

*Yi Zhou shu zhuzi suoyin* 逸周書逐字索引, Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1992.  
*Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844-1896) (ed.), *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982.  
*Zuo zhuan*: Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhushu 春秋左傳注疏, SSJZS.

THE MEANING OF *QING* 情 IN TEXTS FROM GUODIAN 郭店  
 TOMB NO. 1

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I

Ninety per cent of all the ancient Chinese manuscripts discovered over the past years contain texts that have no transmitted counterparts. This is the reason why the palaeographic material recently unearthed in tombs dating from the IV to the II century B.C. are changing our perception of early Chinese thought, adding much important information about philosophical debate in pre-imperial China.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I shall confine myself to discussing the meaning of *qing* 情 in light of the bamboo slip manuscripts excavated in 1993 at Guodian 郭店, Hubei 湖北 Province. As far as dating the archaeological site is concerned, scholars concur on a period ranging from 350-270 B.C.;<sup>2</sup> this means the texts found are obviously copies of still earlier testimonies.

The significance of the Guodian find cannot be overstated. In addition to unearthing a series of manuscripts throwing new light on the genesis of the *Laozi* 老子, the excavation also revealed a huge number of Confucian (or, even better “Ru 儒” or “Classicist”)<sup>3</sup> texts, many without transmitted counterparts.<sup>4</sup> One of these, known as *Xing zi*

<sup>1</sup> See Andreini 2005.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Allan and Williams (eds.) 2000; *Zhongguo zhexue*, 20; Chen Guying (ed.) 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See Nylan 1999, 2000, 2001 and Csiksentmihalyi and Nylan 2003; see also Zuferey 2003.

<sup>4</sup> A volume reproducing the photos of all 730 individual bamboo slips was published in 1998. See *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡. In addition to three documents covering about two fifths of the *Laozi* and the *XZMC*, the main object of our study, the Guodian excavations unearthed the following texts (all without titles and mainly unknown before the excavation): *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水 (a short cosmogonic treatise in a “Laoist” vein); *Ziyi* 緇衣 (which follows the homonymous chapter taken from the *Liji* 禮記); *Lu Mu gong wen Zi Si* 魯穆公問子思; *Qiong da yi shi* 窮達以時; *Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道; *Zhong xin zhi dao* 忠信之道; *Cheng zhi wen*

*ming chu* 性自命出 (XZMC) (Human Natural Dispositions Arise from the Decree), is of fundamental importance to the present study, as it provides a thorough disquisition on the concept of *qing*.

## I.1

*Qing* is certainly one of the most complex and elusive terms in the Chinese philosophical and non-philosophical lexicon. Even restricting the field of analysis to instances of the use of *qing* within the corpus of pre-Han works, doubts would remain, since it is a concept which incorporates a whole array of notions, as Anne Cheng recently demonstrated convincingly.<sup>5</sup> I have referred to the pre-Han corpus as a hypothetical dividing line in the semantic field of *qing*, precisely because certain critics have maintained that this term acquired its most common meaning of 'passions, sentiments, emotions' only during the Han period. A.C. Graham, one of the first to doubt the equivalence between *qing* and emotions or passions, has claimed that "in pre-Han literature ... it never means 'passions' even in *Hsün-tzu* ... as a noun it means 'the facts' ... as an adjective 'genuine' ... as an adverb common in *Mo-tzu* 'genuinely'";<sup>6</sup> Graham also wrote that the *qing* of X is "what is genuinely X in it", "what X essentially is".<sup>7</sup> *Qing* is also related to the act of naming because the *qing* of X is what X cannot lack if it is to be called X.<sup>8</sup>

Shun Kwong-loi has also substantiated Graham's reading, accepting *qing* as "what a thing is genuinely like", though hesitating to follow Graham's translation of *qing* as 'essence' partly because he doubted the legitimacy "of ascribing an Aristotelian framework to early Chinese thinkers and partly because it is unclear that early Chinese thinkers drew a distinction between essential and accidental properties".<sup>9</sup>

*zhi* 成之聞之; *Zun de yi* 尊德義; *Liude* 六德; *Yucong* 語叢 (sections I-IV); *Wuxing* 五行 (Five Modes of Conduct). The content of the last text was already known through the silk manuscript version found in the early 1970s at Mawangdui 馬王堆, (including the *jing* 經 "text" and the *shou* 說 "explanation") which closely corresponds to that of Guodian.

<sup>5</sup> Cheng 1999, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Graham 1986, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Graham 1986, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Graham 1986, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Shun Kwong-loi 1997, p. 185.

For Sarah Allan, too, *qing* did not acquire the sense of passions or emotions until the Han. Before that time, *qing* simply meant one's natural endowment, "but not specifically one's passions".<sup>10</sup>

According to Chad Hansen, the *qing* "of a thing are the reality-related, accessible criteria that practically guide use of its name... *Qing*, in sum, are all reality-induced discrimination or distinction-marking reactions in *dao* executors",<sup>11</sup> where *dao* 道 means the guiding discourses through which we interpret the world. Hansen states that even for Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 340-245 B.C.), *qing* refers not to passions, but to those pre-social, natural responses to reality inputs.<sup>12</sup>

Maurizio Scarpari adopts the definition of the 'most instinctual component of human nature', coining the categories 'instinctual nature' and 'emotional nature',<sup>13</sup> indicating the non-premeditated activity of *xing* which includes emotions, desires and feelings.

Beyond its 'philosophical' implications, it is inevitable that every investigation into *qing* has to take the fundamental, dominant meanings of the term as its starting point: on the one hand we have 'emotions, passions, feelings' and on the other the idea of 'real, true, genuineness'.

Provided it is permissible, if we were to try to mediate on the main meanings of *qing* (on the one hand "intrinsic characteristic, reality, truth", on the other "passions, emotions, feelings"), to give a holistic definition to the term, we would be powerfully persuaded to conclude that the idea of "truth" inherent in *qing* corresponds precisely to that constitutive need to respond to external promptings towards satisfying those desires<sup>14</sup> that emanate from our instinctive nature.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Allan 1997, p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Hansen 1995, p. 196.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen 1995, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> Scarpari 2003, and 1998, p. 495.

<sup>14</sup> There is a large number of occurrences in the philosophical literature of the compound *qingyu* 情欲 'essential desires', 'intrinsic desires', which, as we find in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, may be assimilated into a set of 'basic instinctual or instinctive desires'. See the *Qingyu* section in *Lüshi chunqiu* 2/6a-8a. (The editions of all the traditional received texts quoted in this article are those of the *Sibu beiyao*.)

<sup>15</sup> This seems widely shared by the authors of the *Shangjunshu* 商君書 and the *Xunzi*. See *Shangjunshu*, 2/5b; *Xunzi* 11/4/60. For a strictly technical definition of *qing* in the *Xunzi*, see 82/22/3, 82/22/63. There is then a famous passage taken from the *Liji* which must necessarily be taken into account, precisely because it is usually cited in support of identifying *qing* with 'passions, emotions'. See *Liji* 9/23.

To investigate the breadth of the semantic range of *qing* it is necessary to verify the terms of the discussion of this concept at the heart of the Ruist tradition, and especially to take in the richness of the ethical and moral implications.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the idea that *qing* is a kind of essential natural character, of 'basic motivation structure' as Antonio Cua defines it,<sup>17</sup> faces us with all the moral ambiguity inherent in this concept. If on the one hand it is intended as identifying those characters which show 'what' a specific thing genuinely is and how it behaves and develops if given appropriate support, or a matter of fact, on the other it cannot be denied that *qing* as 'reality' risks concealing a truth that arouses perplexity. In the name of this absolute fidelity to a genuine essence or disposition, a possible moral drift therefore appears: as Xunzi states, if followed with blind tenacity, adherence to *qing* results in immoral behaviours and gives rise to conflictual outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

This brings us to a fundamental point in our discussion of *qing*: the entire pre-Han debate among the Ruist offers strong clues to the contrast between that which man instinctively is and that which he must acquire or develop in order to fully achieve a level of morality that raises him above beasts. In this sense, there were thinkers who wanted to investigate man's inherent characteristics and his psycho-physical and emotional dynamics as objective, undeniable facts and avoiding any recourse to reassuring idyllic formulations about the real make-up of human nature.

Some recently discovered manuscripts such as the *XZMC* develop this critical tension between natural predisposition and the moral accomplishments man strives for, offering new theoretical solutions which require careful reflection.

## II

The precise affiliation of the *XZMC* within the Ru tradition is the object of lively debate at the moment. Several scholars have extended the initial hypotheses of Li Xueqin 李學勤 who asserts that some works from the Guodian tomb such as *Ziyi* 緇衣, *Wuxing* 五行 and *Mu gong wen Zi Si* 魯穆公文子思 would have originally been parts of

<sup>16</sup> This need to look more closely into whether *qing* should be interpreted as *shi* 實 'reality, fact' or 'emotions' in the Ru works has been recognized both by Chen Guying 1999, pp. 402-411, and by Li Tianhong 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Cua 1977, p. 381.

<sup>18</sup> See Xunzi 89/23/57.

the work attributed by tradition to Zi Si 子思 (ca. 483-402 B.C., grandson of Confucius and disciple of Zengzi 曾子), or rather, the lost *Zi Sizi* 子思子.<sup>19</sup>

The discovery of the *XZMC* has therefore helped rekindle interest in Zi Si and, as a result, also in the *Zhongyong* 中庸, a work which Cheng Yi 稱頤 (1033-1107) also attributed, not by chance, to the same Zi Si. His name is associated by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513)<sup>20</sup> to the *Zhongyong* and other works that came to form part of the *Liji* 禮記 during the Han dynasty: *Biaoji* 表記, the already cited *Ziyi*, and *Fangji* 坊記. But that is not all. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 B.C.) in his *Shiji* 史記 rediscovers a very close link between Zi Si (still recognized as the author of the *Zhongyong*) and Mengzi 孟子 (ca. 390-305 B.C.), who it would seem had one of Zi Si's later followers as a teacher: it is on the basis of this 'descent' that the critics (starting perhaps with Xunzi)<sup>21</sup> have isolated the so-called *Si Meng pai* 思孟派 'Zi Si and Mengzi lineage'.

Similarities have then also been identified between the *XZMC*, other documents unearthed at Guodian such as the *Liude* 六德 and the thinking of Gaozi 告子 (420-350 B.C.) as referred to by Mengzi.<sup>22</sup> Finally, scholars like Chen Lai 陳來 have spoken in favour of attributing the *XZMC* to the Confucians Zi You 子遊 or Gongsun Nizi 公孫尼子.<sup>23</sup>

Numerous doubts also assail the structure of the text. The rearrangement of the original order of the slips, completely upset by the obvious cutting of the strings that kept the slips together, is still under way, to the point that various hypothetical versions of the *XZMC* have

<sup>19</sup> The *Zi Sizi* is mentioned in passage 30/16b of the *Hanshu* 漢書. For a discussion on the link between the *Zi Sizi* and the Guodian texts, see Li Xueqin 1998, pp. 28-30; Xing Wen 1998; Jiang Guanghui 1998 and 1999; Guo Yi 1998, p. 33. For the relationship between the *Mengzi* 孟子 and the Guodian texts, including the *XZMC*, see: Guo Qiyong 1999; Liang Tao (which actually deals with the Shanghai manuscript *Xingqinglun*).

<sup>20</sup> See the indication in Zhang Xincheng (ed.) 1998, p. 620.

<sup>21</sup> Xunzi confirm the link between Zi Si and Mengzi; more importantly, he highlights how such a bond would exist precisely in virtue of the fact that both support the doctrine of the *wuxing* 'five modes of conduct', and perhaps precisely according to the ways shown in the two *Wuxing* manuscripts of Mawangdui and Guodian. See Xunzi 16/6/10.

<sup>22</sup> See Scarpari 2001; Tao Lei; Chen Guying 1999, p. 404. On the relationship between the *Xunzi* and the Guodian texts, see Goldin 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Chen Lai 1999; Ding Sixin 1999 (where certain similarities to the *Yueji* 樂記 are also developed), and 2000.

been presented.<sup>24</sup> At this stage, however, it is possible to respond to some important questions of a textual nature thanks to the discovery of another almost identical manuscript source on bamboo, the so-called *Xingqinglun* 性情論 (Treatise on Natural Disposition and *Qing*), held in the Shanghai Museum, together with other texts on bamboo, whose contents are in part now available.<sup>25</sup>

## II.1

We will now look directly at the *XZMC*. The work begins with the following statement:

凡人雖有性心無定志待物而後作待悅而後行待習而後定  
Although every man possesses *xing* 性 (natural inclinations or dispositions), the heart/mind (*xin* 心) does not have an established intention. Only after having entered into contact with things (the heart/mind) is activated; only after being gratified does it take action; only after having practised will it be established. (slips 1 and 2)

But what is the content of *xing*?

喜怒哀悲之氣性也  
Natural dispositions are made up of the vital breaths of pleasure, anger, grief and sadness. (slip 2)<sup>26</sup>

The *XZMC* continues thus:

及其見於外則物取之也  
Having reached the moment when it ('*xing*' or 'pleasure, anger, grief and sadness') becomes externally visible, it means that things have taken a hold on it (or 'them'). (slip 2)

<sup>24</sup> See for example Lian Shaoming 2000.

<sup>25</sup> The text in question, edited by Ma Chengyuan, is *Shanghai bowuguan zang zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, Vol. I. In 1994, the Shanghai Museum acquired a group of about 1,200 inscribed bamboo slips from a Hong Kong antique market. These may have been stolen from one or more late fourth- or early third-century B.C. tombs in the area of the old state of Chu 楚 (the same as Guodian). These bamboo slips include a group of unknown early Confucian texts on music, poetry and divination. The first volume of *Shanghai bowuguan* includes only three texts: the *Xingqinglun*, another version of the *Ziyi* and an unknown text, named as *Kongzi shi lun* 孔子詩論. The *Kongzi shi lun* starts out with the statement attributed to Confucius according to which "Musical performances should not be separated from *qing* (*yue wu li qing* 樂亡離情)".

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation recalls the passage 10.1/60/19 from *Dadai lijì* 大戴禮記; see also *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 58/33/15. The commentary of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) to the *Zhongyong* states that 'pleasure', 'anger', 'grief', and 'happiness, joy' are *qing*, but until they are not expressed, they are identified with *xing*. See *Sishu jizhu* 四書集注, p. 18.

This statement is echoed in slips 10 and 11, which testify how "speaking in general terms, what stimulates *xing* are things, objects (*wu* 物)".

Now we come to the heart of the matter, which directly concerns us:

性自命出  
Natural dispositions arise from the Decree. (slip 2)  
命自天降  
The Decree descends from Heaven. (slips 2, 3)  
道始於情  
*Dao* initiates from *qing*. (slip 3)

The line "*dao* initiates, starts from *qing*" may imply that *dao* is consistent with *qing*, and may prove that man's moral achievements are in keeping with *qing* from the outset, but not that they necessarily derive from total obedience to *qing*.

One point in particular is worth dwelling on: the text does not say that *dao* is produced (*sheng* 生, or *chu* 出 'arises, manifests itself') by *qing*, but that it 'initiates, or starts (*shi* 始)' from *qing*. Furthermore, a statement of this kind does not support the idea that *dao* is entirely and profoundly rooted in the human inner 'motivational structure', to use Cua's words, assuming that *qing* really does constitute a sort of inner essence or the sum of man's emotional states. The process of approaching *dao* starts with the activation of that faculty of expressing emotional impulses and states of mind inherent to *xing* 'natural disposition', which is manifested outwards and fits with ritual elegance (*li* 禮). This is therefore a process which moves from *nei* 內 'inside' (or *zhong* 中 'inside, in the middle') to *wai* 外 'outside, external'.

The *XZMC* clearly establishes the relationship between *xing* and *qing* in the following passage:

情生於性  
*Qing* springs from *xing*. (slip 3)

This is an extremely important point, which we find twice more in the Guodian texts: first in slip 40 of the *XZMC*, with a slight variant, and subsequently in section II of the *Yucong* 語叢, slip 1. As Lian Shaoming 連劭名 points out,<sup>27</sup> the link between *xing* and *qing* is perhaps exemplified by the stillness-movement (*jing-dong* 靜動) relationship, which may be compared to that between water and waves, as mentioned in sub-commentary (*shu* 疏) of the *Zhongyong*. I would

<sup>27</sup> See Lian Shaoming 2000, p. 36; Chen Ligui.

also consider a passage from the *Yuanshenqi* 援神契 chapter of the *Xiaojing* 孝經 according to which *xing* represents the root (*ben* 本) and *qing* the extremity. In saying that *qing* is *mo* 末 ‘the final extremity, the last visible, external appendix’, allusion is made particularly to the fact that there is also an inner-outer relationship between *xing* and *qing*, as already shown in Zhu Xi’s discussion in his commentary of the *Zhongyong*, taken up recently by Chen Lai, Xiang Shiling 向世陵 and Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇.<sup>28</sup>

*Qing* springs from *xing*, because it is activated by *xing*, which in its turn is stimulated by things. The substantial difference between *qing* and *xing* seems that the former represents an explicit manifestation, while the other refers only to an internal dimension, a potential, latent state. This is clear from XZMC, slip 6:

雖有性心弗取不出

Although [man] possesses *xing* and *xin*, neither manage to manifest themselves until [things] take hold of them.

*Qing* thus seems to all intents and purposes to reveal the contents of *xing*:

始者近情

The initial conditions are close to *qing*. (slip 3)<sup>29</sup>

終者近義

The final ones are close to *yi* ‘moral propriety, righteousness’. (slip 3)

知【情者能】出之

He who understands 【what pertains to *qing* is able to】 manifest it. (slips 3, 4)

Should *qing* be manifested? Or *dao*? I lean towards the latter reading, even though the author perhaps refers to the ability to manifest a *qing* that is in full accord with the *dao*.

知義者能納之

He who understands what pertains to moral propriety is able to accommodate it. (slip 4)

The text thus gives us to understand that there is a double action, a double cycle: an expression from within and a development by absorption from without. As *Yucong* section I states:

人之道也或由中出或由外入

As regards man’s *dao*, in some cases it arises from the inside, in others it enters from the outside. (slips 19, 20)

<sup>28</sup> Chen Lai 1999, p. 304; Xiang Shiling 1999, p. 71; Guo Qiyong 1999, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of this question, see Peng Lin.

And again:

由中出者仁忠信

When it arises from the inside there is humanity, conscientiousness and trustworthiness. (slip 21)

The manuscript of *Yucong* I, unfortunately damaged, continues with “when it penetrates from outside...”. In my view it is not unlikely that the text originally read *yi* 義 ‘righteousness’, *sheng* 聖 ‘sagacity, sageliness’, and *zhi* 智 ‘wisdom’, which, together with humanity, conscientiousness and trustworthiness, constitute the six virtues to which the Guodian text identified as *Liude* 六德 (The Six Virtues) found at Guodian refers. The connection with the doctrine Mengzi attributes to Gaozi,<sup>30</sup> based on the principle according to which “humanity is internal, moral rightness is external (*ren nei yi wai* 仁內義外)”, seems quite clear. Slip 26 of the *Liude* contains the same formula, which adheres closely to both the moral vision of the XZMC and the contents of slips 22 and 23 of section I of the *Yucong*, which reads:

仁生於人義生於道或生於內或生於外

Humanity springs from man, moral propriety from the *dao*. The former springs from the inside, the other from the outside.

Let us now go back and examine the XZMC:

好惡性也

Love and hate are matters of the natural dispositions. (slip 4)

所好所惡物也

That which is loved and that which is hated are the things. (slip 4)

善不【善性也】

Being good and being not 【good, is a matter of natural disposition】 (slip 4)

The text suggests that the subject of the last line in slip 4 is once again *xing*,<sup>31</sup> as confirmed by the Shanghai *Xingqinglun* manuscript. If the reading proposed here is correct, then it is natural to underline a connection with the doctrine ascribed by Wang Chong 王充 (27-97) to the Confucian Shi Shi 世碩, who argued that “there is both good and bad in *qingxing* 情性”.<sup>32</sup> These positions are a long way from those expressed in the *Mengzi*, to the point that Chen Ning came to assert

<sup>30</sup> On the relationship between Gaozi and the *Liude*, see Scarpari 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Leading scholars agree in holding that *xing* is indeed the topic. The exceptions are Lian Shaoming 2000, p. 36, who is in favour of *yi* 義, and Ning Chen 2002, pp. 28, 40, who is in favour of *xin* 心.

<sup>32</sup> *Lunheng* 論衡, 13/36/8.

that the Confucian texts from Guodian could be seen as “forerunners of Xunzi’s theory of human nature as being evil”.<sup>33</sup> I nevertheless prefer to interpret these texts from Guodian, including the XZMC, as representing that branch within the Ruist thinkers which held that *xing* is equal for all men, but “morally ambivalent... both normative and factual, as well as being both incipient and accomplished”.<sup>34</sup> Such ‘duality’ and such ‘suspension’ in the interpretation of *xing* were already implicit in the words of Confucius, according to whom “men are close to one another because of their *xing*; they diverge from one another as a result of practice (*xi* 習)”.<sup>35</sup>

Let us look at what emerges from slip 18, where we find:

聖人...理其情而出入之然後復以教

The Sage... regulating his *qing*, ensures that it communicates with the inside and with the outside (manifesting and acquiring as much as is required, *churu* 出入); after that, he turns to the teachings (of the Sages of old).

教所以生德于中者也

The teachings (of the Sages) are the means by which virtue can spring forth from within. (slip 18)

禮作於情

Ritual ceremonies are produced by *qing*. (slip 18)

This statement is supported by section II of *Yucong*, slip 1, where we read “*Qing* arises from *xing* (*qing chu yu xing* 情出於性)”, followed by “Ritual ceremony springs from *qing* (*li sheng yu qing* 禮生於情)”.<sup>36</sup> At this point it is crucial to understand why the text states that ritual behaviour comes from *qing* and not from *xing*. The reason probably lies in the fact that *xing* also includes elements which would give vent to excessive and harmful emotions, such as hate, sadness or fear, if suddenly released in a ritual context. The action should thus be conveyed to ceremonial ritual, which has its origin in that very faculty of human nature whose role is to appropriately attenuate the intensity of feelings and emotions. So it is important not to confuse

<sup>33</sup> Chen Ning 2002, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Chen Ning 2002, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> See *Lunyu* 論語 17.2. The XZMC (slips 12 and 13) confirms that “it is precisely practice which nurtures *xing*”.

<sup>36</sup> On the relationship between *qing* and ritual ceremony, see *Yucong* I, slip 31, which reads “ritual ceremony are in accordance with man’s *qing* (*li yin ren zhi qing* 禮因人之情)”, which is echoed in passage 2:64-12 of the *Guanzi* 管子, in passage 30/2 of the *Liji* 禮記 and in the *Wenzi* 文子, where in passage 8/41/14, however, *qing* is replaced by *xing*.

cause and effect: *qing* is not the source of feelings, but it is responsible for their visible effect.

It is now clear why slip 20 states:

君子美其情

The exemplary person embellishes his *qing*.

Ruist thought constantly stressed the need for behaviour to be refined within the ritual context. The expression of emotions is a constituent feature of human beings; we all need adequate gratification of desires and feelings, but with necessary constraints in order not to damage the self or others. The purpose of morality (*renyi* 仁義), ritual ceremony (*li*) and musical performance (*yue* 樂), is to give harmonic expression to feelings, and to prevent excesses that may interfere with social order.

An echo of this specific attitude emerges from the XZMC (slip 20), where it is stated that “the exemplary person embellishes his *qing*”.<sup>37</sup> It cannot be ruled out that the need to embellish *qing* is derived from the fact that *qing* in itself refers to a natural neutrality which is not necessarily ‘ugly’ or reprehensible (as Xunzi affirmed); a method of responding that is perhaps elementary in its mechanical development. On occasion it might refer to a blind appetite, but more usually it concerns a condition of pre-cultural, basic reflexes where there is not much room for moral consideration.

*Qing* is the starting point of man’s moral experience: this is why the exemplary person embellishes his *qing* and not his *xing*. More precisely, *xing* describes a pre/a-moral seat of basic emotions and desires latent in all individuals, while *qing* describes the mode by which these emotions and desires are articulated, so it is not necessary to embellish an emotion or a latent feeling, but rather to measure the impact of their externalisation at the level of *qing*. Hence, as a response to external phenomena, *qing* is an attitude that an individual consciously cultivates and refines.

The text seems to confirm that moral differentiation amongst men occurs at a level of *qing* (because it invests the faculty of the aesthetic and ethical embellishment of one’s response to outside stimulus) and of *xin* ‘heart/mind’, which directs the will on a moral level. In Xunzi’s view, the exemplary person and the petty man therefore share similar

<sup>37</sup> The *Liji* 7/25 similarly says that “the exemplary person acts according to the rites in order to adorn (*shi* 飾) his *qing*”.

natural dispositions (*xing*); but although their desires and aversions are the same, they diverge on the choices they make guided by *xin*. There is a convergence on this point in the *XZMC*, slip 9, which states that “within the lands lapped by the four seas, all men share the same natural inclinations (*xing*); they differ from one another in the use of their mental faculties (*xin*)”.

It is therefore possible to conjecture that, in the *Xunzi* as in the *XZMC*, *xing* is a natural, amoral endowment. The two texts, at least apparently, also converge in declaring that “the *qing* of man, how unlovely it is (*ren qing shen bu mei* 人之情甚不美!)”<sup>38</sup> and that “the exemplary person embellishes his *qing*” (slip 20). Nevertheless, *Xunzi* reduces *qing* to a collection of egoistic appetites to be subjugated, while the *Guodian* texts record the need for a ‘lighter’ make-up.

We will now look at slip 29:

凡至樂必悲哭亦悲皆至其情也

In general terms, the utmost happiness is necessarily the harbinger of affliction,<sup>39</sup> just as weeping in its turn expresses affliction. These coincide with exerting *qing* to the utmost level of intensity.

Similarly, slips 42 and 43 state that:

用情之至者哀樂為甚

Those who exert *qing* to the utmost, will be highly exposed to grief and happiness.

Slips 37-40 again present *qing* as a term defining the genuine participation of man in that which he does. In this sense, *qing* is contrasted by *wei* 偽 “that which is artificial, false, conscious acquisition”:

人之不能以偽也可知也

Man cannot manage to conceal his falseness without others noticing. (slips 37, 38)

【其】過十舉其心必在焉

When he continues to commit the same error, it necessarily means that his heart/mind intentionally persist in that. (slip 38)

察其見者情安失哉

Carefully observing that which a person reveals of himself, could his *qing* perhaps be withdrawn from view? (slip 38)

忠信之方也

Conscientiousness is the orientation of trustworthiness. (slips 39, 40)

信情之方也

<sup>38</sup> *Xunzi* 90/23/76-77.

<sup>39</sup> A similar claim is made in *Yucong* II, slip 29.

Trustworthiness is the orientation of *qing*. (slip 40)

情出於性

*Qing* arises from natural disposition. (slip 40)

Slips 50-52, whose content according to Chen Lai refers to the sovereign, are quite relevant to our inquiry:

凡人情為可悅也

In general terms, men's *qing* is something that can be pleased. (slip 50)

In this case *qing* is a kind of ‘true emotional nature’ whose needs necessitate being met, and may be met. But *qing* also evokes an appeal to more sincere and authentic impulses as a guarantee that goes beyond the actual results of the action, as shown by the passages that follow:

苟以其情雖過不惡

If we consider the issue in terms of (adherence to) *qing*, though he errs, he will not be blamed. (slip 50)<sup>40</sup>

不以其情雖難不貴

Whenever he disregards *qing*, even if he manages to overcome difficulties, his deeds will not be held in great esteem. (slip 50)<sup>41</sup>

*Qing* also alludes to a kind of loyalty towards oneself as a prerequisite for the trustworthiness (*xin* 信) acquired in the eyes of others. The term *xin* 信 already appeared in slip 40 in relation to *qing*,<sup>42</sup> and slip 23 also confirms such a relationship:

凡聲其出於情也信

All the sounds, when emerging from *qing*, are trustworthy. (slip 23)

The lines that follow show how complete adherence to *qing* ensures that the desired effect is achieved even before the action takes place:

苟有其情雖未之為斯人信之矣

If one shows genuine emotional participation, then one will enjoy the faith of others even before acting. (slip 50)

<sup>40</sup> A similar claim recalls what is read in the chapter *Miuchexun* 繆稱訓 of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. See *Huainanzi* 10/2a. On the similarities between the *XZMC* and the *Huainanzi*, see Liu Yuexian, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> This also emerges from slips 46 and 47, where it is read that “he who, though being mild and living joyfully in harmony and peace with others, shows that he has not fully exercised *qing*, will have reason for regret”.

<sup>42</sup> For other references to the relationship between *qing* and *xin* 信, see *Lunyu* 13/4, *Liji* 32/9, 32/26 (see those passages which occur in the *Biaoji* chapter: *xin jin qing* 信近情 “trustworthiness is close to *qing*”; *qing ke xin* 情可信 “*qing* could be trusted”; *qing you xin* 情有信 “*qing* has trustworthiness”); *Zhuangzi* 莊子 16/6/29, 19/7/3.

未言而信有美情者也

When someone is trustworthy without having spoken it means that he has a refined (or beautiful) *qing*. (slip 51)

未教而民恆性善者也

He who, without the influence exerted by education, ensures the people of constancy (of heart/mind),<sup>43</sup> possesses a natural inclination toward good. (slips 51, 52)

The final two passages are decisive in understanding the sense of *qing* and allow us to point out its difference from *xing*.

*Xing*, natural human dispositions, appears to be a crucible of emotional impulses, contrasting feelings that require the guidance of heart/mind in order to firstly be bent to the will and to education, and finally expressed in a morally suitable form. *Xing* is a gift from Heaven, and coincides with the combination of elementary, pre-cultural, psycho-emotional faculties, ready to receive the prompting of objects by way of the senses.

*Qing*, at least in the *XZMC*, is identified rather as a direct emanation of *xing*, or perhaps it is better to say as its 'function'. *Qing* is also the starting point of man's moral experience (*dao*) and the origin itself which inspires traditional rules of ritual behaviour (*li*).

### Conclusions

The Guodian manuscripts reveal how the philosophical debate on *qing* and on natural dispositions within the Ruist tradition goes beyond the picture emerging from received texts like the *Mengzi* and the *Xunzi*. For obvious reasons these two works provide only partial views of the entire intellectual framework of the 4th-3rd century B.C.; moreover because they were subsequently arbitrarily edited, which could have contributed to the radicalisation of the theories involved. It has been seen that as far as the relationships between *dao*, *li*, *xing*, *xin* 心 and *qing* are concerned, the tones are far more muted and more nuanced than the definitive claims (perhaps more apparent than real) expressed in the famous slogans 'human nature is good', and 'human nature is bad', and the underlying theories found respectively in the *Mengzi* and in the *Xunzi*.

<sup>43</sup> If the subject in question were not the sovereign but the people, then the passage could be interpreted as: "if, before having received adequate teaching, the people were to have a constant [heart/mind], then it would mean that they have a natural inclination towards good".

In the manuscripts I have examined, the concept of *qing* that emerges does not fit so neatly into the inner parameter of uncontaminated purity, an inner reality, an essential nature. Rather it suggests a natural faculty concerned with the outward expression of feelings, emotional states or instinctive reflexes. Obviously, when the visible results of actions are faithful to a sincere feeling, perfect adherence to *qing* is achieved. In this sense, *qing* (contrasted with *wei*), becomes quite similar to another key value of Confucianism: *cheng* 誠, the idea of total adherence to the natural reality of one's heart.

The Guodian texts, and the *XZMC* in particular, show us that man's moral path is a long process aimed at harmonizing the need to express his own natural qualities, and the equally fundamental need to develop his level of response to external phenomena through constant devotion by way of learning and emulating the Sages.

In this sense, the attainment of mature virtue depends on the measured display of one's own basic impulses, and on sincere participation in the social ritual ceremony. This occurs when *qing* is able to act as a perfect osmotic filter between natural emotivity and the ability to translate such impulses into concrete, morally blameless acts.

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