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SELF AS CONTAINER?  
METAPHORS WE LOSE BY  
IN UNDERSTANDING EARLY CHINESE TEXTS

JANE GEANEY

As part of a trend in modern cognitive science, cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, and philosopher, Mark Johnson claim to provide a biologically-based account of sub-symbolic meaningful experiences. They argue that human beings understand objects by extrapolating from their sensory motor activities and primary perceptions. Lakoff and Johnson's writings have generated a good deal of interest among scholars of Early China because they maintain that «our common embodiment allows for common stable truths».<sup>1</sup> Among the many grounds on which Lakoff and Johnson's theories have been criticized, this essay focuses in particular on problems related to their schema of Self as Container. Lakoff and Johnson contend that there are no pure experiences outside of culture, while nevertheless arguing that the experience of being a closed-off container is «direct». «The concepts OBJECT, SUBSTANCE and CONTAINER emerge directly», they write. «We experience ourselves as entities, separate from the rest of the world – as containers with an inside and an outside».<sup>2</sup> By «emerge directly», they do not mean emerging free of culture, but rather that some experiences within culture, specifically physical experiences, are more directly given than others.

My study explores the pitfalls of presuming the «direct» experience of containment makes good sense of texts from Early China (ca. 500-100 B.C.E).<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of sensory processes in classical and non-canonical early Chinese texts do not lend themselves to being interpreted through Lakoff and Johnson's container model. If the body is a container in their sense, the sensory faculties would have to connect the self, which they understand as an internally contained substance, to a world that is clearly delineated as outside and other. But this does not match the portrait of sensory experience in early Chinese texts and it does not account for one of their most interesting features: the absence of fear of massive sensory deception.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1999, p. 6.

In the discipline of Sinology, Sarah Allan's *Ways of Water: Sprouts of Virtue* builds on some of Lakoff and Johnson's ideas, but Edward Slingerland promotes their work much more strongly by arguing that their model «provides us with a bridge into the experiences of "the other"». ALLAN 1997, SLINGERLAND 2003, p. 273.

Other applications of Lakoff and Johnson's work in the field include YU 2009, pp. 63-80; CHONG 2006, pp. 370-391; and MIDDENDORF 2009, pp. 63-80.

<sup>2</sup> LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1981, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> In some cases it is difficult to assign precise dates to texts or their layers of accretion, but sources for my analysis are passages in early Chinese texts predominantly dating from the fourth century B.C.E. to the first century B.C.E. My numbering for chapters and sections of Chinese texts is from the CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts) Database at the Chinese University of Hong Kong [www.chant.org](http://www.chant.org).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Svensson Ekström argues to the contrary that there was a «debate on illusion» in Early China, which he believes set the context for early Han poetics (206 B.C.E - 8 C.E). According to Svensson Ekström, the existence

This essay is divided in two parts, the first of which explains why early Chinese texts should not be understood as positing a self enclosed inside a container.<sup>1</sup> Rather than a container enclosing a static core-self, the body is an «interface» that is put in motion and affected by other things.<sup>2</sup> The second portion of the essay shows what this affectable interface-model of the human subject entails for the nature of perceptual error in early Chinese texts.

### BODY CONCEPTS

There are multiple reasons to doubt Lakoff and Johnson's claim to have discerned common human embodiment from metaphors. Determining which physical experience grounds a particular metaphor might be entirely impossible.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, especially when interpreting other cultures, it also seems there is no way to decide which metaphors actually have the fundamental role of structuring thinking, which is Lakoff and Johnson's definition of «conceptual metaphor». Also, differences in cultures affect what people take to be their more physical experiences. Indeed, the concept of «physical» itself differs by culture.<sup>4</sup> Lakoff and Johnson's method aims to access direct experiences by selecting them out from more culturally inflected experiences. In their view, such experiences include things like light/dark, warm/cold, up/down, and in/out, and even male/female.<sup>5</sup> But, as the inclusion of male/female in this list might signal, the

of duplicates and doppelgangers caused immense anxiety in Early China, ultimately producing a «philosophy of illusion». Svensson Ekström maintains that the fear of deception can be traced to instability at the sensory level. SVENSSON EKSTRÖM 2002, p. 251-289.

<sup>1</sup> Scholarship on Early China has generally converged on the view that the conception of the person is «relational». The application of the term «self» to early Chinese texts is controversial, because of potential associations with egoism, inwardness, privacy, and detachment. Those who use the term usually agree that the «self» in early Chinese texts lacks those features and it was conceived as something of an achievement, produced through cultivation. See for example, BERKSON 2005, pp. 293-331; SHUN 2004, pp. 183-199; TU 1994, pp. 177-186; AMES 1994, pp. 187-212; AMES 1993, pp. 157-177; SPELLMAN 1987 pp. 372-39; and FINGARETTE 1979, pp. 129-140.

In keeping with this relational view of the person, scholars of early Chinese medicine also argue for an understanding of the body that is not substance-based. As Hidemi Ishida writes, «Beings are not solid material entities but are highly differential configurations of energy». ISHIDA 1989, p. 67.

But some recent scholarship has challenged the status quo in this regard. For instance, Slingerland's application of Lakoff and Johnson's theory interprets early Chinese texts in terms of their container model of self. On the one hand, to his credit, Slingerland seems to understand the definition of a container more loosely than Lakoff and Johnson, insofar as he takes any reference to a person having an inside as a sign of such a metaphor. However, Slingerland ends up producing the same stark boundary between the inside and outside by combining Lakoff and Johnson's container model with their model of the «essential self». By «essence», Lakoff and Johnson mean the «collection of properties» that makes something what it is, which they associate with conceptualizing in terms of containers. Thus, combining containers with essences, Slingerland claims that body metaphors in early Chinese texts express an experience of having an essence hidden on the inside, in contrast to an outer container surface that «does not fit» the essence. SLINGERLAND 2003, pp. 34-35; LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1999, pp. 282, 347. For more on Slingerland's use of «essence», see below.

<sup>2</sup> This description of the body as an interface affected by things is borrowed from Bruno Latour's discussion of the difficulty of talking about the body. Following Latour, this use of «interface» is not a programming metaphor for connections between contained systems, but rather a way of talking about the body as sensitive to being moved by other things. In his terms, an «interface» is a «dynamic trajectory». LATOUR 2004, pp. 205-229.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, critics have objected to Lakoff and Johnson's claim that metaphors for «argument» derive from the physical experience of war, both because the experience of argument is no less physical than the experience of war, and because war is a culturally constructed experience that is rather remote from many people's experience. See HOLLAND 1982, pp. 287-297 and RONALD R. BUTTERS 1981, pp. 108-117.

<sup>4</sup> As Dorothy Holland notes, this makes Lakoff and Johnson's «experiential» philosophy sound subjectivist. HOLLAND 1982, p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1981, p. 57.

project of standing within one's culture while attempting to determine which parts of one's experience are less cultural is fraught with interpretive risks.<sup>1</sup> Thus, scholars have objected to Lakoff and Johnson's universalizing claims on the grounds of its insensitivity not only to cultural difference, but to class, gender, and disability.<sup>2</sup>

Of particular importance for applying Lakoff and Johnson's ideas to early Chinese texts is their view that direct experience provides a concept of self as a container, which in their terms means something that is distinctly set off from the rest of the world. They view containers as the appropriate metaphor to express sharply defined categorizing, or what they call «essence prototypes», which they distinguish from categorizing in terms of degrees. They contrast containers to «graded structures of categories» and «the fuzziness of category boundaries».<sup>3</sup> They write, «When we conceptualize categories [as essence prototypes], we often envision them using a spatial metaphor, as if they were containers, with an interior, an exterior, and a boundary». Thus, in their opinion, when we conceptualize in terms of essences, we think of our directly given experiences of containment. Furthermore, by restricting their use of «container» to mean the kinds of things that do not have fuzzy or graded boundaries, they suggest that the reverse is also true. This is evident in their examples of things that do not qualify as containers, which include forests, clearings, clouds, and «fenced in territory». These things apparently do not count as containers because they do not have firm borders or because there is too much similarity between the inside and the surface.<sup>4</sup> In other words, just as Lakoff and Johnson claim that the experience of being a container grounds metaphors of essences, so too they describe a notion of essence that sheds light on what they mean by container. Their view is that people experience themselves as containers in the sense of having boundaries distinct enough to give rise to a prototype of a concept of essence. Hence, when Lakoff and Johnson identify container metaphors, they are not merely contending that we experience ourselves in terms of inside/outside contrasts. They are specifically arguing that we experience our insides and outsides as sharply bounded, with different essence prototypes inside and out. To count as a container, our bound-

<sup>1</sup> Sexual identity formations that do not conform to an exclusively male/female binary are present in a number of cultures, most famously the *hijra* of India. The notion of «misassigned sex» in treatments of hermaphrodites and trans-gendered people also complicates any notion that these distinctions reflect a pre-cultural side of the spectrum. Nor has sex assignment been any clearer in the past. Commenting on an intricate second century method for discerning someone's sex, Thomas Laqueur notes, «Two sexes' refers not to the clear and distinct kind of being we might mean when we speak of opposite sexes, but rather to delicate, difficult-to-read shadings of one sex». LAQUEUR 1990, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Christine Battersby's interesting critique of their container model of self, in which she points out a series of potential reasons why she does not recognize herself as a container. Among the possible reasons for her «failure» of recognition, Battersby considers that it is because, «the primary model of the self is based on that of an individual who does not have to think of himself each month as potentially evolving into two individuals; and also because women are accustomed to seeing 'humanity' and 'persons' described in ways that both include and exclude women». Building on the work of other theorists, Battersby speculates that the way white middle-class women constrain their own physical movements seems to create space-containers around them precisely because they do not experience their bodies as containers. She also explores the possibility that alternative models in twentieth century sciences, already hinted at in the works of certain philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, might render outdated a model of self based on «solidity, space as a container, and the mechanics of solids». BATTERSBY 1999, pp. 352, 349.

Scholars of Disability Studies also criticize Lakoff and Johnson's inattention to their experiences of embodiment. For example, see VIDALI 2010, pp. 33-54.

<sup>3</sup> LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1999, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> They treat a clearing in the woods as a difficult case to classify, since in addition to claiming that we «impose this orientation» on it, they also admit that it «has something that we can perceive as a natural boundary – the fuzzy area where the trees more or less stop and the clearing more or less begins». LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1981, p. 29.

aries must not be experienced as degrees of difference from that which is not us. To be containers, the boundaries of bodies must be stable and our essential self firmly contained within them, regardless of what goes in or out. As Johnson puts it, «We are intimately aware of our bodies as three-dimensional containers into which we put certain things (food, water, air) and out of which other things emerge (food and water waste, air, blood, etc.)». <sup>1</sup> Furthermore, according to Lakoff and Johnson, we often project that container-like experience onto other things. They write, «We also experience things external to us as entities – often also as containers with insides and outsides. We experience ourselves as being made up of substances – e.g. flesh and bone – and external objects as being made up of various kinds of substances – wood, stone, metal, etc.» <sup>2</sup> Thus, Lakoff and Johnson do not stop at making the plausible claim that embodiment structures how people perceive themselves and other things. As their container metaphor indicates, they also contend that it does so through spatialized experiences of radical discontinuity.

Before addressing the implications of applying Lakoff and Johnson's ideas to texts from Early China, it is necessary to briefly sketch the available evidence about sense perception in various extant texts dating to this period. The texts contain relatively few extended discussions of sensory processes, but the discussions that do occur show that the senses are understood to «discriminate» or make distinctions between things. <sup>3</sup> What they discriminate is often not «objects», in the sense of medium-sized dry goods. Instead, the things they discriminate usually seem to be a spectrum of different options, such as «the five colors», «five sounds», or opposing poles, such as black versus white or sweet versus salty, sour, and bitter. <sup>4</sup> As the opposing poles imply, there is nothing neutral about sense processes. The question of whether the senses are «objective» is not even raised. Sensing is embedded in a world of desirable and undesirable things, hence it is motivated by desires and aversions. Moreover, the desires and aversions seem to belong to each of the senses themselves, rather than just to the heart (*xīn* 心), the sense faculty that both reasons and emotes. The heart's connections to the senses are somewhat obscure. It is included in lists of the senses, which suggests that it too is a sense. <sup>5</sup> In some of these cases, the senses are referred to collectively as the «five officials», while at other times the senses are called the «four officials». But the heart is also said to be the «ruler» of the other sense officials. Aside from the heart, the eyes and ears are the

<sup>1</sup> JOHNSON 1987, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> According to Lakoff and Johnson, «We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside». LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1981, pp. 29, 58.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of texts from Early China, «sense perception» is something of a misnomer. The sense operations are best understood on the model of «aspect perception». See GEANEY 2002, pp. 32-35 and FRASER 2011, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The rhetoric of discriminating between opposites, which is not limited to the senses, helps reveal not only this emphasis on discrimination but also some assumptions about the nature of the world. The *Hanfeizi* explains things in the world in terms of contrasting patterns.

凡理者，方圓、短長、麤靡、堅脆之分也。

Patterns are divisions of square/round, short/long, coarse/fine, strong/brittle.

*Hán Fēizi* 20 «Jí Lǎo».

Roger Ames makes a similar observation about the constitution of things in early Chinese texts. The things in the world exist on a continuum of degrees. AMES 1993, p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the regular inclusion of eyes, ears, and mouth, lists of the senses often mention the nose, the body, and/or the heart.

most often mentioned senses. Sensory processes, like vision and hearing, include only the heart, the senses, and the things that are sensed (colors, sounds, etc.). That is, sensory discrimination involves no intermediaries such as «data» or «impressions».<sup>1</sup> In sum, the act of sensing involves desires and aversions, and nothing mediates the senses' interaction with whatever is sensed.

In the context of these overall conceptions of the body's senses in texts from Early China, perhaps the metaphors of «residence» in early Chinese texts are the best evidence for Lakoff and Johnson's body-as-container experience. There is a famous metaphor of the senses as gates in the *Lǎozǐ: Dào Dé Jīng*, a collection of aphorisms, parts of which were widely recognized by the third century B.C.E. It says, «Block the holes and close the doors and to the end of your life you will not labor».<sup>2</sup> The commentary on the passage in the *Hán Fēizǐ*, a compilation of essays from the third century B.C.E, asserts that the eyes and ears are the doors and windows of spirits.<sup>3</sup> These images imply a model of the body as a living space of some sort, in which reside various spirit-like entities. We might think of them as «ghosts and spirits» for convenience.<sup>4</sup> The nature and identity of these residents is not well specified in texts from Early China, thus they might be interpreted as being different in kind from their «housing» or the outside world.<sup>5</sup> To someone looking for container metaphors, this idea of spirits residing inside body-houses might mistakenly evoke a static container model in which a person is composed of a spirit/self, on the one hand, and on the other a very different sort of thing, the body-container in which it resides and through which it is kept apart from other things.

<sup>1</sup> This direct contact between the senses and what they sense helps explain the absence of wholesale sensory doubt discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> *Lǎozǐ* 52. This seems to have been enacted in the treatment of corpses. Chap. 19 of the *Xúnzǐ*, a compilation from the third century B.C.E., prescribes stuffing the corpse's holes – the ears, mouth, and eyes.

<sup>3</sup> *Hán Fēizǐ* 20 «Jíe Lǎo».

<sup>4</sup> For residence metaphors of this sort, see especially *Guānzǐ* 16.1 «Nèiyè» 49 and *Xúnzǐ* 17 «Tiān Lún».

When I say the «body» is referred to as a residence for some ethereal things, I mean the term used for body/person (*shēn* 身) and the term for form/body (*xíng* 形). The differences are difficult to capture with one word. In addition to «body», *shēn* is used to mean «person», and «personal», in the sense of desires for one's own profit and comfort, for example, as opposed to fame or wide-spread respect. Unlike *shēn*, the term *xíng* 形 is not used to mean «person». But *xíng* can be used for the form of anything, and it often indicates the part of a thing that visibly occupies space. That is, although it is true that sounds are sometimes described as having «form», *xíng* is distinctly visual when it is used in contrasts between sound and sight. In another common juxtaposition involving *xíng*, the earth's production of human *xíng* also contrasts with the sky's production of the human *jīng* 精 (concentrated energy).

«Residing» does not seem to be used in relation to *zhuàng* 狀, a term for the body's visual form that occurs in the passage from the *Lǔshì Chūnqū* (third century B.C.E), discussed below, where a ghost imitates (rather than resides in) a person's *zhuàng*, resulting in misleading resemblance.

<sup>5</sup> A number of ethereal entities like «ghosts», «spirits», and «souls», fall in the category of «residing». These entities are hard to pin down, because ideas about them varied by time and region. Moreover, as Roel Sterckx notes, «The classical Chinese perception of the world did not insist on clear categorical or ontological boundaries between animals, human beings, and other creatures such as ghosts and spirits». STERCKX 2002, p. 5. Although definitions are difficult, insofar as «ghosts» (*guǐ* 鬼) and «spirits» (*shén* 神) are distinguished in early Chinese texts, the «spirits» usually refer to spirits of the gods, while «ghosts» refer to spirits of dead humans. POO 2004, p. 176. In addition, early Chinese texts speak of souls of the living, the *pò* 魄 and the *hún* 魂. For a good summary of the topic, see Yu 1987, pp. 363-395.

Ghosts and spirits are said to have neither form nor voice. In the context of discussing drawing, the *Hán Fēizǐ* comments that they lack a visible form, while later texts, the *Báihūtōng* and the *Huáinánzǐ*, observe that ghosts have neither visible form (*xíng* 形) nor sound/voice (*shēng* 聲). Nevertheless, they are also described as wearing clothes, riding chariots, being exorcised, vomiting, and even getting killed.



But if these windows-and-doors metaphors are to be reconciled with the frequent references to fluid traffic through the body, then this residence would have to feature various degrees of interiority and little sense of containment, not to mention multiple inhabitants. Of course, there is no reason to assume that a culture's body metaphors must be consistent with one another. But there is also no reason to interpret one body-metaphor in isolation from the culture's other metaphors, philosophical ideas, and medical conceptions about physicality. This is particularly problematic when granting a metaphor the status of «conceptual metaphor» – that is, a metaphor that structures thought. Early Chinese texts do often describe ghosts and spirits as residing in bodies, but generally the body does not seem to manage to contain them, any more than it restrains other things flowing in and out of it. The residence is temporary. And the spirits' locations in the body are specified in ways that hint at complex spatial arrangements rather than a single conclusive inner/outer boundary. The body is not a well-sealed house. It might just as well be a territory with series of significant sites bounded by intermittent walls and gates.<sup>1</sup> The body consists of not just one, but many places of storage, including, for example, five repositories as well as six storehouses.<sup>2</sup> The ghosts and spirits that visit its sites do not function as an individual core-self. Again, there is no reason to assume consistency in ideas across texts or even within a single text, but the range of ideas about spiritual residence in bodies does not lend itself to a model like spirit-self occupying a closed body-container. According to the *Zuǒ zhuàn*, a narrative history from the fourth century B.C.E., the body-souls (*pò* 魄) are the first changes to develop when a person is born.<sup>3</sup> Once a person is dead, some of the souls leave that body and might become «loose demons» (*yínlì* 淫厲), who «linger near» or «lean on» the living.<sup>4</sup> The departure of souls portends death, but it is possible for souls to leave without the person immediately dying.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, other spiritual entities also intrude or arrive from the outside. This is evident from a comment in the *Zhuāngzǐ* (a text traditionally attributed to Zhuāng Zhōu of the fourth century B.C.E, which also contains later materials) that if you clear the channels of the eyes and ears and expel knowledge from the heart, the ghosts and spirits (*guǐshén*) will come to dwell.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, these are only some of many entities that are said to enter in and move throughout various residences inside the body. The *dào* itself arrives. So do things like breath/energy (*qì* 氣), concentrated energy (*jīng* 精), divine energy (*língqì* 靈氣), and power/virtue (*dé* 德).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the movement in and out is inevitable because inner *qì* is not of a different nature than the *qì* of heaven and earth. Because references to residence «inside» often mean specific locations within parts of the body, and because the traffic in and out is rather heavy, the comings and goings of all these spirit-like entities indicate fluidity that is not characteristic of a fixed container enclosing a core self.

<sup>1</sup> The sense of the body as a «territory defined by gates and boundaries» is what develops in later Chinese medicine. LO 2000, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See *Lúshì Chūnqū* 20.5 «Dà Yù». Even the heart itself is a storehouse for other hearts. *Guānzǐ* 16 8.3 «Nèiyè».

<sup>3</sup> At some later point, *pò* come to be understood as *yín*-souls residing in the lungs, in contrast to *yáng*-souls residing in blood.

<sup>4</sup> This is especially true if a person dies violently. *Zuǒ zhuàn* 10 «Zhāo Gōng» B10.7.9.

<sup>5</sup> In the instance referred to in *Zuǒ zhuàn* 7 «Xuān Gōng» B7.15.7, it is the body-souls that are no longer present.

<sup>6</sup> *Zhuāngzǐ* 4 «Rén Jiān Shì». Ishida argues that in early Chinese texts the spirit (which he takes to be the mind) can leave a person, as a result of which other being's spirits can take its place. ISHIDA 1989, pp. 66-68.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, *Zhuāngzǐ* 4 «Rén Jiān Shì» and 5 «Dé Chōng Fú»; *Guānzǐ* «Xīn Shù Xià» 13.2, and «Nèiyè» 16.1.; and *Hán Fēizǐ* 20 «Jīe Lǎo».

While in Lakoff and Johnson's container model the surface is distinct from its content and constitutes a single, firm inside/outside boundary, in these early Chinese conceptions, the surface is an indefinite boundary that is so linked to external things that it actually transforms in response to them. Liquid metaphors, such as letting loose, leaking, and flowing, describe movement in and out of the body.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the container walls of Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor, no clear line between the human subject and the world precludes this leakage. One liquid image in the *Zhuāngzǐ* describes how external things construct the boundaries of the body. The *Zhuāngzǐ* compares the human body to water that is bounded by other things that permeate it. Typically mocking conventional morality, in this passage the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s stock character, 'Kǒngzǐ' (Confucius) defends the form (*xíng* 形) of a «loathsome person» (*èrén* 惡人) person. Kǒngzǐ contends that ordinary people, whose «power» (*dé* 德) is not very compelling, have bodies like level water.<sup>2</sup> But this man is different because his inner power is whole, which prompts external things to constantly disturb his body by not letting it alone. Young men, young women, and even mating animals will not go away and let the man be. Their attachment prevents his power from being able to structure his form to look like those of others. The passage explains that the materials are all there, but his power does not shape his form. It elaborates on this by saying that power's not shaping one's form is a result of things not leaving it (or him) alone.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is because the power inside the ugly man is so attractive that it does not manage to form standard boundaries as the surface his body. In this claim, what might look like a split between inner and outer is actually a direct result of their connection. That is, the wholeness of the internal power, in combination with its openness to external influence, is what produces a non-standard surface.<sup>4</sup> If the strong inner power were not exposed to the outside, the attraction of young men, women, and mating animals would not result in distorting its surface. Although the passage depicts the body as liquid, this is not an image of water contained in an impermeable tub.<sup>5</sup> As moving water, his body's surface is a site where inner and outer are roughly forged. By implication, when read for its insight about conceptions of ordinary bodies, the passage suggests that, generally, less potent powers inside the body produce a more regular bodily surface. Thus, whether deformed or standard, the body's inside, far from being radically detached from the outside, engages the outside in a tug of war that actually forms the shape of the surface.

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of loose bodily boundaries in texts from Early China, see GEANEY 2004, pp. 113-142.

<sup>2</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* says, «Being level is the fullness of stopped water. It can function as a standard. If it is preserved from within, then the outside (surface) will be undisturbed». *Zhuāngzǐ* 5 «Dé Chōng Fú».

<sup>3</sup> In A. C. Graham's translation, «That the power fails to shape the body is because other things are unable to keep their distance from it». (*Dé bù xíng zhě, wù bù néng lí yě.* 德不形者，物不能離也。). We know the power is within here because the explanation mentions that the water should be «preserved from within» (*nèibǎo* 內保). GRAHAM 1986, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Romain Graziani reads the passage as postulating a «radical and almost necessary split between external form and inner qualities of grace and power». But the important thing to note is that this split results precisely from the strong connection between the inner and outer realms. GRAZIANI 2009, p. 510.

<sup>5</sup> As Roger Ames points out, the early Chinese terms for body are different in this respect from the term «body» in English, which has etymological connections to Old High German «tub» and «vat». AMES 1993, pp. 164-165.

What we should notice about water as an image for bodies in texts from Early China is the possibility that it can penetrate almost anything and thereby change shape. This fits well with the conceptions of «things» (*shí* 實) in early Chinese texts. The *Xúnzǐ* 22 «Zhèngmíng» explains the nature of things in terms the space that they fill, not in terms of filling of containers. The same is true of the «Mohist Canons», Chapters 40-45 of the *Mòzǐ*. As A. C. Graham points out, they conceive of things as fillings of space. GRAHAM 1978, p. 202.

Things departing from inside the body modify its boundaries, just as pressures from the outside do. We can see this in an excavated text from the third century B.C.E that tells the story of a man named Dān 丹, who died and was resurrected.<sup>1</sup> The story asserts that Dān did die, but it does not mention exactly what constituted his being dead or being returned to life. Since it hints that his body tissue had not putrefied after three years, it seems likely that being dead in this context means that Dān's souls, or at least some of them, had departed, which was part of the conception of death.<sup>2</sup> Having endured three years of being dead, Dān's body was in an interesting state. On the one hand, the story mentions that he stood on his tomb for three days before leaving town. But on the other hand, it also notes that, four years after his resurrection, in addition to finally being able to hear animal sounds and eat like a human again, he had sparse eyebrows, an inky tone, and useless limbs. This somewhat contradictory information about Dān's ability to use his limbs is perhaps meant to emphasize the length of time it took for his resurrected body to return to normal functioning. On Lakoff and Johnson's container model, one might expect one of two possible physical effects of the souls' departure from a body. If the body were a container, being isolatable from its content to begin with, it might be expected to rot without its life-giving essence; hence on those grounds one might anticipate that Dān's body would have thoroughly decayed after three years of its souls' absence. Alternatively, as in some cultures' resurrection narratives, one might predict that the return of life-giving content of the container would cause the container's recovery to the condition it was in prior to the spirits' departure. But upon Dān's resurrection, when his souls presumably returned, his body had neither decomposed (aside from the discolored skin and eyebrow loss) nor resumed its normal form. This shows that the souls' presence is important to the operations of the body, not just in the sense of contributing to keeping it alive. If we set aside the static substance model of bodies as spatial containers, we can see how the souls' departure alters the body's boundaries by changing its operations. Because the body is a dynamic pattern of flow, the souls' departure necessarily changes the boundaries of Dān's body by halting its movements. With the souls' return, Dān's body gradually reacquires the ability to hear and eat, if not walk. This points to his relearning to be affected by his environment – its sounds, its tastes, and perhaps eventually its spatial configurations. This gradual relearning to be moved in response to things amounts to Dān's acquiring new bodily boundaries. Insofar as the body is a trajectory of flow, he is, in effect, reacquiring a body. Thus, we see in Dān's story that the departure and subsequent return of internal things affects the (fluid) body's boundaries.

Furthermore, while attempts to close off the body's gaps might evoke a fixed container with small openings, when the holes are virtually everywhere, the resemblance to a container ceases. Far from being a closed system that only occasionally ingests and expels things, bodies in early Chinese texts are like a constant interface. Any firm sense of interiority is an achievement, not a given. Moreover, if the point was to create an im-

<sup>1</sup> The story, found in an excavated tomb in Fāngmātān in 1986, is translated and explained by Donald Harper. Having perpetrated a crime, Dān subsequently killed himself. But someone in the spirit world agreed that it was not his time to die, so a white dog released him from his tomb. HARPER 1994, pp. 13-28.

<sup>2</sup> The departure of Dān's souls is not spelled out in the story, and as a result Poo considers the possibility that they might not even have left. But if all the souls were present, it is hard to see why Dān would have been thought of as dead at all because his body had also not decomposed. POO 2004, p. 178.

permeable container, the sensory holes could only be the most blatant targets of such efforts because the entire skin, which is understood as «skin patterns», is also considered open to contact. Thus, a passage in the *Mèngzǐ*, the collected sayings of «Mencius» of the fourth century B.C.E, seems to express anxiety about exposure to someone's bare chest (*Mèngzǐ* 5B1). It is inevitable that wind and «airs» penetrate not only the ears and nose, but also the skin. Before we impose a container-metaphor where it makes little sense, it is better to understand the goal in blocking the holes of the body as aimed at mastery of an entire mobile interface, rather than sealing off already well-walled container.<sup>1</sup> An impenetrable seal would be difficult because, «Humans are water», according to the *Guǎnzǐ*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, mastery of the body cannot have as its aim the preservation of an already existent inner self, because the permeability of the borders means that the interiority is always in the process of being recreated.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in many cases, the inside is described as positively influenced by contact with the environment. Texts that discuss cultivation of the body/self assert that, while in residence, such entities can assist the heart's functioning.<sup>4</sup> Music entering the ears transforms one's moral character. Excavated medical texts and sexual manuals promote the idea that good health actually depends on «embodying movements of the external world». <sup>5</sup> Even if we view these bodies in terms of substances rather than interfaces, they have the permeability of a sponge or cheese cloth.

In early Chinese texts the surface of the body reveals the interior in ways that are not possible for the kind of container-body proposed by Lakoff and Johnson. To those who are attuned to it, the spontaneity of the surface's response – whether automatic or learned through practice – makes the body and face reliable guides. The pupil of the eye is like a mirror of the person (*Mèngzǐ* 4A15), and one's bearing and complexion can reveal a «completed» heart (*Guǎnzǐ* 16 «Nèiyè» 10.2). This spontaneous expressivity accounts for Kǒngzǐ's claim that the difficulty in serving one's parents is a matter of maintaining the right countenance. According to Kǒngzǐ, there is much to be gained from being aware of other people's expressions: observing the look on a gentleman's face is one of the most important elements of assisting a gentleman. Moreover, an inappro-

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps its use of the graph *fēng* 封, «seal», prompts Slingerland to read the story about Liezi at the end of Chapter Seven of the *Zhuāngzǐ* as promoting an «air-tight seal between inner and outer». (SLINGERLAND 2003, 190) Aside from this being an unlikely interpretation, as Shigehisa Kuriyama argues, mastery of the body was an issue of fullness, not air-tight sealing. The boundary between inner and outer was the thin membrane of skin and pores. These could be «closely knit», but more effective protection came from fullness within, so that there would be no space for invading things to occupy. The discussion of the fullness of water in *Zhuāngzǐ* 5 «Dé Chōng Fú» is illustrative in that regard. (See n. 32). KURIYAMA 1999, pp. 259, 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Guǎnzǐ* 14.1 «Shuǐ Dì» 39. The *Guǎnzǐ* is a compilation of writings from the fifth to first century B.C.E. This assertion occurs in a description of gestation that implies that body/form (*xíng* 形) consists of energy and water.

人，水也。男女精氣合，而水流形。

Humans are water. Male and female concentrated energies unite, and water flows into a form.

This is followed by the claim that water congeals to make humans. As in the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s metaphor of the body as water, there is nothing here to suggest this water is contained in an impermeable tub.

<sup>3</sup> As Angela Zito notes, «What we interpret in philosophical texts as the privileging of interiority, an inner self, can be better understood as valuable proof of boundary creation and control. Thus the 'centering' action of the self through the body paradoxically takes place at its edges, on its surfaces and through its senses, which act as gates to the outside world». ZITO 1994, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> «When thinking cannot get through [understand], the ghosts and spirits manage it». *Guǎnzǐ* 13.2 «Xīn Shù Xià» and 16.1 «Nèi Yè».

<sup>5</sup> LO 2007, p. 405.

priate look can cause significant harm, because even a moment's failure to maintain a reverent appearance produces a bad influence on others.<sup>1</sup> This expressivity of the body's surface is not limited to momentary responses. It extends to more constant bodily patterns. The frequent references in early Chinese texts to reading a person's character on the basis of his/her physiognomy suggests confidence in interpreting more lasting physical features than just fleeting expressions. While the *Xúnzǐ* and the *Zhuāngzǐ* mock the practice, their very attention to it confirms its popularity. However exaggerated at the popular level, it is rooted in early Chinese medical authority. Experts in medicine took seriously the idea that the body's insides produce lasting surface effects. For this reason, diagnoses described in second century B.C.E. excavated medical texts do not need to penetrate below the skin. The physicians determine a person's condition by interpreting signs on the body's surface, such as quality of its perspiration and the nature of its abscesses.<sup>2</sup> Thus, not only the surfaces' spontaneous changes, but even its more constant aspects are continuous with, and therefore reveal, the body's insides.

The contrast of inside/outside might seem like a division that does not accommodate degrees, but early Chinese medical texts imply that there are degrees and layers of physical interiority. Whereas Lakoff and Johnson's container model stresses the importance of a difference in kind marked by one definitive inner/outer split, early Chinese medical texts stress something else. The more dominant pair is *yīn/yáng*, in which inner/outer is subsumed. *Yīn* and *yáng* contrast areas of the body like the underarms as *yīn* (soft, dark, and lower), with other areas that are *yáng* (hard, light, and upper) like limbs. As has been often observed, a *yīn/yáng* division is always contextualized relative to what is being divided. Similarly, the inner/outer division also appears to be relative when used to diagnose illness. Early Chinese physicians take note of internal layers, because merely being «inside» is not enough to make an illness serious. Instead, illnesses are threatening according to their level of depth. In fact, there is no reason to presume that the inner/outer division of the body is any different from the typical distinctions that establish other boundaries of things, including near/far, above/below, short/long, big/small, soft/brittle, light/heavy, and light/dark. All of these are matters of degrees. Thus, instead of a single distinct boundary of inside/outside, early Chinese medical texts interpret the surface in terms of its connections with many layers of malleable boundaries.

This sketch of concepts and metaphors of the body in Early Chinese texts challenges the impulse to mine them for container-metaphors of the sort that Lakoff and Johnson describe. Unless one determines in advance that one will encounter evidence of a self bounded within firm walls, that model of the self is not likely to appear. Certain things do reside within the body or within specific parts of it, but they are not of a different kind from the things that are outside the body. They also travel in and out, sometimes constituting the inside and sometimes the outside. The body is a multilayered malleable construction whose surface is both porous and in process. It is not a static container that has contact with its environment through the senses. Rather it is its continually formed and reformed boundaries.

<sup>1</sup> *Lǐ jì* 19 «Yùè jì».

<sup>2</sup> Lo 2000, pp. 38, 42.

## SENSORY RELIABILITY

Although the body's shifting surface boundaries are layered upon more internal boundaries that affect, and are revealed by, the surface, this does not mean early Chinese texts presuppose that those surfaces are easy to interpret. For the ordinary observer, a potentially insincere face is not necessarily a reliable indication of the insides. In fact, not only in terms of bodies, but also with regard to most things, early Chinese texts exhibit a great deal of concern about being misled. With vehemence, they vilify things that approximate other things. It might even be the case that the texts express an unusual amount of worries about not being able to tell things apart.<sup>1</sup> This problem of deceptive resemblance is important because it gets at the heart of the drawbacks of applying container metaphors of self to texts from Early China. If we assume with Lakoff and Johnson that people in Early China experienced themselves as enclosed inside containers and that they projected these conceptions onto things in the world, it is hard to imagine how the self would avoid feeling radically separate from other things. Adding the idea of «bodies as containers» to a world full of deceptive resemblances is fertile ground for fears that we are not in touch with the world. In a world full of deceptive resemblances, if our walled-off «selves» have only our senses to connect to other things, which we also project to be containers like ourselves, then severe mistrust of sensory knowledge is a likely result. But despite the serious concerns in early Chinese texts about deceptive resemblances, they express little doubt about the capacities of the senses. They present the senses as generally dependable even in discussions of sensory error. Such discussions make it clear that the senses are trustworthy. So what accounts for a situation in which resemblances are deceptive, but the senses are reliable?

The anxiety about distinguishing between deceptively similar things is well represented by the short chapter on «Doubting Resemblances» in the *Lüshi Chūnqiū*, an encyclopedic compilation probably dating from the third century B.C.E. The chapter contends that resemblance (*si* 似) between things is the greatest cause of confusion and error.<sup>2</sup> The usage of *si* in early Chinese texts is by no means restricted to contexts of unreliability, but «Mistrusting Resemblances» focuses on resemblances that cause doubt.<sup>3</sup> In addition to relatively trivial examples of mistaken resemblance – such as weapons that resemble famous swords, rocks that approximate jade, and scholars whose broad learning and clever talk resembles intelligence – the chapter conveys the full seriousness of the danger of *si* through two stories about catastrophes that result from things being too similar.<sup>4</sup> In a «cry-wolf» story, a genuine bandit invasion is taken for a false alarm as a result of previous similar alarms staged to amuse a spoiled concubine. The outcome is the destruction of an entire dynasty. In the other story, a ghost manages to trick a man into slaying his son by disguising himself as the man's son. The story goes like this:

<sup>1</sup> Martin Svensson Ekström draws attention to this idea. He argues that fear of deception features vividly in early Chinese texts. SVENSSON EKSTRÖM 2002, pp. 251-289.

<sup>2</sup> My discussion focuses on *si* 似. For a study that focuses on the graph *xiàng* 象, see XU 2004, pp. 514-532.

<sup>3</sup> One example of the positive use of *si* 似 is *Mèngzǐ* 6A7, where humans resemble one another because we share the sense preferences of the sages.

<sup>4</sup> The term *si* 似 is not used exclusively in the context of one particular sense function. For example, it describes the way drums sound like thunder, as well as the way visual appearance leads to mistaken identity.



North of Liáng was the district of Lìqū, where there was a strange ghost who was skilled at imitating (*xiào* 效) the visual forms (*zhuàng* 狀) of a person's children and brothers.<sup>1</sup> Once, when a man of the town was returning home drunk after visiting the marketplace, the ghost of Lìqū imitated his son's form and then, blocking his way, treated the man poorly. The man returned home, and when he had sobered up, he upbraided his son, saying, "I am your father. Who would have thought you did not love me? When I was drunk you treated me poorly on the road. Why?"

His son cried and knocked his head against the ground, saying "That did not happen. At the time I was taking care of my duties in the eastern part of town. You can ask others."

The father believed him. "Aha! It must have been that strange ghost that I have heard about." He decided that the next day he would once again go drinking in the marketplace, in hopes of encountering the ghost and stabbing it to death. At dawn he went to the marketplace and got drunk. His genuine (*zhēn* 真) son, fearful that his father would be unable to return home, went to help him. When the man saw his genuine son, he drew out his sword and stabbed him. The man's knowledge (*zhì* 智) was confused by the ghost's resemblance (*sì*) to his son, and hence he killed his genuine son.<sup>2</sup> Those who are confused by ministers and thereby lose genuine ministers have knowledge like this man from Lìqū.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that malevolent ghosts have the ability to imitate the forms of loved ones is a compelling example of the threat of misleading resemblances. One can see how such stories express the *Lüshi Chūnqū*'s fear that resemblance is the greatest obstacle to knowledge.

While the *Lüshi Chūnqū* chapter on resemblance barely elaborates on its contention, other early Chinese texts shed more light on such worries about resemblance. The crux of the problem seems to be that some things threaten others by being too similar, as in the example of purple detracting from red.<sup>4</sup> The *Lúnyǔ*, a collection of sayings of and about Confucius, initiates this claim without reference to the graph *sì* (似), but the *Mèngzǐ* develops it using «*sì*». Juxtaposing purple to red, the *Lunyu* implies that purple somehow steals from it:

Kǒngzǐ said, "I hate purple's taking away from red. I hate the sound of Zhèng's making chaos of elegant music. I hate persuasiveness' overturning states and families." *Lúnyǔ* 17/18.

<sup>1</sup> The use of the term *zhuàng* 狀 covers multiple visible aspects of a person. It can include face, body, and complexion. Like the graph *xíng* 形 (form), in some cases it is contrasted with a person's voice.

<sup>2</sup> Translating this term *zhì* 智 here is difficult. «Wisdom» sounds too Orientalist in the context of a Chinese story. «Intelligence» might seem too static. «Knowledge» suggests collected information, whereas knowledge in the context of Early Chinese texts is a skill in making good discriminatory judgments in response to things.

<sup>3</sup> John Knoblock and Jeffrey Reigel's translation, slightly modified. KNOBLOCK, REIGEL 2000, p. 574.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that some particular circumstance caused purple to be fashionable enough in Early China to attract criticism, but what emerges from the texts is not a specific circumstance so much a sense of disrupted orthodoxy. Like many other things in early Chinese texts, color has norms. The texts presume a categorization of colors totaling five: red, yellow, white, black and blue. The numbering is in keeping with many other sets of fives, including those that specifically apply to the senses, for example, five tastes, five sounds, and sometimes five senses themselves. The texts seem to exhibit a common concern when they mention things that threaten to disrupt these sensory norms. For instance, the disparagement of purple often arises in tandem with complaints about the music of Zhèng. Focusing on the five-fold framework, scholars have argued that the music of Zhèng might have employed a scale exceeding the recognized five tones or might have departed from the usual variety of rhythms. Traditional commentaries often argue that the same kind of thinking applies to color and accounts for the criticism of purple. Because purple is not recognized among the official five colors and yet similar to one of them, the use of purple undermines color orthodoxy. Regarding the music of Zhèng, see DEWOSKIN 1982, p. 45 and PICKEN 1977, p. 107.

Mèngzǐ 7B37 expands on this vitriol, introducing the term *sì* in specifying the danger of resemblance. It contends that enmity characterizes the relation between things that resemble one another, in its criticism of «honest villagers». <sup>1</sup> It offers this more elaborate form of the statement attributed to Kǒngzǐ.

Kǒngzǐ said, “I hate things that resemble (*sì*) but are not (*fēi* 非) [*sì ér fēi zhē*]. I hate weeds for fear they make chaos of rice. I hate eloquence for fear it makes chaos of righteousness. I hate persuasiveness for fear it makes chaos of trustworthiness. I hate the sounds of Zhèng for fear they make chaos of music. I hate purple for fear it makes chaos of red. I hate the ‘honest villagers’ for fear they make chaos of virtue/power (*dé*).” Mèngzǐ 7B37

Kǒngzǐ’s rhetoric here might seem disproportionate to the threat involved, but perhaps it is because these problems get at the root of more significant dangers. Things that are too similar are enemies of one another because the inability to distinguish between things produces confusion and contributes to deception.

To understand the criticism of resemblance in Mèngzǐ 7B37, it is important to note that the passage, like many early Chinese texts, speaks of colors as if they *are* things, not just surfaces of things. Some of the passage’s examples of things that Kǒngzǐ hates are easily assimilated into a «container with misleading surface» model, but the example of color defies being understood in that way, hence it indicates how the rest should be read. Weeds and rice, eloquence and righteousness, etc. are sets of things whose boundaries overlap. This is what disturbs Kǒngzǐ. His hatred of purple does not derive from seeing purple as a surface that hides an unseen essence, as we might expect if we interpret the passage as criticizing things that are mere semblance. <sup>2</sup> That might be a likely interpretation if we were persuaded by Lakoff and Johnson’s claim that we project our «in-out orientation» onto things that are bounded by surfaces. <sup>3</sup> But instead, since purple in

<sup>1</sup> There is little consensus about «honest villagers» (*xiāngyuán* 鄉原), the target of this criticism. In keeping with the pattern here, it is likely they are very close to virtuous, but in some way not as virtuous as others, and therefore they cause confusion by being too similar. For an extended discussion of this term in the *Lúnyǔ* and the Mèngzǐ, see the discussion initiated by Steve Angle:

*What’s Wrong with those «Pesky Village Worthies»? «Warp, Weft, and Way»*, Wordpress.com, 9 Nov. 2009.

Scholarship that focuses on «honest villagers» to the exclusion of the other items on the list misses the point. See, for example, Lee Yearley’s interpretation of «honest villagers». Yearley treats the passage as attacking «semblances» of virtue. By «semblance», he means something that is not «real» and yet also not deliberately deceptive (which he calls «counterfeit»). Yearley adds that semblances of virtue are «apparently or partially good». This encourages interpreting the passage as criticizing «appearance», as long as the appearance in question is not intentionally deceptive. But if we apply that to color, which is also included in the Mèngzǐ 7B37 list, the results are two implausible readings of the passage’s view of the relation between purple and red. First, red is real and purple only looks real. Or second, red is real and purple has some, but not all, of the elements that would make it real, like red is. YEARLEY 1990, pp. 19-20, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Translations and commentaries on early Chinese texts do render a number of terms as «essence», but to different effect. In the case of Roger Ames translating *jīng* 精 as essence, he means for it to be understood as «concentrated form», as in vanilla essence. By contrast, Slingerland translates *qīng* 情 as «essence» (and *jīng* as «quintessence»), with something very different in mind. Following A.C. Graham’s weakly justified claim that the «Neo-Mohist Canons» invented the use of *qīng* 情 as a technical term used to mean what makes a thing what it is, Slingerland interprets references to *qīng* 情 in early Chinese texts as meaning that sort of essence. This frees him up to find «internal essences» inside containers even in texts where, he admits, the «container language of inner/outer...is almost completely absent». SLINGERLAND 2003, pp. 33-34, 105; AMES 1993, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Although Lakoff and Johnson do not pursue the color-related implications of their claim that human beings project their in-out orientations onto things, they describe color as dubious on other grounds. They write, «We see color, and yet it is false...cognitive science tells us that colors do not exist in the external world. Given the



these passages functions as a thing rather than a surface of a thing, the type of deception that purple poses here is a different problem entirely. The worry is that its resemblance to another color makes it difficult for Kǒngzǐ to distinguish them. The senses' limitations are not at fault. The blurred boundaries of the two things are to blame.

Hence Kǒngzǐ's criticism of resemblance does not propose that the senses merely provide knowledge of appearance. Unfortunately, various translations of the *Mèngzǐ* passage into English have contributed to misreading the passage this way.<sup>1</sup> The issue becomes clearer once we change our interpretive framework by substituting purity/impurity for reality/appearance.<sup>2</sup> But first, we must look closely at the wording of the passage. It is problematic to translate Kǒngzǐ's statement (*sì ér fēi zhě*) as saying that he hates things that are specious. To be specious is to have the look of being genuine, while being false. Here, that cannot be the case. Although it is possible to say of some instance of red that it is «genuinely red», it makes little sense to assess the color red in general as either «genuine» or «false». Moreover, it is important that, when translating *sì* as «resemblance», the term should not be understood to mean mere «semblance» or mere «seeming» – rhetoric that is coated with doubts about sensory reliability, especially when used in the context of color. The *Mèngzǐ*'s example of color is useful in drawing out the inappropriateness of that reading. The passage does not say, in effect, «*It looks like purple looks like red*». It says, «*Purple looks like red*». The assertion does not express doubt about the eyes' capacity to see purple. Nor does purple's appearance hide anything that determines whether it really looks like red. Since purple in this context is something that is seen, without being the surface of something else, the point here is not just that purple *seems* like red, it *is* like red. Specifically, in being like red and yet not red, purple comes very close to blurring the boundary of red. If we were to think of this as a «problem of illusion», that might evoke a thing whose surface is counterfeit and belies its essential nature – the sort of problem that results from not being in touch with the world.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, we should think of this as a «problem of resemblance», which implies that two (or more) things are similar to the detriment of one.

Indeed, it is important to notice that the passage implies that red is more prized than purple. Hence, a better translation would convey that Kǒngzǐ hates things that closely resemble something valorized but are not that thing. Thus, the object of Kǒngzǐ's hatred is not «seeming» or «appearances». The resemblances he despises are those whose blurred boundaries make it difficult for him to distinguish things he wants to keep pure from those he does not value. This is what the phrasing of *sì ér fēi zhě* emphasizes. First, it does not say he hates «*sì*». This is because «*sì*» is not always used to mean *misleading* resemblances. Second, more technically, the emphasis of the phrase should not be read

world, our bodies and brains have evolved to create color». Thus, they dismiss the ordinary use of the senses as false, if not «subjective». For them, what is not false is the physiological eye (the retina and its neural circuitry) that interacts with wavelengths and lighting in seeing color. LAKOFF, JOHNSON 1999, pp. 23-25.

<sup>1</sup> James Legge translates the term as «semblances». LEGGE 1895; 1970. D. C. Lau uses «specious». LAU 1970. Bryan Van Norden chooses «seems». VAN NORDEN 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Fraser's study of sensory error argues that, in the absence of a representational view of mind, early Chinese texts do not posit a gap between reality and appearance. FRASER 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser remarks that, in the discussions of sensory error in early Chinese texts, «Even in the case of perceptual error due to illusion, the agent is not regarded as misled by appearances or sense impressions that misrepresent reality. Rather, the agent is seen as in touch with the world and usually right about something, namely that whatever feature prompted the erroneous discrimination is indeed similar, at least partially, to a paradigm of the kind of thing the agent took it to be». FRASER 2011, p. 26.

as saying he hates things that *falsely* seem like something without *actually being* that thing. Instead, «*si ér fēi*» should be understood as saying that he hates something's close resemblance (*si*) to something else that it is not (*fēi*). Other aspects of the passage reinforce that Kǒngzǐ's complaints are best understood in a framework of purity/impurity. Everything he hates involves two things whose boundaries threaten to be indistinguishable: weeds and rice, eloquence and righteousness, persuasiveness and trustworthiness, music of Zhèng and music, purple and red, «honest villagers» and virtue.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, both the *Lúnyǔ* passage and the *Mèngzǐ* passage are quite clear about the hatred being directed at what the one thing *does* to the other, or perhaps, what the one thing does to the ability to distinguish it from the other. The threat to the ability to distinguish is also evident in the rhetoric of *Mèngzǐ*'s assertion that honest villagers are the «enemy» of virtue. As this enmity implies, Kǒngzǐ sees purple as being in active opposition to red. To facilitate distinguishing very similar things, he views close boundaries as opposing one another. Therefore, resemblance is a problem not because the senses fail to get past appearances, but because boundaries overlap.

Like these doubts about resemblance in general, discussions of sensory doubts in the *Xúnzǐ* also do not challenge the reliability of the senses.<sup>2</sup> In the «Zhèngmíng» chapter, the *Xúnzǐ* implies that the senses cope with doubtful resemblances (*yísi* 疑似) on a routine basis. It says that when things are of the same kind and circumstance, the senses have some sort of similar reaction that permits them to successfully compare doubtful resemblances.<sup>3</sup> The same confident attitude characterizes the *Xúnzǐ*'s «Dispelling Obstacles» chapter, which addresses a broad range of what it calls «doubtful observations of things»: taking a stone for a tiger; a tree for a man; a ditch for a drain; a city gate for a door; one thing as two; noise as silence; oxen for sheep; and trees for chopsticks. In each case, the text mentions the cause of the misjudgment: darkness, in the case of the tiger and the man; alcohol, in the case of the drain and the door; pressure, in the case of the eyes and ears; distance, for the sheep; and height, for the chopsticks. A man who takes his shadow for a ghost is first introduced as foolish and prone to fright. Reiterating the point, the text notes that, as a rule, «being startled or confused» is a likely cause for thinking one sees ghosts.<sup>4</sup> Thus we are assured that the senses do not misfire for no reason. The chapter lays the blame for such sensory error on factors other than the senses.<sup>5</sup> It stresses that it is ill-advised to formulate decisions in the context of darkness, alcohol, pressure, and other influences. Hence while acknowledging that perceptual mistakes are likely to occur in those contexts, it reserves criticism for the decision to form

<sup>1</sup> See above for the interpretation of «honest villagers».

<sup>2</sup> For longer discussions of sensory error in early Chinese texts, see GEANEY 2002, pp. 39-46 and FRASER 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The line employs obscure language that might be technical. The senses have a similar «intended-thing» (*yiwù* 意物) in response to things of similar kinds. This then permits the possibility of shared naming conventions.

凡同類同情者，其天官之意物也同。

Regarding things of the same kind and circumstance, their heavenly officers' intended-thing is the same.

*Xúnzǐ* 22 «Zhèngmíng».

<sup>4</sup> The *Xúnzǐ*, unlike the *Lüshi Chūnqū*, treats the existence of ghosts as implausible.

<sup>5</sup> Some causes of perceptual error from the *Xunzi* and the *Lushi Chunqiu* include being confined, being fixated, being mentally unsettled by desires and aversions, being incompetent, being in confused circumstances (influenced by things), and being short on functional proficiency. Chris Fraser emphasizes that perceptual error generally results from attending to some features of circumstances and not others. FRASER 2011.

judgments in those compromised circumstances. The passage makes it clear that, as long as the heart is aware of ever-changing environmental influences and conscious of when to form judgments, sensory error cannot become serious. Whereas a reality/appearance split implies something inherently false about what the senses perceive, the *Xúnzǐ* argues that sensory error is trivial and usually avoidable.

The fear of deception in the *Lüshi Chūnqiū* is stronger than in the *Xúnzǐ*, but the *Lüshi Chūnqiū* seems to agree that the problem of resemblance becomes pronounced only when people foolishly ignore confusing circumstances influencing their senses. The tragic *Lüshi Chūnqiū* ghost-story might inspire fear that forces beyond one's control create deceptions beyond one's skills in discernment, but that passage also implies that the consequences of the perceptual error could have been drastically reduced. It is true that the ghost was adept at imitating people's relatives, so the man's senses could not distinguish the ghost from his son. But readers might be expected to consider the possibility that the ghost deliberately targets this man because he is lacking in «knowledge».<sup>1</sup> The story certainly draws attention this flaw. On the one hand, it describes the man's son, who performs his daily duties and looks after his drunken father. On the other, we have the patriarch who spends his days drinking in town. The father's idea of a good plan to defeat the ghost is to stab it while he is drunk. He starts drinking at dawn on the day of his second ghostly encounter. Even after he is aware that the ghost and his son are difficult to tell apart, he still makes the decision to act on the certainty that the person who looks like his son is definitely the ghost. Readers faced with the prospect of clever ghosts imitating their loved ones might find comfort in the man's incompetent judgments. Indeed, there are many reassuring suggestions that a more careful person could avoid this man's fate. The story promotes good judgment through hard work, duty, sobriety, and restraint. These virtues promise to serve as protection against the threat of misleading resemblances. Whatever anxieties the story may initially conjure, on further inspection, any doubts about whether one can trust resemblances only seem to apply to such feckless and unobservant people as this drunken patriarch.

The *Lüshi Chūnqiū* even proposes a method for avoiding sensory doubt – attentive knowledge of the environment. While the *Xúnzǐ* advocates not making hasty decisions when something is influencing the senses, the *Lüshi Chūnqiū* is more proactive. It instructs its readers to familiarize themselves with their environment or rely on those who do. Its entire discussion of doubtful resemblance culminates with the advice to emulate the great sages of the past who sought input from ordinary shepherds and fishers whose territory they entered. As the passage points out, such local knowledge is valuable because it comes from intimate care and attention (*shěn* 審). The passage adds an analogy to a mother discerning the difference between her twins. It notes that a mother knows how to identify her twins and has a constant and regular knowledge of them.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the presumed persistent awareness of a mother's perception of her children epitomizes reliable sensory knowledge. Like the local shepherds and fishers' knowledge of their land, the mother's ability to distinguish her twins results from prolonged intimate contact. That contact with her children, who perhaps not incidentally were once literally part of

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the term being translated as «knowledge», see above.

<sup>2</sup> The line reads: 夫人子之相似者，其母常識之，知之審也。

«As for twins, their mother constantly is aware of them, which is knowing carefully».

her, allows her to perceive finer distinctions between them than others can.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that, drunken patriarchs notwithstanding, we need only consider maternal dedication to realize that there is nothing preventing us from recognizing our kin, even when ghosts impersonate our loved ones. Hence, blurred boundaries do place special demands on sensory knowledge, but not the kind of insuperable challenges that would result if combined with the container-self model. In a world where boundaries are so close that they produce deceptive resemblances, closeness simultaneously provides reassurance: constant intimate contact increases the reliability of knowledge. Intimate contact is possible because human subjects and the world interpenetrate and affect each other. No self is confined inside container walls. Drunken confusion and irresponsibility might get in the way of paying attention, but there are no walls obstructing close familiarity. According to this chapter, to cope with fears of being misled by resemblances, one need only cultivate regular attentive knowledge of one's environment.

The idea of knowing how to distinguish blurred boundaries provides an alternative way of explaining what could otherwise seem like reality/appearance contrasts in which a person's countenance or manner is misleading.<sup>2</sup> For instance, there is a story in the *Zhuāngzǐ* that repeatedly touches on the issue of possible incongruity between a person's insides and outsides. In a conversation between the stock characters 'Kǒngzǐ' the sage and 'Yán Huí' his follower, Yán Huí proposes two schemes for assisting a ruler: bending his outsides while straightening his insides, or presenting himself as empty and unified. Kǒngzǐ rejects both. He doubts that Yán Huí is up to the challenge of acting empty and unified, which, he says, would entail maintaining a composed facial expression. By contrast, Kǒngzǐ predicts that the ruler actually could successfully present himself as outwardly agreeable while inwardly not. By implication, Kǒngzǐ seems to mean that someone with enough power to rule a state could manage a feat like that, at least in front of a novice like Yán Huí. To someone working from a container-self model, these metaphors might evoke a core-self inside a container whose outside is mere deceptive appearance. But it is noteworthy that Kǒngzǐ describes facial control as involving types of energy that are by no means empty semblance. The reason Kǒngzǐ maintains that an ordinary person like Yán Huí would not be able to do it is that he presumes successfully manipulating one's facial expression requires mastery of one's *yīn* and *yáng* energies, a process that produces the body's surface. Indeed, we get the impression that even the ruler would not be able to compose his face well enough to deceive Kǒngzǐ, if he knew him. Thus, most of the time, people's expressions are so closely linked to the complex movements of their interiors that they cannot successfully deceive an astute observer.<sup>3</sup> Inside and outside interpenetrate and most people cannot control them well enough to close off the connection and create a sufficiently deceptive surface. The passage's emphasis on discerning the inside on the basis of the outside presupposes that the external surface is less valuable than the interior in this context. But it does not presume that the outside is so completely unconnected to the inside as to be false appear-

<sup>1</sup> The choice of a mother as an exemplar of knowledge makes an interesting contrast to a model of a self that is enclosed inside a container. As Christine Battersby points out, pregnancy is precisely the kind of boundary-blurring experience that challenges any sense of a unitary self bounded by the container of the body. BATTERSBY 1999. See above.

<sup>2</sup> For a different reading, see SLINGERLAND 2003, pp. 187-188.

<sup>3</sup> Shigehisa Kuriyama's argument about Confucius is broadly applicable here. He notes that, for Confucius, instances of feigned expressions are simply warnings of the need for careful observation, not signs that the face cannot be trusted. KURIYAMA 1995, p. 217.

ance. Yán Huí compares inside/outside to heaven/earth – a comparison that must be understood according to the worldview of early Chinese texts. Inside and outside, like heaven and earth, differ by degrees. Heaven is not especially «real», and earth, while less valuable in certain contexts, is not inherently «false» or «appearance-based».<sup>1</sup> Thus, when a countenance misleads people, it is not because surfaces in general are false. It is because the usually blurred boundaries between inside and outside have been temporarily separated well enough to fool those people. The interior is still evident to a close observer because the surface is still a product of mobilized inner energies.

Lakoff and Johnson's embodied realism aims to remove the gap between subjective and objective by situating experience in bodies. But their presumed common embodiment, like their container-self metaphor, closes off potential for otherness. The sensory processes in early Chinese texts resist being read through Lakoff and Johnson's container model of the self. The body does not consist of walls that are discontinuous with the things in the world or with a core-self that is contained within it. In early Chinese texts, nothing is well bounded, which means the distinctions between the human subject and other things are matters of degrees and always in the process of changing. The desire for clear-cut boundaries that occurs in discussions about the color purple applies as much to the construction the human subject as it does to things. The container metaphor is not appropriate because in early Chinese texts, if there is an experience of containment at all, it has been sought after. It is not a preexisting state or a common embodiment. The internal and external interaction between entities occurs between things of similar sorts that constantly form and reform the subject. This flux is potentially chaotic, but reliable knowledge is possible through attunement to one's surroundings, which amounts to perfecting the senses. Attunement is the way to sense shifting flowing boundaries and thereby achieve more reliable knowledge. If one is attuned, then even in the worst situations – when malicious ghosts disguise themselves as relatives – resemblances will not deceive. This confidence is possible because the potential deceptiveness of resemblance has nothing to do with gaps between the interiors and exteriors of containers. Rather, the reason resemblance can be misleading is that nothing is well bounded, including the things being sensed and the subject who is sensing. Hence, the senses are reliable as long as the knower is not distracted by the traffic moving in and out of the porous membrane and shifting boundaries of the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> In other words, inner/outer is a polarity, not a dualism marked by radically difference. AMES 1993, pp. 158-163.



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