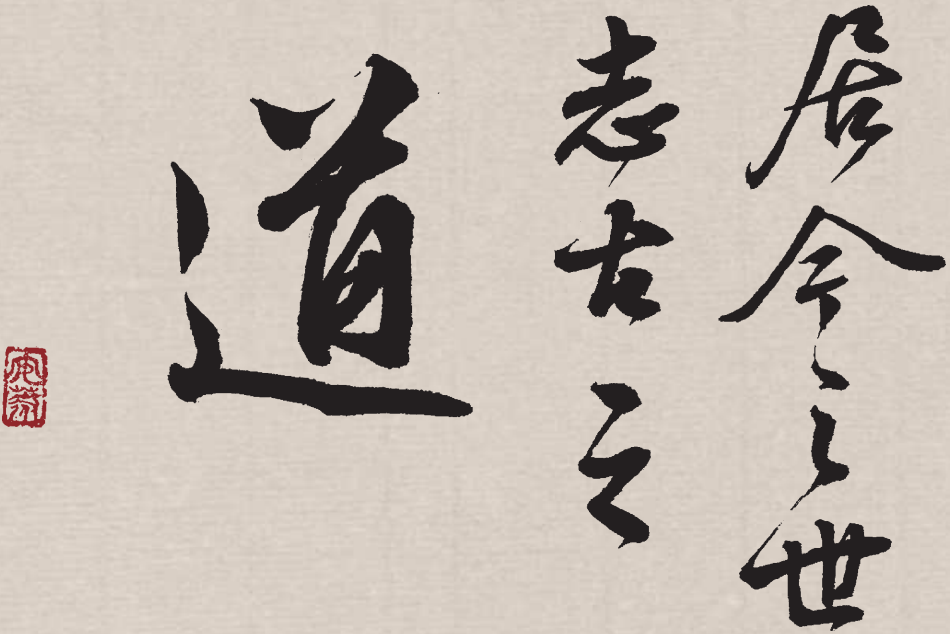


**Settled in the Present,
Committed to the Past**



Festschrift for Achim Mittag

Edited by
Fei Huang,
Dorothee Schaab-Hanke
and Martin Hanke

Settled in the Present, Committed to the Past

Festschrift for Achim Mittag
on the Occasion
of His 68th Birthday

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Fei Huang,
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The calligraphy on the cover, created by Dan-wei Zhu-Mittag (2024), 居今之世，志古之道, alludes to a passage in Chap. 18 of the *Shiji* 史記 ('The Scribes' Records) that serves as the governing word of this volume. For more details, see the introduction.

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Some Backstory of Contested Relationships between Filiality and Loyalty in China

Hoyt Cleveland TILLMAN*

Introductory Context

To celebrate Achim Mittag's scholarship, I am reflecting on my research that he helped to inspire. At the 1998 conference in Essen on Chinese experiences of trauma, Achim asked me to expand my comments on Han Chinese traumatic experiences of Mongol military conquests of the Jurchen Jin and Han Chinese Song dynasties. Since this assignment initiated my research on Yuan history, I began with Yuan Haowen's 元好問 (1190–1257) poetry decrying the destruction of the Jin. When I returned to Song history, I first focused on Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), but soon encountered Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241–1318), whose life was thrown into chaos by Mongol conquests. His struggle with conflicts between loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and filiality (*xiao* 孝) seized my attention. Under pressure from his parents to prioritize Song loyalty over filial obligations to elderly parents, and thus to die for the dynasty, he expressed predicament:

欲死不得為孝子，欲生不得為忠臣。

“I want to die, but cannot die and be a filial son. I want to live, but cannot live and be a loyal official.”¹

I communicated with Achim about Zheng's life and *Xin shu* 心書 (Heart Classic). Achim provided evaluations of debates over the authenticity of the *Xin shu*, including the possibility that it was substantially edited during early Ming's reactions to experiences with Mongol military conquests, but also probably contained some of Zheng's original writings.² This insight brought to mind the early Ming “historical novel” *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, which I used in a class to illustrate historical changes in values. Thus began my research on the history of filiality in relation to dynastic loyalty, a project that yielded public lectures for the 2015 Wang Meng-ou Forum (Wang Meng'ou *jiaoshou xueshu jiangzuo* 王夢鷗教授學術講座) in Taipei and the 2016 Yu Ying-shih Lecture (Yu Yingshi *xiansheng lishi jiangzuo* 余英時先生歷史講座) in Hong Kong, and a Chinese article published in *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲學與文化 in 2021.³

The question of centralization has been an important historiographical question about authoritarianism, especially in the context of Red Guards singing that Chairman Mao was “dearer” than their parents during the Cultural Revolution. Recent scholarship has focused on connections to filial duty which have been so important in Confucianism. Focusing on mourning rituals in the Qing, Norman Kutcher coined the term “parallel conception of society” as an outsider's analytical, etic description of setting parallel obligations to parents and dynastic rulers as exercising fatherly oversight of the realm. Kutcher argues that Manchu emperors broadly projected support for Confucian values, including filiality toward parents, but in reality, often required officials to mourn at their posts, instead of allowing them to return home for three years to grieve according to ritual standards. As a result,

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1 Tillman 2023, 294.

2 See also Mittag 2003.

3 Tian 2016; Tian 2021.

officials became cynical and regarded “state mourning as an avoidable courtesy only”. The Qing’s mourning policies were hidden by restrictions on language, i.e., what was “acceptable discourse”, as well as their use of a loophole to retain important officials in office. Thus, the Qianlong Emperor found no applicable law to punish officials who showed no traditional filiality to his deceased empress. Kutcher thus indicates Manchu demands for absolute obedience were undermined by their prior demand imposed on the functioning of bureaucracy over private family obligations.⁴

Kutcher contrasted discourse of acceptable language for Confucian ritual issues with the bureaucracy’s practical language for discussing law and legal cases; however, Yue Du explores legal cases since the early Qing to demonstrate how law and punishment reinforced generational hierarchy, governmental order, and imperial rulership when both ritual and law “were molded and instrumentalized to meet the need of the imperial state.”⁵ In the twentieth century, Chinese governments long sought to undermine absolute parental authority to enhance governmental power by separating individuals and connecting these atomized individual citizens directly to the government. Therefore, laws during the Republic promoted children’s rights under parents’ transitory guardianship to enhance the role of government in family and society in a vastly different way than during dynastic empires. Communist anti-family iconoclasm in China against filiality and familial solidarity culminated in social disorder and condemnations of parents during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). However, such excessive violence against parental authority produced a backlash and the obvious need to counter extreme atomization of society. Therefore, since the 1980s, the PRC increasingly promoted traditional values and “filial nationalism” as the best potential means to solidify social order and state loyalty. Thus, “in the new era of a rising China, filial piety is again being used to call for unconditional loyalty and obedience from Chinese citizens toward the state.”⁶

Together, Kutcher and Du provide a framework for how a centralized state failed or succeeded in harnessing the power of filial affection from below. In my readings of the *Xin shu* and the *Sanguo yanyi* against the grain of early Confucianism, I hope to show that filial duty was originally seen as a bastion of grassroots familial society before the threat of foreign invasion or internal division pushed Chinese to prioritize loyalty to rulers.

Filiality and Loyalty before the *Sanguo yanyi*

Many scholars view Confucians as handmaidens of the imperial throne, but Confucius himself offers a much more local vision of government based on family bonds rather than governmental laws. The Classical foundation for conflict between filiality to parents and loyalty to ruling authority, or more generally prioritizing either family or state, was formulated in the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects), where an official from the kingdom of She 葉 in South China told Confucius:

「吾黨有直躬者，其父攘羊，而子證之。」孔子曰：「吾黨之直者異於是。父為子隱，子為父隱，直在其中矣。」

“In my area there is a man upright in conduct. When his father stole a sheep, he reported his father to the authorities.” Confucius replied, “Those who are upright in my area are different. Fathers cover for sons, and sons cover for fathers, and being upright lies in this.”⁷

4 Kutcher 1999.

5 Du 2022, 19.

6 Du 2022, 252.

7 *Lunyu* 13.18, tr. Ames and Rosemont 1998, 167, modified.

Although this passage does not explicitly use the terms *zhong* and *xiao*, these concepts were implicit. The official presented a case where even difficulty feeding family did not justify breaking laws against stealing another person's property, so respect for law and loyalty to state authority in She reached this level of precedence over family interests. Confucius projected different priorities: warm bonds within family were a better basis for social order. Fathers and sons would cover up one another's misdeeds and protect one another from state punishments. Although Confucius did not approve of theft and was not opposed to state authority, he evidenced no hesitancy here in declaring priority to family – even at the expense of laws. He further declared (*Lunyu* 2.5) that being filial meant “never disobey” (*wu wei* 無違) parents, namely by following proper ritual decorum while serving them in life and burying them when they died.

Mencius responded to hypothetical questions to extend Confucius' principle to its logical conclusion:

桃應問曰：「舜為天子，皋陶為士，瞽瞍殺人，則如之何？」孟子曰：「執之而已矣。」
「然則舜不禁與？」曰：「夫舜惡得而禁之？夫有所受之也。」
「然則舜如之何？」曰：「舜視棄天下，猶棄敝屣也。竊負而逃，遵海濱而處，終身訢然，樂而忘天下。」

Tao Ying asked, “When Shun was emperor and Gao Yao was the official [in charge of justice], if the Blind Man [Shun's father] killed someone, what would then be done?” Mencius replied: “The only thing to do was to apprehend him.” [Question:] “In that case, would Shun not try to stop it?” Reply: “How could Shun stop it? [Gao Yao] possessed duly delegated authority.” [Question:] “But then what would Shun have done?” Answer: “Shun looked upon casting aside the Empire as no more than discarding a worn shoe. He would have secretly carried the old man on his back and fled to the edge of the sea and lived there happily, never giving thought to the Empire.”⁸

Mencius did not flinch when presented with a question about murder, which obviously greatly raised the stakes from the issue of stealing a sheep to feed one's family. Even a murder case did not trump a son's duty to his father. Even the ruler had obligations to his father that surpassed public duties even to the country where he reigned. Mencius' imagery underscores graphically the priority of filiality over all state concerns: the ruler abandons his throne and, carrying his father on his back, flees to a remote corner of the world beyond the reach of the legal authorities to administer the government's justice. Mencius made Confucius' reasoning for prioritizing family relationships over the state more explicit.

Mencius expounded how Shun's proper priorities resulted in the natural transformation of the empire and its people:

天下大悅而將歸己。視天下悅而歸己，猶草芥也。惟舜為然。不得乎親，不可以為人；不順乎親，不可以為子。舜盡事親之道而瞽瞍底豫，瞽瞍底豫而天下化，瞽瞍底豫而天下之為父子者定，此之謂大孝。

Shun alone was able to look upon the fact that the Empire, being greatly delighted, was turning to him, as of no more consequence than trash. When one does not please one's parents, one cannot be a man; when one is not obedient to one's parents, one cannot be a son. Shun did everything that was possible to serve his parents, and succeeded, in the end, in pleasing the Blind Man. Once the Blind Man was pleased, the Empire was transformed. Once the Blind Man was pleased, the pattern for the relationship between father and son in the Empire was set. This is the supreme achievement of a dutiful son.⁹

8 *Mengzi* 7A.35, tr. Lau, 190.

9 *Mengzi* 4A.28, tr. Lau, 127.

Confucius and Mencius held that prioritizing filial piety and family relationships could transform human relationships in society and thus establish the foundation for a harmonious state.

Please consider several significant milestones in the evolution of the concept, beginning with the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety). This brief text presents itself as Confucius' exposition to Zengzi 曾子 (505–436 BCE) on filial piety, and many in traditional China accepted that claim. Modern scholars prefer to ascribe the text to either the very late Warring States Period or the Western Han. The *Xiaojing* was not recognized as a "Classic" until Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) composed an imperial commentary and had the text engraved on stone among the recognized Classics at the Imperial Academy. Later, Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010) used the Tang text as the basis for his *Xiaojing zhushu* 孝經注疏 (Annotation and Explanation of the *Xiaojing*). Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) utilized only the Old Text version and argued that only a third of the extant text was genuine. For instance, the first six chapters (or seven in the Modern Text version) and the coda of each chapter were actually much later interpolated commentary. Although Zhu Xi's interpretations of the Four Books became officially recognized texts for education and civil service examinations, his version of the *Xiaojing* failed to eclipse the Tang imperial version and Xing Bing's commentary.¹⁰ Tang Xuanzong had infused filiality with social-political philosophy by emphasizing "governing through filiality" (*xiaozhi* 孝治). Thereupon, Xing Bing's commentary focused on "instruction of the ruler" (*wangjiao* 王教) and sought to persuade rulers that modeling filial behavior would enable people attain harmony.

Chapter 15 emphasized the need for sons to remonstrate with fathers, and for officials to remonstrate with emperors, to correct inappropriate behavior:

故當不義，則子不可以不爭於父，臣不可以不爭於君。故當不義則爭之。從父之令，又焉得為孝乎！

Thus, if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his father's part, a son has no choice but to remonstrate with his father, and if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his ruler's part, a minister has no choice but to remonstrate with his ruler. Hence, remonstrance is the only response to immorality. How could simply obeying the commands of one's father be deemed filial?¹¹

The Tang *Xiaojing* text elevated fathers and rulers and also linked filial piety to fathers and loyalty to rulers. However, here and elsewhere (e.g., Chapter 8), there are explicit statements that filiality and loyalty are a response to the care and concern first extended by parents and rulers. Although there is an emphasis on the son's role of obedience, such obedience appears to reciprocate for earlier care and concern, so obedience implicitly was not absolute or unconditional.

The *Xiaojing* also made fundamental distinctions between duties to fathers and to rulers that suggests that duty to father was prioritized as more primary and complete. Chapter 5 explains:

資於事父以事母而愛同，資於事父以事君而敬同。故母取其愛，而君取其敬，兼之者父也。故以孝事君則忠，以敬事長則順。

The lower officials drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their mothers, the love (*ai*) they feel toward them is the same; drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their lord, the respect (*jing*) they feel for them is the same. While to their mothers love is rendered and to their lord respect is

10 See Rosemont and Ames 2009, 17–22; *Zhuzi yulei* 82.2141–2143.

11 *Xiaojing*, ch. 15, tr. Rosemont and Ames 2009, 114.

shown, it is only in service to their fathers that both love and respect combine. Hence, service to the lord with family reverence is loyalty (*zhong*); service to elders with family reverence is compliance (*shun*).¹²

Thus, loyalty is an extension of the filial aspect of respect to rulers. Being filial to parents is the “root” or natural origin of virtue and appropriate loving and respectful behavior; moreover, the aspect of respect should be shown to good rulers by being loyal and obedient to their laws.

Still, Chapter 17 reminds readers that such obedience has limits – a parameter of what is appropriate:

君子之事上也，進思盡忠，退思補過，將順其美，匡救其惡，故上下能相親也。

Exemplary persons when serving those above at court reflect on how they can give their utmost loyalty (*zhong*) to them, and on retiring reflect on how to resolve the excesses of their superiors. They are fully compliant (*shun*) in carrying out what is commendable in the instructions of those above and take steps to remedy what cannot be condoned. It is in this way that those above and below are able to appreciate each other.¹³

The limit is the parameter of what is proper, as ancient Confucians, like *Xunzi* 荀子, said, *cong dao bu cong jun* 從道不從君,¹⁴ i.e., when the commands of ruler do not accord with the Way, “one should follow the Dao and not the ruler.”

In my other speech in Hong Kong, I argued against anachronistically assuming too much state power in the past; instead, it was the contingent external Xiongnu 匈奴 threat that helped convince Confucians to allow greater state financial control and power under Han Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE). It is thus important to look to Han trends, and particularly useful is the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn). Although attributed to Emperor Wu’s advisor Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–104 BCE), this text contains many interjected Han-era chapters from his followers and later specialists on the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Spring and Autumn”, or: *Annals*). Dong has long been regarded as the key figure in Wu’s turning toward “Confucianism” and establishing a more centralized imperial model of governance than the Huang-Lao 黃老 Daoism that had prevailed in earlier decades of the dynasty. Dong championed the role of rulers in harmonizing the human realm with the Heavens and Earth. Using such analogies as rice plants in Chapter 36, he characterized human nature as needing proper conditions and care – which only emperors could provide – before people could actually become good.¹⁵ Thus, Dong had much less confidence than Mencius in people’s potential to cultivate inherent seeds of human feelings to yield virtuous conduct.

Dong’s ideological enhancement of emperors is also evident in responses to Wu’s questions regarding Suburban Sacrifices to Heaven. Advocating Western Zhou ritual practices, Dong argued in Chapter 7 that these sacrifices should be devoted to Heaven and performed only by the emperor as Son of Heaven.¹⁶ Wu continued the worship of Five Thearchs 五帝 (cosmic spirits of five directions). Responding, Dong’s followers compiled Chapters 76 and 77, further championing worship of Heaven, even arguing that regular performance of these Suburban Sacrifices should be the emperor’s priority – even over ritual sacrifices for family ancestors.¹⁷ Thus, they prioritized

12 *Xiaojing*, ch. 5, tr. Rosemont and Ames 2009, 107.

13 *Xiaojing*, ch. 17, tr. Rosemont and Ames 2009, 115.

14 *Xunzi* 13.2; tr. Knoblock 1990, 100.

15 *Chunqiu fanlu* 36; tr. Queen and Major 2015, 353–355.

16 *Chunqiu fanlu* 7; tr. Queen and Major 2015, 153–155.

17 *Chunqiu fanlu* 76, 77, tr. Queen and Major 2015, 550–553, 569–581, and discussion 498–502.

ideological implications for emperors over filial family obligations. Gradually after Emperor Wu's reign, Sacrifices to Heaven were performed more often; however, it was only under the Han usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–CE 23) that the tradition of regular performance of these Suburban Sacrifices became set for the remainder of dynastic China.

Evolving views of filial piety during the Han were framed by expanding naturalistic notions of *yin* and *yang* to incorporate complex concepts about “Five Phases” (*wuxing* 五行). Chapters 38 and 42 enhanced the role of filiality as natural forces in nature. For example, in the “production cycle” of birthing, Phases proceed in order: Wood; Fire; Earth; Metal; Water. Moreover, each Phase serves as “father” of the next Phase; sons complete what fathers began.

故五行者，五行也。由此觀之，父授之，子受之，乃天之道也。故曰：夫孝者，天之經也。

Thus, the Five Phases exemplify the five [forms of] human conduct. From this perspective, we see that the father conferring and the son receiving is the Way of Heaven. Thus it is said: “Filial is Heaven’s Warp [or constancy].”

The Five Phases similarly were called upon to authenticate the claim in the *Xiaojing* that filial piety was also “Earth’s righteousness.”¹⁸ Chapter 44 elaborated on filial virtue of Earth, but succinctly:

不敢與父分功美，孝之至也。

[Earth] not daring to take a share of the merit from its father is the ultimate in the expression of filial piety.¹⁹

Chapter 42 similarly refers to the production sequence among the Five Phases as a “father-son relationship.” Moreover, it explicitly associated being filial and being loyal:

土之事火竭其忠。故五行者，乃孝子忠臣之行也。

Earth’s managing the affairs of Fire fully expresses its loyalty. Thus, the Five Phases [exemplify] the conduct of the filial son and loyal minister.²⁰

Han specialists on the *Annals* thus elevated the importance of filiality by seeing relationships between sons and fathers as rooted in the cosmological order of the Five Phases. But these writings also further linked son-to-father ties to hierarchical and political relationships between officials and emperors. Hence, although filiality is championed as the dynamic relationship among the Five Phases, the *Chunqiu fanlu* also reveals a significant trend toward seeing filiality as strengthening loyalty to emperors.

Although Keith Knapp emphasizes that Chinese fathers during the Eastern Han through the Six Dynasties did not have the level of absolute authority that fathers enjoyed in ancient Rome, he documents “creeping absolutism” expressed in early medieval tales and laws. Knapp declares: “according to the early medieval tales, a parent’s wish must be fulfilled, even if it is unjustified and unrighteous.”²¹ In contrast to our analysis of the *Xiaojing*, Knapp highlights that medieval Chinese patriarchs were treated with the absolute obedience owed to rulers and were not obligated to show that they merited such enhanced obedience. We now turn to another example of a later shift in views of filiality.

18 *Chunqiu fanlu* 38, tr. Queen and Major 2015, 358.

19 *Chunqiu fanlu* 44, tr. Queen and Major 2015, 401.

20 *Chunqiu fanlu* 42, tr. Queen and Major 2015, 368.

21 Knapp 2016, 70.

The *Sanguo yanyi* on Filiality and Loyalty

This important historical novel argued in favor of central authority, both in terms of the primacy of loyalty over filiality and the value of top-down bonds over friendship. Its clearest declaration about priorities of loyalty over filiality was made by the mother of Xu Shu 徐庶 (Shan Fu 單福). Shan Fu was the first significant strategist to aid Liu Bei 劉備 (Xuande 玄德, 161–223). Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) forces captured Mother Xu, and he tried unsuccessfully to win her allegiance. Enraged, Cao wanted to kill her, but advisor Cheng Yu 程昱 (141–220) warned that killing her would strengthen Shan Fu's bond of loyalty to Liu. Instead, she became a hostage. Cheng cleverly pretended to be her son's friend and sent her presents. Utilizing her thank-you letters, he mimicked her calligraphy:

「近汝弟康喪，舉目無親。正悲悽間，不期曹丞相使人賺至許昌，言汝背反，下我於縲絏，賴程昱等救免。若得汝來降，能免我死。如書到日，可念劬勞之恩，星夜前來，以全孝道；[...]，專望救援！更不多囑。」

“The recent death of your younger brother has left me with no other kin save you. In the midst of my sorrow and isolation, I never dreamed His Excellency Cao would lure me to the capital to denounce your betrayal and to put me in chains. My life has been spared only through Cheng Yu. If you surrender, I will be saved. When you read this, do not forget the hardships your mother endured to raise you. Come with all speed to fulfill your duty as a filial son. [...] You are my sole hope of salvation. Need I implore further?”²²

Upon receiving the letter, Shan was tricked; in loyalty, he reported his predicament to Liu. Liu's response demonstrated his understanding of filial duty:

「母子乃天性之親，元直無以備為念。」

“Mother and son are nature's nearest kin. You need not give further thought to me.”²³

Liu's advisors urged him to detain Shan Fu long enough for Cao to execute Mother Xu so Shan Fu would exact revenge against Cao. But Liu upheld filiality:

「[...]。使人殺其母，而吾用其子，不仁也；留之不使去，以絕其母子之道，不義也。吾寧死，不為不仁不義之事。」

“[...] It would be inhumane to let them kill the mother so that we can use the son. It would be unjust and dishonorable to hold him against his will and keep mother and son apart. I would rather die first.”²⁴

Liu's respect for filiality appeared to earn the novel's approval because he was rewarded. Promising never to advise Cao, Shan Fu swore loyalty to Liu:

縱使曹操相迫，庶亦終身不設一謀。

“But no matter how Cao pressures me, I will not propose a single strategy for him to my dying day.”²⁵

Urging Liu to persevere, he recommended Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) as a more capable strategist and took a detour to visit and persuade Zhuge to serve. At this point, the novel apparently endorsed giving priority to filiality. Although Cao intercepted and sought to test him, he changed the subject to his mother. Thereupon, Cao politely requested to benefit from Shan Fu's learning. Again, voicing appreciation for Cao allowing care for Mother Xu, he avoided commitment.

22 *Sanguo yanyi* 36, tr. Roberts 1994, 278.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 *Sanguo yanyi* 36, tr. Roberts 1994, 279.

Upon entering his mother's chamber, Shan Fu prostrated himself respectfully; however, her response was not what he anticipated. Startled, she asked why he came. He explained that upon receiving her letter, he had withdrawn from serving Liu. Mother Xu became enraged and berated him:

「[...]汝既讀書，須知忠孝不能兩全。[...]，汝既事之，得其主矣。今憑一紙偽書，更不詳察，遂棄明投暗，自取惡名，真愚夫也！吾有何面目與汝相見！汝玷辱祖宗，空生於天地間耳！」
As a scholar, *you should be aware that loyalty and filial devotion may conflict.* [...] You had found yourself a proper master, but trusting a forged scrap of paper, which you never bothered to verify, you left the light for the dark and have earned yourself a name beneath contempt. Oh, you utter fool! *With what kind of self-respect am I supposed to welcome you, now that you have shamed the spirit of your ancestors and uselessly wasted your own life?*²⁶ (italics mine)

In chastising Shan Fu for failing to fulfill his duty to his lord, Mother Xu expounds the priority of loyalty over filial devotion; failure to remain loyal “shamed the spirit of your ancestors.” While he still bowed – too ashamed to look up, Mother Xu rushed to her room. When a servant exclaimed that Mother Xu had hung herself, he rushed to save her, but he was too late. She had committed suicide in embarrassment over his foolishness and to ensure that he would never serve Cao. Cao attended sacrificial ceremonies of her funeral, but Shan Fu declined all Cao's gifts.

Mother Xu might seem compulsive or extreme. Her suicide appeared unnecessary because Shan Fu had already promised never to offer Cao useful strategies. Perhaps to counter such musings, the novel further validated her sacrifice. The Daoist recluse Sima Hui 司馬徽 (ca. 173–208) articulated the novel's judgment on Mother Xu's character and priorities. When he came to Liu Bei's camp to visit Shan Fu, Liu reported that Shan Fu had gone to rescue his mother.

徽曰：「此中曹操之計矣！吾素聞徐母最賢，雖為操所囚，必不肯馳書召其子。此書必詐也。元直不去，其母尚存；今若去，母必死矣。」[...]驚問其故。徽曰：「徐母高義，必羞見其子也。」

Sima exclaimed: “So he fell for the ruse! Mother Xu is known for her absolute integrity. Even if Cao imprisoned her, she would never agree to call for her son. The letter has got to be a forgery. By not going he could have saved her; his going dooms her.” When asked [...] for an explanation, he added: “Mother Xu lives according to the highest ethic and would be ashamed for her son.”

Sima's judgment was reinforced by the poem that the author quoted in praising her, including,

惟恐後嗣，玷辱先祖。伏劍同流，斷機堪伍。

“Lest Shan Fu shame his forebears/She joined the ranks of martyred mothers.”²⁷

This poem and Sima's judgment suggest that Shan Fu did not fathom that his mother would regard the family's reputation for loyalty as far more important than her own life. Ultimately, he did not realize that when filial duty conflicted with loyalty, loyalty had to take precedence.

Hence, the story of Mother Xu makes a graphic case for the priority of loyalty to the ruler. The novel attributes to a mother the strongest voice against filial duty if it conflicted with loyalty. Her proclamation and suicide explicitly declare the primacy of political loyalty; Sima Hui's judgment and the poem underscore the message – a stark revision of priorities set forth in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*.

26 *Sanguo yanyi* 37, tr. Roberts 1994, 281.

27 *Sanguo yanyi* 37, tr. Roberts 1994, 282.

Second, although the novel's strong (fictive) brotherhood has appealed to generations of readers, the novel's underlying message actually warns against those very horizontal bonds (in favor of vertical obligations to the throne). An additional example, but from different circumstances, would be the contrast between the beautiful Diaochan 貂蟬 and the Minister of the Interior Wang Yun 王允 (*zi* Zishi 子師, 137–192), versus the warrior Lü Bu 呂布 (*zi* Fengxian 奉先, 161–199) and the Imperial Preceptor and Commander of the Capital District Dong Zhuo 董卓 (*zi* Zhongying 仲穎, d. 192). In both halves of this case, filial relationship was not by birth, but by adoption. However, the relationship between Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu was based upon expediency or self-interest, rather than right principle or loyalty to the Han emperor. Conversely, Diaochan promised Wang:

「[...]。妾若不報大義，死於萬刀之下。」

“[...]. If I cannot live up to my duty, may I die by ten thousand cuts.”²⁸

Thus, Diaochan's filiality was dedicated to serving what was right and the interest of the Han imperial state; moreover, that priority to the state took such precedence over family that Diaochan and Wang risked their whole clan.

Wang Yun first offered Diaochan to Lü Bu to be his wife, but then gave her, as a singing concubine, to Dong Zhuo. Diaochan followed Wang's plan and used her charms to entice both Lü and Dong. To divert Lü's anger about losing his prospective bride, Wang convinced him that Dong, as “father”, insisted on taking his “son's” bride home to prepare for the wedding. Diaochan adroitly convinced Dong that she loved only him and thus scuttled his advisor's plan for Dong to give Diaochan to Lü, a plan that would have restored Dong's relationship and alliance with Lü. Building upon the emotions that Diaochan stirred, Wang seized an opportunity to persuade Lü to join the plot against Dong.

Lü Bu seethed with anger, but initially hesitated to commit because he feared being condemned by history for having killed his “father.” Wang shrewdly aroused Lü's wrath by highlighting how Dong's “violation” of Diaochan had smeared Lü's honor and embarrassed him in the eyes of others, so Lü exclaimed his revenge:

「誓當殺此老賊，以雪吾恥！」

“The villain's life will clear my name!”²⁹

Yet, he wavered due to his fear that historians would condemn him as an unfilial son, so Wang deconstructed the assumed family relationship and questioned where Dong's “fatherly feelings” were when he tried to kill Lü (for talking intimately with Diaochan). Lü's rage was rekindled. For the clincher, Wang assured Lü of gaining an honored place in history if he played a key role in protecting the Han dynasty. Getting Lü to the point of loyally taking action to preserve the Han state required manipulating his emotions and destroying his illusions about the relative priority of filial duty.

Although this second example might be regarded as weak since “filial duty” was posited not to blood relations, but rather to artificially constructed or merely proclaimed relationships; however, this example makes a major point: the custom of extending family labels or ascribed family ties beyond blood relatives greatly enhanced the bounding power of resulting relationships. Such ties were potentially dysfunctional and dangerous if relationships did not serve the higher purpose of loyalty to the ruler/state. This point was also a cautionary tale or counterweight to the novel's glorification of the “brotherhood” declared among Liu Bei, Guan Yu 關羽 (*zi* Yunzhang 雲長, 160–220) and Zhang Fei 張飛 (*zi* Yide 益德, d. 221).

28 *Sanguo yanyi* 8, tr. Roberts 1994, 64.

29 *Sanguo yanyi* 9, tr. Roberts 1994, 71.

Consider the similar parallel conflict between familial duty and political loyalty in the case of the novel's famous brotherhood. As Roberts's Afterword to his translation suggests, the brotherhood and the two junior brothers are of slight importance in Chen Shou's 陳壽 (233–ca. 300) historical *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms), but become absolutely crucial in the novel:

A fraternal tie among the three is mentioned once in the *SGZ* (*Sanguo zhi*), but the novelist has added oath and sacrifice and made the bounding of brotherhood the overture to his tale. Accordingly, the second brother, Lord Guan, and the third, Zhang Fei, are transformed from sparsely sketched figures in the *SGZ* into fully developed fictional characters. The brotherhood plays a major role in the novel, and the oath haunts the narrative until the pledge "to die for one another" is invoked by Lord Guan's death. *Liu Xuande's fidelity to the oath becomes a trial of his worth as a brother and as a king, and the plot turns on his decision.*³⁰

The sentence, I highlighted in italics, is another way to express my thesis regarding conflicting values. Although the brotherhood was founded to protect the Han dynasty, the brotherhood was an "equalitarian fraternity [...] based on the principle of honor (*yi* 義)" that provided a sharp contrast to the strife and disorder within aristocratic families and the imperial family. In the era's disorder, Roberts says,

[...] the family itself as the dominant political institution is implicitly questioned through comparison with the brotherhood, [which is] anti-dynastic in form because it is hostile to filial right.³¹

We could say that the novel's brotherhood served to project what proper priority between filial piety and loyalty to the dynastic state *should be*.

Zhuge Liang projected this proper priority between filial duty to the ruling family state and honor to oaths among relative equals within a sworn brotherhood. Zhuge sought to use the brotherhood for its sworn purpose of protecting the Han dynasty from rebels. Zhuge rejected Liu Bei's suggestion that he depose the heir – if the son proved incompetent or uncommitted to restoring the Han by liberating North China from the Cao family's dominance. Roberts declares that Zhuge did

[...] not want the brotherhood to take precedence over the father-son relation. Patriarchal benevolence and filial devotion – the essence of Confucian political philosophy – and not the brotherhood provide the answer to the corruption of the imperial house.³²

The novel raised implicit warnings about the brotherhood's sense of honor and inherent danger of perverting proper priorities. Guan Yu's relationship and interactions with Liu and Cao provides an example. After Guan had been trapped by Cao's forces and surrendered, Cao tried to win Guan's loyalty through gifts and kindness, so that Guan would feel indebted. During this period, Guan maintained clear priorities; thus, if he heard news of Liu, he was determined to leave Cao to rejoin Liu. Cao acknowledged Guan's sense of honor and loyalty:

「事主不忘其本，乃天下之義士也！」

"To follow one's lord, always true to the first oath, is a world-class man of honor!"³³

Nonetheless, Guan's honor already incorporated obligation to Cao. Although Cao sought to avoid letting Guan repay the debt and depart, Guan Yu soon seized the opportunity to answer Yan Liang's

30 Roberts 1994, 944.

31 Roberts 1994, 945.

32 Roberts 1994, 946.

33 *Sanguo yanyi* 25, tr. Roberts 1994, 196.

顏良 (d. 200) challenge to Cao's army and, having beheaded Yan, Guan Yu felt more justified in departing Cao's camp. In his farewell letter to Cao, Guan made a statement which would later bedevil the brotherhood:

「[...]。其有餘恩未報，願以俟之異日。」

“[...] For whatever benefaction I may yet remain in your debt, kindly defer the accounting until some future day.”³⁴

Because of Guan's sense of honor and obligation to Cao, Zhuge did not initially assign Guan any role in the wake of the Battle of Red Cliffs; however, Guan swore that he had amply repaid Cao, and agreed to be punished by military law if he allowed Cao to escape. Satisfied, Zhuge assigned Guan to the ultimate ambush location on the mountainous road to Huarong. Having escaped the fiery river battle at Red Cliffs, Cao and his battered remnant force did encounter Guan's ambush. Cao became distraught; however, his advisor reminded him of Guan's character and proposed appealing to Guan's sense of honor.

Bowing humbly, Cao sought to soften Guan with memories of past obligations:

「將軍別來無恙？」

“You have been well, I trust, General, since we parted?”³⁵

At first, Guan responded resolutely in accord with Zhuge's orders. Pointing out the condition of his battered force and hopeless situation, Cao again attempted to stir Guan's sense of obligation:

「[...]，望將軍以昔日之情為重。」

“[...] But I trust, General, you will give due weight to our old friendship.”³⁶

Again, Guan remained resolute. After pointing out how his defeating two major adversaries of Cao had already repaid Cao's kindness, Guan pronounced the proper priorities:

「[...]，今日之事，豈敢以私廢公？」

“[...] In the present situation I cannot set aside public duty for personal considerations.”³⁷

Cao persisted by mentioning his commanders whom Guan had also slain; moreover, citing a classic case of honor, Cao admonished him about the priority of honor:

「[...]。大丈夫以信義為重。[...]」

“[...] A man worthy of the name gives the greatest weight to good faith and honor.”³⁸

The novel portrays that it was Guan's sense of honor that softened his resolve to remain true to Liu Bei's cause:

雲長是個義重如山之人，想起當日曹操許多恩義，與後來五關斬將之事，[...]

And Lord Guan, whose sense of honor was solid as a mountain, could not put Cao Cao's many obliging kindnesses or the thought of the slain commanders from his mind.³⁹

Thereupon, Guan lost his resolve and allowed Cao's remnant to escape.

34 *Sanguo yanyi* 26, tr. Roberts 1994, 205.

35 *Sanguo yanyi* 50, tr. Roberts 1994, 383f.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

Returning empty-handed, Guan Yu acknowledged his failures and stood by his oath to accept capital punishment. Zhuge replied that there was no choice except to enforce the oath under martial law, and thus ordered Guan's execution. Nonetheless, Zhuge pardoned him in response to Liu's appeal:

「昔吾三人結義時，誓同生死。[...]。望權記過，容將功贖罪。」

"When my brothers and I pledged mutual faith, we swore to live and die – as one. [...]. I hope you will suspend the rule this time and simply record his fault, allowing him to redeem his offense by future merit."⁴⁰

Guan did not learn his lesson to restrain his pride in honor and to never neglect his duty. When the kingdom of Wu 吳 proposed a marriage to strengthen the alliance with Liu's Shu-Han 蜀漢, Guan again failed to follow Zhuge's instructions, and so insulted the kingdom of Wu and set the stage for Wu's betrayal of its alliance with Liu Bei and killing of Guan.

When Guan's death pressured Liu to avenge his brother and to hastily attack Wu, Liu lost his sense of priorities:

「孤與關、張二弟桃園結義時，誓同生死。今雲長已亡，孤豈能獨享富貴乎！」

"I took an oath of brotherhood with Lord Guan and Zhang Fei. We vowed to die as one. With Lord Guan gone, what meaning do wealth and honor have for me?"⁴¹

Besides making revenge a higher priority than his own life, Liu was so obsessed that he did not even mention the brotherhood's original goal – defending and restoring Han imperial rule. General Zhao Yun 趙雲 (*zi* Zilong 子龍, d. 229) also warned that attacking Wu would undermine the goal of liberating North China from the Cao family that usurped the Han throne,

「漢賊之讎，公也；兄弟之讎，私也。願以天下為重。」

"War against the traitors to Han is a public responsibility. War for the sake of a brother is a personal matter. I urge Your Majesty to give priority to the empire."

Liu vented:

「孫權害了朕弟；又兼[...]皆有切齒之讎；啖其肉而滅其族，方雪朕恨。卿何阻耶？」

"Sun Quan murdered my brother, and others have earned their share of my hatred [...]. Until I've gnawed their flesh and exterminated their clans, my humiliation will not be effaced."⁴²

After Liu's devastating defeat, the Shu Han kingdom had no strength to liberate North China and restore the Han. We could say that despite its glorification of the honor of the brotherhood, the novel ultimately blamed the failure of the Han dynastic re-unification on the quasi-family brothers for making their personal oath a higher priority than loyalty to the Han dynasty.

Conclusion

Our exploration into cases of tension between filial piety to parents and loyalty to the state/ruler illustrates that priorities shifted significantly over time and changing circumstances. Confucius clearly declared greater importance of one's responsibility to parents. Mencius even argued that sage-king Shun would abandon his throne and country to save his father – even if the father committed murder. Besides avoiding such extreme choices, the *Xiaojing* highlighted the reciprocal nature of

40 *Sanguo yanyi* 50, tr. Roberts 1994, 386.

41 *Sanguo yanyi* 78, tr. Roberts 1994, 590.

42 *Sanguo yanyi* 81, tr. Roberts 1994, 612.

filial piety as a response to the care given by parents; moreover, it reinforced the necessity for adult sons to remonstrate with fathers, just as loyal ministers remonstrated with rulers. Thus, filial piety was not a one-sided absolute. The *Xiaojing* suggests that duty to father had priority as more primary and complete than duty to ruler. Nonetheless, the *Xiaojing* more closely linked filial piety and loyalty – a thread that would become stronger over time, especially after Tang Xuanzong promoted the *Xiaojing* as a classic. Yet, already in the Han dynasty, the *Chunqiu fanlu*'s passages assignable to Dong Zhongshu, enhanced focus on ruler's role. The Five Phases provided cosmic foundation for the ruler's role grounded in the natural order. Suburban Sacrifices to Heaven were given priority over ritual homage to imperial ancestors. The *Chunqiu fanlu* explicitly associated being filial and being loyal. Thus, the revision of the classical Confucian priority of filial piety over state loyalty did not suddenly appear in Zheng Sixiao's predicament or in the *Sanguo yanyi*, but rather had a history in enhancements of loyalty to the centralized state and dynastic family.

The *Sanguo yanyi* interjected fictional details into historical accounts of the Three Kingdoms that not only entertained but also promoted messages about values, especially their relative priority when values conflicted. In contrast to Confucius and Mencius who gave filiality precedence over considerations of state laws and rulers, Mother Xu proclaimed that when filiality and loyalty were in conflict, duty to ruler had greater claim. Her suicide not only effaced Shan Fu's disloyalty and embarrassment of the ancestors but also sealed his commitment not to advise Cao. In the contrasts of socially constructed family relationships, Diaochan provided a positive model because she sacrificed herself – not only in response to “father” but also in her commitment to protect the Han throne.

The brotherhood among relative equals provided a further challenge to the supremacy of loyalty to rightful ruler because ultimate loyalty could shift to the brotherhood. Indeed, the honor and heroic bravery demonstrated by the novel's three “brothers” not only enhanced its entertainment quality, but also provided a standard to highlight the flaws of the era's family relationships. Yet the actions of the brothers demonstrated how their sense of honor and duty became an end into itself with disastrous consequences. Honor within the brotherhood was set in tension with family relationships (especially between father and son) and thus to hierarchical order of the paternalistic Confucian political system which culminated in loyalty to rulers of centralized governments. In this context, filial piety served as a counterweight to sworn oaths among “brothers” in a way that upheld the priority of the father-son relationship and duty to the ultimate father figure of the ruler of the nation-family state.

Ultimately, the underlying polarity or choice was between public and private interests. Zhao Yun aptly articulated this conflict in admonishing Liu against prioritizing revenge for brothers over duty to rightful ruler. Even Guan initially response to Cao's desperate plea had declared his commitment not to discard public duty in favor of personal obligations. Unfortunately, none of the brothers steadfastly prioritized public good over personal affections and self-interests.

Returning to Kutcher's characterization of filiality and loyalty being based on Chinese “parallel conception of society”, I would caution against the possible inference of the two concepts being coterminous and on the same or equal level. The back story of tensions between filiality and loyalty demonstrates the triumph of loyalty over filiality by the time of Zheng Sixiao's predicament and popular narratives in the *Sanguo yanyi*. Thus, although there is a long history of linking filiality and loyalty, the classical origins were markedly different, and its evolution has been contested for millennia.

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The essays assembled in this volume have been contributed by long-standing collaborators, colleagues and friends, students and former students of Achim Mittag. The contributors are from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Austria, North America, Mainland China and Taiwan, who came to know him through conferences, research projects, and sustained scholarly conversations, as well as through the daily university work, and they all have enriched his life and academic career.

If one reads the 29 articles contributed by altogether 30 contributors attentively, one will find that most of them discuss topics that Achim Mittag himself has already explored in one way or another and that the authors explicitly refer to these talks or publications. What holds the contributions together is a shared interest: a curiosity to know more than was hitherto known or thought, and to scrutinize a detail that turns out to be a piece of the puzzle that makes up the bigger picture.

The volume is divided into eight thematic sections, namely Part I: "Macrohistory Versus Microhistory", Part II: "Between Historical Geography and Travelogue", Part III: "Working on Texts", Part IV: "Society versus Individual", Part V: "Intellectual Debates in China's Past and Present", Part VI: "Memory Culture and Identity", Part VII: "Early Cultural Encounters with China and the Beginnings of Sinology", and Part VIII: "China Expertise and 'Greater China'".

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