

## The *Ji* Self in Early Chinese Texts

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[This post-print version may be slightly different than the print version, which appeared in Jason Dockstader, Hans-Georg Moller, and Gunter Wohlfart, eds., *Selfhood East and West: De-Constructions of Identity* (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2012): 17-45. Full-text copies of the print version may be accessed at the Religious Studies faculty pages of "The Cupola," Gettysburg College's open-access institutional repository, at the following url: [http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/relfac/.](http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/relfac/)]

Study of the self has created a vast literature in Chinese studies. In much of this scholarship, the English word "self" is used in a general sense to refer primarily to Western notions, and it does not necessarily refer to any specific Chinese term. Projects in comparative philosophy, ethics, and religious studies often begin inquiries into Chinese texts by defining a project in the language of modern Western interests. Ideas of self are complex enough within Western philosophical literature; understanding the self becomes even more challenging when exploring Chinese-language sources, which articulate different notions of self, body, and personhood. In the negotiated space between Western and Chinese languages, the self travels a slippery path. In English translations of Chinese texts, Chinese terms that might be translated as "self" appear and disappear quite arbitrarily. The English word "self" might be a translation of any one of several different Chinese terms, each of which actually has its own field of meaning. Most comparative studies do not distinguish between the meanings of these different terms. And "self" might be a translation of nothing at all--merely a word added to render a passage into readable English. Yet at the same time, a Chinese term that might otherwise be rendered as "self" in English often vanishes conceptually in translations by being omitted or by being translated as another word entirely.<sup>1</sup>

This essay attempts to explore one Chinese notion of the self by focusing on one Chinese character: the character *ji* 己. This term has various fields of meaning, one of which may be rendered by the English word "self." When I use the term "self" in this essay, I am usually referring to this particular character. The term *ji* is very well known, but what is it, exactly? Does it have discernible qualities or characteristics? Does it differ from other terms that also might be translated as "self"? If so, how? My goal is to

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<sup>1</sup> For recent English-language studies of the self, see for example R. Ames et al., *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, Albany 1994; K. Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self*, Aldershot 2006; K. Shun and D. B. Wong, *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community*, New York 2004; and E. Slingerland, "Conceptions of the Self in the Zhuangzi," *Philosophy East and West* 54.3 (2004): 322-342.

determine whether *ji* has any distinct discernable fields of meaning, and if so, to articulate them as clearly as possible. I also consider how the *ji* self differs from other terms for self, person, or body: terms such as *xing* 形, *gong* 躬, *shen* 身, and *ti* 體. For in early Chinese texts, human beings (*ren* 人) are composites of various fields or valences of embodiment, personhood, selfhood, and identity. I have discussed elsewhere how a human being might simultaneously have a *xing* 形 form, or physical frame; a *gong* 躬 body that visually performs ritualized conduct; a *shen* 身 body that is cultivated and is a site of family and social identity; and a *ti* 體 body, which is a complex corpus of overlapping bodies and identities.<sup>2</sup> When doing that earlier study, which focused on conceptualizations of the body and embodiment, I observed that the character *ji* often appeared in passages alongside these other terms, but it seemed to be less embodied than those notions and had its own range of meanings. Here I now explore how a human being has a *ji* self. My method is quite straightforward: using various electronic databases, I have located many occurrences of the term *ji* in received versions of early Chinese texts, and I have tried to identify the terms range of meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Unexpectedly, the character *ji* does not occur nearly as frequently in early texts as I had presupposed. It occurs only once in the *Book of Odes* and is found in less than ten passages of the *Book of Documents*. Appearing only a single time in the received version of the *Daodejing*, *ji* occurs in roughly twenty to thirty entries in each of the following texts: the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Guanzi*, *Mencius* and *Book of Rites*. It occurs around fifty to sixty times in the *Xunzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Han Feizi*. These numbers are actually somewhat inflated, for *ji* 己 is often a variant for several other characters. It is sometimes a variant of the graphically similar *yi* 已, which has several meanings associated with duration of time and might be used as a final particle. *Ji* is also a variant of the hemerological unit *si* 巳, as is seen frequently in the *Zuo Commentary* to the calendaric *Spring and Autumn Annals*. In the following analysis, when I have not been able to determine which character is intended, I have omitted it from consideration.

At first glance the character *ji* seems in many instances to function like a pronoun when translated into English, in which case it is often translated as something such as "oneself," "himself," "herself," or "themselves," or it might be translated simply as "him," "her," or "them." I have often done so myself below, emphasizing the presence of the character *ji* by placing "-self" or "-selves" in italics. When used in the sense of a pronoun, however, *ji* actually has a stronger meaning than that associated with an ordinary English-language pronoun. An English pronoun refers back to a noun or a nominal prototype, and sometimes that noun is a human being. But it is intriguing that in the case of the *ji* self, the word to which *ji* refers is *always* a human being (other than in the special case of the humanized animated creatures in the *Zhuangzi*). It almost never refers to an inanimate object or thing. More interestingly, *ji* almost never refers to a

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<sup>2</sup> For text passages and citations related to each of these terms that are otherwise not provided herein, see my "Boundaries of the *Ti* Body," *Asia Major* 3d. ser. 21 (2008): 293-324.

<sup>3</sup> For locating passages, I am indebted to the National Palace Museum's Hanquan 寒泉 database at <http://210.69.170.100/s25/> and the Thesaurus Linguae Sericae at Heidelberg University.

person who is a family member; it almost always occurs in instances where the actors are not related to one another. So *ji* is not just a pronoun; it has more complex fields of significance that I will attempt to unravel below.

The *ji* self is one of the least somatic aspects of a person's identity, and it is far less material than, for example, the *xing* 形 form, which is the physical frame, shape, or mass of the body. The *ji* self is far more socially and conceptually constructed than is the *xing* form, which bears little of a person's social identity. This self cannot readily be located in, or associated with, the head, the heart or mind (*xin* 心), the torso, or any other region or fragment of the body. Neither is it associated with any of the body's substances or energies, such as blood, *qi* 氣, essence (*jing* 精), or spirit (*shen* 神). *Xing* forms, in contrast, exist at the same subtle level of existence as the energies of *qi*, essence, and spirit, as described, for example, in such texts as the "Inner Training" (*Nei ye* 內業) of the *Guanzi* 管子.<sup>4</sup> The form is not associated with values or mores, and it has little to do with conduct; the *ji* self, on the other hand, is the site of such values as reverence, humaneness, and shame. The *xing* form does not experience feelings, emotions, or desires; the *ji* self, on the other hand, is the place where feelings such as worry or anxiety (*you* 憂) are located within a human being. Mencius, for example, says that Yao was very worried in himself (*wei ji you* 為己憂) about finding a Shun.<sup>5</sup> The self is also the main site of desire (*yu* 欲) within a human being. Forms are discrete entities, for one's form does not overlap with the forms of other people. The *ji* self is coextensive with the form and does not extend beyond it (the *shen* and particularly the *ti* bodies, in contrast, might extend beyond it), but it is not clearly situated spatially in the actual mass of the physical frame. Like the *xing* form, the *ji* self is a discrete phenomena, for a person has only one *ji* self that does not ontologically coincide with that of another person.

Internally, the *xing* form can also be understood as an inner structure or template that is not visible to the eye; in the sense that it can be aligned or made upright (*zheng* 正), either metaphorically or through body placement, it bears some similarities to the *ji* self. In such texts as the "Inner Training," aligning the form (*zheng xing*) is sustained by following the Way and is partnered with "cultivating the mind" (*xiu xin* 修心).<sup>6</sup> Alignment of the *ji* self occurs almost solely in the *Mencius*, where it seems to be used metaphorically and is not associated with body placement. In the *Mencius*, the state of alignment, straightness, or uprightness is often contrasted with a negative state of crookedness or twistedness (*wang* 枉). Warning against twisting the Way, Mencius notes that "it has never happened someone who is twisted themselves (*wang ji*) could straighten others (*zhi ren* 直人)."<sup>7</sup> Here, qualities within the self are juxtaposed to those of others: this positioning is very characteristic of the self, as will be seen below.

The *ji* self has no visual marks or attributes, and there are few if any passages that describe how it might look, either stationary or in motion. The *xing* form, however, is

<sup>4</sup> See H. Roth, *Original Tao*, New York 1999. For a Chinese edition of "Nei ye" I have used Roth. All translations below are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> *Mencius* 3A.3. For a Chinese edition of the *Mencius*, I have used D.C. Lau, *Mencius*, Hong Kong 1984.

<sup>6</sup> *Guanzi*, "Nei ye." See also Roth 1999, 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> *Mencius* 3B.1. On aligning the self, see also 7A.19 and 7B.4.

visible: beautiful, monstrous, immolated, and deformed bodies populate the *Zhuangzi*, for example, and these visible bodies are usually referred to as *xing* forms.<sup>8</sup> Yet there is also another aspect of the human being that is associated with visibility and display: the *gong* 躬 body, which is particularly associated with action and ritual performance. The *gong* body performs ritual publicly and visibly before an audience; its actions and gestures are learned and nonspontaneous, and it toils and labors ritually on behalf of a larger community. Confucius admires this kind of body; Zhuangzi derides it as artificial and contrived. The term *gong* is used for the bodies of the queen and her attendants when they are performing silkworm-raising rituals, and for the body of the ruler when he is plowing the fields ceremonially. Yet even though *gong* can often be translated as "herself" or "himself" in these usages, as for example "the queen herself performed the ritual," the term *ji* is rarely used in these situations. The aspect of body, person, or selfhood that labors ritually on behalf of its community performs without concern for personal interest or profit, and it is usually called *gong*. The *ji* self, on the other hand, is not infrequently associated with personal interests as opposed to the interests of others. The queen performing silkworm rites and the ruler conducting the ceremonial plowing are not doing so for their own personal interest; they have already, to borrow an expression from the *Analects*, "disciplined the (*ji*) self and returned to ritual" (*ke ji fu li* 克己復禮).<sup>9</sup>

Although the *ji* self is individuated, it exists primarily in relation to others, that is, to other human beings (*ren* 人), and it is strongly defined by relations with others. For this self is rarely found without an "other" (*ren*), and this is the case across most early texts. The term *ren*, or person, moreover often implies a person of a certain stature in society, and it does not usually refer to just anyone of any rank. The identity of the other is usually not clear, and precisely how self and other should relate to one another is often equally uncertain. Perhaps precisely because of this uncertainty, space between self and other must be negotiated with care; one should protect one's self (*bao ji* 保己).<sup>10</sup> Relationships between self and other are often shaped by the potentiality for comparison or even competition, either explicitly or implicitly. Negotiations between self and other reflect uncertainty regarding degrees of distance, intimacy, worth, or similitude; they also reflect anxiety about the depth of mutual understanding (*zhi* 知) between people. Many passages are fraught with concern about the contents of one person's *ji* self with regard to other people. Is what I *myself* have--abilities, learning, and so on--the same as what others have? Is it more or less, better or worse? Is what I have, or is what I am, adequately recognized, appreciated, or understood by others? Are others the same as or different from my self? If we differ, who is right and who is wrong?

<sup>8</sup> For the significance of the *xing* form in the *Zhuangzi*, see my "Concepts of the Body in the *Zhuangzi*," in V. Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, 2d ed., Dunedin, Florida, 2010: 212-228.

<sup>9</sup> *Analects* 12.1. This expression is discussed further below. I have followed the Chinese version of the *Analects* in R. Ames and H. Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, New York 1998.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Ze yang" 則陽. I have followed the Chinese edition of the *Zhuangzi* in Guo Qingfan's 郭慶藩 *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, Beijing 1961. See also V. Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, Honolulu 1994, 255.

An uneasy sense of competition is evident even in one of the earliest occurrences of *ji*, which is found in the *Book of Odes* (*Shi jing* 詩經). The term appears only once in that text, in ode 223, "The Bow of Horn" (*Jiao gong* 角弓), in the context of an adversarial struggle between people.

There are people without goodness,  
In mutual (*xiang* 相) abhorrence, at ends (*yi fang* 一方);  
Some gain positions, but have no deference;  
To the point that they themselves (*ji* 己) are ruined.<sup>11</sup>

Relationality and comparison are here suggested by the term *xiang*, or "mutual," and opposition and competition are indicated by the expression "at ends." The author of this verse decries the moral tenor of adversaries who gain advantage but show no respect for others. Finally, however, in the end the adversaries are themselves imperiled.

The self's association with competition and comparison must have been fairly widespread, for its tendency to compare itself with others comes under attack repeatedly in the *Zhuangzi*. Zhuangzi ridicules the propensity that some people have for taking their own *ji* selves as a kind of standard for measuring others, noting grimly that "the ordinary people of the world are happy when others (*ren*) have much in common with themselves (*ji*), and they dislike it when others (*ren*) are different from themselves (*ji*)."<sup>12</sup> Well known for his disdain for artificial distinctions between things, he criticizes those who continually judge others according to degrees of similitude and difference. In the following passage he bemoans how such people think about others.

If they share commonalities (*tong* 同) with oneself (*ji*), then one will respond to them well; if they do not share commonalities with oneself (*ji*), then one will turn away from them. If they exhibit commonalities with oneself (*ji*), one will consider them to be right (*shi* 是); if they exhibit differences (*yi* 異) with oneself (*ji*), then one will consider them wrong (*fei* 非).<sup>13</sup>

Zhuangzi moreover critiques people who set themselves up as standards and make others gauge (*jie* 節) the world according to their own arbitrary views. Such people

ride along on "right" and "wrong." As a result, they come up with "name" and "reality" (*shi* 實), and they consider themselves (*ji*) to be substantive (*zhi* 質). They make others take their selves (*ji*) as a gauge (*jie*).<sup>14</sup>

*Jie*, or gauge, can be conceptualized as the regularly spaced nodes on a linear length of bamboo, or as regularly spaced nodes of time. Zhuangzi thus derides people who would

<sup>11</sup> I have followed the Chinese edition of the *Odes* in J. Legge, *The She king*, rpt. Taipei, 1985. For this passage, see pp. 404-407.

<sup>12</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Zai you" 在宥. See also Mair 1994, 100.

<sup>13</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Yu yan" 寓言. See also Mair 1994, 278-279.

<sup>14</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Gengsang Chu" 庚桑楚. See also Mair 1994, 234.

make themselves "rulers" (in the sense of a linear kind of measurement) over the ways others envision reality.

Zhuangzi disavows adopting the self as a measure of reality, but his views on this matter are not shared by others. In fact, language related to measuring or to measuring-tools is often used of the *ji* self. According to Xunzi, the *ji* self is something like a measuring tool by which one can bring accuracy and definition to one's relationships with others. Sages, for example, do precisely that. The reason sages are not deceived, Xunzi states, is because "sages use themselves (*ji*) as a measure (*yi ji du zhe* 以己度者).<sup>15</sup> Here the term for calibration is not *jie* but *du*, a term that suggests regular and consistent spacing or motion between two or more points. As the context of this statement is the potential for being deceived by others, one can again sense the caution the self must exercise in relationships with others. According to Xunzi, one must moreover exercise caution regarding one's own self, fashioning it with care. Adhering to exactitude and straightness is the work of noble people, who are more strict with others than with themselves. Xunzi claims that noble people "measure (*du*) themselves (*ji*) with a marking-line (*sheng* 繩), but regarding others, they use only a [less rigorous] bow-frame."<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that when the self is juxtaposed to an other, that other is almost never a family member, and it is instead usually someone with whom one might choose to associate by choice rather than by birth or social ascription. A family member is simply not an "other." It is difficult to find even a single instance where someone's *ji* self is juxtaposed to that of their ancestor, parent, sibling, or child. A few exceptions to this rule actually help make the point more clearly. One exception--at first glance--is found in the *Mozi*. Mozi in his discussion of "mutual concern," or *jian ai* 兼愛, encourages people to consider the family members of other people's clans "to be like they were one's own (selves)" (*wei bi you wei ji ye* 為彼猶為己也).<sup>17</sup> But a non-Mohist would simply respond, of course, that those people from other families are *not* one's own at all and are completely unrelated to oneself.

One also finds in *Mencius* 5A.2 the term *ji* used in the context of what at first seems like a relationship between family members--until one notices that the relationship is that between the sage Shun and his deranged step-brother Xiang, who perhaps had little or no blood relationship with Shun at all. The primary thing one learns about Xiang's relationship with Shun in 5A.2 is that Xiang tried to "kill him" (*sha ji* 殺己). What this passage emphasizes is not a family relationship but the absence of one. The exceptional use of the term *ji* here, which is usually used for nonkin relationships, actually serves to emphasize the distance between Shun and Xiang. And yet a third instance of a seemingly familial use of *ji* occurs in the *Zhuangzi* in the story of the piglets who nurse at their mother's side, only to realize she has already passed away. They eventually leave her

<sup>15</sup> Xunzi, "Fei xiang" 非相. For a Chinese edition of the *Xunzi*, I have followed Wang Xianqian's 王先謙 *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, Beijing 1988. See also J. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3 vols., Stanford 1988-94, 1.207.

<sup>16</sup> Xunzi, "Fei xiang" 非相. See also Knoblock 1988-1994, 1.208–209.

<sup>17</sup> Mozi, "Jian ai xia" 兼愛下. I have followed the Chinese edition of the *Mozi* in I. Johnston, *The Mozi*, New York 2010. For this passage, see p. 148.

when they no longer see themselves (*ji*) in their dead mother. The point of this anecdote lies not in the closeness but in the distance between the piglets and the mother, who have now become self and other.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas the term *ji* is more often used when discussing relationships between people who have no clear ascribed familial or social obligations, the term *shen* 身--which might mean body, person, or self--is used instead when discussing relations between family members and between persons who have ascribed relationships. The *shen* body is a physical, psycho-physical, and social living entity that is the site of clan and social status. One's *shen* body overlaps with those of the ancestors who bequeathed that body, and it exists in a contiguous and consubstantial corpus with them. *Ji* selves, on the contrary, do not overlap with one another; they are discrete entities. One might extend what is in one's own *ji* self toward another person, but one never *is* that other person.

Even though the *shen* bodies of parent and child may overlap with one another, the *shen* body does not overlap with those of people who are not kin. But it nonetheless exhibits parallel kinds of resonances with them through mutual alignment (*zheng* 正): when one's own body is aligned, the bodies of others will respond favorably and will resonate with it. And the *shen* body moreover exists in parallel (but not equal) relations with nonkin entities such as the ruler (*jun* 君) or with political entities such as the state (*guo* 國). These relationships are often defined by the notion of service (*shi* 事): one serves one's parents, ruler, and state. One does not usually voluntarily choose the relationships associated with the *shen* body; they are more often ascribed by birth or status, and exchanges between them are guided by ritual, which facilitates mutual expectations of predictable recompense and exchange.

Relations between the *ji* self and the other, however, are more likely to be made by choice, not by ascription; they are not predictable and are even potentially dangerous. The notion of service, or *shi*, is most often absent in the relationship between self and other. And whereas relations between *shen* bodies are more likely to be between people who are of different rank or status, relationships between the *ji* self and the other are more likely to be between people of similar or unknown rank. The "other" might be a stranger, an equal, a colleague, a potential friend, or even a potential adversary; very often the identity of the other is not articulated at all. More often than not, it is a blank whose identity must be filled in carefully. Caution must be exercised in entering into a relationship with others, as is stated *Analects* 1.8, where Confucius warns his disciples to "not befriend anyone who is not up to what you yourself are (*wu you bu ru ji zhe* 無友不如己者)." This same sentiment is also reiterated in *Analects* 9.25. Confucius thus repeatedly advises his disciples to assess others carefully to determine how similar they are to one's own self. As noted above, Zhuangzi, in contrast, ridiculed just such sentiments when he criticized those who respond well to people who share things in common with them but turn away from people who do not. Even though the *Analects* cautions about befriending the other, it is nonetheless worthwhile noting that this is one of the few texts that even suggests the possibility that the other might become a friend.

Relationality between self and other is often tinged with uncertainty about how one's self is understood, known, or recognized (*zhi* 知)--or misunderstood, unknown, or

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<sup>18</sup> Zhuangzi, "De chong fu" 德充符. See also Mair 1994, 47.

unrecognized--by others. This process of knowing or understanding is not associated with any of the other terms for body or self: neither the *xing* form, *shen* body, nor *ti* body are apprehended through knowing, although they may be seen or touched. The *ji* self, on the other hand, is grasped more by cognitive capabilities than by sense faculties. Even a tree can be misunderstood, as is related in the *Zhuangzi's* well-known tale about Carpenter Shi and a seemingly useless tree that stands at the village shrine. Carpenter Shi misunderstands the tree and believes it is unusable; but in fact, as the tree explains to Carpenter Shi in a dream, the tree's perceived unusability actually better enables it to preserve *itself* from people such as Carpenter Shi. Even a tree is liable to be misinterpreted by "those who do not understand it" (lit. "by those who do not understand its *self*," or *ji; bu zhi ji zhe* 不知己者).<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the tree's broader and more organic perspective on the world dwarfs that of the carpenter, who is constrained by the narrowing rescissions of his trade. Note also that the relationship between the carpenter and the tree is one that is potentially adversarial and might well cause harm to the tree.

Remaining unaffected by the tradesman's nescience, the tree, oddly, is very much like those *junzi* 君子, or noble people, of *Analects* 15:19 who "are not worried that people do not understand them" (lit., "who do not understand their selves"; *bu ji ren zhi bu ji zhi ye* 不疾人之不知己也). So many passages in the *Analects* admonish the disciples to be unconcerned about not being understood by others that one may readily surmise that this was indeed a matter of great concern to them. Confucius repeatedly attempts to assuage his disciples' fears about being misunderstood, unknown, or unrecognized and encourages them to transform those fears into concern for others. In 1.16, for example, Confucius says, "Do not be concerned that you yourself are not understood by others (*bu huan ren zhi bu ji zhi* 不患人之不知己); be concerned that you do not understand others (*huan bu zhi ren ye* 患不知人也)." Similar advice is repeated in *Analects* 4.14 and yet again in 14.30. For his own part, Confucius takes his own advice and remains unperturbed in 14.39 when a passing farmer comments that Confucius *himself* was not understood and moreover was a common and inflexible person: "If no one understands him [lit. "his self"], then that's it, that's all" (*mo ji zhi ye si yi er yi yi* 莫己知也斯已而已矣), the farmer remarks. Confucius, however, simply dismisses the farmer's comments as being irrelevant to the project of facing life's real exigencies.<sup>20</sup>

Confucius is remarkable in his repeated insistence on transforming his disciples' concerns about themselves into a concern for others. This special concern for the "other" in the self-other relationship is actually unique to the *Analects* and is rarely found outside of that text. Confucius asks his disciples to inventory the wholesome qualities of what I below call the "storehouse" of the self, and then distribute those qualities charitably to the "other." Confucius adopts the self as a kind of benchmark or baseline for calculating the merit of certain behaviors or attitudes that are then extended to other people. Whereas he does not use specific measure words in association with the self, it is clear that he uses whatever is within the self as a standard for determining how one should act toward

<sup>19</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Ren jian shi" 人間世. See also Mair 1994, 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> In 14.35, Confucius himself says that no one understands him (*mo wo zhi ye fu* 莫我知也夫) except heaven. Since here the term used is *wo* 我, not *ji*, I have not included it in my discussion.



others. People who have two different sets of standards, one for themselves and a different one for others, are *xiao ren* 小人--petty people, small people, or lesser people. *Analects* 15.21, for example, states that "noble people demand things of themselves (*ji*); petty people, of others (*ren*)." In the *Analects*, the *ji* self is clearly the site of qualities such as humaneness (*ren* 仁; *Analects* 8.7), respect (*gong* 恭; 15.5), and shame (*chi* 恥; 13.20). Zengzi, for example, notes in 8.7 that that the self takes humaneness as its responsibility (*ren yi wei ji ren* 仁以為己任).

Two important qualities contained within the *ji* self are desire (*yu* 欲) and nondesire, or aversion (*bu yu* 不欲), and Confucius avails himself of both in his teachings to his disciples. No other aspect of the human person--the *xing* form, *shen* body, or *ti* body--is so closely associated with desire. In some traditions, such as certain forms of Buddhism, desires are poisons or obstacles to be overcome or extinguished. Desires associated with the *ji* self, however, are not necessarily negative, and in many cases they may be understood as wholesome aspirations or wholesome aversions. Aversions can facilitate the development of cardinal principles such as humaneness or consideration (*shu* 恕). When in *Analects* 12.2 Confucius is asked about the meaning of humaneness, he replies, "As for what you yourself (*ji*) do not desire, do not impose that on others (*ren*)." He replies in exactly the same language in 15.24 when he is asked what word might inform one's entire life. Responding that this word is "consideration," he says, "As for what you yourself (*ji*) do not desire, do not impose that on others (*ren*)." Emphasizing similarity and sympathetic resonance rather than difference and competition, Confucius assumes people share similar aversions. He moreover encourages his disciples to utilize desires to help others. When in *Analects* 6:30 Zigong asks Confucius whether being able to help all people is not itself humaneness, Confucius replies: "Humane people, desiring to establish themselves (*ji*) establish others, and desiring to advance themselves (*ji*) advance others." Wholesome desires located within the self, then, become almost virtues when extended toward the other.

Zhuangzi, predictably, ridicules the notion that one can take one's own desires as a viable standard when it comes to caring for others. He makes the point through a parable about a human being who tries to take care of a bird by using things that the human being *himself* (*ji*) liked. Ironically, these "things" are none other than ritual and music, and even more ironically, the parable is told by the character of "Confucius" to Yan Hui. According to the parable, an ocean-going bird once appeared in Lu, and the Lu ruler honored it by putting it in the temple, playing fine music for it, and feeding it the most delicious meats from the temple's best sacrificial offerings. The bird promptly died. "Confucius" explains, "This was a case of using things that nourish (*yang* 養) one's own self (*ji*) to nourish a bird rather than using things that nourish a bird to nourish a bird."<sup>21</sup> Zhuangzi thus implies that even the best-intentioned person cannot simply extend what is in one's own self toward others with any hope of doing them good.

Desires of the self are not unproblematic, for they need to be properly channeled, particularly when the desires of one individual might conflict with the interests of the larger community. A ruler's desires, for example, might inhibit the practice of good governance if he pursued them at the expense of the people. In the *Book of Documents*

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<sup>21</sup> Zhuangzi, "Zhi le" 至樂. See also Mair 1994, 171.

(*Shu jing* 書經), rulers are admonished to "not oppose the people by following the desires of the self" (*cong ji zhi yu* 從己之欲).<sup>22</sup> Setting aside one's self in favor of others is remarkably difficult, and this same passage from the *Documents* notes that it was only the great lords (*di* 帝) of the past such as Yao and Shun who could sustain the steady discipline (*ke* 克) necessary to "set aside themselves and accord with others" (*she ji cong ren* 舍己從人).<sup>23</sup> The term *ke* is difficult to grasp, for it refers to a kind of firmness, discipline, or control that is powerful and pervasive yet not forced. *Ke* appears in several passages about the *ji* self but is rarely if ever used of any of the other terms for the body, perhaps because they are not associated with desires that might require disciplining in the first place.

Disciplining the self with this subtle kind of *ke* energy is multiplied when the person doing it is the ruler. Perhaps keeping in mind the passage from the *Documents* that the great lords of antiquity could discipline themselves or set themselves aside (*she ji*) to accord with others, Confucius lauds the remarkable ability of the sage Shun to rule seemingly effortlessly simply by being respectful about the self (*gong ji* 恭己) and ritually positioning himself in space.

The master said, "Wasn't it Shun who could govern without 'doing' (*wu wei* 無為)? How did he 'do' this? By being respectful regarding the self and by facing south, that is all." [*Analects* 15.5]

Baffled by the impossibility of the ordinary, is the reader to conclude, paradoxically, that being respectful regarding the self is so effortless that only a great sage can do it? Disciplining the self is not an easy matter, but it does not require brute strength. It requires a subtle kind of leveraged force, properly directed, that optimizes rather than maximizes. Ordinary effort, correctly positioned in time and space, is multiplied and produces extraordinary results. Elsewhere, employing the language of hyperbole for dramatic effect, Confucius claims that by succeeding in the discipline of the self (*ke ji* 克己) even for the short space of a day, one's whole world can be leveraged into a higher plane of existence. He discusses this with his favorite pupil Yan Yuan in *Analects* 12.1.

Yan Yuan asked about humaneness. The master said, "To discipline the self (*ke ji*) and return to ritual (*fu li* 復禮) is humaneness. If for one day the self can be disciplined and returned to ritual, all under heaven would return to ritual. Being humane comes from the self (*ji*); how could it come from others (*ren*)?"

Humaneness comes from the self and is not defined by others, yet it needs proper direction in the turn toward, or return to, ritual pathways of behavior. Confucius does not underestimate the difficulty of disciplining the self, and he suggests that it is nearly impossible to do for the space of an entire day.

<sup>22</sup> *Book of Documents*, "Da Yu mo" 大禹謨. For a Chinese edition of the *Documents*, I have followed J. Legge, *Shoo king*, rpt. Taipei 1985. For this passage, see pp. 52-53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* This is also stated in *Mencius* 2A.8.

In rare instances, the self can also be cultivated, or *xiu* 修. Cultivation, however, is much more commonly associated with the *shen* than with the *ji* self. Cultivation of the *shen* body, self, or person (*shen xiu* 身修) is one of the important activities outlined in the *Great Learning*, for example, and it is the subject of the second chapter of the *Xunzi*, "Xiu shen" 修身, or "Cultivating the body." The expression *xiu ji* overlaps in meaning with the expression *xiu shen*, but it is actually extremely rare in early texts, and it appears less than a handful of times in the *Analects*, *Xunzi*, and *Zuozhuan* combined. The expression did, however, become popular in later imperial times, perhaps because it appeared in the preface to Zhu Xi's *Commentary on the Great Learning*, the *Daxue zhangju* 大學章句. But it is very seldom seen in pre-Han texts.

Even Confucius's own disciples were puzzled about the cultivation of this self, for one of them, Zilu, asked the master about it in *Analects* 14.42 in the context of a discussion of the qualities of a noble person (*junzi* 君子). This self, it turns out, is cultivated by practicing reverence--an endeavor that Confucius's disciple Zilu mistakenly believes is easily accomplished.

Zilu asked about the noble person. The master replied, "They cultivate the self with reverence" (*xiu ji yi jing* 修己以敬). [Zilu] said, "Is that all there is to it?" [Confucius] replied, "They cultivate the self by making others secure" (*xiu ji yi an ren* 修己以安人). [Zilu] said, "Is that all there is to it?" [Confucius] replied, "They cultivate the self by making the common people (*xiu ji yin an bai xing* 修己以安百姓) secure. But wouldn't even Yao and Shun be daunted by that?"

In Confucius's first response, cultivating the self begins with reverence, an activity that could very well take place in solitude; his second response, however, makes clear that cultivation occurs through interacting with others and benefitting them. Confucius moreover differentiates the project of "making others (*ren*) secure" from the far larger project of "making the common people secure" in his third response. This indicates that the term *ren*, "others," is by no means synonymous with the common people, that is, the "hundred names," and is in fact a much smaller circle of people.

For Xunzi, like Confucius, cultivating the *ji* self also takes places within a large social context. It develops within the realm of public communal concerns, not isolated private ones, and it is facilitated by exoteric rites and governmental policies, not by esoteric solitary praxis. In a rare passage that indicates the relationship between the notion of the *ji* self, on the one hand, and other terms for the body such as *ti* and *xing*, Xunzi asserts that when all people cultivate themselves (*xiu ji*), then they can form "one body" (*yi ti* 一體). This body moreover can constitute something he calls a "Grand Form" or "Grand Formation" (*da xing* 大形), a very unusual expression that inverts the *xing* form's characteristically discrete boundaries by including an entire community within it. In his chapter "Way of the Ruler" (*jun dao* 君道), Xunzi describes an almost utopian community that can be formed when everyone in the service of government adheres to principles of order, hierarchy, and division of labor.

When everyone from the ministers, officials, and common people on down cultivate themselves (*xiu ji*), there will be security and uprightness, and sincere

and capable people will be employed. The "hundred names" will shed their rusticity, petty people will experience change within their heart-minds, and prodigies will not become troublesome: this may be called the epitome of teaching through governance. When the son of heaven can see without looking, hear without listening, understand without deliberating, and exert effort without moving (*bu dong er gong* 不動而功), then just by his being firmly seated, all under heaven will accord with him like one body (*yi ti*), just like the four limbs accord with the heart-mind. This then is called the Grand Formation.<sup>24</sup>

Cultivation of the self is then accessible to all, even to commoners and petty people. Details of the cultivation process are not offered, and emphasis is placed instead on the grand results obtained: not an inwardly focused goal such as personal awareness but a social goal of a well-governed community that functions as one body headed by the sovereign. It seems highly unlikely that a state might have a ruler who could "exert effort without moving" or rule just by sitting down. Perhaps Xunzi was thinking of someone such as Shun, who according to *Analects* 15.5 could "govern without 'doing'" simply by being respectful regarding the self and facing south.

Although the actual processes of the cultivation of the *ji* self are rarely discussed, it is possible to discern some activities or values that support its development. One of these is reverence (*jing* 敬). We have already seen above in *Analects* 14.42 how the noble person cultivates the self with reverence. Xunzi also notes that noble people are reverent regarding the self, but his main goal is to differentiate the spheres of human activity, on the one hand, and the powers of heaven, on the other. Those who truly value what is human will not long for powers that are beyond their reach, he writes, and it is only by making this distinction that a human being can make progress.

The noble person is reverent regarding what lies in the self (*jing qi zai ji zhe* 敬其在己者) and does not yearn for what lies with heaven; the petty person rejects what lies in the self and yearns for what lies with heaven. The noble person, by revering what lies in the self and not yearning for what lies with heaven, moves forward every day; the petty person, by rejecting what lies in the self and yearning for what lies with heaven, goes backward every day.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the *ji* self is a synecdoche for everything that is human, in contrast to everything that appropriately belongs to the powers of heaven, which here becomes the ultimate "other." Xunzi does not, however, explain precisely what it is that lies within the self.

Surprisingly few passages relate how the *ji* self is associated with introspection or reflectivity, and they are confined largely to the *Xunzi* and *Mencius*, but they are important passages nonetheless. For Xunzi, reflection is supplemented by study, and both are pursuits of the noble person. Xunzi laments, however, that people study mainly to impress other people (*ren*), not for their own selves. Quoting a saying that also appears in *Analects* 14.24, Xunzi warns that "in antiquity, study was for the sake of one's self (*xue zhe wei ji* 學者為己); today, it is for the sake of [impressing] others (*xue zhe wei*

<sup>24</sup> Xunzi, "Jun dao" 君道. See also Knoblock 1988-1994, 2.184-185.

<sup>25</sup> Xunzi, "Tian lun" 天論. See also Knoblock 1988-1994, 3.17.

*ren* 學者為人)." Ideally, the noble person "studies broadly and engages daily in reflecting on the self (*xing hu ji* 省乎己)."<sup>26</sup> Here Xunzi is perhaps referring to *Analects* 1.4, where the agent of reflection is not the *ji* self but the *shen* body or self. The *shen* 身 body in one of its usages can be understood as a focal point to which one can turn (*fan* 反) inwardly and consciously develop or change. In *Analects* 1.4, for example, Zengzi reflects upon his *shen* body or person--not his *ji* self--three times daily (吾日三省吾身), to examine his own behavior and character. Perhaps Xunzi's "daily reflection" is an indirect reference to *Analects* 1.4, which indicates that in the context of self-reflection, at least, *ji* and *shen* are occasionally interchangeable with one another. This can be seen also in *Mencius* 4A.4, where *ji* and *shen* seem to refer to the same phenomenon.

Mencius said, "When you are concerned about others, but they do not become close to you, turn to (*fan* 反) [examine] your own humaneness; when you govern others but governance does not obtain, turn to [examine] your own wisdom; when you act according to ritual toward others but they do not respond to you, turn to [examine] your own reverence. When you are not successful in what you do, always turn to seek [the reason for] it in the self (*ji*). When your person (*shen*) is aligned, all-under-heaven will be inclined toward you."<sup>27</sup>

Here, the *ji* self is the site of humaneness, wisdom, and reverence, and it is a place where those qualities can be explored and improved. Mencius implies that the examination of the *ji* results in the alignment of the *shen*. Elsewhere, he describes the *ji* as being aligned, as noted above. Although *ji* and *shen* might be used interchangeably in this instance, however, they are by no means synonymous in all their usages. *Shen* can also refer to the entire human lifespan or to human life itself, and *ji* is not used in that sense.

Other than in these few passages, however, the *ji* self is not usually the site of reflective or cognitive activities. For Xunzi, these activities are instead associated with the heart-mind. Interestingly, even though there is considerable concern about whether one's self is known (*zhi* 知) by others, any discussion of knowing or understanding one's own self is conspicuous by its absence. This self is what is known by others, but it is not the object of self-knowledge. This is of course not to say there are no concepts in early Chinese texts similar to what in English might be called self-knowledge, self-awareness, or self-reflection, but it is instead to say that the *ji* self is not the place where this activity is likely to occur, and that the term for this activity is not *zhi*. The cognitive activity that takes place is more likely to be called *fan* 反, to turn or to turn inward, or very rarely, as noted above, *xing* 省, to reflect or consider inwardly.

The *ji* self is strongly individuated, in the sense that it is most commonly defined in terms of a relationship with an other. In that sense, *ji* selves may be strongly contrasted with *ti* 體 bodies, which are remarkable for their ability to overlap with one another. The *ti* body is a curious multidimensional entity that might incorporate as little as one or as many as a multitude of people. As I have noted elsewhere, the *ti* body is a

<sup>26</sup> Xunzi, "Quan xue" 勸學.

<sup>27</sup> *Mencius* 4A.4. See also 2A.7, which relates how an archer aligns the *ji* self before shooting and then turns to examine the *ji* self if the shot is not successful.

multivalenced corpus of indeterminate extent that can be divided into smaller parts, each of which is analogous to the whole and is consubstantial with the whole.<sup>28</sup> *Ti* bodies function more like plants in the sense that they multiply through division, and in fact some of the first occurrences of the term *ti* appear in the *Book of Odes* and refer to the bodies of plants (Mao nos. 35 and 246). That is, they function like tuberous plants that are propagated vegetatively (that is, by growing from cut sections of the roots, stem, or leaves of a mother plant, not by growing from seeds): divide a plant such as a potato into quarters, plant each quarter, and four "new" plants will appear. The new plants are in fact still consubstantial with the original plant, and their identities cannot be readily separated from it.

Similarly, the *ti* aspect of the human person can be halved and quartered conceptually, for one human frame may contain several *ti* bodies within it. Mencius, for example, speaks of a small *ti* and large *ti* that inhabits a single body (4A.15); references to the four *ti*, or four limbs, appear frequently in early literature. One *ti* body might also be shared by several human beings: bodies of rulers extend into those of their ministers, with whom they metaphorically share internal organs or limbs. One's *ti* body is moreover the body of flesh and substance that eats and is created by consuming the *ti* bodies of animal victims and by consuming food shared with other people in a system of ritual exchange. At some level, all people in such a system of exchange participate in the same *ti* body. Where a *ti* body begins and ends is difficult to determine.

*Ti* bodies are marked by commonality, consubstantiality, and open boundaries, but the *ji* self, in contrast, is marked instead by individuation, distance from others, and bounded ownership. The *ji* self may be described as a proprietary field of one's-ownness. It is the sum total of what belongs to one's-own-self as opposed to what belongs to other selves, and it is a site of ownership, worth, possession, or at its worst, hoarding. It can also be associated with things or attributes one would like to possess one's self. In the *Book of Documents*, for example, we learn of a ruler who looks on the talents of others "as if he himself possessed them (*ruo ji you zhi* 若己有之)."<sup>29</sup> *Ji* refers to the entire field of attributes or qualities that a person possesses that distinguishes them from another person. Here one finds the qualities, desires, aspirations, facilities, and so on that are unique to a particular human being. This self might be imagined as a kind of storage area or site that contains everything about a person that makes him or her different from all other people. The *ji* self contains accumulated or yet-to-be-accumulated "stuff," so to speak, and each person's accumulated lot is different. What one "has" is implicitly associated with what one "is."

Like the inside of a darkened storehouse, the field of the self cannot be readily observed. Its boundaries are not clear, and there is no clear demarcation between inside and outside. Its contents are not always easily inventoried, either by oneself or others. People can mistakenly construe what is within themselves, and they might over- or underestimate what they contain. The self might contain positive qualities such as reverence, humaneness, and wholesome desires, or it might also contain selfish desires that place it at odds with other people. Some people believed themselves to have qualities that in truth were sorely absent. In the *Book of Documents*, in one of the first

<sup>28</sup> See Sommer 2008, 294.

<sup>29</sup> *Book of Documents*, "Qin shi" 秦誓. See also Legge, *Shoo king*, 629.

passages where the character *ji* occurs, a tyrannical ruler asserts that he himself (*ji*) possesses the mandate of heaven, although his detractors state that his violence and depravity undermine any such claims.<sup>30</sup> And in the "Autumn Floods" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, the Earl of the River is equally mistaken about the contents of his self. He initially boasts that "the fine beauty of all-under-heaven is replete within myself" (*jin zai ji* 盡在己), but when he encounters the much larger ocean, he soon realizes that he is just one of those people who "having heard the Way hundreds of times thinks that no one can be compared with themselves" (*yi wei mo ji ruo zhe* 以為莫己若者).<sup>31</sup> Some people also hope that others will see in their selves things that are not really there. According to Xunzi, many people are selfish (*si* 私) but hope that others (*ren* 人) will consider them (*ji* 己, lit. "their selves") to be public-minded; they are vulgar but hope others will consider them (*ji*) cultivated; they are doltish but hope others will consider them (*ji*) wise.<sup>32</sup>

The notion that the self is a kind of storehouse is also suggested by the *Daodejing*, which acknowledges the self's potential for becoming a site of accumulation (*ji* 積). In the *Daodejing*, being in a state of excess or superfluity is a negative or closed condition, like the clay vessels in verse 11 that instead of being hollow are solid to their brims and are thus useless. Actually, the *ji* self is actually nearly absent from the *Daodejing*, which instead favors the term *zi* 自, which Moss Roberts understands as a condition of being natural, unworked, self-so, and uncontrived, like an uncarved block (*pu* 樸).<sup>33</sup> *Ji* appears in the *Daodejing* only once, in verse 81, which is the last stanza of the text in its received version. By not accumulating and by sharing with others, the self, paradoxically, has plenty (*duo*).

Sages do not accumulate.

By doing for others, they have (*you*) more themselves (*ji yi wei ren ji yue you* 既以為人已愈有).

By sharing with others, they themselves have more (*ji yi yu ren ji yue duo* 既以與人己愈多).<sup>34</sup>

Results usually expected of "not accumulating" are inverted and yield plenty rather than deficit. Ordering of the words "self" and "other" is also reversed, which is very unusual and structurally adds to the sense of inversion. Acting on behalf of others is a message not so different from other-focused verses in the *Analects* such as 6.30, which states that those who want to establish and advance themselves also establish and advance others.

The *Daodejing* does not disavow having more, but texts as different as the *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi* warn how the self can become enmeshed with things (*wu* 物). Xunzi, for example, distinguishes two kinds of people: those who become enslaved to things as

<sup>30</sup> *Book of Documents*, "Tai shi zhong" 泰誓中. See also Legge, *Shoo king*, 291.

<sup>31</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Qiu shui" 秋水. See also Mair 1994, 152.

<sup>32</sup> *Xunzi*, "Ru xiao" 儒效. See also Knoblock 1988-1994, 2.83.

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>34</sup> For the Chinese text of the *Daodejing*, I have followed D. C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, Hong Kong 1982.

opposed to those who value themselves and make things their servants. Whether a person becomes one or the other depends on their emotional condition and their state of mind. Those who trifle with principles (*li* 理) and value external things, Xunzi writes, end up with minds filled with worry and fear. Hence, no matter how much such people might gratify their senses with things--food, beautiful clothing, and comfortable surroundings--they live an impoverished life. "This," Xunzi writes, "is called making one's *self* a servant of things (*yi ji wei wu yi* 以己為物役)."<sup>35</sup> People who have peaceful and joyful minds, however, will be happily satisfied even by the simplest of food and clothing. Even if such people were given all-under-heaven, Xunzi writes, "this would be a great boon to all-under-heaven, but it would diminish that person's own harmony and happiness. This, then, is called valuing the self and making a servant of things (*zhong ji yi wu* 重己役物)."<sup>36</sup> Xunzi's advice to disregard the external world and focus on the interior life of the mind is not so different from Mencius's straightforward assertion that the great person simply "aligns the self (*ji*), and then things are aligned."<sup>37</sup> When one's inner state is properly positioned, the external world presents few concerns.

The *Zhuangzi* makes similar warnings about clarifying principles to avoid becoming entangled in things. Like Xunzi, Zhuangzi discusses things in the context of general principles, or *li*, but adds to this a discussion of particular circumstances, or *quan* 權. People who understand both principles and their applications to particular circumstances will not be harmed by things. In "Autumn Floods," Zhuangzi writes,

Those who would understand the Way must apprehend principles, and those who would apprehend principles must be clear about particular circumstances. Those who are clear about particular circumstances will not allow things (*wu*) to harm themselves (*bu yi wu hai ji* 不以物害己).<sup>38</sup>

Elsewhere, he writes that those who understand the world in its completeness "do not allow themselves (*ji*) to be trifled with by things."<sup>39</sup> Better yet, forget both things and the self altogether and enter a different realm. "Forget things, forget heaven--this is named forgetting the self (*wang ji* 忘己). The person who has forgotten the self may be truly said to have entered heaven."<sup>40</sup>

Zhuangzi notes that people who truly understand the Way and have enlarged their perspectives on the world will have no desire for wealth and no aversion to poverty. They will not hoard the world's treasures for themselves, for they understand that the "ten thousand things"--that is, all creation, ultimately belongs to only one storehouse.

They will not wrest the profits from the whole world in order to turn them into their own (*ji*) selfish allotment (*yi wei ji si fen* 以為己私分). They will not pose

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<sup>35</sup> Xunzi, "Zheng ming" 正名. See also Knoblock 1988-1994, 2.138.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Mencius 7A.19.

<sup>38</sup> Zhuangzi, "Qiu shui" 秋水. See also Mair 1994, 158.

<sup>39</sup> Zhuangzi, "Xu Wugui" 徐無鬼. See also Mair 1994, 247.

<sup>40</sup> Zhuangzi, "Tian di" 天地. See also Mair 1994, 109.



as kings of all-under-heaven or consider themselves (*ji*) steeped in eminence. Their eminence lies in clearly seeing that the ten thousand things are of one storehouse (*wan fu yi fu* 萬物一府), and that life and death share a common makeup.<sup>41</sup>

Here again one sees imagery of hoarding (the selfish allotment, or *si fen*) and storing (the depot, or *fu*) associated with the *ji* self. All things belong metaphorically to one common depot, and they are not to be appropriated into the private caches of individual selves. Zhuangzi makes a similar point in "Preserving and Accepting": the great person (*da ren* 大人), who travels the world freely without boundaries, participates not in the One Storehouse but in the conceptually parallel Great Commonality (*da tong*) and is not concerned with having or possessing.

Their countenance and their form (*xing*) join in the Great Commonality. The Great Commonality is without self (*wu ji* 無己). Without self, how could they consider 'having' as something to have?"<sup>42</sup>

In the *Zhuangzi*, the Great Commonality is analogous to a great, boundless *ti* body where everything is shared, nothing is divided into individual allotments, and there is no selfishness. Zhuangzi is not advocating an emptying of the self in the style of a grand kenosis; he is instead dissolving boundaries between individual allotments to facilitate sharing.

Xunzi warned us earlier about the dangers of the emotions of fear and anxiety regarding the self; Zhuangzi, employing imagery of emptying and filling, warns us also of the dangers of anger. He offers a parable that metaphorically associates fullness or substance (*shi* 實) with anger, and vacuity or emptiness (*xu* 虛) with calm emotional detachment. The parable is from the chapter "Mountain Tree" in a section that begins with a conversation between an official called Master Fairsouth and the Marquis of Lu, who is worried (*you* 憂) by the responsibilities of rulership and troubled by many desires. Fairsouth first advises the marquis to "cleansing your mind to get rid of desire and travel to open country where there are no others" (*you yu wu ren zhi ye* 游於無人之野). In the liminality of the wilds of open country (*ye*), then, there is simply no "other." Fairsouth adds that the marquis should then travel on to a utopian "state" (understood metaphorically) in the south where the joyful inhabitants "have little selfishness (*si* 私) and few desires; they work, but they do not understand "storing up" (*cang* 藏); they share without seeking to be paid back." Fearing a lack of food and provisions--an absence of things--the marquis is at first reluctant to go. But Fairsouth advises him to decrease his desires, his expenditures, and his worries and travel across the waters to a "State of Great Silence."<sup>43</sup>

The *Zhuangzi* continues that worry, anxiety, and other emotions are ungrounded and can vanish when the self is emptied (*xu ji*) and when concern about the "other"

<sup>41</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Tian di" 天地.

<sup>42</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Zai you" 在宥. See also Mair 1994, 101.

<sup>43</sup> *Zhuangzi*, "Shan mu" 山木. See also Mair 1994, 189-190.

vanishes simultaneously. This is explained in a parable about the pain of fullness (*shi*) and the ease of vacuity (*xu*) that uses boats--free-floating open containers--as vehicles for conveying its message. Suppose, for example, that someone is crossing a river in a small skiff, and

an empty boat bumps into them. No matter how irascible the person in the skiff is, they will not get angry. But if there is another person (*ren*) in the other boat, then the person in the skiff will shout and swerve and veer. If their first shout is not heeded, and neither is the second, nor the third, then they'll let loose a volley of foul language. In the first instance [when the empty boat hit them], they weren't angry, but in this second instance, they *are* angry. The first was empty (*xu*); the second, full (*shi*). But if they could only empty themselves (*xu ji*), they could wander the whole world, and no one could harm them!<sup>44</sup>

In the first instance, the person in the skiff is not confronted with an other, and does not respond emotionally. In the second instance, however, the person in the skiff is unable to abide in the state of openness "where there is no other" and where people do not "store up." Vacuity is associated with nonanger; fullness, with rage. Extremes of emotion were generally believed deleterious to one's health, and thus the person in the skiff is harmed by their own excess anger. Zhuangzi's remedy for harm focuses not on responding to the other, but on clearing the *ji* self.

To empty, forget, or simply not have a *ji* self, however, is not tantamount to not existing. In the unlikely event that one empties one's *ji* self, one's identity has by no means evaporated. Although some passages in the *Zhuangzi* take the reader to a State of Great Silence, a place where distinctions between self and other do not matter, the condition of emptying the self is not equivalent to a kenosis or mystical emptying of the self like those described in Western religious literature. The *ji* self is not synonymous with the notion of "self" as understood in a Western general sense, for it is a limited, circumscribed term that by no means signifies anything like the entirety of one's being. Should the *ji* self be forgotten, one loses one's selfishness but still participates in the various kinds of embodiment remaining in the *xing*, *shen*, and *ti* aspects of the human condition. Here is the *xing* form in all its mass and physicality; the *gong* body and its schedule of ritual obligations; the living *shen* body, its entire lifespan, and its familial, social, and cultural marks; and the *ti* body, which potentially might include many people in a large system of ritual exchange. Even Zhuangzi, who is prone even to jettisoning the *xing* form, nonetheless repeatedly returns to rest in this *ti* body as a common corpus where all boundaries are dissolved. Zhuangzi's emptying of the *ji* self implies getting rid of selfishness and excess emotionality--goals that few other early texts would actually disagree with, although they might state such goals differently.

In sum, it must be admitted that the *ji* self is difficult to find. Like a pronoun, it hides inconspicuously within sentences and does not readily give up its meanings. It cannot be located somatically within the physical frame of the body, but it does not exist outside the body either. It is a socially and conceptually constructed phenomenon that cannot be apprehended through the senses, and even though it might be known by others,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

it cannot know itself. Most early texts share in common the notion that the *ji* self is the aspect of a human being that stands in juxtaposition to the other, for it is rarely found on its own and is most commonly found in a relationship with others. These others are almost never one's own kind and are usually people who fall outside ascribed social relationships.

This self is something like a storage site or place of allotment associated with possession, both of things and of qualities; it can be empty or full, and it can be a slave of things or it can be their master. It might be likened to a kind of storehouse, what Zhuangzi might call a *fu*, or depot. Here one's allotment is first collected, then periodically inventoried by processes of reflection, and finally distributed to others based on certain measured criteria. "Commodities" in the depot consist not of grains but of intangible property such as wholesome and unwholesome desires and aversions; emotions such as anxiety; and values such as humaneness and reverence. Each person's allotment is different and unique, and human beings have a tendency to compare their own with those that belong to others. Texts as different as the *Analects*, *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Mencius*, and *Xunzi* each have their own understandings of the issues to be negotiated in the space between the self and other--an area the *Zhuangzi* neatly circumvents by traveling to a state where there is no other. Many texts suggest that it is better to optimize rather than maximize the contents of the self through sharing or clearing. Texts as seemingly dissimilar as the *Analects* and *Daodejing*, for example, are both in agreement that whatever is within the self should be shared with others. To do so is in the self's own best interests.