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Tao Jiang on the *Fa* Tradition (□□)

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- 18 – *Mencius* 4A1.
- 19 – *Mencius* 3A4.
- 20 – *Xunzi* 12:1. Throughout this review, the English translations of the *Xunzi* 荀子 have been adopted from *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. Eric L. Hutton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
- 21 – *Mencius* 1B5 (translation slightly modified).
- 22 – *Xunzi* 11:9a.
- 23 – Jiang, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, p. 342.
- 24 – *Ibid.*, p. 367.
- 25 – *Ibid.*, p. 369.
- 26 – *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- 27 – *Ibid.*, p. 389.
- 28 – *Ibid.*, p. 397.
- 29 – *Ibid.*, pp. 395–396.
- 30 – See Kim, *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*, chap. 3.
- 31 – *Ibid.*, chap. 5.
- 32 – *Ibid.*, chap. 6.
- 33 – See Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), chap. 7.

Tao Jiang on the *Fa* Tradition (法家)



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Among the many strengths of Tao Jiang’s magnum opus, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, his analysis of the *fa* tradition (or the *fa* school, *fajia* 法家, often misleadingly dubbed Legalists)¹ stands out as a major achievement. This achievement is immediately observable from the depth and seriousness with which the *fa* tradition is covered. Two out of the book’s seven chapters (nine if we count Introduction and Conclusion) deal with *fa* thinkers: chapter 4 is dedicated to Shen Buhai 申不害 (d. 337 B.C.E.),

Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 B.C.E.), and Shen Dao 慎到 (fourth century B.C.E.?); chapter 7 deals with Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 B.C.E.). These chapters account for 112 pages out of the book's 476 (excluding bibliography and index), that is, almost a quarter of the text. This is dramatically more than the habitual allocation of less than ten percent to *fa* thinkers in other introductory-level studies of Chinese philosophy.² This feature alone suffices to hail Jiang's book for its readiness to engage the *fa* tradition systematically and not as an intellectual aberration.

The reasons for the habitual sidelining of *fa* thinkers (especially Shang Yang) in studies of early Chinese philosophy are not difficult to find. This sidelining started long ago, with its seeds traceable to the Han 漢 era (206/202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). The *fa* thinkers were detested by imperial literati because of their abusive rhetoric (e.g., the derision of traditional moral values as “parasites” or “lice” [*shi* 虱] in the *Book of Lord Shang*), their advocacy of an excessively centralized and intrusive state apparatus, and most of all—their assault on fellow intellectuals, which was viewed as directly responsible for the infamous Qin 秦 biblioclasm of 213 B.C.E.³ One of China's most illustrious intellectuals, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), succinctly summarized the literati attitude: “from the Han dynasty on, scholars have been ashamed to talk about Shang Yang.”⁴ So negative was the reputation of the *fa* tradition throughout the imperial millennia that even those statesmen who admired Shang Yang's and Han Fei's contribution toward creating “a rich state and a strong army” (*fuguo qiangbing* 富國強兵) eschewed overt identification with *fa* thinkers.⁵

To this traditional dislike of Shang Yang and Han Fei, the twentieth century added a new sort of bias coming from the discipline of Chinese philosophy. Scholars engaged in this discipline may have been traumatized by Hegel's derisive remark about Confucius 孔子 (551–479 B.C.E.) as “only a man who has a certain amount of practical and worldly wisdom—one with whom there is no speculative philosophy.”⁶ Insofar as *fa* texts (most notably the *Book of Lord Shang* associated with Shang Yang) epitomize “practical and worldly wisdom” and display little interest in “speculative philosophy,” they are deemed irrelevant by philosophers. Not accidentally, studies of *fa* thinkers only very rarely appear in such major disciplinary journals as *Philosophy East and West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, and *Dao*.

Against this backdrop, one can understand fully the achievement of Tao Jiang. Instead of sidelining the *fa* thinkers or reducing their role to that of practical statesmen rather than theorists, he engages their philosophy in earnest. He shows not only how much they were immersed in a dialog with earlier thinkers and texts, but also the depth of their impact in the late Warring States period, including on such major texts as *Xunzi* 荀子 and even *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (p. 283). Jiang particularly excels in demonstrating the philosophical depth behind the *fa* thinkers' insistence on the institutionalization of political power. Their advocacy of comprehensive bureaucratization

was not just a response to the practical need of improving the state's functioning. Rather, it reflected their understanding of "the uniqueness and independence of the political domain, especially the nature of political power, that is irreducible to personal virtues. *Fajia* thinkers were the most clear-eyed about this unique and *sui generis* nature of political power" (p. 237). Jiang explains this point further in his discussion of Shang Yang:

Shang Yang's diagnosis of the nature of the ongoing crisis was fundamentally different from the Confucians. . . . Shang Yang saw the crisis as primarily political in nature—hence advocating political solutions—whereas the Confucians saw it as fundamentally moral—hence embracing moral solutions. Indeed, Shang Yang's distinctly political diagnosis and political solutions to the ongoing crisis were one of the most striking features of his *fajia* philosophy, treating the political domain as *sui generis* that has its own dynamics and norms. (p. 266)

The shift of the *fa* thinkers from moral to political solutions in dealing with the ongoing crisis of the Warring States era (Zhangguo 戰國, 453–221 B.C.E.) does not mean, however, that they ignored moral problems, such as that of human nature. To the contrary, this issue was crucial for their project. Building on earlier studies by Harris and Pines, Jiang explores in great detail the previously neglected contribution of such thinkers as Shen Dao and Shang Yang to debates about human nature. Both thinkers considered humans as overwhelmingly self-interested—but this was not necessarily a bad thing. Both concluded that human dispositions "should be taken as given rather than obsessing over whether they can be reformed or not" (p. 270). Therefore, "Shang Yang's political project" was "to build a robust political system that could align people's desires with the interest of the state" (pp. 254–255). For Shen Dao, similarly, "designing a political system that could effectively work with human dispositions was key to his political project" (p. 271). The same understanding is applicable to Han Fei, who "theorized a political system that followed human dispositions instead of trying to change them" (p. 433). Jiang's discussion fully restores the pivotal importance of *fa* thinkers in early China disputations about human nature, which has been habitually overlooked.⁷

Another major contribution is Jiang's dismissal of the *fa* thinkers as "immoral" or "amoral"—one of the most persistent labels immortalized in A. C. Graham's designation of this current as "an amoral science of statecraft."⁸ Rather, Jiang argues,

. . . the *fajia* political system can be understood to be motivated by a different set of moral values, the Mohist impartiality being the most important one. The traditional understanding of the *fajia* project as immoral or amoral is, in many ways, the consequence of the Confucian monopolization of the very definition of what is moral, filtering out other moral values. . . . (p. 267).

I like this observation very much. Our understanding of “moral” and “amoral” in a Chinese context is indeed too much influenced by Confucian perspectives, and it is refreshing to look at the problem from a different angle. Jiang is furthermore absolutely correct in identifying the ideal of impartiality as crucial in *fa* thought. This ideal is epitomized by the Chinese term *gong* 公, which refers to the common interests of the polity. These interests, which are contrasted with selfish or “private” interests (*si* 私), are normally aligned with those of the ruler (note that in early texts, *gong* [lord, duke] was a designation of the polity’s sovereign),⁹ but this equation is not taken for granted. A ruler who follows his private inclinations (e.g., displays personal favoritism) harms the interests of the polity and, by implication, his own. The solution is to allow the ruler and the state apparatus in general to act impartially, which means a reliance on laws and standards (*fa* 法) and not allowing individual sentiments and inclinations to jeopardize these norms. This is the foundation of the *fa* thinkers’ political project.

Jiang shows how the ideas of impartiality are central for Shen Buhai (pp. 241–242), Shang Yang (pp. 258–259), Shen Dao (pp. 274, 281), and Han Fei (pp. 429–431 *et saepe*). Thus, impartiality, no less than the term *fa*, can serve as the common denominator of the *fa* tradition. It also bridges this tradition with other intellectual currents, such as those associated with Mozi 墨子 (ca. 460–390 B.C.E.) and the *Laozi* 老子. In Jiang’s words, “the *fajia* thinkers can be seen as the appropriators of the Mohist (as well as the Laoist) impartialist project who brought the principle of impartiality to its logical conclusion within the political domain” (p. 268, and more on pp. 442–445 in the context of “Mohist Elements in Han Feizi’s Thought”). The *Laozi* connection of the *fa* tradition is commonly recognized (identified, e.g., through broad borrowing of *Laozi*’s lexicon in the *fa* texts). By contrast, the *Mozi* connection was much less noted.¹⁰ Jiang pays due attention to the latter. It was Mozi’s ideas of *fa* as objective standards, and the “elements of impartiality, uniformity, upward conformity, and the statist approach to politics” in his thought, that were eventually appropriated by the *fa* thinkers “in building a theoretical and bureaucratic model with the most profound and far-reaching consequence in Chinese political history” (p. 149).

Jiang’s study is full of other thought-provoking observations, for example that instead of “personal virtues they considered to be at odds with the interest of the state,” the *fa* thinkers “touted professional virtues of specialization and impersonal application of standards when an official was acting on behalf of the state” (p. 238). The concept of “professional virtues” refers to the virtues “dictated by one’s position in the bureaucracy and professional performance evaluated by the assessment about whether the performance matches the mandate of the position” (p. 416). This is a highly interesting interpretation of the concept of *xingming* 刑名 (performance and title), which stands at the heart of *fa* administrative thought. Also, Jiang’s idea that Shang Yang and Shen Dao both valorized “the virtue of humility in political

governance, requiring rulers and officeholders to defer to and follow clearly laid-out stipulations and procedures in the system” (p. 282) surely deserves further attention.

Naturally, there are several points on which I beg to disagree with Jiang. One is his repeated insistence on Heaven as playing an important (even crucial) role in *fa* thought. Thus, the chapter on the early *fa* thinkers is named “Modeling the State after Heaven: Impartiality in Early *Fajia* Political Philosophy.” Only a reader who navigates to pages 268–269 will discover that Shen Buhai and Shang Yang (i.e., two of the three thinkers discussed in the chapter) “did not seem to be particularly interested in or concerned about the way of Heaven and did not devote any significant effort to spelling out a vision of Heaven or the supposed relationship between the heavenly and the humanly.” A connection between the political and the Heavenly order is more explicit in the *Shenzi* (Shen Dao’s) fragments, but even in this case I think a single meaningful invocation of Heaven as a model of regularity and impartiality (fragments 1–3) and a single reference to the “Way of Heaven” (天道) (28–32) do not amount to a coherent discussion of the interaction between Heaven and humans. Harris’ observation that “Shen Dao does not delve into metaphysical and epistemological speculations” akin to those of the *Laozi* and Huang-Lao 黃老 texts is surely valid.¹¹ Shen Dao’s political recommendations would not change if we were to extract the references to Heaven from the text.

The same observation is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the *Hanfeizi*. Whereas some scholars (most notably Wang Hsiao-po and Leo S. Chang)¹² have argued that cosmological speculations, which are concentrated in a few chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, provide solid philosophical foundations for his theory, this conclusion is debatable. Much like Shen Dao (albeit in a more systematic and sophisticated way), Han Fei borrowed ideas and images from the cosmological discourse that flourished in the second half of the Warring States period. Yet once again, these ideas and images are of little importance for Han Fei’s overall political construct, directed, as Jiang correctly asserts, at protecting the impartial state from being hijacked by private interests (p. 401). Taking cosmology out of the *Hanfeizi* would not affect the text’s recommendations.¹³

Interestingly, Jiang’s discussion itself demonstrates how unimportant Heaven and cosmological speculations were for the *fa* project. My feeling is that the notion of Heaven as relevant to the *fa* ideas was part of the book’s original design, reflecting Jiang’s conviction that “drastically different conceptions of Heaven and its evolving relationship with the humans” are among the central topics in early Chinese moral-political philosophy (p. 45). This design remained intact, even though the discussion itself often undermines its underlying assertions. Actually, if Jiang wanted to engage Heaven’s role in the political realm in earnest, he should have paid more attention to the so-called Huang-Lao tradition, which, à propos, is engaged in an

implicit dialog with the *fa* tradition. As I have noted elsewhere, the omission of Huang-Lao ideas is one of the few notable weaknesses of Jiang's book as a whole.¹⁴ Incorporating Huang-Lao texts and comparing them with the ideas of *fa* thinkers would arguably have resulted in a clearer understanding of how marginal Heaven was for the latter.

Besides, I think that Jiang's discussion could have benefited from a clearer juxtaposition of Confucian and *fa* thought with regard to what in my eyes constitutes their major dividing line—the views of the “noble man” (*junzi* 君子). Their differences aside, all Confucian thinkers valorize the *junzi*, whose self-cultivation allows him to become an intellectual and moral leader of society, and who ideally should join the highest echelons of power.¹⁵ By contrast, all the *fa* thinkers discussed by Jiang remain highly skeptical about the possibility that a meaningful number of individuals would be able or willing to transcend their covetousness and lead society in a moral (i.e., impartial) way. Rather, the elevation of “noble men” would bring about the proliferation of fake *junzi* who adopt lofty moral discourse to disguise their selfishness. This point is outlined already in the *Book of Lord Shang*, and it stands at the center of Han Fei's philippics against the talkative and manipulative men-of-service (*shi* 士).¹⁶ The pessimistic expectation that “there are no more than ten honest and trustworthy men-of-service, but there are hundreds of offices [to fill in] within the boundaries”¹⁷ serves as the ideological basis for *Han Feizi's* (and other *fa* texts) insistence on the advantage of impartial standards over the morality of office-holders in ensuring political order. I think that a clearer engagement with this controversy over the role of *junzi* in sociopolitical life could have benefited readers.

My final critical comment relates to the author's use of secondary sources. Jiang excels at incorporating a vast majority of relevant studies in English, including those whose methodology (or conclusions) he does not share. By contrast, only a tiny number of Chinese (and, as far as I can tell, no Japanese) studies are consulted. Since the problem is clearly not of a linguistic barrier, I cannot but conclude that it is part of a bad habit of many colleagues working in the field of Chinese philosophy to ignore studies in East Asian languages. For me, as a historian of early China (the field in which reliance on Chinese and Japanese studies is common), this is inexplicable. Jiang's readers, who benefit immensely from his dialog with Anglophone publications, could have benefited even more if he had involved the best of Chinese scholarship. That this did not happen is regrettable.

However, it is utterly inappropriate to end this review on a negative note; hence I want to shift again to one of the book's manifold strengths. Jiang's overall positive view of *fa* thinkers is very important in correcting the long-term denigration of this intellectual current. Yet Jiang does not err in the opposite direction of uncritical laudation of *fa* thinkers. Rather, he soberly addresses their weaknesses and failures. For instance, “Shang Yang, as well as other *fajia* thinkers, put too much faith in a bureaucrat's

willingness to follow the rules, to such an extent that he was almost blind to the nearly endless opportunities for officials to abuse power in the name of following the rules" (p. 266). Han Fei, in turn, failed to resolve the tension between the monarchy and the monarch (pp. 453–456). And these failures had far-reaching ramifications:

The *fajia* thinkers put all their faith in the political system they designed, which was supposed to operate on its own, vastly underestimating the intractable variations of problems and situations in the human world beyond the (inevitably) limited imagination of the designers and the engineers of that system. Left to its own device, the impartialist state, conceived of by Han Feizi and other *fajia* thinkers, was totalitarian in its monopoly of values under Heaven since no alternative source of values was allowed under such a system. . . . This totalitarian orientation toward impartiality articulated and defended in the *fajia* project exposed a dark side to a single-perspective, monistic notion of justice, especially when it is enforced by an all-powerful state, if that idea is untampered or unbalanced by other norms like humaneness or personal freedom. (p. 457)

This seems to me a fair summary of the *fa* project and among the best and most perceptive I have ever read. The *fa* thinkers excelled at overcoming the state's weakness and inefficiency, but failed to solve the problem of an excessively powerful and effective state run by less than perfect humans. The results could become disastrous. This warning remains relevant well into our days.

Notes

- 1 – The inadequacy of the term "Legalism" (or "Legalist school") has been espoused by Paul R. Goldin in his "Persistent Misconceptions About Chinese Legalism," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2011): 88–104. Jiang laudably avoids the term "Legalism," preferring the Chinese *fajia*. I opt for the usage adopted in the forthcoming *Dao Companion to China's Fa Tradition: The Philosophy of Governance by Impartial Standards*, ed. Yuri Pines (Dordrecht: Springer). Given the low degree of cohesiveness of *fajia* (e.g., the absence of the observable master-disciple relations within this tradition), it is preferable to speak of an intellectual current or tradition rather than a "school of thought."
- 2 – For instance, in Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), the "Legalism" chapter comprises 29 of the book's net 460 pages; in Angus C. Graham's *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle IL: Open Court, 1989), it is 26 of 440 pages; in Anne Cheng's *Histoire de la pensée chinoise* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997), it is 15 out of 292 pages dedicated to pre-Han philosophers; in Wolfgang Bauer's

Geschichte der chinesischen Philosophie, ed. Hans van Ess (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001), the “Legalists and the End of the Philosopher’s Era” chapter occupies 8 out of 117 pre-Han pages. Later introductory-level studies eschew earlier *fa* thinkers and focus on the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 alone. In Bryan W. Van Norden’s *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2011), the *Hanfeizi* merits 15 of 200 pages dedicated to pre-Qin thought. Only in Karyn L. Lai’s *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Paul R. Goldin’s *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) do the “Legalist philosophy” *Hanfeizi* break the glass ceiling of the 10 percent barrier, as they merit 27 and 28 pages out of 234 of pre-Buddhist philosophy and 244 of net text, respectively.

- 3 – For the “alienating” or “abusive” rhetoric in the *Book of Lord Shang*, see Yuri Pines, “Alienating Rhetoric in the *Book of Lord Shang* and Its Moderation,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012): 79–110. For Shang Yang’s and Han Fei’s assault on fellow intellectuals, see Yuri Pines, “Class Traitors? The *Book of Lord Shang* and *Han Feizi*’s Assault on the Intellectuals,” paper presented at the online workshop “Chinese Political Thought: A Global Dialogue beyond Orientalism,” Jan 20, 2022.
- 4 – Su Shi, “Lun Shang Yang” 論商鞅, reprinted in *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集 105:14, e-*Siku quanshu* edition.
- 5 – See more in Song Hongbing, “The Historical Reputation of the *Fa* Tradition in Imperial China,” *Dao Companion to China’s Fa Traditions* (forthcoming).
- 6 – Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 1825–6*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Oriental Philosophy*, ed. Robert F. Brown, trans. Robert F. Brown and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), p. 107.
- 7 – For a classical attempt to discuss early Chinese views of human nature systematically, albeit ignoring the *fa* thinkers’ contribution, see, e.g., Angus C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 6 (1967): 215–274. For rare examples of interest in, e.g., Shang Yang’s views of human nature in earlier studies, see, e.g., Yang Xiao, “When Political Philosophy Meets Moral Psychology: Expressivism in the *Mencius*,” *Dao* 5, no. 2 (2006): 257–271; Sato Masayuki, “Did Xunzi’s Theory of Human Nature Provide the Foundation for the Political Thought of Han Fei?” in Paul R. Goldin, ed., *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, (Dordrecht: Springer 2013), pp. 155–157. Shen Dao’s views of human

nature are systematically discussed in Eirik L. Harris, *The Shenzi Fragments: A Philosophical Analysis and Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 25–36; for the *Book of Lord Shang*, see Yuri Pines, ed. and trans., *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 65–69.

- 8 – Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 267.
- 9 – See Paul R. Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 204–205; see more in Liu Zehua 劉澤華, “Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi ligong miesi’ guannian yu shehui de zhenghe” 春秋戰國時期‘立公滅私’觀念與社會的整合, reprinted in Liu, *Xierzhai wengao* 洗耳齋文稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2003), pp. 332–375.
- 10 – For important early insights, see, e.g., Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Hanfeizi and Moral Self-Cultivation,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2011): 32–35. For the *Laozi* connection, see, e.g., Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 285–292.
- 11 – Harris, *The Shenzi Fragments*, p. 14. I refer to Shen Dao’s fragments according to Harris’ translation.
- 12 – Hsiao-po Wang and Leo S. Chang, *The Philosophical Foundations of Han Fei’s Political Theory* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1986).
- 13 – For an analysis of possible reasons for the appearance of cosmological argumentation in a few chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, see Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 225–226.
- 14 – The Huang-Lao ideas are scattered through several compendia, such as the *Guanzi* 管子 and the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋; they are most vividly present in the “Yellow Thearch” silk manuscripts (*Huangdi boshu* 黃帝帛書) discovered in 1973 at Tomb No. 3, Mawangdui, Changsha 長沙馬王堆 (Hunan). For a good introduction to the thought of these manuscripts, see Randall P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). For the relation between Huang-Lao texts and the *fa* tradition, see Wang Pei, “Laozi, Huang-Lao and the *fa* Tradition: Thinking through the Term Xingming 刑名,” in *Dao Companion to China’s fa Traditions* (forthcoming). As I argue in my review of Jiang’s book in the *Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 3 (2022): 577–578, the omission of Huang-Lao thought from his study may derive from Jiang’s focus on the texts, which are conventionally attributed to a single author.

- 15 – See, e.g., Yuri Pines, “Confucius’s Elitism: The Concepts of *Junzi* and *Xiaoren* Revisited,” in *A Concise Companion to Confucius*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp. 164–184.
- 16 – The topic of fake reputation that allows selfish individuals to ascend the power ladder with the help of like-minded accomplices permeates the *Hanfeizi*. For a condensed discussion, see, e.g., chap. 45, “Deluded Assignments” (“Gui shi” 詭使), which explores the dangers of fake reputation created by the self-declared “sages” (聖), the “knowledgeable” (智), and the “worthy” (賢) (*Hanfeizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校注, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 [Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2000], chap. 45, pp. 986–999).
- 17 – *Hanfeizi xin jiaozhu*, chap. 49, p. 1109 (“Wu du” 五蠹).

The *Zhuangzi*: Personal Freedom and/or Incongruity of Names?



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Tao Jiang’s *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China: Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom* (hereafter *Origins*) has sparked much scholarly debate. Already numerous presentations, various types of discussions, and reviews have appeared based on *Origins*. The present review focuses specifically on the *Zhuangzi* chapter. The entire project actually began, Jiang writes, fifteen years ago as a book on the *Zhuangzi*. Through his research Jiang realized he needed to learn more about the objects of philosophical ridicule and critique in the *Zhuangzi*. *Origins* is the result of this decade-and-a-half study.

Origins provides a somewhat novel framework for reading Warring States period philosophy. Summarizing the basic structure of his project Jiang writes: “I make the case that the philosophical dialectics between the partialist humaneness and imperialist justice formed the fundamental dynamics underlying the mainstream moral-political project during the classic period, with the musing on personal freedom as the outlier” (p. 35). As Karyn Lai puts it, *Origins* revolves around a “predictable set of inherited pre-Qin texts associated with key figures, traditionally called the “Masters” (*zi* 子) text” (Lai 2022, p. 181). Some models inherited by the “masters,” such as *yinyang* 陰陽 thinking or *ming* 名 (names) and *shi* 實 (actualities), are nearly absent in *Origins* and would cast new light on the project as well