts too much to do so), or in any other way suffer a marring residue from the incident' (105). By 'marring residue' Angle means guilt, regret, or other negative effects that suggest the sage's character was impaired in any way (95).[5] This means that while the sage can in fact feel grief, he does not feel any ambivalence about his performance. Angle states that 'classic Confucian treatments of moral conflicts say little or nothing about the agent's mixed emotions or difficulties' (95). In other words, the sage does not doubt he did the right thing, nor is he torn by competing values. Angle states this succinctly, saying, 'For sages, there are no tragic dilemmas' (106).

Angle is thought provoking and quite right in his interpretation of the passages and texts he chooses to discuss. His views are representative of dominant trends within the Confucian tradition; and much of his work is an elaboration of this Confucian view in contemporary philosophical terminology. While Angle provides a detailed account of a Confucian view of value harmony, he is not the first contemporary scholar to articulate it. Max Weber famously

argued that Confucianism is best understood as 'adjustment to the world' (152). His theory essentially meant that Confucians saw society as but a 'special case' of the 'cosmic order'; and as such their goal was for 'man [to] fit himself into the internally harmonious cosmos' (152–153). Shortly after Weber, Karl Jaspers remarked with regard to China, '[Tragedy cannot occur] wherever man succeeds both in achieving a harmonious interpretation of the universe and in actually living in accord with it' (Huang, 58). For Weber and Jaspers, all values, in a Confucian view, are harmoniously blended into the nature of the world. Building on this, scholars such as Herbert Fingarette, Bertrand Russell, and Martha Nussbaum argue that harmony is a key feature in distinguishing 'China' from 'the West'. For these scholars, value conflicts, in a Confucian view, are not part of the ontological world. In a broader context, these claims often reinforce theories of Western exceptionalism with regard to the development of things such as science, democracy, and human rights.

Texts from the Western Han present alternative voices in this conversation. They highlight the fact that a tradition is an extended conversation with diverse perspectives and that Confucian ethics is not univocal on this point.[6] While many of these texts support the dominant narrative of value conflicts, they also provide a glimpse into the context in which the harmony narrative became dominant. At the same time, they reveal that there are always dissenting voices. In short, they show the multifaceted nature of Confucian ethics.

The following vignette from the *Han Shi Waizhuan* articulates a different view on value conflicts. The passage is about a figure named Shen Ming, who lived in the fifth century BCE.[7] He sees his world through Confucian values and is respected by later Confucian figures. He is not regarded as a sage (a category usually reserved for only a handful of people in human history); hence, this passage does not directly counter Angle's theory of value harmony inasmuch as non-sages lack the moral imagination of a sage, but it does open the way for a discussion about alternative views. The story is as follows:

> In Chu there was a gentleman named Shen Ming. He tended a garden to support his parents. His filial behavior became known to the king of Chu, who summoned him. Shen Ming refused to go. His father said, 'Why do you refuse when the king wishes to employ you?'
>
> Shen Ming said, 'Why should I give up being a son to become a subject?'
>
> His father said, 'If you are paid by the state and hold a position in the court, you will be happy and I will have no worries. I wish you to serve'.
>
> Shen Ming said, 'Yes, sir', and so went to court to receive the king's command. The king of Chu made him a *sima* of the Left [i.e., a military leader]. After one year there occurred the revolt of the Governor of Bo, in which were killed the *Lingyin* Zixi and the *Sima* Ziqi. Shen Meng then surround [the Governor of Bo] with troops.
>
> The Governor of Bo said to Shi Qi, 'Shen Ming is the bravest soldier in the world. Now that he [has surrounded me] with his troops, what shall we do?'
>
> Shi Qi said, 'I have heard that Shen Ming is a filial son. Let us seize his father with our troops and then have someone say to Shen Ming, "If you join me I will divide with you the state of Chu. If you do not join me your father shall die." ' [They went and did this.]
>
> Shen Ming replied weeping, 'At first I was my father's son. Now I am my prince's subject. Since I am no longer in a position to be a filial son, how can I not be a loyal subject?' And seizing a drumstick he beat the signal for attack. As a result he killed the Governor of Bo, but his father also died.

> The king offered him a reward. Shen Ming said, 'To receive a prince's pay and then avoid the prince's troubles is not to be a loyal subject. By enforcing the prince's laws to kill one's father is on the other hand not to be a filial son. In conduct I am not both [loyal and filial], nor is my reputation established in both. Alas, if I [continue to] live under such circumstances, what sort of model will I be to the officers of the empire?' Whereupon he cut his throat and died.
>
> The Ode says, 'To go forwards or backwards is alike impracticable' (Hightower 1952, 344–345).

This is a rich vignette and not the only one of its kind. Several similar vignettes, for instance, appear in the *Han Shi Waizhuan*.[8] Shen Ming and his father take different views in dealing with competing values. Shen Ming fears that he cannot be both a filial son and a loyal minister. His father, however, suggests that by serving the ruler as a loyal minister, Shen Ming will also be a filial son – gaining income from the ruler ensures that Shen Ming will be able to financially provide for his father. Shen Ming consents to the king's request out a sense of filial piety for his father. He comes to discover, however, that he cannot be both filial and loyal. He chooses to carry out the king's directive while knowing it will cost the life of his father. Ironically, his filial piety provokes a situation where he can no longer be filial. He kills himself in response to the moral remainder experienced as a result of the situation. While the passage does not use the language of culpability, it seems plausible that Shen Ming saw himself as complicit in the death of his father. He could not find a way to harmoniously tend to all values at stake in this situation.

The final line of this passage (appended by the author/editor of the text) is particularly relevant – 'To go forwards or backwards is alike impracticable'. This line suggests that there is in fact no harmonious solution. Shen Ming's choice between filial piety and loyalty is a choice where maintaining one virtue precludes maintaining the other. The conflict, from the perspective of the editor, is more than epistemic.

The noticeable lack of the language of guilt and the foregrounding of Shen Ming's loss in terms of virtues suggest that moral remainder could be conceptualized somewhat differently in an early Confucian context, or at least in this vignette. Rather than moral remainder understood primarily as the accumulation of negative feelings such as grief or regret, moral remainder is primarily understood as the inability to cultivate virtues embedded in meaningful relationships. When we cannot gain important virtues, we cannot engage in relationships that are a constitutive part of our selves. In situations where this occurs through no fault of our own, our situation can be said to be unfortunate. However, when we are intimately involved in terminating these relationships, as in the case of Shen Ming, our situation is tragic.

This passage from the *Han Shi Waizhuan* does not definitively argue for the existence of ontological value conflicts in Confucian thought, but I believe it does pave the way for further discussing the possibility that early Confucians could see the world in non-harmonious terms – that they could legitimately have conflicted feelings about their moral choices and that they could recognize the possibility of tragic value conflicts.

Short Biography

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APPENDIX

Monographs, Edited Volumes, and Anthologies on the (Western) Han Dynasty

Primary Source Anthologies

Csikszentmihalyi, Mark. *Readings in Han Chinese Thought*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006

Confucianism

Cai, Liang. *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

Zufferey, Nicolas. *To the Origins of Confucianism: The 'Ru' in Pre-Qin Times and During the Early Han Dynasty*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Cosmology

Graham, A. C. *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*. Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, National University of Singapore, 1986.

Wang, Aihe. *Cosmology and Political Culture In Early China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Xiaochun, Sun and Jacob Kistemaker. *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Economic Activity

Barbieri-Low, Anthony J. *Artisans in Early Imperial China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

Chin, Tamara T. *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014.

Hsu, Cho-yun and Jack L. Dull. *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy, 206 B.C.–A.D. 220*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980.

Wilbur, C. Martin. *Slavery in China During the Former Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.–A.D. 25*. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1943.

Yü, Ying-shih. *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-barbarian Economic Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Festivals

Bodde, Derk. *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances During the Han Dynasty*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

The Frontier

Chang, Chun-shu. *The Rise of the Chinese Empire: Frontier, Immigration, and Empire in Han China, 130 B.C.–A.D.157*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.

Byington, Mark E. Ed. *The Han Commanderies in Early Korean History*. Cambridge: Korea Institute, Harvard University Press, 2013.

Government

Bielenstein, Hans. *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

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Loewe, Michael. *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to a Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Han Rhapsodies (*fu* 賦)

Birrell, Anne. *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

Gong, Kechang. *Studies on the Han* Fu. Translated by David R. Knechtges, et al. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1997.

Knechtges, David R. Trans. *Two Han Dynasty Fu on Ch'ü Yüan: Chia I's 'Tiao Ch'ü Yüan' and Yang Hsiung's 'Fan-sao'*. Seattle: Far Eastern and Russian Institute, University of Washington, 1968.

Law

Hafner, Arnd Helmut. *The Penal System of the Qin and the Han*. Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2009.

Hulsewé, A. F. P. *Remnants of Han Law*. Leiden: Brill, 1955.

Idema, Wilt L. and E. Zürcher. Eds. *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China: Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*. Leiden: Brill, 1990.

Life in and Around the Court and Capital

Loewe, Michael. *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1974.

Nylan, Michael and Griet Vankeerberghe. Eds. *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.

Olberding, Garret P. S. *Dubious Facts: The Evidence of Early Chinese Historiography*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

Vervoorn, Aat. *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990.

Material Culture[9]

Guo, Qinghua. *The Mingqi Pottery Buildings of Han Dynasty China, 206 BC–AD 220: Architectural Representations and Represented Architecture*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.

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Lin, James C. S. Ed. *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Liu, Cary Y., et al. *Recarving China's Past: Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of the 'Wu Family Shrines'*. Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2005.

Psarras, Sophia-Karin. *Han Material Culture: An Archaeological Analysis and Vessel Typology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

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Medicine and Science

Brown, Miranda. *The Art of Medicine in Early China: The Ancient and Medieval Origins of a Modern Archive*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

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Sivin, Nathan. *Science in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995.

Military

Loewe, Michael. *Military Operations in the Han Period*. London: China Society, 1961.

Religion

Brashier, K. E. *Public Memory in Early China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Loewe, Michael. *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth and Reason in the Han Period (202 BC–AD 220)*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1982.

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Lai, Guolong. *Excavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.

Social Structure

Ch'ü, T'ung-tsu and Jack L. Dull. Eds. *Han Social Structure*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972.

Hinsch, Bret. *Women in Early Imperial China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

Kinney, Anne Behnke. *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

McMahon, Keith. *Women Shall Not Rule: Imperial Wives and Concubines in China from Han to Liao*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

Important work on the Western Han has also appeared in journal articles. Other than articles written by the authors or editors mentioned in this piece, the following scholars have written on the Western Han: Erica Brindley, Anne Cheng, Barbara Hendrischke, Jean James, Martin Kern, Russell Kirkland, Jurij L. Kroll, Kan Lao, Wai-yee Li, John Makeham, Judson Murray, Yuri Pines, Jessica Rawson, Elisa Sabattini, Gopal Sukhu, Paul van Els, Hans van Ess, and Wen Xing.

Notes

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[1] *The Cambridge History* has recently been supplemented with Nylan and Loewe. See also Loewe 1970; and Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens.

[2] A similarly valuable resource is Knechtges and Chang.

[3] In situations where no full translation is available in English, I have listed translations in other European languages; and where no book-length studies are available, I have listed articles or portions of books. Authors cited in this piece and listed in the Appendix have also published numerous articles on aspects of the Han dynasty. See Paul R. Goldin's bibliography on 'Ancient Chinese Civilization' (available on his faculty page) for a listing of these articles.

[4] Angle is writing primarily about Neo-Confucianism, but sees this theory as applicable to earlier Confucian thinkers as well.

[5] For notions of moral remainder, residue, or distress in broader philosophical literature, see Williams; Marcus; McConnell; and Gowans 1994 (19, 95).

[6] Of course, scholars have long made arguments highlighting Mengzi and Xunzi's differing views on human nature. I aim to facilitate a similar conversation.

[7] For the purposes of this paper, I am taking people portrayed in texts as literary figures.

[8] See Hightower 52–53, 58–59, 143–144, and 202–203. For a deeper look at the issue of value conflicts in early Confucian thought, see Ing forthcoming.

[9] There are a dozen or so books from various museums that display parts of their collections. Here, I include books that are more expository.

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