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The idea of *shan* 善 (goodness): A neglected philosophical relation between Guodian's 'Wu xing' and Xunzi

Fan He

Philosophy Department, Sichuan University, Chengdu, P. R. China

ABSTRACT

The 'Wu xing' belongs to Guodian bamboo slips texts, which were buried around 300 BCE and excavated in 1993. Its relation with Mengzi is widely investigated. Yet how it is philosophically related to Xunzi receives little attention. In this article, I illustrate a neglected relation between 'Wu xing' and Xunzi, by elucidating how *shan* 善 (goodness) is first raised in 'Wu xing' and developed by Xunzi into a concrete idea. Both 'Wu xing' and Xunzi propose that *shan* exists in action, which boils down to the harmonious unity of the mind and body, and to secure the ideal relation between the mind and body requires constant learning and practicing, particularly, of rituals. Learning and practicing not only lead one to realize *shan*, but eventually to become a consummate practitioner of rituals, to use Xunzi's words, to become a sage.

KEYWORDS

Xunzi; Wu xing; *shan*; ritual; unity

1. Introduction

The 'Wu xing' 五行 ('Five conducts', hereafter, WX) belongs to Guodian bamboo slips texts, which were buried around 300 BCE and excavated in 1993. It focuses on two parts, *de* 德 (virtuosity or virtue) and *shan* 善 (goodness). *De* is realized through recovering and cultivating virtues that are inherent in a person. *Shan* exists in action that is in accordance with social norms.¹ The WX's influence on Mengzi 孟子 can be easily identified. The majority of scholars believe that Mengzi's theory, for example, the 'four sprouts' (namely, the sprout of benevolence, the sprout of rightness, the sprout of propriety, and the sprout of wisdom), is developed from WX's *de*.² WX's possible relation with another early Confucian philosopher, namely Xunzi 荀子, is also noted in present scholarship. Some scholars suggest that Xunzi may well have access to WX and is particularly influenced by its idea of *shan*.³ Nonetheless, the exact account of Xunzi's philosophical affinity to WX receives little attention and requires further investigation.⁴

In this article, I illustrate a neglected relation between 'Wu xing' and Xunzi, by elucidating how the account of *shan* is first raised in 'Wu xing' and developed by Xunzi into a concrete idea.⁵ Both 'Wu xing' and Xunzi propose that *shan* exists in action, which boils down to the harmonious unity of the mind and body.⁶ To secure the ideal relation between the mind and body requires constant learning and practicing, particularly, of rituals.

It should be noted that illustrating WX's philosophical relation with Xunzi is not to deny its relation with Mengzi, or to imply that it is more intimately related to Xunzi than to Mengzi. Nonetheless, I am also cautious about ascribing WX exclusively to the 'school' of Zi Si 子思 and Mengzi.⁷ I just have a minimal assumption: I treat WX as a repertoire that could be accessible to philosophers from late Warring States,⁸ be it Mengzi, Xunzi, or even those who are not commonly ascribed to the Confucian 'school'. The investigation of WX's relation with Xunzi, I do believe, would not only provide fresh insight into the development of early Confucian philosophy in the middle-late Warring States, but more importantly, would reveal a unique way to achieve *shan*.

To present WX's relation with Xunzi, I take two steps. First, I give a close reading of WX, analyzing how *shan* exists in action, which comes down to the harmonious unity of the mind and body. Second, I examine how Xunzi further develops WX's approach to *shan*.

2. *Shan* in WX

2.1 *Different interpretations on the relation between two complicated passages*

WX defines *shan* as the harmonization of the four external conducts, which refer to the conduct of benevolence, the conduct of rightness, the conduct of propriety, and the conduct of wisdom, respectively (Liu, 2003, pp. 72–73). To elaborate *shan* in WX, I shall investigate how the four external conducts are harmonized and so considered as *shan*. The investigation of this question hinges on how to read two complicated but closely associated passages of this text. Passage 1 presents how the four external conducts are related with each other to realize *shan*:

(Passage 1) Seeing and knowing it (referring to the way of gentleman) is wisdom. Knowing and being at ease in it is benevolence. Being at ease in it and putting it into action is rightness. Putting it into action and respecting it is propriety. Benevolence and rightness are that from which propriety is born and that which the four conducts are harmonized.⁹ When in harmony, they (referring to 'benevolence and rightness' and the four conducts) are in *tong* 同 (unity or sameness), and when in *tong*, they are in *shan* 善 (goodness). (Liu, 2003, p. 82)¹⁰

This passage can be divided into two parts. The first part explains how the four external conducts, that is, the conduct of benevolence, the conduct of rightness, the conduct of propriety, and the conduct of wisdom, are related with each other and harmonized with 'benevolence and rightness'. The second part shows three different yet related states, namely harmony, *tong*,¹¹ and *shan*. The three states are used to characterize the ideal relation between the four external conducts and 'benevolence and rightness' that are displayed in the first part.

Then, what does the expression 'benevolence and rightness' mean? According to the text, the term 'benevolence' involves 'knowing' and 'being at ease', and the term 'rightness' involves 'being at ease' and 'putting it into conduct'. Since 'knowing' and 'being at ease' belong to activities of the mind and 'putting it into conduct' belong to those of the body, the expression 'benevolence and rightness' represents activities of the mind and body.¹² Hence, the first part of passage 1 reveals that the harmonization of the four external conducts relies on activities of the mind and body. Passage 2 has the same structure as passage 1:

(Passage 2) Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands, feet: these six are the servants of the mind. When the mind says yes, none dare not say yes. (When it says) agree, none dare not agree. (When it says) go forward, none dare not go forward. (When it says) hold back, none dare not hold back. (When it says) go deep, none dare not go deep. (When it says) go shallow, none dare not go shallow. When in harmony, they (the mind and the body) are in *tong*, and when in *tong*, they are in *shan* 善 (goodness). (Liu, 2003, pp. 85–86)

Like passage 1, this passage can also be divided into two parts. The first part discusses the relation between the mind and the body. The second part, which is identical to that of passage 1, presents three states: harmony, *tong*, and *shan*. The three states are used to describe an ideal relation between the mind and the body.

In sum, passage 1 displays how the activities of the mind and body harmonize the four conducts, which leads to *tong* and eventually *shan*. Passage 2 presents how the mind and the body are in harmony, which also leads to *tong* and *shan*. Thus, a full understanding of *shan* boils down to how we explain the relation between the two passages, on which there are at least three interpretations. One explanation is to take the mind-body relation in passage 2 as a metaphor for the harmonization of the four conducts in passage 1 (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, p. 85). This explanation, however, neglects the internal connection between the mind-body relation and the second part of passage 2. In other words, it does not explain how the mind-body relation itself could lead to harmony, *tong*, and *shan*.

Another explanation focuses on the second parts of both passages. Explaining *tong* as conformity, this explanation argues, the phrase ‘when in *tong*, they are in *shan*’ indicates that *shan* is realized through *tong*, namely deliberate action in conformity with norms (Perkins, 2014, pp. 508–509). However, in early Confucian texts, the ‘conformity’ sense of *tong* is often considered negative and used in opposition to harmony (Li, 2015, p. 11). Thus, there would be difficulty in adopting such a sense to account for the phrase ‘when in harmony, they are in *tong*’, which exhibits a compatible relation between harmony and *tong*. The term *tong* in early Chinese texts should not be narrowly understood as conformity, but more broadly as a process of different entities becoming one.¹³ In the following discussion, I shall adopt this broad account of *tong* and show how it can better explain the compatible relation between harmony and *tong* here.

A more plausible explanation suggests that the two passages depict the same process of how the harmony of the mind, the body, and the four conducts leads to *tong* and *shan*.¹⁴ This explanation is based on the fact that the mind-body relation is necessarily reflected in every action. The mind-body relation (in passage 2) is thus integral to that between the activities of the mind and body and the four conducts (in passage 1). In contrast, the first explanation merely uses the mind-body relation as a metaphor to illustrate how the four conducts are harmonized, overlooking that harmonization of the four conducts essentially hinges on the mind-body relation. Moreover, the third explanation can explain why the ideal mind-body relation also leads to *shan*, which receives no attention from the first explanation. In addition, the broad account of *tong* (namely, different entities united as one) could better explain phrases in the two passages than the narrow account. For the phrase ‘when in harmony, they are in *tong*’ in passage 1, it can be explained as when the activities of the mind and body and the four conducts (different entities) are in harmony, they are united as one. For the same phrase in passage 2, it can be explained as when the mind and the body (different entities) are in harmony, they are united as one. The broad account of *tong* can explain the compatible relation between

harmony and *tong*, which cannot be addressed by the second explanation. To adopt this broad account, the last explanation suggests that the harmony of the mind, the body, and the four conducts represents their oneness,¹⁵ in which *shan* exists.

Taken together, we can learn from the two passages that *shan* exists in an ideal state between the mind, the body, and the four conducts. To elucidate *shan*, we should address two related issues: how to understand such an ideal state and how the four conducts are related to the mind and body.

2.2 The ideal state and the harmonization of the four conducts

The ideal state is expressed in the last phrase of both passages, namely, ‘when in harmony, they are in *tong*, and when in *tong*, they are in *shan*’ (*he ze tong, tong ze shan* 和則同, 同則善). There are two interpretations on this phrase, which is due to different explanations of the character ‘則’ *ze*. *Ze* can be glossed as ‘result in’ or ‘is’.¹⁶ If *ze* is glossed as ‘result in’, the last sentence can be translated as ‘harmony results in *tong* and *tong* results in *shan*’, which reveals a progressive relation between harmony, *tong*, and *shan*.¹⁷ Yet, in another place, WX says, ‘that the four conducts are in harmony is called *shan*’ (Liu, 2003, p. 73), indicating that a state of harmony is of *shan*, which is in conflict with the progressive relation that this translation suggests.

In contrast, such a conflict can be obviated by glossing *ze* as ‘is’.¹⁸ From this gloss, the phrase ‘*he ze tong, tong ze shan*’ means that a state of harmony is of *tong* and meanwhile is of *shan*. In other words, this phrase represents an ideal state which is concurrently characterized by three different yet intimately associated dimensions: harmony, *tong*, and *shan*. As discussed in 2.1, the ideal state involves the mind, the body, and the four conducts; and therefore, *shan* exists in the harmony and oneness between the mind, the body, and the four conducts. To elaborate *shan*, I shall investigate how the four conducts are related to the mind and body.

Returning to passage 1, we can have detailed definitions of the four conducts. The conduct of wisdom is that of seeing a worthy person, focusing on *activities* ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’. The conduct of benevolence is that of knowing and being at ease in the worthy person’s virtue, emphasizing activities ‘knowing’ and ‘being at ease’. The conduct of rightness is that of being at ease in and putting it into action, stressing ‘being at ease’ and ‘putting into action’. The conduct of propriety is that of putting it into action and respecting it, emphasizing ‘putting into action’ and ‘respecting’.

Regarding how the four conducts are displayed to achieve the ideal state, I shall first determine whether they are performed in one action or in different actions. If the four conducts were displayed in different actions, they would occur at different times, which is incompatible with their simultaneous occurrence, which is manifested in this sentence ‘that the four conducts are in harmony is called *shan*’. Thus, to achieve harmony, *tong*, and *shan*, the four conducts must be performed in one action.¹⁹ More specifically, *all these basic activities* that constitute the four conducts, namely, ‘seeing’, ‘knowing’, ‘being at ease’, ‘putting into action’, and ‘respecting’, should be *contained and performed in one action*. Furthermore, among these basic activities, ‘knowing’, ‘being at ease’, and ‘respecting’ involve the mind, while ‘seeing’ and ‘putting into action’ involve the body. Hence, the harmonization of the four conducts boils down to the unity of the mind and the body, as a result of which all these basic activities can be exhibited consistently in action.²⁰

However, to consistently and spontaneously exhibit all these activities in every action is effortful. For example, one can 'see' or 'know' the worthy person's virtue, but may doubt its significance, or may lack resolution to follow it or may practice it inconsistently. Perhaps, the reason why it is effortful to display all these basic activities (that is, the four conducts are harmonized) in every action is due to the fact that the mind and the body are constantly susceptible to external influences and hence, maintaining the unity of the mind and body is quite hard.

2.3 Discourses on the relation between the mind and the body

Regarding how an ideal relation between the mind and the body can be secured, the 'Xingzi mingchu' 性自命出 (XZMC for short), another Guodian text, gives a detailed account. In one place, it reads:

In general, although all people possess (human) nature, their mind has no fixed dispositions, (which instead) depend upon (external) things to arise, depend upon gratification (from the mind) to take action, and depend upon practices to become fixed. (Liu, 2003, p. 92)

The process of the mind's disposition becoming fixed reflects the constant communication between the mind and external environments through the body. Initially, there is no disposition inherent in the mind guiding the body to take proper action. There must be something outside stimulating the mind at first. In response to external stimulation, the mind would direct the body to take a particular action, which may not properly respond to such stimulation. Such a sense of impropriety would be in turn conveyed through the body to the mind. The mind would accordingly adjust the body to act in a more proper way. Through continual acts, feedback, and adjustments in practices, the mind would guide the body to act in a proper and consistent manner. That is, the mind possesses a fixed disposition, and can properly respond to external environments.

The understanding that the body plays an important role in the mind's activities can be identified in several texts predating Guodian manuscripts. For example, the *Guoyu* argues that the mind depends on acute ears and sharp eyes to distinguish helpful words and virtuous acts, which further clear and strengthen the mind to issue proper acts.²¹ The *Zuozhuan* also says that it is through the mouth and ears that flavors and sounds influence the mind, which in turn gives rise to virtuous action.²² Thus, this understanding may have been already prevalent before Guodian manuscripts.

Furthermore, XZMC depicts an ideal state in which the mind could properly respond to external environments:

Junzis when fixing their dispositions definitely have mind that is magnanimous; and when uttering words, they definitely have credibility that is forthright. In rituals involving guests, they definitely have countenance that is respectful; in rituals of sacrifice, they definitely have reverence that is solemn; and when undergoing mourning, they definitely bear grief that is reluctant to part. For *junzis*, the body performs the commands of the mind. (Liu, 2003, p. 106)

In reaction to different social occasions such as hosting, sacrifice, and funeral, from the mind accordingly arise respect, reverence, and grief, which would be externally exhibited in countenance, the locus of which is the body. In other words, the mind could direct the

body to act in spontaneous and consistent ways, which meanwhile correspond to social norms.

Last but not least, the interaction between the mind, the body, and action can be identified in many places of XZMC. In one place, it says, 'in general, whenever sounds derive from affections genuinely, their entry (through the body) into and inciting of the mind is profound'. In another place, it says, 'sounds of yearning influence (through the ears) the mind' (Liu, 2003, pp. 96–97). Both sentences reveal how the mind is influenced by external action through the body. More importantly, in the sentence, 'when the sound changes, so too does the mind; when the mind changes, so too the sound' (Liu, 2003, pp. 98–99), even a reciprocal relation between the three is suggested. That is, the mind directs the body (namely, the mouth) to act (to sing), which (the sound of singing) in turn influences the mind through the body (the ears). It is also worth noting that such a reciprocal relation is supported by modern cognitive neuroscience. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio finds that 'the body contributes more than life support and modulatory effects to the brain. It contributes a content that is part and parcel of the workings of the normal mind' (Damasio, 1994, p. 226). In other words, any external influences on the body are integral to the workings of the mind.

Yet the reciprocal relation does not entail equivalence between the mind and the body. Indeed, the mind and the body are interdependent, because each and every organ is integral to the normal operation of the mind and the body as a whole.²³ Nonetheless, the mind is more important than the body. WX's servant-commander metaphor discussed in 2.1 does reveal the mind's reign over the body. We can identify this metaphor in many early texts. For example, the *Yizhoushu* 逸周書 mentions that 'ears and eyes (as servants) serve the mind (as the commander)' (Huang, 1996, p. 162). The same metaphor can also be identified in this sentence of XZMC, namely, 'the body (as the servant) performs the commands of the mind (the commander)' (Liu, 2003, p. 106). In sum, on the one hand, the mind and the body are interdependent; on the other, the mind control the body. Such an understanding of the mind-body relation was prevalent at the time when the Guodian manuscripts were produced.²⁴

2.4 The realization of *shan* in WX

In 2.2, I argue that harmony, *tong*, and *shan* are different dimensions of an ideal state, and the realization of *shan* boils down to how all the basic activities that constitute the four conducts, namely, 'seeing', 'knowing', 'being at ease', 'putting into action', and 'respecting', are harmonized in one action. I also suggest that the harmony of these activities hinges on securing the unity of the mind and the body in every action. The mind and the body, however, are easily influenced by external factors. Another Guodian text, XZMC, presents a detailed account of how an ideal relation between the mind and body can be secured through constant contact with external environments. XZMC provides an important context for us to analyze how *shan* can be reached in WX.

Returning to WX, we can identify an intimate relation of *shan* with action. In one place, it suggests that *shan* is realized through action, saying that 'without action, *shan* will not be approached' (Liu, 2003, p. 74). In another place, it further maintains that the realization of *shan* calls for a continual process, maintaining that '*junzhi* in carrying out *shan* have that with which they begin, and have that with which they end' (Liu, 2003, p. 78).²⁵ According

to WX's context, the words 'begins' and 'ends' do represent a process of fruition of *shan*. By 'begins' it means that initially the mind does not possess any consistent inclinations to guide the body to act properly. Consistent inclinations require, WX suggests, 'observing the worthy person' (Liu, 2003, p. 81). Since one does not have any fixed dispositions to act at the beginning, the phrase 'observing the worthy person' means that the worthy person can inspire one to act in accordance with social norms. Yet it would be effortful to form fixed dispositions in the mind to guide the body to act properly and spontaneously, a state that can be secured by 'the worthy person'. Hence, 'observing the worthy person' also suggests that in the process of one's practice, the worthy person can play both as a motivator for him to act morally, and as a teacher instructing him how to act properly. As a result of continual practices facilitated by external factors such as 'the worthy person', one can attain an ideal state in which all the basic activities that constitute the four conducts can be displayed spontaneously and consistently in one action. Such a state represents the 'ends', namely, the realization of *shan*.

Based on the above accounts, we can further analyze how the interaction between the mind, the body, and external environments is involved in realizing *shan*. Initially, the mind and the body may neither see or know an action that is morally good, nor be at ease it, or put it into action, not to mention respecting it in practices. It is through continual contact with external environments (such as observing sayings and acts from moral exemplars) that the mind and the body can perform these basic activities properly. However, performing each of these activities properly is not easy, and performing all of them consistently in one action is even more difficult. Only through continual practices and at the same time learning from morals exemplars, can all these activities be displayed spontaneously by the mind and the body in every action. That is, when mentally and emotionally accepted as morally good, an action would be spontaneously issued from one's mind and body and meanwhile in consistence with social norms. In such an ideal state, *all the basic activities* are harmoniously and spontaneously performed by the mind and the body. In other words, the four conducts are harmonized in every action, wherein lies *shan*. In this sense, I disagree with Franklin Perkins' connection of *shan* with deliberate choice (Perkins, 2014, pp. 507–509). To me, *shan* exists in every action that is spontaneously issued. In addition, the unity of the mind and the body in every action mirrors a description of the late years of Confucius, '(every action) arising spontaneously from the mind (and is performed by the body) is always in accordance with social norms' (Liu, 1990, p. 43). Likewise, Confucius's ideal state is attained through his whole life of persistent learning and practicing.²⁶

It is worth noting that *de* also represents the harmony of the five internal conducts. According to WX, the internal conduct of sagacity involves the basic activities 'hearing' and 'knowing'; the internal conduct of wisdom involves the basic activities 'seeing' and 'knowing'; the internal conduct of benevolence stresses 'knowing' and 'being at ease'; the internal conduct of rightness emphasizes 'knowing' and 'putting into action'; the internal conduct of propriety involves 'being at ease' and 'respecting' (Liu, 2003, p. 73). Thus, *de* stands for an ideal state in which all of *these basic activities*, namely 'hearing', 'knowing', 'seeing', 'being at ease', 'putting into action', and 'respecting', are harmoniously displayed in every action. Given that all of the five internal conducts form from the inside (Liu, 2003, p. 73), all these basic activities that constitute the five conducts are guided by inherent virtues. Hence, the harmony of the five internal conducts (namely *de*) boils down to

nourishing inherent virtues. In contrast, since the four external conducts form from the outside, their basic activities would not be guided by inherent virtues but only be secured through continual practices. That is, through constant interactions between the mind, the body, and external environments, these basic activities can be secured by the mind and the body and accordingly, harmoniously displayed in every action. Therefore, what distinguishes *shan* from *de* is that *shan* has no relation to inherent virtues but to practices.²⁷

I have presented the account of *shan* in WX. *Shan* exists in action, which boils down to the unity of the mind and the body. Yet because of constant external contact, the relation between the mind and the body is fluid, and to secure an ideal relation requires continual practices. Although external factors such as ‘the worthy person’ are suggested, WX stops short of explicating how these factors contribute to practices. Xunzi further proposes ritual as an essential tool to realize *shan*.

3. *Shan* in the Xunzi

Xunzi follows WX’s understanding of *shan*. First, he emphasizes that *shan* exists in action:

Seeing *shan* 善 (goodness), being delightful (one) must preserve it. Seeing *bushan* 不善 (non-goodness), being sorrowful (one) must self-reflect. When finding *shan* within *shen*, with a sense of firm resolve (one) must cherish its being there. When seeing *bushan* is within *shen*, being frightened (one) must hate that it is there. (Wang, 1988, pp. 20–21)

The expression ‘seeing *shan*’ suggests that *shan* must be performed in external action.²⁸ Preserving *shan*, according to Xunzi, depends on *shen* 身. In early texts, the graph *shen* can be understood as either the body or the mind and the body as a whole. Since *shan* can be seen and self-reflecting, it must involve activities from both the mind and the body. The expression ‘*shan* within *shen*’ suggests that *shen* refers not just to the body but more broadly to the mind and the body as a whole.²⁹ The two expressions ‘seeing *shan*’ and ‘*shan* within *shen*’ thus reveal that to secure *shan* essentially hinges on an ideal relation between the mind and the body.

3.1 Xunzi’s understanding of the relation between the mind and the body

To account for the relation between the mind and the body, Xunzi adopts the metaphor of the lord and officials:

The mind is the lord of the body and master of the spiritual intelligence. It issues commands but does not receive commands. On its own authority it forbids or orders, renounces or selects, initiates or stops. (Wang, 1988, pp. 397–398)³⁰

For good governance, the subjects must follow whatever commands the lord issues. Likewise, the mind, like the lord, possesses the absolute authority of issuing commands and the body, like the subject, must obey.³¹ Apart from the supremacy of the mind over the body, this metaphor also conveys the interdependence between the two, which is depicted in another place:

The eye, ear, nose, and mouth each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but their capacities are not interchangeable—these are termed ‘heavenly officials’. The mind that

dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five officials—it is called ‘heavenly lord’.
(Wang, 1988, p. 309)

Each and every organ is indispensable for the mind and the body as a whole to function. Hence, the metaphor of the lord and officials reveals two points: the mind reigns over the body, while the two are interdependent.

Furthermore, in the relation between the lord and officials, if the lord issues bad rules, the subjects would resist and even rebel and the government be in disorder. Likewise, the disturbance of the mind (like the lord) would lead the body (like officials) in discomfort, which would in turn lead the mind into dysfunction. We can learn such a relation between the mind and the body from another Guodian text, ‘Zi yi’ 緇衣, which argues that although the comfort of the body depends on the mind, the body’s conditions can also lead the mind into dysfunction (Liu, 2003, p. 55). Such a relation between the mind and the body, however, cannot be directly read from the Xunzi’s metaphor.

Nonetheless, Xunzi does observe that the mind can be easily moved by its ‘desires for benefits’ and ‘desires for the utmost in comfort’ (Wang, 1988, pp. 438, 211). Another factor contributing to the mind’s fluctuation comes from external influences. Xunzi says, ‘if the mind is drawn aside by even a little thing, then on the outside one’s correctness will be altered, and on the inside one’s mind will deviate’ (Wang, 1988, p. 401).³² External things can move the mind through the body, and further change the way that the mind directs body to act. In other words, the relation between the mind and the body is constantly fluid.

In sum, Xunzi stresses the mind’s supremacy over the body, and meanwhile observes that the mind itself is fluctuating and could be easily swayed by external influences. Therefore, a stable relation between the mind and the body is difficult to secure.

3.2 Ritual as an essential tool to realize *shan*

Given the mind’s fluctuation and continual external influences, Xunzi proposes ritual (*li* 禮) as an essential tool to regulate the mind and the body. Ritual properly relates humans to the world. They function as a whole system of social norms that guide all of one’s actions in life, from the internal activities of the mind (such as willing, intention, or consideration) to the external activities of the body (such as appearance and movement) and to social communications (such as manners in various social occasions).³³ In other words, it is in the medium of ritual that the mind and the body are united to properly respond to external environments.

As social norms, rituals need to be learnt, and even modified to be suitable for changing conditions. For Xunzi, ‘teachers are those who have capacities to rectify rituals’ (Wang, 1988, p. 33). It means that teachers not only impart the knowledge of rituals to students for practices; but more importantly, because of their knowledge of rituals and their experiences in practices, they have capacities to evaluate the relevance of a ritual and accordingly adapt it in changing environments. Hence, Xunzi asserts that ‘of all the skills of controlling *qi* and nourishing the mind, none is more direct than acting according to ritual, no method is more effective than living with teachers (who are versed in rituals)’ (Wang, 1988, p. 14).³⁴ Moreover, for rituals’ transformation of relations between the mind and the body, Xunzi depicts it as follows:

The learning of (rituals for) *junzis* enters through their ears, is stored in the mind, spreads through the four limbs, and manifests itself in their actions. Their slight words, their most subtle movements, all can serve as a model for others. (Wang, 1988, p. 12)

This transformation consists of two stages. In the first stage, because of its fluctuation, the mind cannot guide the body to act properly. Through a period of learning, the mind enters the second stage, and may become stable and cultivated to follow rituals, and thereby guide the body to act properly.³⁵ Yet to secure an ideal state in which every action is not only in consistency with rituals but also issued spontaneously from the mind, it requires a much longer period of continual learning and practicing. One may sometimes act properly, but most often may be easily influenced by external environments and hence take improper actions; or may act unskillfully, albeit in consistency with rituals; or may act skillfully but in an unnatural manner. Through a long period of continual learning from those who are versed in rituals and accordingly practicing these learnings, one's mind would be guided by rituals and insusceptible to external influences. The relation between the mind and the body would become stable, and accordingly, the mind would naturally guide the body to properly act. The expression '(rituals) stored in the mind' does represent such an ideal state: rituals become integral to the mind; every action naturally arises from the mind and the body and follows rituals. In other words, the mind and the body are harmoniously united to issue proper actions.

Furthermore, an ideal relation between the mind and the body leads one not just to realizing *shan* but also to being a sage. Xunzi says:

It is through rituals that the whole body is rectified. It is by means of teachers that rituals are modified. If there were no rituals, how could the mind and the body be rectified? If there were no teachers, how could one know which ritual is correct? When one's actions are spontaneously in consistent with what rituals mandate, then his emotions will find peace in rituals. When what one's teachers says (about how to practice rituals) he says also, then his knowledge (of rituals) will be like that of his masters. When emotions finding peace in rituals and knowledge like that of one's masters, then he will become a sage. (Wang, 1988, p. 33)

Being a sage can be reflected in two phrases, namely, 'emotions finding peace in rituals' and 'knowledge like that of one's teachers'. The phrase 'emotions finding peace in rituals' means that one never feels any sense of constraint from rituals, when his mind and body spontaneously issue actions. In another place, Xunzi maintains that 'teachers are those who have capacities to rectify rituals' (Wang, 1988, p. 33), which may imply that rituals are not invariable but rectifiable to adapt to changing environments. Moreover, because of teachers' comprehensive knowledge of rituals and rich experiences in practicing, it is they who can cognitively grasp the essences of rituals and hence adapt them for different conditions. Hence, 'knowledge like that of one's teachers' suggests that with comprehensive knowledge of rituals one can modify them timely for changing environments. The sage, in other words, is a consummate practitioner of rituals, whose mind and body are harmoniously united to follow rituals and thereby realize *shan*.

According to Xunzi, the distinction between a sage and ordinary person depends on how much *shan* is embodied. A person such as the tyrants Jie and Zhou and Robber Zhi, is considered morally bad, because there is little *shan* embodied (Wang, 1988, p. 18). For an ordinary person, to be good and even to be a sage hinges on 'accumulating *shan*':

Now if people on the streets were to submit themselves to study and practice learning (rituals), if they were to concentrate their minds and make single-minded their intentions, if they were to ponder, query, and thoroughly investigate—then if adding to this days upon days and connecting to this long period of time, if accumulating *shan* 善 (goodness) without stopping, then they will break through to spirit-like powers and understanding, and will form a triad with Heaven and Earth. Thus, becoming a sage is something that people achieve through accumulation. (Wang, 1988, p. 443)

For an ordinary person, there may be some occasions on which his mind and body can be united to follow rituals and embody *shan*. Yet it is difficult for him to embody *shan* on every occasion. Only through a period of continual learning and practicing of rituals will there be more and more occasions on which *shan* is embodied in following rituals. Hence, ‘accumulating *shan*’ means that the more occasions on which the mind and the body are harmoniously united to follow rituals, the more *shan* is accumulated. Having completely accumulated *shan*, he would embody *shan* on every occasion and could be regarded as a sage. Although Xunzi does not exaggerate the mystic dimension of the sage, expressions such as ‘spirit-like powers and understanding’ and ‘triad with Heaven and Earth’ do suggest the sage’s charisma: owing to persistent self-cultivation, he not only embodies *shan* on every occasion, but also ‘serve as a model for others’ (Wang, 1988, p. 12) to follow his way to secure *shan*, thereby reaching the same ideal state as his.³⁶

Now, we can see how Xunzi develops WX’s account of *shan*. Xunzi follows WX’s understanding that *shan* exists in a harmonious unity of the mind and the body. Yet he also recognizes fluid relations between the two: on the one hand, the mind reigns supreme over the body; on the other, it is easily affected by external influences. This fluid relation renders realization of *shan* difficult. Ritual is thus proposed as an essential tool to stabilize the relation between the mind and the body, and eventually to realize *shan*.³⁷ Because of rituals, the mind becomes rectified, stable, and unsusceptible to external influences, thereby guiding the body to act properly in response to changing conditions. The realization of *shan*, in other words, depends on continual learning and practicing of rituals. According to Xunzi, through persistent learning and practicing, even an ordinary person could eventually on every occasion embody *shan*, and become a consummate practitioner of rituals, namely, a sage. Hence, the distinction between a sage and an ordinary person is not due to some mystic capacities that a sage possesses, but because of his perfectly exercising of rituals, in which exists *shan*.

4. Concluding remarks

This article reveals a neglected relation between WX and Xunzi, by investigating how *shan* is first raised in WX and further developed by Xunzi into a concrete idea. *Shan* exists in action, which comes down to the unity of the mind and the body. Yet because of constant external contact, the relation between the mind and the body is fluid, and to secure an ideal relation requires continual practices. Although external factors such as ‘the worthy person’ are suggested, WX stops short of explicating how these factors contribute to practices.

Xunzi also suggests that *shan* exists in the unity of the mind and the body. He recognizes that the mind itself is fluctuating and could be easily swayed by external influences, and hence, proposes ritual as an essential tool to realize *shan*. Through

persistent learning and practicing of rituals, the mind would be insusceptible to external influences, and thereby would guide the body to act in a consistent and proper manner in response to various environments. In this sense, the mind, the body, and action are harmoniously united, wherein *shan* exists. For Xunzi, such an approach to *shan* is accessible to everyone of society.³⁸ Hence, what distinguishes a sage from an ordinary person is not his possession of some mystical capacities but his perfect practice of rituals. As a result of continual learning and practicing, his every action is spontaneously issued from the mind and the body and meanwhile in consistency with social norms.³⁹

In short, for both WX and Xunzi, *shan* is 'not a mysterious ontological attribute'.⁴⁰ It is embodied in harmonious interactions of the mind, the body, and action with ever-changing external conditions. Continual learning and practicing not only lead one to realize *shan*, but eventually to become a consummate practitioner of rituals, or to use Xunzi's words, to become a sage.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of different distinctions between *de* and *shan*, see Liang (2008, p. 187) and Perkins (2014, pp. 504–510).
2. For discussions of WX's connection with Mengzi, see Csikszentmihalyi (2004, pp. 103–113), Jiang (2021, p. 99), and Ding (2000, pp. 160–163). For discussions of the connection to Mengzi, see Perkins (2014) and Liang (2008).
3. Tao Liang suggests that WX represents the transitional stage for early Confucian philosophy that would lead up to two different Confucian streams, which are represented by Mengzi and Xunzi, respectively (Liang, 2008, p. 206). Paul Goldin suggests that Xunzi's positions may be more systematically argued than anything that is found in the Guodian manuscripts, but there can be little question that he descends from the same doctrinal sects (Goldin, 2005, pp. 36–57). Kuanyun Huang also contends that Xunzi had available to him a certain version of WX (Huang, 2014, pp. 291–325). Franklin Perkins is cautious in concluding that Xunzi had access to a version of the WX text, but admits that it is possible and suggests that if Xunzi had access to the text, it was already through something like the commentary from Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Perkins, 2014, p. 517).
4. The received *Xunzi* probably contains writings of followers of Xunzi and other materials that are believed to belong to the tradition of Xunzi. For convenience, I use Xunzi to refer to authors or editors of the received text.
5. Mengzi also mentions *shan* and particularly argues 'human nature is *shan*'. Nonetheless, *shan* is used by Mengzi in a general sense, and never considered as an idea with a concrete sense. It is in WX and the *Xunzi* that *shan* has been developed into a concrete idea.
6. Through this article, I follow Harold Roth's translation of the Chinese term *xin* 心 as mind, which represents 'the physical organ of the heart and is the source of feelings, desires, thoughts, and intuitions' (Roth, 1991, p. 600). I also use 'body' for convenience to refer to the physical organs of a person. The word 'body' is often used to, yet not accurately, correspond to the Chinese term *shen* 身 and *ti* 體. However, the meanings of *shen* and *ti* are quite complicated, which can be used to refer to the concrete physical body, the physical form generally, the person, and others. For discussions of *shen* and *ti*, see Sivin (1995, p. 14) and Sommer (2008, pp. 293–299). In the following discussion, I do not use 'body' to express these complicated senses, but simply use it in contrast to the mind to represent physical organs such as ears, eyes, and mouth.
7. Such an ascription of WX is prevalent among present scholars such as Ding (2000, pp. 160–168), Liang (2008, p. 184), and Liu (2003, p. 69). Mark Csikszentmihalyi doubts the claim that WX is associated with Zisi (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, pp. 86–100). I am also cautious in using the word 'school' to define philosophies in the Warring States. Mark

- Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan carry out a comprehensive study to argue against the idea that there are discrete schools of thought contending in the Warring States and Han periods (Csikszentmihalyi & Nylan, 2003, pp. 59–99). Christoph Harbsmeier also contends that there is never one organized and unified Kong jia 孔家 or ‘school of Confucianism’ in the Warring States Period (Harbsmeier, 2013, p. 18).
8. For the composite nature of early texts, William Boltz argues that ‘the practice of compiling texts from a reservoir of preexisting materials, combined with whatever newly composed material was called for, was not just widespread but perhaps the norm’ (Boltz, 2005, p. 70). Martin Kern’s account of the poetic repertoires in early China is also conducive to reflection on the nature of early Chinese philosophical texts, see Kern (2019).
 9. The first part of this sentence is translated by some scholars as ‘benevolence is that from which rightness and propriety are born’. Scott Cook makes an argument for translating it as ‘benevolence and rightness are that from which propriety is born’ (Cook, 2012, p. 506). I adopt Cook’s understanding.
 10. There are different translations of the last sentence, which will be discussed in section 2.2.
 11. The translation of unity or sameness does not accurately correspond to *tong*. To retain the complexity of *tong*, I keep this term untranslated. I shall give a nuance account of *tong* soon.
 12. In this sense, I disagree with a comment of Mawangdui manuscripts (probably buried around 200 BCE and excavated in 1973) on WX, which interprets ‘benevolence and rightness’ as the mind (Pang, 2000, p. 77).
 13. For a detailed account of *tong* in early China, see He (2019).
 14. Lai Chen also remarks that every action necessarily involves the mind and the body (2009, p. 140), but does not give a detailed account how *shan* can be reached through the mind, the body, and the four conducts.
 15. The commentary in the Mawangdui manuscript on the phrase *he ze tong* echoes my account, explaining *tong* as ‘to be with the mind as one’ (Pang, 2000, p. 68).
 16. For a detailed discussion of the usage of *ze* in classical Chinese, see Yang (1982, pp. 324–328).
 17. Some scholars consider the relation between harmony, *tong*, and *shan* as progressive, and translate *ze* as ‘results in’ (Perkins, 2014, p. 508) or ‘will be’ (Meyer, 2012, p. 114).
 18. Cook’s translation echoes this gloss (Cook, 2012, p. 507).
 19. Pang comments the phrase ‘舍夫四’ as ‘the four conducts are in harmony and become as one’, implying that the four conducts can be united in one action (Pang, 2000, pp. 68–69). Liang remarks that ‘regarding *tong*, there is no difference for appearance between the four conducts’ (Liang, 2008, p. 410), also hinting that the four conducts would be performed in one action. However, both scholars do not analyze how the four conducts are performed in one action.
 20. It should be noted that in Mawangdui’s comment on the term *shen qi du* 慎其獨, it is the mind that unites the five conducts as one that can be taken as one’s personal identity. See Pang (1980, p. 31). I thank one reviewer for informing me of this point. Yet, my argument is that, rather than merely the mind, it is the mind and the body that the five conducts are united as one.
 21. This point can be inferred from the following two passages, ‘the ears and eyes are pivots of the mind, so hearing must be in harmony and sight must be straight. When hearing is in harmony, the ears will be acute; when sight is straight, the eyes will be clear. With acute ears, helpful words will be heard; with sharp eyes, the virtuous action will be distinguished. Hearing helpful words and distinguishing virtuous action will make the mind clear and firm’, and ‘when harmonious sounds through the ears enter into the mind, beautiful words of the mind accordingly come out through the mouth’ (Zuo, 1978, p. 125).
 22. This can be inferred from expressions, such as ‘the former kings adjust the five flavors and harmonize the five notes, in order to compose their minds’, ‘*junzis* hear such music to compose their mind and so the mind is in calm and the virtue in harmony’, and ‘harmonious sounds are entering into the ears and stored in the mind. In comfort, the mind will be in gratification’ (Li, 2000, pp. 1614, 1619, 1626).
 23. This point is made by the ‘Yu cong’ 語叢, another Guodian text, which suggests that every physical organ is responsible for a particular function (Liu, 2003, p. 192).

24. Edward Slingerland argues that early Chinese embrace a quite vigorous form of mind-body dualism and opposes the strong ‘holist’ position on the mind-body relation (Slingerland, 2012, pp. 6–55). Lisa Raphals also conducts comprehensive investigations of the mind-body relation in early China, for the mind-body relation in Guodian manuscripts, the mind-body relation in early Chinese medicine, and mind-body metaphors, see Raphals (2019, 2020, 2021), respectively.
25. The Mangwangdui manuscript comments on this line that it is the body from the beginning to the end that carries out the action of *shan*. Pang explains that ‘carrying out *shan* hinges on one’s own actions’ (Pang, 2000, pp. 42–43). Both the Mawangdui’s comment and Pang’s explanation directly associate *shan* with actions.
26. David Wong focuses on the effortful effortlessness in early Confucian philosophy, and provides an account of how the mind, the body, and action are spontaneously united (Wong, 2015, pp. 185–187).
27. It should be noted that both *de* and *shan* involve the unity of the mind and body. Nonetheless, the unity that leads to *de* is essentially guided by inherent virtues, while the unity that leads to *shan* is only secured by practices.
28. The expression ‘*shan* relies on deliberate action’ (*shanzhe weiye* 善者偽也) appears nine times in the chapter ‘Human nature is bad’. It should be noted that *wei* 偽 can be literally translated as rectification (*jiao* 矯). However, Qing dynasty scholars such as Hao Yixing and Wang Xianqian argues that in Pre-Qin texts the graph 偽 is interchangeable to 為, and that in the same chapter, 偽 in the phrase ‘wares are produced from workers’ deliberate action’ (*qishen-gyu gongren zhi wei* 器生於工人之偽) should not be translated as rectification but as deliberate action, and so *wei* 偽 in the *Xunzi* should be consistently read as deliberate action (*wei* 為). For their detailed arguments, see Wang (1988, p. 434).
29. It should be noted that *Xunzi*’s *shen* should not be considered as the body, but as a locus where one’s mental and bodily activities take place. In this sense, it must comprise both the mind and the body.
30. All the translations of the *Xunzi* in the article consult Knobolck (1994) and Hutton (2014).
31. The metaphor of the lord and officials perhaps had been prevalent at the time of *Xunzi*. The *Guanzi* 管子, for example, suggests that in the operation of the whole body, the mind as the lord at the center rules the body, while organs as officials play their due roles in serving the mind (Li, 2004, p. 759).
32. The mind’s fluctuation can also be observed in phrases such as (the mind is) ‘not at times not-in-twofold’ and ‘not at times not-in-movement’ (Wang, 1988, p. 395).
33. For a detailed discussion of the essential role of ritual in society, see He (2020, pp. 326–330).
34. In another place, *Xunzi* suggests that ritual and teachers can be used to regulate and rectify temperaments and personalities, thereby fundamentally transforming the mind (Wang, 1988, p. 26).
35. Michael Ing observes ritual’s role in aligning the outer dimensions of the body with the inner dimensions of the mind (Ing, 2012, p. 19).
36. Herbert Fingarette’s account of ‘magic’ is apposite to be used to describe *Xunzi*’s sage. He says that ‘magic’ represents the ‘power of a specific person to accomplish his will directly and effortlessly through ritual, gesture and incantation. The user of magic does not work by strategies and devices as a means toward an end; he does not use coercion or physical force’ (Fingarette, 1972, p. 3). Hagop Sarkissian also depicts a sage’s social magic (Sarkissian, 2010, pp. 10–11).
37. Cheng Chungying argues that *WX* has revealed that it is ritual that guides the mind and the four conducts to be in *shan*, and that the actions of *shan* must be judged according to outer rules of the ritual (Cheng, 2010, p. 150). However, there is no textual evidence to support Cheng’s point, which, I believe, is more germane to the *Xunzi* rather than *WX*.
38. It should be noted that, in the bronzes and the small seal script, the graph *shan* is written with at least two and occasionally three ‘speech’ (*yan* 言) radicals. In light of this, Kwan Tze-wan suggests that when the ancients talked about *shan*, they were not referring to ‘good’ in itself, but ‘good’ as it obtains in the relations among people. I thank one reviewer for alerting me to

Kwan's comment. For Kwan's detailed comment, see the Research Centre for Humanities Computing of CUHK (Ed.), *Multi-function Chinese Character Database: With Archaic Script Forms*. <https://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/search.php?word=%E5%96%84>.

39. Xunzi's sage is completely different from the two models of sages that are explicated by Susan Wolf as unattractive, namely sages out of love and sages out of duty (Wolf, 1982, pp. 419–439).
40. I borrow this expression from Christine Korsgaard. Korsgaard's account of 'objective goodness' is akin to the *shan* of WX and Xunzi, particularly for she associates objective goodness with 'the physiological, psychological, economic, historical, symbolic and other conditions under which human beings live' (Korsgaard, 1983, p. 195). It is worth noting that Harbsmeier argues that Chinese norms 'were not conceived as out-of-this-worldly absolutely mandatory imperative'; they are 'always remain context-sensitive' (Harbsmeier, 2015, p. 540), which is in line with my discussion of *shan*.

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