

The Use of Color  
in  
History, Politics, and Art



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Edited by Sungshin Kim



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## Introduction

Sungshin Kim

As ubiquitous as colors are to human perception, a long tradition exists of dismissing them as superficial. In the classic opposition with form, color (in the general, abstract sense) does indeed appear to be the recessive element, as something that can never exist independently on its own. Yet an alternative aesthetic tradition could be assembled in which overt colors have been highly valued, often exactly as a liberation from the dominant tradition: signifying the primitive, the childlike, or the sensual. When Yves Klein calls color “enslaved by line that becomes writing,” he posits it against the rule of logos.

These oppositions hint at the potential of color to provide a point of departure for the exploration of structures of thought. The essays in this collection all explore how color—whether as abstract notion or considering particular colors—can provide clues to the interpretation of concrete historical formations, works of art and literature, or the specifics of a political situation. Made up of historians, scholars of art, literature, and popular culture, as well as political scientists, the authors of this volume were asked to engage color as it emerged in their specific domains of research, which range broadly from the politico-ethical thought of classical China to the shopping malls of the present. This volume is thus not a history of the use of color or its theorization, but a demonstration of the role color can take in the analysis of culture (including political culture) and its products.

The essays collected here started as contributions to the 2012 Arts and Letters Conference on “The Significance of Color,” held at the University of North Georgia. Presented in expanded and often revised form, they illustrate the particular strength of different disciplines while laying out their case to a broader audience. The best way to introduce them might be a reflection on color from the perspective of my own field, as a historian.

The most obvious way to historicize color would be as part of the history of taste. For instance Michel Pastoureau has traced the ascent of blue, from a color that was rarely used in ancient art to the one that most people in the West, at least

according to surveys, now call their favorite.<sup>1</sup> But it turns out, this rise started with the use of blue as a non-color (like black and white, but also grey, today), embraced by elites during the crisis of the late Middle Ages as an other-worldly hue that could stand for the abnegation of temptation.

But the rise and fall of colors is also a history that has to be told in a material key, involving man's relationship with nature as well as the transformation of economic forces. Imperial purple in the Ancient Mediterranean world depended on the sea snails from which this pigment was extracted, as Michael Proulx mentions in his contribution. In the Medieval West, the dyeing industry was surrounded by mystery not just due to the wonder of transformation itself, but also because the dyeing guilds were very protective of their trade secrets.

The desire for certain hues has even been linked to exploitation. One of the most bizarre examples must be that of "mummy brown," a deep brown used by Western painters from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which was produced by the grinding up of Egyptian mummies, relying on a centuries-long trade in these embalmed corpses. Upon learning the details of the process, the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones abandoned the color, ceremonially burying his last tube. In our own times, as Amy Hagenrater-Gooding reminds us in this volume, the color pink is almost completely intertwined with the apparatus of mass consumption that employs and reproduces its gendered connotation.

So colors do have a history, shaped by cultural, socio-economic and technological change. But can we historicize color not just in terms of the twists in fortune of specific colors and their changing meanings, but also in what it has meant to perceive colors in the first place?

To help throw light on this question, I would like to contrast how color was appreciated in two distinct historical periods. First, the high Middle Ages, which Herman Pleij in his *Colors Demonic and Divine* describes as an epoch when color reached its cultural prime, during which aristocratic and urban culture saw a mania for the use of bright colors, often in the most stark combinations, on materials that ranged from such textiles as linen and silk to leather, wood and furs, and, of course, in the illumination of manuscripts. Even in architecture, usually thought of as almost entirely concerned with form, color was central to the Gothic, in which colored light captured by stained glass played a crucial role.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this explosion of hues, Pleij also argues that color was more meaningful then than it is today. Colors were potentially meaningful signs as part of the God-given order of Creation for fallen man to interpret. So red came to be associated with blood, but this was in the first place the blood of Christ, shed for the salvation of mankind. In this search to interpret the divine order, everything could be linked to everything else, in a system-building that might look arbitrary to us. Colors could be associated with the four elements, seasons, temperaments, etc., although no consensus was ever reached that codified such systems.

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1 *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2 Herman Pleij, *Colors Demonic and Divine: Shades of Meaning in the Middle Ages and After*, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), esp. 5-6, 13.



This way of seeing—the search for association— also meant that colors could be used by their bearers to express values or emotional states. In the verses and plays of aristocratic culture, the Virtues, personified by women, were often distinguished by the colors of their dress. So Fidelity would be dressed in black, Honor in gold, Chastity in white, Constancy in blue, Protection in green, and Love in red. Courtly literature also shows the use of color to signal the stages of the passions in romance. Here green could stand for hope, white for faith in a happy outcome, blue for steadfastness, brown for modesty, gold for fulfillment and black for mourning for a lost love. But in all these cases, a large number of combinations circulated so the precise meaning of colors could appear interchangeable. Pleij even cites a play in which colors themselves figure as characters, quarreling about their own meaning and value.<sup>3</sup>

To put this medieval use of color in comparative perspective, I turn to comments made by Fredric Jameson on modern—nineteenth century—art, in his intervention into affect theory.<sup>4</sup> In the medieval examples sketched above, we find colors organized into a system with each of them expressing a clearly *named* value or emotion: fidelity, hope, mourning. This is not changed by the fact that the exact assignment of a specific meaning to each color was often rather arbitrary. Color was used in the Middle Ages to express a clearly circumscribed state of feeling or even the essence (as in the case of the Virtues) of their bearers. Compared to such named emotions, Jameson notes a very different logic when it comes to modern affects, with “Baudelaire’s description of a painted street sign [as] ‘a green so delicious it hurts’; or Flaubert’s remark that all of *Salammbô* (1862) was written to convey a certain bilious shade of yellow.”<sup>5</sup>

These colors do not convey the clearly named and reified emotions we saw in medieval literature, but rather a bodily state on a (much less precise) sliding scale. That is how Jameson distinguishes modern affects, with an entirely new attention to the body, from the older systems of emotions that had been in circulation. In our examples of medieval art, colors stood for emotions that were in themselves stable and essential. The body did not play a role in them, except as a frame to display them on. But for Baudelaire and Flaubert, colors could work upon one’s bodily state, truly changing how one felt. Contrasting Pleij and Jameson demonstrates how color can function as a clue to deeper cultural formations, in this case showing different ways in which color related to subjectivity.

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Part One of this collection brings together studies on the role of color in historically different political cultures. The first two essays in this volume are explorations in ancient political thought. Thomas Radice uses the Chinese term *se*, whose translations include “color,” as his starting point for a study of ritual in Ancient Chinese political thought in which he reveals certain commonalities

3 Ibid., 10, 14, 23–4, 28–9.

4 As developed in his “Wagner as Dramatist and Allegorist,” in *The Ancients and the Postmoderns* (London: Verso, 2015).

5 Ibid., 39.

across opposed philosophical schools, as well as a more active role prescribed for the ruler. Michael Proulx's work focuses on the antique Mediterranean, where he shows how colors like purple, or more precisely the associations attached to them, figured in the representation of political and religious communities. Timothy May's study here is the first fully devoted to color symbolism in the Turko-Mongolian cultures of Central Asia (advancing also some new hypotheses along the way). In the next piece, by Renee Bricker, color serves as a window of changes and continuities in sixteenth-century English culture. The remaining two pieces of Part One consider color in the twentieth century, offering an arresting contrast between cultural imaginations of the local and the global. In the first, Victoria Hightower looks at the role of color in the construction of political authority and the invention of tradition in the United Arab Emirates, while Christopher Jespersen's essay on US international history studies the use of color to signify or imagine global, world-encompassing, threats.

Part Two turns to color in the arts, and is opened by Robert Machado with a theory-based exploration of the way in which color is expressed in verbal and visual media. Then Pamela Sachant looks at the use of flesh tones in the work of nineteenth-century French painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, as the starting point for a discussion of the aesthetic ideals of this period and their transgression. Finally, April Conley Kilinski studies the power of color symbolism in the representation of race, perhaps the most charged expression of color in modern history. Her lens is an intertextual reading of the novels of Jean Rhys and Michelle Cliff, drawing on Postcolonial theory.

The final section consists of three essays that deal with contemporary politics and culture. Amy Hagenrater-Gooding offers a critical reading of the use of pink in contemporary consumer culture. Celnisha L. Dangerfield looks at the representation of Barack Obama during his first years in office from the angle of communication studies. Jonathan Miner brings us to contemporary Turkey, where the color gray is his starting point for an overview of the contradictions in Turkish politics.

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# Part I

Color and Political Power



# 1

## Painting on a White Foundation: Color, Countenance, and Performance in the *Analects* and *Han Feizi*

Thomas Radice

Confucius<sup>1</sup> taught his students many things about ritual, but sometimes they repaid the favor, if only accidentally.<sup>2</sup> One example is *Analects* 3.8:

Zixia 子夏 asked, “Artful dimples of her smile, beautifully well-defined eyes, white on which to adorn’—what does this mean?” The Master replied, “The painting comes after the white.” Zixia then asked, “Do rituals also ‘come after?’” The Master said, “You stimulate me, Zixia! It is you with whom I can begin to talk about the *Odes*!”<sup>3</sup>

The *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), a collection of early Chinese poetry, was an important authoritative text for Confucius, for he believed it held the key to self-cultivation, if only one could interpret it correctly.<sup>4</sup> Here, however, it is Zixia

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1 I would like to thank the participants of the 2012 North Georgia Arts and Letters Conference for their helpful comments on my original presentation, especially Victor Mair, Sungshin Kim, and Eli Alberts. I also thank the two anonymous referees, who challenged me to clarify my ideas.

2 Confucius (or Kongzi 孔子, ca. 551 – 479 B.C.E.) was one of the most famous (if not *the* most famous) thinker in early China. He lived in a period of great social and political upheaval, which eventually resulted in China fragmenting into several autonomous states in the Warring States period (ca. 480 – 221 B.C.E.). Confucius taught mostly about morality and politics (without much of a distinction made between them). He wrote nothing, but his sayings were collected by his disciples (and his disciples’ disciples) in a text called the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), which also includes sayings attributed to some of his disciples. Because of the numerous issues pertaining to authorship and date of composition in this text, it is nearly impossible to discern the sayings of the historical Confucius from later additions. Consequently, I use the name, “Confucius,” in this essay mainly as a way of referring to the contents of the *Analects* without assuming that Confucius actually said any of it.

3 *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, ed. Cheng Shude 程樹德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 5.157–159. Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this essay are my own. For this passage, compare translations in D.C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 68 and Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 19–20.

4 For more passages on Confucius’s emphasis on studying the *Odes*, see *Analects* 2.2, 8.8, 13.5, 16.13, 17.9, and 17.10. For a broader discussion of the significance of the *Odes* in the thought of Confucius and other Warring States thinkers, see Paul R. Goldin, “The Reception of the *Odes* in the Warring States Era” in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 19–35.

who points out a very fundamental aspect of rituals (*li* 禮),<sup>5</sup> though it is a seemingly irrelevant passage about a woman putting on makeup before a wedding. But as it turns out, the woman's makeup—or, more specifically, its application—is a perfect metaphor for rituals. The key line in the poem is the last one (though it is actually absent in the received version of the *Odes*<sup>6</sup>). Confucius clarifies for Zixia that the line implies a temporal sequence: first the white powder, then the paint “afterwards” (*hou* 後). Zixia then somehow makes the intellectual leap to rituals occurring *after* something else. Commentators tell us that before the woman applies the colors to her face, there first must be a white foundation—which, in turn, will make the colors more striking.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, then, rituals come after something else, which make them better or more effective in some way.

This color metaphor highlights more than just how someone should perform a ritual. The significance of the “brightness” or “dullness” of colors is that they are perceived as such by others. Likewise, ritual performances are also observed and evaluated by others who evaluate their success or failure. This essay analyzes this phenomenon by discussing “performance,” paying particular attention to the performer/audience relationship. Analysis of audience reception of performances, in particular, highlights an important aspect of early Confucian politics, one that reveals an underlying connection between the thought of Confucius and that of someone normally thought to be diametrically opposed to him, Han Feizi 韓非子.<sup>8</sup> Though there are clear differences between the two, they share a desire to discern the truth about political “actors” and a deep skepticism about most people's ability to do so.

## The “Color” of Performance

Rituals were fundamental to the way Confucius envisioned religion and politics, but they also were part of a larger process of self-cultivation that ideally resulted in becoming “humane” (*ren* 仁), “virtuous” (*de* 德), or a “gentleman”

5 *Li* is a complex term in early Confucianism. It can refer to a formal religious ritual, but it also refers to aspects of more mundane social intercourse. As such, it has been translated in various ways, including “etiquette” and “propriety.” For a good discussion of the development of *li* in the period discussed in this essay, see Masayaki Sato, *The Confucian Quest for Order: The Origin and Formation of the Political Thought of Xunzi* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 163–236. In order to avoid confusion, in this essay, I consistently translate *li* as “ritual” conceived in the broad sense to include all the formalities and banalities encompassed in this term. To this end, I define “ritual” as Ronald Grimes does: “Ritual is embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment,” which he further explains as something separate from ordinary action that is stylized, and requires “unpacking” for outsiders to make sense of it. See his “Religion, Ritual, and Performance” in *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith*, ed. Lance Gharavi (New York: Routledge, 2012), 38.

6 The passage that Zixia quotes is from Ode 57. For a full translation, see Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*, edited with additional translations by Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 48–49.

7 *Lunyu jishi*, 5.158.

8 Unlike the *Analects*, the *Han Feizi* is composed of longer essays on various topics, most of which are believed to have been composed by the historical Han Feizi (d. 233 B.C.E.). He is often associated with “Legalism” (*fa jia* 法家), a term that did not exist until the first century B.C.E. Because of the diversity of views contained in the texts associated with “Legalism,” I deliberately avoid the term in this essay, preferring to avoid over-generalizations in the form of “Confucianism vs. Legalism.” For a discussion of the problems of “Legalism,” see Herlee G. Creel, “The *Fa-chia* 法家: ‘Legalists’ or ‘Administrators?’” in *What is Taoism? And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 92–120 and Paul R. Goldin, “Persistent Misconceptions about Chinese ‘Legalism,’” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38.1 (2011), 88–104.



(*junzi* 君子) – all terms used throughout the *Analects* to denote the ideal individual.<sup>9</sup> At one point, for example, when he was asked about “humaneness,” Confucius described it as “overcoming oneself and returning to ritual” (*ke ji fu li* 克己復禮), and when asked for more clarification, he told his disciple not to do anything that was not in accordance with ritual (*fei li* 非禮).<sup>10</sup> Zixia’s insight in 3.8 shows that ritual performance, if it really is intended to “overcome oneself,” cannot be merely a matter of moving in a prescribed fashion. He makes this point more directly in 17.11:

The Master said, “‘Rituals! Rituals!’ they say. Is this to say ‘jade and silk?’ ‘Music! Music!’ they say. Is this to say ‘bells and drums?’”<sup>11</sup>

The comment on music clarifies the previous one about ritual because it is easier to understand how the simple presence of bells and drums does not constitute music. Any random striking of bells and drums does not constitute music either. The production of authentic music through these instruments requires some special skill in the performer. Likewise, though jade and silk are important “props” in a ritual, they are not substitutes for what a person does with them.

Regarding what might come “before” the ritual that leads to a proper performance, passages describing filial piety (*xiao* 孝) provide a good indication about what is required.<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2.7, Confucius complains that people equate filial piety with “nourishment” (*yang* 養) for their parents. That is, they think that the simple act of keeping their parents alive is sufficient for fulfilling their filial duties. But Confucius sees this as no better than caring for dogs and horses. As he says, “without respect (*jing* 敬) what’s the difference?”<sup>13</sup> This feeling of respect must, in some sense, come “before” the filial actions in order for them to be truly filial. Confucius makes a similar point in 1.11:

When his father is alive, observe the son’s intentions; when his father is dead, observe his actions. If for three years he does not change the ways of his father, he can be called filial.<sup>14</sup>

Most commentators focus on the latter part of the passage regarding the actions of the son after his father’s death, but it is the beginning of the passage that is more intriguing. Commentators explain that because a son cannot “act on his

9 Much like *li*, these terms are not easily translated into English. *Ren*, for example, is often translated as “benevolence” or simply “Good;” *junzi* has been translated also as “noble person” or “superior person.”

10 *Analects* 12.1; *Lunyu jishi*, 24.817–821. To emphasize the importance of ritual in all forms of behavior, Confucius actually specifies not to “look” (*shi* 視), “listen” (*ting* 聽), “speak” (*yan* 言), or “move” (*dong* 動) unless it is in accordance with ritual.

11 *Lunyu jishi*, 35.1216; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 145 and Slingerland, 205.

12 According to *Analects* 2.5, when Confucius was asked about filial piety, he eventually replied with explicit appeal to ritual practices: “When one’s parents are alive, serve them according to ritual; when they die, bury them according to ritual, and sacrifice to them according to ritual.” *Lunyu jishi*, 3.81.

13 *Lunyu jishi*, 3.85.

14 *Ibid.*, 2.42; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 60 – 61 and Slingerland, 5.

own” (*zi zhuan* 自專), one must “observe his intentions” (*guan qi zhi* 觀其志).<sup>15</sup> The notion of proper intentions is similar to the requirement of respect expressed in 2.7, but here the issue is not simply how to perform filial duties properly, but also how to evaluate others’ performances. Exactly how one observes the intentions of others is not explained (even by the commentators), but returning to the issue of “color” provides a clue to what Confucius had in mind. For example, 2.8 reads:

Zixia asked about filial piety. The Master said, “The countenance is what is difficult. When there is work to be done, the young take on the burden; when there is food and drink, they are placed before the elders—is this what it means to be filial?”<sup>16</sup>

The word, *se* 色, in addition to “countenance,” can mean “color,” “beauty,” and even “sex”—all uses found in the *Analects*, and all having to do in some sense with appearance. This passage, like 2.7, invokes the issue of empty, mechanical behavior toward parents, but here Confucius requires a visible expression on the part of the child. One must provide wine and food, but one must do so with the correct expression that indicates to others that the individual is acting with the proper motivation. If one’s countenance, for example, demonstrates that one is performing the action begrudgingly, then the ritual is not performed successfully. The intention is, so to speak, “written all over one’s face.”

Nowhere in the *Analects* is the issue of one’s face so significant than in Book 10, which traditionally has been interpreted as specific observances of Confucius himself (though most modern commentators believe that it is mostly a collection of descriptions of superior people in general). Most passages in the *Analects* that discuss ritual focus more on the general importance of it for moral and/or political success. By contrast, Book 10 rarely delves into abstractions, and remains thoroughly in the specific behavior of the performer, so much so that whatever quotations of Confucius it contains are of secondary importance. The real significance is in what he did and how he did it.

The impact of Confucius’s facial expressions is showcased in four of the eighteen passages in this book (3, 4, 5, and 25). These passages, in addition to describing his actions, specify that Confucius “changed his countenance.”<sup>17</sup> Each of these passages begins with setting up a specific context (such as “when his ruler called upon him to receive a guest,” “when entering the duke’s gate,” “when grasping a jade tablet,” “when he saw someone mourning,” and “when fine food was placed before him”), resulting in Confucius’s altering his facial expression. The context provided by the narrator provides a certain situation to which Confucius responds, but it is also general enough to indicate that actions of Confucius are not entirely original. The level of generality in the context implies that Confucius performed the described behavior, not only in that particular instance, but rather *whenever* he encountered that situation. Consequently, we can describe Con-

15 *Lunyu jishi*, 2.44. See also *Analects* 2.10, in which Confucius says that, when evaluating the character of others, one must “observe their motives” (*guan qi suo you* 觀其所由); *Lunyu jishi*, 3.92.

16 *Lunyu jishi*, 3.88; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 64 and Slingerland, 10.

17 In passages 3, 4, and 5, the operative term used is *bo* 勃; in 25, it is *bian* 變.

fucius's "performance" in a more formal sense. Confucius's actions are what Richard Schechner calls "restored behavior," which he insists is "the main characteristic of performance."<sup>18</sup> As Schechner puts it, "Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the *n*th time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior.'<sup>19</sup> Restored behavior is repeated for a particular context, even rehearsed. It is meant to cover a broad range of activities that can fall under the concept of performance, from theatrical events to religious rituals, to forms of social interaction—all of which are distinct from ordinary behavior.

Conceiving early Confucian ritual performance as restored behavior also informs the way others have described the aesthetic dimensions of Confucian ethics. Herbert Fingarette, Karyn Lai, and Amy Olberding, for example, have all used the analogy of a musical performance to describe ritual performance in the *Analects*, especially in the way a performer exhibits the elements of a masterly or virtuoso performance, and even the development of such virtuosity as a metaphor for self-cultivation.<sup>20</sup> The notion of restored behavior actually implies much of both the aesthetics of a musical performance and the skills required for an adept one, since musical performance qua performance is a form of restored behavior. Analyzing ritual as restored behavior, however, is more firmly situated in human behavior, and virtuosity is displayed through one's own body rather than through an external instrument. Therefore, a closer analogy to describe a ritual performer would be an actor rather than a musician, which has the advantage of better accommodating Confucius's specific requirements of (and personal example as) an ideal performer, especially the expressive function of the face.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of whether one is a musician or an actor, in the act of performing there is always an audience. As Marvin Carlson writes, "Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self."<sup>22</sup> The audience in Book 10 of the *Analects* is clearly not Confucius only, and its presence is revealed through the text's narrative technique. For example, though the specific facial expressions that Confucius makes are never described in any detail, the implication in each passage is that his face expressed some sense of sincerity, reverence, or sympathy. However, it is a distinct feature in all the passages in Book 10 that the feelings of Confucius are never described. There are no passages in which Confucius is said to have "felt pity" or "felt a deep sense of respect." These attributes are merely implied through a surface description of what he did and

18 Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35.

19 *Ibid.*, 36.

20 See Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—the Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 53–54; Karyn Lai, "Confucian Moral Cultivation: Some Parallels with Musical Training" in *The Moral Circle of the Self: Chinese and Western Approaches*, ed. Kim-chong Chong, Sor-hoon Tan, and C.L. Ten (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2003), 107–139 and "Li in the *Analects*: Training in Moral Competence and the Question of Flexibility," *Philosophy East and West* 56.1 (2006), 72–76; Amy Olberding, *Moral Exemplars in the Analects: The Good Person is That* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 125–135. Much of what Olberding describes as "personal style" on pp. 112–125 actually fits well with what I describe as "theatricality" below.

21 This is not to deny the importance of music in early Chinese ritual. For a detailed discussion of the connection between music and formal rituals in early China, see Lai "Confucian Moral Cultivation."

22 Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

how he appeared when he did it, as if it truly were something witnessed or seen. These exclusively visual descriptions of Confucius's behavior are not insignificant. Though all passages in the *Analects* were written by people other than Confucius, the passages in Book 10 go into great detail about what specifically the author saw Confucius do—and, presumably, do well. The author, then, is a spectator to the action, describing Confucius's restored behavior to the reader.<sup>23</sup>

This connection between the actions of the performer and the reactions of the audience is what Willmar Sauter calls “theatricality.”<sup>24</sup> Sauter distinguishes the actions of a performer as “exhibitory,” “encoded,” and “embodied.” An exhibitory action is the mere appearance of a performer in front of an audience, which can also indicate a person's mental status as a performer (e.g., confident or nervous).<sup>25</sup> A performer's actions, including gestures and vocal actions, are encoded in that they follow certain cultural patterns and aesthetic norms.<sup>26</sup> And finally, these actions are embodied when they are intended to signify some meaning to another person (i.e., the audience).<sup>27</sup> All of these actions overlap in practice, which can be demonstrated through an example from the *Analects*. In 10.25, when Confucius encountered someone in mourning, he “changed (his countenance)” (*bian* 變), and the passage later mentions that in a similar situation, he leaned forward on the crossbar of his carriage (*shi zhi* 式之). To follow Sauter's analysis, Confucius's physical appearance (i.e., his physical presence) in the situation is a basic exhibitory action in showing himself—either intentionally or unintentionally—to his audience (i.e., the mourners and the narrator).<sup>28</sup> His actions of changing his countenance and bending forward in his carriage are encoded in that they are considered appropriate for his specific cultural circumstance and they follow certain aesthetic norms as dictated by ritual. Ultimately, these actions are embodied in that they signify Confucius's sympathy and respect to both the mourners and any onlookers.

But the performer is only half of the theatricality equation. Sauter outlines three levels of “theatrical communication” to correspond to the three types of actions of the performer in order to understand the spectators' reception of a performance. Exhibitory actions communicate at the “sensory” level in that they cause “both automatic responses, which only gradually are processed into understandable cognitive knowledge, and persistent feelings that remain active during an entire performance.”<sup>29</sup> Encoded actions communicate at the “artistic” level and require a certain competency on the part of the spectator to transform the pleasure of the experience into an intellectual evaluation of the performer's

23 The reader, in turn, becomes another kind of “spectator” of Confucius's performance.

24 Willmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 50.

25 *Ibid.*, 53-54. It should be noted that the “mental state” that Sauter has in mind is different from the performer's intentions, which will apply to embodied actions. These exhibitory actions are similar to what might be called “stage presence.”

26 Sauter, 54.

27 *Ibid.*, 56.

28 Later on in this essay, I distinguish how the people Confucius encounters and the narrator form different types of audiences.

29 Sauter, 59.

skill.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, the “symbolic” level corresponds to embodied actions in which the audience recognizes the meaning of the actions that the performer is trying to convey. For all of these levels of communication, however, Sauter insists that the spectators themselves bring as much to the performance as the performer. As he puts it, “Since prior experiences, producing expectations, preferences, and prejudices have a strong impact on both emotional and cognitive reactions during and after the performance, they become part of the actual theatrical experience and can be dealt with as direct responses to the performer.”<sup>31</sup> These subjective experiences are significant in understanding how an audience “observes the intentions” of a performer—indirectly and, perhaps, imperfectly.

### Gentlemen, Village Worthies, and Uncultivated Audiences

To understand the significance of Confucius’s own idea of spectators’ reception of ritual performance with regard to their personal experiences, it is first necessary to discuss what he saw as a pervasive performance problem. As much as Confucius stresses the importance of an expressive countenance for ritual performance, he also expresses a strong distrust for such overt expressions in one’s actions. Take, for example, 1.3:

The Master said, “Clever words and a fine-looking countenance are rarely signs of humaneness.”<sup>32</sup>

Confucius here acknowledges the very real possibility of hypocrisy—that people may attempt to “put on a good face,” but their performance is not founded upon the proper feelings of respect or other moral intentions. It is all spectacle with no substance. Likewise, in 11.21, Confucius questions whether someone who speaks in a serious manner is really a gentleman (*junzi* 君子) or merely “appears” or “has the countenance” (*se*) of one. Thus, Confucius exposes a problem for his stress on ritual performance: the performers must express (especially through the face) their sincerity, but some people try to express sincerity without really having it.

What is far worse, however, is that others are so easily duped by such people, so much so that receiving popular acclaim, according to Confucius, is hardly a sign that one is virtuous. For example in 12.20, his disciple, Zizhang 子張, asks about the criteria for referring to someone as “distinguished” (*da* 達), and when Confucius asks Zizhang what he thinks being “distinguished” means, Zizhang describes it as being “well-known” (*wen* 聞). However, Confucius insists that these two notions are far from equivalent, and differentiates the two as follows:

Distinguished people have an upright temperament and love rightness. They examine the words (of others) and observe their countenances, and anxious-

30 Ibid., 59-60.

31 Ibid., 58.

32 *Lunyu jishi*, 1.16; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 59 and Slingerland, 2. This passage is repeated in 17.17 and a similar point is made in 5.25.

ly defer to others. They will surely be distinguished in their states and their families. Those who are well-known may have countenances that indicate humaneness, but their actions are far from it, and remain without any self-doubt. They will be well-known in their states and in their families.<sup>33</sup>

There are a few things that become apparent here. First, Confucius's own disciple makes a serious mistake in confusing fame with distinction. Second, people who are merely "well-known" can become so basically by "faking" it. That is to say, they have the proper appearance, but their actions in some sense do not meet the criteria of humaneness. Finally, someone who is truly distinguished is not only moral, but also a good observer of others' countenances, and therefore is perceptive to the reaction of others, and perhaps even the morality of others.

One can see how all three of these issues are related when one investigates in more detail the notion of true self-cultivation vis-à-vis the lack of such cultivation in much of society. For example, the mistake that Zizhang makes is not isolated to 12.20. Elsewhere in the *Analects*, Confucius insists that his disciples not necessarily follow popular opinion regarding the evaluation of someone else's character. In 13.24 and 15.28, Confucius tells his disciples to be more discerning than the average person. In 13.24, in particular, Confucius insists that instead of looking to see whether everyone (*jie* 皆) in a village loves (*hao* 好) a certain person, it is better to see if all the "good" (*shan* 善) people love him. Thus, some people are simply better judges of character than others.

These passages clarify a basic element of Confucius's political theory—the attraction of virtue. As Confucius says very famously in 2.1:

One who rules by virtue can be compared to the pole star, which stays in its place while the other multitude of stars revolves around it.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, at the end of 12.19, Confucius says,

The virtue of the gentleman is like the wind; the virtue of the uncultivated person is like the grass. When the wind blows over the grass, the grass must bend.<sup>35</sup>

These passages indicate that popular opinion can be a sign of one's superior cultivation,<sup>36</sup> especially since in other passages, Confucius insists that the un-virtuous person has the opposite effect. As he says in 13.6, after noting the ease that the ones who have corrected their character (*shen zheng* 身正) can rule over the people, he says "As for those who do not correct their character, though they issue orders, they will not be followed" (*qi shen bu zheng, sui ling bu cong* 其身不正，雖令不從。)<sup>37</sup>

33 *Lunyu jishi*, 25.868–869; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 116 and Slingerland, 134–135.

34 *Lunyu jishi*, 3.61; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 63 and Slingerland, 8.

35 *Lunyu jishi*, 25.866; compare translations in Lau, *Analects*, 115–116 and Slingerland, 134.

36 Similar ideas are expressed in *Analects* 2.19 and 12.22.

37 *Lunyu jishi*, 26.901.

But clearly this is not the full story. As Confucius insists in 15.28, people are not necessarily repulsed by an uncultivated person. A virtuous person may have great charisma,<sup>38</sup> but a less cultivated person may have a similar appeal. It is in this context that the saying, “The village worthy is the thief of virtue” (*xiangyuan de zhi zei ye* 鄉原德之賊也),<sup>39</sup> illustrates what must have been a serious problem for Confucius: someone who could be considered by many to be virtuous, and yet not actually be virtuous.

This problem leads to the second issue indicated by 12.20 – that people can put on a countenance that some others perceive to represent genuine intentions, but these intentions are not really there. Mencius (Mengzi 孟子)<sup>40</sup> elaborates on this notion of the “village worthy” during a conversation with Wan Zhang 萬章, one of his disciples. In 7B.37, Mencius distinguishes Confucius’s feelings about the “village worthy” from those who are “wild” (*kuang* 狂) and those who are “timid” (*juan* 狃). Both the “wild” and the “timid” are inferior to those who follow the mean of the Way (*zhong dao* 中道) by not achieving this mean. As Kwong-loi Shun points out, both “wild” and “timid” individuals try to improve themselves, but the “village worthies” already feel satisfied with their self-cultivation.<sup>41</sup> Mencius imagines them saying, “To be born in this era is to be of this era – to be good is enough.”<sup>42</sup> However, Mencius explains that the danger of the village worthy is not in mere complacency or mediocrity, for as Wan Zhang indicates, they are quite popular with other people. It is here that Mencius has a difficult time explaining precisely what is noticeably wrong with the village worthy:

If you try to criticize them, there is nothing to hold up; if you try to pin them on something, there is nothing to pin. They are in agreement with the current customs and connected with this corrupt era. They reside in what resembles devotion and trustworthiness, and their actions resemble honest purity. The multitude is pleased with them, and so they are self-assured, but you cannot enter the Way of Yao and Shun<sup>43</sup> with them. Thus, they are called “thieves of virtue.”<sup>44</sup>

This explanation shows that the “village worthies” are not mere hypocrites who

38 Philip J. Ivanhoe aptly translates *de* as “moral charisma,” which he describes as “the natural attraction one feels toward morally great individuals.” See his *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, second ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), xiii.

39 17.13; *Lunyu jishi*, 35.1219.

40 Mencius, a major Warring States thinker, lived during the fourth century B.C.E., and supposedly was trained by Confucius’s grandson. He saw himself as transmitting the ideas of Confucius, but he also elaborated on them in original ways. His ideas are contained in a text that bears his name. Like the *Analects*, the *Mencius* was not written by the person to whom it is attributed, and the passages are not in ordered according to topic. However, the passages tend to be longer than those in the *Analects*, and most of them are snapshots of conversations that Mencius had with various individuals, including kings, his disciples, and other thinkers with opposing viewpoints.

41 Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 178.

42 *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義, ed. Jiao Xun 焦循 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 29.1029. Compare translations in D.C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 203 and Bryan W. Van Norden, trans., *Mengzi with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2008), 195.

43 Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 were legendary sage kings, considered by many Warring States thinkers to be great moral exemplars.

44 *Mengzi zhengyi*, 29.1031; compare translations in Lau, *Mencius*, 203 and Van Norden, 195.

say one thing and do another, either consciously or unconsciously. They follow accepted norms, and perhaps do so whole-heartedly, which makes them difficult to criticize. But Mencius insists that there is a higher standard, and despite the praise they receive from most people, there are others (such as Mencius and Confucius) who can discern who is a truly cultivated person.

Mencius then elaborates on this problem by quoting Confucius:

I hate a resemblance that is false. I hate weeds for fear that they will be confused with grain sprouts. I hate flattery for fear that it will be confused with rightness. I hate glibness for fear that it will be confused with truthfulness. I hate the tunes of Zheng 鄭 for fear that they will be confused with proper music. I hate purple for fear that it will be confused with vermilion. I hate the village worthies for fear that they will be confused with the virtuous.<sup>45</sup>

The qualification of “false” (*fei* 非) that is added to “resemblance” (*si* 似) in the beginning of this passage is not redundant or insignificant. The only instances of this term in the *Analects* are in Book 10 in reference to what Confucius himself “appears” to be doing.<sup>46</sup> But presumably, what Confucius “resembles” to be in those passages is “true” (*shi* 是) or genuine; that is, one can trust the surface appearance to be a sign of his true character. Of the series of false resemblances that follow, it is the last three that are the most significant, for a very close variation is also found in *Analects* 17.18. They also point to an interesting connection between aesthetic and moral performance and judgment. At first glance, Confucius makes a transition from the aesthetic (color and music) to the moral (the “village worthy”). However, in the case of music, Confucius finds the tunes of Zheng to be licentious and therefore immoral, not merely less beautiful than other music.<sup>47</sup> But more importantly, given the above discussion about the theatrical aspects of morality through ritual performance, one can more clearly discern how moral criticism can be intertwined with aesthetic criticism in more complex ways. Rather than some forms of art leading its audience to either moral or immoral behavior, moral activity as performance affects its viewers in ways that are aesthetic. People are drawn to the morality of others in the way they gravitate toward a style of music or a particular color. In Sauter’s terms, people who form an audience for ritual performances respond to the morality of the performer on the sensory—and especially the artistic and symbolic—levels as responses to the performers’ theatrical communication.

But to further understand the aesthetic responses of the audience to ritual performances, it is helpful to introduce one way Schechner analyzes audiences. He distinguishes two general types of audiences: “integral” and “accidental.” In the simplest terms, “an accidental audience comes ‘to see the show’ while the integral audience is ‘necessary to accomplish the work of the show,’”<sup>48</sup> but Schechner also

45 *Mengzi zhengyi*, 29.1031; compare translations in Lau, *Mencius*, 203 and Van Norden, 195.

46 *Analects* 10.1 and 10.4.

47 Zheng was one of the major states during the Warring States period. For Confucius’s criticism of the music of Zheng, see *Analects* 15.11.

48 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, revised ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 220; Schechner continues,



insists that the boundaries between the two are not always firm.<sup>49</sup> Audiences can shift from “accidental” to “integral” and vice versa. Moreover, what makes Schechner’s distinction applicable to the Confucian context is how he applies these audiences to rituals and “aesthetic theater” (performances that are intended primarily to provide aesthetic enjoyment for the audience)<sup>50</sup> to form four broad categories: integral-aesthetic, integral-ritual, accidental-aesthetic, and accidental-ritual.<sup>51</sup> For any ritual, the integral audience includes the main participants. In the case of *Analects* 10.25 discussed above, the integral audiences are the mourners to whom Confucius responds with his own ritual behavior.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes, however, as in every case in Book 10 and other descriptions of Confucius’s ritual behavior, rituals have accidental audiences—spectators who do not have a special connection to what is taking place before them.<sup>53</sup> In 10.25, Confucius behaves in response to the mourner, but as noted above, his behavior is also witnessed by the narrator, who is presumably not a mourner. The narrator is part of an accidental audience and his<sup>54</sup> experience of the ritual is different from the mourner’s, because he is witnessing the larger spectacle. As such, his experience is similar (though not identical) to an accidental-aesthetic audience in that he perceives the aesthetic features—or, in Sauter’s sense, the theatricality—of the ritual. The main difference from a purely aesthetic performance is that for Confucius and Mencius, the theatricality of Confucius’s ritual performance is also a fundamental part of his exemplary moral behavior, which then also draws the audience toward moral cultivation.

But again, as Sauter insists, the audience response to a performance has much to do with the audience members themselves. The above discussion has revealed a similar perspective from Confucius and Mencius, but with significant differences. Sauter’s description of the performer/audience relationship makes no value judgment about the performer or the audience with regard to any kind of “cultivation,” whether moral or aesthetic. For example, since Sauter’s conception of theatricality depends on communication between the performer and spectator, he speaks favorably of instances when performers alter their actions in order to re-establish engagement with the audience if it is lost.<sup>55</sup> Such manipulation of a performance that caters specifically to the audience is not something that Confucius condones, and he repeatedly insists cultivated individuals should be very concerned about the lack of recognition they receive from others.<sup>56</sup> One reason for this rigid

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“Or, to put it another way, the accidental audience attends voluntarily, the integral audience from ritual need. In fact, the presence of an integral audience is the surest evidence that the performance is a ritual.” As shown below, however, Schechner also acknowledges how non-ritual performances can have integral audiences.

49 Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 220.

50 This form of theater can include modern Western-style theater, non-Western theater, and performance art.

51 *Ibid.*, 221.

52 The mourners, of course, are also performers in their own ritual, in which Confucius is part of the integral audience.

53 One example that Schechner uses is “tourists watching a ceremony” (p. 221).

54 Though the sex of the narrator is never specified, I am using “he” and “his” in order to avoid the cumbersome “he or she” and “his or her,” and because the authors and editors of the *Analects* were most likely men.

55 Sauter, 61. Sauter notes examples of accommodating an audience that cannot understand the spoken language of the performance and also accommodating a very young audience. In both instances, the performers respond to the spectators who either fall asleep or leave their seats during the performance.

56 See for example *Analects* 1.16, 4.15, 14.30, and 15.19.

perspective on performance is that, for Confucius, members of (accidental-ritual) audiences fall within a range between the cultivated and uncultivated. The uncultivated spectators are mainly the common people, who lack the necessary expertise, and who are drawn to the words and facial expressions that seem to indicate authentic morality. By contrast, cultivated spectators can point out that there are better examples of morality elsewhere, or simply that a given moral performance is lacking in some way. This special perception informs Confucius's insistence that "only the humane person is able to love others and hate others."<sup>57</sup> To use the color metaphor in 3.8, uncultivated spectators see what seem like "brilliant colors" in a person's makeup, but cultivated spectators do not because they have experience with what truly brilliant colors look like.

In addition to appreciating a narrower range of performances, cultivated spectators also are not merely passive observers. Their "expertise" in judging performers is not analogous to theater critics, who may boast a wide range of theatrical experiences that therefore qualify them to distinguish truly "great performances." Rather, as cultivated spectators, they are also cultivated performers themselves. This issue is exhibited most strikingly in the recently excavated Guodian 郭店 version of "The Five Aspects of Conduct" (*Wu xing* 五行):<sup>58</sup>

Humane thoughts: [they] are essential; being essential, you will have keen insight; having keen insight you will be at ease; being at ease you will be gentle; being gentle you will be happy; being happy your demeanor is pleasant; having a pleasant demeanor you can be intimate; being intimate you will be loving; loving your countenance will be jade-like; having a jade-like countenance you will be formed; being formed you will be humane.<sup>59</sup>

This passage shows a progression from something unobservable (one's thoughts) to the observable (one's countenance), which in turn leads to the full description of being "humane." In this way, then, one can begin to surmise how one's face allows others to "observe one's intensions." The passage that immediately follows,

57 4.3; *Lunyu jishi*, 7.230.

58 A version of this text (along with other texts) written on silk was originally discovered in 1973 in a tomb that dates to 168 B.C.E. It was discovered at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in the province of Hunan 湖南. In 1993, an earlier version of this text written on bamboo slips (again, with other texts) was discovered in a tomb that dates to around 300 B.C.E. It was discovered in Guodian in the province of Hubei 湖北. Since many parts of the slips had deteriorated over such a long period of time, and since whatever was used to tie them together had deteriorated completely, scholars have tried to figure out how they should be ordered. Nearly everything about these texts is still hotly debated by scholars—from the order of the slips to the proper transcription into modern Chinese characters to how exactly these texts fit into Warring States intellectual history. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that these texts are very important, and will revolutionize how we understand the Warring States period. The original compilation of these texts was published in *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). For a good overview of the significance of these texts and other excavated manuscripts, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). For an interpretation of how Guodian manuscripts (particularly, the "Five Aspects of Conduct") help us better understand Warring States intellectual history, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) and Kenneth W. Holloway, *Guodian: the Newly Discovered Seeds of Chinese Religious and Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 2009). All translations from "The Five Aspects of Conduct" in this essay are Holloway's. He follows the transcription of Li Ling 李零 from his *Guodian Chujian jiaoduji* 郭店楚簡校讀記 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007). Below, I cite page numbers to Li Ling's transcription, but also indicate the original slip number provided in *Guodian Chumu zhujian*.

59 Holloway, 133; Li Ling, 101; slips 12–13.

however, provides an interesting qualification to what appears to be revealed in the face:

Wise thoughts: [they] are extended; having extended [your thoughts] you will comprehend; once you comprehend you will not forget; not forgetting you will have keen vision; having keen vision you will perceive an outstanding person; being able to perceive an outstanding person you will have a jade-like countenance; having a jade-like countenance you will be formed; being formed you will be wise.<sup>60</sup>

As with the previous passage from this text, there is a connection between thoughts and facial expressions, but here the process toward a “jade-like countenance” (*yu se* 玉色) includes the ability to “perceive an outstanding person” (*jian xianren* 見賢人). In this context, “outstanding” (*xian* 賢) should be understood as exceptional morality, something similar to the notion of “humaneness” in the previous passage. Therefore, what one “perceives” (or more literally “sees”) are the very qualities that lead to having a “jade-like countenance.” To read this in the context of the *Analects*, though all people may be influenced by a person with a true “jade-like countenance,” the only people who can truly perceive superior cultivation are people with an identical level of cultivation themselves. In the absence of such a superior individual, less cultivated spectators will most likely be attracted to others with “non-jade-like” countenances and not seek out someone better. Given that Confucius thought such outstanding individuals were rare in society,<sup>61</sup> it is all the more apparent that the inability of the majority of society to perceive an inauthentic performance would concern him. Hence, “the village worthy is the thief of virtue,” not only because he deceives others into thinking he is virtuous, but also because most people are incapable of demanding a better performance from someone who really is virtuous.

### Performing Politics in the *Han Feizi*

In the Warring States period, there was no one less impressed with the common people than Han Feizi, who explicitly rejected the idea of “gaining the hearts of the people” (*de min zhi xin* 得民之心)<sup>62</sup> through the kind of moral charisma described in the *Analects* and other early texts. According to Han Feizi, the common people had “the minds of little children” (*ying'er zhi xin* 嬰兒之心),<sup>63</sup> by which he meant that they did not really know what was good for them, and were in no place to evaluate what the ruler did for his state. The ruler was like a parent who cared for his children in such a way that the children may “yell and scream incessantly, because they do not understand that the little pain they suffer now will bring great benefit later.”<sup>64</sup>

60 Holloway, 133; Li Ling, 101; slips 14–15.

61 See *Analects* 15.4 and 6.29.

62 *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解, ed. Wang Xianshen 王先慎, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), “Xian xue” 顯學, 50.463.

63 *Ibid.*, “Xian xue,” 50.464.

64 Adapted from Burton Watson, trans., *Han Feizi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003),

As such, Han Feizi was critical of the Confucians for their insistence on the inviolable connection between morality and politics. His view was not that there was no morality, only that it had little place in politics. If anything, moral duties conflicted with political loyalty.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, he believed that the words of so-called “outstanding” (*xian*) people were too mysterious for ordinary people to comprehend.<sup>66</sup> And since few people ever seemed to master moral behavior, it was impractical to assume that one could populate a state’s government with virtuous people.<sup>67</sup> As a result, rather than promoting a political theory based on the morality of ritual performance, Han Feizi recommended the establishment of a clear set of laws (*fa* 法) that all people could understand. He even made an analogy to make-up, similar to what is found in *Analects* 3.8:

Appreciating the beauty of Maoqiang or Xishi will not improve one’s appearance, but if you use rouge, gloss, powder, and eye-paint, you will become twice as attractive as you were to begin with. Talking about the humaneness and righteousness of the former kings will not improve your government, but clarifying one’s laws and regulations and determining rewards and punishments will be the rouge, gloss, powder, and eye-makeup of the state. Thus, the enlightened ruler is quick to apply real aids, reluctant to praise the former kings, and does not speak of humaneness and righteousness.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the rejection of moral government—and its foundational ritual performances—the writings of Han Feizi do not express a rejection of performance. In fact, his essay, “The Way of the Ruler” (*Zhu dao* 主道),<sup>69</sup> describes an elaborate performance that the ruler must perform for his ministers, who, according to Han Feizi, want only to manipulate him. Han Feizi recommends that the ruler remain “empty” (*xu* 虛) and “still” (*jing* 靜).<sup>70</sup> These two notions, which are especially prominent in the *Laozi*,<sup>71</sup> are a means for the ruler to hide his true desires (*yu* 欲)

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129. This idea contrasts sharply with the notion of “the father and mother of the people” (*min zhi fu mu* 民之父母 or *min fu mu* 民父母) that appears in other Warring States texts, which denotes a more “loving” relationship between the ruler and the people.

65 Han Fei tells two stories of men who faced a choice between fulfilling their filial duties or fulfilling their duties to their ruler, chose the former. The first, a man named Honest Gong (Zhi Gong 直躬) turned his father into the authorities for stealing a sheep, and was subsequently executed for unfilial behavior. The second was a man who was a member of the military in the state of Lu 魯, who repeatedly retreated from combat because his elderly father would have no one to care for him if his son died in battle. Confucius praised this man and recommended him for an official position in the government. Han Fei sees such both the condemnation of Honest Gong the praise of the son from Lu as examples of how morality does not make for a strong government. See *Han Feizi jijie*, “Wu du” 五蠹, 49.449. For another version of the “Honest Gong” story, see *Analects* 13.18.

66 *Han Feizi jijie*, “Wu du,” 49.450.

67 *Ibid.*, “Wu du,” 49.451.

68 *Ibid.*, “Xian xue,” 50.462; compare translation in Watson, *Han Feizi*, 128.

69 Unlike the *Analects*, the *Han Feizi* is composed of longer essays on various topics, most of which are believed to have been composed by the historical Han Feizi. An overview of textual issues can be found in Jean Levi, “Han fei tzu 韓非子,” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley, CA: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 115–124.

70 *Han Feizi jijie*, “Zhu dao,” 5.26.

71 The *Han Feizi* actually contains the earliest partial commentary on this text in two chapters: “Jie lao” 解老 and “Yu lao” 喻老. For a discussion of the relationship between the *Han Feizi* and the *Laozi*, see Tae Hyun Kim, *Other Laozi Parallels in the Hanfeizi: An Alternative Approach to the Textual History of the Laozi and Early Chinese*

and will (*yi* 意) from his ministers. As Han Feizi says, “If the ruler reveals his desires, his ministers will engrave themselves [*zi jiang diao zhuo* 自將雕琢] (accordingly)...If the ruler reveals his will, his ministers will change their exterior [*biao* 表] (accordingly).”<sup>72</sup> Given the above discussion of the “The Five Aspects of Conduct,” the metaphor of “engraving” oneself becomes all the more significant in that one can imagine ministers attempting to mimic a “jade-like countenance” that agrees with the given desires of the ruler. To combat this underhanded tactic, Han Feizi advises rulers to do exactly what Confucius hates: resemble something that they are not (*si er fe* 似而非).<sup>73</sup> As Han Feizi puts it, “See but appear not to see; hear but appear not to hear; know but appear not to know.”<sup>74</sup> But all of these actions are reactions, such that Han Feizi, in guiding a ruler’s performance, is really guiding his role as an audience engaged in a process of theatricality with his minister. Unlike the Confucian gentleman, Han Feizi’s minister as performer will always play to his audience to receive a positive response, so the ruler as audience must appear contrary to what is true in order to get at the truth about his ministers.

This combative relationship between ruler and minister becomes all the more apparent in another of Han Feizi’s essays, “The Difficulties of Persuasion” (*shuo nan* 說難). Though the act of persuasion is not quite a ritual in the Confucian sense, it is restored behavior in that there are certain protocols to be followed. Han Feizi states in the beginning that what is difficult about persuasion is not anything to do with one’s knowledge or abilities, but rather in knowing the “mind” (*xin* 心) of the person one is persuading.<sup>75</sup> In full accordance with his warnings to the ruler in the previous essay, Han Feizi admonishes the minister to tailor his advice carefully to the specific attributes and desires of the ruler/audience before him.<sup>76</sup> In this way, the ruler functions as both an integral audience—without whom there is no “persuasion”—and an accidental audience—who (hopefully) responds to the specific exhibitory, encoded, and embodied actions of the minister that are tailored to what the ruler finds appealing. In other words, knowing the mind of the ruler informs the proper aesthetic necessities of the performance.

Though in many respects, the notion of “persuasion” (*shuo* 說) is distinctly verbal, Han Feizi emphasizes its visual aesthetics in a closing anecdote about a minister named Mi Zixia 彌子瑕, who was beloved by the ruler of Wei 衛. On one occasion, Mi heard about his mother’s illness, and used the ruler’s carriage to go visit her. On another occasion, when Mi and the ruler were walking through an orchard together, Mi bit into a peach and then decided to share it with the ruler. On both these occasions, the ruler of Wei praised Mi Zixia—first for his filial

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Thought,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 199 (2010), 1–76. See also Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Han Feizi and Moral Self-Cultivation,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38.1 (2011), 31–45.

72 Han Feizi *jijie*, “Zhu dao,” 5.26

73 Han Feizi does not actually use this phrase, but the same meaning is implied in the passage quoted below.

74 Han Feizi *jijie*, “Zhu dao,” 5.28; compare translation in Watson, *Han Feizi*, 17.

75 Han Feizi *jijie*, “Shuo nan,” 12.86.

76 For another analysis of the relationship between these two essays, see Paul R. Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine of Self-Interest” in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 58–65. My performance analysis of these essays elaborates on tension that Goldin sees between these two essays.

devotion to his mother, and second for his generosity. Over time, however, Mi Zixia's looks faded (*se shuai* 色衰),<sup>77</sup> and as a result, the ruler's love for him followed suit, resulting in Mi's being accused of a crime against the ruler. The ruler of Wei then interpreted Mi's actions differently. Taking the ruler's carriage to visit his mother was considered theft, and the sharing of a peach was an offensive act of offering the ruler a half-eaten peach.

For this reason, it is no wonder that Han Feizi associates ministers with concubines. As Han Feizi notes about concubines in particular, their beauty fades (*mei se shuai* 美色衰) by age thirty, though the ruler's "fondness for sex" (*hao se* 好色) is still strong, even at age fifty.<sup>78</sup> The ruler's inevitable longing for younger, more beautiful companions is why, Han Feizi asserts, the women of the palace "hope for the (early) death of their ruler" (*ji qi jun zhi si* 冀其君之死).<sup>79</sup> Mi Zixia serves as an instructive example of this point. Much like a young concubine, his good looks allow him to enjoy great favor, but the inevitable decline of his appearance leads to his equally inevitable demise. Though Han Feizi's comparison between ministers and concubines serves as a warning to rulers, the story of Mi Zixia is a warning to ministers, who, unlike concubines, have the potential to make up for the loss of their natural beauty through a new aesthetic appeal of skillful performance, one that establishes a theatrical dynamic between the minister and his ruler.

In another tale of warning, Han Feizi tells the story of Mr. He 和氏 who offered an unpolished piece of jade to a ruler of Chu 楚.<sup>80</sup> The ruler had someone examine it, but this person insisted that it was merely a rock. Thinking Mr. He was trying to deceive him, the ruler ordered Mr. He's foot to be amputated as punishment. When the next ruler of Chu took the throne, Mr. He tried offering the same piece of jade again, but met the same disbelief, anger, and punishment from the ruler (his other foot was amputated). It was only after Mr. He wept profusely and lamented that his genuine gift of jade was repeatedly mistaken as a fraud, and the ruler subsequently ordered someone to polish it, that the jade was finally recognized as such.

There are two notable aspects of this story. The first is that Han Feizi uses Mr. He's jade as an example of a truly good idea presented by a potential advisor, which means that his bleak scenario of mutual mistrust between a ruler and his ministers is mitigated by his belief that some people do have more worthy advice to offer a ruler than others. After all, Han Feizi himself was someone who desired to serve a ruler, and insisted that his views were much more effective than those of others. The story of Mr. He, in fact, is really a message to most Warring States rulers, who, according to Han Feizi, generally fail to recognize when worthy ideas are presented to them. Thus, while Han Feizi may think that the common people have the "minds of little children," he really has little faith in the abilities of rulers to understand what is best for their states.

77 Ibid., 12.94.

78 Ibid., "Bei nei" 備內, 17.115.

79 Ibid. For more on the connection between sex and power in the *Han Feizi*, see Paul Rakita Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 41–42.

80 *Han Feizi jijie*, "He shi" 和氏, 13.95–97. For a full translation of this story, see Watson, *Han Feizi*, 81–82.

The second notable aspect of this story is that good ideas are not enough. Mr. He's wisdom needed for its appearance to be altered in order for its value to be recognized. Han Feizi, like Confucius, is not content with relying solely on what the audience (i.e., the ruler) finds pleasing because the audience cannot be trusted as the best perceivers of good policies. Unlike Confucius, however—and in addition to the obvious rejection of moral government—Han Feizi does not recommend that would-be ministers remain content, even if the value of their ideas is not acknowledged. Mr. He is the prime example of the danger of taking such a position in Warring States politics. According to Han Feizi, he should have “engraved” (*diao zhuo* 雕琢) himself, much like the ministers depicted in “The Way of the Ruler,” for at least he had something substantive to offer beyond a skilled and aesthetically pleasing performance. Performance, then, is a necessary “add-on” that simply responds to what Han Feizi sees as a bleak political situation in the late Warring States in which rulers must constantly be wary of manipulation and ministers must constantly be wary of being accused of such manipulation.

If Han Feizi, like Confucius, has a concept of a qualified individual coupled with a distrust of popular opinion, who is the “village worthy?” The term, *xiangyuan*, does not appear in this text. However, in his essay, “Eminence in Learning” (*Xian xue* 顯學), Han Feizi accuses the Confucians and Mohists<sup>81</sup> as the root cause of disorder. More precisely, disorder results from the rulers who apply the ideas of the Confucians and Mohists in their states. Much like the common people of the *Analects*, who become seduced by the performances of the less-than-virtuous, rulers become seduced by the performances of unqualified advisors. And to make matters worse, rulers patronize members of both traditions, despite their contradictory advice. As a result, Han Feizi believes these rulers cannot help but drive their kingdoms into chaos.<sup>82</sup>

Such a pessimistic outlook on Warring States politics is why “The Way of the Ruler” and “The Difficulties of Persuasion” are two essays that offer no content knowledge for either the ruler or the minister. Both essays are purely about “methods” of performance. Although Han Feizi clearly believes that some ideas are better than others (and therefore, some individuals are wiser than others), he believes it is unlikely that a knowledgeable advisor will gain an audience with a perceptive and capable ruler. The most likely scenario would be a meeting between an unknowledgeable advisor and an unperceptive and incapable ruler. In such an event, the best both can hope for is to escape death. Performance, then, is a survival strategy for a world in which “jade-like” wisdom is, indeed, a rare jewel.

## Conclusion

In the late nineteenth century, James Legge translated *Analects* 9.18 as follows: “The Master said, ‘I have not seen one who loves virtue as he loves beauty

81 The Mohists were the intellectual descendants of Mozi 墨子, a thinker who lived during the fifth century B.C.E. He disagreed vehemently with many of the details of Confucius's political philosophy, but agreed with his general principle that the best government was a moral government.

82 *Han Feizi jijie*, “Xian xue,” 50.548.

(*se*).”<sup>83</sup> One might criticize this translation as an example of Victorian prudishness, for Legge acknowledges in his notes that *se* here means “sensual pleasure.”<sup>84</sup> A more direct rendering of this passage, then, would be “I have never seen someone who loves virtue as much as sex.”<sup>85</sup> However, from the above discussion, it seems that Legge’s translation may be particularly apt for the broader meanings of *se* in the text. One might imagine Confucius wishing that more people recognized true virtue than its attractive, yet inferior, resemblance that stems from a skilled performance by someone with an expressive countenance. Moreover, one can see how Han Feizi might agree with at least part of this saying. Though surely he would not be concerned with loving virtue, he would wish more people (i.e., rulers) would recognize those people with truly worthy ideas, rather than be distracted by the fine appearance and performance of charlatans. Thus, both Confucius and Han Feizi wished more audiences recognized and appreciated the “painting on a white foundation” rather than the less vivid “colors” without this foundation, although what Confucius and Han Feizi each recognized as “white” differed considerably.

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83 *Lunyu jishi*, 18.611. James Legge, trans., *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1893; reprint, New York: Dover, 1971), 222. This passage is actually numbered 9.17 in Legge’s translation.

84 Legge refers the reader to his note about *se* in 1.7 on pp. 140–141.

85 For more on the meaning of *se* as “sex,” see Derk Bodde, “Sex in Chinese Civilization,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129.2 (1985), 161–162.



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