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# Ideals and Techniques of Rulership in the Huainanzi: Analysis of Relevant Terms: Shen, Shenming and Shenhua

Linh D. Vu

Connecticut College, [vu.dam.linh@gmail.com](mailto:vu.dam.linh@gmail.com)

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History Department

## History Honors Papers

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*Year 2007*

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**Ideals and Techniques of Rulership in the *Huainanzi***

***Linh D. Vu***

*Ideals and Techniques of  
Rulership  
in the Huainanzi*

*Analysis of Relevant Terms: Shen, Shenming and  
Shenhua*

An Honor's Thesis presented by  
Linh D. Vu  
to The History Department in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Honors in the Major Field

Prepared under the direction of  
Professor Sarah Queen, Primary Advisor  
Professor Judson Murray, Secondary Advisor  
Professor Alexis Dudden, Secondary Advisor

Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut

## Table of Contents

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*Acknowledgements* 3

*Introduction* 5

*Shen* 14

*Shenming* 47

*Shenhua* 73

*Conclusion* 89

*Bibliography* 94

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## Chapter I - Introduction

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### *The Huainanzi*

The *Huainanzi* 淮南子<sup>1</sup> ('The Master of Huainan') is believed to have been composed by many authors of different schools of thought under the patronage of Liu An 劉安 (179 – 122 BC), a prince who inherited one-third of his father's kingdom and turned his state, *Huainan* 淮南, into a cultural center of the time. Liu An was reputed as a talented and dedicated scholar whose role in compiling the *Huainanzi* was most significant. In 139 B.C., he paid homage to the emperor in Chang-an and presented his newly written book to the young ruler, Emperor Wu 漢武帝, who was also Liu An's nephew in the hope of influencing the imperial court's political tendency. However, due to the struggle among different political circles at the emperor's palace, Liu An was consequently accused of treason and committed suicide, and the authors of the *Huainanzi* failed to realize their visions of re-structuring the empire.<sup>2</sup> The *Huainanzi* is an ambitious project that contains twenty-one chapters covering discussions of the Way (Dao 道), cosmology, astronomy, philosophical discussions, historical and semi-historical fables, rituals and customs, military techniques, and, most pervasive, the ideals and techniques of rulership.<sup>3</sup> Fascinated by

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as *Huainan honglie* 淮南鴻烈 (The Great Brilliance of Huainan).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Liu An's life and the composition of the *Huainanzi*, see Vankeerberghen 1-78 and Wallacker 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> The twenty one chapters of the *Huainanzi* are:  
Chapter I: The Original Way [*Yuandao* 原道訓]

the text's remarkable and unique view on government, I choose to focus on the three significant concepts belonging to the rulership theme in the *Huainanzi*: spirit, spirit-illumination, and spirit-transformation.

In terms of the school affiliation of the *Huainanzi*, Moss Roberts claims that it is “a collection of essays called *xun* 訓 (teachings) that were profoundly informed by the Dao De Jing” (8). Harold Roth reasons that the *Huainanzi* appeared at the final stage of the history of early Daoism, around second century B.C. (123). It is called the “Syncretist” phase, represented by the Huang-Lao manuscripts, several essays from the *Guanzi* 管子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and the *Huainanzi* (Roth 123). According to Roth, besides the presence of cosmology and transformation, this phase also emphasized “the precise coordination of the political and cosmic orders by the

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Chapter II: Primordial Genuineness [*Chuzhen* 俶真訓]

Chapter III: Celestial Patterns [*Tianwen* 天文訓]

Chapter IV: Terrestrial Forms [*Zhuixing* 墜形訓]

Chapter V: Seasonal Ordinances [*Shize* 時則訓]

Chapter VI: Surveying Obscurities [*Lanming* 覽冥訓]

Chapter VII: The Quintessential Spirit [*Jingshen* 精神訓]

Chapter VIII: The Basic Warp [*Benjing* 本經訓]

Chapter IX: The Ruler's Craft [*Zhushu* 主術訓]

Chapter X: Profound Evaluations [*Miucheng* 繆稱訓]

Chapter XI: Integrating Customs [*Qisu* 齊俗訓]

Chapter XII: Responses of the Way [*Daoying* 道應訓]

Chapter XIII: Far-reaching Assessments [*Fanlun* 汎論訓]

Chapter XIV: Explaining Maxims [*Quanyan* 詮言訓]

Chapter XV: An Overview of Military Affairs [*Binglue* 兵略訓]

Chapter XVI: A Mountain of Persuasions [*Shuoshan* 說山訓]

Chapter XVII: A Forest of Persuasions [*Shuolin* 說林訓]

Chapter XVIII: Human Relations [*Renjian* 人間訓]

Chapter XIX: The Duty of Cultivation [*Youwu* 脩務訓]

Chapter XX: The Ultimate Ancestor [*Taizu* 泰族訓]

Chapter XXI: An Overview of the Essentials [*Yaolue* 要略].

Based on the Chinese original text and translation of passage [21/223/21-28] (Major and Queen, et al. 2)



thus-enlightened ruler,” and “a syncretic social and political philosophy” that borrows from the Legalist and Confucian schools (123). These subjects are well represented in the *Huainanzi*. Furthermore, many scholars agree that the description of *Daojia* 道家 (the Daoist school) by Sima Tan 司馬談 in the essay “On the Six Lineages of Thought” of *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* by Sima Tan and Sima Qian 司馬遷 c. 100 BC) clearly reflects the content of the *Huainanzi* (Roth and Queen in de Bari 268-269). According to the essay, Daoism is one of the six great schools (the other five are: the Naturalist, the Confucian, the Mohist, the Legalist and the Terminologist school), and it borrows the finest elements from the other schools and is thus considered as the most excellent in terms of both theory and practice. The Daoists are said to focus on preserving the numinous essence, acting according to the seasonal changes, and minimizing their affairs by complying with the cosmic order <sup>4</sup> (Roth and Queen in de Bari 278-282). Moreover, the *Huainanzi* is classified by Arthur Wright as a representative of the ‘establishment political Daoism’ school because it emphasizes the legitimate authority of an enlightened ruler and promotes social hierarchy (Wright 1969, pp 248-255). However, it lauds the non-assertive form of governing consisting of minimal use of laws and policies that are favored by the Legalists; in addition, it even diminishes righteousness and humaneness that are presented as ideals of rulership in Confucian texts. Although they are from different schools of thought, the authors seem to contend almost in unison that the state functions well through the ruler’s achievement of a higher form of knowing and his transformation of the populace back to

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<sup>4</sup> Sima Tan’s lecture: “*The Daoists enable the numinous essence within people to be concentrated and unified. They move in unison with the Formless and provide adequately for all living things. In deriving their techniques, they follow the grand compliances of the Naturalists, select the best of the Confucians and Mohists, and extract the essentials of the Terminologists and Legalists. They shift [their policies] in accordance with the seasons and respond to the transformations of things. In establishing customs and promulgating policies, they do nothing unsuitable. Their tenets are concise and easy to grasp; their policies are few but their achievements are many.*” (Roth and Queen in de Bari 1993, 278-282) (*italic added*)

their natural state. Nevertheless, the complex and multidimensional arguments presented in the book cannot be simplified into one broad claim. I made an effort to enumerate relevant terms (spirit, spirit-illumination, and spirit-transformation), and analyze them in their contexts in order to understand their different nuances because I believe that the understanding of terminology is important, especially for such an esoteric text as the *Huainanzi*.

### ***Content***

The key terms that I regard as most relevant to the ideals and techniques of rulership in the *Huainanzi* are: *shen* 神 (spirit), *ming* 明 (illumination), and *hua* 化 (transformation); furthermore, together they form two additional concepts: *shenming* 神明 (spirit-illumination) and *shenhua* 神化 (spirit-transformation). The authors of the *Huainanzi* assert that the meaning of life is to return to the primordial state<sup>5</sup> through self-cultivation because human beings have been demoralized by their contact with civilization. The term ‘spirit’ can roughly be defined as the mentality and quintessence inherent to a human being, who has been influenced by man-made civilization and lost it. This notion of human spirit and quintessence is quite comparable to the idea of the Absolute Spirit and human essence in Hegelian and Marxian thought. The human essence is something more complex than our rationality can explain. Yet, in the process of discovering ourselves, we can get closer to the understanding of and repossession of the concept.

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<sup>5</sup> The primordial/original state that the authors of the *Huainanzi* are in favor of is the state at the beginning of time when the universe is still in utter chaos [*hundun* 混沌], and has not differentiated itself into Heaven and Earth. This original state signifies a society without any class, rank, or distinction. This society is characterized by simplicity, tranquility, and harmony. In terms of the human mind, the original state is one in which human beings only know of their true emotions that are given by Heaven. Their mind is free from worries, lusts, and preferences. This is what the authors of the *Huainanzi* refers to as the ideal state, and the goal of life is to reserve the differentiating process of the cosmos, going from multiplicity to oneness.

The loss of human essence through contact with civilization in the *Huainanzi* is similar to the self-alienation of human beings through religion and industrialization.<sup>6</sup> Without the refined spirit, human beings become evil, and a state of disorder and contention prevails in the society. The aim of the perfect government envisioned in the *Huainanzi*, therefore, is to enlighten (*ming* 明) the people and transform (*hua* 化) their polluted mentality back to the original state of true feelings (*qing* 情) even before rationality arose. In order to accomplish this universal restoration, the ruler must first commit himself to the way of the *Dao*, i.e., conforming to the patterns of Heaven and Earth, practice austerity and embrace tranquility and emptiness. He will then achieve a higher form of knowledge (*shenming*) and can transform his subjects with his aura of cultivated spirit (*shenhua*). When the people become good, harsh laws and severe punishments, which, in actuality, cause harm to the society's well-being, are no longer necessary. Even values of humaneness and righteousness become secondary. The result will be a completely harmonious human body and society, modeled upon the universal order.

### ***Outline***

As I have mentioned above, the *Huainanzi* is a text of different authors pulling materials from various sources. Chapter II is meant to accomplish the task of analyzing various connotations of *shen* 神 (spirit). The term 'spirit' contains different meanings that require thorough analysis, such as the divine substance of the cosmos, supernatural entities, spirit-like characteristics, and, most importantly, the human quintessence and the cultivated essence of the

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<sup>6</sup> See "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" in which Marx criticizes religion as the opium of the people, and *The Capital*, in which Marx demonstrates that the estrangement of human beings from their species-essence is caused by the tenuous work in the factory.

sage and the Perfected Man [*zhiren* 至人]<sup>7</sup>. The last two meanings of *shen* are most relevant to the discussion of the ideals and techniques of rulership in the sense that they signify the existence of a special substance inherent to all human beings, governing their perception and rational facilities; therefore ruling the people is essentially to act on *shen*. The two concepts of spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明] (Chapter III) and spirit-transformation [*shenhua* 神化] (Chapter IV), based on the postulation of the presence and mechanisms of spirits, seem to be the most significant to the understanding of ideals and practices of rulership proposed in the *Huainanzi*. The functions of *shenming* and *shenhua* rely on the theory in the Daoist cosmology that one's vital energy (*qi* 氣) is able to resonate through space due to the omnipotence and omnipresence of *qi*. The ruler who cultivates his Heaven-endowed *qi* to the spirit-like level (*shen* 神) can perceive and make use of the flows of the vital energy, allowing him to understand things clearly (spirit-like discernment, *shenming* 神明), and to transform the people miraculously (spirit-like transformation *shenhua* 神化). The two concepts signify a distinctive perception of rulership, in which the leader is not ruling from above; rather, he, together with the people, participates in a self-cultivation program for life. The ultimate goal of self-cultivation is the return to the primordial state, starting from individuals (from the ruler to the people), to the society, and finally to the whole universe. The advocates of *shenming* seem to argue that the resonant effect of his cultivated essence and spirit (known by various names: *shenqi* 神氣 [spirit-like qi], *shen* 神 [spirit] or *jingshen* 精神 [quintessential spirit]) reach the people, allowing them to cultivate

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<sup>7</sup> The Perfected Man is one who has successfully preserved and cultivated his essence and spirit. He represents the highest form of existence: he has become one with the Way, and thus there is nothing he cannot accomplish.

their own spirits. Spirit-illumination can create and transform the myriad things<sup>8</sup> as it has the power of the ‘spirit’ (will, intention) and ‘light’ (sunlight). *Shenhua* is the transformation of the people’s essence and consciousness by means of the ruler’s genuine emotions (*qing* 情).

According to the principles of *shenhua*, the ruler and the people are engaged in a symbiotic relationship - one relies on the other to fulfill their respective interest. In order to make this system work, they must be sincere, expressing only their true feelings in their actions. Because of the remarkable result, the process of enlightenment and transformation is said to resemble a god’s doing (spirit-like, *shen*), which can be another interpretation of *shenming* (spirit-illumination) and *shenhua* (spirit-transformation). The final chapter is devoted to tying together discussions of different concepts, and looking into the relevance and significance of the *Huainanzi* among its audience of different eras and cultures.

### ***Methodology***

First, I have consulted a number of primary and secondary works in this area in order to have a fundamental understanding of different early Chinese schools of thought, especially Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism. This is important in analyzing the *Huainanzi* as it is a syncretic book composed by multiple authors pulling materials from other texts. Second, I have tried to gather all existing translations<sup>9</sup> of the *Huainanzi* in English in order to tackle the problem of the text’s ambiguous terms. I tried to compare different translated versions so as to illuminate the original meaning. I found a number of translated versions of selected chapters. The following list of materials is used in my project, arranged by time. Frederic H. Balfour translated

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<sup>8</sup> ‘The myriad things’ is the translation of *wanwu* 萬物, which means the million (*wan*) things (*wu*) or everything.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on English translation of the text, see Le Blanc 15-16.

Chapter I in *Taoist Texts: Ethical, Political, and Speculative* (1884). Evan Morgan translated and annotated chapters I, II, VII, VIII, XII, XIII, XV and XIX in *Tao The Great Luminant: Essays from Huai Nan Tzu* (1934).<sup>10</sup> Benjamin E. Wallacker translated and annotated Chapter XI in *The Huai-nan-tzu, Book Eleven: Behavior, Culture and the Cosmos* (1962). Charles Le Blanc translated and commented on chapters VI in *Huai-nan-tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought* (1985). John Major translated and commented extensively on chapters III, IV and V in *Heaven, Earth and Man in Early Han Thought* (1993). Roger Ames translated and commented extensively on Chapter IX in *The Art of Rulership* (1994). D.C. Lau and Roger Ames introduced and translated Chapter I in *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source* (1998). Many scholars have translated isolated passages from the *Huainanzi*.<sup>11</sup> I am fortunate to have access to the translated text of the *Huainanzi* completed by Professors John Major, Sarah Queen and other scholars. The project, entitled *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Royal Government in 139 B.C.E.* by Liu An, King of Huainan, will be the first complete English translation of the book. Citations and page numbers in this project are based on the draft version and might not match those in the final translation. Last, in large part of the project, I offer my own interpretation of the passages based on my limited background knowledge of classical Chinese philosophy, and thus I cannot avoid inaccuracy. As I have no access to a published Chinese version of the

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<sup>10</sup> An online version of Morgan's book can be found at: <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/tgl/index.htm>>. This translation is said to be incomplete and incorrect by some scholars; however, I still relied on its translation of Chapter II and provided Chinese original text for reference.

<sup>11</sup> The texts that I used in this projects are: Cleary, Thomas F. translated passages concerning with leadership and strategy in *The Tao of Politics: Lessons of the Masters of Huainan* (1990). Harold Roth translated passages from Chapter I, II, VII and XIV in "The Inner Cultivation Tradition" in *Religions of China in Practice* (1996). Michael Puett translated passages from Chapter VII in *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (2002). See bibliography for the complete list.

*Huainanzi*, I relied on one online version<sup>12</sup> and use it to have a better grasp of the English version and for readers' reference.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wang, Li-Ching. 淮南子 *Huai Nan Zi*. Copyrights 2002. Geocities. December 1st, 2006. <[http://www.geocities.com/fengshui\\_clasicos/HuaiNanZi.html](http://www.geocities.com/fengshui_clasicos/HuaiNanZi.html)>. There are a number of other online versions:

1. <http://www.zhaoxia.net/pinshu/huainanzi/index.htm> (First 10 chapters)
2. [http://www.yasue.cc/wai\\_nam\\_chi.html](http://www.yasue.cc/wai_nam_chi.html) (All 21 chapters)
3. <http://ef.cdpa.nsysu.edu.tw/ccw/01/hnz.htm> (All 21 chapters)
4. <http://www.guoxue.com/zibu/huainanzi/hnzml.htm> (All 21 chapters)
5. <http://www.tianyabook.com/gudian/huainanzi/index.htm> (All 21 chapters)

<sup>13</sup> Some characters cannot appear because the Chinese font that I use does not support them.

## Chapter II: *Shen*

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In this chapter, I seek to explain the concept of *shen* [神] used in different chapters of the *Huainanzi*. The character *shen* [神] is usually translated as ‘spirit.’<sup>14</sup> *Shen* in the *Huainanzi* however seems to describe many different things: the transcendent spirit of the cosmos, a supernatural entity, the spirit within human beings and their cultivated essence, the spirit of sages, the spirit of the Perfected Man, and the god-like quality of an action.

### *Shen as the Numinous Qi*

*Shen* [神] is used to describe the substance which, at the beginning of time, formed Heaven and Earth, or in other words, the numinous force of the cosmos:

Long ago, in the time before there existed Heaven and Earth, there was only figure (*xiang*) without form (*xing*) [惟像無形]. Obscure, dark, vast, and deep - no one knows its gate. There were two spirits born together [有二神混生], they aligned Heaven, they oriented Earth [經天營地]. So vast – no one knows its end or limit! So overflowing – no one knows where it stops! Thereupon, they divided and became yin and yang, separated and become the eight pillars. [別為陰陽，離為八極] Hard and soft completed each other, and the myriad things were thereupon formed (*xing*). (Puett 271)

The turbid *qi* [煩氣] became creatures,  
 The refined *qi* [精氣] became human.  
 Therefore the Quintessential Spirit [*jingshen* 精神] is of Heaven  
 And the skeletal system [*guhai* 骨骸] is of Earth.  
 When the Quintessential Spirit enters its gateway [精神其門]  
 And the skeletal system returns to its root [根],

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<sup>14</sup> Some scholars such as Roth translate it as ‘numen’ or ‘primal numen.’



How can I still survive?  
[7/54/24-55/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 1-2)

*Shen* is a spirit-like matter born out of murkiness (the undifferentiated state), and it directs the formation of Heaven and Earth. This notion of spirit (*shen*) is somewhat comparable to the Hegelian concept of the world spirit (*geist*), which is responsible for historical progress by means of its transcendent consciousness, and supersedes human perception and rationality. The two spirits [*er shen* 二神] in this context are equivalent to the rational mind of the cosmos as they are responsible for all formation: they align and orient Heaven and Earth, establish directions, and create the myriad things according to the Way.<sup>15</sup> However, unlike the single *geist*, the birth, co-existence and cooperation of the two spirits signify a dualistic worldview usually promoted in ancient Chinese philosophy. Different from the Absolute Spirit that aims to triumph over itself, the two spirits in the *Huainanzi* suggest a desire for peace, harmony, and coordination.

Another important point in this description of the birth of the universe is the generation of ‘forms.’ Heaven and Earth form the vertical plane; and the eight directions form the horizontal plane. When the two planes intersect, they create the three-dimensional space in which things can have forms (*xing*). On the one hand, the existence of form complicates the world. On the other hand, forms become containers of the spirits of individual humans, and thus they impede the unobstructed interaction that used to exist in the undifferentiated world. Human beings therefore lose their natural connection with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. A sage is able to preserve his internal spirit and link it with spirits of others by overcoming the concern with forms.

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<sup>15</sup> Puett claims that the spirits have the power to do what should be done, not what they wish to do (283). It is because the spirits are subjected to principles of the Way.

The two spirits transformed themselves into *yang* and *yin*; however, they are not separate but coexist in the myriad things existing between Heaven and Earth.<sup>16</sup> Heaven endows the two spirits' quintessence [*jingshen* 精神]; the Earth endows their skeletal form [*guhai* 骨骸], which can be understood as the concrete and material substance of the spirits.<sup>17</sup> Hence, each man is a microcosm of the cosmos. When one dies, the essence and spirit, as they are lighter, ascend back to Heaven, while the form disintegrates and skeletal material decomposes into dust (returning to Earth). The following passage shows that the spirits are eternal and unchanged:

Moreover, there are those who mortify their bodies, without harming their minds, and those who cede their dwelling [i.e. the mind], without diminishing their Quintessence. The thinking of a leper is not altered.

The body of the madman not impaired.

But when the Spirits eventually make the far-off journey, who will have time to think about what they did [in their life]. Thus even though the body disappears, the spirit never transforms. If you use what does not transform to respond to transformations, then even though you undergo a thousand transformations and [respond to] a myriad of things, you will not begin to reach a limit.

That which transforms returns to the Formless,

But that which does not transform is born together with Heaven and Earth.<sup>18</sup>

[7/58/3-10] (Major and Queen, et al. 18)

The spirits only reside temporarily within the human body, and constantly move to different places. The reason is that the spirits are given to human beings by and thus belong to Heaven and Earth. It argues that human bodies are transitory vessels for the spirits, which are independent of their containers' condition. The leper with a decaying body can have a sound spirit; the madman without a spirit to govern his action can have a sound body. When the spirits dwell in people's

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan translates *shen* in this context as "the twin and undivided divinities," which shed light on the meaning of the cosmic spirits (Morgan 58).

<sup>17</sup> A similar passage from *The Guanzi, Inward Training*, except *jing* is used instead of *shen*: "The life of all human beings is as follows: heaven produces their essence; earth produces their form. The two unite to become a human being" (2:130) (Zhang 173).

<sup>18</sup> 且人有戒形而無損於心，有綴宅而無耗精。夫癩者趨不變，狂者形不虧，神將有所遠徙，孰暇知其所為！故形有摩而神未嘗化者，以不化應化，千變萬珍而未始有極。化者，復歸於無形也；不化者，與天地俱生也。

body, they can think and act, and yet none of their accomplishments will be attributed to them when they die because these are the doings of the Heavenly spirits: “when the Spirits eventually make the far-off journey, who will have time to think about what they did [in their life] [7/58/3-10] (Major and Queen, et al. 18). The authors argue that not a single human being is responsible for historical events, which are maneuvered by the will of the cosmos. The following passage further demonstrates that the spirit is the perpetual power that is responsible for creating and transforming everything in the world:

The power which brings about organic life does not die itself, nor does the transformer of inorganic things change. The spirit crosses the Lu Mountain and the Tai Hang without finding difficulty. It enters the Four Seas and the Nine Rivers without getting soaked. Placed in the narrowest and most exiguous space, it is not cramped; stretched out over the vast regions of the Universe, it can do so without ‘panting.’<sup>19</sup> (Morgan 51-52)

The spirits can reach the narrowest space and extend to cover the vastness of the cosmos. They overcome physical boundaries and external influences without losing any of their own substance. Even on the highest mountain or deepest seabed, the spirits are present. This passage illustrates how the formlessness and shapelessness of the spirits allow them to have universal impact.

Because the spirits make up the universe, the whole cosmos is the container of *shen* (*shenwu* 神器):

Thus, all under the Heavens is a spirit-like vessel (*tianxia shenwu* 天下神器): you cannot impose your personal will on it; those who do so will be defeated; those who try to hold onto it will lose it. Now that Xu You devalued all under the heavens and would not trade places with Yao was because he had the intention of leaving behind all under the heavens. Why was this so? Because he thought that you should act on all under the heavens by adapting to it (and not trying to impose your own will upon it).

The essentials of all under heavens  
Do not lie within the Other  
But instead lie within the self  
Do not lie within your own being (*shen*)

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<sup>19</sup> 夫化生者不死，而化物者不化，神經於驪山、太行而不能難，入於四海九江而不能濡，處小隘而不塞，橫局天地之間而不窳。

When you realize what rests within your own being then the myriad things will all be arrayed before you.

When you thoroughly comprehend the discussions of the Techniques of the Mind then you will be able to put lusts and desires, likes and dislikes outside your self. (1/8/14-19) (Major and Queen, et al. 35-36)

Because the spirits are the force that controls everything in the world, human beings should not try to impose their way in dealing with affairs; rather, they should follow the workings of the spirits. Xu You did not want to succeed Yao, the mythological sage-king because he wanted to leave the world to its own mechanisms. The world will reveal and fulfill itself, and any human involvement is unnecessary if not detrimental to their existence (when they fail to abide by the natural laws). Moreover, the spirits cover the vast universe and reach the very depth of human beings; hence, humans should focus on discovering their inner selves so that they could comprehend the external world: “When you realize what rests within your own being then the myriad things will all be arrayed before you (1/8/14-19) (Major and Queen, et al. 35-36). Emptying one’s lusts and understanding the world are the two goals of the sage-ruler’s self-cultivation. They can be achieved through acknowledging the existence and nature of the substance that constitute everything under Heaven – the spirits.

### ***Shen as the Supernatural Entity***

In chapter VI, *shen* is used in *shenwu* 神物 – spirit-like entity: “In ancient times Master Kuang played the tune “White Snow,” and because of that, spirit-like creatures [神物]<sup>20</sup> descended [from heaven], rain and wind arrived violently, Duke Ping became impotent and ill,

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<sup>20</sup> Le Blanc explains that *shenwu* in the *Huainanzi* means “numinous things, such as those used in divination,” or “marvelous, unpredictable events or transformations, miracles” (102n).

and the lands of the state of Jin reddened [with drought]”<sup>21</sup> [6/49/27-31] (Major and Queen, et al. 1). *Shenwu* in the context above specifically means “a thing that has undergone a miraculous transformation” (Le Blanc 102n). This kind of transformation changes the nature of a creature [*wu* 物] from an ordinary animal to a supernatural being with a certain power to affect humanity. This interpretation is supported by the phrase: *zhi jing wei shen* [至精為神] (the essence [of a human being] that has been cultivated to the utmost becomes spirit), which will be discussed in the later section [9/68/1-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 8). The revelation of the spirit-like creatures residing in Heaven signifies that Heaven has sympathized with the feelings expressed in Master Kuang’s music and sent them as representatives together with violent rain and wind. In this context, the ‘spirit-like’ nature of these creatures indicates their celestial origin.

Having the same connotation as used in *shenwu* [神物], *shen* [神] is combined with *gui* 鬼 (ghosts), *guishen* 鬼神, which means ‘supernatural spirits’ or ‘ghosts and spirits.’ This term appears in many chapters of the *Huainanzi*, indicating the importance of their presence among the ancient Chinese:

Now with regard to ghosts and spirits,  
     we look for them but they are without form;  
     we listen for them but they are without voice;  
 yet we perform the Suburban Sacrifice (*jiao* 郊) to Heaven and the *wang* (望) sacrifice to the mountain and river [spirits].  
     With prayer and sacrifice we seek prosperity;  
     With the *yu* 雩 [sacrifice] and the *dui* 兌 [trigram] we seek rain;  
     With tortoise shell and milfoil we decide matters.  
 The Odes says,  
     "When the spirits might descend  
     Cannot be calculated.  
     How can you treat them with disdain?"  
 [20/211/5-7] (Major and Queen, et al. 7-8)

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<sup>21</sup> 昔者，師曠奏白雪之音，而神物為之下降，風雨暴至，平公癡病，晉國赤地。庶女叫天，雷電下擊，景公臺隕，支體傷折，海水大出。

Human beings cannot communicate with ghosts and spirits through the senses and yet the former seek the later for various favors such as prosperity, rain, and fortune. It appears that a body of *guishen* [鬼神] is purely negative forces that bring harm to the human world. They are likely to be powerful, dangerous, and wicked:

Yao, Shun, Tang and King Wen and King Wu confidently faced south and ruled the world. In those times,  
 when a gong was struck they ate;  
 when the [musical composition] “Concord” was played, the table was cleared.  
 After finishing their rice they offered a sacrifice to the Stove God.  
 In their conduct they did not make use of shamans’ invocations.  
 Ghosts and spirits [*guishen* 鬼神] did not dare to work black magic on them;  
 Mountains and rivers did not dare to harm them.  
 They could be said to be [truly] noble. Yet they were  
 Preoccupied and fearful,  
 Daily more and more careful.<sup>22</sup>  
 [9/80/9 – 9/81/4] (Major and Queen et al. 66)

*Shen* in this context means the same as *shen* (spirit-like, numinous) in *shenwu*. However, when it is combined with *gui* (ghost, demon), it adopts a shade of negative meaning. On the one hand, ghosts and spirits are supernatural beings that do not belong to the realm of human beings and can affect humans because they possess a mystical power; nevertheless, the sage-kings could put them under control and prevent them from harming humanity.

Using ghosts and spirits to explain phenomena is deemed as biased and superstitious, compared to relying on historical evidence and objective analysis. It is because ghosts and spirits do not function according to our will or their own will. As we see in the argument of *shenwu*, they are the representatives of Heaven. Their presence signifies either Heaven’s sanction or dissatisfaction about human actions; therefore, making sacrificial offerings to them is in fact to please Heaven. Hence, believing in *guishen* seems to be cast as superstitious: “Thus, as Minister

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<sup>22</sup> 當此之時，馨鼓而食，奏雍而徹，已飯而祭灶，行不用巫祝，鬼神弗敢崇，山川弗敢禍，可謂至貴矣，然而戰戰慄慄，日慎一日。

of Justice in Lu, when he [i.e. Confucius] heard cases he inevitably came to a decision. In compiling the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he did not give accounts of ghosts and spirits [*guishen* 鬼神], nor did he dare to [inject] his personal opinions”<sup>23</sup> [9/80/9 – 9/81/4] (Major and Queen, et al. 69). Since the will of Heaven decides everything, one cannot blame ghosts and spirits for harming or aiding humanity. From this perspective, although the authors do not reject the existence of *guishen*, it seems there is an implicit depreciation or denunciation of the influence of ghosts and spirits in the human world. The cosmological spirit directs the world according to its principles (the Way); therefore, supernatural beings with their malicious power cannot change the course set by the Way. However, the account of ghosts and spirits can be used by the ruler to manipulate the common people because they are ignorant of certain phenomena. Explanation for such phenomena is made comprehensible to the people by attributing them to the working of ghosts and spirits:

As for the deceptive resemblance between what is identical and what is different, it is commonplace in our time to be confused and perplexed by it.

Things are [sometimes] seen that are not generally found within the [four] seas;  
Things are [sometimes] heard that are not clear to the common people.

For this reason they rely on ghosts and spirits, blessings and portents, and use them to set up taboos, they conjure up shapes and extend categories so as to shift appearances.

...we rely on the ghosts and spirits to warn and caution them.

... we rely on the terrors of ghosts and spirits [*guishen* 鬼神] to teach them a lesson.

...That sacrifices... is not due to the fact that these spirits are able to enjoy these sacrifices, but rather people presume upon and rely upon their virtue, so that hardship and suffering will not visit them personally. For this reason, when people in season observe the Virtue [of these spirits], they do not [afterwards] forget their efficacy.

[13/130/19-13/131/13] (Major and Queen, et al. 37-39)

The passage presents that the common people are sometime incapable of understanding things and resort to belief in ghosts and spirits, blessings and portents. Such superstition is tolerable

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<sup>23</sup> 然爲魯司寇，聽獄必爲斷，作爲春秋，不道鬼神，不敢專己。

because it helps them rest assured that “hardship and suffering will not visit them personally.” It also makes them constantly observe the power (*de*) of the spirit and not fall away from the *Dao*. On the journey to the actual enlightenment, the people should be instructed to make sacrifices because making regular offerings remind them about the importance of conforming to seasonal ordinances, which are the manifestation of the cosmic order on earth. Abiding by these natural rules is following the Way.

The authors of the *Huainanzi* desire to put these supernatural entities under control and even use them to their advantage; hence, they attribute this power to the sages:

[The Perfected 至人]  
 They emerge from and enter into the Dimensionless.  
 And employ ghostly spirits as their servants [役使鬼神].  
 They plunge into the Fathomless  
 And enter the Non-existent.  
 Their different forms succeed each other.  
 Ending and beginning like a circle,  
 But no one can trace its outline.  
 This is how their Quintessential Spirit is able to verge upon the Way.  
 This is the Roaming of the Perfected.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The larger context is:

“The repeatedly cycle from end to the beginning  
 And we cannot know their starting and stopping points.  
 They behold the dwelling place of Total Darkness  
 And contemplate the lodging place of Total Brightness.  
 They rest in the realms of the Unfettered,  
 And roam in the field of the Nebulous.  
 At rest they have no appearance  
 In place they have no location.  
 In movement they have no form  
 In stillness they have nobody  
 They are present yet seem to be absent  
 They are alive yet seem to be dead  
 They emerge from and enter into the Dimensionless.  
 And employ ghostly spirits [*guishen* 鬼神] as their servants.  
 They plunge into the Fathomless  
 And enter the Non-existent.  
 Their different forms succeed each other.  
 Ending and beginning like a circle,



[7/57/10-7/58/2] (Major and Queen, et al. 17)

[Fu Xi and Nü Wa]

Aimlessly drifting, rambling at random,

Leading [a retinue of] ghosts and spirits [*guishen* 鬼神]<sup>25</sup>

They climbed to ninefold Heaven,

Paid court to the [Supreme] Thearch at the Numinous Gate,

Silent and reverent they ended [their journey] in the presence of the Great Ancestor.

[6/52/24 – 6/53/8] (Major and Queen, et al. 19-20)

The two passages above demonstrate ghosts and spirits as servants of the Perfected Man, and underlings of the legendary sages, Fu Xi and Nü Wa. Their influence, on the one hand, is so great that it reaches every corner of Heaven and Earth, turning supernatural entities like ghosts and spirits into their allies. On the contrary, common rulers have to perform ceremonies to appease such powers: “It [The *Mingtang*] was sufficiently quiet and clean for sacrifices to the high gods, and for ceremonies (directed at) the spirits and deities [*guishen* 鬼神]” [8/65/1-19] (Major and Queen et al. 10). It is because the common rulers’ spirits have not achieved the power to penetrate the supernatural realm and communicate with the spirit-like beings. On the other hand, Fu Xi and Nü Wa are the two mythological deities who saved the world and humanity by mending the torn sky, setting up the Four Pillars that separate Heaven and Earth, and re-establishing security and harmony for humanity [6/52/24 – 6/53/8] (Major and Queen, et al. 19). Therefore, being allowed to accompany the two great figures signifies an important status of ghosts and spirits in the universe. These spirit-like creatures assisted Fu Xi and Nü Wa to restore the shattered world. Consequently, we can deduce that human beings must pay respect to ghosts and spirits because they have played an important part in maintaining order and stability

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But no one can trace its outline.

This is how their Quintessential Spirit is able to verge upon the Way.

This is the Roaming of the Perfected.”

[7/57/10-7/58/2] (Major and Queen, et al. 16-17)

<sup>25</sup> 靜潔足以享上帝，禮鬼神。

in the world although sometimes they can cause harm to human beings, when gods and goddesses neglect to control them.

Ghosts and spirits also have significant qualities that people wish to achieve. The essence (*jing* 精) of ghosts and spirits, the Power (*de* 德) of Heaven and Earth, and the brilliance (*ming* 明) of the sun and moon are three qualities of the sage-king:

One who emulates yin and yang  
 has Power comparable to Heaven and Earth,  
 and brilliance like that of the sun and moon;  
 his essence is as comprehensible as that of ghosts and spirits [*guishen* 鬼神].  
 He wears roundness as a hat,  
 and squareness as shoes;  
 he embraces the gnomon  
 and holds fast to the marking-cord.  
 Within he is able to govern his person,  
 without he is able to win people's minds.  
 When he promulgates edicts and issues commands, there is no one in the world who does not comply with them.<sup>26</sup>  
 [8/64/5-21] (Major and Queen, et al. 8)

It argues that if the sage king matches the efficacy of yin-yang forces, he obtains the essence equal to that of supernatural beings, which means that not only can the sage-ruler exert his influence in the human world, but his power can also reach the mystical realm. This assumption is supported by the argument presented in the next four lines: “He wears roundness as a hat/and squareness as shoes/he embraces the gnomon/and holds fast to the marking-cord” [8/64/5-21] (Major and Queen, et al. 8). The status of the sage-king extends to Heaven and Earth (the ancient Chinese perceived that the sky is round and the Earth is square), and the four directions (implied by the gnomon and marking-cord, the two ancient tools to determine directions). Moreover, it signifies that ghosts and spirits hold an honored position, comparable to Heaven and Earth, the

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<sup>26</sup> 法陰陽者，德與天地參，明與日月並，精與鬼神總，戴圓履方，抱表懷繩，內能治身，外能得人，發號施令，天下莫不從風。

sun and the moon. The common ruler might be able to maintain his perfect health and absolute power in the human world, yet ghosts and spirits can thwart his efforts. Only the sage-ruler who has obtained the inner nature comparable to that of these supernatural entities can make none of them dare challenge him or disturb his internal well-being.

Not only the sage-ruler but the military leader also must be able to control the interference of ghosts and spirits in the human world. The great military leader is the one with a thorough understanding of the myriad things, including the mysterious and unknown: “The great military does no injury; it communicates with the ghosts and spirits”<sup>27</sup> [15/144/9-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 7). Political and military leaders in ancient China usually resorted to prognostication and sacrificial ceremonies as we see from Chapter V of the *Huainanzi* which is devoted to the patterns of the seasons and signs of natural disasters, together with regulations of personal conduct and state sacrifices performed by the ruler pleading for stability and prosperity.<sup>28</sup> The ideal commander therefore must be able to seek advice and favor from ghosts and spirits to ensure the victory without risking his soldiers’ lives or causing unnecessary bloodshed of civilians.

### ***Shen of Human Beings***

The spirit of human beings controls their mental capability<sup>29</sup> similar to the function of *shen* as the rational mind in the cosmos.<sup>30</sup> The following story in Chapter II of the *Huainanzi* demonstrates how the human spirit governs rationality and differs from the animal mentality:

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<sup>27</sup> [大兵無創, 與鬼神通]

<sup>28</sup> See translation and analysis of Chapter V Seasonal Ordinances in Major, John. Heaven, Earth and Man in Early Han Thought. New York: State University New York Press, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Queen claims that “The vital essence is the purest and most concentrated vital force (qi). The numen is the finest portion of the vital force. Seated in the cardiac system, it governs the

In ancient times, Kung Nui-ai [Kong Nui-ai] had a fit of madness and, during seven days, was changed into a tiger. His brother peeped in at the door to look at him and was seized by the tiger and killed. Hence the human limbs had changed into the claws and teeth of the wild beast. Will and mind had changed, spirit and body were transformed [*shen yu xing hua* 神與形化], and then he was a tiger. In that state he was ignorant that he had been a human being previously. Just when he was a man, he was totally unaware that he would be a tiger as well. Each of these two alternations had its several pleasures according to the form: but the creature, in the one form, was wholly unconscious of his existence in the other form. The change of state by the substitution was immense; but there was a continuity of pleasure in both the assumed forms. Cunning and stupidity, right and wrong! Who can say how they spring up?<sup>31</sup> (Morgan 34)

The story is very similar to the butterfly dream in *The Zhuangzi* in which Zhuang Zhou dreams of himself turning into a butterfly.<sup>32</sup> This anecdote is different from the ‘butterfly dream’ story in that Kong Nui-ai metamorphoses into a tiger while Zhuang Zhou only dreams of metamorphosing into a butterfly. Yet, the theme of mental border between different entities is present in both. In the ‘butterfly dream’ story, Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly do not know of each other. Kong Nui-ai and the tiger are not aware of each other’s existence. It signifies that the spirit can transform drastically from humanly nature to animalistic nature. At the beginning of chapter VII, the *Huainanzi* argues that humans are made up of the refined *qi* and animals the turbid *qi*. That means the human spirit, when becomes polluted, becomes spirit of animals. When Kong Nui-ai turns into a tiger, both his spirit and body transform: not only does he assume the tiger’s form, his consciousness is no longer that of a human being because he kills his brother cold-bloodedly. The human spirit of Kong Nui-ai cannot penetrate into the animal spirit of his

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vital processes, is responsible for all consciousness and mental activity, and, like the vital essence, is the object of Daoist self-cultivation” (de Bary 298n).

<sup>30</sup> See the previous discussion on the two spirits that Created heaven and Earth and the myriad things.

<sup>31</sup> 昔公牛哀轉病也，七日化爲虎。其兄掩戶而入覘之，則虎搏而殺之。是故文章成獸，爪牙移易，志與心變，神與形化。方其爲虎也，不知其嘗爲人也；方其爲人，不知其且爲虎也。二者代謝舛馳，各樂其成形。狡猾鈍昏，是非無端，孰知其所萌！

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter II in *Zhuangzi* (Ivanhoe and Norden 224).

metamorphosed self because the spirits are contained within “forms.”<sup>33</sup> *Shen* in this context means the consciousness of oneself as a human and the instinctive compliance to the human conduct, which, in the Kong Nui-ai story, is the rationality that prevents humans from harming their fellows. Rational capacity of the human mind is the ability to respond to things according to principles or patterns (*li* 理) – explained in the later section.

Another nature of the spirit is that if it encounters a thing multiple times, in each occasion the spirit<sup>34</sup> is supposed to respond in the exact same way; however, experiences make it impossible:

Now when a water mirror comes in contact with shapes, it is not because of wisdom and precedent that it is able to flawlessly reflect the square, round, crooked and straight. Therefore, the echo does not respond at random and the shadow does not independently arise. They mimic sounds and forms and naturally do so without intent. That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Responding only after being stimulated, our nature [*xing* 性] is harmed. When things arise and the *spirit* responds [*wu zhi er shen ying* 物至而神應], this is the activity of perception [*zhi* 知]. When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, it cannot return to the self and the heavenly patterns are destroyed. Thus those who penetrate through the Way do not use the human to alter the heavenly. Externally they transform together with things but internally they do not lose their true responsiveness [*qing* 情].<sup>35</sup>  
[1/2/13-16] (Major and Queen, et al. 8-9)

*Shen* as the human mentality needs to be moderated and relieved from stimulations. The spirit of human beings, due to its natural propensity, spontaneously and indiscriminately responds to arousals as its nature is like water, mirror, echo and shadow. The human spirit is prone to be

<sup>33</sup> See discussion of *Shen as Numinous Qi*.

<sup>34</sup> *Shen* in this context is similar to that in *shen jing* 神經 – nerve, and *shen jing bing* 神經病 – mental illness.

<sup>35</sup> 夫鏡水之與形接也，不設智故，而方圓曲直弗能逃也。是故響不肆應，而景不一設，叫呼彷彿，默然自得。人生而靜，天之性也。感而後動，性之害也。物至而神應，知之動也。知與物接，而好憎生焉。好憎成形，而知誘於外，不能反己，而天理滅矣。故達於道者，不以人易天，外與物化，而內不失其情。

contaminated because its owner is not yet able to preserve and refine it. In the differentiated world, as things are different from others, the reaction to them brings about varied experiences. Encounters with the external world alter the naturally, spontaneously, and unintentionally responsive nature of the spirit because they teach human beings to avoid what does not make them satisfied and try to obtain things that bring them happiness. Experiences become knowledge, which is accumulated and developed throughout a person's life and generations of human beings. When a person sees a hare, he will try to catch it because someone has told him such animals are food. He then uses his intelligence to make traps to catch more hares. People begin to attach artificial values to objects. For instance, gold becomes overrated and everyone wants to have more and more of it while in fact wrapping in gold does not make them warm in winter and eating gold does not satisfy their hunger. The ability to perceive and assess is developed by human beings, and should not be used to suppress the heavenly 'responsiveness'. The authors of the *Huainanzi* imply that human beings cannot avoid being attracted to things<sup>36</sup>; however, they can cultivate themselves to the point that even though their physical body responds to stimulations (for example, shivering when cold or craving when hungry), their spirit does not change accordingly. They therefore can preserve their true responsiveness (*qing* 情): "Externally they transform together with things but internally they do not lose their true responsiveness (*qing*)" [1/2/13-16] (Major and Queen, et al. 8-9). The authors of the *Huainanzi* value *qing* as the true emotions that Heaven bestows on human beings at birth. With the true responsiveness, one's senses cannot be disturbed by temptations of the external world. However,

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<sup>36</sup> Chapter II contains a basic illustration of how the external environment easily influences the human spirit: "Furthermore, the senses, (ear and eye) of men are in contact with and respond to impressions. The mind and will are cognitive of anxiety and joy; the hand and foot feel the itch of things. People want to avoid heat and cold. When a wasp or scorpion bites the finger, the spirit is restless [神不能憺]; when a mosquito or gnat (gadfly bores the skin, the mind is ill at ease." (Morgan 53)

they have lost the true responsiveness and only through self-cultivation of their spirit can human beings re-gain their Heavenly nature.

The spirit is prone to err because it is the foundation of wisdom. Wisdom and idiocy go together –the duality principle: with one extreme, there is another.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the mind should be kept still and empty, and not utilized to “think” [*silu* 思慮].<sup>38</sup> Stillness is understood as physically reactive but mentally tranquil; emptiness is the absence of prejudices that are created by experiences. This point is supported by the advocacy to eliminate intelligence and wisdom and become oblivious to the world in the *Huainanzi*. The ambition to obtain things makes his mentality strained with calculations; therefore, elimination of desires will free the spirit:

If you take the world lightly, the spirit [*shen* 神] certainly will not be burdened.  
 If you minimize the myriad things, your mind will not be confused.  
 If you equalize death and life, your thought will not be intimidated.  
 If you take all alternations as the same, your clarity will not be darkened.<sup>39</sup>  
 [7/58/3-10] (Major and Queen, et al. 19)

This passage tells people to take things easy. The meaning of life is not to obtain things, but to find peace in the mind. Fortune comes and goes. The more properties one gains, the more one worries about losing them. The richer one is, the more dreadful one feels about death. Having the empire [*tianxia* 天下] and obtaining everything only make the mind suffer from strain and gloominess. The right way to lead a life is to view everything equally and keep the mind open to

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<sup>37</sup> The spirit is easily influenced by earthly pleasures and this leads to distortion of reality:  
 If a drunkard endeavors to enter the city gates, he will consider it to be like the seven-foot [door to] the women’s quarters.  
 If he is crossing the Yangzi or the Huai River, he will consider it to be a ditch no [wider than] a *cun* or a *zhang*.  
 The wine has muddled his spirit.  
 [13/130/12-17] (Major and Queen, et al. 36)

<sup>38</sup> “If you use calmness to nourish your nature, and use quietude to transfix your spirit [以漠處神], then you will enter the Heavenly Gateway” [1/3/24-1/4/3] (Major and Queen, et al. 14).

<sup>39</sup> 輕天下，則神無累矣；細萬物，則心不惑矣；齊死生，則志不懾矣；同變化，則明不眩矣。

different circumstances. Similarly, chapter II promotes abandoning greed for power and glory. The authors argue that the loss of one's spirit happens over time and goes unnoticed; therefore, one must actively try to regain it by discarding wants and lusts: "the doctrine of the Sage is, by the desire of returning nature to the original [*yu yi fan xing yu chu* 欲以返性於初], to exercise the mind in non-desire [*you xin yu xu* 游心於虛]" (Morgan 48). The mind should be immersed in the state of emptiness [*xu* 虛]. *Xu*, or non-being, implies the environment in which nothing is taken as 'real,' everything is just transitory and their existence is just an illusion of the mind. With this mindset, one cannot be distressed and that is the state of utmost happiness. The authors of the *Huainanzi* argue that non-being is the natural condition of human mentality and criticize that the way of the Confucians is harmful to the mind: "Its eclectic ethic cramps nature, leading to an inward anxiety of spirit and an outward misuse of eye and ear" (Morgan 48). The Confucians try to impose superfluous moral principles that go against human innate nature of emptiness and freedom and cause disturbances in the mind and these create confusion in perception.

It is interesting to see a different attitude toward rulership. From the scholars' viewpoint, having the empire is less valued than comprehending the world:

I hold it is better [than principles the Confucian school] to have the true ease of spiritual culture than the sweets of empire. It is better to roam in the infinitude of naturalness and have a true apprehension of the relationship between the invisible and the invisible, than to have to the pleasure of glory and renown. To possess a well-ordered life and have a logical apprehension of Being and non-Being is the great thing. Universal praise adds no encouragement to such a man, nor would there be any abatement of purpose, even were the whole realm to be hostile. These men have a clear and definite idea of the value of life and death, and a clear perception of that which constitutes honor and shame. Were fire or flood to overwhelm the world, the spirits of these men would not quail, nor would it give them any surprise. Thus they look upon this span of life as but a feather wafted in



the winds, or a floating straw on the waters (Empire and its glories are but a bubble).<sup>40</sup>  
(Morgan 48-49)

The way of the sage is to achieve peace of the mind instead of having the empire. If one learns the way of the sage, he is able to live “a well-ordered life” and have “a logical apprehension of Being and non-Being.” With such profound knowledge of the world, one’s spirit is free from fear for losses of fame or property. By devaluing fame and material gain, the sage preserves his spirit and nothing could excite his senses. It does not mean the sage should stay away from politics; rather, the sage should be able to undermine such things associated with political authority as glory, and restore the government to its intended function of providing for the people.

Furthermore, the authors of the *Huainanzi* seem to argue that governing a state should begin from the ruler’s governing his appetites. Only when the ruler is able to free his spirit from lusts, that is, able to “look upon his span of life as but a feather wafted in the winds, or a floating straw on the water” can he become the sagely king who can ensure happiness for his subjects (Morgan 49).

The cultivation of the spirit is aided by music: “When Shen Nong first made a *qin* [stringed instrument], it was in order to make people return to their spirits [*gui shen* 歸神], suppress lewdness, and revert to the Heavenly Heart”<sup>41</sup> [20/213/12-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 20). Music can cause exaggerated feelings; yet in this context, music is the means to allow people to return to their inner essence. The people might have become calloused with experiences, and thus musical instruments are to awaken the genuine emotions innate within human beings. After it has been restored, the spirit can be given the task of thinking:

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<sup>40</sup> 是故與其有天下也，不若有說也；與其有說也，不若尚羊物之終始也，而條達有無之際。是故舉世而譽之不加勸，舉世而非之不加沮，定于死生之境，而通于榮辱之理，雖有炎火洪水彌靡於天下，神無虧缺於胸臆之中矣。

<sup>41</sup> 神農之初作琴也，以歸神；及其淫也，反其天心。

The actions of one who gives free rein to desires and loses his nature have never been correct....

For this reason, whenever one is about to take up an affair, one must first stabilize one's intentions and purify one's spirit. [神清意平]<sup>42</sup>

When the spirit is pure and intentions are stable

Only then can things be aligned [*zheng* 正].<sup>43</sup>

[11/96/7-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 10)

The purification of the spirit means restoring it to the neutral state, free from prejudices. After taking up too many affairs, one's mentality is tainted with experiences that will influence one's judgments; hence, before taking on a new task, one has to discard formerly acquired prejudices in order to remain fair and righteous [*zheng* 正]. As one with a contaminated spirit can never make a right decision, the spirit needs to be strengthened and stabilized so that it will not be tempted by offerings or influenced by external things.

In chapter IX, *shen* means the human's utmost essence. Human beings can cultivate their essence to the numinous level [*zhi jing wei shen* 至精爲神] because they are endowed with the necessary substance (quintessential *qi*) by Heaven. Human beings and animals are both given the same form [*xing*] and material from Earth. The difference is that humans are made of the refined *qi* and animals of the turbid *qi*. Human beings can cultivate their *qi* to the spirit-like level *consciously*, but animals cannot.<sup>44</sup> *Shen* therefore is the *qi* of heavenly quality, which humans with their refined essence can achieve through inner cultivation and resonance with the cosmos. Moreover, since the Way generates and controls the myriad things including human beings, the refined essence is the Way manifested in them. The essence is the substance of the Way, and the

<sup>42</sup> A passage from the *Zhuangzi* mentions the purification of the quintessential spirit: "Confucius asked Lao Dan, "Today while you are at rest dare I ask about the utmost Way?" Lao Dan replied, "You should fast and train yourself and clean out the channels of your mind, wash white the essential spirit [*jingshen*] and bash up your knowledge. The Way is deep and difficult to speak about." (*Zhuangzi* 22, *Knowledge Roams North*, line 29) (Zhang 175)

<sup>43</sup> 是故凡將舉事，必先平意清神。神清意平，物乃可正。

<sup>44</sup> Spirit-like creatures are those who transform by absorbing spirit-like power from Heaven or gods, not through cultivation.

Way is the mechanism that instills this essence into each and every person.<sup>45</sup> It is then the human's task to cultivate it to the utmost level. Cultivating the spirit means to attain the utmost essence [*zhijing* 至精]: “[By] concentrating their essences [*jing* 精] and disciplining their thoughts, discarding all concerns and gathering together their spirits [*shen* 神], they merged above with the Nine Heavens and stimulated their most subtle essences [*zhijing* 至精]” (Le Blanc 104). The cultivation of the essence to the utmost level is based on the principles of non-action [*wuwei*] and stillness [*jing* 靜]:

When fluctuating moods are done away with and the circulation is not awry, then the Quintessential Spirit is abundant and the vital energy is not dissipated then one is functioning according to Underlying Patterns [*li* 理].

When one functions according to Underlying Patterns one attains equanimity.

When one attains equanimity one develops penetrating awareness [*tong* 通].

When one develops *penetrating awareness* one becomes *like the transcendent*. [理則均, 均則通, 通則神]

When one is a spirit [*shen* 神] then with vision there is nothing unseen, with hearing there is nothing unheard, and with actions there is nothing incomplete.

...

For this reason anxiety and worry cannot enter and aberrant vital energy cannot seep in. Thus there are certain things that you seek outside the Four Seas yet never meet and others that one guards within the physical frame yet never sees. Therefore, the more you seek, the less you attain; the greater you see, the less you understand.

[7/55/25-27] (Major and Queen, et al. 5-7)

If the quintessence and spirit within a human body) are abundant and the *qi* is not dissipated, one will understand principles [*li* 理]. Understanding *li* will lead to complete awareness (*tong*) which is equivalent to the spirit-like status. Based on that reasoning [理則均, 均則通, 通則神], *shen* is a transcendent state resulting from complete awareness (not just *zhi* 知 [know] but *tong* 通 [know everything]). The thorough awareness does not originate from

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<sup>45</sup> “The use of *jing* [精] to describe the union with Tao establishes an equivalence between the main ideas of the Theory of Yin-Yang on the one hand, and of Taoism on the other. The most subtle essences are, from an objective viewpoint, similar to Tao; like Tao, they have their own inner dynamism and spontaneously bring about orderly and harmonious patterns.” (Le Blanc 11)

acquiring actual knowledge, but rather through balancing the inner *qi*. When *qi* is balanced and preserved, people are not influenced by outside factors and able to behave according to *li* (reason, fairness, and underlying patterns). Given the impartial state of mind, he can develop penetrating awareness; seeing things under clear light makes his judgments correct. *Tong* also means “unobstructed,” implying the condition in which the *qi* flows according to its natural course. The sage cultivates himself so that his existence will not obstruct the flows of *qi*, and thus he becomes like a god. *Shen*, which means the divine or god-like level, is the state of transcendence in which one has risen above confinements of their physical existence, got rid of earthly obstructions, and has been able to see the world clearly and understand it thoroughly. *Shen* is the state when “with vision there is nothing unseen, with hearing there is nothing unheard, and with actions there is nothing incomplete”<sup>46</sup> [7/55/25-27] (Major and Queen, et al. 5-7). The *Huainanzi* implies that people can achieve ultimate understanding of the world while being part of humanity. In order to attain a god-like position, human beings seek within themselves as the essence and spirit are internal. From this perspective, enlightenment is a personal accomplishment, some kind of victory over the self, and achievement of the state beyond physical existence. The road to a god-like position is not easy:

Tree planted and cultivated by the work of ten men, by means of irrigation and fertilization, could be pulled up by one man and a clean sweep made of every vestige in one night. How much more so were the whole country to engage in the work of destruction of what has been planted! Though a desire existed for a lengthy life, how could it be attained? Take again the example of a bowl of turbid water standing in some hall. It would take more than a day for it to settle and become so transparent that the eye-lashes could be seen reflected: on the other hand, it can be made turbid in a moment, so that you could not distinguish square from round in it. Man’s spirit is easily befouled and most difficult to clarify: it is similar to the example given by the bowl of water. How much befouled the soul would be if the pollution had been continued through a long time.

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<sup>46</sup> 神則以視無不見，以聽無不聞也，以爲無不成也。

Moreover, how can the spirit find a moment's peace, subject to the worries and cares and temptations of the world?<sup>47</sup> (Morgan 53-54)

The tree that needs constant care by many people over a long period of time can be destroyed in a moment. The turbid water takes days to settle and become clear and a slight tip can ruin its transparency. Similarly, one person trying to preserve his spirit for a long time can lose it in an instant of negligence. Moreover, numerous and ubiquitous temptations make the self-cultivation even more difficult. This is the reason why sages are few, sufferings prevail, and wars are endless. The human mind is, again, compared to water. However, in this context, water does not mean the advantage of being flexible and shapeless, but vulnerable: the water can easily be disturbed and muddied. It implies that the human mind, although having the superior characteristics of water which can adapt to instant and various changes, cannot avoid the drawback of being affected easily by the slightest touch.

### *Shen of the Sage*

The forth meaning of *shen* is 'the spirit' that the sage has already acquired, carefully preserved and continued to develop within his body. In the passages below, *shen* does not indicate the substance that requires assiduous self-cultivation and miraculous transformation; rather, it exists as part of the sage's being:

In ancient times, when Shen Nong ruled the world,  
His spirit did not rush about within his breast;  
His knowledge did not go beyond the four sides [of his body].  
He embraced humanness [*ren* 仁] and sincerity [*cheng* 誠] in his heart.<sup>48</sup>  
[9/67/17-23] (Major and Queen, et al. 3-4)

<sup>47</sup> 今夫樹木者，灌以灑水，疇以肥壤，一人養之，十人拔之，則必無餘●，又況與一國同伐之哉？雖欲久生，豈可得乎！今盆水在庭，清之終日，未能見眉睫；濁之不過一撓，而不能察方員。人神易濁而難清，猶盆水之類也，況一世而撓滑之，曷得須臾平乎！

<sup>48</sup> 昔者神農之治天下也，神不馳於胸中，智不出於四域，懷其仁之心。

The spirit residing in the chest implies that *shen* represents the internal vigor or quintessence, while knowledge represents the rationality, and humaneness and sincerity represent the morality of human beings. Shen Nong was able to preserve all three essential components, which are quintessence, rationality and morality, within himself. It can be deduced *shen* is one of the three factors constituting a human mentality, together with knowledge and ethics.

The following passage in Chapter II, however, argues that the physical body and the spirit might not have mutual connection:

Water, on the approach of winter, congeals and becomes ice. Ice melts with spring and melts to become water again. Water and ice are periodic changes of form. In the wheel's revolution of flux, who may imagine which is pain and which is joy? Therefore the bodily form suffers from the rigors of cold, heat, dryness and dampness. The body wastes, but the spirit is hale [形苑而神壯]. On the other hand, the spirit may suffer from the outrages of joy, anger and anxieties. Whilst the vitality of spirit is being exhausted, the form may remain in abundance of strength. Again, when the carcasses of worn-out horses are skinned, the hide is found to be dry and brittle: but the carcass of a young hound, on the other hand, is found to be full of sap, when killed. Hence the ghost of him who has an untimely death (from injury) is troubled. The spirit of him who dies full of years is rigid. All these instances indicate that body and spirit do not end together and are not identical. Now the sage makes use of his mind, leans on his nature, depends on his spirit; and when these are mutually helpful, a tranquil life is lived and ended. Hence he has no dreams during his sleep and has no anxieties during consciousness.<sup>49</sup> (Morgan 34-35)

The passage argues that the body [*xing* 形] and the spirit [*shen* 神] are separate and not mutually affected. The physical form can go through a great deal of suffering while the spirit remains “hale.” The spirit can be exhausted from emotional strain while the physical body is strong. A man who dies of unnatural cause still has a strong spirit while his body has already

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<sup>49</sup> 夫水嚮冬則凝而爲冰，冰迎春則泮而爲水，冰水移易于前後，若周員而趨，孰暇知其所苦樂乎！是故形傷于寒暑燥溼之虐者，形苑而神壯；神傷乎喜怒思慮之患者，神盡而形有餘。故罷馬之死也，剝之若槁；狡狗之死也，割之猶濡。是故傷死者其鬼嬈，時既者其神漠。是皆不得形神俱沒也。夫聖人用心，杖性依神，相扶而得終始，是故其寐不夢，其覺不憂。

decayed. That means the sage can preserve his spirit while enduring physical hardship like everyone else.

The sage is superior to ordinary human beings because besides preserving it for his well-being, he knows how to make use of the spirit's power:

In the reign of King Tang [of the Shang dynasty] there was a seven-year drought. The King offered himself as sacrifice at Mulberry Forest. Thereupon

clouds from the Four Seas collected together

and rain arrived from a thousand *li* away.

He embraced his essential self [抱質] and put sincerity [效誠] into action, which evoked a response from Heaven and Earth; his spirit [*shen* 神] projected itself beyond the borders [of the known world]. How could promulgating orders and prohibitions suffice to accomplish something like this?<sup>50</sup>

[9/69/11-15] (Major and Queen et al. 12-13)

The sage-king's spirit reaches out to evoke Heaven and Earth to make rain. His spirit's power comes from his essential substance (*zhi* 質) and sincerity (*cheng* 誠). The spirit is the representative of the ruler's uncorrupted essence and his true emotions, which communicate with Heaven and Earth and appeal to them for favors. It signifies that human quintessence and emotions are the connection between them and the deities above. Once they regain these qualities, they can express themselves with the supernatural powers and have them work for humans' benefits. The spirits of sages allow them to join with the transformations of the myriad things:

The two August Lords of high antiquity grasped the handles of the Way, and so were established in the Center. Their spirits roamed together with all transformations [神與化游],<sup>51</sup> and thereby pacified all within the Four Directions. Hence, they enabled the

<sup>50</sup> 湯之時，七年旱，以身禱於桑林之際，而四海之雲湊，千里之雨至。抱質效誠，感動天地，神諭方外，令行禁止，豈足為哉！

<sup>51</sup> Lau and Ames translate this phrase as “in spirit they roamed together with the demiurge of transformation.” (Lau and Ames 63)

Heavens to revolve and the Earth to stand still, they cycled round and round yet left out nothing. Flowing unceasingly like water, they ended and began together will all things.<sup>52</sup>  
[1/1/10-17] (Major and Queen, et al. 2)

The sages' spirits are able to transform with the alternation of the cosmos without leaving their physical bodies. This is their 'miraculous' (*shen*) power. The *non-initiating* nature of their spirit is compared to water, which has no shape of its own but spontaneously takes up the shape of its container. Water also is the propensity of the Way, that is, it is omnipresent and gains access to the farthest corner and flows through the smallest opening. It might be deduced that sages, having the flexibility similar to water, are able to mentally adapt to the constant transformations of the cosmos and thus they never fail to respond to newly emerging situations. How does the sage's spirit exert its power?

That things in their [various] categories are mutually responsive [物類之相應] is [something] dark, mysterious, deep and subtle.

Knowledge is not capable of assessing it.

Argument is not capable of explaining it.

Thus,

when the east wind arrives, wine turns clear and overflows [its vessels];

when the silkworms secrete fragmented silk, the *shang* string (of a stringed instrument) snaps.

Something has evoked a response in them.

When a picture is traced out with the ashes of reeds, the moon's halo has a (corresponding) gap,

When the leviathan dies, comets appear.

Something has moved them.

Thus, when the sage occupies the throne, he embraces the Way and does not speak, and his nurturance reaches to all the people (*wanmin* 萬民). But when the ruler and ministers harbor distrust in their hearts, back-to-back arcs appear in the sky. The mutual responses of spirit *qi* [*shenqi xiangying* 神氣相應] are subtle indeed!<sup>53</sup>

[6/50/14-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5)

<sup>52</sup> 泰古二皇，得道之柄，立於中央，神與化游，以撫四方。是故能天運地滯，輪轉而無廢，水流而不止，與萬物終始。

<sup>53</sup> 夫物類之相應，玄妙深微，知不能論，辯不能解。故東風至而酒湛溢，蠶吐絲而商弦絕，或感之也。晝隨灰而月運闕，鯨魚死而彗星出，或動之也。故聖人在位，懷道而不言，澤及萬民。君臣乖心，則背譎見於天。神氣相應，徵矣。



The power of the spirit lies in the mutual responses of *qi* in the cosmos. Le Blanc translates the spirit in the above passage as “the subtle essence or substance in a naturalistic sense” (Le Blanc 118n). As *qi* exists in every human being, even when one tries to conceal his thoughts or suppress his feelings, *qi* of different sources can communicate if they are compatible. The sages however possess spirit-like *qi*, which allows them to wield the power of *qi* based on the mechanisms of *ganying* 感應 (mutual correspondence or resonance<sup>54</sup>). Le Blanc explains that “the idea of resonance means all things in the universe are interrelated and influence each other according to the pre-set patterns, so that interaction appears as spontaneous and not caused by an external agent” (9). *Ganying* indicates that the myriad things in the cosmos are linked together in a web of spirits and thus mutually impinge on each other.

Moreover, the sage can cultivate their spirit to the level of supreme transcendence (*zhishen* 至神):

There is nothing from which they [sages] are too aloof,  
 And nothing with which they are too intimate.  
 Embracing the Power and blending with the harmonious,  
     They accord with Heaven.  
     They make the Way their boundary  
     And the Power their neighbor.  
     They do not make [attaining] good fortune a priority;  
     They do not make [avoiding] misfortune an antecedent.  
     Their ethereal and corporeal souls are settled in their dwelling,  
     Their Quintessence and Spirit [*jingshen* 精神] are preserved in their root.  
     And death and life do not alter them.

Therefore we say they are supremely spirit-like [*zhishen* 至神].<sup>55</sup>  
 [7/57/5-9] (Major and Queen et al. 12-13)

<sup>54</sup> See the detailed discussion of *ganying* in Le Blanc, Charles. Huai-nan tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> 是故無所甚疏，而無所甚親，抱德煬和，以順于天。與道為際，與德為鄰；不為福始，不為禍先。魂魄處其宅，而精神守其根，死生無變於己，故曰至神。

When the sage attains the level of “supremely spirit-like,” he has become one with the Dao. Since everything is Dao, there is nothing unfamiliar to him. He achieves the fullest inner force (*de*) and harmony (*he*). His actions accord to the principles of the Way. Fortune and misfortune, life and death fail to excite him. His soul and essence are preserved and restored to the original state, which is the state of non-differentiation and true emotions, and in which knowledge and wisdom do not exist.

### ***Shen of the Perfected Man***

The spirit can be cultivated to different levels. The common man cultivates his spirit so that it will be able to return to its heavenly nature (that is, to the original state of utmost purity and balance). The sage cultivates his spirit to the point that he can rule the world according to the Way. The Perfected Man can let the spirit wander freely without being depleted and resuscitating the myriad things (Puett 281). He nurtures the spirit and uses it to revive the world without fearing it would become depleted: “They [e.g. the Perfected] make their Spirit overflow, without losing its fullness. Day and night, without injury, they bring spring to external things”<sup>56</sup> [7/58/3-10] (Major and Queen et al. 18). The Perfected Man is relieved from the burden of thinking and his spirit is free from fear of death:

[The Perfected Man]  
 .... Living is not sufficient to preoccupy their thinking.  
 Death is not sufficient to occlude their spirit.<sup>57</sup>  
 Embrace simplicity and guard essence [抱素守精].  
 [7/58/25-29] (Major and Queen, et al. 21-22)

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<sup>56</sup> 使神滔蕩而不失其充，日夜無傷而與物為春。

<sup>57</sup> 生不足以挂志，死不足以幽神。

The spirit is used in the context with simplicity [*su* 素] and essence [*jing* 精]. Simplicity [*su* 素] also appears in the *Daodejing*, Chapter Nineteen, which promotes the abandonment of all products of civilization such as sageliness 聖, wisdom 智, benevolence 仁, righteousness 義, cleverness 巧, and profit 利 in order to return to state of simplicity and plainness.<sup>58</sup> The *Daodejing* argues that such so-called products of civilization are not able to bring harmony and goodness to the world; the true culture (*wen* 文) must include simplicity and plainness. In other words, simplicity and essence are the original qualities, which have been replaced by artificial values such as knowledge, righteousness and cleverness, which cannot save human beings from corruption and suffering. Therefore, the passage from the *Huainanzi* above implies the rejection of superficial values in order to restore simplicity in the world and cultivate the refined qi (*jing*) in the body. Simplicity is the primordial nature underlying the apparent complication of the cosmos, and essence is the primal substance unifying all creation in the universe. Only by establishing the state of simplicity in the world and preserving the internal essence can the mentality and spirit of Perfected Man remain uninhibited by the toil in life or the fear of death. Moreover, if we make a connection between the first two lines and the last line, we can see that simplicity (*su*) is matched with ‘thinking’ (*zhi*), and essence (*jing*) is matched with spirit (*shen*). It means that the quality of simplicity makes the mental capacities of the Perfected Man powerful

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<sup>58</sup> *Daodejing*’s Chapter Nineteen:

Cut off sageliness, abandon wisdom, and the people will benefit one-hundred-fold.  
 Cut off benevolence, abandon righteousness, and the people will return to being filial and kind.  
 Cut off cleverness, abandon profit, and robbers and thieves will be no more.  
 This might leave the people lacking in culture;  
 So give them something with which to identify:  
 Manifest plainness [素].  
 Embrace simplicity.  
 Do not think just of yourself.  
 Make few your desires.  
 (Ivanhoe and Nordern 172)

enough not to be troubled with world affairs; and the spirit, empowered by the refined essence, does not fear the terror of death. The following passage further illustrates these assumptions.

Although he can use generously his spirit to bring life to the myriad things, the Perfected Man tries not to waste his spirit and essence in useless business:

They [the Perfected *zhiren*] embody the foundation and embrace the spirit [*tiben baoshen* 体本抱神] and so roam freely within the confines of Heaven and Earth. Untrammelled, they ramble outside this dusty world and wander aimlessly in their taskless calling [*ye* 業]. Unfettered and unhindered, they harbor no clever devices or cunning knowledge in their minds.

...Being such as these negate obsession and fear, and cast aside perceptions. Their mental activity is concentrated internally and penetrates through to be a companion with the One. At rest, they have no objectives; in motion they set no goals.

...They take life and death to be a single transformation  
And the myriad things to be a single whole.

They merge their vital essence with the foundation of Great Purity  
And roam freely beyond the boundless.

They do not recklessly expend their vital essence,  
Nor thoughtlessly use their [Quintessential] Spirit.

They identify with the artlessness of the Unhewn  
And take their stand amidst the supreme pure.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, their sleep is dreamless.

Their wisdom is traceless.

Their corporeal soul [*po*] does not sink (return to the earth)

Their ethereal soul [*hun*] does not soar.

[7/57/10-7/58/2] (Major and Queen, et al. 16-17)

This passage repeats many similar ideas as in the passage [7/58/25-29], such as: embracing the root, discarding worries of life and fear of death, abandoning knowledge, and returning to the simplicity/the ‘unhewn.’ It implies that self-cultivation of the spirit is an ongoing process. Even the Perfected Man who can employ his spirit freely should not neglect his self-cultivation as we discussed before that the spirit is like water, flexible and yet easily negatively influenced by external factors. Relaxing strict regulations for a moment will thwart the effort accumulated throughout the years.

<sup>59</sup> 以死生為一化，以萬物為一方，同精於太清之本，而游於忽區之旁。有精而不使，有神而不行，契大渾之樸，而立至清之中。

The Perfected Man not only uses his spirit to bring life to the world, he also assists people's self-cultivation of their spirits:

[They] who dwell with the Perfect Man, are led to forget family poverty; and the honorable of the world do not display their splendors when he is present, (one course suffices for the feast), but rejoice in simplicity. In his presence the hero shrivels his martial spirit, and the covetous man suppresses his concupiscence. Sitting down, he has no need to instruct; standing up, he has no need to criticize; and the guest who comes with receptive heart goes away loaded with solid truth. So, without speaking, he quenches the thirst of men with truth. Hence the perfect Tao is *wu wei*, (an action of the spirit), operating like the action of the dragon or the snake. They stretch out or contract, change their form and throw off the skin according to the time. Outwardly he follows convention, but inwardly he maintains his nature. His eye and ear are not confused by a show of power, nor is his mind perplexed by doubt. The spirit which he cherishes being uniquely great, he thereby roams in the Great Purity (*dao*), encouraging and stimulating the whole creation. It may thus be concluded that he who uses his spirit in a complexity of things, loses his spirit; he who nourishes his spirit, the spirit abides.<sup>60</sup> (Morgan 38-39)

The mere presence of the Perfect Man has a tremendous impact. In the charisma of the Perfect Man, the common people forget their material shortage, the honorable man embrace simplicity, the martial man shrinks his spirit, and the covetous man abandons his greed. The Perfect Man cherishes his spirit by not using it to create a complexity of things; instead, he acts like a dragon or a snake, whose sleek form and ability of shedding the outer skin allow them to adapt to the myriad transformations: "Hence the perfect Tao is *wu wei*, (an action of the spirit), operating like the action of the dragon or the snake. They stretch out or contract, change their form and throw off the skin according to the time" (Morgan 38). He does not have to lecture or reason with the people to make them see the truth. His charisma resulted from his refined spirit is adequate to make changes in people's minds. It can be understood that his spirit is protected and nourished,

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<sup>60</sup> 是故與至人居，使家忘貧，使王公簡其富貴而樂卑賤，勇者衰其氣，貪者消其欲。坐而不教，立而不議，虛而往者實而歸，故不言而能飲人以和。是故至道無爲，一龍一蛇，盈縮卷舒，與時變化。外從其風，內守其性，耳目不耀，思慮不營。其所居神者，臺簡以游太清，引楯萬物，群美萌生。是故事其神者神去之，休其神者神居之。

and thus it is always sufficient to manifest its power to the people, turning them away from decadence.

### *Shen as “Spirit-like” or “God-like”*

*Shen* also means comparability to the quality of a god, implying a transcendent, superhuman nature of an attribute or action.

Now dancers twirl their bodies like rings of jade. They bend and touch the ground, and turn quickly and nimbly. As they move, twist and turn, light and beautiful as fairies [便擬神]

Their bodies seem as light as wind-borne autumn floss,  
their hair like banners flapping in the wind,  
their steps are quick as those of a racehorse.

[19/209/20-28] (Major and Queen, et al. 33-34)

The authors compare female dancers’ extraordinary beauty to that of fairies (*shen*). *Shen* in this context represents the attributes that human beings apply as standards of fairness, and they try to attain such levels. As they describe the dancers in comparison with all the finest characteristics in nature, such as “rings of jade,” “wind-borne autumn floss,” “banners flapping in the wind,” and “racehorse,” we can deduce that spirit-like quality (*shen*) in fact is the combination of the best features in nature. Nature again serves as the exemplary for human conduct.

*Shen* also is used to describe an action of the exalted quality:

The myriad things in their totality  
All pass through this One Portal.  
The roots of the hundreds of endeavors  
All emerge from this One Gateway.  
Its movements are Formless;  
Its transformations are numinous [變化若神];  
Its actions are traceless;  
It constantly follows and never initiates.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> 萬物之總，皆闕一孔；百事之根，皆出一門。其動無形，變化若神；其行無跡，常後而先。

[1/6/25-27]<sup>62</sup> (Major and Queen, et al. 26-27)

The myriad things are created from one origin, the Way. From the One, the totality of things emerges and transforms into numerous different things in an instantaneous and unobservable way. Such action is named ‘spirit-like.’ The singular substance reveals itself in the world in innumerable forms. It signifies the remarkable ability to transform limitlessly of the Way. Only the sages can act in an equal manner:

He nurtured the people with public-spiritedness; the people [in turn] were simple and steady, straight and sincere.  
 They did not engage in angry struggle but goods were sufficient.  
 They did not strain their body but they completed their accomplishments.  
 They availed themselves of the gifts of Heaven and Earth and lived in harmony and unity with them.  
 Therefore,  
 His awesome demeanor was stern but not exercised;  
 His punishments existed but were not used.  
 His laws were sparing and uncomplicated.  
 Thus [Shen Nong’s] transformation [of the people] was numinous. [其化如神]  
 [9/67/17-23] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5)

The task is done in such a marvelous way that it is like what the divine agent does. “Its [the Way’s] transformations are numinous [*bianhua ruo shen* 變化若神]” [9/67/17-23] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5). Shen Nong 神農 transforms the people into “simple and steady, straight and sincere” human beings in order that they overcome self-interest and engage in the society altruistically. The methods he employs are stern, but sparing and uncomplicated. The sage-ruler does not initiate but follows the course of nature. He does not have a specific agenda imposed on the officials. These are similar to the principles of non-action (*wuwei*). By modeling himself on the Way, the ruler accomplishes his mission with little effort and great result, which is only what a god can do.

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<sup>62</sup> Morgan’s translation: Creation massed together passes through the one portal: the root of all things emerges through one gate (the *tao*). Its movements have no form: its transformations are God-like; its actions leave no vestiges, constantly behind and yet moving in advance (19).

## ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, the analysis of *shen* demonstrates that *shen* refers to the special form of the universal substance, *qi*, and the miraculous manner of actions. The cosmos, Heaven and Earth, human beings and animals are made of *shen*: the universe is the vessel of *shen*. When the cosmos transformed into the differentiated world, *qi* has manifested itself in diverse forms and different concentrations. Human beings are made of the refined *shen* while animals are made of the turbid *qi*. *Shen* is the human essence given by Heaven and prone to be altered by exposure to the differentiated world. Human beings are given consciousness (*shen*), thus they can deliberately cultivate their essence to the godlike level (*shen*), and this is why such treatises like the *Huainanzi* were composed. Sages, through relentless cultivation, become competent at preserving, concentrating, and employing their *shen*. Sages can cultivate their *shen* to the level of the Perfected, who can live according the Way without deliberate thought and alter life and death of the myriad things. The idea of cultivation of *shen* seems to imply that when one reaches this ultimate level, one perceives that *shen* is the same in every entity and everywhere, that is, one is able to be back in the undifferentiated world, which is the final goal of self-cultivation. *Shen* is used to describe the miraculous transformations of the myriad things by the Way and of the people by the sage. Based on the mechanisms of *shen* as the essence of the cosmos, human beings and sages, we can understand the workings of spirit-illumination and spirit-transformation in the next two chapters.



## Chapter III: *Shenming*

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*Shenming* 神明 is translated as numinous clarity, numinous light, spirit-discernment or spirit-illumination, and appears in Chapters II, VII, VIII, XI, XII, XV, XIX and XX. I will use spirit-illumination as the English equivalent. In this chapter, I will present different nuances of the term when used in different contexts such as with the Way, penetrating awareness, instinctive responses, quintessential spirit, humaneness and righteousness, and music and rituals. However, different descriptions of spirit-illumination appear to be complementary, adding to the overall understanding of the concept as a profound ideal of rulership. *Shenming* is associated with the power to reach out to the myriad things and influence them in a miraculous way. Spirit-illumination, *shenming* 神明, is comprised of *shen* 神 (spirit), which is associated with the mental faculty of human beings, sages and the cosmos, and *ming* 明 (light), which is associated with the vision, brilliance, and insight. Therefore, the power of *shenming* lies in the discerning (*shen*) and illuminating (*ming*) abilities. The sage-ruler who wants to acquire the understanding of spirit-illumination must undergo self-cultivation of his essence and spirit. The power from understanding spirit-illumination allows the ruler to influence his people to be good (in a philosophical sense). The reason why the ruler should endeavor to achieve understanding of spirit-illumination is that it is claimed to be the most powerful measure to transform the world compared to the affect of virtues and rituals.

## *Power of Insight*

The following passage argues that the extraordinary power of *shenming* is stronger than sunlight:

Penumbra asked Shadow: “Is the brilliance of the sunlight the spirits’ illumination [*shenming* 神明]?”

“No, it’s not,” replied Shadow.

“How do you know it to be so?” queried Penumbra.

Shadow replied: “When the *Fusang* tree falls into darkness (*fusang shouxie*), the sun illuminates the universe (*yuzhou*), the radiance of its light illuminating all within the four seas. But if you shut your doors and close your windows, it has no means to enter your home. If it were spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明],

it would penetrate the four corners of the world  
and there would be nowhere it did not reach;

above, delimiting (*ji*) Heaven

while below, encircling (*pan*) Earth

it would *transform and nourish* the myriad things and yet it could not be construed as having any particular appearance.

In the twinkling of an eye, it would embrace all that lies beyond the four seas.

How could “the brilliance of the sunlight be sufficient to name the spirits’ illumination [*shenming* 神明]?”<sup>63</sup>

[12/117/1-4] (Major and Queen, et al. 47-48)

In order to illuminate the features of spirit-illumination, the authors imagine a conversation between the two shadows. They conclude that *shenming* is superior to sunlight because it can penetrate through physical obstruction while light can be stopped by closing the door and stop shedding light at night. Light is easily perceived even though it is formless and weightlessness, which are also characteristics of spirits (*shen*), yet unlike sunlight, spirits are invisible. It is reasonable to deduce that because of their imperceptibility, the ancient Chinese attributed the spirits to the factor behind all inexplicable phenomena. *Ming* (light) also denotes the ability of

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<sup>63</sup>罔兩問於景曰：「昭昭者，神明也？」景曰：「非也。」罔兩曰：「子何以知之？」景曰：「扶桑受謝，日照宇宙，昭昭之光，輝燭四海。闔戶塞牖，則無由入矣。若神明，四通並流，無所不及，上際於天，下蟠於地，化育萬物而不可爲象，俛仰之間而撫四海之外。昭昭何足以明之！」

insight. *Shenming* can then mean the power to penetrate and completely understand the nature of things and events.<sup>64</sup> When one acquires the penetrating power, he is spirit-like.<sup>65</sup> The following passage demonstrates the power of seeing and understanding of *shenming*:

The commander must see singularly and know singularly,  
 Seeing singularly is to see what is not seen.  
 Knowing singularly is to know what is not known.  
 To see what others do not is called “enlightenment” [*ming* 明].  
 To know what others do not is called “spirit-like” [*shen* 神].

The spirit-like and enlightened [*shenming* 神明] is one who triumphs in advance.  
 One who triumphs in advance,  
 Cannot be attacked when he defends  
 Cannot be defeated in battle;  
 Cannot be defended against when he attacks.

This is because of “emptiness” [*xu* 虛] and “fullness” [*shi* 實].

When there is a gap between superiors and inferiors, when the commander and officials do not cooperate, when what one upholds is not straight, when the minds of the soldiers accumulate insubordination, this is called “emptiness”;

When the ruler is enlightened (*ming* 明) and the commander competent;

When superiors and inferiors are of the same mind;

When [the soldiers’] *qi* and intentions are both around;

This is called “fullness.”<sup>66</sup>

[15/153/1-4] (Major and Queen, et al. 45)

Spirit-illumination, *shenming*, in this context means enlightenment (*ming*) at the ‘spirit-like level’ (*shen*). It is defined by the authors as the power to see and to understand what is hidden

<sup>64</sup> Roth translated it as ‘mystical gnosis’ (123).

<sup>65</sup> When one attains equanimity one develops penetrating awareness [*tong* 通].

When one develops penetrating awareness one becomes like the transcendent. [理則均, 均則通, 通則神]

When one is like a spirit [*shen*] then with vision there is nothing unseen, with hearing there is nothing unheard, and with actions there is nothing incomplete.

[7/55/25-27] (Major and Queen, et al. 6)

<sup>66</sup> 夫將者，必獨見獨知。獨見者，見人所不見也；獨知者，知人所不知也。見人所不見，謂之明；知人所不知，謂之神。神明者，先勝者也。先勝者，先勝者，守不可攻，戰不可勝，攻不可守，虛實是也。上下有隙，將吏不相得，所持不直，卒心積不服，所謂虛也。主明將良，上下同心，氣意俱起，所謂實也。

and unknown. The military leader must have the ability to see singularly and know singularly<sup>67</sup> (*dujian duzhi* 獨見獨知), which means discerning the minor differences between things. In other words, the commander must learn how to control his troops at the micro level, which might involve personal visits to the battlefield and his units, not just giving orders to his subordinates from his tent far away from danger. Furthermore, the skilled commander, for instance, can analyze differences between encampments, various elements of a coming battle, the strengths and weaknesses of his soldiers, and other military factors. Through insight into warfare, he eliminates gaps between the superiors and inferiors, promotes cooperation, and inspires soldiers with ambition to win. Such an army will not suffer from any defeat.

Having the power of spirit (*shen*) and insight (*ming*), spirit-illumination allows freedom of the will:

The Superior Man [*junzi* 君子] has the ability to arouse the essence and examine the infinitesimal.

Polishing and grinding his talents, spontaneously exercising his Spirit Illumination [*shenming* 神明],

observing the broad spectrum of things;  
penetrating the obstructions of things,  
observing the clues of beginning and end,  
perceiving the realm that has no exterior,  
wandering freely within the limitless,  
meandering beyond the dust of the world.  
Splendidly, he stands alone;  
loftily he leaves the world.

Such are the means by which the mind of the sage wanders.<sup>68</sup>  
[19/206/22-19/207/6] (Major and Queen, et al. 20-21)

The Superior Man, with his ability [*cai* 才] to arouse the essence (maneuvering *qi*) and examine the infinitesimal, is said to have obtained the power of spirit-illumination. His mind acquires a

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<sup>67</sup> Edmund Ryden translates *dujian duzhi* 獨見獨知 as “see for himself” and “know for himself,” *ming* 明 as “perspicacity” and *shen* 神 as “being numinous” (42).

<sup>68</sup> 君子有能精搖摩監，砥礪其才，自試神明，覽物之博，通物之壅，觀始卒之端，見無外之境，以逍遙仿佯於塵埃之外，超然獨立，卓然離世，此聖人之所以游心。

wide scope of knowledge and penetrates through exterior layers to the core of things. His heart can wander freely, beyond the worldly restraints and temptations (namely dust [*chen* 塵]). He becomes an independent and superhuman being that external factors cannot affect. He can stay or leave the world according to his will. When he posits himself in the universe, he surpasses all things (*chao* 超). When he chooses to leave, he rises up above all creation like the sun rising from the east, which is described by the verb *zhuo* 卓. This character *zhuo* 卓 is comprised of *bi* 匕 (compare) and *zao* 早 (the rising sun); hence, *zhuo* means ‘comparable to the rising sun.’ This is related to spirit-illumination, *shenming*, as *ming* 明 means ‘light,’ ‘brilliance,’ and ‘illuminating.’ Hence, spirit-illumination, when exercised (*shi* 試), brings the ruler to the highest position in the world and releases him from all worldly matters. He becomes equal to the status of the sage [*shengren* 聖人].

Human beings, however, have lost the power of *shenming* because they desire material gains: “Man, on the other hand, driving his soul [神], disturbs his spirit [精]. He strives after insipid honors and gain: he pursues after the things of the outside world. These efforts all ruin his clarity of spirit [*shenming* 神明] and separate him from its true abode”<sup>69</sup> (Morgan 44-45). Desires for gains and fame are like the screen separating human beings from the truth and his genuineness as well. Spirit-like clarity is made possible by purifying and tranquilizing the quintessential spirit. It is a reciprocal relationship: if one has preserved his spirit, he can attain spirit-illumination and be free from anxieties; and if one wants to achieve spirit-illumination, one has to free his spirit from disturbances caused by desires. The closer one gets to spirit-illumination, the less desires one has in the mind, and vice versa.

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<sup>69</sup> 夫人之事其神而嬈其精，營慧然而有求於外，此皆失其神明而離其宅也。

The following passage in chapter VIII demonstrates the penetrating power of *shenming* by analyzing its relationship to instinctive disposition (*qing* 情)<sup>70</sup> and the (quintessential) spirit (*jingshen* 精神):

When spirit-discernment [*shenming* 神明] is stored up in the formlessness,  
and the essential *qi* (*jingshen*) reverts to ultimate truth,  
Then the eyes are clear [明] but they are not used for seeing,  
And the ears are comprehensive [聰] but they are not used for hearing,  
the mouth is apt [當] but it is not used for speaking,  
and the heart is orderly and penetrating [條達] but it is not used for thinking and  
planning.

[Under such circumstances,]  
there are responsibilities but no intentional action,  
harmonious action but no boastfulness.

There is a true expression of the instinctive responses invoked by (the ruler's) nature and  
life circumstance, so that wisdom and precedent are unable to confuse (him).

When the vital essence flows to the eye, vision is clear;  
When it is present in the ear, hearing is comprehensive;  
When it resides in the mouth, speech is apt;  
When it collects in the heart, its feelings are appropriate.

So when one shuts the Four Gates,  
in the end the body suffers no adversity,  
and the hundred joints have no diseases;  
there is neither death nor birth,  
neither vacuity nor repletion.

This is what is called the True Man [*zhen ren* 真人].<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Instinctive responses (*qing* 情) include thought, forethought, comprehensiveness of hearing, clarity of sight, happiness and anger:

“Heaven loves its (own) essence,  
Earth loves its (own) properties.

People love their (own) instinctive responses (*qing* 情).

Heaven's essential qualities are the sun, moon, stars, planets, thunder, lightning, wind and rain.  
Earth's properties are water, fire, metal, wood and earth.

People's instinctive responses are thought [思], forethought [慮], comprehensiveness (of hearing) [聰], clarity (of sight) [明], happiness [喜] and anger [怒].

Thus if one  
closes the Four Gates (of perception)  
and puts an end to the Five Extravagances,  
then one will be immersed with the Way.”  
[8/64/23-28] (Major and Queen, et al. 7-8)

[8/64/23-28] (Major and Queen, et al. 7-8)

‘Spirit-illumination storing up in the formlessness’ [*shenming cangyu wuxing* 神明藏於無形] means the successful reversal of the mind to the state of non-differentiation. Formlessness [*wuxing* 無形] is used to describe the cosmos in its original state, before the time of Heaven, Earth and creation.<sup>72</sup> In this universe, the essence and spirit (*jingshen*) are purified and unadulterated by superfluous feelings or desires; the senses are not used to absorb information that damages human essence and spirit. This passage illustrates the goal for the ruler to achieve in self-cultivation: He must close the Four Gates of perception (eyes, ears, mouth, and heart) in order to create and maintain within himself the state of formlessness, in opposition to the external world filled with colors, sounds, tastes, and emotions. His body and mind becomes an independent environment with characteristics of the original cosmos: shapelessness, murkiness, and chaos. In this state, the ruler obtains spirit-illumination and lets it govern his senses. Spirit-illumination, *shenming*, allows the ruler to regain his instinctive emotions: “There is a true expression of the instinctive responses invoked by (the ruler’s) nature and life circumstance, so that wisdom and precedent are unable to confuse (him)” [8/64/23-28] (Major and Queen, et al. 7-8). His senses are unaffected by the external world. The ruler becomes the True Man, the person who has successfully restored the original patterns of the cosmos at the micro level, that is, within himself. He then will go on trying to re-establish the original patterns of the universe on a broader level, that is, in the society.

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<sup>71</sup> 是故神明藏於無形，精神反於至真，則目明而不以視，耳聰而不以聽，目言而不以當，心條達而不以思慮，委而弗爲，和而弗矜，冥性命之情，而智故不得雜焉。精泄於目則其視明，在於耳則其聽聰，留於口則其言當，集於心則其慮通。故閉四關則身無患，百節莫苑，莫死莫生，莫虛莫盈，是謂真人。

<sup>72</sup> “Long ago, in the time before there existed Heaven and Earth, there was only figure (*xiang*) without form (*xing*) [惟像無形]” (Puett 271).

The authors of the *Huainanzi* argue that some people lose their spirit-illumination although they are bestowed with the same instinctive responses. It is because they allow their senses instead of the Way to guide them:

The nature of water is clear,  
But soil muddies it.  
The nature of human beings is calm and tranquil,  
But lusts and desires disrupt it.

What humanity receives from Heaven is:

The relationship between the ears and eyes and sounds and colors,  
The relationship between the nose and mouth and tastes and fragrances,  
The relationship between the skin and flesh and cold and heat.

Their essentials (*qing* 情) are the same in everyone.

So why is it that some people attain the numinous light [*tongyu shenming* 通於神明]

While others are nothing more than fools?

It is because the ways in which they control them are different.

Hence

The numen [*shen* 神] is the fount of knowledge.  
When the numen is clear, knowledge is illuminated.  
Knowledge is the storehouse of the mind.  
When knowledge is impartial, the mind is balanced.

Human beings never mirror themselves in surging water,  
They mirror themselves in still water.

Because it is tranquil.

No one sees their form in cast iron,  
They see it in the burnished iron of a mirror,

Because its surface is even.

Only the even and tranquil  
Can reflect the true nature of things.

When looked at from this viewpoint,

Utility depends on what has no use.

Therefore

The Empty Chamber generates brightness  
And the lucky and auspicious will stop therein.  
So when the mirror is bright  
Dust cannot sully it.  
When the numen is clear  
Passion cannot disrupt it.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 水之性真清而土汨之，人性安靜而嗜欲亂之。夫人之所受於天者，耳目之於聲色也，口鼻之於芳臭也，肌膚之於寒燠，其情一也，或通於神明，或不免於癡狂者，何也？其所為制者異也。是故神者智之淵也，淵清則智明矣；智者心之府也，智公則心平矣。人莫鑑於流沫，而鑑於止水者，以其靜也；莫窺形於生鐵，而窺於明鏡者，以睹其易也。夫唯



[2/10a9-b4] (Roth in Lopez 140)

Heaven gives human beings the five senses to perceive things in the outer environment. Heaven then bequeaths upon them the faculties to analyze and emotions to appreciate what they perceive. At this stage, human beings have spirit-illumination because people's perception of things is appropriate to their actual values. However, in the course of time, these faculties and true emotions are replaced by lusts and desires if one does not constantly practice self-cultivation. Like surging water and cast iron cannot reflect a true image, the disturbed mind with impure emotions cannot offer good judgments. The senses are no longer capable of analyzing and appreciating information correctly. Therefore, the sage-ruler is one who surpasses sense perception and human wisdom to a higher form of gnosis or knowing called *shenming*. In this state of spirit-illumination, wisdom and knowledge are discarded, and the instinctive responses (*qing*), decreed by Heaven to guide one's actions, are restored, allowing the senses to be most perceptive but not employed.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the senses regain their original nature of emptiness and thus having the fullest potentiality to react to external stimulations; nevertheless, since they are not used but carefully preserved, their power is retained at the highest level.

While the passage [8/64/23-28] above focuses on *shenming*'s exertion of its power to transform agents of the external environment, the following one demonstrates spirit-illumination as an internal state:

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易且靜，形物之性也。由此觀之，用也必假之於弗用也，是故虛室生白，吉祥止也。夫鑑明者塵垢弗能穢，神清者嗜欲弗能亂。

<sup>74</sup> Compare to *jingshen*:

Only if you do not use something [now] can you use it later;

Only if you do not act [now] can you act later.

If essence and spirit are overworked, they become dispersed;

If the ears and eyes are [employed] excessively, they become exhausted.

Thus the ruler who has the Way extinguishes planning and discards intent. Quiet and empty, he waits.

[9/77/7-15] (Major and Queen, et al. 53)

Tranquility and stillness [*jing mo* 靜漠] are the dwellings of spirit-like discernment [*shenming* 神明],

And emptiness and nothingness are where the Way resides.

For this reason, those, who seek for it externally, lose it internally, and those who preserve it internally attain it externally as well. It is like the roots and branches of trees: none of the thousands of limbs and tens of thousands of leaves does not derive from the roots.<sup>75</sup>

[7/54/24-55/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 2-3)

Tranquility and emptiness are the root, hidden yet interrelated with the myriad things. Similar to the root gives life to and thus having power over branches, tranquility and emptiness are able to control everything as they are the core (*ben* 本) of all emotions and actions. Therefore, in order to enter the state of *shenming*, the ruler must practice inner cultivation, that is, looking for it within himself. Once he has obtained *shenming* internally, he will have the power of insightfulness in the external environment as well. Only the cultivated mind that is unaltered by emotions, preferences or desires can obtain understanding and penetrate (*tongyu* 通於) spirit-illumination. The heart/mind (*xin* 心) is the agent of self-cultivation:

When the mind [*xin* 心] is not worried or happy it achieves the perfection of inner power [*de* 德].

When the mind is absorbed and does not alter it achieves the perfection of tranquility [*jing* 靜].

When lusts and desires are not borne by the mind it achieves the perfection of emptiness [*xu* 虛].

When the mind is without likes and dislikes it achieves the perfection of equanimity [*ping* 平].

When the mind is not mixed up with things it achieves the perfection of purity [*cui* 粹].

If the mind is able to achieve these five qualities then it will be absorbed in Numinous Clarity [*shenming* 神明].

If it is absorbed in Numinous Clarity then it will realize its inner potential.<sup>76</sup>

[1/7/4-11] (Major and Queen, et al. 29)

<sup>75</sup>夫靜漠者，神明之宅也；虛無者，道之所居也。是故或求之於外者，失之於內；有守之於內者，失之於外。譬猶本與末也，從本引之，千枝萬葉莫不隨也。

<sup>76</sup>故心不憂樂，德之至也；通而不變，靜之至也；嗜欲不載，虛之至也；無所好憎，平之至也；不與物散，粹之至也。能此五者，則通於神明。通於神明者，得其內者也。

Sometimes the text describes how the ruler's *shenming* can create and transform the world while other times the text describes it as a beneficial state to the individual cultivating this highest form of gnosis. *Shenming* is not a kind of substance like essence and spirit, but rather is the environment to which the sage-ruler belongs. Spirit-illumination is not the end, but the means to realize one's inner potential (*de*). In order to attain the state of spirit-illumination, the ruler must attain the five qualities (inner power, tranquility, emptiness, equanimity and purity) by being completely unaffected by the external world. Roth claims that "it is through the systematic elimination of the emotions, distractions, desires, preferences, thoughts, deliberations and attachments to sense-objects that usually flood the conscious mind that one may break through to the level of "Sprit-like Clarity" [*shenming*] and realize what lies at the basis of one's own inner being" (Roth 14). In a sense, in order to achieve the state of *shenming*, the person must undergo multiple stimulating experiences. The mind is trained in this way until it is able to restrain the tendency to alter according to external stimulations. As we have learned from chapter on *shen*, the mind naturally responds to arousals in the same way as the mirror's reflection, echo or shadow.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, to the ruler, the state of *shenming* is not a natural endowment, but rather a product of painstaking and extensive cultivation. We have concluded that one's penetrating power is at the highest level when one obtains, cultivates, and preserves the quintessential spirit. His mind attains the utmost tranquility and emptiness; his senses are able to resist external stimulations, and the authentic emotions (*qing*) are restored.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, *shenming* is used to

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<sup>77</sup> See passage [1/2/13-16].

<sup>78</sup> But if you make your ears and eyes totally clear and profoundly penetrating and not enticed by external things;  
If your vital breath and attention are empty, tranquil, still and serene, and you eliminate lusts and desires;  
If the Five Orbs are stable, reposed, replete and full and not leaking [the vital energies];

describe the status of penetrating awareness that one is able to achieve through cultivating his essence and spirit.

It seems that *shenming* cannot be achieved by self-cultivation through wisdom [*zhi* 智], cunning [*qiao* 巧], agility [*jin* 筋], and strength [*li* 力] – opposite characteristics of instinctive responsiveness (*qing*):

Heaven and humanity are mutually in communication with each other. Thus  
 when a state is destroyed and perishes, the pattern of Heaven changes.  
 when an age is deluded and chaotic, rainbows appear.  
 The myriad things are mutually linked; *spirit-essence* and impurity are mutually in  
 conflict. Thus matters of *spirit-illumination* [*shenming* 神明]  
 cannot be created by wisdom and cunning,  
 nor can they be achieved by agility and strength.  
 What Heaven and Earth embrace,  
 what yin and yang nurture,  
 what rain and dew moisten/saturate  
 are the myriad things which are born and live.<sup>79</sup>  
 [20/210/18-25] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5)

The reason is that, the ability of god-like perception is not achieved using artificial abilities. The Heavenly qualities must be obtained by the Heavenly nature because the divine and the humanly, contaminated will certainly try to overcome each other: “*spirit-essence* and impurity are mutually in conflict” [20/210/18-25] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5). One should not let the non-natural characteristics to replace the original nature because its consequence is not only the

If your Quintessential Spirit is preserved within your physical frame [*xinggu* 形骸] and does not flow out,  
 Then you will be able to gaze before past generations and to see beyond future events.  
 [1/2/13-16] (Major and Queen, et al. 8-9)

Sages experience them [pleasures] but not so much as to dominate their numinous essence [*jingshen* 精神] nor to disrupt their vital energy and mindfulness [*qizhi* 氣志], or cause their minds to be enticed away from their true [essential] nature [*qingxing* 情性].  
 [1/8/25-1/9/4] (Major and Queen, et al. 38)

<sup>79</sup> 天之與人以有相通也。故國危亡而天文變，世惑亂而虹蜺見，萬物有以相連，精祲有以相蕩也。故神明之事，不可以智巧為也，不可以筋力致也。天地所包，陰陽所嘔，雨露所濡，化生萬物。

agitation of one's mind, but at the higher level, the society will be in turmoil and the universe's order will be upset as well. These atrocious outcomes are realized because humans and the society and the cosmos are mutually linked. One should respect the power to create and transform of *shenming* in nature, and use it to enlighten one's mind and replace the 'human' acquired skills such as physical strength and wisdom.

### ***Power to Create and Transform***

*Shenming* means the power to create (*zao* 造), generate (*sheng* 生), transform (*hua* 化), nourish (*yu* 育), exterminate (*sha* 殺) and respond (*ying* 應) in a god-like way; this is closely related to the function of the Way. *Shenming* alters the myriad things both in the natural world and in the civilized world. Spirit-illumination in nature appears to be the force behind the appearance and disappearance of things. Sages and great men acquire this form of understanding and employ it to transform the contaminated and disturbed human nature back to purity and tranquility. The following passage depicts *shenming*, as an omnipresent, omnipotent, and invisible force, miraculously transforming and nourishing the myriad things:

If it were spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明],  
 it would penetrate the four corners of the world  
 and there would be nowhere it did not reach;  
 above, delimiting (*ji*) Heaven  
 while below, encircling (*pan*) Earth  
 it would *transform and nourish* the myriad things [化育萬物] and yet it could not  
 be construed as having any particular appearance.

In the twinkling of an eye, it would embrace [*fu* 撫] all that lies beyond the four seas.

[12/117/1-4] (Major and Queen, et al. 47-48)

Having the attributes of the spirit, *shenming* instantly reaches every corner of the world and unlike sunlight, none can block it. It spreads over space and simultaneously alters everything

without being construed as having a particular form. The passage below further demonstrates *shenming* as the agent of generating and exterminating the myriad things in a spirit-like way:

[Heaven] ...

In giving life [*sheng* 生] to things, no one sees the means by which it nurtures them and yet things reach maturity;

In taking life away [*sha* 殺] from things, no one sees the means by which it sends them off to death and yet things cease to exist.

This is called “spirit-illumination” [*shenming* 神明].

Sages resemble spirit-illumination. Thus,

When they initiate good fortune, no one sees from whence it originates and yet it arises;

When they eradicate calamity, no one sees the means by which they do so and yet it disappears.

Move away from it [viz. spirit-illumination], yet it nears;

Approach it, yet it recedes;

Search for it, yet it will not be obtained;

Examine into it, yet it is not insubstantial;

Reckon it by days, yet it is incalculable;

Reckon it by years, yet there is surplus.”<sup>80</sup>

[20/210/3-6] (Major and Queen, et al. 1-2)

It compares the workings of *shenming* in the natural world with the power of *shenming* in the human world by first presenting the mechanisms of Heaven as spirit-illumination and then by arguing that sages resemble it. The mechanisms of spirit-illumination are unknown to everyone who can only see the outcomes. The action of the sage is the manifestation of the cosmic operations in the human world. They appear to people as invisible, passive and non-imposing, yet they in fact actively contribute to make the world better by creating fortune (*qi fu* 起福) and eliminating calamities (*chu huo* 除禍). It demonstrates the ideal of modeling the human world on nature. Nevertheless, *shenming* in nature appears to be indifferent as it gives and takes away life from the myriad things indiscriminately while sages are benevolent as they generate happiness

<sup>80</sup> 其生物也，莫見其所養而物長；其殺物也，莫見其所喪而物亡，此之謂神明。聖人象之，故其起福也，不見其所由而福起；其除禍也，不見其所以而禍除。遠之則邇，延之則疏；稽之弗得，察之不虛；日計無算，歲計有餘。

and prevent catastrophe. The actions of the legendary Five Thearchs and the Three Kings<sup>81</sup> epitomize *shenming*:

The Five Thearchs and the Three Kings  
viewed the world as a light [affair],  
minimized the myriad things,  
put death and life on a par,  
matched change and transformation.

They embraced the great heart (*xin* 心) of a sage by mirroring the dispositions (*qing* 情) of the myriad things.

Above they took spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明]<sup>82</sup> as their friend,  
below they took creation and transformation as their companions.

Now if one wants to study their way, and does not attain their pure clarity and mysterious sagacity [*qingming xuansheng* 清明玄聖], yet maintain their methods, statutes, rules and ordinances, it is clear that one cannot achieve order.<sup>83</sup>

[11/99/7-18] (Major and Queen et al. 20-21)

*Shenming* is also one of the qualifications of these great men allowing them to alter and create the civilization, evidenced by the “methods, statutes, rules and ordinances” [法籍憲令], which have been passed down to generations. The eight men cherish the benevolent heart (*xin*) of the sage by following their instinctive dispositions (*qing*), and use *shenming*'s power in affecting the myriad things on earth. *Shenming* is the means to achieve the intention of the humane heart, which is the true nature of human beings. Laws and regulations of the great men are created out of the heart full of concern for the people and out of the mind absorbed in spirit-illumination.

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<sup>81</sup> They are the mythological, semi-historical rulers whose reigns were supposed to precede the Xia Dynasty.

<sup>82</sup> Cleary translates *shenming* as ‘spiritual luminosities’: “Ancient leaders considered the world light and myriad things small; they equalized death and life and assimilated to change and evolution. They embraced the mind of great sages to mirror the feelings of all beings. Above, they were companions of *spiritual luminosities*; below, they were members of creation. If those who want to learn their Way now do not attain their clear illumination and profound sagacity, but just keep their laws and policies, clearly they cannot govern” (19).

Wallacker translates *shenming* as ‘spiritual light’: “Above they were mates with the spiritual light; below they were [fellow-] men with the creative force [of nature]” (40).

<sup>83</sup> 五帝三王，輕天下，細萬物，齊死生，同變化，抱大聖之心，以鏡萬物之情，上與神明為友，下與造化為人。今欲學其道，不得其清明玄聖，而守其法籍憲令，不能為治亦明矣。

*Shenming* is the ‘pure clarity and mysterious sagacity’ [清明玄聖] behind the sage’s actions that the common people cannot perceive. Therefore, if they mimic the sage’s policies that are only the surface of his wisdom and insight, they will fail to establish order in the state.

According to the *Huainanzi*, spirit-illumination, *shenming*, is illustrated as a creative power in the human world:

Formerly,  
 Cang Xie invented writing,  
 Rong created the calendar,  
 Hu Cao made clothing,  
 Hou Ji introduced agriculture,  
 Yi Di invented wine,  
 and Xi Zhong made carts.  
 These six men all had  
 the Way of Spirit Illumination [皆有神明之道]  
 and [followed] footsteps of sagely wisdom [聖智之跡].

Thus [each] person invented something and bequeathed it to posterity. It is not the case that a single person alone could have embraced all of them. Each fully applied their knowledge, prizing what he hoped to achieve so that subsequently each provided something for the world. Now if these six men had altered<sup>84</sup> their tasks, would their brilliance then not be perceptible? The myriad things of the world are utterly numerous. Knowledge is not sufficient to envelop them all. After the House of Zhou there have been no worthies such as these six and yet people have all cultivated their callings. If among the people of that age there was not a single talented person, how did they come to know the Way of the Six Worthies? Education and training extended and continued it so that their knowledge could flow forth and penetrate through [to later] ages]. From this perspective it is clear that learning can never cease.<sup>85</sup> (cut off *ming yi*)  
 [19/206/10-14] (Major and Queen, et al. 18-19)

The six great inventions of the six great men, which are writing, calendar, clothing, wine, agriculture and carts, are of god-like quality as people can see and make use of them on the daily basis. However, none knows how they were created or based on what principles. In other words,

<sup>84</sup> *Yi* 易 can mean ‘switched.’

<sup>85</sup> 昔者，蒼頡作書，容成造曆，胡曹爲衣，后稷耕稼，儀狄作酒，奚仲爲車。此六人者，皆有神明之道，聖智之跡，故人作一事而遺後世，非能一人而獨兼有之。各悉其知，貴其所欲達，遂爲天下備。今使六子者易事，而明弗能見者何？萬物至衆，而知不足以奄之。周室以後，無六子之賢，而皆脩其業；當世之人，無一人之才，而知其六賢之道者何？教順施續，而知能流通。由此觀之，學不可已，明矣！



*shenming* is god-like because its outcomes are practical and indispensable to human beings. Moreover, the great men of history invented the products of civilization. Instead of attempting to reverse to the original state of utter simplicity, the six men invented things that have complicated human life, further removing human beings from their authenticity. Writing and calendars make way for wisdom and precedent to pass down to generations. Clothes distinguish one man from another. Wine muddies the mind. Agriculture and carts allow people to create more wealth than enough to sustain them. And yet, those inventors are praised as having spirit-illumination and following the sagely way. The way of spirit-illumination enabled the sages to know what and how to make these extremely necessary things. It can be explained that these inventions are inevitable in the progress of mankind as the cosmos expands with the generation of the myriad things, and that progression allows human beings to survive in the struggle with beasts and natural disasters. It can also be explained that civilization is encouraged and promoted because invention and development create changes in the external environment; however, the cultivation of human nature is an internal act and thus the process of self-cultivation remains unaffected by the changing surroundings.

Interestingly, the second half of the passage argues that although the six great men had the power of spirit-illumination, none of them could singularly make all six inventions. In fact, one man is strictly responsible for his invention, and cannot invent a different one. It can be deduced that spirit-illumination, adapted to a person's self and conditions, allows him to go on one set career track, that is, to create one particular thing. It is because knowledge is unable to cover the multitude of things. It already requires extraordinary insight from one person to invent just one thing. However, creative power might be rare among people, yet education allows others to learn about these inventions and develop their own careers. The authors argue that learning

and training are the alternative to spirit-illumination for the people of less talent in later generations. Society continues development even without the great men because the ordinary masses, through education, continue to inherit such inventions and develop their skills that might be less extraordinary but just as useful.

In the context of war, *shenming* is described as the ability to adapt constantly and limitlessly:

The military is weak if it loses the Way;  
 Strong if it obtains the Way.  
 The commander is inept if he loses the Way;  
 Skillful if he obtains the Way.  
     What is the Way?  
     Embodies the circle and is modeled upon the square,  
     Shoulders the yin and embraces the yang,  
     Is soft on the left and hard on the right,  
     Treads in the obscure and carries illumination.

It [the Way] alters and transforms without constancy [*bianhua wu chang* 變化無常], it obtains the source of the One in responding limitlessly [*ying wu fang* 應無方], this is called spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明].<sup>86</sup>  
 [15/144/1-7] (Major and Queen, et al. 5)

Spirit-illumination is used in the context with the Way, which is explicitly defined as the ability to combine and reconcile pairs of opposites (circle/square, yin/yang, soft/hard, left/right, and obscure/illumination). The universe is comprised of contrary qualities, if we follow one extreme, we will miss out on the other. Therefore, the military on par with the Way means the General is able to reconcile two extremes: His troops are highly disciplined (implied by the quality of being square 方/hard 剛/yang 陽) but there is leeway for improvisation (round 圓/soft 柔/yin 陰). His policies are clear (illuminating 明) to every soldier of his, and yet their essence is well concealed (obscure 幽) from the enemy. On the general level, he must reconcile his personal ambition to

<sup>86</sup>兵失道而弱，得道而強；將失道而拙，得道而工；國得道而存，失道而亡。所謂道者，體圓而法方，背陰而抱陽，左柔而右剛，履幽而戴明，變化無常，得一之原，以應無方，是謂神明。

win and the universal principles of the Way; if the former is not in line with the latter, the general will suffer losses. He must reconcile the two worlds: the differentiated (the external environment that has evolved out of the murkiness) and the non-differentiated (his cultivated mind that has returned to its original state of nothingness). Hence, the military leader must achieve understanding of the Way, which is not an easy task because the Way is formless, nameless and inconstant,<sup>87</sup> in order to modify his action accordingly. We can claim that the understanding of the Way is characterized as “spirit-like illumination.” Spirit-illumination allows the commander to tirelessly create and constantly revise strategies to attack and counter the enemy’s tactics. He must be creative in applying unconventional methods and not restrict himself to any principle so as to respond spontaneously to different situations. The principle of the military is to take the enemy by surprise, and the commander with spirit-illumination masters this art of war. This point emphasizes spirit-illumination’s miraculous and undetectable power that triumphs over the myriad things. Spirit-illumination appears to draw its power from embracing dualities: circle/square, yin/yang, hard/soft, obscurity/illumination, and initiate/respond. This point will be analyzed in the next section.

### ***Source of Shenming’s Power***

The two following passages from the *Huainanzi* demonstrate how duality is the source of *shenming*’s power:

Heaven extends to the highest,  
 Earth extends to the thickest.  
 The moon illumines the nights,  
 The sun illumines the days.  
 The arrayed stars are bright and clear;

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<sup>87</sup> See *Daodejing*, Chapter One. Since the *Huainanzi* draws heavily from the *Daodejing*, they must have similar perception and definition of the Way.

Yin and yang transform.

There is no purposive activity in this. If you rectify their Ways, *things will be thus-of-themselves* [*ziran* 自然]. Thus,

Yin and the yang [cycle through] four seasons, but not [in order to] generate the myriad things;

Rain and dew fall in season, but not [in order to] nurture grasses and trees.

Spirit and illumination join [*shen ming jie* 神明接],

yin and yang harmonize,

and the myriad things are born.<sup>88</sup>

[20/211/5-7] (Major and Queen et al. 7-8)

“Heaven, earth, and the four seasons do not [purposefully] produce the ten thousand things.

Spirit and illumination join [*shen ming jie* 神明接],

yin and yang harmonize,

and the myriad things are born. When a sage rules the world, he does not change [*yi* 易] the peoples’ nature, but rather soothes and facilitates the nature that is already present and purifies and cleanses [*didang* 滌蕩] it. Thus following [the nature of things] may be considered great, whereas making [things] may be considered minor.<sup>89</sup>

[20/212/7-19] (Major and Queen, et al. 13)

Spirit-illumination, *shenming*, is not one concept but like *yin* and *yang*, Heaven and Earth, sun and moon, they are two: spirit (*shen*) and illumination (*ming*). Therefore, *shenming* takes the connotation of a pair of dual elements that exist in nature. Heaven and Earth, yin and yang, the sun and the moon, and natural phenomena contain no purpose in their doing, which is similar to *shenming*’s indifference in its action. They operate according to *ziran*, meaning ‘of themselves’ or ‘for themselves’; therefore, they do not aim to create things. Things come into being because it is their disposition to realize themselves in reality when they have the right condition. Instead, with the combination of spirit and illumination and the harmonization of yin and yang forces, the myriad things are born (*sheng* 生). It implies that there are four elements constituting a thing: yin, yang, spirit, and light. It sheds light on the creating and transforming power of *shenming*

<sup>88</sup> 天致其高，地致其厚，月照其夜，日照其晝，陰陽化，列星朗，非其道而物自然。故陰陽四時，非生萬物也；雨露時降，非養草木也；神明接，陰陽和，而萬物生矣。

<sup>89</sup> 天地四時，非生萬物也，神明接，陰陽和，而萬物生之。聖人之治天下，非易民性也，拊循其所有而滌蕩之，故因則大，化則細矣。

discussed in the previous section. Since spirit (*shen*), as we discussed in chapter II, is the consciousness, it explains why *shenming* is a purposive action. *Ming* (light) denotes the presence of an object that is perceived by human beings as it contains the luminous quality, or penetrating power. ‘Illumination’ is the agent that comes up with the idea, while the spirit, as the consciousness, executes it. When the intention and the capability meet, they make use of natural materials and conditions to generate things. The first passage demonstrates that spirit and illumination cannot create and transform the myriad things by themselves; rather, they rely on natural conditions to do so. The second passage argues that such attributes are also of the sages’ actions: “he does not change the peoples’ nature, but rather soothes and facilitates the nature that is already present and purifies and cleanses it.” Sages rely on human nature that has already taken form and guide it toward goodness rather than forging it into a desirable mold. It implies that governing cannot be executed in “quick solution” fashion; the ruler cannot rely on harsh laws to quickly end crimes in this state. Human nature does not welcome coercion; therefore, using punishment can promptly put an end to offenses, even though it cannot alter the root of human nature. Under the legal government, outwardly people appear to obey the laws, yet inwardly they are scheming plans to transgress the laws. The best system of governance is one in which the sage-ruler gradually instills into the people the sense of integrity and slowly expels covetous desires out of them.

### ***Comparison with Other Rulership Principles***

I have demonstrated that in the civilized world, *shenming* is the power of sages to create and transform human beings and it is also the source of such power. The following section is

about comparison between spirit-illumination and other measures such as virtues, humaneness and righteousness, and music and rituals in ruling the people.<sup>90</sup>

*Shenming* and *daode*<sup>91</sup> (virtues) are believed to be superior to humaneness, righteousness, music and rituals:

Coming down to the era of decline, [it transpired that]  
 people were abundant but wealth was scarce;  
 people labored to the utmost but their nourishment was insufficient.  
 Thus competition and strife were born, and benevolent was valued.  
 The benevolent and the petty-minded were (however) not treated equitably.  
 neighbors formed groups  
 and friends formed cabals.  
 They promoted falsehood and deceit,  
 and cherished a spirit of contrivance and artifice.  
 Thus rightness was valued.  
 None of [the people's] feelings associated with yin and yang [i.e., sexual feelings]  
 were free from the stimulation of blood and qi. Men and women [therefore]  
 gathered in places and promiscuously dwelt together without distinction.  
 Thus propriety is valued.  
 Feelings evoked by [the people's] natures and life circumstances overflowed and  
 were mutually conflicting. They could not stop themselves and therefore were  
 discordant.  
 Thus music was valued.  
 [8/62/6-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 2)

Music and rituals can regulate people's feelings that are easily superfluous and mutually conflicting; humanness and rightness can execute matters to prevent contention and deception; and virtues can exert influence on people's conduct. However, what they do is to repair the

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<sup>90</sup> The *Daodejing* also undermines the impact of Confucian values and knowledge in general on the people:

“Do away with sageliness, discard knowledge,  
 And the people will benefit a hundredfold.  
 Do away with humaneness, discard rightness,  
 And the people will once more be filial and loving,  
 Dispense with cleverness, discard profits  
 And there will be no more bandits and thieves.”  
 (Chapter 19) (de Bari 84-85)

<sup>91</sup> *Daode*, in this context, carries the Confucian connotation, signifying ‘morality’ or ‘virtue,’ not ‘the Way and its Virtue.’ Because the *Huainanzi* promotes the vision of a pre-moralistic and pre-rationalistic world, *daode* is not as highly valued as in Confucian texts.

deterioration of specific conditions, but they do not treat the root of decadence: “benevolence, rightness, propriety and music though able to save [the world] from ruin, are still not the perfection of comprehensive governance” [8/62/6-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 2). *Shenming* and *daode* are able to cleanse human nature of the inauthentic traits they acquire from experiences and restore it to the primordial condition. After arguing that *shenming* and *daode* are more powerful than humaneness, righteousness, music and rituals, the authors compare *shenming* and *daode*:

When spirit-discernment [*shenming* 神明] is established in the world,  
then minds revert to their original state [*chu* 初].

When minds reverts to their original state,

Then the people’s nature becomes good (*shan* 善).

When the people’s nature becomes good, they are followed by heaven and earth and by yin and yang. Wealth then becomes sufficient. When wealth becomes sufficient, the people are respectful; covetousness, petty mindedness, anger and competition have no occasion to arise. From this one can see that (under these circumstances) there is no need for humaneness and rightness.

When the Way and its Power are established in the world, then the people become pure and simple. Thus,

their eyes are not fixed on beauty

their ears are not drawn to sounds.

If there be (entertainers) sitting in rows and singing songs, or prancing about with their hair hanging loose –

even if they be as beautiful as Mao Qiang or Xi Shi,

(the people would) take no pleasure in them;

even if the tunes were “Falling Wings” or “Martial,” they would not find any music/joy in them;

even if the lewdness were without limit, it would come to nothing.

From this one can see that (under these circumstances) there is no need for propriety and music. Thus,

When virtue declines, benevolence is born;

When conduct fails, rightness is established.

When harmony is lost, there are sounds and ditties;

When rituals are decayed, comportment is gaudy.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>92</sup> 神明定於天下而心反其初，心反其初而民性善，民性善而天地陰陽從而包之，則財足而人澹矣，貪鄙忿爭不得生焉。由此觀之，則仁義不用矣。道德定於天下而民純樸，則目不營於色，耳不淫於聲，坐俳而歌謠，被髮而浮游，雖有毛嬙、西施之色，不知說也，掉

[8/62/6-20] (Major and Queen et al. 3-4)

*Daode* brings human beings to the state of purity and simplicity (*chunpu* 純樸), which are characteristics of the primordial state of the Dao, and *shenming* reverses human nature to the original state, characterized by goodness (*shan* 善). Therefore, both *daode* and *shenming* bring human beings back to the state in which people and the Way are unified. In this state, they are free from excessive and clashing (“unnatural”) feelings and they become good (*shan* 善)<sup>93</sup> – humans’ original nature. Re-gaining goodness, human beings react as the heart compels them. They live in an abundance of wealth and harmony. They do not have to conform themselves according to the patterns of Heaven and Earth, yin and yang; instead, their good nature makes the cosmic forces follow and protect them.

It becomes apparent that *daode* replaces music and rituals in moderating human instinctual emotions (sexual feelings and sense perception), and *shenming* replaces humaneness and righteousness in moderating social behaviors (manifested in relations with neighbors, brothers, friends, and the communities). The absence of music and rituals is not as detrimental as that of benevolence and righteousness. Without music and rituals, there are promiscuity, excesses of feelings, ditties, and gaudy comportment, but not contention or war. Without benevolence and righteousness, however, competition and strife will lead to the formation of factions within the community. It will lead to fights over scarce resources, which is more likely to end in the self-destruction of mankind. Hence, *shenming* is more important than *daode* in

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羽、武象，不知樂也，淫泆無別，不得生焉。由此觀之，禮樂不用也。是故德衰然後仁生，行沮然後義立，和失然後聲調，禮淫然後容飾。

<sup>93</sup> *Shan* is also used by Mencius in describing human nature “Human nature is good just as water seeks low ground. There is no man who is not good; there is no water that does not flow downwards.” [人性之善也，猶水之就下也。人无有不善，水无有不下。] (Mencius Book VI Part A). According to Mencius, humans are good because “no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others” (Mencius Book II Part A).



sustaining the human world. The following passage proves the more crucial role of spirit-illumination:

Thus,

If one understands [*zhi*] spirit-illumination [*shenming* 神明], then one can understand the inadequacy of the Way and Power [*daode*] for affecting things;  
 If one understands the Way and Power, then one can understand the inadequacy of humaneness and rightness [*renyi*] in putting things into practice;  
 If one understands humaneness and rightness, then one can understand the inadequacy of ritual and music [*liyue*] in regulating conduct.<sup>94</sup>

[8/62/6-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 5)

Once understanding of spirit-discernment is achieved, the people will realize that other measures are not sufficient to nourish human life. We see an order of efficacy: at the bottom are rituals and music, above them are humaneness and rightness, followed by virtue, and then the highest form is spirit-illumination. The power of *daode* 道德 (virtues), *renyi* 仁義 (humaneness and righteousness) and *liyue* 禮樂 (rituals and music) acts on [*wei* 爲], puts into practice [*xing* 行], and cultivates [*xiu* 脩] various things; all of these verbs include a coercive nature, different from *shenming*'s nurturing nature (*yu*). Such measures are to rescue humans from strife, errors, lewdness and melancholy that do not exist in the age of antiquity.<sup>95</sup> Only in the state of decline do human beings have the tendency to fall into depravity because “people were abundant but wealth was scarce/people labored to the utmost but their nourishment was insufficient” [8/62/6-

<sup>94</sup> 是故知神明然後知道德之不足爲也，知道德然後知仁義之不足行也，知仁義然後知禮樂之不足脩也。

<sup>95</sup> The people of antiquity were of one qi with Heaven and Earth; they wandered in an era of singularity. At this time,

There was no garnering advantage by praise and rewards,  
 no intimidation by mutilations and punishments.  
 Propriety and rightness, purity and modesty had not yet been established,  
 slander and flattery, benevolence and contempt had not yet been set up,  
 and the myriad peoples had not yet (begun to) treat one another with fraud and oppression,  
 cruelty and exploitation – it was as if they were still immersed in turbid obscurity [*hunming* 混冥]  
 [8/62/6-20]

20] (Major and Queen, et al. 5). Morality, humaneness, righteousness, propriety, music and rituals therefore aim to suppress these bad characteristics instead of restoring human nature to its original condition. *Shenming* is the mechanism of transformation whereby the ruler facilitates this grand return to primordial authenticity.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, the discussion of *shenming* reveals opinions on the ideals of rulership. Governance begins with the ruler's striving to achieve complete insight into the natural mechanisms of the world and then his transforming the people's nature to be good by means of expelling desires and expressing original emotions. The sage-ruler governs with his ability of spirit-illumination, which can enlighten the subjects based on the supremacy of the Dao, and he transforms their state of mind back to the undifferentiated beginning. The separate use of *shen* and *ming* also demonstrates the theory of the creation of everything in the world as the random, yet harmonious, combination of yin-yang forces, the spirit and the light.

## Chapter IV: *Shenhua*

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In this chapter, I analyze the term *shenhua* 神化, translated as spirit-transformation, spirit-like transformation, and transformation of the spirit. *Shenhua* appears most frequently in chapter IX: *The Ruler's Techniques* and in chapters X, XV and XX as well. *Shenhua* can be roughly understood as the employment of the spirit's power to transform the people to be good (*shan* 善) in a godlike way, in contrast with the coercive form of government. In some contexts, spirit-transformation is used with 'nurturing' (*yu* 育) to emphasize its non-assertive, encouraging nature. In order to exercise the power of *shenhua*, the ruler must undertake self-cultivation that is similar to the cultivation of the spirit and spirit-illumination.

### ***What is Spirit-Transformation?***

The following passage makes a strong, detailed and lucid argument about the power of spirit-transformation:

In ancient times, the Utmost Essence [至精] of the sage kings took form within themselves and their personal likes and dislikes were forgotten outside themselves. They spoke simply to express their emotions [*qing* 情]; issued orders to make clear of their intentions; displayed [their essential qualities] in rites and music; and exemplified them in songs and ballads.

Their achievements

have spread to a myriad generations without being impeded,  
and have pervaded the four directions without being depleted.

Even birds, beasts and insects were transformed by them. How much more so were they effective in maintaining laws and carrying out commands?

Thus

The loftiest [of rulers] transforms with his spirit [*shenhua* 神化].  
 The next lower [ruler] gets people to act without transgressions;  
 The next lower one rewards the worthy and punishes the unruly.<sup>96 97</sup>  
 [9/69/11-17] (Major and Queen, et al. 13)

This passage asserts that *shenhua* is/has<sup>98</sup> the power to transform human beings and other things because of the ruler's highly cultivated spirit (the Utmost Essence *zhijing*). Ames claims that the government that utilizes *shenhua* is “one in which the charismatic influence of the ruler has transformed the people such that they do what is right of their own accord” (133). The authors of the *Huainanzi* argue that the highest ruler is one who transforms the people with his spirit since the effect of spirit-transformation is long-lasting and prevailing to the point that even other beings are influenced as well. The second kind of ruler is able to restrain people's actions so that they cannot disturb the social and political order. In other words, this form of government aims at removing all possibilities that could lead to transgressions from the social order. The people are simply kept ignorant of certain things that might lead to disobedience, yet there is no guarantee that they will remain obedient as the ruler desires. The lowest kind of ruler is one who makes use of reward-and-punishment system. Unable to extract information from the people, this kind of

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<sup>96</sup> Ames' version: “The highest ruler is *godlike in his transformations*. Next comes one who makes it impossible for people to do wrong. And next comes one who rewards those of superior qualities and punishes the troublemakers” (174).

Clery's translation is very simple: “*Spiritual government* is the very best. Next best is to make it impossible for people to do wrong. Next after that is to reward the worthy and punish the disruptive” (5).

Similar lines are found in the *Daodejing* Chapter VII:

“The greatest of rulers is but a shadowy presence;  
 Next is the ruler who is loved and praised;  
 Next is the one who is feared.”

(Ivanhoe and Norden 170)

<sup>97</sup> 古聖王至精形於內，而好憎忘於外，出言以副情，發號明旨，陳之以禮樂，風之以歌謠，業貫萬世而不壅，橫局四方而不窮，禽獸昆蟲與之陶化，又況於執法施令乎！故太上神化，其次使不得為非，其次賞賢而罰暴。

<sup>98</sup> Due to the ambiguity of the term *shenhua*, I use both the verbs “to be” and “to have.” *Shenhua* means both the definition and the source of the power to transform.

ruler allows them to act freely but disciplines them to be good by treating their behaviors with rewards and punishments [9/69/11-17]. In the last two forms of government, the ruler is still an active figure in constraining the people, which means that if he relaxes his political muscles for a single moment, the subjects would likely commit transgressions. On the contrary, in the case of the government ruled with *shenhua*, once transformed by the ruler's spirit, the myriad things everywhere remain good for generations. The following passage further demonstrates defects of the coercive government and shows the superiority of ruling through spiritually transforming the people. Instead of taxing himself with government duties, the ruler has few affairs and yet things complete themselves successfully:

When waters are muddy, fish gasp for air [near the surface];  
 When the government is harsh, the people become disorderly.  
 Thus those who raise tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses and elephants  
   give them pens and cages,  
   provide for their desires,  
   feed them appropriately,  
 yet the animals still harbor great anger and cannot live out their normal life spans because they live under compulsion. That it is that  
   When those above have many clever schemes, those below have much  
 deceitfulness  
   When those above have many matters to deal with, those below have many  
 fabrications.  
   When those above are troubled and vexed, those below are unsettled.  
   When those above have many wants, those below struggle harder against one  
 another.  
   Failing to correct the root  
   But attending to the branches  
 is like  
   Spreading dirt to stop a dust storm  
   Or bringing firewood to put out a fire.  
 Thus with sages,  
   Their undertakings are few and easy to deal with;  
   Their desires are few and easily satisfied.  
   They do not give but are considered humane;  
   They do not speak but are believed.  
   They do not seek but they attain,  
   They do not act but they succeed.

Self-sufficient, the sage preserves the true, embracing Virtue and extending sincerity. The world follows him as an echo responds to a sound or a shadow imitates the form [that casts it]. What he cultivates is the root. Punishments are not enough to alter customs or executions enough to proscribe wickedness. Only spirit-like transformation [*shenhua* 神化] is to be valued.<sup>99</sup>

[9/68/1-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 7-8)

If the king rules the people in the same way as one puts wild animals in cages, he cannot bring peace and harmony. The reason is that, although harsh laws might momentarily subdue the people, there is no way to check for schemes and fabrications that might have been deeply harbored in their mind. Constant struggle between the ruler and the ruled, either in the mind or in actuality, causes chaos and imminent self-destruction. When the state is rife with discontent, harsh laws can only add to its turmoil. The *Huainanzi* strongly criticizes the employment of penal laws in ruling because “[punishments] are not enough to alter customs or executions enough to proscribe wickedness” [9/68/1-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 8). Moreover, the authors seem to argue that for the common people, customs (*feng* 風 / *su* 俗 / *xi* 習) play a significant role in influencing their behaviors; therefore the ruler should try to alter their nature through establishing good customs and habits.<sup>100</sup> Customs have taken root in people’s mind for hundreds of years while the legal system keeps changing with the rise and fall of dynasties. Moreover customs are usually established through common agreement in the community in order to ensure everyone’s interests while laws are imposed on the people by the authority to ensure the interests

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<sup>99</sup> 故聖人事省而易治，求寡而易澹，不施而仁，不言而信，不求而得，不為而成，塊然保真，抱德推誠，天下從之，如響之應聲，景之像形，其所修者本也。刑罰不足以移風，殺戮不足以禁姦，唯神化為貴。

<sup>100</sup> *Su* 俗 and *xi* 習 is used in “[Everywhere] they reform habits and change customs [變習易俗], so that the people change and become good, as if [the sage’s] nature was inculcated into each of them, and thus [they] become capable of spirit-like transformation [*shenhua* 神化]” [20/210/27-20/211/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 5-7).

of the ruling class and thus often against the people's will. Therefore, cultivating the people's traditions is said to effectively transform human nature as if in a god-like way.

### *Hua Yu Ru Shen* 化育如神

Closely related to spirit-transformation *shenhua* is the term 'transforming and sustaining like a spirit' [*hua yu ru shen* 化育如神], which expands the ideal of non-assertive government and the meaning of god-like transformation in the two following passages:<sup>101</sup>

The Way of the ruler is round, revolving and turning endlessly, transforming and sustaining like a spirit [*hua yu ru shen* 化育如神], vacant, gliding without apparent purpose, always at the rear and never taking the lead.

The Way of the official is square, discussing practicalities and being in the right place. In accomplishing tasks he is the first to take the lead; guarding his score of knowledge and parceling out his insight he thereby establishes his success.

Therefore,

when the ruler and [his] officials follow different Ways, there is order.

[When they follow] identical ways, there is disorder.

When each obtains what is appropriate to him and situates him in his proper place, above and below can work with each other.<sup>102</sup>

[9/71/17-20] (Major and Queen, et al. 26)

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<sup>101</sup> This passage quoted in chapter II to illustrate the attribute of *shen* to an extraordinary act is also relevant here, yet to avoid redundancy in textual analysis, I omit it from this chapter arguments:

“He nurtured the people with public-spiritedness; the people [in turn] were simple and steady, straight and sincere.

They did not engage in angry struggle but goods were sufficient.

They did not strain their body but they completed their accomplishments.

They availed themselves of the gifts of Heaven and Earth and lived in harmony and unity with them.

Therefore,

His awesome demeanor was stern but not exercised;

His punishments existed but were not used.

His laws were sparing and uncomplicated.

Thus [Shen Nong's] transformation [of the people] was numinous. [其化如神]”

[9/67/17-23] (Major and Queen, et al. 4-5)

<sup>102</sup> 主道員者，運轉而無端，化育如神，虛無因循，常後而不先也。臣道員者運轉而無方者，論是而處當，爲事先倡，守職分明，以立成功也。是故君臣異道則治，同道則亂。各得其宜，處其當，則上下有以相使也。

*Hua* 化 and *yu* 育 take the quality of “roundness (*yuan* 員),” that is, the process of transforming and sustaining is smooth, revolving, and natural. Assigning ‘roundness’ as a characteristic of the ideal government adds to the understanding of *wuwei* 無爲, non-action: As the process of transformation is like a circle, it cannot be determined that the ruler is at the front or behind his people. Rather than leading them, the ruler attracts the people to join his orbit and thus guides them to goodness, while he himself is engaged in self-cultivation as well. Similarly, the passage below praises the imperceptibility of ruling through spirit-transformation:

When sages rule, they transform and nurture [the people] in a spirit-like way [化育如神].  
[If the ruler was of] the highest type, [the people] said, “I [do this because] it is nature.”

[If the ruler was of] the next rank, [the people] said, “How subtle to be that way.”  
Thus the *Odes* says,

“He manages the reins [of government]  
As if they were silk ribbons [of a dancer].”

The *Changes* says,

“Concealing his elegant brilliance,  
The signs are favorable [to rule].”<sup>103</sup>

[10/85/8-9] (Major and Queen, et al. 16)

In these two passages, spirit-transformation signifies the power to affect things in a miraculous and undetectable way. Commenting on *shenhua* in ancient Chinese philosophy, Zhang Dainian writes, “The term *shen*, in addition to meaning ‘the spirits’ or ‘the human spirit,’ is also used to mean ‘a tiny, almost imperceptible change.’ In this usage, it is always combined with the term *hua* 化, ‘transformation’ (190). In the *Huainanzi*, *shenhua* does not simply mean a small change as in passages [1/6/25-27]<sup>104</sup> and [20/210/27-20/211/5],<sup>105</sup> transformations of the Way and in

<sup>103</sup> 聖人在上，化育如神。太上曰：「我其性與！」其次曰：「微彼，其如此乎！」故詩曰：「執轡如組」，易曰「含章可貞」。

<sup>104</sup> The myriad things in their totality  
All pass through this One Portal.  
The roots of the hundreds of endeavors



nature are said to be god-like because they are numerous and enormous (a huge quantity of various things are created at once). Instead, the greatest ruler knows to transform and nurture the people in a spirit-like way, which means they are unaware of his influence.<sup>106</sup> The authors quote the *Odes* to illustrate the comparison of the sage-ruler's techniques with those of a dancer performing with a silk ribbon. There is no coercion in her handling of the ribbon or in the ruler's management of state affairs. The people follow their leader naturally, like the ribbon flows

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All emerge from this One Gateway.

Its movements are Formless;

Its transformations are numinous [變化若神];

Its actions are traceless;

It constantly follows and never initiates.

[1/6/25-27] (Major and Queen, et al. 26-27)

<sup>105</sup> A person of Song used ivory to make a mulberry leaf for the ruler. It took three years before it was finished.

Stem and veins, downy hairs and indentations,

Tenuous points and lustrous color

When it was mixed in among real mulberry leaves, one could not know [which it was]. Liezi heard this and said, "If it were to take Heaven and Earth three years to make a leaf, then among the ten thousand things there would be very few that have leaves! Now when Heaven and Earth carry out their transformations, with a zephyr [leaves] are born and with a slight wind they fall. How could that be so laborious?!" Thus,

Anything that can be measured is small

and any [quality] that can be counted is few.

No measurement can encompass the supremely great;

No enumeration can count the supremely numerous.

[20/210/27-20/211/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 5-7)

<sup>106</sup> The following passage discusses the imperceptibility of the ruler's authority:

If the people

yield to one another and compete to dwell humbly;

delegate benefit and compete to receive scantily,

work at tasks and compete to follow arduously,

*daily transformed by their superiors and moved to goodness without realizing the means by which they came to be so, this is root of government.*

With beneficial rewards to encourage goodness,

and fearful punishments to prevent misdeeds,

laws and ordinances corrected above

and the common people submitting below,

these are *the branches of government.*

[20/216/5-10] (Major and Queen, et al. 34-35)

according to the dancer's will. The nature of the people is compared to a silk ribbon, which is extremely flexible and completely subjected to manipulation. It is the ruler's task to take advantage of this nature. They use the words of the *Book of Changes* to describe the invisibility of the ruler's authority. The political power should be concealed so that the people think they are acting according to their free will and plot no scheme to overthrow the ruler. What they perceive as their free will is in fact imposed on them by the sage-ruler. By hiding his power, the ruler creates among the people the illusion of utmost freedom and makes them utterly contented. The ruler appears to the people as if a figurehead of no consequential authority.

### ***Power of Spirit-Transformation***

The following passage illustrates the wondrous outcome of spirit-like transformation in the natural world to demonstrate that the great ruler should follow the laws of nature in an attempt to transform his people:

A person of Song used ivory to make a mulberry leaf for the ruler. It took three years before it was finished.

Stem and veins, downy hairs and indentations,  
Tenuous points and lustrous color

When it was mixed in among real mulberry leaves, one could not know [which it was]. Liezi heard this and said, "If it were to take Heaven and Earth three years to make a leaf, then among the ten thousand things there would be very few that have leaves! Now when Heaven and Earth carry out their transformations, with a zephyr [leaves] are born and with a slight wind they fall. How could that be so laborious?!" Thus,

Anything that can be measured is small  
and any [quality] that can be counted is few.  
No measurement can encompass the supremely great;  
No enumeration can count the supremely numerous.

Thus,

The realm of the nine provinces [i.e., all of China] cannot be measured in *qing* and *mu*;

The eight cardinal points cannot be measured in *dao* and *li*.

Mount Tai cannot be calculated in *zhang* and *chi*.

The rivers and seas cannot be measured in *dou* and *hu*.

...

Thus the Great Man

Conforms in Virtue (*de*) with Heaven and Earth,  
 Conforms in brightness (*ming*) with the sun and moon,  
 Conforms in numinous efficacy (*ling*) with the ghosts and spirits,  
 And conforms in trustworthiness (*xin*) with the four seasons.

Thus sages

embrace the *qi* of Heaven and enfold the Heavenly Heart,  
 grasp centrality and embody harmony.

They do not descend from the Ancestral Temple yet they journey to the Four Seas.  
 [Everywhere] they reform habits and change customs, so that the people change and  
 become good, as if [the sage's] nature was inculcated into each of them, and thus [they]  
 become capable of spirit-like transformation [*shenhua* 神化].

The *Odes* says,

"The spirits hear  
 if in the end we are in harmony and peace."<sup>107</sup>

[20/210/27-20/211/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 5-7)

The working of Heaven and Earth is superior to that of men as the latter takes as long as three years to create a mulberry leaf out of jade while nature can make and take away large amounts instantly. Every transformation that nature initiates is spirit-like in the sense that it is inexplicable, miraculous and of highest quality.<sup>108</sup> The leaves have numerous tiny veins, delicate hair, and lustrous color that make observant viewers awe. The sage is able to make thousands of people everywhere transform into being good in a short time. They are not just temporarily decent but instilled with the sagely nature that allows them to transform others as well. Not just the population of a village or a city is transformed, but as many people as leaves are affected by the sage-ruler. Not only the outward expression (that is, attitude and action) of the subjects is benign,

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<sup>107</sup> 故大人者，與天地合德，日月合明，鬼神合靈，與四時合信。故聖人懷天氣，抱天心，執中含和，不下廟堂而衍四海，變習易俗，民化而遷善，若性諸己，能以神化也。詩云：「神之聽之，終和且平。」

<sup>108</sup> Xunzi also uses *shen* to refer to changes in nature: "The constellations follow each other around, the sun and moon change their stations as lights, the four seasons succeed each other, yin and yang produce great transformations, wind and rain go forth everywhere. The myriad things each obtain their harmony and are produced thereby. Each acquires its fostering and is completed. One cannot see the cause of this, only its fruit, and this is what is called the numinous." (*Xunzi* 17, *Discourse on Heaven*, lines 8-9 quoted in Zhang 192)

but their innermost thoughts and feelings also become good. Such transformation of human nature is considered to be god-like.

The military leader is also expected to rely on the natural principles. In chapter XV, spirit-transformation is discussed in the context of warfare:

Form/Punishment (*xing*) is the ultimate of the military. Arriving at being without form/punishment may be called the ultimate of the ultimate. For this reason, The great military does no injury, it communicates with the ghosts and spirits; It does not brandish the five weapons, [yet] none in the world dare to oppose it. It sets up its drum [but] does not open its arsenal, and none of the feudal lords does not freeze in terror.

Thus,

One who wars from the temple becomes Emperor;

One who [effects] spirit-transformation [*shenhua* 神化] becomes king.

What is called warring from the temple is to model [oneself] on the Way of Heaven.

Spirit-transformation is to model [oneself] on the four seasons.

He cultivates governance within his borders and those afar long for his virtue;

He achieves victory without battle and the feudal lords submit to his might.

It is because internally his government is ordered.<sup>109</sup>

[15/144/9-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 6-7)

Punishment/form (*xing* 刑) is the usual foundation of the military. However, the *Huainanzi* argues that the superior military is the one operating without punishment and regulations. Instead of using the might of weapons, the true king eliminates internal schemes and external threats through spirit-like transformation. Spirit-transformation is to model one's way after the four seasons, that is, the regular changes of nature. In order to assist the rulers to understand the natural patterns, Chapters III, IV and V of the *Huainanzi* provide thorough presentation and analysis of the three fundamental elements in ancient Chinese philosophy that determine success or defeat of an endeavor: Heaven, Earth and seasonal changes. Spirit-transformation in the

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<sup>109</sup> 刑，兵之極也，至於無刑，可謂極之矣。是故大兵無創，與鬼神通，五兵不厲，天下莫之敢當。建鼓不出庫，諸侯莫不懼。沮膽其處。故廟戰者帝，神化者王。所謂廟戰者，法天道也；神化者，法四時也。脩政於境內而遠方慕其德，制勝於未戰而諸侯服其威，內政治也。

context of war can be understood as transforming with the natural flow of things, relying on the power of nature to avoid and eliminate the enemy. Spirit-transformation therefore implies ‘non-initiative’ principle: the ruler does not attempt to set up regulations to make his military powerful; instead, he makes use of nature’s laws in managing his state’s defense.

The following passage attributes the god-like quality of *shenhua* to the working of the heart’s essence:

The essence of the heart is that it can transform [others] like a spirit [*shenhua* 神化] but it cannot point things out to them (*dao* 導).

The essence of the eye is that it can cut through obscurities but it cannot give clear warning.

What lies within the dark and obscure cannot be verbalized to others.

Thus

Shun did not descend from his mat and the world was ordered.

[The tyrant] Jie did not leave his throne and the world was disordered.

Certainly feelings are deeper than spoken commands. To seek from others what one lacks in oneself – such has never been heard of from ancient times to the present.

If the speech is identical but the people trust it [in some cases], it is because trust [*xin* 信] preceded the speech.

If the command is identical but the people are transformed by it [in some cases], it is because sincerity [*cheng* 誠] lay beyond command.

When the sages rule above and the people are moved and transformed, it is because their feelings have paved the way for them. When there is movement above and no response below, it is because feelings [*qing* 情] and orders [*ling* 令] are at variance with one another [*shu* 殊]. Thus the *Changes* says,

“If the dragon dwells in a shallow pond,  
he will have reason to regret.”<sup>110</sup>

[10/84/22-26] (Major and Queen et al. 13-14)

*Shenhua* is not about “leading” (*dao* 導), rather “influencing” and “communicating” without means of speech. It is because the heart’s essence (心之精) is the agent that transforms others in

<sup>110</sup> 心之精者，可以神化，而不可以導人；目之精者，可以消澤，而不可以昭認。在混冥之中，不可諭於人。故舜不降席而天下治，桀不下陛而天下亂，蓋情甚乎叫呼也。無諸己，求諸人，古今未之聞也。同言而民信，信在言前也。同令而民化，誠在令外也。聖人在上，民遷而化，情以先之也。動於上，不應於下者，情與令殊也。故易曰：「亢龍有悔。」

a way that the senses cannot perceive. The sage-ruler can transform people but he cannot show them why and how. Since the Way is supreme and beyond words to reason, the ruler must show his people the Way with the essence of his heart. None can explain why neither the sage Shun nor the tyrant Jie left their positions, and yet the results of their action, or rather, non-action, are different. The former was able to stabilize the world and the later caused disorder. Such divergence appears because the essence of rulership is not perceptible to the common people. The power of speech and command does not lie in themselves, but rather in their honesty. The authors emphasize the role of sincere feelings [*qing* 情] in relation with outward expressions of command and order. If inward feelings and their outward expressions (that is, actions) do not match, the effect of command and order is minimal. Although the people cannot perceive the lapse between feelings and actions of the ruler, the lack of true emotion in the ruler's action minimizes the result. It is similar to a painting lacking the spirit and thus fails to convey its meaning to the viewer. The authors use the passage from the *Book of Changes* to exemplify the discrepancy between the internal nature and the external environment: the mighty dragon lying at the bottom of a tiny pond will be remorseful; the majestic nature of the dragon can only be matched with the boundless skies or ocean. Similarly, the honesty and sincerity of the people cannot be matched with harsh laws, but with the responsibility and nobility of the ruler.

To sum up this section about the characteristics of *shenhua*, I find Ames' definition most comprehensive. He attributes the power of *shenhua*, "an accumulated magical potency," to power to transform "in an imperceptible fashion:"

Late Warring States and Western Han literature repeatedly attributes an accumulated magical potency to the exemplary sage-ruler. This potency is frequently associated with a capacity to elevate and transform his subjects in an imperceptible fashion beyond their understanding or even knowledge. This transformation is wrought through a veiled influence which is likened to divinely inspired change. This notion of *shen hua* is a popular subject in the *Huai Nan Tzu* in general. (Ames 133-134)

### ***How to Achieve Shenhua?***

We have discussed the imperceptible nature of *shenhua*, the next section is about accumulation of such potency to transform. Spirit-transformation requires the ruler to cultivate himself first in order to alter the people's nature. The self-cultivation techniques in passage [9/69/11-17]<sup>111</sup> have been seen in sections on cultivating *shen* and *shenming*: The ruler concentrates the utmost essence within his body and externalizes his personal preferences. He does not aim at directly exerting his influence on things; rather, he does things only to express his authenticity; he speaks to express his instinctive emotions, issues orders to clarify his purposes, and uses music and rituals to show his genuineness. It should be noted that the utmost essence is equal to the spirit (*shen*);<sup>112</sup> therefore, the process of spirit-transformation can be interpreted that the sage-ruler has cultivated his essence to the spirit-like level (*shen*), and then transforms (*hua*) the people with his spirit. Moreover, in the discussion of spirit cultivation, the attainment of *shen* is in fact the return to one's original self (*ben* 本) and true responsiveness (*qing* 情) that human beings receive from Heaven at birth. Hence, at the first glance, to

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<sup>111</sup> In ancient times, the Utmost Essence [至精] of the sage kings took form within themselves and their personal likes and dislikes were forgotten outside themselves. They spoke simply to express their emotions [*qing* 情]; issued orders to make clear of their intentions; displayed [their essential qualities] in rites and music; and exemplified them in songs and ballads.

Their achievements

have spread to a myriad generations without being impeded,  
and have pervaded the four directions without being depleted.

[9/69/11-17] (Major and Queen, et al. 13)

<sup>112</sup> This point is deduced from the phrase: *Zhi jing wei shen* [至精爲神], which means the essence [of a human being] that has been cultivated to the utmost becomes spirit [9/68/1-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 8).

accumulate the power of spirit-transformation, the ruler must purify his inner essence so that it regains the Heavenly nature.

In the same chapter, chapter IX, the authors argue that there is no other valuable form of governing except spirit-transformation, which the sage masters through cultivating four qualities: naturalness (*ran* 然), truthfulness (*zhen* 真), power (*de* 德), and sincerity (*cheng* 誠). “Self-sufficient, the sage preserves the true, embracing Virtue and extending sincerity. [塊然保真，抱德推誠] The world follows him as an echo responds to a sound or a shadow imitates the form [that casts it]. What he cultivates is the root” [9/68/10-12] (Major and Queen, et al. 8). *Ran* denotes conforming to natural principles (or ‘the way things are’ as *ran* means ‘as it is’). *Zhen* implies preserving the true nature (that is, the original nature [*ben* 本] that Heaven bestows on human beings). *De* implies making use of the Power of the Way. *Cheng* indicates the means to transfer the sagely nature from the ruler to the ruled through *ganying* ‘resonance’ (of the spirit).<sup>113</sup>

In the following passage, the great man becomes the sage with power of spirit-transformation after acquiring four seemingly different virtues:

... the Great Man

Conforms in Virtue (*de*) with Heaven and earth,  
 Conforms in brightness (*ming*) with the sun and moon,  
 Conforms in numinous efficacy (*ling*) with the ghosts and spirits,  
 And conforms in trustworthiness (*xin*) with the four seasons.

Thus sages

embrace the *qi* of Heaven and enfold the Heavenly Heart,  
 grasp centrality and embody harmony.

They do not descend from the Ancestral Temple yet they journey to the Four Seas.

[Everywhere] they reform habits and change customs, so that the people change and

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<sup>113</sup> “the idea of resonance means all things in the universe are interrelated and influence each other according to the pre-set patterns, so that interaction appears as spontaneous and not caused by an external agent” (Le Blanc 9).



become good, as if [the sage's] nature was inculcated into each of them, and thus [they] become capable of spirit-like transformation [*shenhua* 神化].”  
[20/210/27-20/211/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 6-7)

The great man is one who attains the four qualities of virtue, enlightenment, efficiency and trustworthiness. Such qualities are also compared to those of nature: virtue (*de* 德) as the power of Heaven and Earth, enlightenment or insightfulness (*ming* 明) like the brightness of the sun and the moon, efficiency equal to the numinous efficacy (*ling* 靈) of ghosts and spirits, and trustworthiness (*xin* 信) as dependable as the regular change of the four seasons. The great man becomes the sage who does not leave his position yet people everywhere are reformed. It should be noted that the outcome of the sage's transformation is to make people become good (*shan*), similar to the aspect of spirit-illumination. Nevertheless, not just to become good, the people also turn into sages and they are capable of transforming themselves and others in a spirit-like way [20/210/27-20/211/5] (Major and Queen, et al. 6-7). The two different sets of virtues are 1) naturalness, truthfulness, power and sincerity; and 2) virtue, insight, efficacy and trustworthiness. The reason why they appear in two different chapters IX and XX of the *Huainanzi* is that the book was composed by multiple authors. By comparing the two passages containing the same term, we can further understand different nuances of the recondite concept, *shenhua*.

## ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, *shenhua* promotes the form of government that refrains from using rewards and punishments. The masters of Huainan claim that the state can only become permanently in order and secure when the people's nature has been truly transformed back to its original state of goodness. Ames argues that the “notion of ‘god-like transformation’ (*shen hua*) is very close to the traditional conception of virtue [in Confucian writing] – a potency which

encourage the natural development and proper operation of the empire” (58). Indeed, the transformation of the people’s nature relies on the power (*de*) of the Way and the cultivated spirit (*jingshen*) of the ruler. The people can only be completely transformed through the means of sincere feelings, rather than orders or penal laws, as emotions are an inherent part of the human mind and thus appealing to them brings better results than appealing to reasons that has only been superficially introduced to them.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

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The profundities of the *Huainanzi* have not received sufficient consideration, and thus I am hoping that my undergraduate thesis will somewhat contribute to the appreciation of this political philosophy treatise. Interpreting an ancient, recondite text in the contemporary framework cannot avoid making incorrect assumptions, either failing to decipher the text or attributing erroneous meanings to it. I have analyzed different terms related to the ideals and practices of rulership in the *Huainanzi*: *shen* (spirit), *shenming* (spirit-illumination), and *shenhua* (spirit-transformation). I have presented that the spirit (*shen*) is usually associated with the supernatural entities or substances, which are somewhat alien to humans while the same ‘spirit’ constitutes human mentality and quintessence. The reason why humans do not realize the existence of ‘spirits’ is that they have alienated themselves from their ‘inner quintessence’ through their conscious adaptation to changes in the external environment. The *Huainanzi* argues that this special essence allows human beings to make decisions about their course of life and advocates for them to choose the *Dao* as their life path. Following the *Dao* is to nourish this essence in order to achieve a higher level of knowing and influencing things. Moreover, throughout the three chapters on the spirit, spirit-illumination, and spirit-transformation, it seems to me that the three concepts bear some similar characteristics: they are/have the greatest power in the universe, and inherent to human beings, yet they have been lost in the course of civilization and expected to be re-gained through self-cultivation. This leads to the most overall conclusion about the syncretic nature and multiple authorship of the *Huainanzi* that all different

(sometimes seemingly contradictory) arguments constitute an integrated philosophy of life, which appears in many other texts of the Daoist school [*Daojia* 道家] such as the *Daodejing* and the *Guanzi*: to be with the *Dao* because everything essentially is the *Dao* and will return to the *Dao*. Last, it is not surprising to find the idea of human essence and spirit bearing such a resemblance to Hegelian philosophy of the mind and of history. They ascribe the superior mental capacity of human beings compared to other species to ‘the quintessence’ given by the Creator, and the historical events to the will of the absolute spirit of the universe. Inner cultivation of one’s essence is comparable to the Absolute Spirit, at the fourth stage of history, after being greatly hurt by the violence in the external environment, recoils into itself trying to understand and reconcile itself with the world. The Daoist human spirit’s endeavor to conforming to the cosmic patterns is similar to the Hegelian Spirit’s attempt to unite the individual will and the universal will, singularity and universality, and the divine and the human. Trying to answer such fundamental questions of humankind, the *Huainanzi*’s value transcends throughout time and space, reaching readers of different cultures and eras.

For the original audience, who were the intellectual elites of ancient China, with profound knowledge of and belief in the Daoist cosmology, such terms as spirit, spirit-illumination, and spirit-transformation, must have sounded a great deal more familiar and occupied a venerable place. Given the keen belief of ancient Chinese people in the existence and power of the cosmic spirit and human essence, it is easy to see how powerful a political statement the *Huainanzi* must have made at the Han court and throughout pre-modern Chinese history. When the corpus was presented to Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the emperor was “on the verge of sanctioning the exclusive teaching of five Confucian classics in place of the Huang-Lao texts that had been influential at the imperial court during the previous four decades”

(Roth and Queen 268-269). It then could be deduced that the *Huainanzi* carried a significant political motive that the power struggle at the court led to the death of Liu An. The Daoist vision of non-coercive government maneuvered by the sage-king was replaced by the Confucian system of strict moral principles and the Legalist framework made up of rewards and punishments. The Daoist ideals of rulership, persuasively presented in the *Huainanzi*, never made a comeback in Chinese history.

For members of today's audience that are not Chinese specialists, I think the *Huainanzi* is best perceived as the manifesto of non-coercive system of governance born out of the violent history rampant with political conflicts amongst many states in ancient China. The book is an attempt of the Daoist intellectuals to seize political power from the hands of Legalist statesmen and Confucian ritualists; the former supported laws and punishments, the latter authoritarian hierarchy. The authors of the *Huainanzi* made an effort to provide the blueprint for a society modeled upon the original human nature, or the cosmic patterns since both are one, which, according to them, is characterized by emptiness, tranquility and order. Although these terms, spirit, spirit-illumination, and spirit-transformation, contain different meanings to me as I look at them from the analytical viewpoint, browsing through the pages, I have witnessed a fervent, philosophical desire to achieve harmony, not just limited to a general social hierarchy, but also the universal order and synchronization of individual activities with the cosmic patterns. The human internal environment is a microcosm of the external society, which is a microcosm of the vast universe. The three worlds are mutually affected according to the principle of *ganying*, or resonance, that is, everything is interwoven in a web of *spirits*. Disturbances in the functions of the human body due to excessive desires will lead to the destruction of the society, as greed will manifest itself in the form of violent struggles for gains. Wars and hostility upset the harmonious

patterns of the cosmos causing greater chaos in the human world. Social disorder results in mental distress – the human body fails to function well. Moreover, the *Huainanzi* does not see that one person's freedom and interest are limited by others' freedoms and interests. Since the world is mutually affected, none can benefit while others suffer. If the ruling class exploits the common people, they must be straining their minds with calculations and putting themselves in jeopardy because the people are about to revolt against them. Ames, with his thorough analysis, makes this point more comprehensible to today's audience: because the people seek their own benefit and the ruler seeks political stability, the two sides can enter a mutually beneficial agreement in which the ruler provides opportunities for the people to pursue their goals and the people abide by the government policies (54).

On the contrary, some scholars have skeptical opinions about the humanist value of the *Huainanzi*. Paul Goldin claims that the ideal of 'profiting the people' [*limin* 利民] "represents a consciously articulated ideology of autistic paternalism" (91). This argument is supported by the vision of rulership in which the sage-ruler is the most 'enlightened' of all and his task is to reverse people's minds to the primordial state of non-differentiation. The subjects are 'autistic' as they have no sense of truth; their senses are always deceived by illusions of material gains and fame. The sage-ruler even resorts to such means as superstitious belief in supernatural beings to scare the people into following the Dao.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the ruler is the most 'autistic' of all as he himself has successfully returned to the undifferentiated state. In my opinion, the *Huainanzi* advocates returning the human nature to its sincerity and truthfulness to their feelings. Benjamin Schwartz has an excellent conclusion on this goal of life which

means maintaining one's health, avoiding anxiety, satisfying one's physical desire without, however, injuring one's health or becoming entangled in needless passions. Here

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<sup>114</sup> See Chapter II, section on *ghosts and spirits*.

there is no mysticism but rather a deep appreciation of the value of “just living” in as comfortable and anxiety-free a manner as possible. Living this way is the only obligation which our Heavenly nature imposes upon us. (192)

Human nature is inherently blank and tranquil, yet superficial values and temptations have temporarily altered this nature. Unnecessary complications in the world lead to misunderstanding, which, when raised to the state level, leads to wars. As we have seen in the world today, conflicts happen when people fail to realize the true values of life, and to communicate with their competitors. The authors of *Huainanzi* must have maintained an unwavering faith in restoring the human heart to honesty by propagandizing its advocacy of ‘following the Way’ through state policy. The *Huainanzi* could have persuaded the Han emperor with its argument of correlative and causal influence. That is, since everything in the world is mutually linked through the web of spirits, punishment of one person not only would upset his inner quintessence, but also affect others’ well-being, and consequently the society and the state would experience negative changes. It is unfortunate that the plan was not in favor of the emperor and the *Huainanzi*’s vision is then classified among utopian ideas of the government.

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