

The Phrase “*Xing Ming Zhi Qing* 性命之情” in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子

By

Sara Barrera Rubio

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Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Csikszentmihaly

Professor Michael Nylan

Professor Robert Ashmore

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Introduction

While the meaning of “*qing* 情” in early Chinese texts has been the object of extensive research and inconclusive debates, little attention has been given to the instances where it appears accompanied by “*xing* 性” (“nature”) and “*ming* 命” (“destiny” or “fate”) in the phrase “*xing ming zhi qing* 性命之情.” Indeed, there is nearly no contemporary scholarship on it, and traditional commentaries often assume that the phrase simply clarifies the cosmological origins of “*qing*.” However an analysis of the early sources where it appears reveals that although related, its use was distinct. Specifically, “*qing*” and “*xing ming zhi qing*” appear in similar discussions on whether or not people should shape their inclinations, yet the former was mostly used to argue in favor of such practice, whereas the later was crucial in defending the preservation of one’s innate qualities of character and behaviour. Given that this is a crucial debate in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and that in this text “*xing ming zhi qing*” appears the most times, this thesis centers on analysing the role of the phrase in it. Aiming to shed light on both the thought of the *Zhuangzi* and on the later research on the uses and meanings of “*qing*” and “*xing ming zhi qing*” in early China, I situate the study in the context of some of the main early texts that deliberate on these concepts, to then focus on the arguments that use them in the *Zhuangzi*. Overall, I argue that *xing ming zhi qing* in this text refers to the people’s innate dispositions that become corrupted when shaping their *qing*, which includes both their inborn inclinations and the desires, ambitions and sentiments they develop through life.

The first chapter examines the background to understanding the use of *xing ming zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi*. The first section presents a literature review on “*qing*.” It shows that contemporary scholarship has challenged the common spread understanding of the term as “emotions,” “sentiments,” “feelings,” and “passions” in early Chinese texts, however scholars have not reached an agreement neither on its meaning, nor on the appropriate methods to approach it. Indeed, definitions have ranged from “essence” and “reality input” to “situation,” while it has also been suggested that one single translation cannot capture the versatility of *qing*, and hence it is best to analyse the debates in which it appears without trying to find an unifying definition. In the second section, I examine the main debate in which *qing* played a central role in early China, on whether or not people should shape their *qing* with the righteousness (*yi* 義) that the classics teach.

In particular, I look at the *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 and the *Xunzi* 荀子's arguments that human inclinations are not fixed and should be patterned through learning in order to direct them to produce a righteous social order. In the third section, I turn to the arguments that contain "*xing ming zhi qing*" in the early sources, which oppose the views on shaping *qing* with benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness. In particular, I analyse the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and the *Wenzi* 文子's arguments that comprehending (*da* 達), submitting to (*fu* 服) or preserving (*bu shi* 不失) *xing ming zhi qing* is the basis for putting into practice one's innate qualities, which are intrinsically benevolent and righteous.

Taking as a point of departure the diversity of readings to "*qing*" that the first section reveals, in each subsequent section I problematize and infer the meaning of the term from the arguments where it appears, without trying to delimit it into one definition or translation. In the second section, I deduce that *qing* in the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi* broadly is close to sentiments, inasmuch as they include the thoughts and opinions that people develop through life based on feelings about situations, which in turn influence their attitude and behaviour. In the third section, I distinguish this from *xing ming zhi qing* as the people's natural ways of reacting to external influence, which depend on the innate qualities of mind and character, behavioral tendencies and emotional dispositions. In short, *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* broadly refer, respectively, to the people's ways of processing and reacting to external input, and to the innate inclinations that people bring forward when they do not shape their behaviour.

The second chapter centers on *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi*. The first section examines the larger debate in which *qing* when referring to people (*ren zhi qing* 人之情) should be understood, that on whether or not people have control over the *qing* of things (*wu zhi qing* 物之情). I analyse the arguments in chapters such as the "Da zong shi 大宗師" that although humans have a tendency to want to control the *qing* of things, it is ultimately outside of their reach and therefore they should just follow the natural course of things. This attitude starts with refraining from creating judgments (*shi fei* 是非) and hence from developing likes and dislikes (*hao wu* 好惡), which irremediably lead to frustration. In the second section, I focus on the more specific discussions on whether humans should alter their *qing*. I examine the defense in chapters such as the "Dao zhi 盜跖" that shaping one's *qing* with qualities like *ren* 仁 (benevolence) and *yi* only hinders and corrupts one's innate dispositions, resulting in feelings of frustration, worry and

sadness. Since the opposite attitude of giving free reign to desires (*yu* 欲) has a similar outcome, people should instead nourish their dispositions by satisfying only their basic desires. From this perspective, I grapple with the view in the “De chong fu 德充符” that inasmuch as *qing* includes the faculty of judging, humans are ideally without it (*wu ren zhi qing* 無人之情) in the sense of avoiding to be harmed by their likes and dislikes. In the third section, I situate in this context the argument that while people are ideally without *qing*, they should appoint their *xing ming zhi qing* to lead their behaviour, so as to respond to external input with their innate dispositions unobstructed, allowing the potency (*de* 德) of the *dao* 道 or natural world order to unfold.

Following the same methodology as in the first chapter, I infer interpretations of the meanings of *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* from the analysis of the arguments where they appear in the *Zhuangzi*. In the first section, I understand *wu zhi qing* as the functioning principle of things, that is, the ways in which things naturally function and evolve, although it also has other related uses within the semantic range of the constitution and the core characteristics of the things it qualifies. In the second section, I deduce that *ren zhi qing* refers to the functioning faculties and propensities of human beings, including their innate dispositions and the desires, ambitions and sentiments that they develop through life. Since the text argues that men who do not allow their likes and dislikes harm them can be considered in a way *wu ren zhi qing*, their inborn constitution is the essential part of their *qing*, whereas the inclinations and sentiments they chose to develop are dispensable. In the final section, I read *xing ming zhi qing* as the people’s ability to respond to external input with their inborn dispositions which, free from an unnecessary and damaging use, naturally align and participate in the spontaneous world order. In sum, *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi* mainly refer respectively to the constitution and functioning principle of things and people, and to the people’s innate dispositions when preserved from abuse.

I. Background to *qing* 情 in Early China

A) Literature review on *qing*

In Chinese history, and especially during and after the Song dynasty, the most common meanings and uses of the term *qing* have ranged between “emotions,” “sentiments,” “feelings,” and “passions,” but in contemporary scholarship on early China the projection of these meanings into the ancient texts has been contested. In fact, approaches and interpretations of it have varied considerably, and still today there is no agreement on the matter. Some authors starting with Angus Charles Graham have found in it two separate meanings, as “fact” or even “essence,” and “emotions” or “feelings.” Other scholars, such as Chad Hansen, have determined one meaning that unifies the various uses, as the inputs that one receives from things as well as one’s reactions to those. And yet other academics have pointed out that *qing* had a range of meanings, and that the best way to approach them is by analysing the debates in which the term appeared — in particular that on whether or not to pattern the *qing* with the teachings of past traditions.

Graham’s appendix on *qing* from 1967 became the main reference for later scholars.¹ He argues that *qing* in pre-Han literature refers to “the facts” (as a noun), to “genuine” (as an adjective) and to “genuinely” (as an adverb); in other words, “what X essentially is” or “what X cannot lack if it is to be called X.”² To illustrate this, he uses a passage in the “De chong fu 德充符” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* which contains a dialogue between two characters, one of which tries to convince the other that men can be without *qing*, but that the meaning of this is not what his interlocutor expects:

既受食於天，又惡用人？有人之形，無人之情。有人之形，故群於人；無人之情，故是非不得於身。眇乎小哉！所以屬於人也。[...] 惠子謂莊子曰：「人故無情乎？」莊子曰：「然。」惠子曰：「人而無情，何以謂之人？」莊子曰：「道與之貌，天與之形，惡得不謂之人？」惠子曰：「既謂之人，惡得無情？」莊子曰：「是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情者，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然而不益生也。」

¹ Graham, pp. 59–66.

² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Having received your food from Heaven, what do you need from Man? Have the shape of a man, be without the *essence (qing)* of man. Have the shape of a man, and so flock with men; be without the *essence (qing)* of man, and so right and wrong will not be found in your person.” HuiZi asks: “May a man really be without his *essence (qing)*?” “Yes.” “In that case, how can one call him a man?” “The Way gives him the guise, Heaven gives him the shape, how can one not call him a man?” “Granted that we do call him a man, how can be without his *essence (qing)*?” “Judging between right and wrong is what I mean by his *essence (qing)*. What I mean by being without his *essence (qing)* is that a man does not inwardly wound his person by likes and dislikes, constantly follows the spontaneous and does not add to what grows in him.”³

The passage makes a distinction between the heavenly and the human realms, and Zhuangzi argues that since men receive their nourishment from heaven, they do not need to use the human (*yong ren* 用人), for men can have human form without having *qing* (*wu ren zhi qing* 無人之情). Being without *qing*, “affirmations and negations” or “judgments on right and wrong” (*shi fei* 是非) cannot be found in oneself. HuiZi 惠子 brings up the doubt that someone without *qing* can be called a man. Zhuangzi then repeats that by *qing* he means “judging right and wrong (*shi fei*),” and explains that “*wu ren zhi qing*” involves not being harmed by likes and dislikes (*hao wu* 好惡), instead consisting on going along with nature or things as they are (*yin zi ran* 因自然), without trying to add anything to life (*bu yi sheng* 不益生), that is, not try to change it. In other words, the definition of *qing* as “judging right and wrong” refers to creating judgements and therefore preferences, which the text conceives as something characteristically human but potentially harmful for oneself. Graham does not delve into the meaning of this, but he focuses on the objection that men cannot be without *qing* to argue that this concept in early China referred to the essence of humans, and on the definition of the term as judging “right from wrong” to argue that it did not mean emotions, feelings or passions. Although he recognises that the use of *qing* in this passage is an exception in the *Zhuangzi*, for according to him this term has positive connotations everywhere else in the text, it still never means “passions,” which instead appear with negative implications.

³ Here I am quoting Graham’s translation, since it is linked to his reading of *qing*.

To this reading of *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* and by extension in early China, Graham admits the exception that in “the ritualistic school of Confucianism,” in particular in the *Xunzi* 荀子 and in the *Liji* 禮記, *qing* is the genuine in man which it is polite to disguise or to refine (“*wen* 文”) in obedience to the rites: that his, his feelings and passions.⁴ For example, the *Xunzi* states that “性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情,” that is, “One’s nature likes and dislikes, happiness and anger, and sadness and joy are called its *qing* (feelings).” He also states that “文理情用相為內外表墨，並行而雜，是禮之中流也,” which Graham translates as “the refined and ordered and the genuine [*qing*] and useful, becoming each other’s exterior and interior, proceeding together in conjunction, this is the midstream of the rites.”⁵

Following Graham’s analysis, scholars maintained similar or derived definitions of *qing* as “essence” and “genuine,” also considering some passages in which *qing* meant “emotions” or “desires” as exceptions. For example, in *Chinese Philosophical Terms* (1986), Yi Wu considers the *Zhuangzi* the main source of *qing* as “reality” or “essence,” and the *Xunzi* the most clear proponent of *qing* as emotions.⁶ Ding Sixin 丁四新, in turn, deconstructed the projection of *qing* as emotions in early China as resulting from Song dynasty’s commentaries — particularly that of Zhu Xi 朱熹 —, while conceding that there are signs of that meaning in some of the ancient texts.⁷

Despite the influence of the theory that the main meaning of *qing* is “essence” or “genuine,” Chad Hansen challenged it in 1995 and tried to reconcile the divergent uses of the term — including that of emotions and desires — into a psychological theory on how humans process perception.⁸ He argues that defining *qing* as “facts,” “essence” or “reality” and exceptionally as “emotions,” “feelings” or “desires” as distinct meanings is the result of trying to fit the term into a Western centered view of metaphysics and psychology. These disciplines have created dichotomies between substance as definitional and unchangeable properties of a thing and its accidents, and between the rational and the irrational — which includes emotions, feelings and desires. According to Hansen, one would do better to understand *qing* outside of these dualisms, as the “inputs from reality” on the basis of which humans discriminate reality and apply conventional naming standards, therefore creating judgements (“*shi fei*”). Thus, the *qing* of a thing are the reality-related,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶ Wu, p. 147.

⁷ Ding, pp. 61–68.

⁸ Hansen, pp. 181–201.

accessible criteria that we receive and guide the use of its name. From this perspective, “essence” and “genuine” are not far from the meaning of the concept, but they do not capture its full breath, which is also close to *yu* 欲 (desire) because in acquiring names we are acquiring likes and dislikes.

To defend his theory, Hansen analyses mostly passages from the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* to show that they use *qing* with the same meaning, but that the role of the concept in their respective philosophies is antagonistic.⁹ On the one hand, the *Zhuangzi*'s point in defining *qing* as *shi fei* is that issuing judgements over the inputs we receive from the world is natural and unavoidable, and therefore not negative unless we allow them to harm us. On the other hand, the *Xunzi*'s point in defining *qing* as one's nature likes and dislikes, happiness and anger, and sadness and joy is that the natural, pre-social responses to the world are mostly desires which lead to disorder and strife, and therefore need to be refined and regulated.

Hansen's theory gave continuity to the study of *qing* as holding either one or a few interrelated meanings having to do with the basic characteristics of a fact or a thing and the human reactions to them. For example, in 2003 Brian Bruya argued that *qing* in early China meant both “situation” in the sense of “facts together with sentiments,” and “reactions” to facts and sentiments.¹⁰ This is because the term was part of a cosmology of mutual interpenetration in which emotions are more than mere psychological states, and *qing* is more than mere essence or genuineness and reality feedback. But such a monolithic approach to *qing* was nuanced in 2004 by Christoph Harbsmeier's division of the semantic range of *qing* into seven interrelated groups, including the basic facts of a matter, underlying and basic dynamic factors, basic sentiments or responses, instincts or propensities, sensibilities and sentiments, motivations and attitudes, as well as convictions and feelings.¹¹

Recognising the semantic range that characterises *qing*, Michael Puett instead chose not to try to determine its precise meanings, in order to focus rather on how thinkers re-defined the term for the purposes of their specific arguments.¹² Specifically, he centers on the line of reasoning on whether or not traditions from the past should be followed, in the context of ethical and political legitimation in the form of representations of sagehood, especially during the fourth to second

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197–201.

¹⁰ Bruya, p. 159.

¹¹ Harbsmeier, “The Semantics of *Qing* in Pre-Buddhist Chinese,” in Eifring, pp. 67–146.

¹² Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* in Early Chinese Thought,” in Eifring, pp. 37–68.

centuries BCE. This became an important matter of reflection as the forms of political ideology associated with the Zhou state became unconvincing and many thinkers developed an interest in resting claims of authority in the figure of the sage, that is, the person who in any given context knows what actions to take. With this in mind, intellectuals appealed to terms such as *qing* in order to elaborate their views on the human faculties that enabled a person to become a sage.

To delimitate the study, Puett chooses the *Xing ming zhi chu*, the *Xunzi*, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and the Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒's memorials.¹³ He argues that in the *Xing zi ming chu*, *qing* is the crucial term in the defense of the study of earlier traditions as natural and necessary. It refers to the natural ways in which humans relate to the world, in the sense of spontaneous responses to particular circumstances. These responses have a strong emotional component, and they should be refined with the internalization of *yi* (propriety), which is taught in the classics of *Documents*, *Poetry*, *Rituals* and *Music* through the representation of past exemplary actions and traditions. The *Xunzi* instead shows an ambivalence in the usage of *qing*: at times, it defines it as simply emotions that must be controlled through the artifice of rituals that past traditions established, and at other times the text represents such artifice as necessary to nourish and fulfill the *qing*. In other texts, however, *qing* was used against the defense of following past traditions. For example, in the *Huainanzi*, it refers to one's spontaneous responses, and propriety is achieved only by modeling oneself upon Heaven (*tian* 天) and *qing* to become ever more resonant with them. Perhaps in response to positions such as this, Zhongshu's memorials went to the other extreme and defined *qing* in purely negative terms, as nothing but desires that require constant restraint and regulation through the study of the past.

Despite the awareness that the uses of *qing* in early China go beyond the modern understanding of emotions, recent research has continued to struggle with the projection of this meaning into the ancient texts. For example, Chen Guying's 陳鼓應 article on *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* takes as point of departure the argument that before the Spring and Autumn period the term referred only to objective circumstances (*keguan de qing kuang* 客觀的情況), but during this time it began to refer also to people's true feelings (*zhen qing shi gan* 真情實感).¹⁴ Ulrike Middendorf, in turn, uses contemporary advances in the affective sciences to analyse the *Xing zi*

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 43–68.

¹⁴ Chen 陳, 2014, pp.50-59.

ming chu, and he argues that *qing* comes close to the modern concept of emotion in cognitive-motivational-relational and multi-component emotion theories, although the term in early China covered a much broader range of affective phenomena.¹⁵

The struggle of how to understand *qing* has not been, therefore, fully resolved. Neither the definition of emotions nor the alternative definitions as “essence” or “reality feedback” are fully satisfactory, because there is no concept that captures the complexity of *qing* in early China. One of the complexities is that *qing* sometimes refers to what today we understand as emotional states and feelings, for example *xi* (happiness), *nu* (anger), *ai* (sadness) and *le* (joy), whereas other times it refers to actions that we would situate in a different category, such as the acts of judging right from wrong (*shi fei*). Another difficulty is that *qing* sometimes qualifies people’s states and behaviours, whereas other times it refers to things — something that has not been stressed enough in the scholarship on *qing*. And finally, at least in some instances *qing* is assumed to be something central, and even the most fundamental characteristic of whatever it refers to, and this has certainly not been the place of emotions and feelings in the history of Western philosophy and psychology, very much focused on reason as the substance of the world and human beings. Taking these difficulties into consideration, it seems reasonable to infer that there is not one single definition of *qing*, but rather a diversity of uses within a semantic range that can be analysed contextually.

B) Modes of patterning (*li* 理) *qing*

The diversity and even antagonism of uses of *qing* is clear in the examples that academics choose to analyse the most, mainly passages from the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*. These differences led Graham to believe that the term changed meanings, and Hansen to argue that it played antagonistic roles in those two texts, despite holding one unified meaning. Puett, in turn, pointed out that the key to the different nuances of *qing* lay in the disagreement among a set of texts on whether or not *qing* should be shaped with qualities such as righteousness (*yi*) taught in the classics. Whereas the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi* first established the arguments in favor of such patterning, later texts such as the *Huainanzi* contested them. Hence understanding the *Xing*

¹⁵ Middelndorf, pp. 97-159.

zi ming chu and the *Xunzi*'s proposals is central to understanding any other text's standpoint on shaping *qing*. Whereas the *Xing zi ming chu* describes the cosmological origins and functioning of *qing* in order to justify its refinement, the *Xunzi* instead centers on how to shape it.

The *Xing zi ming chu* begins with the premise that people have natural inclinations but they are not fixed and rather depend on habits:¹⁶

凡人雖有性，心亡奠志，待物而後作，待悅而後行，待習而後奠。喜怒哀悲之氣，性也。及其見於外，則物取之也。性自命出，命自天降。道始於情，情生於性。始者近情，終者近義。

In general, although all people have *xing*, their heart-minds have no fixed inclinations, which depend upon [external] things to arise, depend upon gratification to take action, and depend upon practices to become fixed. The vital energies of joy, anger, grief and sorrow are nature; once they manifest externally, things take hold of them. *Xing* comes via *ming*, and *ming* is sent down from *tian*. The *dao* begins in *qing*, and *qing* is born of *xing*. [The *dao*'s] beginnings are close to *qing*, while its finalities are close to *yi*.

All people have *xing* 性 (nature), but their inclinations (*zhi* 志) arise only with the stimulus from external things, and they are put into practice when they provide satisfaction (*yue* 悅). When these inclinations are put into practice they become habits. Then the text provides an explanation for these statements: *qing* is born out of *xing*, and *xing* is made of *qi* 氣 (vital energy) of *xi* 喜 (joy), *nu* 怒 (anger), *ai* 哀 (affliction) and *bei* 悲 (grief). These in turn are given by *ming* 命, which is "fate, destiny or mandate" provided by heaven, *tian* 天. In other words, heaven delivers a mandate that includes human nature, and this is formed by the vital energies of states that we consider emotions. These in turn give rise to *qing*, which even though is not defined, it must be responsible for making *zhi* become habits when external impulses provoke a gratifying reaction, since the text argues not only that it originates in *xing*, but also that it is in turn the origin of the *dao* 道 or "world order." This *dao* refers to the world order that humans aspire to create, for the text continues to argue that its end is righteousness (*yi*). In other words, the order of the world depends on *qing* and human habits, whose purpose is righteousness.

¹⁶ See "*Xing zi ming chu*," in Scott Cook, p. 697-750.

Accordingly, the *Xing zi ming chu* further argues that one should shape one's character in order to give direction to one's nature:

知情者能出之，知義者能內。好惡，性也。所好所惡，物也。善不善，性也，所善所不善，勢也。[...] 凡心有志也，無與不可，性不可獨行，猶口之不可獨言也。牛生而長，雁生而伸，其性使然，人而學或使之也。

Those who know *qing* can bring it forth, while those who know *yi* can instill it. Liking and disliking belong to *xing*; the objects of that liking and disliking are [external] things. Excellences and deficiencies belong to [human] nature; the objects of these excellences and deficiencies are circumstances. [...] In general, the inclinations of the heart-mind are such that they do not take [action] unless they are induced. [That the heart-mind cannot] act on its own is like the mouth being unable to speak on its own. Oxen are born to spread out, and geese are born to line in formation - this is their nature. [Humans, however, are born] to learn, as there is something to give them direction.

Knowing *qing* allows to bring it forth, and knowing *yi* to internalise it. The following sentences explain the meaning of this. It is part of human nature to have likes and dislikes (*hao wu*), as well as excellences and deficiencies (*shan bu shan* 善不善). This implies that these feelings and qualities play a role in the reaction that external impulses cause in oneself, as well as in bringing *zhi* into practice. In other words, just like the mouth cannot speak on its own, human action depends on various elements: one's *xing*, one's *qing*, and the impulses received. And since unlike animals, one's nature has no fixed inclinations, humans are meant to learn about *qing* to bring their actions forward, and they are supposed to know about righteousness to instill it in themselves and others. Learning therefore gives humans a direction, by which they are able to shape themselves to behave according to righteousness.

For people to learn and instill righteousness to themselves, the sages (*shengren* 聖人) assembled the classics to instruct them:

《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《樂》，其始出皆生於人。[...] 聖人比其類而論會之，觀其先後，而逆訓之，體其義而節度之，理其情而出入之，然後復以教。教，所以生德於中者也。

The *Odes*, the *Documents*, *Rituals*, and *Music* in their beginnings arose from mankind. [...] The sages compared their types and arranged and assembled them; observed their succession and reordered them into better accord; gave embodiment to their *yi* and provided it with regularity and refined pattern; ordered their *qing* by pulling it out and reimplanting it; and then returned [all of this] to the people so as to instruct them. Instruction is that by which one gives rise to the *de* within.

The *Odes*, the *Documents*, *Rituals*, and *Music* were originally produced by humankind, and the sages gave them the best order and arrangement while embodying the righteousness represented in the texts and at the same time shaping it by providing it with measure and order; that is, in arranging the texts, the sages themselves shaped the righteousness that the texts transmit while also embodying it. In doing so, they patterned (*li* 理) their *qing* by practicing the cycle of bringing forth and internalizing. Then the sages could return their task to the people through the classics, in order to instruct them. And with their instruction, the people could give rise to their virtue (*de* 德) within, therefore completing the cycle of shaping their inclinations and produce a righteous social order.

The text goes on to elaborate further on these ideas, which do not fully define *qing*, but they give a fair amount of information about it. In mediating between *xing* and the *dao*, *qing* is responsible for bringing inclinations (*zhi*) into practice and creating habits. It reacts when one's physiological self receives stimuli that creates pleasant impressions. This is because *qing* emanates from *xing*, which is formed of the vital energies of joy, anger, affliction and grief. *Xing* also involves preferences and personality traits such as excellences and deficiencies. Therefore the way in which one's physiological self responds to input depends on the feelings that it generates as well as that person's preconceptions and personality qualities. This makes *qing* close to "sentiments," which include thoughts and opinions based on feelings about situations.¹⁷ These should be shaped in order to produce righteousness, and hence the sages arranged the classics while embodying *yi* in order to teach the people and give them direction.

The *Xunzi*'s argument on shaping *qing* is very similar to the *Xing zi ming chu*'s, although it emphasizes more *qing* as preferences and emotions that should be kept on check:

¹⁷ I distinguish "sentiments" from "emotions" as the neuro-physiological reactions to inputs, and from "feelings" as the conscious experience of emotions.

散名之在人者：生之所以然者謂之性；性之和所生精合感應，不事而自然謂之性。性之好、惡、喜、怒、哀、樂謂之情。情然而心為之擇謂之慮。

As for the various names that apply to people, that by which they are as they are at birth is called “[human] nature.” The close connection of stimulus with response, which requires no effort but is so of itself, and which is produced by the harmonious operation of nature, is also called “[human] nature.” The feelings of liking and disliking, happiness and anger, and sadness and joy in one’s nature are called “*qing*.” When there is a certain *qing* and the heart makes a choice on its behalf, this is called “deliberation.”¹⁸

According to this passage from the “Correct Allotment” (*zheng ming* 正命) chapter, nature (*xing*) is the way it is because it is given to humans by birth. Therefore, spontaneous (*ziran*) responses to external stimuli should be considered part of human nature, because the faculties that humans develop over the course of their life, such as thinking, do not interfere with them. Instead, when one deliberates, the heart-mind differentiates, chooses and discards among one’s feelings and emotional responses to external input. These feelings and emotional responses, which include likes and dislikes, as well as pleasure, anger, affliction and grief are defined in the passage as also part of nature, but more specifically, they are *qing*. Therefore, *qing* are the sentiments themselves that are given by nature but shaped with the external input and the influence of the heart-mind. Unlike in the *Xing zi ming chu*, *qing* here does not emphasize as much bringing inclinations into practice when external input produces a gratifying response as it stresses the feelings and emotions that the heart-mind is supposed to shape.

Other parts of the *Xunzi* emphasize even more the need to shape *qing* by using this term as concupiscible desires (*yu* 欲), which are not fixed but instead depend on the circumstances and the human control applied to them. For example, the “Honor and Disgrace” chapter states that for food men desire (*yu*) grass and grain-fed animals, for clothing ornaments and embroidering, for traveling carriages and horses, and overall men desire accumulation of wealth (“*yu cai xu ji zhi fu* 餘財蓄積之富”). However, if having to spend a long time in poverty (“*qiong nian lei shi* 窮年累世”), humans become numb to their needs (*bu zhi bu zu* 不知不足). The text considers this state

¹⁸ My translations of the *Xunzi* have partly relied on Eric L. Hutton, 2014.

also to be *qing*, since humans have both desires and the ability to constrain them with the heart-mind.

Since *qing* can take the form of both desires and their desensitization, in some passages the *Xunzi* emphasizes the importance of cultivating (*xiu* 修) and patterning (*li*) it, whereas in others the text speaks of nurturing (*yang* 養) and fulfilling (*jian* 兼) *qing*. For example, the “Discourse on Heaven” (*tian lun* 天論) argues that Heaven provides constancy to the world and that likes, dislikes, happiness, anger, sorrow and joy are heavenly dispositions, just like the abilities of the eyes, ears, nose and mouth and the rest of the body each have heavenly faculties. The heart-mind controls the five faculties, and for this reason it is called the heavenly master. Therefore, happiness (*fu* 福) is the result of according with what is proper to one’s kind (*shun qi lei* 順其類), and this involves nurturing one’s heavenly dispositions.

In order that people control their desires, nourish their *qing* and conform with what is proper to them, the former kings (*xian wang* 先王) established ritual (*li* 禮) and *yi* as contained in the *Odes* and the *Documents*:

夫詩書禮樂之分，固非庸人之所知也。故曰：[...] 以治情則利，以為名則榮，以群則和
[...] 先王案為之制禮義以分之，使有貴賤之等，長幼之差，知愚能不能之分，皆使人載
其事，而各得其宜。然後使穀祿多少厚薄之稱，是夫群居和一之道也。

For the social divisions contained in the *Odes* and *Documents* and in the rituals and music are not something an ordinary person will understand. Thus I say: [...] use them to order your *qing*, and you will gain benefit. Use them to find your reputation, and you will gain honor. Use them to live in a community, and there will be harmony [...] The former kings established ritual and *yi* in order to divide the people up and cause there to be rankings of noble and base, the distinctions between old and young, and the divisions between wise and stupid and capable and incapable. All these cause each person to carry out his proper task and each to attain his proper place. After that, they cause the amount of abundance of their salaries to reach the proper balance. This is the way to achieve a harmonious community life and the unity of the dao.

More specifically, this passage from the “Honor and Disgrace” chapter argues that since most people do not understand the *Odes* and *Documents*, they need those in power to study the *li* and *yi*

represented in them and established by the sage kings who founded civilization.¹⁹ With this knowledge, those in power are able to order their *qing* accordingly, as well as society. Ordering society according to *li* and *yi* means to divide the people according to the social rank, age and degree of knowledge that correspond to them depending on their *qing*. This way, people carry out the tasks that are suitable to them and therefore also accomplish what is proper to them. As a result, society has the harmony and unity of the *dao* or ideal world order that the sage kings established. In other words, unlike in the *Xing zi ming chu*, which emphasizes the sages teaching the *yi* from the classics to the people, the *Xunzi*'s emphasis is that those in power divide society according to the *li* and *yi* from the classics, so that people know what is proper to them, without the need to understand the classics themselves.

Qing in the *Xunzi*, therefore, refers to the sentiments that the heart-mind is supposed to shape, since they naturally tend to desires (*yu*) for material goods, but they can also be constrained until a person is numb to his needs. For this reason *qing* should be patterned while also nurtured. The classics of *Documents* and the *Odes* teach the rituals and righteousness that those in power should use to shape their *qing* and create a society according to the *dao* established by former kings. Although the *Xing zi ming chu* emphasizes more *qing* as the organism's responses to gratifying stimuli, as well as the role of education for the people to internalize *yi*, both texts present very similar arguments on the importance of shaping sentiments with the *yi* contained in the classics.

C) The phrase *xing ming zhi qing*

These arguments strongly in favor of shaping *qing* with the *yi* represented in the classics were opposed by a set of texts in which *qing* appears qualified by the words *xing* and *ming*, in the expression *xing ming zhi qing*. If the meaning of *qing* is difficult to decipher because it is never fully defined in the ancient texts, and its uses have no exact correspondents in modern languages, the meaning and uses of *xing ming zhi qing* are even more cryptic. While studies are limited to brief problematizations of the definition of the phrase, translations and commentaries often assume that it merely clarifies the cosmological origins of *qing*. Yet, an analysis of the arguments in which the

¹⁹ *Xian wang* 先王 refers to the sage kings previous to the Eastern Zhou, including the legends or semi-legends Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹 and Tang 湯. They are often portrayed in the early sources as exemplary figures of great moral character who ruled peacefully.

phrase appears reveals that it had a distinct use. With some variations, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and the *Wenzi* 文子 argue that comprehending (*da* 達), submitting to (*fu* 服) or preserving (*bu shi* 不失) *xing ming zhi qing* is the basis for putting into practice one's innate qualities, which are intrinsically benevolent (*ren* 仁) and righteous.

The *Lüshi Chunqiu* argues that comprehending *xing ming zhi qing* is the foundation for knowing how to preserve life:

今吾生之為我有，而利我亦大矣。論其貴賤，爵為天子，不足以比焉；論其輕重，富有天下，不可以易之；論其安危，一曙失之，終身不復得。此三者，有道者之所慎也。有慎之而反害之者，不達乎性命之情也。不達乎性命之情，慎之何益？[...] 夫弗知慎者，是死生存亡可不可，未始有別也。未始有別者，其所謂是未嘗是，其所謂非未嘗非，是其所謂非，非其所謂是，此之謂大惑。

Now my life is something that I possess, and the benefits I enjoy from it are indeed supreme. As for its nobility — it cannot even compare to the Son of Heaven. As for its value— it cannot even compare to the wealth of the whole world. As for its security — were I to lose it in a single morning, I could never again regain it. The person who possesses the *dao* is attentive to these three qualities. Although some people are attentive to them, they nonetheless damage them because they do not comprehend *xing ming zhi qing*. Without comprehending *xing ming zhi qing*, what is gained by being attentive? [...] Those who do not recognise what one should be careful about have not begun to make the distinction between the things that lead to death or life, survival or destruction, permissible and impermissible. Not having begun to make these distinctions, what they call “right” is never right and what they call “wrong” is never wrong. Right they call “wrong” and wrong they call “right.” This is called “great delusion.”²⁰

The person who accords with the *dao* takes care of the benefits of life, which are incomparable. Indeed, nothing equals it in rank, value or safety to life itself — not even the position of son of heaven, all the wealth of the world, or anything that men can secure, for everything depends on life. Because of this, everyone wants to be careful (*shen* 慎) with their life. However, some people try to do so and fail, because they do not make the right distinctions between the things that lead to preservation or destruction, and therefore to life or death. As a result, they call “right” what is

²⁰ My translations of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* have partly relied on John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, 2000.

wrong and vice versa. This is because they do not comprehend (*da*) *xing ming zhi qing*. In other words, knowing how to preserve life starts by fully understanding *xing ming zhi qing*, which allows one to make correct distinctions.

Knowing how to preserve life is, in turn, the basis for an ordered society in which no one shapes their *qing*:

至治之世，其民不好空言虛辭，不好淫學流說。賢不肖各反其質，行其情，不雕其素
[...] 君服性命之情，去愛惡之心，用虛無為本，以聽有用之言謂之朝。[...] 故治天下之
要，存乎除姦；除姦之要，存乎治官；治官之要，存乎治道；治道之要，存乎知性命。

In an age of perfect order, people dislike empty words, vacuous phrases, superfluous learning and ephemeral theories. Both the worthy and inept revert to their essential character and put their *qing* into practice without embellishing its simplicity. [...] If the lord submits to *xing ming zhi qing*, rids himself of the feelings of love and hate, uses emptiness and non-assertion as his base, and then listens to purposeful words, this is called “holding court.” [...] Therefore, the basis of ordering the world is eliminating treachery; the basis of eliminating treachery is ordering officials; the basis of ordering officials is ordering the *dao*; the basis of ordering the *dao* is understanding *xing* and *ming*.

Embracing *xing ming zhi qing* goes hand in hand with getting rid of the inessential in one’s character and returning to one’s essential qualities (*zhi* 質). When the ruler acts this way, the rest of the people follow his example, and by eliminating treachery society is ordered. More specifically, an ordered society starts with the ruler comprehending and submitting to *xing ming zhi qing* while disposing of futile feelings and actions. By discarding feelings such as love (*ai* 愛) and hate (*e* 惡), which can delude one’s actions, the sovereign is able to use the purity of his constitution as the bases for government. If he takes control of the *dao* this way, the people neither adopt empty and pompous words, nor superfluous learning or ephemeral theories. Because they are free of perfidy, they bring their original *qing* into practice without embellishing it. This contrasts with the *Xing zi ming chu*’s and the *Xunzi*’s views of shaping *qing* to produce a righteous world order.

Since *qing* is not to be modified, the *yi* and *ren* that the disciples of Kongzi 孔子 and Mozi 墨子 teach is fruitless:

孔、墨之弟子徒屬充滿天下，皆以仁義之術教導於天下，然而無所行，教者術猶不能行，又況乎所教？是何也？仁義之術外也。夫以外勝內，匹夫徒步不能行，又況乎人主？唯通乎性命之情，而仁義之術自行矣。

The disciples and followers of Kongzi and Mozi fill the world, and they all provide it with instruction in the techniques of *ren* and *yi*. Nevertheless, these techniques are not put into practice anywhere. If the teachers are unable to put their methods into practice, how can those they teach hope to do so? Why is this? Because the methods of benevolence and righteousness are external. If ordinary men on foot are not able to use what is external to overcome what is internal, how much less will rulers be able to do so! Only by penetrating *xing ming zhi qing* can one practice the methods of benevolence and righteousness by oneself.

The concepts of *ren* and *yi* were central to Kongzi's and Mozi's doctrines, correspondingly, and whereas the *Lüshi Chunqiu* does not criticise them per se, it argues that the disciples and followers who teach them are doing so incorrectly. Instead of considering *ren* and *yi* internal attributes in the people, the scholars who teach these qualities treat them as external techniques that are supposed to master the internal constitution of the people. However, the only way to be benevolent and righteous is to penetrate (*tong* 通) *xing ming zhi qing*, since this allows one to eliminate the inauthentic in oneself and to distinguish right from wrong. This contrasts with the *Xing zi ming chu*'s and the *Xunzi*'s adherence to instilling the *yi* transmitted through tradition into society, even though neither of these texts trace their reasoning back to Kongzi or Mozi.

Therefore, despite the fact that the *Lüshi Chunqiu* does not explicitly criticise neither the *Xing zi ming chu* nor the *Xunzi*, it uses the phrase *xing ming zhi qing* to oppose the arguments on shaping *qing* that these texts present. In short, complete understanding and embracing of *xing ming zhi qing* allows one to purify one's *qing* from feelings and sentiments in order to exercise its function without their interference. This means that for the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the proper functioning of *qing* is not to respond to external stimuli based on the feelings that they generate in oneself and that person's preconceptions and personality traits. Instead, *qing* is to bring into effect the recognition, not mediated by feelings and sentiments shaped through experience and learning, of *shi* and *fei* as what leads to the preservation and destruction of life respectively. Accordingly, a

benevolent and righteous society is achieved when the ruler and the rest of the people use their *qing* without modifying it with adopted techniques to shape their behaviour.

With a similar but more radical perspective, the *Zhuangzi* argues that preserving *xing ming zhi qing* is the only way to correctness (*zheng* 正),²¹ which instead becomes hindered when changing one's nature (*xing*) with *ren* and *yi*:

駢拇枝指，出乎性哉！而侈於德。附贅縣疣，出乎形哉！而侈於性。多方乎仁義而用之者，列於五藏哉！而非道德之正也。[...] 彼正正者，不失其性命之情。

A ligament uniting the big toe with the other toes and an extra finger may be natural growths, but they are excesses of potency.²² Excrescences on the person and hanging tumours are growths from the body, but they are unnatural additions to it. There are many arts of benevolence and righteousness, and the exercise of them arranges the five viscera. However, this is not the correctness of the potency of the dao. [...] That which is the right correctness is not to lose *xing ming zhi qing*.²³

Although the passage does not mention *qing*, the role that *xing ming zhi qing* plays in it manifests the text's opposition to distorting people's innate qualities. In particular, the *Zhuangzi* compares using models of *ren* and *yi* as techniques to order one's internal constitution to a physical malformation, which is an abnormal growth as well as an excess of the work of nature even if it springs out from nature itself (*xing*). Because of this, instead of changing one's nature, one should simply protect it by making sure one does not lose or neglect (*shi* 失) one's *xing ming zhi qing*. Consequently, *xing ming zhi qing* represents in the text one's innate dispositions which, unless disregarded and manipulated, unfold the potency (*de*) of the *dao*. Since such a display lets nature unfold its creative process, it constitutes the correct administration of the world (*zheng zheng*). From this perspective, the correct order is nature itself, and guarding it requires still less human agency and interference of sentiments than *xing ming zhi qing* in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* suggests.

²¹

²² Whereas I translate *de* as "virtue" in the *Xing zi ming chu*, I translate it as "potency" in the *Zhuangzi* because rather than deferring to ethics, it refers to the potentiality of the dao as it unfolds through nature.

²³ My translations of the *Zhuangzi* have partly relied on James Legge, 1891, Burton Watson, 2013, and Brook Ziporyn, 2020.

The sort of quietism that the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi* — most of whose passages on *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* are parallels — convey is not very different, even though according to these texts penetrating *xing ming zhi qing* requires some psychological work:

天愛其精，地愛其平，人愛其情。天之精，日月星辰雷電風雨也；地之平，水火金木土也；人之情，思慮聰明喜怒也。故閉四關，止五遁，則與道淪。是故神明藏於無形，精神反於至真，[...] 委而弗為，和而弗矜，冥性命之情，而智故不得雜焉。

Heaven loves its quintessence; earth loves its levelness; people love their *qing*. Heaven's quintessence is formed by the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, thunder, lightning, wind and rain. Earth's levelness is formed by water, fire, metal, wood and soil. People's *qing* is formed by thinking, forethinking, comprehensiveness [of hearing], clarity [of sight], happiness and anger. Thus if one closes the Four Gates [of perception]²⁴ and puts an end to the Five Extravagances,²⁵ then one will be immersed in the Way. Therefore when spirit illumination is stored up in the formless, and the quintessential spirit reverts to ultimate genuineness [...] there are responsibilities but no intentional action, harmonious actions but no boastfulness. There is the depth of *xing ming zhi qing*, so that wisdom and precedent are unable to create confusion.²⁶

The passage starts by defining *qing* as the combination of thinking, perception faculties and emotional states that are characteristically human. Indeed, just like heaven is formed by quintessence (*jing* 精) which fills the planets as well as the meteorological phenomena, and the earth is mostly characterized by levelness (*ping* 平) formed by the elements, humans have *qing* which include their abilities to perceive the outside world together with the mental and emotional spheres of themselves. Yet it is not by using these capacities and indulging in reflections and emotions, but on the contrary when closing the gates of perception and ceasing to search satisfaction in the outside that humans are able to immerse themselves (*lun* 淪) in the *dao*. This is because in making space in oneself for the spirit illumination (*shenming* 神明), one's quintessential spirit (*jing shen* 精

²⁴ Eyes, ears, mouth and heart-mind.

²⁵ This refers to five forms of pleasure seeking: gold (such as the use of utensils), wood (such as the prosperity of the palace), water (such as the pleasure of boating), fire (such as the beauty of cooking) and earth (such as the height of the tower). This meaning of the

²⁶ *Wenzi*: ...知而不矜，直性命之情，而知故不得害. My translation of the *Huainanzi* has partly relied on An, Liu, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, (trans. by Major, John S, Queen, Sarah A., Seth Meyer, Andrew, and Roth, Harold D.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

神) reverts to its utmost genuineness (*zhen* 真). This state in turn reveals the depth of *xing ming zhi qing*, which prevents from getting confused with external standards of wisdom.

Accordingly, the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi* also criticise the practice of external techniques of benevolence and righteousness.²⁷ Instead, it is only when truly comprehending (*cheng da* 誠達) *xing ming zhi qing* that benevolence and righteousness firmly adhere to oneself (*gu fu* 固附), and one is able to make decisions according to these qualities. From this perspective the texts, just like the *Lüshi Chunqiu* and the *Zhuangzi*, position themselves against using models to domesticate one's behaviour, but placing more emphasis in the internal process to penetrate *xing ming zhi qing* and its effects.

An analysis of the early sources where *xing ming zhi qing* appears, therefore, not only reveals that with minor argumentative variations it was used consistently and distinctly from *qing*, but also allows us to sketch the semantic range of the phrase. Unlike *qing*, *xing ming zhi qing* did not refer to the ways in which humans respond to external input based on sentiments as judgments and feelings developed with experience and learning, but to the people's natural ways of reacting to external influence. These must depend on the innate qualities of mind and character, behavioral tendencies and emotional dispositions of the people. Since they spring from nature, they produce actions that follow the natural course of life and are in harmony with the natural world and the rest of organisms functioning alike. For the texts that defend such world order or *dao*, *xing ming zhi qing* is consequently the guide for "right" and "wrong" as well as for benevolence and righteousness. Instead, acting on judgments and feelings obstructs the innate dispositions, so they should be relinquished while embracing *xing ming zhi qing*. Accordingly, its role in the texts implies that "xing" and "ming" qualify the meaning of "qing" by underlying the given nature of certain human dispositions.

²⁷ External techniques in the sense of skills that shape one's behaviour towards the world, as opposed to an internal transformation.

II. *Qing* in the *Zhuangzi*

A) The *qing* of things (*wu* 物)

Although the most researched pericope on *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* qualifies humans (*ren zhi qing*), the most common occurrences of this term in the text refer to other things, as in *wu zhi qing* 物之情 (the *qing* of thing), *wan wu zhi qing* 萬物之情 (the *qing* of the myriad creatures), *tian di* 天地之情 (the *qing* of heaven and earth), *shi zhi qing* 事之情 (the *qing* of affairs), and *ren yi zhi qing* 仁義之情 (the *qing* of benevolence and righteousness). Therefore the debate on *ren zhi qing* is part of a larger discussion. An examination reveals that *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* plays a central role in deliberations on whether or not people have ultimate control over the course of things, and what is the consequently appropriate attitude in the world. The “Da zong shi 大宗師,” the “Xu wu gui 徐無鬼,” the “Qiu Shui 秋水,” and the “Shan mu 山木” chapters argue that men cannot change the *qing* of things, the myriad creatures or heaven and earth, and therefore they should go along with the transformations of things without developing likes and dislikes.

The “Da zong shi” contains the most commented pericope on *wu zhi qing*, which argues that the lack of control that humans have over the course of things is due to the *qing* of things:

死生，命也，其有夜旦之常，天也。人之有所不得與，皆物之情也。[...] 夫大塊載我以形，勞我以生，佚我以老，息我以死。故善吾生者，乃所以善吾死也。夫藏舟於壑，藏山於澤，謂之固矣。然而夜半有力者負之而走，昧者不知也。藏大小有宜，猶有所遯。若夫藏天下於天下，而不得所遯，是恆物之大情也。

Life and death are fated — constant as the succession of dark and dawn, a matter of Heaven. There are some things which man can do nothing about — all are a matter of the *qing* of things. [...] The great clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death. You hide your boat in the ravine and your fish net in the swamp and tell yourself that they will be safe. But in the middle of the night a strong man shoulders them and carries them off, and in your stupidity you don't know why it happened. You think you do well to hide little things in big ones, and yet they get

away from you. But if you were to hide the world in the world, so that nothing could get away, this would be the great *qing* of the constancy of things.

The passage centers on a distinction between the *qing* of things and the great *qing* of the constant in things (*beng wu zhi da qing* 恆物之大情) in order to discuss the human tendency to hold onto life and possessions, and to suggest a different approach to them. Regarding the cycles of life and death, and their constant cycles of day and night, they do not depend on human will but on *ming* and *tian* respectively. Therefore there are limitations to the human ability to intervene (*de yu* 得與) in the order of things, which is due to *wu zhi qing*. Because of this, holding on to things such as life itself is in vain. Likewise with holding on to properties, since even the most well thought scheme to preserve them can fail. Instead, it is best to surrender to the course of events, which the text describes as “hiding the world in the world (*cang tian xia yu tian xia* 藏天下於天下).” This way, nothing escapes the extent of one’s boundaries. This is the great *qing* of the constant in things.

Although it is clear that *Zhuangzi* uses *wu zhi qing* and *beng wu zhi da qing* to discuss the human limitations over things, the exact meaning of these phrases has been debated by commentators. Some have associated the term to men’s emotions and feelings. For example, Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312 AD) commented that people carry feelings ranging from sorrow (*you* 憂) to pleasure (*yu* 娛) due to their limitations in obtaining things, and this is due to the *qing* of things as distinct from their principle (*li* 理).²⁸ Yet if people accord with the course of things, they have no need to discriminate between them, thereby their *qing* broadens in scope and corresponds with the world. This is for Guo the constancy of the great *qing* (*chang cun zhi da qing* 常存之大情). Other commentaries, instead, have understood the *qing* of things to refer to their inherent functioning, principle or order. Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (ca. 620-670 AD), for example, took it as the quality of things that sentiments obstruct (*zhi* 滯) when trying to change them, and *da qing* in *beng wu zhi da qing* as the true *qing* of the great *dao* which the people who do not try to control things comprehend.²⁹ Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (1935) in turn developed this interpretation, defining *qing* as the *li* of things, and *da qing* as the real condition (*zhen shi qing xin* 真實情形) of the myriad things.³⁰

²⁸ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, p. 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176-177.

³⁰ Chen 陳, 1999, p. 180.

Whereas reading the *qing* of things as emotions and feelings adds assumptions to the original text, the interpretation of *qing* as the functioning principle of things is coherent with the “Da zong shi.” The former analysis assumes that the objective of the original text is to discuss the feelings that humans develop in relation to the world, which the *Zhuangzi* does not mention. Instead, the latter explanation completes the message of the passage by elucidating that men cannot ultimately change the way that things work (*wu zhi qing*), but they can entrust the things that they hold on to the overall functioning of the world as an organic whole (*beng wu zhi da qing*).

This reading is coherent with other instances of *wu zhi qing*, such as a pericope in the “Letting be and letting go (*zai you* 在宥)” chapter which argues that trying to govern the world only disturbs the regularity of heaven while colliding with *wu zhi qing*:

鴻蒙曰：「浮游不知所求，猖狂不知所往，遊者鞅掌，以觀無妄，朕又何知！」雲將曰：「朕也自以為猖狂，而百姓隨予所往；朕也不得已於民，今則民之放也。願聞一言。」鴻蒙曰：「亂天之經，逆物之情，玄天弗成；解獸之群，而鳥皆夜鳴；災及草木，禍及止蟲。意！治人之過也！」

Hong Mang said, 'Wandering listlessly about, I know not what I seek; carried on by a wild impulse, I know not where I am going. I stroll and bustle around, and see that nothing proceeds without method and order — what more should I know?' Yun Jiang replied, 'I also seem carried on by an aimless influence, and yet the people follow me wherever I go. I cannot help it. Regarding letting them go, I wish to hear a word from you.' The other said, 'What disturbs the regularity of Heaven, comes into collision with the *qing* of things, prevents the accomplishment of the mystery of Heaven, scatters the herds of animals, makes the birds all sing at night, is calamitous to vegetation, and disastrous to all insects — all this is owing, I conceive, to the error of governing men.'

In this passage, both Hong Mang 鴻蒙 and Yun Jiang 願聞 seem to wander around without a particular aim, yet people imitate the latter and not the former. In order to let the people go, Yun interrogates Hong on his method. He argues that he has observed that everything in the world follows an order without the need of men governing anything, and in fact human government only disturbs the order of Heaven and defies the *qing* of things. This causes animals and vegetation to deviate from their natural development. Even though Yun seems to accord with their order, the fact that people follow him and he ruminates on his method shows that in fact he is not as carefree

as he seems to be. In other words, he is still trying to control the *qing* of things. From this perspective, this passage uses *qing* similarly to the *Da zong shi* chapter, and both Chen's interpretation of the term as the quality of things that sentiments obstruct as well as Cheng's definition of it as the principle of things apply.

The arguments that the *qing* of things cannot be controlled and that governing men only obstructs it are complemented by the suggestion in the “Xu wu gui 徐無鬼” chapter that the best way for a lord to end a war is to abandon his personal interests (*si* 私) while cultivating authenticity (*cheng* 誠) in himself and agreeing with the *qing* of heaven and earth (*ying tian di zhi qing* 應天地之情). Xu wu gui transmits this message to the marquis Wu, who wishes (*yu* 欲) to love (*ai* 愛) the people and to be righteous (*yi*) in order to put his soldiers to rest. Xu warns him that, actually, loving the people and being righteous with the goal of ending a war is the root of the conflict, since any attempt to accomplish something requires to adopt a specific form (*xing* 形) that even if it becomes consolidated, it will at some point be challenged or harmed, creating an external conflict (*wai zhan* 外戰). As a result, it is best to just accord with the order of the world, and to start with there will be no wars to end.

Another instance of “*wu zhi qing*” from the “Qiu Shui 秋水” chapter elaborates on how to align with the world order by arguing that creating judgements show a lack of understanding of the principles (*li*) of heaven and earth as well as the *qing* of things:

北海若曰：「以道觀之，物無貴賤；以物觀之，自貴而相賤；以俗觀之，貴賤不在己。[...] 以趣觀之，因其所然而然之，則萬物莫不然；因其所非而非之，則萬物莫不非。[...] 故曰：蓋師是而無非，師治而無亂乎？是未明天地之理，萬物之情者也。

Ruo of The Northern Sea said, 'When we look at them [things] in the light of the Dao, they are neither noble nor mean. Looking at them in themselves, each thinks itself noble, and despises others. [...] Looking at them with respect to their inclinations, if we regard a thing as correct because there is a certain correctness to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not correct. If we regard a thing as wrong because there is a certain wrong to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not wrong. [...] Hence the sayings, "Shall we not follow and honour the right, and have nothing to do with the wrong? shall we not follow and honour those who secure good government, and have nothing to do with those who produce

disorder?" show a want of acquaintance with the principles of heaven and earth, and with the *qing* of the myriad things.

Things are judged in comparison with each other and from the perspective of the person who judges, so any adjective that people give to things is relative to them, and does not belong to the things themselves. For example, each person considers himself noble, while despising others. Also, we believe that something is noble because other things are less noble. However, when looking at things from the perspective of their inclinations (*qu* 趣), if we consider them correct because they have a certain correctness, then there is nothing that is not correct, and likewise with their wrongness, since each thing has a certain correctness and wrongness depending on the perspective. Consequently, classifying the myriad things into "right" and "wrong," and on top of this to want to follow the "right" and avoid the "wrong" hinders the perception of the *li* of heaven and earth together with the *qing* of the myriad things.

Therefore, the uses of *wu zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi* are consistent with each other and play a crucial role in the arguments that people tend to want to control the course of things, be it natural events such as life and death, their own material belongings, or the behaviour of other people. As part of this tendency, people issue judgements on things, as the things they want to control become expressed in terms of categories. However, their attempts to are always ultimately frustrated, not only because the *qing* of things is outside of their control, but also because their efforts to fulfill their expectations manipulate and hence obstruct the natural functioning of the world. On this account, *wu zhi qing* refers to the ways in which things naturally function and evolve, that is, the way that they are, and consequently *wu zhi da qing* points to the way that the world is a whole.

Other instances of *qing* support this interpretation. For example, the "Men in the world (*ren jian shi* 人間世)" chapter discusses the proper way of engaging in the *qing* of affairs (*shi zhi qing* 事之情). Zi Gao 子高 exposes his tribulation when facing a mission entrusted to him, whose source is thinking that he may fail and consequently get punished. Zhongni 仲尼 in response warns him about two main considerations: *ming* and *yi*. Whereas the love of a son for his father is *ming*, the service of a subject to his ruler is *yi*. They have different denominations because one is determined by birth, whereas the other by society. Yet both are important because people can avoid neither of them. However, if people occupy themselves with deliberations such as the consequences

of their success or failure, this will just produce worries and anxieties in them that will affect their performance. Because of this, people should put aside any of these contemplations and forget about themselves (*wang qi shen* 忘其身) while engaging in the *qing* of the matters entrusted to them. In this case, *qing* refers to the core of affairs.

Another passage from the “Way of heaven (tian dao 天道)” chapter defines the *qing* of *ren* and *yi* (*ren yi zhi qing* 仁義之情). Kongzi argues that it means to be kind (*kai* 愷) and to love all things (*jian ai* 兼愛) while having no personal interests (*si*). In the line of argumentation of the other instances of *qing*, *ren* and *yi*, the responder, in this case Lao Dan 老聃, objects that seeking *ren* and *yi* is selfish in itself since these qualities introduce disorder into human nature (*luan ren zhi xing* 亂人之性). Instead he should just follow heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, the stars, and natural elements such as trees, all of which accomplish their function without interfering with the innate dispositions of other beings. In this context, *qing* refers to the defining characteristics of *ren* and *yi*.

Qing in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, not only referred to the functioning principle of things and the order of the world, but it had other related uses within the semantic range of the constitution and the core characteristics of the things it qualifies. Consequently, at least in most cases *qing* does not equal emotions, feelings or sentiments. Instead, the definition of “essence” is closer to it inasmuch as *qing* was used to point out the fundamental features of things. However, unlike “essence” and “substance” in Western intellectual history, *qing* did not convey a dichotomy between the unchangeable and the contingent properties of things. Instead, it referred to the constantly changing nature of things, which even though follow a regular order as pieces of an organic whole, they escape any human attempt to ultimately determine them. From this perspective, *qing* can also be understood as the inputs from reality on the basis of which humans discriminate the world, except that in the *Zhuangzi* *qing* cannot be grasped with the ordinary ways of knowing things, and in fact sentiments obstruct it. In the text, then, the *qing* of a thing does not refer to the ways that humans respond to external inputs, but to the things themselves.

B) The *qing* of humans (*ren* 人)

As part of the larger debate about the limits of human abilities to control the *qing* of things, the *qing* of humans plays a crucial role in more specific discussions on whether or not humans can or in any case should alter their nature. Whereas contemporary scholarship has focused on the dialog in the “De chong fu” on whether or not humans can be without *qing*, and have struggled to interpret the Zhuangzi’s view that inasmuch as *ren zhi qing* is “judging right and wrong” they can in the sense of avoiding to be harmed by their likes and dislikes, other chapters such as the “Dao zhi 盜跖,” the “Zai You” and the “Ze Yang 則陽” shed light on this argument. They defend that both indulging and restraining one’s *qing* corrupts one’s dispositions and hinders the natural course of things, bringing about negative feelings. The solution is therefore to unveil and nourish one’s basic dispositions by casting aside the human tendency to want to control things, so as to accord with the constantly changing world order, as a result not being affected by emotions.

The “Dao zhi” presents a dialogue in which Dao Zhi 盜跖 responds to Kongzi’s advice to abandon his disrespect of kingship and become a ruler himself by arguing that the *qing* of humans leads to frustration unless one is content with just satisfying one’s basic dispositions:

今吾告子以人之情：目欲視色，耳欲聽聲，口欲察味，志氣欲盈。人上壽百歲，中壽八十，下壽六十，除病瘦、死喪、憂患，其中開口而笑者，一月之中不過四五日而已矣。天與地無窮，人死者有時，操有時之具而託於無窮之間，忽然無異騏驥之馳過隙也。不能說其志意，養其壽命者，皆非通道者也。

Now I’m going to tell you about the *qing* of humans. Their eyes yearn to see colors, their ears to hear sounds, their mouths to taste flavors, and their wills to be satisfied. A man of the greatest longevity lives a hundred years; one of middling longevity, eighty years; and one of the least longevity, sixty years. Take away the time lost in nursing illnesses, mourning the dead, worry and anxiety, and there are no more than four or five days in a month when men open their mouths and laugh. Heaven and earth are unending, but men have a time of death. Take this time-bound toy, put it down in these unending spaces, and it is over as quickly as the passing of a swift horse glimpsed through a crack in the wall! No one who is incapable of gratifying his will and cherishing the years fate has given him penetrates the *dao*.

While exposing the view that in ancient times the people were virtuous (*de*) because society had not yet been established and they lived rudimentarily by using natural resources without hurting each other, Dao Zhi argues that the person who understands the *dao* is able to be at ease with just fulfilling the primary desires of their senses and will (*zhi qi* 志氣). This is because humans are characterized by their desire (*yu*) to gratify both their senses and their will, yet they also tend to feel sick, sad, worried and anxious. Indeed, the amount of time that they feel content is very little in comparison with the times that they feel frustrated, because their human limitations — such as the shortness of their lifespans — do not allow them to fulfill their aspirations when given free rein. For example, ruling the people involves controlling them, therefore any attempt to do so will ultimately fail, both because one cannot fully control the nature of things, and because any accomplishment is only temporary. Such is *ren zhi qing*. Given this, humans should not let their ambitions grow beyond gratifying their basic needs in order to nourish (*yang*) their life without contending with the environment and the rest of human beings. This way of living aligns with the *dao* which in the *Zhuangzi* is the natural order of the world.

On the contrary, both those whom the world admires because of their pursuit of rulership and those whom the world despises because of their search of wealth mislead their own genuineness (*zhen*) and strongly oppose (*qiang fan* 強反) their natural dispositions (*qing xing*), changing (*bian* 變) their *qing*. This is because their desires and ambitions go beyond satisfying the basic needs of their dispositions and require shaping them in a certain way for the sake of gain (*li* 利), which ends up having a negative effect on themselves and other people. For example, Huangdi 皇帝, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 became some of the most respected rulers at the cost of fighting the enemies for the conquest of territories, lacking filial piety, losing parts of their bodies, or getting imprisoned. The only difference between their actions and those of criminals is that the judgments of the people in power become the standard of acceptable behaviour, which places the actions contrary to this outside of the law. In short, both creating a certain order and opposing it for personal profit alters the natural course of things.

This argument accords with the “Pian mu 拑拇”s’ view that shaping one’s *qing* with *ren* and *yi* involves changing one’s *xing* as much as restraining oneself from benevolence determines (*jue* 決) one’s dispositions. Indeed, the chapter argues that *ren* and *yi* are not part of the human *qing* (*fei ren qing* 非人情), and compares the effect that adopting these qualities has on one’s

nature with a physical deformity caused by an unusual growth like a wart in order to illustrate that an excess of nature hampers the right functioning of the organism. This is because the person who branches off (*zhi* 枝) with *ren* obstructs (*sai* 塞) *xing* by pulling out its power (*zuo de* 擢德). This results in feelings of distress at the sufferings of the world (*you shi zhi huan* 憂世之患). However, rejecting *ren* altogether is not the solution either, for this prevents one's natural dispositions from developing social qualities and opens a breach to grow greediness for money and rank. In other words, regardless of the goal in controlling one's *qing*, it always brings a damaging outcome.

According to the “Mati 馬蹄” chapter, neither *xing* and *qing* nor *dao* and *de* separated until the sages created confusion by practicing *ren* and *yi*, since earlier the people had a constant *xing*, a common *de* and no desires (*wu yu*). Indeed, when men lived among nature they all had regular lives consisting simply of working the land and eating. They also considered themselves equal with animals and among themselves: having no knowledge (*zhi* 知), they did not discriminate between virtuous (*junzi* 君子) and unvirtuous people (*xiao ren* 小人). Therefore, they were pure and simple (*supu* 素樸), and because they did not try to obtain anymore than they needed, they let heaven follow its course (*tian fang* 天放). Yet people began to question all of this when the sages introduced not only *ren* and *yi*, but also everything else meant to shape one's behaviour, including rituals (*li*) and music (*yue* 樂). An excess of these practices corrupted the power of the *dao* (*daode*) and the nature of *qing* (*xingqing*), including the people's faculties of perception and discrimination.

As a result, when the people follow the general practice to govern their body and shape their heart-mind (*xin* 心), they escape (*xun* 遁) heaven, abandon (*li* 離) their *xing* and annihilate (*mie* 滅) their *qing*:

今人之治其形，理其心，[...] 遁其天，離其性，滅其情，亡其神，以眾為。故鹵莽其性者，欲惡之孽，為性萑葦蒹葭，始萌以扶吾形，尋擢吾性。

Nowadays, most men, in governing their bodies and shaping their minds, [...] they retreat from heaven, separate from *xing*, destroy their *qing*, and annihilate their spirit, just to be doing what the crowd is doing. Thus dealing with their *xing* like the farmer who is negligent of the clods in his soil, the illegitimate results of their likes and dislikes become the weeds and rushes of their *xing*. At first seeming to spring up to support our bodies, they gradually eradicate our *xing*.

In the context of a description of a border guard who either leaves the clods unbroken or breaks them up, this passage from the “Ze Yang” compares the results of the way that people in the present time patten (*li*) themselves to weeds and rushes that at first seem to support them, but actually end up damaging them. Specifically, when people shape their bodies and minds to conform with the generally established practices, they deform their likes and dislikes, which far from disappearing, end up growing to destroy their *xing*. Because of this, the people not only abandon their *xing*, but also their *qing*, their *shen* 神 (“spirit”), and consequently the course of heaven.

The “Yang sheng zhu 養生主” illustrates one case of a master and his disciples escaping (*xun*) heaven and turning their backs (*bei* 被) on their *qing*, as a result indulging in grief. It shows the disciples of the master Lao Dan 老聃 crying uncontrollably at his death, whereas Qin Shi 秦失 cries only three times, and when asked about his austere reaction, he explains that the fact that other people are mourning so intensely makes him realize that Lao Dan was not a true master. The reason is that he must have done something for his disciples to feel so attached to him that they react so emotionally at his death, even if he did not explicitly ask them. This shows ignorance of the fact that life and death follow a natural course with its corresponding “seasons” of opportunity, which if accepted and followed along, cause no grief (*ai*) or joy (*le* 樂).

When referring to humans, then, *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* points to their dispositions, which if given free rein cannot be satisfied, but if opposed or altered develop deformities which corrupt their nature and hinder the natural course of things. Specifically, *ren zhi qing* includes the desire (*yu*) of the senses and will to be gratified with external input, as well as their inclination to develop further ambitions, which because cannot be fulfilled, cause feelings of frustration, worry and sadness. This means that *qing* involves both men’s innate faculties and propensities, as well the sentiments that they develop in their interactions with the world, including judgements, feelings and emotions. Whereas the former are an integral part of the people’s constitution, the latter are contingent on the way they manage their basic dispositions. And since abandoning oneself to desires as well as constraining them is problematic, the solution for the *Zhuangzi* is to be content with satisfying one’s desires to the extent that they do not involve controlling the course of things, and therefore changing the things that cannot be changed.

Based on this analysis, the meaning of *ren zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi* is similar to *qing* in the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi*, although slight differences justify their opposite arguments on whether or not *qing* should be shaped with the *ren* and *yi* that the sages teach. Indeed, where the *Xing zi ming chu* portrays *qing* as bringing inclinations into practice based on external inputs and the people's qualities and sentiments, the *Zhuangzi* argues that *qing* are the people's inclinations themselves as well as the sentiments resulting from interacting with the world. And where the *Xing zi ming chu* describes *qing* as part of a cosmology originating in *tian* and ending in *yi*, the *Zhuangzi* implies a similar relationship between *tian*, *ming*, *xing*, *qing*, *dao* and *de*, except that the end of *dao* and *de* is not *yi*, but a return to a way of living previous to its becoming impaired by *yi*. As for *qing* in the *Xunzi*, it is also similar to the *Zhuangzi*'s inasmuch as it includes desires that should be limited, although where it mostly emphasizes feelings that should be shaped with the *ren* and *yi* from the classics, the *Zhuangzi* mostly signals the innate faculties and propensities that should be fulfilled. In short, *qing* in the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi* involves feelings, emotions and sentiments that humans develop through life and should pattern into *ren* and *yi*, whereas *qing* in the *Zhuangzi* primarily involves the people's innate dispositions that if determined either by *ren* and *yi* or the rejection of these qualities altogether cannot function properly.

This interpretation completes the view in the “De chong fu” that people can be without *qing* as “*shi fei*.” While arguing that virtue (*de*) does not depend on one's physical form but on the use of one's faculties, the text portrays the sage who is able to roam along with the course of things as abandoning common ways in which people misuse their capacities to live in society, including acquiring knowledge (*zhi*) to create stratagems (*mou* 謀), practising sophistry (*jiao* 膠) to produce embellishments (*zhuo* 斲), performing virtue (*de*) to mourn losses (*sang* 喪), and doing business (*shang* 商) to accumulate goods (*huo* 貨). This renunciation amounts to not using the human (*yong ren*) in order to nourish the heavenly (*tian yu* 天鬻), because having received their form from heaven, men do not need to live by their most distinctively human tendencies, the core of which are judging right from wrong and developing likes and dislikes. Consequently, when people do not purposely develop and indulge in these faculties, they are also not harmed by them (*wu yi hao wu nei shang qi shen* 無以好惡內傷其身). And given that they are part of *ren zhi qing*, when people abandon them, it can be said that they have no *qing*, although this does not literally mean its absence altogether, because sentiments are just the contingent part of *qing*.

Therefore, although the *qing* of humans does not require to be shaped, it still needs certain self-cultivation in the form of mastering the use of one's faculties. This involves recovering and preserving one's inborn dispositions from the abuses that humans tend to apply to them. Unlike the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi*, therefore, mastering one's faculties in the *Zhuangzi* does not mean patterning them, but on the contrary, freeing them from any alteration.

The epitome of this kind of mastery is represented in a figure that appears in the “Xiao yao you 逍遙遊” chapter. This figure is a spirit-man (*shen ren* 神人) who mounts the clouds while riding flying dragons and feeds himself with just the wind and dew. Nothing can hurt him (*wu mo zhi shang* 物莫之傷), and even though he does not occupy himself with worldly affairs, he is able to cause the world not to have calamities and instead have plentiful harvests. Jian Wu 肩吾 hears about this and cannot believe it, because such an entity seems too far removed from *ren qing* 人情. In other words, since the faculty of knowing is in itself flawed, one cannot use it to understand that a figure can exist which makes no use of the faculties associated with *ren zhi qing*, as a result not being affected by anything while contributing to the unfolding of the order of the natural world.

The *Zhuangzi*, hence, plays with the various layers of the meaning of *qing* when discussing *ren zhi qing* and *wu ren zhi qing*. Since overall in the text *qing* refers to the functioning principle of things, *ren zhi qing* points to the functioning faculties and propensities of human beings, that is, their constitution. Accordingly, both the passage that defines *ren zhi qing* as “judging right and wrong” and “likes and dislikes,” as well as the pericope that describes it as the desires of the senses and the will together with feelings make a point about the human condition: that men can avoid the tendency to follow desires, ambitions and sentiments that are damaging for themselves and the rest of the world, without changing their nature. And given that such tendency is part of *ren zhi qing*, but following it is not an essential feature, the *Zhuangzi* characterises as in a way “*wu qing*” the people who are able to refrain from it. *Wu ren zhi qing* therefore helps framing a view of *qing*, while further establishing an opposition to the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi*, by implying that the very desires, emotions and sentiments that these texts attribute to *qing* are actually not necessarily part of it, and consequently does not need to be patterned.

C) The *qing* of *xing* 性 and *ming* 命

While *qing* is part of the debate on whether or not humans should try to change their nature, *xing ming zhi qing* is at the core of more specific discussions of how to protect one's basic dispositions from harm. Although the commentarial tradition and contemporary scholarship has rarely distinguished between *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing*, a close analysis of the passages where these concepts appear in the *Zhuangzi* reveals that whereas the text argues that humans are ideally without *qing*, they should make sure they do not lose (*shi*) their *xing ming zhi qing* by either indulging in their inclinations or restraining them with *ren* and *yi*. Instead, people should simply appoint (*ren* 任) their *xing ming zhi qing* to make an appropriate use of their faculties. This involves freeing themselves from the tasks that fuel the desires, emotions and sentiments that are damaging for oneself and the rest of the world, so as to respond to external input with one's basic innate dispositions unobstructed. As a result, emotions remain balanced.

After arguing that people lose their *xing ming zhi qing* when abusing their nature, the “Pian mu” chapter moves on to advise simply rely on it to guide their behaviour:

吾所謂臧者，非仁義之謂也，臧於其德而已矣；吾所謂臧者，非所謂仁義之謂也，任其性命之情而已矣；吾所謂聰者，非謂其聞彼也，自聞而已矣；吾所謂明者，非謂其見彼也，自見而已矣。夫不自見而見彼，不自得而得彼者，是得人之得而不自得其得者也，適人之適而不自適其適者也。[...] 余愧乎道德，是以上不敢為仁義之操，而下不敢為淫僻之行也。

What I call excellence is not what is called benevolence and righteousness; it is being excellent in regard to your potency and that is all. What I call excellence is not what is called benevolence and righteousness, it is appointing your *xing ming zhi qing* and that is all. When I speak of excellent hearing, I do not mean listening to others; I mean simply listening to yourself. When I speak of excellent eyesight, I do not mean looking at others; I mean simply looking at yourself. He who does not look at himself but looks at others, who does not get hold of himself but gets hold of others, gets hold of what other men have and does not get hold of himself. He follows what other men follow, but does not follow himself. [...] I have a sense of shame before *dao* and *de*, and so I venture neither to raise myself up to holding on to benevolence and righteousness, nor to lower myself to the practice of excess and vice.

Since directing one's faculties for the sake of any profit damages them, the way to protect them is not pursuing any gain and hence not letting external influences alter them, instead just trusting the conduct that one's innate dispositions naturally deliver. Indeed, excellence does not reside in pursuing *ren* and *yi*, but in one's virtue, which is the potency of the *dao* and amounts to one's *xing ming zhi qing*. Therefore, one should simply appoint one's *xing ming zhi qing* to unfold *de*. Accordingly, excellence in hearing is not defined by listening to other things but to oneself, and likewise, excellence in sight is not determined by looking at others but at oneself. Because when people direct their faculties towards things other than themselves, they obtain (*de* 得) and follow (*shi* 適) things that do not belong to themselves. Instead, if one respects *dao* and *de*, one dares neither to rise oneself up to grasp *ren* and *yi*, nor to lower oneself to the practice of excess and vice.

However, when rulers try to change the *de* of the people in order to exert control, they confuse and destabilize them, making them unable to simply be at ease (*an* 安) with their *xing ming zhi qing*:

陰陽並毗，四時不至，寒暑之和不成，其反傷人之形乎！使人喜怒失位，居處無常，思慮不自得，中道不成章，於是乎天下始喬詰 [...] 故舉天下以賞其善者不足 [...] 匆匆焉終以賞罰為事，彼何暇安其性命之情哉！

When *yang* and *yin* are damaged, the four seasons will not come as they should, heat and cold will fail to achieve their proper harmony, and this in turn will do harm to the form of men. Men's joy and dissatisfaction are made to arise where they ought not to do so, their movements are all uncertain, they lose the mastery of their thoughts, and are unable to coherently complete their path. [...] If now the whole world were taken to reward the good it would not suffice, nor would it be possible with it to punish the bad. [...] Agitated and tumultuous, always occupied with rewards and punishments, what leisure have men had to be at ease with their *xing ming zhi qing*!

The passage is part of a larger argument in the “Zai you” chapter that if the government tries to control the feelings of the people, even if it manages to make them joyous, it will still cause them harm because it creates an imbalance of emotions in them. This is due to the fact that when one type of emotion is brought to emerge in people, it makes them lack the opposite kind of emotions and feelings. This in turn will affect their ability to manage their own faculties, losing control of

their own thoughts (*silu* 思慮) and coherence (*chengzhang* 成章) with the *dao*. In order to put order into this confusion, rulers then tend to offer rewards and inflict punishments with the aim of guiding the people's behaviour, but this only distracts people further from their *xing ming zhi qing*, having no opportunity to simply be content with it.

Instead, when people are at ease with their *xing ming zhi qing*, they do not get distracted by inputs that awaken in them emotions and feelings:

而且說明邪，是淫於色也；說聰邪，是淫於聲也；說仁邪，是亂於德也；說義邪，是悖於理也；說禮邪，是相於技也；說樂邪，是相於淫也；說聖邪，是相於藝也；說知邪，是相於疵也。天下將安其性命之情，之八者，存可也；亡可也；天下將不安其性命之情，之八者，乃始嚮卷、猖囊而亂天下也。

Moreover, do men delight in what they see? They are corrupted by colors. Do they delight in what they hear? They are corrupted by sounds. Do they delight in benevolence? They bring confusion to virtue. Do they delight in righteousness? They turn their backs on principles. Do they delight in rites? They are aiding artificiality. Do they delight in music? They are aiding corruption. Do they delight in sageness? They are assisting artifice. Do they delight in knowledge? They are assisting defects. As long as the world is at ease with their *xing ming zhi qing*, it makes no difference whether these eight delights exist or not. But if the world is at ease with their *xing ming zhi qing*, then these eight delights will begin to grow warped and crooked, jumbled and deranged, and will bring confusion to the world.

It is only when people are not at ease with their *xing ming zhi qing* that they develop delights that end up causing them trouble. Indeed, delighting (*yue* 說) in the senses corrupts them as much as delighting in *ren* and *yi* corrupt virtue and the functioning principle of things. Likewise, delighting in *li* and *yue* contributes to the creation of artificial and exaggerated means as much as delighting in sageness and knowledge contributes to the formation of skillful and flawed standards. However, if one is able to rest at ease in one's *xing ming zhi qing*, it does not matter whether these delights exist or not, because they cannot affect one's character and behaviour. In other words, the use of the senses, the practice of *ren*, *yi*, *li* and *yue*, as well as the cultivation of knowledge and wisdom are not problems in themselves, rather the problem is the delight and indulgence that results from neglecting one's *xing ming zhi qing*.

Xing ming zhi qing, therefore, refers to the people's innate dispositions which are distorted or even lost when they develop emotions, sentiments and therefore attitudes and behaviours that are influenced by external inputs challenging their natural responses. This is often the case when governments try to control the behaviour of the people by making them feel a certain way, because it prevents them from nourishing their own emotional responses which unless manipulated keep their organism balanced because they naturally accord with the functioning principles of the world. For this reason, when people allow neither external inputs nor their own sentiments to alter their own constitution, and instead just trust their *xing ming zhi qing* to lead their behaviour, they do not find pleasure in the things that would otherwise corrupt them, including the use of their faculties and the practice of *ren*, *yi*, *yue* and *li*.

Since *xing ming zhi qing* does not include the adopted sentiments, attitudes and behaviours but only people's inborn constitutions, it amounts to the fundamental side of *qing*. By defining *qing* as "judging right from wrong" and arguing that ideally men are without *qing* in the sense that they should not let their dislikes and dislikes harm them, the *Zhuangzi* presents the view that humans have the ability to interact with the world with more essential and beneficial tools than those that commonly result in characterizing them as humans. However, *wu zhi qing* defines such a way of relating to the world in negative terms, as what humans have to give up in order to achieve it. With *xing ming zhi qing*, the text formulates the aptitude that allows men to follow and unfold the natural order of the world.

Accordingly, the best person to govern the world is the one who is able to renounce the usual ways of using his faculties to govern, and instead is just at ease with his *xing ming zhi qing*:

故君子不得已而臨邪天下，莫若無為。無為也，而後安其性命之情。故貴以身於為天下，則可以託天下；愛以身於為天下，則可以寄天下。故君子苟能無解其五藏，無擢其聰明，尸居而龍見，淵默而雷聲，神動而天隨，從容無為而萬物炊累焉。吾又何暇治天下哉！

If the gentleman finds he has no other choice than to direct and look after the world, then the best course for him is inaction. As long as there is inaction, he may rest in the true form of his nature and fate. If he values his own body more than the management of the world, then he can be entrusted with the world. If he is more careful of his own body than of the management of the

world, then the world can be handed over to him. If the gentleman is able to keep from rending apart his five vital organs, from tearing out his eyesight and hearing, then he will reside in a corpse but have the vision of a dragon, he will be deeply silent but make the sounds of a thunder. His spirit will move in the train of Heaven, gentle and easy in inaction, and the ten thousand things will be dust on the wind. "What leisure do I have now for governing the world?" he will say.

The person who should be entrusted with the government of the world is not the one who chooses to govern, but the one who withdraws from his inclination to control the world and instead masters his own dispositions. By refraining from actively governing the world, he is able to just rest on his *xing ming zhi qing*, as a result preventing his faculties from being damaged, and therefore being able to optimise them. Indeed, even though it seems that such a person dwells in a corpse because he does not actively use his body to rule the world, his vision is that of a dragon, his voice is that of thunder, and his spirit moves along with *tian*. The text defines this as “*wu wei* 無為” or inaction, because that person is not doing anything on purpose to rule the behaviour of the people; instead, he is simply freeing them from any obstacles to follow the natural course of things.

Another passage that contains the phrase “*xing ming zhi qing*” from the “Xu wu-gui” chapter underlines the fact that letting go of control while submitting to one’s condition is the way to protect oneself:

徐無鬼曰：「君將盈耆欲，長好惡，則性命之情病矣；君將黜耆欲，擊好惡，則耳目病矣。」[...]武侯超然不對。少焉，徐無鬼曰：「嘗語君，吾相狗也。下之質，執飽而止，是狸德也；中之質，若視日；上之質，若亡其一。吾相狗，又不若吾相馬也。吾相馬，直者中繩，曲者中鉤，方者中矩，圓者中規，是國馬也，而未若天下馬也。天下馬有成材，若卹若失，若喪其一，若是者，超軼絕塵，不知其所。」武侯大悅而笑。

Xu Wu-gui said: “ If you try to fulfill all your appetites and desires and indulge your likes and dislikes, then you bring affliction to the true form of your inborn nature and fate. And if you try to deny your appetites and desires and forcibly change your likes and dislikes, then you bring affliction to your ears and eyes. [...]” Marquis Wu, looking very put out, made no reply. After a little while, Xu Wu-gui said, “Let me try telling you about the way I look at dogs. A dog of the lowest rank thinks only of catching its fill of prey — that is, it has the nature of a wildcat. One of the middling rank seems always to be looking up at the sun. But one of the highest rank acts as

though it had lost its own identity. And I'm even better looking at horses than I am looking at dogs. When I see a horse, if he can gallop as straight as a plumb line, arc as neat as a curve, turn as square as a T square, and round as true as a compass, then I would say he is a horse of the kingdom, but not as good as a horse of the world. The horse of the world has complete talents. He seems dazed, he seems lost, he seems to have become unaware of his own identity, and in this way he overtakes, passes, and leaves the others behind in the dust. You can't tell where he's gone to!" Marquis Wu, greatly pleased, burst out laughing.

In this pericope, Xu Wu-gui 徐無鬼 shows the marquis Wu 武 the way to balance indulging his likes and dislikes and restraining his senses by simply realizing that his dispositions are by themselves complete if he does not abuse them. Xu wu-gui starts by warning the marquis that fulfilling the desires of his senses (*shi yu* 奢欲) will only feed his likes and dislikes while making his *xing ming zhi qing* sick (*bing* 病), whereas abandoning those desires will tear apart his likes and dislikes while making his senses sick. Yet, there must be a way to neither make his *xing ming zhi qing* nor his senses ill. In order to make the marquis understand this, Xu Wu-gui ranks the possible characters (*zhi* 質) of dogs and horses. A dog of the lowest rank just cares about catching prey to satiate his appetite, one of middle rank has a more contemplative attitude that drives him to stare at the sun, and one of a higher character is able to behave breaking through his self-awareness. As for horses, there are those that learn skills that are not natural to them, such as galloping completely straight or in perfect circles, and those that behave spontaneously according to their natural talents. Whereas the former are ideal as horses of the state because they can follow orders, the latter are better equipped for the world. This explanation resonates with the marquis Wu who bursts into laughter, thereby stepping out of the afflictive dualism between abusing his senses or his *xing ming zhi qing*, and recreating the behaviour of the dog that loses his self-awareness or the horse that behaves spontaneously without questioning the completeness of his dispositions.

The person who protects his *xing ming zhi qing* without constraining his senses is therefore able to respond to external inputs with his innate dispositions and according to the circumstances, in a way that he agrees with the course of heaven without trying to impose his own desires and sentiments. Consequently, he is not hurt by the emotions and feelings that result from trying to control the course of things. Accordingly, any emotions and sentiments that he may

produce in reaction to impulses are not mediated by his likes and dislikes, and so he is able to maintain an impartial perspective on things. Therefore, *xing ming zhi qing* refers to the fundamental constitution of human beings, which can nonetheless be damaged or even annihilated when developing the harmful inclinations of the human condition, or *ren zhi qing*.

Conclusions

This study has shown that the uses of “*qing*” in “*wu zhi qing*,” “*ren zhi qing*,” “*wu ren zhi qing*” and “*xing ming zhi qing*” in the *Zhuangzi* are distinct from each other but also consistently interrelated, in a way that they cannot be fully understood in isolation. Indeed, I have argued that the text uses *qing* when referring to things in order to defend that men have no complete control over nature and the course of events, such as life and death. In this sense, *qing* broadly refers to the constitution and core characteristics of the things it qualifies, and particularly, to their functioning principle. In addition, I have shown that the text uses *qing* when qualifying humans so as to argue that most of the time they are afflicted because their senses and will have desires that are not satisfied, and because they are inclined to create judgements and develop likes and dislikes that become frustrated. In this context, *qing* mainly points to the human condition, and specifically, their inborn inclinations and propensities, as well as the desires, ambitions and sentiments that they develop through life. Therefore, when the text suggests that ideally men lack *qing*, it plays with the various layers of the term, inasmuch as it is in human nature to have tendencies that are harmful to them, but they are also able to refrain from developing them. Finally, I have argued that the *Zhuangzi* uses *xing ming zhi qing* to articulate the people’s ability to protect their inborn constitution from abuse and trusting it to lead their behaviour. In this regard, *xing ming zhi xing* refers to the people’s innate dispositions.

At the same time as the uses of *qing* in its various forms in the *Zhuangzi* must be understood in relation with one another, they also articulate a position in debates among various texts on patterning the people’s inclinations. Indeed, the view that shaping one’s *qing* only corrupts one’s nature responds to the arguments in the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xunzi* that people’s inclinations are not fixed by nature and should be shaped in order to produce a righteous world order. While these texts argue that one’s *qing* should be patterned with the *yi* that classics like the *Odes* and the *Documents* teach, the *Zhuangzi* defends that doing so deforms one’s dispositions in a way that they further develop the very tendencies that are intended to be patterned. In this debate, each text understands *qing* in slightly different ways, with the *Xing zi ming chu* taking it close to

sentiments and the *Xunzi* emphasizing emotions and desires, whereas the *Zhuangzi* brings a sense of human nature to the term.

Just like *ren zhi qing* in the *Zhuangzi* establishes a dialogue with other early texts that use the term, *xing ming zhi qing* can also be seen to respond to other sources where the phrase appears. Certainly, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi* together with the *Zhuangzi* argue that embracing one's *xing ming zhi qing* allows to purify one's *qing* from feelings and sentiments in order to exercise its function without their interference. However, whereas the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi* argue that comprehending one's *xing ming zhi qing* allows to achieve truthful judgements on *shi fei*, resulting in benevolence and righteousness, the *Zhuangzi* takes this viewpoint to a more radical perspective, by defending that appointing one's *xing ming zhi qing* to lead one's behaviour allows to abandon judgements altogether and unfolds the potency of the *dao*. In this context, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi* understand *xing ming zhi qing* as a purified version of *qing* as human dispositions, whereas the *Zhuangzi* connects the term with the natural world order (*dao*) itself.

Analysing the early discussions in which *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* played a crucial role also sheds light into the disagreements in the secondary scholarship. Where Graham found an essentialist meaning in the term as the *Zhuangzi* uses it, and a very distinct meaning in the *Xunzi* as men's feelings and passions, I have argued that desires and sentiments are also part of the *qing* of humans in the *Zhuangzi*, although overall this text uses the concept to make a point about human condition. In relation to Hansen's interpretation that *qing* in the early texts referred to the "inputs from reality" on the basis of which humans discriminate reality, I have shifted his perspective to emphasize that the *qing* of humans can be understood as their reactions to external input based on their innate dispositions and the sentiments that they develop through life. Overall, though, I have adhered mostly to Puett's suggestion that the best way to approach *qing* in early China is through the examination of the debates in which it appears, particularly, on whether or not people should pattern their *qing* with *ren* and *yi*. To his approach, I have added further inferences on the function and meaning of *qing* in each context.

While I have tried to shed some light on the phrase "*xing ming zhi qing*" in the *Zhuangzi* and its implications for understanding *qing* in early China, further research is required to better understand it. In particular, while I have given a coherent view of the phrase within the *Zhuangzi*

and in relation to other texts through close textual analysis of the sources, the inferences on its meaning run the risk of encapsulating it into the very discriminations that the *Zhuangzi* tries to deconstruct. In addition, such inferences on the meaning of the phrase can imperil advancement of contemporary research beyond the attempts of defining it. Therefore, more emphasis should be put into further researching the questions, debates and arguments where *qing* and *xing ming zhi qing* played a role. At the same time, the study of these matters offers a rich ground for the fields of philosophy and psychology, since the concept of *qing* in early China conveys views on human nature and behaviour outside of the dualisms between substance and accidents, and reason and emotions.

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