

OVERGROWN COURTYARDS AND
TILLED FIELDS: IMAGE-BASED DEBATES
ON GOVERNANCE AND BODY POLITICS
IN THE *MENGZI*, *ZHUANGZI*, AND
HUAINANZI

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Abstract

Thus far, scholarship on early China has mainly focused on conceptual debates and re-interpretations of terminology. I showcase in this article a methodology called metaphorology that enables us to analyze how discourses developed through the reworking of images. In particular, I reconstruct a discourse on governance and self-cultivational practices as enshrined in *Mengzi* 3A.4, the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter and *Huainanzi* 9.13. While *Mengzi* 3A.4 purports that the cultivation of agricultural fields and human bodies are necessary steps in the civilizational process, the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter demands a decultivation of the human population and a return to the wilderness. In my reading, *Huainanzi* 9.13, from the "Arts of Rulership" chapter, amalgamates these two image-based debates with the help of the metaphors of the ruler as an overgrown courtyard and the officials as tilled fields. Hence, I propose that *Huainanzi* 9.13 creates its integrative vision of governance that promotes both education and decultivation by synthesizing the "Mati" chapter's focus on wilderness and *Mengzi* 3A.4's concerns with tilling. As a result, I encourage us to engage fully in imagery's role as a central and foundational aspect of early Chinese debate culture rather than a rhetorical side effect of its various discourses.

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Introduction

Ritualistic and agricultural imagery dominates depictions of a proper organization of the human and social body in early Chinese texts. Bodies (*shen* 身) and human dispositions (*xing* 性) are born/grown (*sheng* 生), purified (*zhai* 齋), cultivated (*xiu* 修), or nurtured (*yang* 養).¹ The specific roles of these images, however, have been understudied.² Scholars of early China have thus far mainly focused on conceptual debates and re-interpretations of terminology.³ To advance such an intellectual historical approach that focuses on imagery, this article introduces a methodology that enables scholars to retrace how discourses developed through the reworking of images. I will put into conversation three passages from the *Mengzi* 孟子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子,⁴

1. See Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 93–122.

2. For some research in addition to Sarah Allan's work that utilizes analytical tools to interpret imagery in the study of early China, see Kim-chong Chong, "Zhuangzi and the Nature of Metaphor," *Philosophy East & West* 56.3 (2008), 370–91, Norman Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Daoism: The Theme of Chaos (Hundun)* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2008), Andrew Seth Meyer, "Root-Branches Structuralism in the *Huainanzi*," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, ed. Sarah A. Queen and Michael J. Puett (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 23–39, Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3–117.

3. For an example of such a discourse based on shifting connotations of a concept, see Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). In addition to such an intellectual historical approach, a vast corpus of literature focused on the development of agriculture and farmers' class struggle in early China. However, these texts treat agriculture as a socio-economic phenomenon rather than a heuristic device. See Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣 (1917–2012), ed., *Huangtu yu Zhongguo nongye de qi yuan* 黃土與中國農業的起源 (Kowloon: Xianggang zhongwen daxue, 1969), Qi Xia 漆俠 (1923–2001) et al., *Qin Han nongmin zhanzheng shi* 秦漢農民戰爭史 (Beijing: Sanlian, 1962), and *Zhongguo nongye yichan yanjiu shi* 中國農業遺產研究室, ed., *Zhongguo nongxue shi* 中國農學史 (Beijing: Kexue, 1959). For a concise introduction to agriculture in early China, see Roel Sterckx, "Food and Agriculture," in *Routledge Handbook of Early Chinese History*, ed. Paul Rakita Goldin (London: Routledge, 2018), 306–24.

4. In this article, I use the following Chinese versions and translations of the aforementioned texts: Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820), ed., *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義, in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 1 and Bryan W. van Norden, trans., *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008); Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896), ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, in *Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 3 and Victor H. Mair, ed. and trans., *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang-tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); Liu Wendian 劉文典 (1889–1958), ed., *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解, in *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2006) and John S. Major, Sarah A.

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texts from roughly the fourth to the second century B.C.E.⁵ that employ agricultural imagery in various contexts to depict distinct understandings of (de-)cultivation and governance.⁶ Based on Hans Blumenberg's (1920–1996) project of a metaphorology, I analyze how changes in the usage of images of tilled fields and wilderness crystallize, and how they purport transformations of the conceptualizations of rulership in these three examples.⁷ In other words, I want to turn scholars' attention from debates based on concepts and terminologies to some of the ways in which imagery might function as a foundational aspect of reasoning in early China.

My analysis of the historical transformations of agricultural imagery in three instances demonstrates that *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*'s "Horses' Hoofs" ("Mati" 馬蹄) chapter represent two idealtypical representatives of oppositional views on governance and (de-)cultivation in the late Warring States period (475–221 B.C.E.).⁸ While *Mengzi*

Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, eds. and trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). However, I have modified the translations in some instances, which I will note in each of the respective footnotes.

5. I exclusively use B.C.E. and C.E. for dates in this article.

6. The choice of texts is based on my reading of the passage from the *Huainanzi*'s "Arts of Rulership" ("Zhushu" 主術) chapter. I am convinced that *Huainanzi* 9.13 alludes to contemporaneous discourses on the body, self-cultivation, and agriculture, fragments of which are nowadays paradigmatically enshrined in *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*'s "Horses' Hoofs" ("Mati" 馬蹄) chapter. In other words, I do not claim that the *Huainanzi* consciously refers to the *Mengzi* and *Zhuangzi*. It rather synthesizes aspects of the multilayered debates prevalent during the early imperial period that are just recorded in the extant versions of the *Mengzi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Due to this limited scope, the article only provides an initial glimpse into the metaphor of agriculture and wilderness in early China. For a more in-depth analysis of agricultural imagery and its argumentative properties in early Chinese texts, see Roel Sterckx, "Agronomy and Philosophy in Early China," *Renwen xueheng* 人文學衡 1 (2018), forthcoming.

7. In this article, I use the term wilderness to depict the "Mati" chapter's concern with a primordial and "uncut" state of the world in which birds, beasts, and humanity coexisted—an uncultivated environment as expressed with the phrases "wide and open spaces/plains" (*guangmo zhi ye* 廣莫之野 and *kuanglang zhi ye* 曠垠之野) in the *Zhuangzi*'s "Carefree Wandering" ("Xiaoyaoyou" 逍遙遊) and "Responses for Emperors and Kings" ("Yingdiwang" 應帝王) chapters. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 21 ("Xiaoyaoyou") and 132 ("Yingdiwang") and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 9 and 67. Hence, I do not intend to allude to the vast and shifting discourses on the wild in the US and Europe and its construction as an "Other." See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69–90.

8. With the number/letter combinations, I refer to the specific chapter(s) in van Norden, *Mengzi*. The German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) developed the

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3A.4 positively interprets the development and active promotion of civilization and agriculture as a first step in the separation of humanity from birds and beasts (*qinshou* 禽獸) that needs to be continued by enabling the subjects to nurture their Four Sprouts (*si duan* 四端), the “Mati” chapter of the extant *Zhuangzi* rejects such a positive reading of regulating and straightening (*zheng* 正) the cosmos and the subjects’ bodies. Only by abandoning knowledge and decultivating oneself, leading to a dissolution of the civil (*wen* 文) as a whole, would men be able to revive the “age of ultimate integrity” (*zhide zhi shi* 至德之世) during which humanity harmoniously co-existed with the animal world in an unregulated wilderness.⁹

I propose that these two dichotomic positions within the multilayered debates at the intersection of governance, (de-)cultivation, and agricultural imagery during the Warring States period re-appear in similar fashion in the *Huainanzi*,¹⁰ a text whose production has traditionally been attributed to Liu An 劉安 (c. 179–122 B.C.E.), the king of Huainan 淮南, and his retainers.¹¹ In the chapter on the “Arts of Rulership” (“*Zhushu*” 主術), we encounter a passage (*Huainanzi* 9.13) that creates a contrast between the tracelessness and formlessness of an overgrown court(yard) (*chaoting* 朝廷) and the incised and structured shape of tilled fields (*tianye* 田野).¹² According to my reading, these two images function as paired metaphors that depict the difference between

concept of an idealtype (*Idealtypus*). It refers to an idealized representation that functions as a heuristic device through which one may evaluate or measure concrete phenomena. In my case, I utilize *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*’s “Mati” chapter as idealized representatives of two polar voices in early Chinese debates on governance, cultivation, and agricultural imagery. For Max Weber’s definition of idealtypes, see Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1949), 85–106.

9. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 152 (“Mati”). The translation is altered from Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 81.

10. For a discussion and brief explanation of why one should read early Chinese texts within the context of larger discourses and debates, see Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 16–20.

11. For a discussion of the *Huainanzi*’s early textual history, see Charles Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985), 19–78, Harold D. Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-Nan Tzu* (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 1992), 9–26, and Tobias Benedikt Zürn, “Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*’s Self-Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2016), 92–110.

12. With the numbers, I refer to the specific chapter(s) according to Major et al., *The Huainanzi*. In addition, I am using parentheses for the term court(yard) throughout the article since it allows me to preserve the allusive quality of the Chinese term *chaoting* as a court and a yard.

the sage ruler and the officials.¹³ By purporting that both education and decultivation fulfill important functions in the running of an empire, the authors of chapter nine introduce with the two metaphors a bipartite approach to governance that distinguishes between the Dao-like, de-cultivated (*fanxiu* 反修) and non-interfering (*wuwei* 無為) role and body of the ruler and the cultivated (*dexiu* 得修) and policy executing officials.¹⁴ In so doing, *Huainanzi* 9.13 effectively synthesizes the two contrastive discourses, parts of which are nowadays enshrined in *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter. In other words, I claim that Liu An and his retainers expressed their vision of rulership by working with a stock of agricultural images prevalent throughout the late Warring States and early imperial period that manifested in oppositional forms in the two passages from the *Mengzi* and *Zhuangzi*.

Hence, the *Huainanzi*'s contrastive employment of tilled fields and an overgrown court(yard) and, more generally, its use of metaphors and allusions, apparently transcend merely ornamental or rhetorical purposes, an interpretation of the function of imagery still prevalent in scholarship on the *Huainanzi*.¹⁵ Rather, (agricultural) imagery seems to play a significant, irreducible, and unifying part within the *Huainanzi*'s argumentative exposition of sage rulership. However, before we may embark upon this journey, let us turn to Blumenberg's project of a metaphorology since it is relatively unfamiliar in sinological circles.¹⁶

13. In this article, I use the term metaphor as a literary form of speech whose two elements (vehicle/tenor; principal/subsidiary subject; or *Bildspender* / *Bildempfänger*) generate a tension or interaction between each other through which the metaphor produces meaning. Image, however, refers to a larger, more vague category that may be graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, or verbal as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests. See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7–46.

14. The two terms *dexiu* and *fanxiu* appear in *Huainanzi* 9.14 and are according to my reading construed in parallel to the paired images of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields.

15. For prior work emphasizing the rhetorical role of imagery in the *Huainanzi*, see John S. Major, "Tool Metaphors in the *Huainanzi*," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production*, ed. Queen and Puett, 153–98, John S. Major, "Animals and Animal Metaphors in *Huainanzi*," *Asia Major* Third Series 21.1 (2008), 133–51, Judson B. Murray, "The Liu Clan's 'Flesh and Bone': The Foundation of Liu An's Vision of Empire," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production*, ed. Queen and Puett, 291–325, and Edmund Ryden, *Philosophy of Peace in Han China: A Study of the Huainanzi ch. 15, on Military Strategy* (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1998), 45–47.

16. To my knowledge, my M.A. thesis on the metaphor of disease in early Chinese texts is still the only project that utilizes Blumenberg's methodology to discuss the function of imagery in the context of early China. See Tobias Benedikt Zürn, "Die Metapher der Krankheit in der antiken chinesischen Philosophie" (M.A. Thesis, Ludwig-Maximilian's University, Munich, 2008).

Hans Blumenberg's Project of a Metaphorology

Together with Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), Hans Blumenberg may be considered one of the most important German philosophers of the latter half of the twentieth century. He is largely known for his work that brought imagination and “figurative” speech back into philosophical discourse. Blumenberg developed his theory of a metaphorology against a tendency in philosophy to dismiss imagery as a mere ornament that may be discarded or replaced by “pure” terminologies.¹⁷ As Max Black (1909–1988) summarized this trend, “To draw attention to a philosopher’s metaphors [was] to belittle him—like praising a logician for his beautiful handwriting. Addiction to metaphor [was] held to be illicit, on the principle that whereof one can speak only metaphorically, thereof one ought not to speak at all.”¹⁸ Blumenberg intended to address this “iconoclastic” attitude of (post-)Enlightenment philosophical discourse, and he therefore went out to prove the intellectual significance of “figurative” speech in vast portions of his *œuvre*.¹⁹

To address such a Cartesian skepticism towards imagery, he introduced the concept of an absolute metaphor (*absolute Metapher*)—that is, a metaphor that cannot be substituted or dissolved into pure terminology.²⁰ Instead of painting terms and logics as the epitome of philosophical inquiry, he construed the world of pure speech as developed, for example, in René Descartes’ (1596–1650) writings, to be

17. Of course, this does not mean that imagery played no role in philosophical discourse. Rather, it illustrates the fact that scholars downplayed the argumentative role of imagery until recently. For example, Joachim Ritter (1903–1974), the first editor of the thirteen-volume *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy* (*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*), did not deem it necessary to include an entry on metaphors in his massive project. See Dirk Mende, “Vorwort: Begriffsgeschichte, Metaphorologie, Unbegrifflichkeit,” in *Metaphorologie: Zur Praxis von Theorie*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp and Dirk Mende (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 11.

18. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 25.

19. One may understand Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) and Hans Blumenberg’s conceptualizations of vivid metaphors (*la métaphore vive*) and absolute metaphors (*absolute Metapher*) as a continuation and revision of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889–1951) attempts to reintegrate figurative speech and poetics into the field of philosophy. See Fabian Goppelsröder, *Zwischen Sagen und Zeigen: Wittgensteins Weg von der literarischen zur dichtenden Philosophie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007) and Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (London: Routledge, 2003).

20. For an elaborate depiction of Blumenberg’s (implicit) model of metaphors, see Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 61–77 and Thomas Rentsch, “Thesen zur philosophischen Metaphorologie,” in *Metaphorologie: Zur Praxis von Theorie*, ed. Haverkamp and Mende, 137–52.

inherently flawed.²¹ In Blumenberg's words, "Concepts aren't capable of all the things rationality demands," so humanity developed metaphors to cope with this deficit.²² Due to their indeterminate meaning and open structure, metaphors are inherently better suited than terms to depict what he calls totalities—abstract concepts that as a matter of fact cannot be clearly defined and/or made present in the phenomenal world.²³ Since Blumenberg considers metaphors to be the main vehicle for envisioning totalities such as the world, life, truth, or governance,²⁴ an analysis of the historical transformations of imagery enables us to track down and unearth seminal changes and ruptures of people's lifeworlds and their reflections upon it.²⁵ In other words, a metaphorological investigation (*metaphorologische Untersuchung*) is a kind of archeology of the imagination.²⁶ It excavates and reconstructs how debates were conducted and concerns were conceived via metaphors.

According to Blumenberg, such debates and their constructions of metaphors are highly intertextual procedures, since their creators commonly develop them with and against a set of received images. Within this context, he introduces the notion that myths function as such imaginary storage units that transmit or hand down a repertoire of images to posterity against and through which anyone at any given time may

21. See Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, 9–18.

22. "Der Begriff vermag nicht alles, was die Vernunft verlangt" (Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, 11), my translation.

23. Blumenberg proposed that metaphors serve as linguistic aides in those moments when pure terminologies fail to clearly depict things/matters. See Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, 88 and Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 1–5.

24. Hans Blumenberg's *œuvre* reflects this focus on what he calls totalities. His metaphorological investigations (*metaphorologische Untersuchungen*) center around the topics of truth as light (Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*), life as seafaring and shipwreck (Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor of Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997)), or the world as a book (Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986)).

25. Based on Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) work, Alfred Schütz (1899–1959) describes the lifeworld as both the unarticulated structural backdrop (the world) and the instrument of human actions (the life). See Alfred Schütz, "The Lifeworld," in *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: Selected Writings*, ed. Helmut R. Wagner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 72–78. For Blumenberg's take on the concept of a lifeworld, see Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Lebenswelt*, ed. Manfred Sommer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010).

26. For such an archeological vision of a metaphorology, see Dirk Mende, "Technisierungsgeschichten. Zum Verhältnis von Begriffsgeschichte und Metaphorologie bei Hans Blumenberg," in *Metaphorologie: Zur Praxis von Theorie*, ed. Haverkamp and Mende, 85–107.

develop metaphors.²⁷ In other words, he claims that metaphors are often a shortened and instrumentalized reworking of a myth—a procedure he calls “work on myths.”²⁸ Exactly in this tension between received images and “new” metaphors lies, according to Blumenberg, an indispensable opportunity for the historian to uncover some of our most foundational thought processes.

Hans Blumenberg developed the majority of his ideas paradigmatically rather than theoretically, and I follow his example in introducing his methodology. First, I will excavate Lord Millet’s (Hou Ji 后稷) myth of an agricultural revolution with the help of the song “Giving Birth to the People” (“Shengmin” 生民; Mao 245) from the *Classic of Odes* (*Shi jing* 詩經).²⁹ Based on the importance of the *Shi jing* during the late Warring States and early imperial period, we can be almost certain that at least an oral version of the narrative was widely known among the literate populace of the late Warring States period.³⁰ Accordingly, I shall utilize it as a starting point for and backdrop to my selective discussion of image-based debates on governance, (de-)cultivation, and agriculture

27. “Myths are stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation. These two characteristics make myths transmissible by tradition. Their constancy produces the attraction of recognizing them in artistic or ritual representation as well [as in recital], and their variability produces the attraction of trying out new and personal means of presenting them. It is the relationship of ‘theme and variations,’ whose attractiveness for both composers and listeners is familiar from music. So myths are not like ‘holy texts,’ which cannot be altered by one iota” (Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 34).

28. For a discussion of Blumenberg’s idea that the “work of myths is work on myths” (“Die Arbeit des Mythos ist die Arbeit am Mythos”; my translation), see Stephanie Waldow, *Der Mythos der reinen Sprache: Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, Hans Blumenberg* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), 199–262.

29. I utilize in this article Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648 C.E.), ed., *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Taipei: Yiwen, 2001), vol. 2, 587a–96b (“Shengmin” 生民) and Jeffrey Riegel, trans., “Classic of Odes,” in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163–65. However, I have modified Riegel’s translation in some instances, which I will note in each of the respective footnotes.

30. References to the *Shi jing* played an important role in the social and textual life of the late Zhou 周 dynasty (c. 1045–256 B.C.E.). See Andrea Schmözl, *Vom Lied in der Gemeinschaft zum Liedzitat im Text: Liedzitate in den Texten der Gelehrtentradition der späten Chou-Zeit* (Egelsbach: Dr. Markus Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 1993). Although the extant text has most likely a Han 漢 (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) origin, “The Zhou versions were circulated primarily by means of oral transmission” so that we may assume that at least comparable versions of this myth existed during the Warring States period. See David R. Knechtges, “Questions about the Language of *Sheng Min*,” in *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, ed. Pauline Yu, Peter Bol, Stephen Owen, and Willard Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 16.

as recorded in *Mengzi* 3A.4, *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati," and the *Huainanzi*'s "Arts of Rulership" chapters in order to showcase how texts were working with and against a continuously updated stock of (agricultural) imagery.

"Shengmin" and the Myth of an Agricultural Revolution

Agriculture as an important means to civility and ritual prowess features prominently in the *Classic of Odes*, a collection of traditional poems largely from the Western Zhou 西周 period (c. 1045–771 B.C.E.) whose assemblage had traditionally been attributed to Kongzi 孔子 (trad. 551–479 B.C.E.). In the piece "Shengmin" from the "Great Hymns" ("Daya" 大雅) section, which was probably a song performed during the (harvest) sacrifices at the Zhou 周 court,³¹ we find a rather long illustration of the creation of agriculture as an important step in the evolution of the Middle Kingdoms (*zhongguo* 中國).³² Although the text provides several semantic problems in its specific extant form, its general plot seems to be rather clear.³³ After describing how Jiang Yuan 姜嫫 gave birth to Hou Ji as a result of her stepping into the footprint of either the divine being Di 帝 or Emperor Ku (Di Ku 帝嚳), the poem narrates how the sage ancestor of the Zhou dynasty (c. 1045–256 B.C.E.) invented agricultural methods and shared this knowledge with his people.³⁴ It does so by recounting the steep rise of Lord Millet from being an outcast nurtured by wild animals to a culture hero and lord of the Tai household (*Tai jia shi* 邰家室). It depicts him as a semi-divine figure in tune with the natural

31. See Willard Peterson, "Reading *Sheng Min*," in *Ways with Words*, ed. Yu et al., 32–33.

32. For another poem in the *Shi jing* on Hou Ji, see "Mighty Are You" ("Siwen" 思文; Mao 275) in Kong Yingda, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 721a–22a ("Siwen") and Arthur Waley (1889–1966), trans., *Book of Songs: The Ancient Classic of Poetry*, ed. and trans. Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 295. For a discussion of this poem in the context of a ritualistic exhortation of an ancestor to create a link between the present and the past, see Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 28–30.

33. As David Knechtges summarized this issue, "[I]t is not the general idea of the song that is difficult to understand, it is the details" (Knechtges, "Questions about the Language of *Sheng Min*," 22). In the following recapitulation, I do not intend to solve these very complicated issues regarding the precise meaning of "Shengmin." Rather, I want to emphasize solely how agriculture is construed as a civilizing technology in this mythological song.

34. Although there is some debate about this passage and the conception of Hou Ji, it is solely important for the purpose of this article that Hou Ji is construed as a demigod associated with the generation or revelation of agricultural technologies via his birth. For a discussion of some of the ways in which this episode has been interpreted, see Knechtges, "Questions about the Language of *Sheng Min*," 17–21.

world,³⁵ for “[O]xen and sheep protected and cherished him” (*niuyang feizi zhi* 牛羊腓字之) and “[B]irds covered him with their wings” (*niao fuyi zhi* 鳥覆翼之).³⁶ Due to his intimate knowledge and early experience of the wilderness, the poem depicts Hou Ji as being able to control and increase the growth of crops.³⁷ Forced to feed himself at a young age, he invented the agricultural technique of “clear[ing] the thick grasses” (*jue fengcao* 厥豐草) so he could “plant[] the fields with the yellow crop” (*zhong zhi huangmao* 種之黃茂) and several other plants.³⁸

After having been appointed the lord of the Tai household, “He surrendered his auspicious seeds” (*dan jiang jia zhong* 誕降嘉種) to his people,³⁹ provided them with the agricultural technologies he invented,⁴⁰ and “brought [the crops] home and installed a harvest sacrifice” (*yi gui zhaosi* 以歸肇祀).⁴¹ Thereby, he granted his people control over the natural world and increased their harvest. Thus, according to the mythological narrative, Hou Ji enabled the ancestors of the Ji 姬 clan, the later imperial family of the Zhou dynasty, to nourish themselves comfortably and to use their surplus food to communicate with gods and the dead via sacrificial offerings and rituals whose descriptions fill the last two stanza of the ode. In that sense, this etiological myth enshrined in “Shengmin” depicts the rise of the Ji clan, its civility, and its ritual prowess as the result of a revelation of agricultural technologies that enabled humans to conquer and control the wilderness—a power

35. Stephen Owen even goes so far as to suggest that Lord Millet is not only in tune with the natural world; he is rather a personified or divine vegetable. See Stephen Owen, “Interpreting *Sheng Min*,” in *Ways with Words*, ed. Yu et al., 28–29.

36. Kong Yingda, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 591b (“Shengmin”) and Riegel, “Classic of Odes,” 164.

37. The poem vividly depicts the masses of crops Hou Ji produced by using repetitions such as “line for line” (*peipei* 旃旃), “ear for ear” (*suisui* 穉穉), “bush after bush” (*mengmeng* 幪幪), or “lush and plump” (*fengfeng* 擘擘). See Kong Yingda, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 592a (“Shengmin”). The translations are altered from Riegel, “Classic of Odes,” 164.

38. Kong Yingda, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 592b and 593a (“Shengmin”) and Riegel, “Classic of Odes,” 164.

39. Of course, the agricultural imagery in the *Classic of Odes* may also be understood as metaphors for amorous encounters and procreation. For two examples of such folkloristic readings of the *Odes* that embrace the sexual connotations of “rustic” themes, see Marcel Granet (1884–1940), *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, trans. E. D. Edwards (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1932), 11–145 and Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946), “Jiang Yuan lü daren ji kao” 姜嫄履大人跡考, in *Wen Yiduo quanji* 聞一多全集 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin, 1994), vol. 3, 50–57.

40. I consider in this context the techniques such as “clear[ing] the thick grass” or the generation of specific seeds that Hou Ji provided and/or developed as agricultural technologies.

41. Kong Yingda, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 593b and 594a (“Shengmin”). The translations are altered from Riegel, “Classic of Odes,” 164.

conferred by a demigod who gained this practical knowledge due to his intimate relationship with the natural world. In other words, the poem seems to construe agricultural technologies such as the clearing and tilling of fields as the very means through which human beings may leave behind their “barbaric” origins, take control over the natural world via rituals, and ascend to civility—as the *sine qua non* of social order and governance.⁴²

Agricultural Technologies and Rulership in *Mengzi* 3A.4

Early Chinese texts commonly hailed this conquering of the natural world and the development of agricultural technologies by Lord Millet or, as in other stories, by the Divine Farmer (Shennong 神農). At the same time, however, these writings often elaborated and worked against/with the myth’s conclusion that agricultural and therewith ritual prowess directly leads to social order in their specific discussions of proper rulership.⁴³ For example, a passage in the chapter “Upper Section of Lord Teng Wen” (“Teng Wen Gong shang” 滕文公上) from the *Mengzi*, a collection of sayings attributed to Master Meng Ke 孟軻 (c. 379–304 B.C.E.), uses this image of conquering the wilderness to explain that an agricultural revolution as depicted in the *Shi jing*’s ode to Hou Ji is not enough to lift mankind above its beastly roots.⁴⁴

The passage in question may be found in *Mengzi* 3A.4. This section of the extant text illustrates a scene in which Meng Ke dismantles the arguments of the Agricultural School (*nongjia* 農家) as put forward by his contemporary, Xu Xing 許行, whose policies are based on the “words

42. For a discussion of the early Chinese discourse that grains and cooked foods are signs for a cultivated or educated civilization, see Robert Ford Campany, “The Meanings of Cuisines of Transcendence in Late Classical and Early Medieval China,” *T’oung Pao* 91.1 (2005), 7–19 and Roel Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20–21.

43. For example, the *Mozi*’s 墨子 chapter “On Eschewing Faults” (“Ciguo” 辭過) refers to the image of the development of agriculture as the origins of human civilization in order to argue for a necessity to limit material excesses since the wealth made possible by technologies had seduced and corrupted contemporaneous rulers. See Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908), ed., *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒詁, in *Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 4, 20–21 (“Ciguo”) and Ian Johnston, trans., *The Mozi: A Complete Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 43–45.

44. For a brief discussion of the *Mengzi*’s vision of agriculture, see Cho-yun Hsu, *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy* (206 B.C.–A.D. 220), ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 9–12.

of the Divine Farmer" (*Shennong zhi yan* 神農之言).⁴⁵ Chen Xiang 陳相, a Ruist disciple who had been impressed by Xu Xing's doctrines, seeks Master Meng to discuss the idea that everybody should produce their own food—including the ruling elite. Meng Ke rebuffs this claim, arguing that job-sharing is an inevitable and vital part of society since it is impossible for anybody to produce all the things that one needs. Only if "There are the activities of the great people and the affairs of the petty people" (有大人之事，有小人之事), each fulfilling their specific role (*fen* 分), will a society be well-ordered and functioning.⁴⁶

Within this context of a debate between the teachings of the Agricultural School and Ruists, *Mengzi* 3A.4 develops a vision of a cultivated and ordered society rooted in the conquering of the floods and the invention of agriculture to harvest foods and grains (*gu* 穀).⁴⁷ It utilizes Yao 堯, Shun 舜, and Hou Ji, and their focus on "labor with their hearts" (*laoxin* 勞心) rather than "labor with their strength" (*laoli* 勞力), to substantiate its claim that job-sharing is a sign of a cultivated society.⁴⁸ However, *Mengzi* 3A.4 employs this signification to argue that although the development of these technologies (i.e. channeling/damming and plowing) allowed humans to control the "[g]reat waters [that] overflowed their banks, spreading throughout the world" (洪水橫流，氾濫於天下) and the "[a]nimals [that] harried people" (*qinshou biren* 禽獸害人), it still

45. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 214 ("Teng Wen Gong shang" 滕文公上). The translation is altered from van Norden, *Mengzi*, 68. For a discussion of the Agricultural School, see A. C. Graham (1919–1991), *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 67–110.

46. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 218 ("Teng Wen Gong shang") and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 70.

47. In similar fashion, texts like the "Kingly Regulations" ("Wangzhi" 王制) chapter of the *Records of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) use culinary customs to separate "barbarious" from "cultivated" civilizations. The "Kingly Regulations" claims that the invention of the cultural technologies of cooking and growing crops inherently separates the peripheral tribes of the Yi 夷, Man 蠻, Rong 戎, and Di 狄 from the Middle Kingdoms. Based on the cosmological system of the Five Quarters (*wu fang* 五方), it construes the periphery as inherently culturally inferior to and susceptible to the powers of the center whose civility the text leaves unmentioned. See Kong Yingda, ed., *Liji zhushu* 禮記註疏, in *Shisan jing zhushu*, ed. Ruan Yuan (Taipei: Yiwen, 2001), vol. 5, 247b–48a ("Wangzhi") and James Legge (1815–1897), trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites—An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions* (New York: University Books, 1967), vol. 1, 229–30. For a discussion of the changing meanings of the Four/Five Quarters system, see Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23–128.

48. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 219 ("Teng Wen Gong shang") and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 70.

did not help them to transcend the limitations of being a thing (*wu* 物).⁴⁹ Humans “without instruction” (*wujiao* 無教) would still remain “close to being animals” (*jin yu qinshou* 近於禽獸).⁵⁰ Due to the limited impact that several portions of the *Mengzi*, including *Mengzi* 4A.1 and 6A.8, attribute to the mere satisfaction of nutritional and sacrificial needs,⁵¹ *Mengzi* 3A.4 unsurprisingly claims that there is a need for the rulers to do more than just “[teach] the people planting, harvesting, and cultivating the five types of grain” (教民稼穡，樹藝五穀).⁵²

In this vision, ethical cultivation of the people is the next necessary step after an agricultural revolution to separate humans further from their origins close to animals.⁵³ By eradicating the threats of the natural world, culture heroes of the distant past spatially separated the animal from the human world so that “The Middle Kingdoms may be obtained and fed” (中國可得而食也).⁵⁴ Now, it would be the task of the present sages and rulers to cultivate the masses to such a degree that humans may leave behind their beastly traits and stop the interhuman struggles of the Warring States period.⁵⁵ In other words, it seems as though *Mengzi* 3A.4 argues that only if the rulers prepare the ground and provide both material and ethical means to nurture the subjects and their hearts (*xin* 心) would the Four Sprouts flourish and a harmonious society arise.⁵⁶

49. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 219 (“Teng Wen Gong shang”) and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 70.

50. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 226 (“Teng Wen Gong shang”) and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 71.

51. For the passages in question from *Mengzi* 4A.1 and 6A.8, see Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 287 (“Li Lou shang” 離婁上) and 456–58 (“Gaozi shang” 告子上), respectively. For translations of these two passages, see van Norden, *Mengzi*, 88–90 and 151–52.

52. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 224 (“Teng Wen Gong shang”) and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 71.

53. A. C. Graham and Bryan W. van Norden argue in a similar direction that the *Mengzi* puts a lot of emphasis on extending the mere nurturing of the subjects with food to a nurturing of their hearts (*xin* 心). See A. C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian [Mengzian] Theory of Human Nature,” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, ed. Liu Xiusheng and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 18–32 and van Norden, *Mengzi*, xxv–xxxvii.

54. Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 221 (“Teng Wen Gong shang”). The translation is altered from van Norden, *Mengzi*, 71.

55. For a brief discussion of the *Mengzi*’s vision of the ruler as a potential guarantor of moral order, see Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 34–36.

56. For *Mengzi* 2A.6’s discussion of the inherent goodness of human beings and its comparison between the growing of Four Sprouts and the cultivation of the human body and its Four Limbs (*si ti* 四體), see Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, 138–40 (“Gongsun Chou shang” 公孫丑上) and van Norden, *Mengzi*, 45–47. For two discussions of the *Mengzi*’s vision of cultivating the heart, see Alan K. L. Chan, “A Matter of Taste: *Qi*

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Hence, *Mengzi* 3A.4 reduces the development and importance of agriculture and its technologies from a sufficient condition for social harmony as found in the “Shengmin” and Xu Xing’s words to a necessary one. It metaphorizes and projects agriculture and the tilling of fields, which functioned as the foundation of social order in the “Shengmin,” onto the totalities of governance, as well as the human and social body—an intellectual transition and “work on myth,” to use Blumenberg’s terminology, that is also crystallized in the etymology of the term “arts” (*yi* 藝) in early China.⁵⁷

The Call of the Wild: The Admonition to De-Cultivate in the *Zhuangzi*’s “Mati” Chapter

As we have seen above, “Shengmin” and *Mengzi* 3A.4 apparently interpreted the conquering of the wilderness as a positive aspect of human governance. Although these two texts differ in their concrete employment of the etiological narrative and its scope (cultivation of fields vs. cultivation of bodies), they nonetheless depict the conquering and development of the natural environment that surrounded human beings in the Middle Kingdoms’ distant past as a necessary step out of barbaric circumstances. However, a passage from the *Zhuangzi*, a collection of materials and discourses edited by Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 C.E.) that had retrospectively been attributed to Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (fl. fourth century B.C.E.), displays a different take on the human domination of the natural world.

In the “Outer Chapters” (“Waipian” 外篇) of the extant *Zhuangzi*, we find an essay in the “Mati” chapter that develops an elaborate argumentation for the superiority of the natural world over any “civilizing” human activities.⁵⁸ By comparing human governance

(Vital Energy) and the Tending of the Heart (*Xin*) in *Mencius* 2A2,” in *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 42–71 and Irmgard Enzinger, “Bedeutungen des Begriffes ‘Herz’: das Körper-Denken in *Mengzi* und *Zhuangzi*,” *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002), 143–52.

57. According to Tu Wei-ming, the term arts (*yi*) as utilized in the self-cultivational program of the Six Arts (*liu yi* 六藝) originally signified the planting and cultivating of fields, referring to an understanding of agriculture similar to *Mengzi* 3A.4 yet distinct from the “Shengmin.” Blumenberg would call such lexicalized metaphors the result of a terminologization (*Terminologisierung*), a case in which “[T]he word’s metaphorical aspect is no longer perceived.” See Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, 82 and Tu Wei-ming, “The Idea of the Human in Mencian Thought: An Approach to Chinese Aesthetics,” in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 60–63.

58. According to A. C. Graham’s influential analysis of textual strata in the *Zhuangzi*, the “Mati” chapter would be considered to be a peripheral text written

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as epitomized by rites (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂) to the taming and breeding of wild horses and the throwing of pottery,⁵⁹ it in fact argues that any human intervention with natural processes inevitably leads to violence and death.⁶⁰ Thereby, all three examples illustrate a situation in which the Myriad Beings (*wan wu* 萬物) are artificially reshaped and utilized, a violent act according to the “Mati” chapter’s vision that only makes them subservient and useful to humanity and its “civilizing” process.⁶¹ Accordingly, humanity should refrain from any such project and instead return to the Uncarved Block (*supu* 素樸).⁶²

To substantiate this claim, the “Mati” chapter develops an alternative reading of the relationship between mankind’s distant past and present. It construes a vision of a primordial utopia in which humanity “dwel[t] together with the birds and the beasts. They would come together in tribes with the [M]yriad [Be]ings” (同與禽獸居，族與萬物並).⁶³ It describes this early stage of human development prior to the

by the hands of a later author labeled “Primitivist.” See A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-Tzū: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-Tzū* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 197–99. I disagree with his problematic evaluation based on the assumptions that 1) Zhuang Zhou was a philosopher and 2) that we may meaningfully disentangle authorial voices from the text’s hodge-podge structure. Instead, I treat the *Zhuangzi* as a collection of multifarious discourses (and NOT schools) that may or may not reverberate shared themes. For a critique of Graham’s evaluation, see Esther Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*,” *T’oung Pao* 96 (2011), 299–369.

59. For a brief discussion of the *Zhuangzi*’s rejection of Ruists’ rites and morality, see Kim-chong Chong, “The Concept of *Zhen* 真 in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Philosophy East & West* 61.2 (2011), 327–33.

60. For two discussions of the relationship between nature and death in the *Zhuangzi*, see Mark Berkson, “Death in the *Zhuangzi*: Mind, Nature, and the Art of Forgetting,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Amy Olberding (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 202–7 and Agnè Budriūnaitė, “Joys of an Empty Skull: The Tension between Nature and Death in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *New Visions of the Zhuangzi*, ed. Livia Kohn (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2015), 23–39.

61. Albert Galvany discusses a similar situation in his article on the usefulness of uselessness (*wuyong zhi yong* 無用之用) by exploring the *Zhuangzi*’s utilization of the image of trees. See Albert Galvany, “Discussing Usefulness: Trees as Metaphor in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Monumenta Serica* 57 (2009), 71–97. For another article on this theme, see John S. Major, “The Efficacy of Uselessness: A Chuang-tzu Motif,” *Philosophy East & West* 25.3 (1975), 265–79.

62. For translations of several examples from the *Zhuangzi* that display such a utopian vision of governance and a brief discussion of this idea, see Graham, *Chuang-Tzū*, 170–75.

63. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 152 (“Mati”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 81.

emergence of “civility” (*wen*) as an “age of ultimate integrity” (*zhide zhi shi*),⁶⁴ of an inborn, untaught, and unreflective disposition of humanity as a self-less (*wuji* 無己), desire-less (*wuyu* 無欲), and knowledge-less (*wuzhi* 無知) partaker in the phenomenal world.⁶⁵

With “the arrival of the sages” (*jizhi shengren* 及至聖人) and their implementation of rewards and separations in the forms of benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), music (*yue*), and rites (*li*),⁶⁶ however, the entire situation changed drastically.⁶⁷ The “Mati” chapter claims humans only lost their ultimate integrity due to the rise of (agri-)cultural technologies, education, and knowledge (*zhi* 知). It blames the creation of rites and music, understood to be the epitome of the ritualistic construction of roles (*fen*) and separations (*bie* 別),⁶⁸ as a transgression or “error of the sage” (*shengren zhi guo* 聖人之過),⁶⁹ a cultural invention that destroyed humanity’s inborn virtue of togetherness (*tongde* 同德).⁷⁰ Consequently, it calls upon humans to decultivate and release themselves from the

64. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 152 (“Mati”). The translation is altered from Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 81.

65. Perhaps the most famous crystallization of such an understanding of an equality and essential unity between humans and other beings may be found in the second chapter “Discourse of Evening out Beings” (“Qiwulun” 齊物論). See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 21–54 (“Qiwulun”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 10–24. However, similar ideas seem to permeate in various guises large portions of the extant *Zhuangzi*. See for example Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 114–24 (“Dazongshi” 大宗師) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 56–61.

66. The passage’s play on ideas reflected in the *Mengzi* and other Ruist writings may be justified by their shared terminology. In addition to the term music (*yue*), the text almost completely reflects the Four Sprouts (*ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* 智) as the root of all harm in this world. For two comparative analyses of the *Mengzi* and *Zhuangzi*, see Enzinger, “Bedeutungen des Begriffes ‘Herz,’” 95–170 and Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 277–80.

67. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 152 (“Mati”). The translation is altered from Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 81–82.

68. For a discussion of how distinctions are fixed (*fending* 分定) by rites in the *Liji*’s “Workings of the Rites” (“Liyun” 禮運) chapter, see Kong Yingda, *Liji zhushu*, 430a–30b (“Liyun”) and Legge, *Li Chi*, vol. 1, 377–78. For a passage from the *Liji*’s “Record of Music” (“Yueji” 樂記) chapter that discusses how music guides the Myriad Beings to return to their proper roles and order (*li* 理) according to their categories (*lei* 類), see Kong Yingda, *Liji zhushu*, 681a–81b (“Yueji”) and Legge, *Li Chi*, vol. 2, 109–11.

69. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 153 (“Mati”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 82.

70. Passages from the chapter “Robber Zhi” (“Dao Zhi” 盜跖) and “All under Heaven” (“Tian xia” 天下) clearly construe early Chinese “history” in a similarly bifurcated sense. The “Dao Zhi” chapter even explicitly criticizes the culture heroes Huangdi 皇帝, Yao, Shun, Tang 湯, and Wu 武 for their infringement of the workings of the Dao. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 429–30 (“Dao Zhi”) and 462–64 (“Tian Xia”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 302 and 334–35.

project of civility so they may become a generation of ultimate integrity and non-knowledge (*wuzhi*) again.

Hence, we may conclude that this discourse on the necessity to decultivate the Middle Kingdoms into a primordial society as enshrined in the “Mati” chapter connotes the phase of “human development” as a violent and destructive intrusion into the workings of the universe.⁷¹ In fact, it states that the sages “chopped the Way and its Potency in order to create benevolence and righteousness” (毀道德以為仁義).⁷² In other words, the “Mati” chapter’s vision starkly contrasts the treatment of agricultural imagery in the *Shi jing*’s “Shengmin” and *Mengzi* 3A.4.⁷³ It reverses the judgmental directionality of their shared agenda to further separate humanity from the natural sphere by turning back to the wilderness as an ideal lifeworld—a past prior to the rise of sages, culture heroes, agriculture, and civility.⁷⁴ In Blumenberg’s words, we find in the “Mati” chapter a depiction of the totalities of governance and social order in terms of agriculture’s antipode: primordial wilderness. In so doing, it works against the “Shengmin’s” myth by developing its own cosmogonic narrative. It rejects the positive interpretation of tilled fields as both cultivated spaces and educated bodies, as evinced in *Mengzi* 3A.4, and purports an image of agriculture as a violent and forceful implementation of intentional actions (*youwei* 有為).

71. For a brief discussion of such violent aspects of human cultivation as illustrated in the *Zhuangzi*’s story of Primordial Chaos (*hundun* 渾沌) that I cite in n.73 below, see Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Daoism*, 70–78.

72. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 153 (“Mati”). The translation is altered from Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 82.

73. While the *Mengzi* argues that not cultivating one’s Four Sprouts will lead to one’s own or a ruler’s death, the *Zhuangzi*’s “Mati” chapter evokes in this discourse a similarly violent scene by claiming that the kind of cultivation taught by the sages inevitably injures the entire universe. It literally leads to the carving of the Un-carved Block (*chunpu* 純樸) or the incision of orifices in *hundun* as in another passage in the *Zhuangzi*. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 139 (“Yingdiwang”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 71.

74. In this instance, the passage from the “Mati” chapter clearly opposes Kongzi’s remark in the *Analects*’ (*Lun yu* 論語) chapter “Master of Wei” (“Weizi” 微子) that “Birds and beasts cannot flock together with [mankind]” (鳥獸不可與同羣). See Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (1791–1855), ed., *Lun yu zhengyi* 論語正義, in *Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 1, 393 (“Weizi”). The translation is altered from Edward Slingerland, trans., *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 217.

Employing Wilderness and Tilled Fields: The *Huainanzi*'s "Arts of Rulership"

Thus far, we have encountered two oppositional understandings of agriculture and utilizations of its imagery. Although *Mengzi* 3A.4 considered agricultural technologies as being insufficient to guarantee social order and thus diverted slightly from the "Shengmin's" eulogy of Hou Ji, it nonetheless attributed to their invention and the tilling of fields a significant role in the evolution and maintenance of human society. In other words, *Mengzi* 3A.4 worked with the image of tilling as enshrined in Hou Ji's myth and projected it onto the human body and its cultivation. At the same time, the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter worked against the myth of agriculture as the source of social order by completely reversing *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the "Shengmin's" vision of culture heroes and their (agricultural) inventions and by counter-intuitively stylizing the stage of a primordial wilderness as the real pinnacle of humanity.

When we turn our focus to the *Huainanzi*, a highly intertextual and comprehensive text from the early Western Han 西漢 dynasty (202 B.C.E.–23 C.E.) that Liu An, the king of Huainan, presumably presented to his nephew Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (156–87 B.C.E.; r. 141–87 B.C.E.) during his inaugural visit, we find a synthesis of these two positions.⁷⁵ I propose that Liu An and his workshop illustrate in a passage from chapter nine, titled "Arts of Rulership," the relationship between the ruler and the officials and their respective responsibilities regarding punishments (*zhu* 誅) and rewards (*shang* 賞) with the help of the metonymical images of a "court(yard) [that] is full of weeds and devoid of traces" (朝廷蕪而無跡) and "farmers' fields [that] are well tilled and devoid of weeds" (田野辟而無草).⁷⁶ In other words, I suggest that the *Huainanzi* works with and combines the two polar treatments of agricultural imagery as paradigmatically enshrined in *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter. The passage in question from *Huainanzi* 9.13 reads as follows:

是故明主之治，國有誅者而主無怒焉，朝有賞者而君無與焉。誅者不怨君，罪之所當也；賞者不德上，功之所致也。民知誅賞之來，皆在於身也，故務功修業，不受贖於君。是故朝廷蕪而無跡，田野辟而無草，故「太上下知有之」(*Laozi* 17)。

75. Charles Le Blanc has suggested that about a third of the *Huainanzi* had been "borrowed" from a wide range of pre-Han writings. See Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu*, 79 and 83. For references to scholarship that discusses the *Huainanzi*'s early textual history, see n.11 above.

76. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282 ("Zhushu"). The translations are altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307.

Thus in the governance of an enlightened ruler, when the state implements punishments, there is no place for the ruler's anger. When the court bestows rewards, there is no place for the ruler's involvement. One who is punished does not resent the ruler, for the punishment suits the offense. One who is rewarded does not feel gratitude toward the ruler, for the reward has been earned by merit. In such a state the people understand that rewards and punishments all come from themselves. Thus they perform their duties and serve their callings, not feeling that they should receive special tribute from their ruler. Thus the court(yard) is full of weeds and devoid of traces; farmers' fields are well tilled and devoid of weeds. Therefore, "Of a great ruler, those below know only that (s)he exists."⁷⁷

The *Huainanzi* narrates here a twofold scheme that presents an idealized vision of the responses of subjects towards their punishments and rewards. In both cases, the text suggests that only a ruler's absence from any decisions on and conferrals of punishments and rewards will lead to the situation that the subjects dissociate their specific treatments from the ruling power that underlies the governance of the empire. Similar to the Way's (*dao* 道) running of the cosmos whose hidden powers (*yinde* 陰德) we may only experience through the motions (*xing* 行) of the celestial bodies, the changes of seasons, and other natural processes,⁷⁸ *Huainanzi* 9.13 suggests by using the words of chapter seventeen of the *Laozi* 老子 that subjects should only experience the ruler's might through the actions (*xing*) of the officials so that "Of a great ruler, those below know only that (s)he exists" (太上，下知有之).⁷⁹ In other words, the passage purports a vision of governance that construes the ruler as

77. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282 ("Zhushu"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 306–7.

78. For such an illustration of the Way as an ineffable power, see *Huainanzi* 1.1 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 1–2 ("Yuandao" 原道) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 48–49. For an explanation of *yinde* as a hidden yet positive power, see Marc Nürnberger's translation in William H. Nienhauser Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records Volume X: The Memoirs of Han China, Part III* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 183–85, n.107.

79. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282 ("Zhushu"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307. We will see in the next pages that the officials are *de facto* the ones who should execute punishments and rewards according to the *Huainanzi*—despite the fact that the passage does not explicitly mention them. Moreover, *Huainanzi* 9.13 interestingly appropriates in this case a passage from chapter seventeen of the *Laozi* that in its received form seems to be concerned with the decay of the kingly way over generations and not so much with the positive impact of a policy. See Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 C.E.), ed., *Laozi zhu* 老子注, in *Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 3, 9–10 and D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 (1921–2010), trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 21.

the unknowable pivot at the center of the human realm that takes care of the underlings by not actively interfering (*wuwei*) with their actions and the resulting punishments and rewards.

In this discussion of the functionality of rulership based on punishments and rewards that is reminiscent of legalist conceptualizations of governance, we encounter at the end of the passage the two images of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields that immediately catch our eye.⁸⁰ What is the meaning and purpose of these two images? First, it seems as if we can reconcile the situation with the help of a rather literal reading, suggesting that “The court(yard) is full of weeds and devoid of traces” and “The farmers’ fields are well tilled and devoid of weeds” because the government works. Such an interpretation propounds that the court is empty since everyone is off doing what they should be doing (namely, managing the fields, etc.) so that the population does not bring their grievances and suits before the ruler.⁸¹ In other words, such an interpretation understands the two images as an emblematic illustration of “the governance of an enlightened ruler” (*mingzhu zhi zhi* 明主之治).⁸²

Although such a “literal” reading seemingly explains the usage of the two images of an overgrown court as a deserted place and tilled fields in this passage, it does not explain why a court building would be overgrown with grass. In my opinion, we may only reconcile this impasse with a metaphorical reading that interprets the overgrown character of *chaoting* as some sort of figuration—that is, as a symbol for its non-utilization over a long period of time in a sage empire. But then we would treat the images constructed in congruence in two completely distinct ways: the tilled fields as factual and the overgrown court(yard) as symbolical. To avoid such a bifurcated reading of the two images that, as we will see, are clearly construed in congruent terms, I would like to suggest an interpretation that further takes into account the larger textual and cultural context of these two images and the allusive quality of the

80. The *Han Feizi* 韓非子 develops the concept of the Two Handles (*er bing* 二柄), i.e. punishment (*xing* 刑) and reward (*de* 德), as the basis for proper rulership. However, the *Huainanzi* starkly differs from the *Han Feizi* by putting this power into the hands of the officials. See Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (1859–1922), ed., *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解, in *Zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), vol. 5, 26–29 (“Er bing” 二柄) and Burton Watson (1925–2017), trans., *Han Feizi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 29–34.

81. I want to thank an anonymous reviewer of the journal *Early China* who suggested this reading. (S)he also commented that *chaoting* might solely refer to a court building. Accordingly, I translate it as a court in the next paragraphs where I discuss such a literal reading of the image.

82. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 306.

contrast between traceless (*wuji* 無跡) and tilled (*bi* or *pi* 辟) spaces. In other words, I propose that the function(s) and meaning(s) of the two contrastive images of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields might be far less determinate than they appear at first sight.

When we consider the passages right before and after *Huainanzi* 9.13, it seems as if this part of the “Arts of Rulership” is also concerned with the relationship between the ruler and the officials. *Huainanzi* 9.12, for example, utilizes the image of crafts and the production of a chariot (*che* 車), an image commonly used to depict the state,⁸³ in order to emphasize the importance of job-sharing.⁸⁴ Similar to the creation of a chariot for which one would utilize several specialists who do “not have two different skills” (*gong wu er ji* 工無二伎), a ruler and the officials should “each st[i]ck to [their] professions and ... not interfere with others” (各守其職，不得相姦).⁸⁵ Hence, the portion of the *Huainanzi* that directly precedes the passage on the overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields problematizes the relationship between rulers and officials as part of “the governance of an enlightened ruler.”⁸⁶ Only if “[T]he ruler and [her/]his ministers work closely together for a long time without imposing on each other” (君臣彌久而不相厭)⁸⁷ will a government “possess[] the technique for ‘driving the chariot’ [of state]” (有術以御之也; *Huainanzi* 13.8).⁸⁸

83. Early Chinese texts commonly use the number of chariots to depict a state’s strength. In addition, the chariot became associated with the universe so that riding a chariot expressed the control of all under Heaven. See Zürn, “Writing as Weaving,” 161–67. According to John Major, such metaphors of tools and technologies often illustrate political actions, the qualities of the sage ruler, and her/his relationship to officials. See Major, “Tool Metaphors in the *Huainanzi*,” 158–81.

84. In fact, this discourse on the importance of a job-sharing between the officials and the sage ruler also appears in the *Zhuangzi*’s “Heavenly Way” (“Tiandao” 天道) chapter. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 207–10 (“Tiandao”) and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 121–23.

85. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 281 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 305.

86. Judson Murray discusses this job-sharing element of the *Huainanzi*’s vision of “the governance of an enlightened ruler” within the context of kinship relations. See Judson B. Murray, “The Liu Clan’s ‘Flesh and Bone,’” 306–25. Griet Vankeerberghen describes this job-sharing relationship—albeit with an evaluation quite the opposite to Judson Murray’s piece—with the help of the *Huainanzi*’s discourse of lord-kings (*zhuhouwang* 諸侯王). See Griet Vankeerberghen, “The Discourse about Lords (*Zhuhou*) in the *Huainanzi*,” in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production*, ed. Queen and Puett, 326–50.

87. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 281 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 306.

88. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 436 (“Fanlun” 汎論) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 500. The *Huainanzi* oftentimes uses the image of a chariot to depict statecraft and the relationship between the charioteer and the horses to illustrate the relationship

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The same theme continues after *Huainanzi* 9.13. The majority of *Huainanzi* 9.14 also describes the ruler's role within the government and explains how her/his non-involvement would still impact the "[H]undred [O]fficials [who] obtain their cultivation from [her/]him" (*bai guan dexiu yan* 百官得修焉).⁸⁹ It claims that the ruler should "cover up hearing and sight/illumination and decultivate her/his way" (掩聰明而反修其道).⁹⁰ Only "if (s)he is placed in foolishness and fulfils Potency" (*chuyu chengde* 處愚稱德),⁹¹ a characteristic that the *Laozi* and later material cultural depictions of True People (*zhenren* 真人) and Ascended Beings (*xianren* 仙人) often associate with sagehood,⁹² do "[T]he [M]yriad [Be]ings revert" (*wan wu gui zhi* 萬物歸之), and then "[T]he world gives what it has" (*tianxia wei zhi* 天下遺之).⁹³ Thus, the ruler's non-involvement in the daily activities such as punishment and reward and her/his decultivation (*fanxiu*) into an empty and foolish non-being, which strongly contrasts the *Huainanzi's* discourse on the utilization of the officials who obtain cultivation (*dexiu*), are apparently at the heart of these passages.⁹⁴

between the ruler and the officials. See *Huainanzi* 1.4, 6.6, 6.9, 9.24, 9.25, 10.116, 12.10, and 14.52 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 5–10 ("Yuandao"), 203–5 ("Lanming" 覽冥), 215 ("Lanming"), 297–301 ("Zhushu"), 342 ("Miucheng" 繆稱), 387 ("Daoying" 道應), and 481 ("Quanyan" 詮言) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 51–52, 222–23, 229–31, 321–25, 390, 447, and 563. For a brief discussion of chariotteering in relationship to the ruler and the officials, see Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu*, 90–92.

89. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282–83 ("Zhushu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307.

90. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282–83 ("Zhushu"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307.

91. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282–83 ("Zhushu"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307.

92. Chapter twenty of the *Laozi*, for example, attributes the "heart of a fool" (*yuren zhi xin* 愚人之心) confused (*hun* 昏) and dull (*menmen* 悶悶) to the sage. See Wang Bi, *Laozi zhu*, 11. The translations are altered from Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 24–25. There is quite some debate on how to best translate the term *zhenren*. Instead of the common translation "Perfected Person," which in my understanding puts too much emphasis on the process of cultivation rather than decultivation, I follow in my translation Poul Andersen's suggestion based on his in-depth analysis of the concept of true/real (*zhen* 真). He claims that unlike the Western philosophical traditions the term *zhen* does not support a distinction between truth and reality. See Poul Andersen, *The Paradox of Being: Truth, Identity, and Images in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, in preparation).

93. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 282–83 ("Zhushu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 307.

94. *Huainanzi* 9.1 presents such a job-sharing situation stating, "[T]hough [her/]his [heart] knows the norms, [her/]his savants transmit the discourses of the Way; though [her/]his mouth can speak, [her/]his entourage proclaims [her/]his words; though [her/]his feet can advance, [her/]his master of ceremonies leads; though [her/]his ears

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This contrast between the hidden ruler and the openly active officials, whom the *Huainanzi* also illustrates with the help of the contrastive images of the chariot wheel (axle/hub:sage and spokes:officials), roots and branches (*benmo* 本末), round and square (*yuan* 圓 and *fang* 方), or bones and flesh (*gurou* 骨肉) amongst others, dominates the majority of the “Arts of Rulership” chapter.⁹⁵ According to Roger Ames, chapter nine is filled with repeated concerns about the proper roles of rulers and officials.⁹⁶ Hence, it seems as if the images of the overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields belong to a long list of binaries the *Huainanzi* utilizes to depict the relationship between the ruler and the officials/subjects. Isn’t it possible, then, that the images of the overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields not only depict a sage empire but also allude to the discourse of job-sharing that permeates the “Arts of Rulership”?

When we turn our focus from the images’ textual context to their microstructure, it becomes even more likely that the two images not only illustrate a sage empire, but also function as paired metaphors that construe a contrast between the ruler (tenor) as a court(yard) (vehicle) and the officials (tenor) as tilled fields (vehicle).⁹⁷ For example, the specific characters for grass and tilling that the passage employs insinuate the *Huainanzi*’s congruent vision of governance. The term weed (*wu* 蕪) visually alludes to the central concepts of non-being (*wu* 無) and non-active interference (*wuwe*)—two ideas that also play a prominent role in the ninth chapter’s vision of a sage ruler.⁹⁸ Moreover, the utilization of

can hear, [her/]his officials offer their admonitions” (心知規而師傅諭導，口能言而行人稱辭，足能行而相者先導，耳能聽而執正進諫). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 269 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 295.

95. For examples of the wheel image as an illustration of job-sharing, see *Huainanzi* 1.2, 9.16, 20.36, and 21.2 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 2–3 (“Yuandao”), 283–84 (“Zhushu”), 694–95 (“Taizu” 泰族), and 703 (“Yaolüe” 要略) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 49–50, 308–9, 836, and 853. For two brief discussions of the image of root and branches, see Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu*, 185–89 and Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 95–97. For a discussion of the root-branches structuralism in the *Huainanzi*, see Meyer, “Root-Branches Structuralism in the *Huainanzi*.” For an example of the round/square binary as an illustration of the ruler and the officials, see *Huainanzi* 9.15 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 283 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 308. For a discussion of the image of bone and flesh (*gurou*) to illustrate the cooperation between the emperor and his blood relatives/subjects, see Murray, “The Liu Clan’s ‘Flesh and Bone,’” 306–25.

96. See Roger Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 58–62.

97. See Ivar Armstrong Richards (1893–1979), *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 89–138.

98. *Huainanzi* 9.1 prominently states, “The ruler’s techniques [consist of] establishing non-active management and carrying out wordless instructions” (人主之術，處無

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the expression *wuji* in this passage seems to point towards a quality of the Way, as I will show below. The court(yard)'s traceless environment starkly contrasts the fields' tilled or incised (*bi* or *pi*) structure that hints at the practice of active law enforcement (*bi* or *pi*) and educative training as reflected in writings such as the *Mengzi*.⁹⁹ Hence, in addition to their literal reading as a sage empire these two images also evoke associations to the traceless sage whom the *Huainanzi* depicts as someone who embodies the Way (*tidao* 體道) and the well-cultivated and policy executing officials.

This contrast is reaffirmed in the passage's seemingly intentional usage of parallel sentence structures. While "The court(yard) is full of weeds and devoid of traces" (朝廷蕪而無跡), "The farmers' fields are well tilled and devoid of weeds" (田野辟而無草).¹⁰⁰ The two sentences contrast these two spaces by cross-using the ideas of grass and trace. In so doing, the *Huainanzi* seems to consciously construe the two metaphors in terms of an opposition of having (*you* 有) and not having (*wu*). In my reading, they therefore evoke with the help of terminological allusions and parallelism a juxtaposition between private yards and public fields; between "useless" spaces of leisurely roaming and dwelling and useful areas of productivity; between the emperor's non-active (*wuwei*) and the officials' active (*youwei*) governance; and finally between the ruler's inward (*nei* 內) and the officials' outward (*wai* 外) realms of activity. Due to the passage's contention that officials and not the ruler should administer punishments and rewards, the cultural significance of plants and agriculture as metaphors for governance and practices of self-cultivation in early China, as well as the images' textual context and micro-structure, it is therefore very tempting, in my opinion, to read these two images not only as an illustration of a sage empire but also as metaphors for the specific roles of rulers and officials, respectively.¹⁰¹

為之事，而行不言之教。 See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 269 ("Zhushu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 295.

99. For a discussion of the importance of agricultural imagery in relationship to education and self-cultivation in the *Mengzi*, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yang-ming* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 88–95 and Sterckx, "Agronomy and Philosophy in Early China," forthcoming.

100. See n.77 above.

101. In fact, these two readings do not exclude each other since *Huainanzi* 20.36 in one of its last phrases clearly affirms, "[W]hen high and low follow different Ways, there is order. When they follow the same Way, there is disorder" (上下異道則治，同道則亂). That means, a sage kingdom in which courts are not frequented and fields tilled (literal reading) is only possible if the ruler remains inactive and the officials are active (metaphorical reading). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 695 ("Taizu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 836.

Unwrapping the Allusiveness of the Images of an Overgrown Courtyard and Tilled Fields

Thus far, this first analysis has only scratched the surface of the images' implications. In addition to a literal reading, it suggested that the court(yard) and tilled fields might also function as paired metaphors that refer to the distinct roles of the ruler and the officials within the *Huainanzi's* vision of governance. If we read these two images as metaphors within this context of a debate about political roles, however, the passage raises at least two further questions: in what sense do an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields really serve as vehicles for the tenors ruler and officials? And what are the larger implications of these two metaphors within the *Huainanzi's* discussion of rulership? In the next sections, we will see that the overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields might not only refer to governmental roles. They similarly evoke strong associations with early Chinese discourses of the cosmos, body, and (de-)cultivational practices, evading any possibility of being substituted in pure terminologies.¹⁰²

To illuminate further their relationship to late Warring States and early Han 漢 understandings of the body and (de-)cultivation, I will concentrate on the image of the overgrown court(yard) and its tracelessness (*wuji*) in the following discussion. Since *Huainanzi* 9.13 construes tilled fields and the overgrown court(yard) in congruent terms according to my reading, I deem it sufficient to present at this point only a detailed analysis of what I consider to be a metaphor for the ruler. We will see that the *Huainanzi* purports that the practice of *wuwei* would finally result in a ruler's hiding (*cangji* 藏跡 and *dunji* 遁跡), covering up (*yanji* 揜跡), or eradicating traces (*mieji* 滅跡), leading to a transformation of her/his body into a formless being homologous to an overgrown court(yard) and the Way. In that sense, I will suggest retrospectively that the *Huainanzi* apparently construes two distinct self-cultivational programs depending on the role of the person in question. While the ruler needs to decultivate (*fanxiu*) her-/himself and her/his surroundings into an overgrown court(yard)—a Dao-like being of non-action (*wuwei*), non-knowledge (*wuzhi*), and formlessness (*wuxing* 無形)—I deduce *ex negativo* that officials must obtain cultivation (*dexiu*) and trim themselves into a cultivated field (*tianye*) defined by the traces of their actions

102. For a discussion of the intricate relationship between state, cosmos, and body in the writings of the late Warring States and early imperial period, see Nathan Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), 5–37.

and words.¹⁰³ But before we get to this point, let us first explore how tracelessness, a defining aspect of the *Huainanzi*'s metaphor of an overgrown court(yard), is related to illustrations of the cosmic Way and the sage.

The Tracelessness of the Way and the Sage's Eradication of Traces in the *Huainanzi*

The *Huainanzi*'s metaphor of the ruler as an overgrown and traceless court(yard) alludes to a vivid discourse about the tracelessness of the Way in texts from the late Warring States period and the early Han.¹⁰⁴ Texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Huainanzi* depict the Dao as an intangible force that remains untraceable for human beings while its actions are omnipresent in the universe.¹⁰⁵ *Huainanzi* 1.13 from the chapter "Originating Way" ("Yuandao" 原道), for example, refers to the two locomotive terms motion (*xing*) and movement (*dong* 動) to depict the actions of the Way. It creates a stylistic parallel between these two activities by saying that "Its movements are formless" (*qi dong wuxing* 其動無形) and "[I]ts motions/actions are traceless" (*qi xing wuji* 其行無跡).¹⁰⁶ Hence, the *Huainanzi* implicitly contrasts the trace- and formlessness of the Way with the Myriad Beings' bodily shapes and tracks.¹⁰⁷

103. For a concise example that explains the Arts of Rulership in such a job-sharing way, in which the ruler performs non-interfering actions (*wuwei*) while the officials work out the governance of the empire, see *Huainanzi* 9.1 in n.94 above.

104. Although the idea of being traceless appears already in the *Laozi*, only in the late Warring States and early Han does the occurrence of the term *wuji* increase. Texts like the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Wenzi* 文子, and Wang Chong's 王充 (c. 27–100 C.E.) *Discourses Weighed in Balance* (*Lunheng* 論衡) frequently employ the term tracelessness when they depict the Dao or the sages. In that sense, it seems as if this discourse is rooted in some basic ideas about the Way that are already present in the *Laozi*. For the passage in the *Laozi*, see its chapter twenty-seven in Wang Bi, *Laozi zhu*, 15 and Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 32.

105. The chapter "Knowledge Wanders North" ("Zhibeiyou" 知北遊) of the *Zhuangzi*, for example, contains a passage that reflects upon such an understanding of *wuji* as a quality of the Way. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 323 ("Zhibeiyou") and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 215. The *Huainanzi* almost exclusively uses the expression *wuji* to depict the sage, the human manifestation of the Way. For an example in addition to *Huainanzi* 1.13, see *Huainanzi* 14.2 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 464 ("Quanyan") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 537.

106. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 30 ("Yuandao") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 65.

107. According to entries from Han proto-dictionaries, the Myriad Beings were at least partially defined by their form and tracks. For examples of animals and their tracks, see Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324 C.E.), ed., *Erya* 爾雅, in *Si bu beiyao* 四部備要 (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua, 1965), vol. 28, 11.1a–1b ("Shishou" 釋獸). For an example of carts (*che*) and their tracks, see Xu Shen 許慎 (58–147 C.E.), ed., *Shuowen jiezi zhenben* 說文解字真本, in

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This discourse on the tracelessness of the Way gains further importance since Liu An and his workshop projected this ideal onto the sages, construing them and their actions as being beyond the grasp of humanity. *Huainanzi* 14.32 from the chapter “Explaining Words” (“Quanyan” 詮言), for example, further fleshes out the techniques (*shu* 術) that according to the *Huainanzi* would enable a sage to act like the traceless Way. The passage depicts an environment in which the goodness of the officials’ actions and the benefit that the subjects receive all originate from the sage who “makes certain that [her/]his goodness does not bring [her/]him fame” (*shi shan wuming* 使善無名).¹⁰⁸ Only if neither the scholars (*shi* 士) nor the people (*min* 民) know of the beneficiary origin of their actions, will the ruler be able to avoid the consequences that “[F]unctionaries will compete [to establish] reputations” (*shi zheng ming* 士爭名) and “[P]eople will vie with one another to obtain them [i.e. benefits]” (*min zheng gong* 民爭功).¹⁰⁹ We find here again the same discourse that guided our discussion of the overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields above and according to which the ruler should manifest hidden powers (*yinde*). This time, however, the *Huainanzi* connects this political discourse with the act of “hid[ing] [her/]his tracks [in] doing good” (*yanji yu weishan* 揜跡於為善).¹¹⁰

Chapter fourteen further elaborates on this idea of hiding one’s traces in doing good by comparing cosmic entities and their attributes with the outcomes of sage and human rulership. *Huainanzi* 14.45 creates a parallel between human governance and Heaven and Earth—i.e. the rulers of the cosmos—whose impartiality and intangibility are the basis for their successful control and ordering of the universe: “Heaven and Earth are without anything to give. Therefore, they are without anything to take. The sun and the moon are without hatred. Therefore, they are without enmity” (天地無予也，故無奪也；日月無德也，故無怨也).¹¹¹ Accordingly, human rulership should follow the same patterns in order to create social harmony. Only if human governance cosmicizes itself so that it correlates with “the self-so-ness of Heaven and Earth”

Si bu beiyao (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua, 1965), vol. 30, 14a.15b (“Che bu” 車部). For a definition of the term trace (*ji* 跡), see Xu Shen, ed., *Shuowen jiezi zhenben*, in *Si bu beiyao* (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua, 1965), vol. 29, 2b.2b (“Chuo bu” 辵部).

108. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 473 (“Quanyan”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 552.

109. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 473 (“Quanyan”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 552.

110. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 473 (“Quanyan”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 552.

111. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 478 (“Quanyan”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 560.

(*tiandi ziran* 天地自然),¹¹² i.e. the order (*zhi* 治) and principles (*li* 理) of the cosmos, will the world and the empire be working effectively and successfully.¹¹³ Again, the *Huainanzi* argues that “eradicating one’s traces in non-interfering action” (*mieji yu wuwei* 滅跡於無為) is an important component of such cosmicized rulership.¹¹⁴

Since this passage uses the same sentence structure we encountered in the example above to depict good actions as being traceless (*yanji yu weishan*), it seems as if chapter fourteen intends to parallel the two concepts of *wuwei* and *weishan*, implying that a good (political) action, i.e. a ruler’s non-interference with the workings of the cosmos and the empire as expressed in *Huainanzi* 9.13, leaves no traces in this world in form of praise (*yu* 譽) or benefits (*li* 利).¹¹⁵ In other words, *wuwei* is portrayed as the very means that allow a ruler to keep the underlings in control without relying on the use of praise, insult (*hui* 毀), benefit, or harm (*hai* 害). Thus, it enables the ruler to become an intangible force similar to the origin of the universe that automatically orders the empire/cosmos.¹¹⁶ If we follow the parallel in content and structure regarding punishment and rewards in *Huainanzi* 9.13 and the “Quanyan” chapter, it seems as if the court(yard) may also refer to the sage and her/his performance of *wuwei*. However, it is important to note that the *Huainanzi* does not only call here for an implementation of Dao-like policies and actions in the sage ruler’s governance. In fact, it develops this kingly way based on characteristics of a practice through which a ruler may embody the Way (*tidao*), as we will see in the next section.¹¹⁷

112. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 478 (“Quanyan”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 560.

113. I define cosmicization as the emulation of cosmic schemes in a text, object, space, or body’s content and/or design. This idea is based on Mircea Eliade’s (1907–1986) famous claim that “[M]an cosmicizes himself ... he reproduces on the human scale the system of rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world, that, in short, defines any universe” (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 173).

114. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 478 (“Quanyan”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 560.

115. In fact, a passage (*Huainanzi* 13.19) in the chapter “Boundless Discourses” (“Fanlun”) explicitly parallels *wuwei* and *weishan*: “What is meant by “doing good” is to be quiescent and non-active” (所謂為善者，靜而無為也). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 455 (“Fanlun”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 519.

116. See Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 259–86.

117. For an example that illustrates True People as the ones who remain untraceable due to their decultivation, see n.105 above.

Embodying the Way: The Sage as a Form-, Action-, and Traceless Dao-Being

The *Huainanzi* repeatedly proposes that sage rulers should not only mimic the workings of the universe but also embody the Way. A passage in *Huainanzi* 13.8, for example, directly addresses such a technique of “us[ing] their bodies to incarnate it [i.e. the Dao]” (*yi shen ti zhi* 以身體之).¹¹⁸ With the help of paradoxical pairings reminiscent of the *Laozi*’s rhetorical strategy of utilizing exclusionary binaries to depict the Way, this part of the “Boundless Discourses” (“Fanlun” 汎論) chapter claims that sages conjoin the qualities of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 by being “lenient yet firm” (*kuan er li* 寬而栗) or “forceful yet humane” (*meng er ren* 猛而仁).¹¹⁹ In other words, by “obtain[ing] the root of the Way” (*de dao zhi ben* 得道之本),¹²⁰ the sages’ bodies function as spaces in which the cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang* may synthesize into a primordial unity.¹²¹

This passage raises an interesting question: if the sages use their physical form in order to embody such a primordial unity of cosmic forces similar to the Way, how should we concretely imagine the outcome of the process of embodying the Dao? Fortunately, the *Huainanzi* contains several passages that provide some clues to this question. *Huainanzi* 7.6 from the chapter “Quintessential Spirit” (“Jingshen” 精神), for example, explicates this transformation of the ruler into the force that, according to *Huainanzi* 2.12 from the “Activating the Genuine” (“Chuzhen” 俶真) chapter, “transformingly gives birth [yet] does not die and transforms beings [yet] does not transform” (化生者不死，而化物者不化) in terms

118. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 433 (“Fanlun”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 499.

119. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 432 (“Fanlun”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 498. The *Laozi* regularly creates “paradoxes” and uses antithetic pairs to depict aspects of the ineffable Way and its Potency (*de* 德). See, for example, chapter forty-one of the *Laozi* in Wang Bi, *Laozi zhu*, 26 and Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 48. For a discussion of vagueness in the *Laozi*, see Steve Coutinho, “The Abduction of Vagueness: Interpreting the *Laozi*,” *Philosophy East & West* 52.4 (2002), 416–21.

120. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 432 (“Fanlun”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 498.

121. For such a discussion of the *Huainanzi*’s bio-spiritual techniques whose locus “is the corporal body of the adept ... becoming one with the cosmos,” see Ori Tavor, “Embodying the Way: Bio-Spiritual Practices and Ritual Theories in Early and Medieval China” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 133–42. For a discussion of “Inner Cultivation” practices in the *Huainanzi* that emphasizes the cognitive rather than the corporal aspects of such self-cultivation techniques, see Harold D. Roth, “Daoist Inner Cultivation Thought and the Textual Structure of the *Huainanzi*,” in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production*, ed. Queen and Puett, 40–82.

of being and non-being.¹²² In the words of *Huainanzi* 7.6, “The sage would use [her/his] non-existence in order to resonate with those that exist” (聖人以無應有),¹²³ an ontological binary the *Huainanzi* apparently frequently utilizes to depict the relationship between the ruler and the officials/subjects as shown above.¹²⁴ The continuation of *Huainanzi* 7.6 makes it clear that the sages transform themselves into formless non-beings (*wu*) who are able to impact and govern the phenomenal world:¹²⁵ by “[M]ak[ing] the Way their boundary and Potency their neighbor ... [d]eath and life do not alter them” (與道為際，與德為鄰 ... 死生無變於己).¹²⁶ According to *Huainanzi* 7.7, such sages or True People (*zhenren*) are Supreme Spirits (*zhishen* 至神) whose “inborn nature [merges] with the Way. Therefore, they [exist] but appear to be [non-existent]. They are full but appear to be empty” (性合於道也。故有而若無，實而若虛).¹²⁷ At the end, the passage depicts the sages as the ones who “perform *wuwei*, return to the Uncarved Block” (*wuwei fupu* 無為復樸), and therewith “embody the root” (*tiben* 體本).¹²⁸

This vision of the sage ruler as a human embodiment of the Way is emphasized by the fact that the *Huainanzi* construes *wuwei* as the very body of the Dao. *Huainanzi* 2.6 claims that “The Utmost Way is/performs

122. See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 72 (“Chuzhen”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 103.

123. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 226 (“Jingshen”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 247.

124. For examples of such binaries, see n.88 and n.95 above.

125. For a discussion of the *Huainanzi*’s vision of *zhenren* and how they may order the world via *wuwei* and resonating correspondences (*ganying* 感應), see Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu*, 191–206. For a discussion of musical imagery in the *Huainanzi* and its discourses of sound(lessness), resonances, and sage rulership, see Avital H. Rom, “Echoing Rulership—Understanding Musical References in the *Huainanzi*,” *Early China* 40 (2017), 1–41.

126. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 226–27 (“Jingshen”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 247.

127. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 227 (“Jingshen”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 248.

128. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 227 (“Jingshen”). The translations are altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 248. Tellingly, *Huainanzi* 1.2 provides a concrete example of such sage rulers who embody the Way by using the same vocabulary to illustrate Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女媧. Apparently, they grasped the handle of the Way and were able to rotatigly “return to the Uncarved Block, perform *wuwei*, and merge with the Dao” (還反於樸，無為為之而合于道). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 2 (“Yuandao”). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 50. According to these passages, it seems as if the practice of *wuwei* is the very technique that allows the sage to follow in the footsteps of Fuxi and Nüwa, return to the Uncarved Block, and merge with the Dao.

wuwei" (*zhidao wuwei* 至道無為).¹²⁹ In addition, *Huainanzi* 9.10 proclaims, "[*Wuwei*] is the Ancestor of the Way. Attaining the Ancestor of the Way, one [resonates with] the [Myriad] [Be]ings without limit" (無為者，道之宗。故得道之宗，應物無窮).¹³⁰ Or as *Huainanzi* 14.56 puts it succinctly and in the most explicit way: "*Wuwei* is the body of the Way," or perhaps "The one who performs *wuwei* is/becomes the body of the Dao" (無為者，道之體也).¹³¹ Hence, it seems as if we do not only deal here with the implementation of a *wuwei*-policy. The *Huainanzi* rather claims that the implementation and performance of *wuwei* leads to a physiological transformation of the ruler into a trace- and formless (non-)being by merging with the Way.¹³²

As Mark Csikszentmihalyi has powerfully demonstrated, a physiological and material vision of virtues and powers should not surprise us since it might have been commonplace during the Western Han dynasty.¹³³ If we consider such a physiological understanding of (de-)cultivation for our examples from *Huainanzi* 9.13, the "Mati" chapter, and *Mengzi* 3A.4, it seems as if the *Huainanzi* does not only compare in the metaphors of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields the roles of farmers and officials with the sage ruler as I suggested at the beginning of this discussion. It rather claims that the sage ruler's body—like a decultivated court(yard)—is homological to the traceless Way.¹³⁴

129. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 54 ("Chuzhen"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 92.

130. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 278 ("Zhushu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 304.

131. Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 482–83 ("Quanyan"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 565.

132. *Huainanzi* 2.13 contains another discussion on self-cultivational techniques that similarly ends on the notion of embodying the Way (*tidao*). Liu An and his workshop apparently thought that the performance of practices such as nurturing life (*yangsheng* 養生), carrying Potency in one's bosom (*baode* 抱德), or, as I would suggest, the eradication of traces via *wuwei* would *de facto* alter the physiological condition of the ruler's body since *Huainanzi* 2.13 clearly states: "Those who are like this: Their blood and pulse have no sluggishness or stagnation; their [F]ive [O]rbs have no diseased *qi*" (若然者，血脈無鬱滯，五藏無虧氣). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 73 ("Chuzhen") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 103.

133. See Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Fivefold Virtue: Reformulating Mencian Moral Psychology in Han Dynasty China," *Religion* 28 (1998), 77–89 and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

134. The "Basic Warp" ("Benjing" 本經) chapter reflects this idea in form of an embodiment of Taiyi 太乙/太一, the celestial manifestation of the Way. See *Huainanzi* 8.7 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 258–60 ("Benjing") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 277–79. For a discussion of the importance of the cult of Taiyi during the Western Han, see Marianne Bujard, *Le Sacrifice au Ciel dans la Chine Ancienne: Théorie et Pratique sous le Han Occidentaux* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2000), 142–49. For a

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Consequently, the eradication or hiding of one's traces via *wuwei*, which is repeatedly depicted as the very means to make the ruler a formless (*wuxing*), universally resonating non-being (*wu*), becomes a central concern of the *Huainanzi's* body politics. In this vision, it is not enough if the ruler only replicates the actions of the Way in her/his governance. (S)he rather has to decultivate her/his body to such a level that (s)he alleviates her-/himself of her/his thing-ness (*wu*) and transforms her-/himself into a form-, trace-, and action-less force similar to the Way in order to control the cosmos and the empire.¹³⁵ Or to use Michael Puett's terminology, the task of the ruler is to divinize her-/himself so (s)he "can become fully linked with the proper patterns of the universe ... that any spirit inherently follows."¹³⁶ And according to my reading of *Huainanzi* 9.13, this entire discourse has been alluded to and is encapsulated in the metaphor of the ruler as a traceless, overgrown court(yard).

Conclusion: The Role of Imagery in Early Chinese Texts

In this article, I utilized Hans Blumenberg's method of a metaphorology to explain why the *Huainanzi* might employ the metonymical images of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields in its chapter on the "Arts of Rulership." By retracing an idealtypical speckle of the history of agricultural imagery in early China, I suggested that there might be a much wider and more complex connotation to these two images than it first appears. In addition to interpreting them in a literal fashion as an emblematic illustration of a sage empire, I proposed that these two images also function as paired metaphors for the ruler and the officials, evoking a vast array of interlinked discourses on social roles, practices of (de-)cultivation, and the body prevalent during the late Warring States and early imperial period. In other words, I read the two images as responses to an image-based debate on governance and body politics whose polar positions paradigmatically crystallized in the received versions of *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi's* "Mati" chapter.

classic study of Taiyi and its various identities, see Qian Baocong 錢寶琮 (1892–1974), "Taiyi kao 太一考," in *Qian Baocong kexue shi lunwen xuanji* 錢寶琮科學史論文選集 (Beijing: Kexue, 1983), 207–34. For a critique of Qian Baocong's study, see Li Ling, "An Archaeological Study of Taiyi (Grand One) Worship," trans. Donald S. Harper, *Early Medieval China* 2 (1995–1996), 1–39.

135. For another example that depicts the sage as the one who "conceals [her/]his brilliance in the Formless and hides [her/]his traces in non-action" (攄明於不形，藏跡於無為), see *Huainanzi* 14.3 in Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 464 ("Quanyan") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 538.

136. Puett, *To Become a God*, 284.

Within this discussion of agricultural imagery in *Mengzi* 3A.4, *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter, and *Huainanzi* 9.13, it turned out that the text attributed to Liu An and his retainers only partially agrees with the "Mati" chapter's negative evaluation of agricultural and educational cultivation. On the one hand, the *Huainanzi* clearly follows the "Mati" chapter's interpretation of wilderness as a primordial stage of ultimate integrity and incorporates it in its own discussion of the ruler's role as someone without intentional actions. While the passage from the *Zhuangzi*'s "Mati" chapter calls for a primordial civilization in which the entire community displays aspects or behaviors of the Dao, the *Huainanzi*, however, requires this mimicking of the Way only for the sage ruler. By de-cultivating the human physique so that (s)he may eradicate her/his traces, the ruler is thought to embody the Dao, enabling her/him to guarantee the proper working of the empire via her/his universally resonating (non-)presence (*wu*). Thereby, the sage ruler and her/his body—like the overgrown court(yard)—do not fulfil any discernibly "useful" tasks (*shi* 事) for the realm and in so doing remain out of reach for the subjects. Hence, the ability to decultivate (*fanxiu*) the ruler's body to such an extent that (s)he is able to hide and eradicate the traces of her/his actions and loses her/his human condition is a central concern in the *Huainanzi*'s body politics. Only the organization of the ruler's court and body in such a way that (s)he disappears as the source of the power behind punishments and rewards would enable her/him to govern the empire successfully.¹³⁷ In that sense, it describes the Arts of Rulership as the implementation of the traceless workings of the Dao in the ruler's actions, body, and court.¹³⁸

On the other hand, *Huainanzi* 9.13 rejects the "Mati" chapter's complete dismissal of any form of human cultivation. Regarding the officials and subjects, it also employs an image similar to *Mengzi* 3A.4. According to my reading, *Huainanzi* 9.13 claims that human beings—like agricultural fields—need to be cultivated (*dexiu*) and tilled so they may fulfill their roles (*fen*) in the running of the empire. As part of this vision, it illustrates the body of the subjects and officials as cultivated and tilled

137. *Huainanzi* 9.1 clearly states, "The Son of Heaven surrounded himself with screens so as to isolate himself" (天子外屏所以自障), creating a space in which the ruler may disappear—an idea quite similar to the image of the overgrown court(yard). In so doing, both images—the ruler behind her/his paravent and the overgrown court(yard)—seem to emphasize the importance of private, imperial spaces separated from the public. See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 270 ("Zhushu") and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 296.

138. Accordingly, the *Huainanzi*'s employment of agricultural imagery fully reflects Nathan Sivin's depiction of the correlation between cosmos, state, and body in the late Warring States period and Han dynasty. See Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body."

fields devoid of weeds (*wucao* 無草) and full of furrows or traces. While it apparently perceives plowing to be an active and humanly forced production of agricultural furrows in the ground that shall lead to literal fruition and “birth” (*sheng*) of agricultural goods, it seemingly depicts learning as the watering and tilling of a human body whose knowledge and skills may be harvested in “the governance of an enlightened ruler.”¹³⁹ Similar to the Way and its utilization of the Myriad Beings, the *Huainanzi* understands officials and farmers to be human beings in the service of the sage ruler who help nourish and keep running the empire’s physique.¹⁴⁰ Thus, it seems as if Liu An and his workshop, like *Mengzi* 3A.4, also consider the tilling of the agricultural and human fields as two important aspects of sage governance.

Hence, the “Arts of Rulership” chapter presents a bipartite approach to governance that distinguishes between the Dao-like and non-interfering (*wuwei*) ruler and the executors (*youwei*), i.e. officials and farmers. While it is fundamental to maintain the intangibility of the ruler to guarantee an ineffable framework or guiding force for the ordering and harmonizing of the empire, it is almost equally important to employ educated and trained subjects in order to engender a smooth running of the world. In short, Blumenberg’s method allowed us to retrace via an analysis of the reworkings of agricultural imagery how *Mengzi* 3A.4 and the *Zhuangzi*’s “Mati” chapter partake in an elaborate debate on (de-)cultivation and governance that became synthesized in *Huainanzi* 9.13.

In addition to providing some specific insights into early Chinese debates about governance and (de-)cultivational practices, this article has also shown that an engagement in the historical transformations of images and metaphors may yield new insights into conceptual changes within early Chinese debate culture. Michael J. Puett has recently argued that narratives and poems worked as catalyzers for the production of new meanings and debates in early China.¹⁴¹ In his understanding,

139. For an article that discusses the agricultural origins of the cultivational program of the Six Arts (*liu yi*), see Tu Wei-ming, “The Idea of the Human in Mencian Thought.”

140. *Huainanzi* 9.24 explicates this pragmatic relationship between the ruler and the subjects with the help of the chariot-teering image: “[A]uthority and positional advantage is the ruler’s chariot chassis, and the high-ranking ministers are the ruler’s team of horses” (權勢者，人主之車輿也；大臣者，人主之駟馬也). See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 297 (“Zhushu”) and Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 322.

141. See Michael J. Puett, “Text and Commentary: The Early Tradition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Li, and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 112–13. For another discussion of such “intertextual” techniques, see Hans van Ess, “Die Bedeutung des Zitats für die konfuzianische Tradition in China,” in *Sakrale Texte: Hermeneutik*

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various narratives functioned as a stock of cultural knowledge that became repeatedly reinterpreted and reappropriated in early Chinese texts. I would like to suggest in this conclusion that we should not limit such a discourse-analytical model to narratives and poems, but also include reworkings of imagery.

As we have seen, *Huainanzi* 9.13 apparently works with the polar positions of the images of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields in order to develop its novel vision of governance and body politics.¹⁴² Hence, the *Huainanzi* construes itself as a text that—like the sage who conjoins *yin* and *yang*—synthesizes binary forces.¹⁴³ Consequently, the images' functions within the *Huainanzi* go far beyond mere illustrations of a sage empire or ornamental and rhetorical purposes, as classical theories of metaphors would suggest.¹⁴⁴ The metaphors of an overgrown court(yard) and tilled fields apparently become the very ground on which Liu An and his retainers unite their specific visions of the body as a partaker in the universe and as the very site through which rulers may be transformed into Dao-beings and officials into useful resources of a sage governance, respectively.

Therefore, the *Huainanzi*'s metaphors of tilled fields and an overgrown court(yard), which allude to a wide range of discourses circling around the themes of governance, the body, and practices of (de-)cultivation, may not simply be substituted by some actual meaning or pure term (*Begrifflichkeit*). According to my reading such an interpretation would wholly disregard the images' allusive qualities. Instead, these metaphors, due to their non-conceptuality (*Unbegrifflichkeit*) to use Blumenberg's terminology, seem to fulfill the requirements of what Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) termed a vivid (*métaphore vive*) and Blumenberg called an absolute metaphor; that is, a "strategy of discourse by which language divests itself of its function of direct description in order to reach the mythic level

und Lebenspraxis in den Schriftkulturen, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 216–43.

142. *Huainanzi* 2.7, for example, depicts the *Huainanzi* as a hub that unites the individual spokes of the "Hundred Schools [and] their different sayings/theories" (*bai jia yi shuo* 百家異說) into a well-functioning chariot wheel. See Liu Wendian, *Huainan honglie jijie*, 55–56 ("Chuzhen"). The translation is altered from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 93.

143. Michael J. Puett and Tobias Benedikt Zürn have recently argued that the *Huainanzi* might have been produced to function as such a textual sage or an *wuwei*-performing Dao-text, respectively. See Michael J. Puett, "Sages, Creation, and the End of History in the *Huainanzi*," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production*, ed. Queen and Puett, 269–90 and Zürn, "Writing as Weaving," 111–358.

144. For critical evaluations of the substitution theory in conceptualizations of metaphors beyond Blumenberg and Richards' work, see Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 204–54 and Black, *Models and Metaphor*, 25–47.

where its function of discovery is set free.”¹⁴⁵ They escape a clear definition by evoking a vast array of discourses. Hence, the article paradigmatically shows in the context of *Huainanzi* 9.13 that metaphors such as tilled fields and the overgrown court(yard) may function as “*foundational elements* of philosophical language, ‘translations’ that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicity.”¹⁴⁶ It calls for more research that tries to understand the diverse function(s) of (agricultural) imagery in early Chinese texts beyond linguistic figuration and encourages us to fully engage in imagery’s role as a central and foundational aspect of early Chinese debates rather than a rhetorical side effect of its discourses about specific concepts and terminologies.

「朝廷蕪」與「田野辟」：從隱喻學角度討論《孟子》、《莊子》、
《淮南子》中的統治術與身體政治

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提要

迄今為止的早期中國研究大多著力於對術語、概念的爭論和詮釋。在這篇論文中，我希望展示一種新的研究方法，即通過研究意象的轉化來分析各種話語的變化發展。尤以《孟子·滕文公上》、《莊子·馬蹄》和《淮南子·主術訓》為例，我試圖重構這三個文本所體現的統治與修身話語。雖然〈滕文公上〉主張耕作與修身是禮樂文明賴以發展的必經階段，〈馬蹄〉的一些章節卻要求人們去除禮樂教化，回歸「廣莫之野」。而〈主術訓〉一章藉由兩個比喻——以「朝廷蕪」比喻君主「無為而治」，以「田野辟」比喻官吏「務功修業」——將《莊子·馬蹄》的荒野和《孟子·滕文公上》的耕作這兩種不同意象融為一體。由此，《淮南子·主術訓》創造性地提出了一種整合禮樂教化與無為復樸的統治術。

Keywords: Metaphor, Self-Cultivation, Embodiment, Agriculture, Hans Blumenberg,

比喻, 修身, 體道, 農業, 漢斯·布魯門伯格,

145. Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 292.

146. Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, 3.