

STORIES OF SUICIDE IN ANCIENT CHINA

An Essay on Chinese Morals

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On a Suicide
Here lies in earth a root of Hell
Set by the Deil's ain dibble
This worthless body damn'd himsel
To save the Lord the trouble

Robert Burns

When Christianity spread over Europe it met with and merged into several disparate cultures that by accepting the Christian faith gradually acquired similar moral standards.

Regarding suicide, it would seem as if many of the more primitive pre-Christian cultures regarded the taking of one's own life as morally neutral. Suicide derived its morality from the circumstances under which it was committed, and was condemned or praised in relation to the motive and the result of the act.

Thus it was generally regarded as praiseworthy if an individual sacrificed himself for the social group, whether it was a political unit, an ethnic group, or his own kin. The Israelites appear to have held similar views, for the story of Samson's suicide has the ring of an heroic epos.¹

The suicides of aged people reported in many of the pre-Christian cultures could also be regarded as self-sacrifices. In times of shortage one could not afford to support the aged, even

The author is grateful to Dr. Chang Tao-Wen for writing the Chinese characters for this article.

¹ *The Book of Judges*, Ch. 16.

in a farming community, and anyone who could not follow the herds was a burden to a nomadic group. In order to camouflage dire necessity, several pre-Christian cultures tried to encourage voluntary self-sacrifice in old age, for instance by the prospect of special favours in the after-life.

Suicide among adults in the full vigour of life, on the other hand, was rejected. Every able-bodied person was needed in the community, and failure to perform one's duties was disloyalty.

In Greece and early Rome the citizen was considered state property, and suicide was considered a crime because it deprived the state of one of its members.² Such unlawful suicide was punished posthumously and the victim was denied the proper burial rites.

In general, it can be said that in less sophisticated cultural stages suicide was condoned if it served the community, but rejected if it harmed the community.

This utilitarian view was not sustained by Greek and Roman philosophy. The great philosophers almost unanimously considered life a chastisement, and the body a gaol for the soul. Life and suffering were well-nigh equated and death was seen as the only release from the torment of earthly existence.

Although this tragic view of life was held by most thinkers, opinions on suicide varied greatly from school to school and from philosopher to philosopher. Some schools held that man should patiently serve his term of imprisonment in the flesh, looking forward to his day of release. To free himself prematurely would be the greatest of sins. Other schools taught that man had a right to leave a disagreeable life, as one leaves a tedious party, and, in fact, several philosophers did die by their own hand. Their lavish interments and the deep respect paid to them after death prove beyond doubt that in the public opinion their suicides were commendable acts.

Two incompatible views thus existed at the same time: suicide was a crime against the state and a sin against the gods. On the other hand, it could be defended, even propagated, by the

² Karl August Geiger *Der Selbstmord im klassischen Altertum*, Augsburg 1888. Throughout the section on suicide in ancient Greece and Rome I draw heavily on this excellent work.

thinkers, and those who killed themselves were honoured and respected.

During the Roman Republic suicide ceased to be regarded as a crime. The change of view was as complete as is possible, because from having been in itself a criminal act, suicide came to be regarded as a means to minimize or even efface a crime. If the accused managed to kill himself before he was sentenced the prosecution was terminated. Suicide under such circumstances was not really regarded as a declaration of innocence, but in the eyes of the law had the same effect as irrefutable proof thereof. Whether the accused was in fact guilty or not, if he managed to commit suicide, his reputation remained unimpaired. He was therefore buried with all due ceremony and his property could not be confiscated.

Although this legislation made it possible even for a traitor to leave his estate intact to his heirs, it was not until under Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) that a new law was promulgated, stating that suicide by an accused should be regarded as a confession of guilt. The heirs then had to appeal against the verdict, and only if they managed to prove the innocence of the deceased could they succeed to their inheritance.

Thus various views on suicide were and had been held in different parts of Europe at the beginning of our era. Each and every one of these views, however, was superseded by Christian ideas as Christianity spread over the continent. In regard to suicide the Christian opinion is very straitlaced. Suicide is a mortal sin and can under no circumstances be condoned or excused.

The Catholic Church declared its standpoint at a very early date, and at the council of Arles in 452 A.D. suicide was branded as a sin because it could be caused only by a diabolically inspired fury.³

David Bakan, in his "Suicide and Immortality", gives a brilliant exposition of the underlying concepts⁴:-

... Will is the very material out of which guilt is fashioned.

In our culture, and perhaps in all cultures, the meeting out

³ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide, A Study in Sociology*, New York 1966, p. 327.

⁴ In Edwin S. Shneidman (ed.), *On the Nature of Suicide*, San Francisco 1969.

of punishment is based on evidence that will was involved in the act to be punished . . .

(While this is certainly true of Western culture, it does not apply to ancient China, as will be shown below).

When will is brought to bear on the matter of existence itself, then is it most provocative. It is precisely at the point where will is exerted in connection with existence that the greatest negative reaction is aroused; and this is clearly reflected in the things which have been found odious in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The arrogation of existence to will is the essence of sin for a good deal of the tradition, especially in medieval Catholicism. We observe this in the odiousness associated with the control of birth, making the birth of the child subject to the will; the odiousness of murder, in which one, at will, terminates the life of another; the odiousness of abortion or any willful decision between the life of the mother and the life of the child even in cases where the mother's life is clearly in danger. Some of the Church fathers found that the major sin of Satan was for him to have maintained that he had willed himself into existence. And finally, we note the odiousness of suicide on the part of the historical Catholic Church.

. . .

Basically, there are two major points in life which should be beyond will: birth and death, the two critical existential moments in a lifetime. The arrogation of will to these two points is found odious.

. . .

The bearing of these considerations on the matter of the suicide is that suicide is clearly an instance of the will being brought to bear on existence.

. . .

Strictly speaking sin should be understood as trespass against divine law and crime as trespass against secular law. In actual fact, however, no strict division has been upheld. That which canon law regarded as mortal sin, civil law usually considered

capital crime. Once suicide had been declared a sin the secular authorities soon meted out posthumous punishment for it. The dead body was mutilated and the property of the victim was returned to the feudal lord or to the Crown.

Thus in Christendom suicide came to bear the double stigma of being both sin and crime.

The Reformation wrought no change on this particular point and it was not until during the age of Enlightenment that the decriminalization of suicide set in. Although changes of opinion have been noticeable, suicide has been considered both sinful and criminal in many countries in the West right up to the present century.⁵

If George L. Trager and Edward T. Hall's theory of culture⁶ as having a formal, an informal and a technical level is applied

⁵ Cf also Erwin Stengel, *Suicide and Attempted Suicide*, Pelican Book A704, Harmondsworth 1964, Ch. 6, *The Attitudes of Society to Suicide*.

⁶ Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, New York 1970.

The Trager-Hall tripartite theory of culture is a useful tool in the analysis of the attitudes towards suicide. For the non-specialist I summarize and define the three levels, as they will be used here.

The formal level is tradition-bound. Formal systems are extremely tenacious and they change very slowly, almost imperceptibly. They are also very resistant to changes imposed upon them. Members of a culture *know* what is right or wrong in regard to matters that their culture treats as formal and people tend to be strongly emotional about their formal systems. If for instance theft is considered wrong in a culture, its members will know for sure that it is so, and they will not argue the point or doubt the validity of the statement. Members of that culture would feel that a person who defended or praised theft behaved immorally or even unnaturally, and they would often hold him to be dishonest. In a culture that formalizes behaviour to a high degree, an equally high degree of conformity is required of its members. Children are brought up to accept the norms of the formal patterns mainly through corrections when they overstep the boundaries: 'Don't do that, it's wrong!' As most adults will give the same admonitions, the child will slowly understand within what sphere he has a freedom of choice.

On *the informal level* there are no well-defined rules. However, although the members of the culture are unaware of any rules for informal behaviour, they do tend to react to entire classes of stimuli in correspondingly set patterns. The reason for this is that they have acquired behaviour patterns through unconscious imitation. Gestures afford a good example. Americans – black or white – are recognizable in a street anywhere in Europe just by the way they stand or walk. At home an American would not be conscious of this – it would, indeed, be odd if an American considered the fact that he stands in an un-European way – but abroad a sensitive person

to Western concepts of suicide, it becomes apparent to what an extent the Christian moral outlook has permeated our culture.

Until a few decades ago suicide was treated almost entirely in a formal way—in some communities this holds good even today. Westerners knew beyond doubt that suicide was wrong and hardly anybody would question the validity of this verdict. This was an issue where a member of our culture could feel assured that he shared his view with practically all other members. The rejection of suicide was so strong that it was felt that other cultures ought to share this outlook. Other attitudes—even those known to have prevailed earlier in Europe—were held to be immoral, insincere or even unnatural.

This strong formal stand against suicide is rapidly breaking down, but although the matter is handled in a more informal way the element of rejection is usually retained. Young people who grow up in our culture acquire their attitudes by noticing the reactions of the family and friends of the deceased. In this informal way they will usually be made to understand that something shocking and terrible has occurred. Often they will also

might become keenly aware of it. The response to mistakes in informal behaviour varies considerably, simply because some kinds of informal actions are less important than others. Americans are not condemned in Europe because of their gestures, but they may be observed and imitated, sometimes gently ridiculed and made to feel a certain discomfort. Under the pressure of such subtle corrections many Americans control their gestures if they stay in Europe over a longer period. — To mention a fashionable example, it is largely through the same kind of subconscious imitation that men and women grow into their sex roles.

It is only on *the technical level* that man is more aware of the reasons for his actions. Only on the technical level is one able to choose between possibilities and to discuss methods of achieving a desired result. Therefore comparatively little affect is attached to things treated in a technical way.

Any culture would function on all these three levels at any given time. The proportion of elements treated on a specific level, however, differs greatly from culture to culture and from one period to another within one and the same culture. Actions that at one time were handled in a formal way might lose their significance. Yet they might be retained for hundreds of years on the informal level, not for any other reason than that one has ever done it. Other elements that one has earlier treated formally or informally may suddenly be subjected to technical scrutiny. Things that have been taken for granted will then be tested and discussed. Results achieved on the technical level may then stiffen into new fixed patterns which in their turn are dealt with in a formal way.

note that some people react with a feeling of guilt, although they may have no reason to accuse themselves. A very common attitude in the West is to hush the thing up. Even the suicidal person may try to find a way of killing himself that makes it difficult to decide whether in fact he committed suicide or died by accident.

To some extent the formal stand is carried over on to the technical discussion of suicide. In our culture it is axiomatic that a suicidal person is a misfit. If anyone confesses a will to die it is usually interpreted as a quest for life. Most scientists will discuss questions pertaining to suicide in a detached way only as long as it is presupposed that suicide is wrong. It is, in fact, very difficult to discuss suicide in a detached way, even when one endeavours to be technical about it, for the very word "suicide" is loaded with affect. The substitutes found for technical discussion, where the suicidal person is termed "the suicidal patient", "the victim" etc., do not make things better. That suicidologists are embarrassed when lecturing on their subject and feel an urge to make it clear that they themselves are not suicidal is, indeed, very revealing.⁷

The medieval Catholic Church, within which the formal Christian attitude towards suicide was formed, is no longer in existence. Yet the formal attitude then arrived at still permeates Western culture and colours our conceptions whether we are faithful Christians or not.

Due to this cultural background Westerners find it easy to agree with Máo Zédōng in his complete rejection of suicide, even if they may not accept his arguments.⁸ A Westerner finds it easy to agree,

⁷ David Bakan, "Suicide and Immortality" in Edwin Shneidman (ed.): *On the Nature of Suicide*, San Francisco 1969:—

My . . . embarrassment is that you should perhaps suspect that I myself might harbor some secret intention to commit suicide or that you might suspect that at some time in the past I have made an attempt to commit suicide. Indeed, my embarrassment appears to me to apply more generally than to myself alone when I peruse some of the professional literature on suicide and note the many ways by which writers on suicide equally announce to their audience that they consider the act of suicide something of which the weak or the sinful might be guilty, but of which there is no trace underneath their professional robes and roles.

⁸ Roxane Witke, *Mao Tse-tung, Women and Suicide in the May Fourth Era*, China Quarterly No. 31, 1967.

because to some extent Máo Zédōng subscribes to the view commonly held in the West. People in East Asia, on the other hand, are more likely to disagree because the concepts pertaining to suicide in the East differ considerably from those in the West. As would be obvious to anyone studying Eastern culture and history, those who died by their own hand were often highly respected *for the very act of committing suicide*.

The reverence paid to the performer is particularly striking in the spectacular form of Japanese suicide known as seppuku or harakiri. Seppuku has also attracted considerable interest of both laymen and scholars in the West, and the concepts and rituals pertaining to it have been investigated.⁹

In China suicide has never been ritualized—one feels tempted to say standardized—to the same extent as it has in Japan, and has therefore attracted less attention. Yet suicide has played an important role throughout Chinese history, and an astounding number of eminent men and women are reported to have taken their own lives. Far from being blamed for having done so, they were often highly praised for their courage and integrity.

There were, in fact, certain situations in which suicide was regarded as desirable. When a person of character found himself in circumstances which to him amounted to a signal to die, he would consider suicide. He would not act like a soldier, who blindly obeyed an order, for his was certainly to reason why, and he would consider the matter with the utmost care. If he found that the established moral code or the recognized code of honour did indeed require that he die, he would submit to the call without hesitation.

For Westerners, who belong to a culture where neither the moral code nor society encourages or even permits the taking of one's own life, it is easy to understand that such suicides were committed under cultural pressure. Our "person of character" would not be able to recognize any such pressure. If at all he pondered the matter he would claim that he had willingly accepted the code of honour and that he acted in conformity with its rules. It would not occur to him that there could be other codes of

⁹ See for instance Jack Seward, *Hara-Kiri. Japanese Ritual Suicide*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo 1968.

honour or moral codes that regarded suicide as a sin. His attitude towards suicide is on the formal level and therefore held to be the only possible one.

In a culture like the Chinese, where tradition is a formidable force, it can be very difficult to live, if one does not conform.¹⁰ If then tradition requires of a man that he commit suicide under certain conditions and he does not respond in the expected way, he faces a most distressing situation. He might lose the respect of his fellow men, and even worse, he might lose his self-respect. This is very evident in China, were a man could feel obliged to apologize for not having killed himself when the time was due.¹¹

A man's entire conception of himself was thus at stake at this critical moment. If he considered himself a man of high integrity and unblemished honour, and yet failed to comply, he might even come to doubt his own identity. To stay alive in defiance of his code of honour may thus have saved a man's body but endangered his mind.¹²

For those who did comply, it was not that they *wanted to die*, but rather that they *did not want to live*. When a man can no longer face life, he has to face death.

Turning now to suicide in China, the questions to be answered are: "What were the conditions under which Chinese men and women felt that they no longer wanted to live?" and "What ideas and ideals were considered more important than life itself?" and "How did the concept that under certain circumstances one had forfeited one's life originate and develop?"

The present article deals with the oldest period of Chinese history known to us. The cases of suicide related here are culled from the pre-Qín Chinese classics and are ascribed to prominent

¹⁰ Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, New York 1970, p. 73:-

... the Zuni of New Mexico have a predominantly formal culture that exerts a heavy pressure on its members. People simply cannot disregard social pressures and remain in the pueblo. If they want to leave and live with strangers the rest of their lives, they can fly in the face of tradition, otherwise they have to conform.

¹¹ The most famous example is probably Simǎ Qīān's letter to his friend Rèn Ān. Qīān Hàn Shū 62.

¹² The Japanese author Mishima Yukio expressed similar ideas before he ended his life by committing suicide. See *The Japan Interpreter* No. 1, Vol. 7, 1971, *Mishima Yukio 1925 - 1970*.

people of the pre-Qín feudal states.¹³ Many of the persons mentioned are probably historical characters, but in spite of this the tales do certainly not add up to a trustworthy picture of actual conditions in those early times.

The major part of the classics in the form that we know them were written down during the Hàn dynasty.¹⁴ Many of the earlier records were destroyed or lost during the reign of the first Qín emperor. Beside the written records, however, there must have been a vast oral literature.¹⁵ From very early times stories must have been told at the courts of noblemen both for edification and entertainment. Many such tales were both well-known and widespread, in fact, "everybody under Heaven knew them".

When reassembling the lost classics of earlier times, the Hàn scholars probably included some such orally transmitted tales to be written down and thus preserved for the future. Some stories would be selected for the very reason that they supported the Hàn moral code, others would be refuted because they did not. The tales were thus chosen not because they were held to be *true*, but because they were regarded as *correct*. Through this selective process Hàn morals and Hàn ideas were projected backwards in time.

The same technique was applied by the compilers of slightly later works such as the Hàn Shǐ Wàì Zhuàn and the Liè Nǚ Zhuàn. Only selected tales of suicide preserved in the older texts reappear there, together with others from unknown sources—perhaps again orally transmitted?—and some few stories that obviously have been written in order to elucidate a certain point.¹⁶ These later

¹³ The Qín dynasty 221 – 206 B.C.

¹⁴ The Hàn dynasty lasted from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D. with a brief interruption 9 – 23 A.D.

¹⁵ Bernhard Karlgren, *On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan*, Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 32, 1926, p. 8, Note 1:—

In my opinion too little regard is generally paid to this oral transmission in the discussion of the history of the Chinese classics. The argumentation is often such as if copying of earlier written documents were only the way in which the texts were handed down – certainly a very wrong notion.

¹⁶ There are indications that make it possible to identify the latter kind of stories. Thus, for instances, women in ancient China were usually identified as "the daughter of So-and-so", "the elder sister of So-and-so" or "the wife (or some other

collections are more decidedly moral in character, and almost everything said of suicide in them fits into a strict pattern.

Not all the tales of suicide preserved in older works fit into the same pattern, for although the classics taken as a body reflect Hàn moral concepts, individual stories sometimes allow us to get glimpses of an older value system. This is especially true of the stories found in the *Zuǒ Zhuàn*, where many a recorded suicide is distinctly in disagreement with the Hàn moral code.¹⁷

The process we discern, if we compare the accounts of suicide in feudal China as they are recorded in these ancient works, is the gradual creation of a very firm formal stand. The principal features of the moral code that was the result of this process was to last for two millennia in China.

As we shall see, there were two separate bonds of loyalty which guided and restricted the conduct of any person of character in pre-modern China. One of these was common to both men and women, namely the loyalty towards their agnatic clan. A man's second loyalty was towards the lord he was serving and to his country, while the second loyalty of a woman was towards her husband and his clan.

Violations of those loyalties, even if they were committed inadvertently, let alone unconsciously, could only be expiated by suicide. Suicide was also the only solution, when somebody found that he could only meet the requirements of one of his loyalties by trespassing against the other.¹⁸

harem title) of So-and-so". When a woman is neither named nor identified in this way, there is reason to begin to suspect that the compiler made up a story himself to clarify a point for which he could find no illustration in older works.

As we shall see, some of these unidentified women are such perfect paragons of virtue as to render their lifestories completely unbelievable.

See for instance the story from *Liè Nǚ Zhuàn* 5:15 below.

¹⁷ This is but another indication that the *Zuǒ Zhuàn* was indeed written down before Hàn times.

Cf. Bernhard Karlgren, *On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan*.

¹⁸ In his analysis of the suicides found in over 1500 Chinese short stories dating from the 14th to the 20th century, Prof. Wolfram Eberhard notes that all suicides committed for the sake of loyalty are held to be honourable:—

Under *altruistic suicides* I understand suicides committed in the interest of another person or an abstract concept. The sixteen cases in this category are overwhelmingly cases of loyalty either to the state or the dynasty, or to the husband.

Loyalty to the agnatic clan was expressed in 孝 *xiào*, 'filial piety'. 'Filial piety' is a misleading translation, for the term *xiào*, as it is used in the classics, covers a complex set of loyalties. The foremost bond is between the father and his sons, especially his eldest son. This is a two-way binding, for a father should show loyalty to his son, as well as a son should be loyal to his father. A daughter was also bound by loyalty to her father, but there is no clear evidence that this loyalty was considered reciprocal. Brothers should mutually respect and support each other, and a sister was in duty bound to obey her brothers. A mother could claim loyalty from her children only in her capacity of wife of their father, and the loyalty towards her should on no account be extended to her kinsmen.

All these bonds of loyalty regulated a person's relations to the agnatic clan. A mother's loyalty towards her children, on the other hand, did not, and therefore it was not an element of *xiào*. The main emphasis in the concept of *xiào* was on the bonds that upheld the proper sacrificial line, which was the very backbone of the agnatic clan system and which should go from the father to his eldest son.

It is likely that *xiào* as we find it in the classics originated as a means to counteract other kinds of clan formation that existed in China in early times.¹⁹

It should be noticed that "clan" is used here to designate a relatively small sacrificial group offering sacrifice to the same ancestor. The highly organized Chinese clans with elaborate clan rules and well-developed internal administration came many centuries later.²⁰

All sixteen of these suicides would be judged by the authors of the *shan-shu* as justified, honourable, and not sinful.

(It is startling to find the term *altruistic suicide* here. I have deliberately avoided using current sociological categories in my work, for – as Prof. Eberhard points out – the system does not work for the concepts of suicide as they are found in Chinese literature).

Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967, Chapter 6: "Suicide in Short Stories".

¹⁹ For types of clan formation, see:

Marcel Granet, *La civilisation chinoise*, Paris 1929, I Ch. 2: "Les coutumes paysannes".

²⁰ Denis Twitchett, "The Fan Clan's Charitable Estate, 1050 – 1760" in David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (ed.): *Confucianism in Action*, Stanford 1959, 97f.

In the standard work on filial piety, the *Xiào Jīng*, loyalty to the ruler is clearly perceived as a continuation and enlargement of *xiào*. This idea is also found in an embryonic form in the *Lún Yǔ*, where Yǒuzǐ says that those who adhere to *xiào* are seldom rebellious and that people who are not rebellious never create disturbances in society.²¹

Only a man who could serve his father with honest devotion had the necessary background for loyal service to a larger community. Because of this, lack of *xiào* has been considered not only abominable but also criminal from oldest times.²² Yet the capacity for *xiào* was seen as an inborn quality, not as anything that could be acquired.²³ A man who appeared to be totally devoid of *xiào* was a misfit and nothing could be done with him, for he had no foundation for loyalty to his lord.

Loyalty to the ruler includes patriotism in the form of strengthening the ruler's position. In our tales of suicide, however, loyalty to the person in most cases seems more important than loyalty to the country.

A woman should devote her service to her husband just as a man should serve his lord. These two kinds of service were similar in essence, for they had a similar social function.

The stories that have come down to us deal mainly with the highest level of society, and the marriages we are informed about

²¹ *Lún Yǔ* I:2.

²² *Shū Jīng*, *Kāng gào*:—

The king said: "Feng, when the primary evil-doers are (thus) greatly detested, how much the more then the unfilial and the unbrotherly? . . . If we are (pitying =), kind to these, and they are not considered as offenders by us, the rulers, the norms given by Heaven to our people will be greatly brought into disorder. I say, may you speedily follow Wen Wang's (rules of) punishments, and punish these without pardon".

Translation from Bernhard Karlgren, "The Book of Documents" in *BMFEA* No 22, 1950.

²³ Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature*, New York and London 1962, p. 149:—

It should be noted, however, that in Confucian literature there is never any question as to whether children should have, or actually do have, such a deep and abiding love for their parents. As in the case of the literature of romantic love in the West, the emotion itself is taken for granted, and the only question is how it is to be guided and expressed.

are usually those that were of importance for the clan's prestige among the feudal noble families. It was the duty of a young man to leave his home forever when called to serve a ruler, just as it was the duty of a young woman to leave her home to be the wife of a ruler. Only the legal wife played an important role in this connection, and therefore we know very little of other marriages, not even of the secondary wives of the nobles.

The wife's loyalty to her husband also had its foundation in *xiào*, and a woman lacking in *xiào* could not serve her husband and his clan in the proper manner. It should be noted that the children belonged to the husband's family. Therefore the loyalty of a mother towards her children involved her husband's clan and not her father's.

Thus everybody was bound by two separate loyalties. Throughout history the Chinese have found it difficult to decide what the relative importance of the two should be. Many of the stories of suicide are attempts to clarify this point.

The loyalties discussed above are cornerstones of Confucian morals. There is also a proverbial saying 殺身(以)成仁 *shā shēn (yǐ) chéng rén* 'to kill oneself to realize humanity'²⁴ that goes back to Confucius²⁵ himself. The phrase is found in *Lún Yǔ*: 'The Master said, "Among determined knights and humane men no one would seek life if thereby he would injure humanity, but some would kill themselves to realize humanity".'²⁶ To be able to realize humanity was the very peak of virtue as Confucius conceived of it, for humanity is central in his philosophy.²⁷

Confucius thus considered self-sacrifice a virtue, and yet it is far from clear how his conception relates to the loyalties discussed above. Loyalty to one's lord, as understood in Hàn times, forbade a man to serve the enemy of a former master. Confucius, however,

²⁴ In modern usage "to die for a good cause". Cf. Huang Yen-kai, *A Dictionary of Chinese Idiomatic Phrases*, Hong Kong 1964.

²⁵ Traditional dates B.C. 551-479.

²⁶ *Lún Yǔ* 15:8.

²⁷ Wing Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton 1963, p. 16. Cf. also Wing Tsit Chan: "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept *Jen*" in *Philosophy East and West*, 4, 1955.

greatly approved of Guǎn Zhòng, who did not hesitate to enter the service of the man who had ordered the execution of his former master.²⁸

Guǎn Zhòng was a famous statesman in the state of Qí. He died in 645 B.C. and was presumably still quite well remembered in Confucius' own time.

According to his biography in the *Shǐ Jì*, which agrees with what is said of him in the *Lún Yǔ*, Guǎn Zhòng first went into the service of Prince Jiū of Qí. Prince Jiū was executed by his brother, who assumed power and was enthroned as Duke Huán of Qí. Guǎn Zhòng was thrown into prison, but was pardoned when a faithful friend recommended him for service to Duke Huán. The duke appreciated Guǎn Zhòng's ability and in due time made him his foremost councillor. Far from committing suicide or even refusing to serve, Guǎn Zhòng worked diligently for the enemy of his dead master. It was through the superior statesmanship of his councillor that Duke Huán became the hegemon among the feudal lords and succeeded in holding the threatening barbarians at bay.

When Confucius' disciples called Guǎn Zhòng's humanity in question the Master answered that Guǎn Zhòng's political ability had been of major importance to later generations. Everyone in China was still benefiting from his good government. Confucius found that one could not expect a man of Guǎn Zhòng's calibre to go and strangle himself in some obscure drain or ditch. It was an advantage to everyone that he was aware of his own extraordinary value as a statesman, otherwise China would perhaps have been under barbarian rule in Confucius' own time.

The explanation of Confucius' great regard for Guǎn Zhòng is certainly partly to be found in his reverence for good government. In turbulent times effective administration is in itself an ethical quality.

On the other hand, Confucius said that the people praised 伯夷叔齊 *bó yí shú qí*, who starved beneath Shǒuyáng.³⁰

²⁸ *Lún Yǔ* 14:17, 18.

²⁹ *Sīmǎ Qiǎn*: *Shǐ Jì*, Ch. 612.

Sīmǎ Qiǎn's dates are B.C. 1457-907.

³⁰ *Lún Yǔ* 5:23, 7:14, 16:11 and 18:8.

We are also informed that *bó yí shú qí* did not harbour resentment and had no reason to do so, for *bó yí shú qí* "sought humanity and achieved humanity".

The collocation *bó yí shú qí* occurs over and over again in the ancient texts, but the context in which they appear is always so scanty and incoherent that it does not make much sense. The four characters, taken together, seem to be the name of a single person and thus should be transliterated as Bóyí Shúqí.³¹ Commentators have split them into two names, Bó Yí and Shú Qí. This is inevitable since *bó* designates 'father's elder brother' and *shú* 'father's younger brother'. Whether it is a single person or two brothers, the hazy sayings pertaining to *bó yí shú qí* are based on legends and have furnished excellent material for developing new legends.

In the biography of Bó Yí and Shú Qí, as it is found in the *Shǐ Jì*,³² the elements of the legend found in older texts are neatly woven into a comprehensive story that supports some of the elements of Hàn morality. In the form the legend had taken by Sīmǎ Qiān's time, it mirrors the Hàn view rather than conditions in prehistoric times.

According to the biography Bó Yí and Shú Qí were sons of the ruler of Gūzhú. Although Shú Qí was not the eldest son, their father wanted to appoint him heir to the throne. Shú Qí, on the other hand, wanted to yield in favour of his elder brother for the sake of correct succession. At the same time the brothers were obliged to obey their father.

The brothers thus faced one of those insoluble dilemmas where suicide was the only way out. Only if they disobeyed their father would they be able to uphold the sacred sacrificial line.

The legend offers an ingenious explanation why these worthy men of old did not put themselves to death, although they ought to have done so. They had heard that a new ruler had risen in the West and that he "took good care of old people". This was

³¹ Cf. Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, London 1964.

In Note 1 on page 126 Waley points out that Bó Yí and Shú Qí "are always spoken of as though they were to all intents and purposes a single person".

In Mencius, however, only Bó Yí occurs.

³² *Shǐ Jì*, Ch. 611.

King Wén,³³ father of the first sovereign of the glorious Zhōu dynasty.³⁴ King Wén has always been regarded as the most virtuous of all kings and a determination to serve him would excuse the otherwise inexcusable.

Bó Yí and Shú Qí left their home country to take service under King Wén. To their disappointment it was all in vain, for King Wén had died shortly before their arrival, and his heir, King Wǔ,³⁵ was on the point of attacking the last ruler of the Yīn dynasty. The worthy brothers could have served the impeccable King Wén, but they could not serve his powerful son. King Wǔ trespassed against *xiào* when he went to war while still in mourning for his father, and furthermore the man he planned to attack was his lawful ruler.

Afterwards, when King Wǔ had conquered the Yīn, the brothers considered it unrighteous to eat the grain of Zhōu, for in their opinion King Wǔ had usurped supreme power. They did not commit suicide in protest against this grave breach of loyalty, but instead they withdrew to the lower slopes of Mount Shǒuyáng. There they tried to keep alive by collecting edible plants, but did not succeed, and in the end they died of starvation.

In the Hàn version of the legend the importance of *xiào* and loyalty to the lawful ruler is stressed in a way that supports current views. There is no eulogy on suicide, however, for Bó Yí and Shú Qí did not commit suicide in the strictest sense of the word. Twice they were in situations where suicide would have been regarded as praiseworthy and both times they simply withdrew leaving their problems behind. In the end they shunned the comforts of their own culture because they disapproved of the Zhōu king's method of assuming power. Zhōu, however, was soon to encompass "everything under Heaven", and was to be the transmitter of Chinese high culture. The brothers deprived themselves of this culture and therefore of every hope of survival. Outside the boundaries of Zhōu culture there was nothing but wilderness, starvation and death. — Was this the idea the story originally intended to convey?

³³ Traditional dates B.C. 1231–1135.

³⁴ B.C. 1122–255.

³⁵ Traditional dates B.C. 1169–1116.

Thus the only thing that can be said with certainty of Confucius' view on suicide is that he thought that a man should die rather than preserve his life, if this would injure 仁 *rén* 'humanity'. The import of this is probably only that one should not strive to preserve one's life by impure means.

Mencius'³⁶ view on self-sacrifice agrees with that of Confucius, although in Mencius' terminology it is adherence to 義 *yì* 'righteousness' rather than to humanity that may require the supreme sacrifice of a worthy man.³⁷ In a long discourse on the relative value of life and righteousness Mencius says that he loves life and wants to live, but that there is something that he values even more than life, namely righteousness. Therefore he does not presume to hold on to life at the cost of righteousness. Death, on the other hand, is something he hates. Yet there is something he abhors even more than death itself. Because of this, there are certain kinds of suffering that he may not be able to avoid, and under certain circumstances it may prove impossible to avoid death.

Mencius elevates this to the status of a universal rule. Man ardently wants life, yet there are means of preserving life that he would not use. Man detests death, yet there are ways of escaping death that he would not employ. From this—in Mencius' opinion—it may be seen that man loves righteousness even more than life.

The relative value of noble principles and life apparently occupied people's minds a great deal in early China. On another occasion Mencius was asked about the relative importance of 禮 *lǐ* 'propriety' and survival.³⁸ How should a man act, if he had to choose between starvation and breaking the rules of propriety. Although Mencius certainly regarded adherence to propriety as being of great merit, his answer reveals that he interpreted its rules as guiding norms rather than absolute directions. When faced with a problem of this kind, he says, one should weigh the importance of the factors involved in the actual situation and not regard a slight neglect of propriety as more

³⁶ B.C. 372–289.

³⁷ Mencius 6A:10.

³⁸ Mencius 6B:2.

important than life itself. On the other hand, who would twist his elder brother's arm to get a morsel of food?

Mencius was, on the whole, very cautious where questions of life and death were concerned. In one case he states explicitly that when there is a choice between dying and not dying, to die debases valour.³⁹ By this he probably meant that dying for the purpose of appearing a hero degrades the very concept of valour.

Not even when it came to self-sacrifice in order to protect inherited territory did Mencius give a definite answer.⁴⁰ When Duke Wén of Téng asked the philosopher how he should act in order to protect his small state against its powerful and aggressive neighbours, Mencius told him a story about King Tàì, one of the ancestors of King Wén. King Tàì was the ruler of Bīn. After innumerable attacks from the surrounding barbarians he realized that all his attempts to buy them off with tribute were in vain. The barbarian chieftains cared little for tribute, for what they in fact desired was land. Therefore King Tàì left Bīn, the land of his ancestors, and began to build a new capital at the foot of Mount Qí. He was, however, a benevolent ruler, and therefore the people of Bīn soon came to him in great numbers.

Duke Wén would of course be free to take this as a precedent and act accordingly, but Mencius also mentioned—seemingly without much enthusiasm—that there was an alternative. One could remain in the city and defend the land inherited from the ancestors to the bitter end as some of the inhabitants of Bīn chose to do.

Although Duke Wén was given this choice it seems obvious that Mencius favoured the example set by King Tàì and those who followed him.

It could be said that King Tàì was to Mencius what Guǎn Zhòng was to Confucius. These worthy men of old were both aware of their eminent gifts and, against odds, they created a future for themselves and those who depended on them. For both philosophers good government was in itself a proof of virtue in the rulers of the realm. If a man had had such marked success in

³⁹ Mencius 4B:23.

⁴⁰ Mencius 1B:15.

governing that even later ages profited from their rules, the virtue of such a man could hardly be questioned.

Neither Confucius nor Mencius expressly denied that it could be honourable for a man to lay down his life in defence of his country or to follow his lord in death. Nonetheless they both suggested that great achievements were more desirable than premature death, however valiant and honourable such death may appear.

It is of interest to note that the view of life held by the early Chinese philosophers was quite different from that of most Western philosophers. The deep pessimism of Western philosophy is not to be found in any philosophical school in ancient China. Chinese philosophers were of course keenly aware of the sorrows and calamities that may befall men, but they did not blame them on life as such. Tragedies and difficulties were seen as external matters that had influence over life, but were by no means equated with life. The reason why nobody in China asked the question: "Is life worth living?" seems to be that nobody ever doubted that life was indeed worth living.

The Daoist school of philosophy taught that man should accept death peacefully when it came. This certainly does not mean that life was held to be odious. In the Daoist works no exhortation to seek death can be found. To the Daoists life and death were but different aspects of the eternal Way and man should pass from the one to the other without strife and without regret.

Outside the Daoist school, however, most philosophers would agree with Mencius' statement that man loves life and abhors death. The tales of suicide offer few exceptions to this. Usually people in the stories do not kill themselves because they are weary of life—as we shall see the few exceptions deal with dishonourable suicide. Those who were praised for dying by their own hand did not listlessly cast away a worthless existence, but bravely sacrificed their treasured life. It is only this supreme sacrifice that was honoured and admired.

As we have seen, the early Confucian philosophical works contain no proof that the philosophers held that one should commit suicide for the sake of one's bonds of loyalty. Formal Confucian morals were, where suicide is concerned, inspired by stories found

in the historical records rather than by principles laid down by the great Confucian philosophers.

Although the concept of *xiào* is the cornerstone of Confucian morals, the stories dealing with men who killed themselves as a direct consequence of their adherence to *xiào* are very few. The concept should primarily serve to uphold the proper relations between father and son. If *xiào* led to the annihilation of either party it had failed to produce the desired effect.

When a man dies because of his unflinching loyalty to his father this reveals that something has gone seriously wrong within the family. Usually somebody else has offended against *xiào* so grossly and shamelessly that *xiào* is thrown out of gear and works evil instead of good.

Typical is the sad tale of Shēnshēng, the eldest son of Duke Xián of Jin, who died because of his love and respect for his father.⁴¹ Shēnshēng is a truly tragic figure who dies because of his most admirable quality, but in spite of this his behaviour could not be considered faultless.

When Duke Xián reduced the Róng barbarians to submission he took a barbarian woman, Lady Lí, captive. The lady was uncommonly beautiful and the duke made her his consort, although the divinations were unfavourable.

In the stories under consideration all kinds of strong personal attachments which are not curbed and tempered by propriety invariably lead to debasement and more often than not to total destruction. Duke Xián's infatuation with the alluring Lady Lí led him to neglect the prophecy, and no good could come of that.

The duke grew more and more fond of his barbarian wife, and ere long she gave birth to a son. Lady Lí saw in her son a way of furthering her own advancement and began to plot in order to have him elevated to heir apparent. In order to achieve this she had to dispose of Shēnshēng, Duke Xián's eldest son by his former consort, who was the one through whom the sacrificial line should continue. Cunningly the lady poisoned the duke's mind until he hated and feared his filial son, and she artfully silenced such loyal ministers as would not support her own son.

⁴¹ Guó Yǔ, Jīn yǔ 1,2.

When Shēnshēng realized what way the wind was blowing he ought to have taken action and remonstrated with his father. Shēnshēng's friends advised him to go to his father and tell the truth, but his filial devotion prevented him from doing so although the sacrificial line was at stake. To keep the line pure was important not only to the parties directly involved but also to the ancestors and to coming generations.

Finally Lady Lí tricked Shēnshēng into offering his father some sacrificial wine and meat which she had poisoned. When the duke poured a libation on the ground the ground boiled up, and when the meat was tested on a dog and a servant they both died.

Shēnshēng's loyal friends tried to persuade him to leave the realm, but Shēnshēng was unable to follow their advice. His love and devotion forbade him to impair his father's domestic happiness by accusing the beloved consort, and it was beyond him to allow any rumour of his father's weakness to be spread abroad. In his own opinion he himself was the guilty party because he had incited the disfavour of his parents. Therefore, when Lady Lí appeared before her stepson and accused him of plotting to assassinate his father in order to curry favour with others, Shēnshēng was completely defenceless and hanged himself in the ancestral temple.

This melancholy tale is not told to glorify a courageous timely suicide but to warn against the disasters caused by enchanting women. It was the fascination with such a dangerous woman that led Duke Xián to suspect his righteous heir of double dealing.

The Chinese classics do not have much to say in favour of exuberant female beauty. If we are to believe the stories, extremely beautiful women more often than not have a propensity for plotting. Even the more unobtrusive ones tend to become the centre of intrigue. Beautiful women not only cause evil, they are themselves evil through and through, and it is often stated that exceedingly beautiful women bear vicious offspring.

Lady Lí was one of these ill-omened women, and if she had achieved her ambition—in actual fact her son was killed soon after the demise of the duke—the sacrifices to her husband's ancestors would have been continued by an intruder and impostor, who, to make things worse, was the son of a barbarian mother.

In his folly the duke neglected his duties both towards his ancestors and towards his descendants. *Xiào*, however, is an active force that should not be trifled with, and when the duke failed to discharge his part of *xiào*, *xiào* ran wild and irreparably destroyed the sacrificial line.

Thus Shēnshēng's dilemma was out of the ordinary. He over-emphasized one of the elements of *xiào*, namely the love and respect for the father. In doing so he ruined the very purpose of *xiào*, which was to strengthen clan solidarity as expressed in the sacrificial line.

The concept of *xiào* was of the utmost importance for unity and concord within the clan. Because *xiào* was seen as the origin and foundation of all kinds of loyalty, the theory was that the man with the greatest capacity for *xiào* would make the most loyal minister.

If a man took service under the head of his own clan the two loyalties would have the same aim and no conflict would occur. When the theory came into being in the pre-Qín feudal society this was certainly usually the case.

When the state became centralized under the first Qín emperor, conditions radically changed. Men were from then onwards required to acknowledge the emperor as the head of state, the only lawful ruler of the realm. For the centralized state, *xiào* as an expression of clan solidarity became inconvenient.

Yet *xiào* could not be attacked openly during the Hàn, for the state was perceived as an enlarged family, a kind of super-clan, and hence loyalty to the state was an enlargement of *xiào*. Not until modern times, when the Chinese became aware of different concepts of state, was it possible to assault *xiào* directly and savagely.

Nevertheless it could be said that there have been subtle attempts—with varying success—to undermine clan loyalty throughout the history of Imperial China. All endeavours to shift the emphasis from the powerful "clan consolidation" to the meek and feeble "filial piety" are, indeed, efforts to debilitate the formidable force of *xiào*.

In the classical historical works loyalty to the state is stressed at the cost of *xiào* in several ways. Thus for instance the selection

of stories puts much emphasis on the minister who loyally served rulers of foreign states. This can certainly not mean that most great statesmen in feudal China left their home country to serve a foreign lord, but merely indicates that these men were of utmost interest in Imperial China.

In spite of this *xiào* is glorified. Men who are sufficiently staunch advocates of *xiào* to die for the principle when it came into conflict with their loyalty to the ruler, are all men of unblemished repute and great valour. Such men do not hesitate to slit their own throats in other suicidal situations. A man who decides to die for the sake of *xiào*, on the other hand, often puts off his own death until he has discharged his duty to his lord.

A filial son could not possibly serve a lord who had had his father executed. One feels that the interests of the father and his clan would have been better served if the son killed himself in order to induce his lord to change his mind and thus prevent the execution. The pattern is, however, usually as in the following story.

Zǐnán, a minister to the King of Chǔ, was unduly fond of one of his attendants and lavished official money on him.⁴² The king decided to have Zǐnán executed. Zǐnán's son was in service with the king as a charioteer, and the king was well-disposed towards him. Since the king had taken his decision to do away with his extravagant minister, tears flew down his cheeks whenever he saw Zǐnán's son. When the son was told the reason for the king's emotion he felt trapped. If he revealed the king's scheme to his father, he would be disloyal, and if he were to sacrifice his father's life, then he would be unfilial.

One wonders why he did not leave his service at this point to take service with somebody else. This, however, he did not do, and once his father had been executed there was no place for him to go. His filial piety had been impaired and there was no longer any foundation for his loyalty. Therefore he could not expect anyone to employ him any longer. Accordingly, he strangled himself shortly after the interment of his father.

In general the stories of men who took their lives for the sake of *xiào* when they were caught between the loyalties towards kin

⁴² Zuǒ Zhuàn, Xiāng Gōng 26th year.

and ruler tend to conform to a pattern. An officer in command receives orders to lay siege to a city which his father (or sometimes his son) is defending. Unhappily the officer laments that *xiao* does not allow him to follow orders, whereupon he captures the city and then commits suicide.

In rare cases similar themes are treated with great ingenuity as in the following story, that seemingly consists of one long glorification of the concept of *xiao*.

In the protracted struggle between the powerful states of Wèi and Qín the city of Guǎn had a strategic position.⁴³ The lord of Xīnlíng regarded it as imperative that the city should be taken, otherwise Qín would invade his land from that direction. Guǎn was guarded by a son of Suō Gāo, who was in the service of the lord of Ānlíng. Ānlíng was an old dependency of Wèi, and the lord of Xīnlíng took it for granted that its lord would not refuse a polite request from those in power in Wèi. He therefore sent a messenger to Ānlíng saying that the lord of Xīnlíng wanted to make Suō Gāo a high officer at his court.

The lord of Ānlíng suspected foul play and told the messenger to ask Suō Gāo in person. Suō Gāo also saw through the plot at once. He would, of course, be commissioned to attack the city of Guǎn, in which case his son would be put in the most precarious position. Consequently Suō Gāo refused to go.

The lord of Xīnlíng would not take no for an answer and ordered that Suō Gāo should be bound and brought to him. The lord of Ānlíng, however, bravely stood his ground. It was stated in the laws of Wèi, he said, that a son who killed his father and a commander who surrendered a city were not eligible for amnesty. He refused to participate in a plot that would place Suō Gāo's son in a dilemma where he would be guilty of a capital offence whatever he chose to do. There could be no reason to manacle Suō Gāo as if he had been a criminal, for he had done nothing worse than refusing to accept a high position.

When Suō Gāo heard this he went to the messenger's residence, where he cut his throat and died. This was not done in order to release his son from the threatened impasse, as perhaps one would have expected. Instead he did it to ameliorate the lord of

⁴³ Zhàn Guó Cè, Wèi 4.

Xinling's wrath that would inevitably ensue when he heard of the refusal. Suō Gāo could not bear to be the cause of endangering his lord's good relations with the powerful state of Wèi.

Thus the stalwart Suō Gāo refused to comply with a request when *xiào* forbade him to do so. His equally stalwart lord dared to brave the mighty of his time for the sake of *xiào*. Yet, when Suō Gāo cut his throat, it was out of loyalty to his lord.

For the reader's edification it should be added that the noble sacrifices of these worthy men were not in vain. When the lord of Xinling heard of it he was filled with remorse and apologized humbly to the lord of Ānling.

* *

*

Fear is my private affair, while dying
for my lord is my public duty.
Hàn Shī Wàizhuàn 1:21.

Considering that loyalty to the ruler was propagated at the expense of *xiào*, one would expect to find a selection of stories that made it absolutely clear under what circumstances a man ought to lay down his life for his lord. Surprisingly this holds good only up to a certain point.

The situations under which a man in active service commits suicide fall into several categories. Within some of these there is no doubt about the norms, in others there is considerable uncertainty and vacillation. It is obvious that more than one value-system is involved and that the Hàn scholars were undecided what the correct standpoint should be.

One of the categories pertains to a kind of "suicide" that should rather be termed "self-execution". A truly upright man would not wait for the issue of a death-warrant, if he knew that he had failed in his office. The crimes, serious and trivial, deserving of death were legion, and it was of absolutely no consequence whether they were committed inadvertently or intentionally. It was the ensuing effect of an act that mattered. If the result was bad, protestations of good intent were of no avail.

A man would kill himself for having lost a battle, because a

prisoner of war had escaped him, because he did not manage to protect a woman or child in his ward—the latter pertains to women, too—for having divulged matters of state or for being suspected of having the intention to do so.

Sometimes the reasons were but minor offences, but instead of omitting those stories, the collectors created a special story to warn people not to commit suicide for mere trifles. The story appears in several versions, with different personages and different locale.

An envoy from Qí was carrying a live goose to present as a gift to the king of Chǔ.⁴⁴ On the way the envoy had to give the goose some water, and the goose escaped. Nevertheless the envoy continued his mission and went on to Chǔ with an empty basket. In his audience with the king he explained how the goose had escaped. At first, he said, he had contemplated running away or falling on his sword, but upon consideration he had refrained. If he had killed himself, people would only have said that his lord "thought lightly of knights but honoured geese".

As usual, correct behaviour found its reward. The king so admired the envoy's versatility that he retained him as a highly honoured guest for the rest of his life.

Sometimes a man was ordered to commit suicide. In such cases the accused did not have a choice between life and death, but only between two forms of death. Self-execution was therefore usually readily and even thankfully accepted.

We know that during the Hàn era men of higher social strata "did possess a—rather doubtful—privilege, i.e. that instead of having to undergo shameful punishment at the hands of low menials, they could and often did escape suffering and shame by means of suicide".⁴⁵ What we do not know, however, is whether this form of execution had any further legal implications at an early stage.

In ancient Rome a man accused of treason would commit suicide lest his estate be confiscated.⁴⁶ It is not unlikely that a

⁴⁴ *Hán Shǐ Wàizhuàn* 10:8.

⁴⁵ A. F. P. Hulswé, *Remnants of Han Law*, Vol. 1, Leiden 1955, p. 296.

⁴⁶ Karl August Geiger, *Der Selbstmord im klassischen Altertum*, Augsburg 1888, p. 63ff.

man in ancient China in a similar way protected the rights and possessions of his kin by executing himself. When a man was publicly executed other members of his clan—in extreme cases even of his mother's and wife's clan—were sometimes put to death at the same time.⁴⁷ To judge from the stories of men who were permitted to commit suicide, nobody else was included in the sentence of death. This may have been the real reason why permission to commit suicide was received as a grace.

Whatever the legal implications may have been—if any—self-execution always had an ameliorating effect. The victims were often held in high esteem, sometimes even by the prince who had pronounced the sentence of death.

Very few of the stories of self-execution represent faithful discharge of duty as being the only important component in the loyalty to the lord. The story of Lǐ Lǐ is unusual in two respects. Firstly, he kills himself against the expressed wish of his master, and secondly, he had a purely civil status. The majority of self-executions were performed by military men, usually high officers of staff, who had failed in a military situation. Lǐ Lǐ, on the other hand, was a civil servant and killed himself because he found that he had committed an error in the management of public affairs.

When Lǐ Lǐ,⁴⁸ chief judge to Duke Wèn of Jìn, heard that an innocent man had been sentenced to death and executed, he took the whole responsibility for the error upon himself. He let himself be arrested and asked Duke Wèn to grant him death. The duke replied that the mistake was no fault of Lǐ Lǐ's but should rather be blamed on one of the inferior officers. Lǐ Lǐ insisted that the guilt rested with him as the responsible officer. The duke then pointed out that if that were so, he himself, being responsible for the entire government, should also be held guilty.

Still Lǐ Lǐ protested his guilt. Punishment had been misapplied and this was a crime punishable by death. The duke had entrusted him with the workings of the law, and now that he had failed he deserved death. Almost disgusted by the judge's zeal, the duke

⁴⁷ A. F. P. Hulswé, *Remnants of Han Law*, Vol. 1; p. 112ff: Extermination of Relatives.

⁴⁸ *Hán Shǐ Wàizhuàn* 2:20.

retorted: "That you should abandon your post, lay down your office, suffer penalty and thus be lost to the country is not what I had hoped for. Be gone at once and do not sadden my heart!" However, Lǐ Lǐ's feelings of defeat and worthlessness were so strong that he could not live with them. Despite the duke's rebuttal he fell upon his sword and died.

Allegedly Lǐ Lǐ was a man of the seventh century B.C., but nonetheless he is the Confucian bureaucrat of Imperial China making his entry on the stage.

That a man should die by his own hand, when he was guilty of a crime deserving of death, was never disputed. Nor was it called in question that a man should sacrifice himself for the ruler when he or the country was in acute peril. When a prince was in immediate danger, everyone of his retainers, from the highest officers down to his domestic servants, would give their lives for him without hesitation. At such a moment a brave and honest man would forget grudges and illtreatment and do his utmost to save the head of state.

Duke Xiāng of Qí had attracted many enemies, who were plotting to assassinate him and replace him by one of his cousins.⁴⁹ During a hunt the duke caught sight of a boar and someone said that it was one of the duke's enemies in supernatural disguise. In his anger the duke shot an arrow at the animal, but when the boar gave a howl and stood up like a man, the duke collapsed in his carriage from fear. In the fall he hurt his foot and lost his sandal. The loss of the sandal was blamed on Bì, one of the footmen, and as Bì was not able to recover it, the duke had him flogged until blood was drawn.

It is not clear why the duke got so upset and meted out such harsh punishment for the loss of his sandal. Perhaps the implication is that the possession of the shoe, which the duke had worn shortly before, would give his enemies power over him. If this is what is meant, Bì could be suspected of double dealing, when he returned without the shoe. To arouse suspicion of treachery was enough of a crime to deserve death and a flogging would be regarded as leniency. It is equally possible, however, that the flogging is mentioned in order to demonstrate that the duke had

⁴⁹ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Zhuāng Gōng 8th year.

a nasty temperament and had his faithful servants severely punished for minor mistakes.

Bì went out again—the flogging apparently took place after the return from the hunt—but at the gate he met the duke's enemies, who caught him and began to bind him. Bì stripped to show them his wounded back and assured them that he would certainly not oppose them. They believed him and when he asked to be allowed to go back in, they permitted him to do so.

In great haste Bì hid the duke and went out again and fought the rebels till they cut him down at the palace gate. Another of the duke's retainers was slain, when he tried to hold the rebels back at the foot of the stairs. Still another man lay down in the duke's bed and was stabbed before the assassins discovered that it was the wrong man. When they realized their mistake they looked around and saw the foot of the duke sticking out from his hiding place. They dragged him out and killed him.

The gate, the stairs and an inner chamber are common stages in palace fights in the classics. That the foot betrayed the duke, makes one wonder if the sandal had acquired magic power.

In a situation where the life of the ruler is threatened, honourable men would fight actively to protect their master's life. If they did not succeed it was considered honourable to kill oneself after the failure. This amounted to a self-inflicted punishment, for it was, indeed, a crime not to be able to protect the head of the state. It is also easy to rationalize one step further. A man should not serve the enemy of his lord. He should not allow the enemy to make use of the ability as a statesman or warrior that he had acquired under his former master.

In the classics taken as one body there is considerable uncertainty as to how far this should go. Although most stories are agreed that it was right in principle to die for one's ruler, some stories imply that it was unreasonable to expect a worthy and capable man do die for a scoundrel or an ignoramus.

The statesman Yàn Yīng's opinion on this point is made clear in the following story.⁵⁰ Yàn Yīng was standing outside the house, when Duke Zhuāng of Qí was murdered by Cūi Shù, with whose

⁵⁰ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Xiāng Gōng 25th year.

wife the duke had had an illicit affair.⁵¹ When Yàn Yīng was informed that his master had been murdered he remained passive. When he was asked if he would die or go into exile, he answered that he would do neither. A ruler should live and die for the altars of the land, and if he died for them his ministers should follow, because the foremost duty of a minister was towards the country. If a prince was killed when he was pursuing his private ends, as was the case with Duke Zhuāng, only his personal retainers were in duty bound to follow him. Yet the minister wept for the duke. The murderers wanted to kill him for this demonstration of loyalty but did not dare, because the people looked up to Yàn Yīng.

Yàn Yīng was later to become a famous statesman, known for his thrift and cunning. His attitude towards suicide can be said to correspond to that of Guān Zhōng, whose ability Confucius admired.

To refuse to die for an unworthy lord was not in keeping with the code of honour the Hàn scholars wanted to develop. In the later collections of stories the obligation to die for a ruler who had died a violent death is strongly emphasized.

One such story again takes as the background the murder of Duke Zhuāng. The story is very loosely attached to the tale of the murder, and it is told—maybe deliberately invented—to counteract the impression created by Yàn Yīng's refusal to die. Yàn Yīng's refusal is not touched upon, it is only said that he refused to make a covenant with the assassin.⁵²

The minister Jīng Kuǐruǐ,⁵³ we are informed, was abroad on a mission, when his lord, Duke Zhuāng of Qí was murdered. When Jīng Kuǐruǐ was informed of what had occurred he hurried towards the duke's residence in order to die for his lord. On the way his charioteer pleaded with him saying that the duke had been an unprincipled man and that nobody could be expected to follow him in death.

The charioteer thus takes the same stand as did Yàn Yīng.

⁵¹ The tale of the murder will be discussed more fully in connection with women's suicides.

⁵² *Hán Shī Wàizhuàn* 2:13.

⁵³ *Hán Shī Wàizhuàn* 8:4.

He was, of course, just a charioteer and no sound judgement of high principle could be expected from him. The opinion is thus considerably weakened by making a charioteer instead of a famous statesman hold it. As we shall see the compiler added a small sequence at the end of this story to make it absolutely clear that the charioteer's judgement was indeed unsound.

The minister refuted his charioteer's argument and said that if he had remonstrated in time and the duke had not listened to his advice he could have taken his leave with a clear conscience, but as it was he had no choice. The principle was that if one had eaten a man's food one also had to die for his cause. Therefore he hastened back and "died for the duke's cause".

The charioteer felt that if his master had to die for a bad ruler, he himself had to die for a good master and accordingly he cut his throat.

A comment to the story lauds the minister's suicide, because he died for a high principle. The charioteer's suicide, on the other hand, is not approved, for there was no reason for him to die. That the minister could be said to have a duty to stay alive for the sake of the country is of course not mentioned.

The point in this and similar stories is, indeed, to propagate unconditional loyalty to the head of state, and it is made amply clear from tales where women are on the casualty lists. In the following story, where a woman is enrolled in the struggle between *xiào* and loyalty to the ruler, family considerations are depicted as negligible.

When the Róng barbarians exterminated Gài⁵⁴ they proclaimed that those who dared to commit suicide would have their entire families wiped out. One general nevertheless attempted suicide, but was prevented from completing the act. When he returned home his wife scolded him vehemently for being alive. In her opinion it was no excuse that he had once been prevented from killing himself. He ought to have tried again and again until he succeeded. That he could not bear having his family wiped out was an extremely feeble excuse: "Wife and children are but a private affection, while serving the ruler is a public duty".

⁵⁴ Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 5:5.

The wife's final words before she committed suicide are a broadside of heavy artillery: "You have stolen your life to live dishonourably. If a person like me is ashamed, how much more ought you be? I cannot live with you concealing the shame!"

We are not informed whether the general committed suicide or not, but after all, what should the unfortunate man do? As husband and wife were buried together it seems likely that he did.

The reward for this noble sacrifice—the extermination of the general's entire family—is so extraordinary that it is startling to find it even among tales of pure propaganda. The wife was greatly admired by the Róng barbarians and her younger brother came to prominence among them through her courageous act. To act in such a way that her own clan comes to power while her husband's is annihilated is in sharp discord with a woman's duty as represented in other tales of suicide. Just to mention that the wife's family was thus rewarded seems to be an unusually direct attack on the clan system.⁵⁵

One more tale of unconditional death for an unworthy lord will be related, because it is one of the few stories in which the method of suicide is described. In general the tales show very little interest in the actual act of suicide. Suicide is more often than not reported simply as 自殺 *zì shā* 'committed suicide'. Otherwise it is mentioned only in passing that the hero hanged, drowned or stabbed himself, and very seldom are any grisly details recorded. Probably the cutting of the abdomen as in the story below was regarded as a particularly courageous way of killing oneself and therefore more honourable than other suicides. Anyhow those suicides are reminiscent of seppuku, Japanese ritual suicide.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Women's duties towards their father's and husband's clans will be discussed below.

⁵⁶ Cf. Jack Seward, *Hara-Kiri, Japanese Ritual Suicide*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo 1968, p. 29ff.

Seward (as indeed many scholars before him) regards suicide by cutting the abdomen as peculiar to the Japanese. There are, however, a few tales of suicides committed in this way in the Chinese classical literature.

Thus it is obvious that the invention of this kind of suicide can in no way be related to Zen ideas, as Seward proposes.

I do not believe, however, that the early cases related here served as models for

Unfortunately for the worthless rulers their most loyal ministers always seem to have been away when they most needed their protection. Just as Jing Kūrǔi was abroad when Duke Zhuāng was murdered, so also the faithful minister Hóng Yin had been sent on a mission, when the Dí barbarians attacked the state of Wèi.⁵⁷

The people of Wèi refused to fight for Duke Yì, when the barbarians attacked. The duke had only cared for his womenfolk and his cranes and neglected his people. The people therefore found it proper that he asked the women and the cranes to fight for him. The barbarians took the duke prisoner, killed him and ate up him completely until only the liver remained.⁵⁸

When Hóng Yin returned, he reported on his mission to the duke's liver. Having finished his report he cried aloud and wept. When the keening was finished he said: "For me as his minister the only thing to do is to die." With this he ripped himself open, removed his intestines, placed Duke Yì's liver inside himself and died.

In this story there are traits that indicate the close connection between the idea of following one's lord in death and human sacrifice at the tomb of a deceased ruler. Yet, although in the classics following in death is lauded as the highest proof of loyalty, there are strong objections to human sacrifice in the form of interment of living people with the dead ruler.⁵⁹

Japanese seppuku. There are later cases in Chinese history that are more likely to have been the immediate models.

⁵⁷ Hǎn Shǐ Wàizhuàn 7:11.

⁵⁸ One wonders if, in fact, an actual case of human sacrifice is not at the root of this tale. If this is so, it is astonishing to find that the liver should have been left. Usually the liver was the most desired part of human body in ritual cannibalism.

Cf. W. Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, Leiden 1968, p. 172.

⁵⁹ "Living interment" has been a controversial question mainly because of the dictum of Confucius which is to be found in Mencius 1A:4. Scholars of two millennia have felt that the dictum had to be interpreted as an objection to this kind of sacrifice, for if Confucius had condoned it, he would have been inhuman. That, however, is to misconstrue the problem. The question is not whether Confucius was humane but what he considered humane.

It is necessary to give the context of this problematic quotation before the quotation itself is discussed.

Mencius was discussing government with King Hui of Liáng. He asked the king

Sacrifices are undertaken in order to achieve a desired effect. Yet deliberations pertaining to sacrifice are not treated in a technical way as long as the myths behind the rites still hold the performers in their grip. The believers do not feel any need for

whether there is any difference between killing people with a sword and killing them with bad government. The king admitted that there was no difference. Then Mencius said:-

"There is fat meat in your kitchen and there are well-fed horses in your stables. Yet the people look hungry and in the wilderness there are bodies of people who starved to death. This leads wild animals to eat men. Wild animals eat each other and people despise it. The man who is the father and mother of the people, if in governing he cannot prevent that animals are led to eat men, wherein lies his parentlike care for the people? - X - This being so, how could one allow the people to starve to death?"

The passage makes good sense as it stands here, but at the - X - an enigmatic

sequence of characters is found: 仲尼曰始作俑者其無後乎為其象人而用之也 Zhōngnǐ yuē shǐ zuò yǒng zhě

qí wú hòu hū wèi qí xiàng rén ér yòng zhī yě 'Confucius said: "Those who first made wooden images, will they not be without posterity?"' Thus far the translation is obvious, but how should the eight characters following hū be interpreted?

D. C. Lau translates: 'When Confucius said, "The inventor of burial figures in human form deserves not to have any progeny"', he was condemning him for use of something modelled after the human form'.

This is certainly the best that can be made of the sequence, if it is read in context. The translation is forced, however, for the phrase *wèi qí xiàng rén ér yòng zhī* can hardly mean anything but 'they are used because they resemble human beings'.

In *LI JI*, *Tán Gōng* 2:1 the quotation reappears but in a whimsically amended and ingeniously misconstrued form. The fact that Confucius condemned those who invented the wooden images, which obviously substituted for living people, had to be explained away. Therefore in the *LI JI* Confucius is made to praise the makers of straw effigies. Those who made wooden images were, according to the same text,

not humane, for 不殆於用人乎哉 *bú dài yú yòng rén hū zāi*

'is this not running the risk that people are used?'

Here it would seem, as if the compiler had read the phrase *wèi qí xiàng rén ér yòng zhī* as if the character *zhī* referred back to *rén*. An interpretation of this kind is grammatically impossible but morally correct. It has also well served its purpose, and for two millennia scholars East and West have, in fact, interpreted the phrase as if it said *wèi qí xiàng rén ér yòng rén* 'people are used because they (= the wooden images) resemble men'.

We may take it for granted, however, that Confucius did not blame the makers

verification of their beliefs, because they know without a fraction of doubt that the myths are true.⁶⁰ Nobody would dare to discontinue the sacrifice lest the desired effect should cease. Once doubt is present the discussion of the sacrifices can be brought from the formal level to the technical and thereby it is made possible to argue their utility.

Archaeological finds provide indications that doubt may have

of wooden images because the dolls led people to think of interring living people. The inhabitants of pre-Qin China did not need to be reminded of the practice of burying retainers and women with a deceased prince.

When considered in isolation the phrase *wèi qī xiàng rén ér yǒng zhī* is more likely to be part of Confucius' utterance. If this is so, then it is a dependent clause which lacks the main clause and the *yě* at the end would be a later addition. The translation would then be: 'Confucius said: "Those who first made wooden images, will they not be without posterity? Images are used because they resemble human beings, . . ."'

This translation does not fit into the rest of the passage as it is rendered above, but then the sequence of characters does not fit into the original text either. Either the quotation has been cut or it has been inserted into the text in order to suggest that Mencius equated interment of living men with drastic food shortages caused by bad government.

As will be shown in this article the official morality in Hàn times took a strong stand against interment of the living with the dead. It seems likely that the opponents of this new-fangled idea backed up their argument with a quotation from Confucius. The Hàn moralists seem to have tried to counteract the inconvenient quotation both by shrewdly inserting it in a mutilated form into the Mencius text and by misconstruing it as in the *Li Ji*.

By such means Confucius was enrolled on the right side in the moral struggle and the unfortunate quotation was converted into a support for those who were endeavouring to abolish the sacrifice.

It is tempting to conclude the saying: ". . . but the wooden images have no life, how then could they ensure posterity?" This is, of course, sheer conjecture, but it is well in keeping with the preceding question: "Those who first made wooden images, will they not be without posterity?" The question suggests that Confucius deplored the invention because he considered the use of puppets instead of living people as so grave a breach of ritual that it endangered posterity.

⁶⁰ Cf. Søren Holm, *Mythe og Symbol*, Festskrift udgivet af Københavns Universitet, Copenhagen 1971, p. 46:—

The Myth has come into existence through vision or intuition. Its contents are obviously true for the maker of the myth. It *must* have been like that. There is no need for further verification, because there is faith. In the mythical stage there was no reason to distinguish between knowledge and belief, for there was nothing called doubt.

(Translated from the original Danish).

begun to set in during the Zhōu dynasty, although it was to last for centuries before the habit vanished completely. Human sacrificial victims in great numbers were buried at the funerals of kings during the Shāng dynasty. The tradition was continued throughout the Zhōu dynasty, but the number of victims seems to have declined considerably.⁶¹

Consideration for the victims was used as an argument in the debate against human sacrifice. It is, however, most unlikely that the tradition was discontinued because people suddenly began to take pity on the victims. Compassionate people had certainly always taken pity on them, shuddered at their wailings, perhaps tried to diminish their sufferings or done their best to compensate the chosen ones in different ways before the fateful day.⁶²

If, indeed, commiseration with the victims had played any decisive part in the abolition of the sacrifices, interment of living men under other circumstances would have been debated simultaneously. This was certainly not the case, and human sacrifices in connection with the foundation of important constructions such as bridges and big buildings were undertaken as late as 1000 A.D.⁶³

Religious rites are not discontinued until they are regarded as either harmful or of absolutely no use to the community, the community of the *living* that is. When living people were interred with the dead it was in order to serve the dead so that they in their turn would do their utmost for their descendants.

Since suicide was lauded as an act of loyalty, it seems reasonable to assume that the strong stand taken against the interment of living people was another argument in the same debate. Can participation in the rite have been seen as an act of the utmost

⁶¹ Magdalene von Dewall, *Der Gräberverband von Wu-kuan-t's'un/Anyang*, *Oriens Extremus* 7, 1960 p. 129ff. William Watson, *China before the Han Dynasty*, pp. 69f and 126f. Kwang-chih Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, London 1968, pp. 187 and 215.

⁶² An excellent description of the reactions of the parties concerned in the interment of a living man is given in Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest China*, Cambridge, Mass. 1947, p. 433: "The burying alive of a Lo-lo leper".

⁶³ W. Eberhard, *Folktales of China*, London 1965, p. 231, Note 60.

loyalty to the clan? However reasonable such an assumption may appear, it can hardly be substantiated by evidence found in the classics.⁶⁴ The only thing that can be said with certainty is that there is clear evidence of an older value system—as would be expected most of those cases are found in the *Zuǒ Zhuàn*—and that this value system is repudiated in most of the classics.

If no move was made against the sacrifice on the ground that it was injurious to the state, then the line of attack would be that the sacrifice was of no value. Doubt as to the utility of burying live people may have set in when larger areas were brought under control of the representatives of the high culture. Closer contacts with non-Chinese tribes were established, and the Chinese would have noticed that some tribes had other burial rites and thrived all the same.⁶⁵

Whatever the reason may have been, we know that sometime in the centuries before our era the sacrifice of living men with their master was brought from the Trager-Hall formal level and set under technical debate.

Mòzǐ's⁶⁶ refutation of the rite is of a decidedly technical nature. He complained that dozens or even several hundreds of people were chosen to accompany a Son of Heaven at his demise, while from a few up to some dozens were sacrificed with an officer or a high minister. Mòzǐ hated wastefulness in any form. He objected to lavish sacrifices in kind at funerals because they were a waste of valuables, and to human sacrifices because they were a waste of manpower.

Mòzǐ's objections indicate that doubt had already set in before the unification of China. They can hardly be refuted unless the

⁶⁴ Some stories dealing with the interment of living women with their deceased husbands justify the assumption that living interment was considered an act of loyalty to the clan.

⁶⁵ Cf. W. Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, Leiden 1968, p. 466.

Although I agree with Prof. Eberhard that the abolition of the sacrifice may well have depended on a culture meeting, I find it hard to believe that "Confucius recommends the (Tungus) straw figures because they have no inner relationship to burying live people".

⁶⁶ Mòzǐ 25. Mòzǐ lived during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., but the exact dates are unknown.

whole work is rejected, for they are well in keeping with the sentiments he expresses.

Since it was the stand against the sacrifice that eventually was victorious many attempts have been made to interpret tales that have leaked through the filter of Hàn learning in such a way as to support this view.

This is also the case with Ode No. 131, which has been regarded as a testimony of very early disapproval of the sacrifice:

"Crosswise (fly) the yellow birds, they settle on the jujube trees;
who follows prince Mu? Tsi-kü Yen-si;

now this Yen-si, he is the champion among a hundred men;

when he approaches the pit (grave), terrified is his trembling;

that blue Heaven, it destroys our good men;

if we could redeem him, his life would be worth that of a hundred men.⁶⁷

The ode has two more stanzas with minute variations. The main difference is that the hero has a new designation in each stanza, 子車奄息 Zījū Yānxī in the first, 子車仲行 Zījū Zhòngháng in the second and 子車鍼虎 Zījū Zhēnhǔ in the third stanza.

The ode is interpreted as a lament over the death through living interment of three brothers of the Zījū family. (If perhaps the three stanzas deal with one and the same person giving him a different designation in each stanza, the tradition would of course soon split him up into three brothers, once his identity was forgotten.) The brothers followed Duke Mù of Qín in death in 621 B.C., at which occasion no fewer than 177 persons are said to have been interred with the ruler.⁶⁸

It is difficult to see that the poem could be a protest against the sacrifice as such. It does not express any grief over the other 174 victims, but is merely lamenting the loss of the three brothers,

⁶⁷ Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, Stockholm 1950. Ode No. 131.

⁶⁸ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Wén Gōng, 6th year relates the sad story of the unlucky brothers and then reads us a long moral lecture in the best Confucian style.

who were all valiant and worthy men. Instead it seems as if the rite still had its full occult significance. It was Heaven that requested the offering, therefore redemption was impossible.

The characters 惴惴其慄 *zhuì zhuì qí lì* here rendered as 'terrified is his trembling' is an expression of the utmost horror. As it stands in the poem, *qí* can be interpreted as having a direct reference to the victim. The phrase could, however, also be taken as a more general expression of terrified shuddering. It does not seem likely that a man who went to his death with chattering teeth would have been considered the equal of a hundred men, and his demise would hardly have been celebrated in an ode.⁶⁹

That live burial is constantly referred to in the classics is in itself enough to prove that the rite could not have been forgotten in pre-Qin China as later commentators will have us believe.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ For obvious reasons we know almost nothing of the actual state of mind of voluntary sacrificial victims, when the moment of death is approaching. Reports of eyewitnesses are not very many, and the cases where a reliable witness has had an opportunity to speak to the victim are very rare indeed.

The following summary of an eyewitness report is from Upendra Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India*, Delhi 1963, p. XIII.

In 1822, a European officer of the British Government witnessed a religious suicide in India. A young man threw himself down from a high rock as a sacrifice to Kala Bhairava. The officer had ample time to try to dissuade the youth from his design but it was of no avail. As the officer stayed throughout all the preparations and the actual sacrifice, he noted the reactions of the victim. The youth, it would seem, acted as calmly and collectedly as if he had been preparing to go on a trip to the neighbouring village. From the top of the rock he bade farewell to the onlookers and then "descended in a most manful leap".

It is disconcerting to notice that even the levelheaded civil servant seems to have received some kind of moral edification from the nauseating performance he had tried so hard to prevent. He finishes his report: "Instant death followed this descent of ninety feet, and terminated the existence of this youth, whose strength of faith and fortitude would have adorned the noblest cause, and must command admiration when feelings of horror have subsided. Thus closed the truly appalling scene".

⁷⁰ Strangely enough the Chinese view of their own early culture was at first accepted by European scholars. Recent research gives a different picture of life in early China.

Eduard Erkes says in "Menschenopfer und Kannibalsmus im Alten China", *Erdball* 1, p. 1:—

"Man hat sich bis vor nicht langer Zeit von der Religion der Chinesen, besonders von der des chinesischen Altertums, recht sonderbare Vorstellungen gemacht. Man

Conspicuously often, however, the stories limit themselves to a discussion of the rite, while only very few stories mention live burial as an accomplished fact.

From the written evidence preserved to us we may conclude that the idea of having company in the nether world had no small attraction to people in those early days. In one case a promise to be buried with the ruler is used to gain favour. If nobody believed in a continuation of life with full possession of all one's senses in the nether world this story would be completely pointless.

A favourite of the King of Chǔ⁷¹ was once warned by a resourceful minister that he had no real merit that could secure him the king's favour for good. The favourite's position, the minister said, would be in danger as soon as the king lost interest in his person. The minister therefore advised the young man to make an offer to be interred with the king, thereby endearing himself to his lord. The favourite realized that the advice was good but waited several years for a suitable opportunity to make his proposal. He saw his chance when after a day's unusually thrilling and rewarding hunt the king exclaimed: "Oh, what joy today's excursion has been. Æons hence, with whom shall I rejoice like this?" The favourite assured the king that he could think of no greater pleasure than to go before his lord to the Yellow Springs to screen him from the ants.

We are not informed whether the favourite ever had to keep

hat im allgemeinen geglaubt, sie fast ganz als symbolischen Kultus affassen zu müssen und ihr sogar so wesentliche Elemente wie eine Mythologie und ein Priestertum abstreiten wollen. Heute nun wissen wir, dass dem keineswegs so ist, sondern dass die Religion der alten Chinesen sich in nichts von der anderer Völker auf entsprechender Kulturstufe unterschieden hat; es gibt wohl keinen primitiven Zug, den wir nicht auch für die chinesische Vorzeit irgendwie aufzeigen könnten. So hat auch das chinesische Opferwesen keineswegs immer die symbolischen Formen des späteren Kultus gezeigt, sondern ist ursprünglich ebenso realistisch, blutig und roh gewesen, wie es auf primitiven Stufen zu sein pflegt. Auch das für die Chinesen – wie ja gelegentlich auch für andere Kulturvölker – gern bestrittene Menschenopfer ist sogar in verhältnismässig später Zeit, als China bereits eine hohe Kulturstufe erklommen hatte, noch vorhanden gewesen, und der in der Regel mit ihm verbundene Kannibalismus ist wenigstens noch andeutungsweise zu erschliessen.

⁷¹ Zhàn Guó Cè, Chǔ 1.

his promise, but during the king's lifetime it paid off very well. It was the immediate cause of the favourite's enfeoffment as lord of Ānlíng.

The king's exclamation indicates that he believed in an active world-like life after death. Exactly what the prevalent opinion on conditions after death was in early China is not clear. There can, however, hardly be any doubt that the common view was that the dead had some power of perception and even that they were aware of the actions of those left behind.⁷²

It is therefore somewhat astonishing to learn that a widowed queen should have desisted from having her lover interred with her for the reason that the dead have no power of perception.⁷³ The queen was ill and felt her end approaching. She asked to have her favourite buried with her, and in his distress the favourite asked a friend to intervene on his behalf. The friend made the queen admit that she did not believe that there was any consciousness after death. In a sophisticated and rather academic monologue the friend pointed out to the queen that there could be no reason to have the beloved one buried with a dead body that would be unaware of his company. On the other hand, the argument continues, the deceased king would have good reason to harbour resentment against his queen, if he were aware of her actions after his death. The queen realized that her interlocutor was right and gave up the plan.

Probably all stories where someone is dissuaded from having company in death are meant to work, presumably also did work, towards the abolition of living interment. Still the argumentation in the above story is unexpected, if it was meant as a general protest against the sacrifice. Objections to live burial on the grounds that the dead have no consciousness would be totally ineffective in a society that held different beliefs.

On the other hand, the protests of an earlier spouse could be relevant only if a widow requested company in the afterlife. A man was entitled to more than one wife, and if his legal wife predeceased him, there was nothing to prevent him from remar-

⁷² Cf. Bernhard Karlgren, *Religion i Kina. Antiken*. Stockholm 1964, Ch. II, "Tro och kult under storkungadömet och feodalepoken".

⁷³ Zhàn Guó Cè, Qín 3.

rying. There does not seem to have been any tradition for interment of men with dead women either, and all other stories of living interment deal with men who follow their lord and women who follow a man. As we shall see, the man whom the women follow is usually, but not always, their husband.

Another tale where the victim presumably is forcibly interred with his dead master is of special interest for different reasons.⁷⁴ Many of the stories dealt with here possess artistic qualities, but in this story it is particularly easy to demonstrate deliberate artistic design.

The story is built up with meticulous care, and its effects are enhanced by the use of sharp contrasts. There can be no doubt that here we have a sample of early fiction, and it is reasonable to assume that this tale is part of a storyteller's repertoire.

The tale begins with a dream of ill omen. Once the marquis of Jin dreamt of a fearful, threatening ghost. Disturbed by the nightmare the marquis next morning had a shamaness summoned from the mulberry fields⁷⁵ to interpret the dream. She took the dream to mean that the marquis would not taste the new crop.

Soon afterwards the marquis fell ill, and when the illness reached a critical stage a famous doctor was sent for from the faraway state of Qín.

Thus two people were consulted. One was an illiterate "wise woman" of the local community brought in from the nearby fields. The other was a learned physician, a doctor of repute who was summoned from the world's end at considerable expense.

Just before the doctor arrived the marquis had another dream. He dreamt that his own illness had taken the form of two boys, and these boys discussed whether the famous doctor would be able to hurt them or not. The more confident one said that if they took up their abode above the diaphragm but below the heart of the patient, the doctor could not attack them without killing the marquis. Therefore they had nothing to fear.

⁷⁴ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Chéng Gōng 10th year.

⁷⁵ The characters 桑田 are usually rendered as a placename Sāngtián. Whether they denote a place or not, the point is that the shamaness was to be found just outside the palace gate.

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When the doctor examined the patient he said that the illness was located above the diaphragm but below the heart and that therefore there was no cure for it. The marquis was deeply impressed by the doctor's knowledge and rewarded him handsomely before he dismissed him.

In spite of the learned doctor's prognosis, which had provided him with such a substantial reward, the marquis slowly recovered. Six month later he had regained his health, and as it was harvest time he asked for a sample of the new crop. While the grain was being prepared, the local shamaness was called in from the mulberry fields. The courtiers showed her the food being prepared for the marquis and then killed her as a punishment for her incorrect prognostication. A moment later, however, just as the marquis was about to taste the food, he felt an urge to relieve himself. He went to the privy, fell into it and died.

Thus the learned doctor was rewarded for his skill, although all his fine theories were put to shame, when the marquis recovered his health. The shamaness, on the other hand, was put to death just before her intuitive knowledge was proved right. The marquis died a sudden and completely unexpected death by a fall into the privy, just at the point where everybody had stopped worrying about his consuming illness. The contrasting effects are thus very prominent throughout this part of the tale. A similar device is employed in a tragicomical sequel to the story.

At the court there was a servant who had a beautiful dream on the morning of the marquis's fatal accident. He dreamt that he was carrying his master to heaven on his back. In the middle of that same day he had to carry the dead body on his back out of the privy. Later the hapless servant was interred with his deceased master.

The only piece of information this story adds to our knowledge of living interment in ancient China is that people spoke of it even in jest. The hideous contrast between dreaming of carrying the marquis to heaven and having to carry him out of the privy is crudely comical even today. It would, however, certainly be incorrect to assume that people in ancient China treated human sacrifice lightly because they were able to joke about it. Man has, and probably always has had, the ability to laugh at that which he fears most.

This is one of the few longer stories in classical Chinese literature that does not seem to have any moral at all. It has certainly been preserved on account of its artistic qualities, which happen to be easily detectable. Otherwise it is extremely difficult to predict exactly which stories would be sufficiently interesting or amusing to be regarded as literature worth preserving by members of a culture other than one's own.⁷⁶ In dealing with very ancient stories one should bear in mind that they may possess literary qualities that we are now unable to appreciate. These literary qualities may well have been the deciding factor in the preservation of other stories in the Chinese classics.

In the last category of suicides for the sake of loyalty to the ruler to be dealt with here, nearly all the tales have distinct artistic qualities. There are, however, indications that their literary value is not the only reason why they have been preserved. The heroes of these stories are warriors and statesmen, who left their homes, often also their native states, to go in search of a lord. Many of these men were, if the stories are to be believed, highly able men who came into prominence in their new surroundings. So much attention is paid to these itinerant statesmen and warriors that if the classics are taken to be at all representative of

⁷⁶ Cf. Charles F. Hockett, *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, New York 1964, Ch. 63.

Professor Hockett most aptly illustrates the difficulty of appreciating the literary taste of other cultures by quoting an English translation of an incomprehensible, yet strangely fascinating, American Indian tale:—

Kwatyat caught sight of two girls. "Whose daughters are you?" said Kwatyat to the two girls. The girls did not tell him who their father was. Many times did Kwatyat ask them who their father was, but they would not tell. At last the girls got angry. "The one whose children we are", said they, "is Sunbeam". For a long time the girls said this.

And then Kwatyat began to perspire because of the fact that their father was Sunbeam. Kwatyat began to perspire and he died. Now Kwatyat was perspiring and he swelled up like an inflated bladder, and it was because of the girls. Now Kwatyat warmed up and died. He was dead for quite a little while, and then he burst, making a loud noise as he burst. It was while he was dead that he heard how he burst with a noise.

As Prof. Hockett points out, this particular story could just as well be told in the original Nootka for all the sense the translation makes to people outside that community.

the actual conditions in pre-Qín China, it would have to be assumed that a considerable portion of the society was constantly on the move. This can, of course, not have been the case. Most influential and powerful men certainly served in their native states, and there must be some other reason why the Hàn scholars chose to preserve so many stories of men who served under strangers.

There is a broad variety of themes within this category. Some of the stories deal with superb statesmanship, some with warfare and strategy, and others are simple tales of adventure, honour and revenge. The heroes of the tales cannot be classified in any way. They belong to all strata of society,⁷⁷ and the services they are able to offer their chosen masters are of various kinds. Anything may be found from shrewd political planning and military prowess down to nothing but a promise to die for the master if need be.

Many of the stories in this category are long and told in elaborate detail. Several of the personages are delineated with such care and consistency as to become lifelike. The personalities of the heroes, however, vary greatly, so that they cannot be classified as belonging to any particular type.

In all this diversity, the defining element, a man in search of his lord, is the one obvious factor that all the stories have in common. The only variation of this common theme is that we sometimes find a lord in search of his man.

That so many stories elaborating this specific theme have been selected for preservation, seem to indicate that loyal service under a stranger was of considerable interest to the Hàn scholars who assembled the classics. This stands to reason, for it was certainly imperative for the centralized government to propagate the idea that a man's foremost loyalty was not necessarily to the leading family in his home country.

That this is the real reason for the preservation of these tales

⁷⁷ Cf. James J. Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, London 1967, p. 2ff.

The term "knight-errant" chosen by Prof. Liu is misleading. He endeavours to draw similarity with the European knight-errant who driven by religious fervour "roamed around the country and used force to right wrongs" (p. XII). Prof. Liu's delimitation of his own work seems to prevent him from discovering that the lord-servant relationship is a prominent factor in the older stories he translates.

is made even more probable by the fact that the stories, taken as a body, provide us with nothing less than a definition of rulership.

In tales relating to pre-Imperial China one would expect to find that loyalty was due primarily to the head of the ruling family of one's native country. If the heroes of our stories had taken birthright as the criterion of true lordship, however, they would certainly not have been seeking a lord.

The tales deal with war-torn times, where both states and individuals had to struggle hard for survival. One might therefore expect that the qualities men sought for in a true lord would be courage and military skill. However, military prowess matters little more than hereditary rights for the men who were seeking a lord to attach themselves to. Bravery and skill in military matters were certainly laudable qualities in any man, but they did not in themselves make a man a true lord.

Instead the most important quality of all in a good ruler was, according to our stories, the ability to judge men. Over and over again it is stated that the one who can employ worthy men is fit to be the ruler of the people. If a ruler had this ability—which in the stories is of an almost supernatural character—he would be able to use each and every man in such a way that all his skills, whether evident or hidden, would appear to the greatest advantage. Once a ruler was known to possess this mystical ability, men of worth would be attracted to his service.

Most commendable of all was the ruler who was able to recognize a man of honour even if the latter appeared in disguise and in lowly surroundings where worthy men were not usually sought. A truly pre-eminent ruler should thus be able to trace a hero to his hiding place and to recognize superior ability and valour at the first glance. When singling out a man he wanted to employ the ruler was not masterful or bidding, on the contrary his whole attitude was one of humble admiration and patient expectation.

Once a ruler had found a worthy man a peculiar relationship developed between the two. When the worthy was a swordsman considerations of state played a very inferior role in this particular kind of relationship. It was primarily a man-to-man relationship,

where the ruler would never waver in his humble admiration for the illustrious warrior. The hero would first test the honesty and patience of his master-to-be in all possible, often humiliating, ways. If the ruler was found to be sufficiently appreciative, the hero would finally swear him allegiance, expressly or implicitly. The valiant man, who had thus been offered friendship and trust by a lord, would feel that there was someone who knew his worth, and "a warrior dies for the one who understands him, just as a woman beautifies herself for the one who takes delight in her".⁷⁸

An attachment of this kind shed great honour on both the lord and his follower, but still it was decidedly a one-way relationship. The hero might well test his master in several ways, but in the end he was the one to fight for his master's cause. When the time came he would be the instrument of the revenge that his lord was burning to get. — Personal revenge is a common theme in these stories. — He was the one to blot out the disgrace that made his lord toss and turn during sleepless nights. Eventually he would have to give his life for his master without hesitation or regret. The master was certainly not expected to reciprocate. He would only pay for this extreme loyalty by keeping the hero as a favoured retainer or, as in the following story, simply by giving expression to his high esteem.

At an audience in the Hàn state Yán Sùì was publicly insulted by a minister.⁷⁹ He made an unsuccessful attempt to slay his opponent, who was an influential personage, and Yán Sùì had to flee the state. He went in search of someone who was brave enough to assist him in taking revenge on the minister. At last he found Niè Zhèng, a daring man, who had gone into hiding as a dog-butcher to avoid one of his own enemies.

The dog-butcher's profession was the most despicable of all, but Yán Sùì knew that Niè Zhèng was his man and associated with him despite his lowly condition. To show his humble ap-

⁷⁸ This is one of the pet phrases of the men who did not hesitate to sacrifice themselves for their chosen lords. With slight variations it is found in several stories, and one wonders if perhaps the stories are made up to illustrate a proverbial saying.

⁷⁹ *Shi Ji*, Ch 86.

preciation he often feasted Niè Zhèng and his mother and even offered a substantial amount of gold to the aged woman. Niè Zhèng refused to accept the offer, and Yán Sùi took good care not to press the point. Soon it became obvious that Yán Sùi had an ulterior motive. Without knowing what the motive might be, Niè Zhèng excused himself, saying that he could not accept to undertake any dangerous task for anyone as long as his mother was still alive.

The concept of *xiào* is not prominent in this kind of stories. The reference to *xiào* in its weakened form is somewhat unexpected here, for, as will be demonstrated later, when *xiào* is mentioned at all, it usually plays a very different role in the stories of men who went in search of a lord.

When the old mother died, the story continues, Niè Zhèng remembered that Yán Sùi had once recognized him for his true value and had honoured him regardless of his lowly position. He therefore went to Yán Sùi and declared his readiness to undertake whatever task was in store for him.

Yán Sùi confided to Niè Zhèng his ardent longing for revenge on the Hàn minister who had once insulted him. This minister was an uncle of the Duke of Hàn. To attempt to assassinate a man in such high position was dangerous, and Niè Zhèng was free to choose his own followers. Niè Zhèng nevertheless decided to go alone in order not to endanger the enterprise by letting others into the plot.

When Niè Zhèng arrived in Hàn, his master's enemy was attending a well-guarded meeting. Niè Zhèng saw that the murder could be accomplished only at the peril of his own life, but this was of small consequence to him. He rushed forward and stabbed his victim, wounded the duke and slew several tens of the duke's retainers. Having done his cruel deed he turned his rage towards his own person. Before anyone could prevent him he skinned his face, blinded his eyes and disembowelling himself he died.

Niè Zhèng's violent ferocity, his disdain of death and his contempt of his own body are elements which belong to tales of adventure. It could have been assumed that this was nothing but a tale of heroism, if the ruler-subject theme had not been

elaborated in detail, and if the story had not had this theme in common with a great number of other stories.

That dying for one's true lord grants imperishable honour is further emphasized in a sequel to this tale.

When Niè Zhèng had died his heroic death his body was exposed in the market-place of Hàn, but nobody had the least inkling of who he might be. When Niè Zhèng's elder sister heard of the heroic deed she concluded that the man must be her younger brother.

Since she was Niè Zhèng's only relative she felt in duty bound to give a name to the mutilated body so that posterity would know of her brother's incomparable bravery. She therefore left her home to go to identify the suicide. When she came to Hàn and found that the exposed body was, indeed, that of her brother, she cried aloud: "This is my younger brother Niè Zhèng from Shēnjīng village in Zhǐ!" Then she killed herself and sank down beside the body of her brother.

The sister thus died an heroic death, in fact, she died the death of a man. Her death enhances the effect of her brother's deed, and he in his turn died for his lord. Equally important is that she died for the sake of a junior member of her own clan, presumably leaving husband and children behind. In this her action is in disagreement with the women's moral code. — That Niè Zhèng is a younger brother is no coincidence. As we shall see below, the relationship between elder sister and younger brother has a specific significance.

In this and similar stories it is the master's understanding and unswerving faith in the bravo's courage that brings forth the heroic deed. Often the swordsmen who have been singled out as retainers are depicted as bragging swashbucklers, held to be nothing but pampered parasites by other courtiers. This stresses the uniqueness of the ruler's ability to judge men. He and only he is able to detect and develop the hidden worth in men whom others regard as mere blackguards.

Like the warriors, the ministers who went in search of a lord were well aware of their own incomparable merits. In order to develop their faculties as statesmen they had to encounter a lord who made their capacities flourish.

Sometimes a minister whose hopes to win recognition for his ideas had been frustrated time after time, would seek oblivion in death. Most celebrated of these is the Chǔ poet Qū Yuán, who gave vent to his grief in a long poem, *Lí Sāo*.⁸⁰ Qū Yuán knew that he alone was clean in a muddy world, and that he alone was sober while everybody else was drunk. In other words, he alone was honest while all rival ministers were insincere knaves, only his ideas were right and sound while other ministers led the ruler towards disaster. Qū Yuán, utterly disillusioned with the affairs of the world, embraced a boulder, flung himself into a river and thus ended his life.

A man seeking a lord would know his true master by the effect the encounter had on himself. Whether he had served someone else or whether others offered him more favourable conditions was of no consequence. Only once in his life could a man meet a lord who answered all his needs, only one man could be his true lord, and only to him would he give his loyalty.

Yù Ràng⁸¹ had already served two masters, when he found his true lord, Earl Zhī. He did not hesitate to serve the earl, who had annihilated his former masters and their families. When the earl in his turn was killed, however, Yù Ràng dedicated his life to avenging his lord.

No personal suffering was too great, and he mutilated himself in order to be taken for a convict labourer. In this disguise he hid in the enemy's privy and waited for a chance to assassinate him. His attempt failed and he was dragged out. The target of the murderous scheme, however, pardoned the would-be assassin because of his valour and unflinching loyalty.

Yù Ràng could not live under the same sky as his true lord's murderer and did not give up his attempts to avenge him. Family and friends meant nothing to him any longer. He smeared his body with fresh lacquer, which causes a distorting and extremely painful skin disease, removed hair and eyebrows, and finally he ate charcoal to distort his voice and thus make himself completely unrecognizable.

⁸⁰ Qū Yuán's biography is found in *Shǐ Jì*, Ch. 84. *Lí Sāo* is the first poem in *Chǔ Cí*.

⁸¹ *Shǐ Jì*, Ch. 86.

Transformed in this hideous way he hid under a bridge which the enemy was to cross on a tour. The horses shied, however, and also this attempt failed. Again Yù Ràng had to face his enemy.

Sad at heart the enemy asked why he strove so eagerly to kill him, when he had made no move to avenge his earlier masters. In Yù Ràng's heart there was no doubt as to who was his true lord. "When I served Fǎn and Zhōngháng (his former lords)", he said, "they treated me as an ordinary man and therefore I requited them as an ordinary man would. Earl Zhī, on the other hand, treated me as a hero, and therefore I requite him as a hero should."

Before Yù Ràng committed suicide, he requested that the enemy's cloak should be handed over to him so that he could strike at it and take at least a symbolic revenge. The request was granted in recognition of Yù Ràng's laudable sense of honour. The hero drew his sword, leapt three times as an expression of grief, cried out loud and struck at the garment. "Now I can requite Earl Zhī", he said, and with this he fell upon his sword and died.

As has been mentioned above, the concept of *xiào* plays a secondary, yet significant, role in the stories now under consideration. When *xiào* is alluded to at all, it is often the man who ignores the immediate requirements of *xiào* who comes into prominence. In the following story loyalty to the ruler is by no means a natural extension of *xiào*. Instead *xiào* is the driving force behind the hero's inextinguishable hatred to the ruler of his native state. It is *xiào* that forces him to seek a lord in a foreign state in order to wage war against his own country.

When Wǔ Zǐxū,⁸² a man from the state of Chǔ, went to seek a ruler, it was in order to avenge the execution of his father and elder brother. The father was first imprisoned, falsely accused of plotting against the king. Wǔ Zǐxū and his brother were sent for. Only if they presented themselves at the court would their father's life be spared. The brothers realized that their father was already doomed. Still the elder brother went to the royal court in an attempt to save his father's life. The king broke his word and both father and son were put to death.

⁸² Shǐ Jì, Ch. 66.

Wǔ Zǐxū fled the state and after several adventures he came to the state of Wú and took up service under King Liáo. It was while he was in the service of King Liáo that he encountered the man who was to become his true lord in Prince Guāng, the future King Héliú.

Although there was still no ruler-minister relationship between them, the two men almost immediately got a clear perception of each other's capabilities. When Wǔ Zǐxū used a border dispute as an excuse to advise the king to attack Chǔ, Prince Guāng warned the king that Zǐxū's sole aim was to take revenge for the execution of his family members. The prince thus had a profound understanding of Zǐxū's secret thoughts already at this early stage, and he clearly saw his potential value. A man of Zǐxū's calibre was immensely valuable for the one who could use him, but he was also a threat when attached to someone else, therefore his schemes had to be counteracted.

Simultaneously Wǔ Zǐxū perceived that Prince Guāng had hidden ambitions and had a presentiment that the prince was the lord he had been seeking. For this reason Zǐxū retired from service and took up farming in the countryside. He did not enter service again until the king had been assassinated on Prince Guāng's instigation and the prince had been enthroned as King Héliú.⁸³

From then on the fates of these two men were intertwined. Following his minister's advice the king was able to strengthen his country and the Wú state became increasingly powerful. When Wú was strong enough to attack Chǔ, Wǔ Zǐxū was able to take at least a symbolic revenge. The ruler who had ordered the execution of Zǐxū's father and brother was dead, but his body was exhumed and publicly flogged.

Through a perfect cooperation of ruler and minister the state of Wú reached the height of its power. Some neighbouring states were brought to submission, others were kept in awe.

As soon as this mystical symbiosis came to an end through the death of King Héliú, however, the decline of Wú began. The successor did not heed the advice of his experienced minister but listened to slanderous reports. In the end he sent a famous sword to Wǔ Zǐxū with an order to commit suicide.

⁸³ This is but another variation of the Guān Zhōng theme.

Wǔ Zǐxū understood that this spelt the end of an era. Before he cut his throat he asked his friends to gouge out his eyes and nail them to the gate of Wú so that he could see the enemy's army descend on the city.

The examples above would be enough to demonstrate the great variety within the category of tales dealing with men who chose a master for themselves.

Perfect relationship between a lord and his man was not a new idea. As early as in the Shū Jīng it is said that the good rulers of old had illustrious followers who protected and directed their lords.⁸⁴

In the Shū Jīng, however, the last ruler of the Yīn dynasty was condemned, because he went past his own clansmen when he employed high officers: "He destroys and rejects his (left over=) still living uncles and uterine brothers and does not (cause them to advance=) promote them. Thus, the great criminals and runaways of the four quarters, them he honours, them he respects, them he trusts and them he employs, them he has for dignitaries, ministers and officers, and causes them to oppress the people and so commit villainy and treachery in the city of Shāng".⁸⁵

If the high officers are uncles and brothers of the ruler, their loyalty to him is an enlargement of *xiào*. When in the classics so many stories of "runaways of the four quarters" employed as dignitaries are preserved, there is reason to believe that these stories should be seen as subtle attacks on *xiào*. Elements like Niè Zhèng's laudable filial piety and Wǔ Zǐxū's thirst for revenge on the ruler who had his father and brother executed are nothing but judicious efforts to conceal this fact.

In the greater part of the tales of suicide committed by men loyalty to the ruler takes precedence over *xiào*, although loyalty to the ruler was defined as an extension of *xiào*. The attempts at a definition of rulership found in the stories dealing with men who chose a ruler to their liking are also at variance with the concept of *xiào*. Thus it would seem that the advocates of centralized government regarded clan solidarity as the foremost rival for power.

⁸⁴ Shū Jīng, Jūn Shì.

⁸⁵ Shū Jīng, Mù Shì.

Translation from Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Documents*, BMFEA No. 22, 1950.

It is better to preserve righteousness and die
than to violate righteousness in order to
save one's life.

Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 4:10.

As has been mentioned above, only a few stories deal with women who commit suicide for the sake of loyalty to the ruler. The women who killed themselves for this reason are exceptions, for a woman's behaviour was guided and restricted by two other loyalties, loyalty towards her own clan and towards her husband's clan.

Most of the stories concerning suicides committed by women found in the classics are connected with their married status. In a fully developed clan system a marriage transaction does not only involve the bride and her future husband, instead a marriage is a bond between two clans. As has been mentioned before, the clan system was only in the making in early China. Therefore, although many of the rules pertaining to clan intermarriage are found in the classics, tales where the rules are violated without social censure also abound.

Clan intermarriage was the foremost means of establishing social contact. Such a marriage should be preceded by negotiations between the clans, and from oldest times the negotiations were undertaken by a go-between. In the *Shī Jing* it is said: "The splitting of firewood, how is it done? Without an axe one cannot do it; the taking of a wife, how is it done? Without a go-between one cannot obtain her . . ." ⁸⁶

The negotiations were of the utmost importance to the bride's kin, because through them the clan had an opportunity to clarify their social status in relation to another clan. The more gifts and advantages they could claim the stronger their social position. From the kinsmen's point of view the girl's personal happiness was not of prime importance. They were far more concerned to gain social recognition from the clan into which she married. Such recognition could only be secured through the go-between, before the marriage contract was concluded.

Girls were educated to accept clan intermarriage as a social

⁸⁶ Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, Stockholm 1950. Ode No. 101.

necessity. To refuse a betrothal arranged by the family would have been regarded as utterly selfish. A young lady who found a man to her own liking ran the risk of being repudiated by her kinsmen, if she married without a go-between. Even if she married far above the social status of her agnatic clan and the marriage was a great success, it did not make things much better. In marrying without giving her kinsmen an opportunity to negotiate, she had neglected her foremost duty towards them.

The high social position of the groom was thus of no consequence to the bride's father, when the heir apparent of Qí fell in love with the court annalist's daughter and took her for legal wife without preliminaries.⁸⁷ The bride's action amounted to a flat denial of *xiào*, and her infuriated father raved: "A woman who has married without planning is no child of mine. She has defiled our clan." To the end of his days he never had any contact with his daughter despite her high position.

During her betrothal period and even at the beginning of the wedding ceremony the bride was still a member of her father's clan. On the day of the wedding she gave expression to her adherence to *xiào* by taking good care that the rites pertaining to marriage were completed. It was her duty to guard the rights of her kin by making sure that all the gifts enumerated in the preceding negotiations were actually brought to her father's house.

There were probably also other reasons for a bride to be anxious lest the rites were imperfectly performed. If the rites were faulty, she would refuse to go to the house of her betrothed. It seems likely that in refusing to accept a vitiated ceremony the bride defended her personal reputation and her own future status in her new family. Had she not been wedded with all due ceremony she could risk being treated as a secondary wife by her new kinsmen. Her status within her husband's clan would in its turn influence the position of her future sons.

There was every reason for a young lady to be cautious, when she first was introduced in the new family, for her position was precarious. As the legal wife of the heir—almost the only women the tales deal with—the bride was of the utmost importance to the husband's clan, because the responsibility of securing posterity

⁸⁷ Zhàn Guó Cè, Qí 6.

rested with her. Still she was an intruder and regarded with suspicion. She was a person, who had already acquired one set of responsibilities and loyalties to members of another clan. Since childhood she had been taught that it was her duty to vindicate the rights of her kinsmen. Filial piety had been inculcated in her mind since she was a small girl, and her parents were members of another clan.

A wife's ties to her father were always regarded as a potential threat. When there was a feud between a woman's husband and her father, it would therefore be wiser for the husband not to inform his wife. The following tale was certainly told in order to warn men not to reveal affairs of prime importance to their womenfolk.

When Yōng Jiū's⁸⁸ concubine learnt that her husband was about to kill her father, she asked her mother: "Who is the closer of kin, a father or a husband?" Perhaps the mother felt that the life of her own husband was in danger, since she answered: "Any man could be a woman's husband but only one her father. How could one compare?" The concubine told her father of the murderous plot and her husband was put to death.

Although the woman is here not a legal wife but only a concubine, the moral of the story is doubtful, even deplorable. The Hàn moralists would have a virtuous woman behave in a different manner when she found herself in a dilemma of this kind. There must have been a dearth of suitable stories to illustrate the correct behaviour of a virtuous woman in such a situation, for the story below seems to be nothing but a rather poor desk-work product of Hàn times.

The husband of a virtuous woman of Chángān⁸⁹ had a mortal enemy. As the enemy knew the woman to be virtuous and filial he took her father prisoner. Word was sent to the woman that she could come and visit her father. As would be expected the father told his daughter that he would be killed, if she did not allow the enemy to put her husband to death.

Whatever the poor woman chose to do, she would violate one of her loyalties, and she lamented: "If I *do not* allow it, then they

⁸⁸ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Huán Gong 15th year.

⁸⁹ Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 5:15.

will kill my father and that would not be filial. If I *do* allow it, then they will kill my husband and that would not be righteous. Who wants to live, if she is not filial or not righteous?''.

The virtuous woman therefore instructed the enemy's men how to find her husband's room and bed and promised to leave a door open for the assassins who would be sent to her home that night. When evening came she changed beds with her husband. The enemy and his men entered the house during the night and beheaded the woman where she lay in her husband's bed. In the morning the enemy discovered that the wrong person had been killed.

Such staunch adherence to morals never fails to be duly rewarded in our tales. In this case the deadly foe was so deeply impressed by the courage and determination of the virtuous lady that he repented, released the woman's father and made peace with her husband.

As is shown by the examples above, a wife's ties to her father were regarded with suspicion by the members of the husband's clan. The possibility that the wife had deep emotional ties to one of her brothers gave, however, rise to even graver misgivings. Such a strong connection between brother and sister is often referred to in the classics. Conspicuously often the brother concerned was a younger brother, and we may take it for granted that, when it was an elder brother, he was not the eldest son of the family.

The eldest son of a family had his fixed position in the sacrificial line, and in due time he would become the head of the family. In his youth he was busy guarding his own position as heir apparent and had little opportunity to meddle in his married sisters' family affairs. His younger brothers, on the other hand, had no well-defined positions to look forward to. It was easier for them to function as links between a married sister and her agnatic clan, and it was also more tempting for them to try to further their own position by gaining influence in another family.⁸⁰ Often it

⁸⁰ It is obvious that certain modern wedding rites reflect this time-honoured relationship between a bride and her younger brother. So for instance it is usually a younger brother who accompanies the bride to her new home. Cf. Maurice Freedman: *Rites and Duties, or Chinese Marriage*, Inaugural Lecture read at the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1967.

seems as if a younger brother took up service with one of the dignitaries attached to the court of his brother-in-law.

The Chinese language does not distinguish between brothers and male parental cousins, and "younger brother" may therefore sometimes denote a younger parental cousin. In later China sexual intercourse between brothers and sisters and between parental cousins was regarded as incest and strictly prohibited. Maternal cousins, on the other hand, belonged to another clan and were therefore marriageable. Strict rules in this respect are part of a fully developed clan system, and before the clan system was completed the rules were not always upheld. In the classics a very strong personal attachment between brother and sister is so very often referred to that it cannot have been regarded as abnormal or even grossly immoral.

Marriage between parties of the same family name was illegal in later China. In pre-Qín China, on the other hand, men of high social status occasionally took a "sister" in marriage, sometimes even as the legal wife.⁹¹ The rules preventing such marriages were probably created only in Zhōu times and were beginning to make their effect felt in parts of China during the last centuries before the Qín dynasty. This also seems to be the period when clan names were generally assumed among the upper layers of society.⁹² Once clan names were established a man was required to make sure that the woman he married was not of his own surname, not only when choosing his legal wife but also when taking a concubine.⁹³

⁹¹ Cf. 羅雨田: 中國風俗獵奇 Taipei 1969, p. 3 ff.

⁹² George A. Kennedy, *Selected Works of . . .*, p. 318:—

Professor Herrlee Creel, who knows most about him (= Confucius), has commented in his Biography that Confucius "was the only person of the K'ung surname to attain prominence in the state of Lu", (p. 26). This is hardly strange, since K'ung was not a surname at all. According to the 'Father of Chinese History', who gives us a biography of Confucius in chapter 47 of his great work, the father of Confucius was named Shwu-liang Her, and Shwu-liang has been later interpreted as a surname. At the best, then, we should have to conclude that Confucius and his father had different surnames, which is equivalent to saying that the system of surnames, as we know it, was not yet in existence.

⁹³ Zuǒ Zhuàn, Zhào Gōng 1st year.

In pre-Qín China there seems to have been no cult of virginity. Realistically, it was admitted that the attraction between young people living close together was sometimes irresistible. If it became known that a girl had an illicit relation with a man of the same surname, it would lower her value on the marriage market but not render her unmarriageable. Such premarital relationships could sometimes last for many years and were sometimes continued even after the girl had been married into another family.⁹⁴

A feud between a woman's younger brother and her husband is said sometimes to have caused the woman to kill herself. Some such tales indicate that sexual rivalry was involved in the trial of strength between the two men.

This was the case, when the king of Dài⁹⁵ was murdered by his brother-in-law, Xiāngzǐ of Zhào. When Dài had been subdued, Xiāngzǐ wanted his sister to return with him. The sister, however, reminded him that their father had once given her in marriage to the king of Dài with the charge that she should serve him. Although Xiāngzǐ had now killed her husband she did not want to return to her brother's home, because, she said: "I have heard that righteousness for a woman is not to have two husbands. How could I then have two husbands? Now you want to welcome me, but what would come of that? To treat a husband rudely for a brother's sake is unrighteous and to harbour resentment against a brother for the husband's sake is not benign. I do not dare to harbour resentment, but I am not going to return with you either." As she could see no other way out, she killed herself.

While the agnatic clan system became increasingly stable the demand for exogamy became more severe. Consequently the separation of the sexes grew more and more necessary. Interdiction of sexual intercourse between young people living in the same group requires a profusion of technical props to be enforced. Strict separation of the sexes is the first step in order to meet the requirements of exogamy.

⁹⁴ The most "abominable" of the women who continued to have illicit relations with a brother after her marriage, was the notorious Wén Jiāng. The relationship lasted for decades.

Zuǒ Zhuàn, Huán Gōng 8th year – Zhuāng Gōng 21st year.

⁹⁵ Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 5:7.

Technical props of this kind tend to be raised to the formal level. Once they have turned into formal rules of conduct, these rules are often extended until they cover much larger areas of behaviour than was originally intended. Thus separation of the sexes was originally only a means to achieve exogamy in China as elsewhere. Yet in later times married women, too, were required to lead a secluded life. A married woman should not have any contact of any kind with other men than her husband. She should never allow herself to be seen by other men, and she should under no circumstances touch or even look at another man.

In the course of time even her association with her own husband became severely regulated. A wife was not to be the companion, let alone the hostess, of her husband. A dutiful wife was under no circumstances to allure her husband with her charms. If she did, she would lead his attention away from the important matters of state that were his true object in life.

A wish to keep the sacrificial line pure is, of course, also indicated in the demand for chastity in a wife. The rules limiting the freedom of association between husband and wife, on the other hand, cannot possibly be a consequence of such a wish.

One of the tales concerning suicide by a married woman is a splendid example of a technical rule for upholding chastity turned formal. The only reason for the woman to obey the rule was that the rule existed. Her self-sacrifice could not possibly serve any sensible purpose.

Bó Jī,⁹⁶ the wife of Duke Gōng of Sòng, was a lady of spotless reputation. In her youth she had vindicated her rights and her future position by refusing to go to the ducal house until the duke met her in person as was seemly, when a man took a woman as legal wife. When this strict lady was well advanced in years there was a fire in the palace. When a lady appeared in public, she should be attended by at least two of her foremost ladies-in-waiting. Only one was present to accompany Bó Jī in this emergency, and consequently Bó Jī preferred to perish in the flames. She would "rather preserve righteousness and die, than violate righteousness to save her life".

When the rules of a formal moral code become extremely

⁹⁶ Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 4:2.

strict, it may be better to attempt suicide than to jeopardize one's good repute. The heroine of the tale below attempted suicide for the sake of propriety, and we may take it for granted that the attempt strengthened her position considerably.

Like many other virtuous women, Mèng Jī⁹⁷ had in her youth made it amply clear that she was not to be trifled with. When she discovered that the wedding ceremony was incomplete, she severed relations with her first betrothed. Her steadfastness deeply impressed Duke Xiào of Qí, who asked for her in marriage. On the wedding day the duke went in person to fetch his bride, and he took good care that the ceremonies were complete and well executed. Before the bride left her parental home all her relatives cautioned her to be diligent and obedient and to remember the rules of propriety.

Mèng Jī certainly never forgot the warnings, and she remained meticulous in regard to propriety throughout her life. The man she married seems to have forgotten that his wife was a paragon of womanly virtue, for on a later occasion he blundered considerably. Mèng Jī, however, knew how to regain the respect due to her.

Once the duke and his wife went out together on a pleasure drive. Suddenly the carriage in which Mèng Jī was riding broke down and the lady fell out. The duke found a cart to bring her home, but to her horror the cart had no seats and, even worse, no proper curtains to screen her off. Mèng Jī could not ride in a cart where she would be exposed to the looks of strangers, nor could she stay unprotected out in the open and far from home. As a lady of spotless repute she would "rather die an untimely death than live without propriety", and accordingly she tried to hang herself. A lady-in-waiting revived her, however, and when the proper vehicle arrived she returned home.

The suicidal attempt above may be interpreted as a wife's effort to inspire respect for herself. Otherwise only little attention is paid to internal family affairs in the classics. The interest in the tales of women's suicides is focussed on the social interaction between the clans. For the same reason very little is said of secondary wives and next to nothing of servant girls. Only the

⁹⁷ *Liè Nǚ Zhuàn* 4:6.

legal wife was of importance for the clan interaction, therefore only her behaviour attracted interest.

According to our sources, the critical moment, when a wife had to make a decision whether she wanted to live on or not, was at the death of her husband.

The vital point in her own considerations, as well as in the reactions of both her own kinsmen and the members of her deceased husband's clan, was whether she had given birth to a son or not. A legal wife's foremost duty to her husband's family was, as we have seen, to secure posterity. Had she not had a son at the death of her husband, there was no pressing obligation for his clan to continue to maintain her. The wife was not in herself a member of her husband's clan, and she could claim a share in the family property only through her husband, and after the latter's demise through her son.

That a woman's economic situation was indeed precarious after her husband's death is demonstrated in the touching lament of the desperate widow of Qí Liáng of Qí.⁹⁸ Her husband had fallen in battle, and when his body was brought home, she wailed over him until the city wall crumbled. After the interment of her husband, the widow gave vent to her grief and fear in the following words: "Where shall I go? A wife should have someone to rely on. While the father is alive, she relies on her father, when the husband is alive, she relies on her husband, and while the son is alive, she relies on her son. Now in the generation above me I have no father, in my own generation I have no husband, and in the generation below me I have no son. In my husband's family there is nobody on whom I could depend while making my sincerity manifest, and in my own family there is no one on whom I could rely while verifying my purity. How could I remarry? I had better die too." — With these words she drowned herself in a river.

In this story the ideal of retaining widowhood is found, but otherwise this ideal is not particularly salient in the classics. On the contrary, stories abound in which women marry twice, and there are even some cases where a woman was married several times.

⁹⁸ *Lǐ Nǚ Zhuàn* 4:8.

The strong aversion to remarriage found in later China was apparently just beginning to take effect in Hàn times and only few stories recommend that a young childless widow should preserve her widowhood.

In one case⁹⁹ a husband had charged his young wife with the care of his aged mother before he left for a post from which he was never to return. When the parents of the widow wanted to find a new husband for her, she threatened to commit suicide. Her only wish in life was to continue the service of the old lady.

Even when a young widow was thus able to find a meaningful position in her deceased husband's family, her maintenance was an economic burden for them. On the other hand, a childless widow's own kin would see in her a possibility to establish worthwhile connections with still another clan. As has been noticed before, there was no cult of virginity, and a young childless widow seems to have had the same value on the marriage market as an unmarried girl. Usually the parents or brothers of a young widow arranged a new marriage for her.

A childless widow, who vehemently refused to remarry, would hardly have any other choice than to commit suicide. Society in early China had not much room for lonely women. Yet objections are found to interment of widows with their dead husbands.

There is one example in the *Zuǒ Zhuàn*¹⁰⁰ of a man who had his daughters interred with a man towards whom he felt indebted. This, however, is definitely an exception and has to be regarded as a remnant of a different value system. Not only the fact that women were actually buried alive with a man would be odious in Hàn times. Even more repulsive would this particular tale be, because the man with whom the girls were buried was not even their husband.

Only a small number of tales deal with living interment of women, but even from the limited material available a tendency towards propagation of discontinuing the habit is clearly discernible. In the stories where a man requests that one or several of his women be interred with him, his request is usually not granted.

⁹⁹ *Liè Nǚ Zhuàn* 4:15.

¹⁰⁰ *Zuǒ Zhuàn*, *Zhāo Gōng* 13th year.

Wèi Wǔzǐ¹⁰¹ had a favourite concubine, who had borne him no son. When Wǔzǐ fell ill he ordered his son Kē to marry her off, but later, when his illness grew worse, he wanted her to be buried with him. When his father died Kē had his stepmother remarried.

Not to fulfill the last wish of a dying father would normally be considered as a very grave breach of filial piety, but Kē defended himself saying: "In his severe illness my father was confused, I *have* fulfilled his charge!".

There is a peculiar sequel to this story. In a battle Kē saw an old man tying grass together to trip a certain formidable warrior from the enemy's camp. The warrior did in fact fall and was then taken prisoner, and Kē carried the day. During the night after the victory Kē dreamt of the old man he had seen on the battlefield. (That the man appeared in a dream indicates that he was dead.) The man said that he was the father of the concubine whom Kē had saved from premature death. By tripping the enemy's most dangerous warrior he had rewarded Kē for his kindness and consideration.

In the story above the son refuses his dying father his last wish. The reward for this unfilial act is an unexpected victory. The outcome of the battle is decided by the active intervention of the stepmother's deceased father. Consequently it paid off very well to disregard a father's dying words. Interment of the surviving women with their dead husband was probably regarded as an expression of the utmost loyalty to the deceased. The point in the above story may well be that loyalty to the father should not be carried too far.

There is another story, found in several versions, which shows that the reason for condemning living interment of women is that family affairs should be subordinated to matters of state.

When Gōngfǔ Wénbó¹⁰² died, some of his female attendants followed him. To everybody's great surprise, Wénbó's virtuous mother did not weep for her dead son. When asked why she did not show any signs of sorrow, the old lady gave vent to her deep disappointment in her son. During Wénbó's illness, she said, no worthy men had come to see him, but when he died his women-

¹⁰¹ Zuǐ Zhuàn, Xuān Gōng 15th year.

¹⁰² Hán Shǐ Wàizhuàn 1:19.

folk wanted to accompany him. In the old lady's opinion he had therefore obviously been lacking in his relations to worthy men but been over-generous towards his household.

Although living interment was thus rejected, a wife who had borne no son is, as has been demonstrated above, sometimes found to commit suicide at the death of her husband.

This, however, is not the case with wives who had given birth to male children. Once a wife had a son, her position in her husband's clan was totally different, much stronger but also much more fixed. She had fulfilled her obligations towards her husband's kin, and it was their irrefutable duty to maintain her, if she became widowed. If her husband died prematurely, the wife's foremost duty was to rear his children and to take care of their interests within the family.

The children, especially the sons, were the hope for the future of the husband's kin. The eldest son was usually the one who was to conduct the family sacrifices, and it was important that he was reared within the clan. It was therefore of great moment that the widow did not marry into another family, at least not while the children were so young that they were under her immediate care and had to accompany her.

In the stories a dutiful widowed mother would therefore go to any extremes in order to ward off offers of remarriage. She could not follow her husband in death, for she could not leave her children orphaned.

A model of womanly virtue was Gāoxíng,¹⁰³ who was widowed at an early age. She was an uncommonly beautiful and respectable young lady and had many offers of remarriage. Since she had children in her first marriage she was determined not to marry again. In the end, however, even the king himself sent betrothal gifts to her house. Gāoxíng found it difficult to refuse and understood that she would not easily be left in peace. She deplored her inability to go with her husband to the after-life, but she could not bear to make her children lose their mother too. As she felt it to be her duty to stay alive for the sake of her children she did not commit suicide. Instead she cut off her nose to make herself impossible on the marriage market.

¹⁰³ *Liè Nǚ Zhuàn* 4:14.

In later China the foremost duty of a virtuous lady was to remain faithful to a single man even if the man died before the marriage had been consummated. This demand for complete loyalty to the husband and his kin is not clearly expressed in the stories under consideration. A woman could, as we have seen, break an engagement and yet be married to someone else. Even if the marriage had been consummated, the demand for lifelong faithfulness to a deceased husband did not arise unless the couple had male offspring.

Thus it is mainly in tales regarding the behaviour of widowed mothers that the demand for clan solidarity finds expression. When a widowed mother was remarried, the sacrificial line in her first husband's clan was discontinued, if she removed her son from his proper environment. The widow herself, being a woman, could be integrated into any clan, but her son could not. Therefore his presence in the stepfather's clan was bound to cause dispute and disruption. Thus it was a misfortune both for the father's and the stepfather's clan, when the mother of a young boy contracted a new marriage.

For this reason it was imperative that a widowed mother should lead a secluded life in order not to attract the attention of other men. Men should always beware of any attractive woman, for woe betide those men who allowed themselves to be inveigled by such an ill-omened woman.

These ideas are beautifully expressed in the story of Dōngguō Jiāng,¹⁰⁴ one of the most captivating tales preserved in the Chinese classics. That the story has been written down in intricate detail testifies to the importance attached to it. Also the fact that several secondary stories have been loosely attached to it indicates that it must have been widely known.¹⁰⁵

The story will be rendered here at some length and with

¹⁰⁴ Liè Nǚ Zhuàn 7:11. Cf. also Zuǒ Zhuàn, Xiang Gōng 25th–28th year. In the Zuǒ Zhuàn version the main emphasis is on Cui Shù's insurrection. Jiāng is thus not of prime importance in that version of the tale.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance the tales of Yàn Yīng and Jīng Kūfū above (Notes 50 and 53).

The murder of Duke Zhuāng, which is part of the story under consideration, seems to have been one of those events that serve as milestones in time. Other events are dated as being either before or after the murder of Duke Zhuāng.

extensive comment from the Hàn moralist's point of view. This is justified by the fact that this tale weaves together a series of events involving several of the contemporary moral ideas and principles into a many-splendoured, yet consistent, fabric. In fact, the tale could be seen as a summary of most of the moral ideas discussed in the present article. Yet, although it is no doubt a kind of homily and will be treated as such here, in the original language it is above all a piece of magnificent literature.

Dōngguō Jiāng was first married to Duke Táng of Qí and had borne him a son. Duke Táng died prematurely, and at the burial ceremonies Jiāng was seen by the minister Cūi Shù.

According to Hàn morals this is the germ of all the tragic and sinister events that follow. A widow, quite especially a widowed mother, should live a secluded life and not allow any man to set eyes on her. By having exposed herself to the sight of a stranger, Jiāng caused an evil development.

The minister Cūi Shù had Dōngguō Jiāng's younger brother in his service, and he asked for Jiāng in marriage.

Calamity could still have been averted, if Jiāng had shown sufficient determination. When pressed by her younger brother to remarry, she ought to have threatened to commit suicide or mutilated herself rather than accept the proposal. Having a son, Jiāng ought to have preserved her widowhood at any cost in order to bring up her son in his proper surroundings.

Jiāng was not capable of foresight and circumspection. Therefore she did not understand that it spelled evil for Cūi Shù and his whole clan and for her own person, when she moved into Cūi Shù's house and brought her—or rather Duke Táng's—young son with her.

Duke Táng's son was thus removed from the clan that was his by birthright. He could not be integrated into his new surroundings, where he was regarded as a threatening intruder by the stepfather's sons in an earlier marriage. One more outsider gained undue influence in Cūi Shù's family through the marriage, namely Dōngguō Jiāng's younger brother. When his elder sister married his master, the younger brother found his position considerably strengthened. The two outsiders also competed with Cūi Shù's sons for power in the intrigues to come.

Jiāng's evil influence was not confined to the development inside Cui Shù's clan but reached much further until it jeopardized matters of state. Since Jiāng had been faithless to her deceased husband it was only to be expected that she should be unfaithful to her living husband too.¹⁰⁶ Duke Zhuāng saw her on one occasion and fell for her irresistible charms. Thereby the duke's fate was sealed, and for a long time there was considerable trafficking between the nearby palace and the minister's house.

Cui Shù knew of the affair for quite some time but at first took no action. Then on one occasion the duke snatched Cui Shù's cap away and conferred it on an attendant.

It is not clear from the story what this implies. As the cap was a token of manhood, however, it may have been a coarse hint that Cui Shù was unable to master his charming wife. Anyhow, it must have been a gross insult, for Cui Shù was filled with fury and decided to take revenge on the duke, who had shamed his house.

One day, when the duke came to visit his minister, Dōngguō Jiāng—apparently at her husband's instigation—lured the duke inside. Suddenly the duke found himself trapped and surrounded by armed men in his minister's courtyard. He pleaded guilty but was not pardoned. Not even his request to be allowed to kill himself in his ancestral temple was granted. When at last the unhappy duke tried to climb the wall in order to escape he was shot down and killed.

Thus Dōngguō Jiāng's attractiveness caused evil even to the state. In the meantime the tragic developments within Cui Shù's family approached a climax. In due time Jiāng bore a son to Cui Shù, and the baby's presence was soon to provoke intrigues. Three groups competing for influence emerged: Cui Shù himself, who favoured his baby son, the two elder sons, and the two outsiders, Dōngguō Jiāng's younger brother and Duke Táng's son.

Because of Cui Shù's infatuation with his new wife the two elder sons were most unfairly treated. The eldest son was demoted from his position as heir apparent in favour of the baby son. Jiāng's son by Duke Táng, who was not even of the Cui clan,

¹⁰⁶ In the Zuǒ Zhuàn version it seems as if Cui Shù purposely used her as a lure.

was entrusted with the family affairs. To compensate for his heavy loss of status the eldest son requested the Cui clan's ancestral seat for himself and his full brother to live and die in. To begin with it seemed as if his father would consent, but then the two outsiders disputed his right to it.

Thus Cui Shù trespassed grossly against *xiào*. When he made the youngest son heir apparent he broke the proper sacrificial line. To make things even worse, he favoured the outsiders at the cost of his elder sons.

The elder sons reciprocated and broke the rules of *xiào*, when they felt that they had been totally abandoned by their father. In their frustration and despair they turned to the minister Qing Fèng, their father's worst rival for power, in order to get advice from him. Qing Fèng saw his chance to make the youngsters of his competitor's family destroy each other. He therefore advised the two brothers to slay the outsiders. Accordingly the brothers killed Jiāng's younger brother and her son by Duke Táng in Cui Shù's great hall.

Infuriated by this outrage Cui Shù set out for Qing Fèng's house in order to protest. While he was away, however, his adversary sent a troop of warriors who killed Cui Shù's sons and burned down his stables and granaries.

In this moment of visitation Dōngguō Jiāng lamented: "It is better to die than to live like this", and the unhappy woman killed herself. It is, indeed, no wonder that Cui Shù followed his family in death, when soon afterwards he returned only to discover that there was nothing left for him to return to.

Although Dōngguō Jiāng was not actively instigating this series of trespasses and crimes, she was in fact guilty of every one of them. If she had only threatened to commit suicide, when her younger brother wanted her to marry Cui Shù no evil act would have ensued. To threaten suicide at that point would have been a laudable act. When in the end fate caught up with her and she had to kill herself, her suicide was an act of the utmost hopelessness and despair.

It is stories like these that have formed the Chinese, to a considerable extent also the Japanese, concepts of suicide. These concepts are in sharp contrast with those of the West, where the

act is regarded as being "sordid, depressing, muddled", even among those who are opposed to the religiously founded view of suicide as mortal sin and capital crime.¹⁰⁷ Through well-known and widespread tales of laudable suicide the act was sanctified in the Far East. The performers were held to be heroes and the act itself was regarded as glorious, dignified and beautiful.

The idea that suicide was the only proper way to solve specific moral dilemmas was part of the Chinese formal moral code till modern times. The impeccability of this moral code, although at times it has been doubted by individual persons, was not generally discussed in a technical way before the impact of the West.

Suicide was thus approved by the formal moral code without any hesitation. Though very few Chinese had ever doubted that suicide was indeed correct under certain circumstances, there was always considerable uncertainty as to what were the exact circumstances requiring suicide.

It is precisely because of this uncertainty regarding the exact content of this otherwise rigid rule of conduct that in China tales of suicide are singularly well suited for propaganda purposes. In the stories we have thus noticed that the relative importance of loyalties is graded. A man's loyalty to his lord should take precedence over loyalty to his family. A woman should, especially if she had male offspring, show greater loyalty to her husband's kin than to her own.

From earliest times the Chinese have thus been accustomed to use tales of suicide to emphasize rules of conduct. A story where the hero kills himself out of conviction has remained an effective means of propagating ideas.

Needless to say, an actual suicide would have an even greater effect than a mere story, provided that the performer¹⁰⁸ was sufficiently well-known. In the West the suicide of a famous

¹⁰⁷ A. Alvares, *The Savage God*, London 1971, p. 132:—

The suffering of a tragic hero, distanced and ennobled by poetic drama, is literally a world apart from suicide off-stage, which is rarely tragic, never grandiose and most often sordid, depressing, muddled.

¹⁰⁸ I have called the person concerned "performer" in preference to "victim", "executant (1)", etc. in order to avoid emotional connotations. The "performer" does seem to play the role of an actor in a morality play.

person is merely sensational. In China such a suicide would be equally sensational, but the act would also be liable to moral interpretation and highly praised by those who approved of its moral implications.

Not only were suicides committed for unknown reasons liable to interpretations on moral grounds but, throughout the history of China, persons of high moral standards have resorted to suicide as a final attempt to propagate their ideas. Such suicides are committed under cultural pressure, and their consequences are culturally bound. If such a sacrifice is to be understood as the performer intended, those whom he wanted to impress must share his cultural background.

A Westerner wishing to understand these sacrifices will first have to rid himself of the preconceptions of suicide that he has acquired in his own cultural sphere.

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