

Nature and Artifice: Debates in Late Warring States China concerning the Creation of Culture

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IT is a truism that one often finds in early Chinese texts assertions that humanity and the natural world are inherently linked. As K. C. Chang has argued, early Chinese thinkers frequently claim a “continuity between man and animal, between earth and heaven, and between culture and nature.”¹ However, the ways in which this continuity between nature and culture were posited changed dramatically over the course of the pre-Han period, and much work remains to be done in exploring why particular claims of continuity were advanced at particular times. This essay will focus on one aspect of this issue, namely, the ways in which thinkers during the late Warring States period conceptualized the initial creation of culture. My goal will be to analyze the debate that developed during the period from roughly 270 to 221 B.C. over such questions as who created culture, what such a creation entailed, and whether or not the culture thus created was still linked to the natural world.

For reasons that I will explicate below, much of the debate came to focus on discussions, arguments, and interpretations of the term

I would like to thank Professors Peter K. Bol, Edward Shaughnessy, Tu Wei-Ming, and Anthony C. Yu for their extremely helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

¹ K. C. Chang, “Ancient China and its Anthropological Significance,” in *Archaeological Thought in America*, ed. C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 165.

zuo 作. Although *zuo* has a variety of meanings, including “arise,” “be active,” “do,” “build,” and “create,”² it was primarily the latter of these senses that became problematic in the late Warring States period. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind the other meanings as well, for, as their intellectual scrutiny intensified, thinkers exploited the full semantic range of the term in their efforts to define their respective positions on the issue of the emergence of culture. Here, as with other terms that were widely debated in the late Warring States period, it well repays the effort to study the depth of usage that the word was given in each text and to explore how the word was defined and redefined for particular purposes.

To introduce some of the key issues in the late Warring States debates, I will begin by discussing of several passages from earlier Confucian and Mohist texts. These early passages concerning creation were to become a common point of reference during the late Warring States period, and the concepts and ideas found therein were to be subjected to repeated discussion and comment.

EARLY DISCUSSIONS OF *ZUO*

One of the early statements most commonly referred to in the late Warring States debate on creation is that attributed in the *Lunyu* to Confucius:³ “The master said: ‘Transmitting but not creating (*zuo*),

² For a full discussion of the etymology of the word, see chapter 1 in my book manuscript, *The Ambivalence of Creation: The Rise of Empire in Early China*.

³ The traditional view of the composition of the *Lunyu* is that given in the “Yiwenzhi” chapter of the *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 30.1717, which describes the work as having been put together by disciples of Confucius following their master’s death. This would mean that the text was written sometime in the fifth century B.C., based upon the statements and actions of Confucius and his disciples in the earlier part of that century and the latter part of the previous century.

As has long been noted by many scholars, however, the *Lunyu* is at least in part composite, containing later interpolations and possibly entire sections of a later provenance. A great deal of textual work on this question was produced by the Qing scholar Cui Shu 崔述, who raised the view, still largely accepted, that chapters sixteen through twenty seem to date from a later period than the rest of the text. See, for example, his *Kaoxinlu* 考心錄 (1810; rpt., Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1960). More recent work has been undertaken both on the text itself and on relevant material from other texts (concerning quotations, attributed or unattributed, that are similar to passages in the *Lunyu*, later statements about the composition of the work, etc.) by, among others, Takeuchi Yoshio 武内義雄, in his *Rongo no kenkyū* 論語の研究 (Iwanami, 1939). Some of the findings from this research have been conveniently summarized in D. C. Lau, *The Analects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 220–33, Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (New York: State University of

being faithful toward and loving the ancients, I dare to compare myself with old Peng.’⁴ The passage is a statement of modesty vis-à-vis the past: Confucius presents himself as transmitting the past instead of creating anew, and as loving and trusting in the ancients. As such, the claim is clearly related to a number of other statements in the *Lunyu* that point to the importance of following (albeit selectively) the ways of the past,⁵ as well as to passages in which Confucius declines to call himself a sage.⁶ It thus implies a belief that the sages of the past were creators, with Confucius claiming himself not to be such a sage.

The attitude that only sages should create persists in early literature written in the tradition of Confucius, such as the *Mengzi*, which states:

As the generations declined and the way became obscure, heterodox teachings and violent practices arose. There were instances of ministers killing their rulers and sons killing their fathers. Confucius was worried and created (*zuo*) the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is an undertaking for a Son of Heaven. This is why Confucius said: “Those who understand me will do so through the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; those who condemn me will do so through the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.”⁷

Only a Son of Heaven should create a work like the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Thus, implies Mencius, Confucius was in fact a sage, even though he did not occupy the position of king.

Two centuries later, Sima Qian, who presented his *Shiji* as a work written in the tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, made similar claims.⁸ In his postface, he narrates a scene in which he responds to

New York Press, 1990), pp. 240–41 nn. 4 and 6, and Anne Cheng, “Lunyu,” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 313–23. Unless otherwise noted, the passages referred to in this section are from the earlier portions of the *Lunyu*, portions that probably date from the fifth century B.C., and, accordingly, represent some of the earliest formulations of the issues and concerns that dominated discussion for the next few centuries.

⁴ *Lunyu*, Sibu beiyao edition (hereafter SBBY), 7/1.

⁵ See, for example, *Lunyu*, 7/20, 3/14, 11/14, and 15/11.

⁶ As in *Lunyu*, 7/34.

⁷ *Mengzi*, SBBY, 3B/9.

⁸ This is not to imply that Sima Qian is a “Confucian”; my point here is simply that he presents his composition of the *Shiji* as being comparable to Confucius’s reputed composition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. On this point, see Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 1–71, as well as my review of Durrant’s book, *HJAS* 57.1 (1997): 290–310.

a query by a “High Minister Hu Sui” with a modest disclaimer that his work cannot be compared with the *Spring and Autumn Annals* because he, unlike Confucius, is simply transmitting, not creating:

What I am referring to is transmitting ancient affairs and arranging and ordering the traditions passed down through the generations. It is not what can be called creating (*zuo*), and for you to compare this with the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is mistaken.⁹

Immediately after, however, Sima Qian undermines this assertion. He claims that he is authoring the *Shiji* in a state of despair, and compares such a situation to that faced by earlier sages when creating great works; among those situations mentioned is Confucius’s creation (*zuo*) of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.¹⁰ He then presents the contents of his work, explaining why he wrote each section; the verb he uses to describe his acts of composition is *zuo*.¹¹ Thus, while Sima Qian mimics Confucius’s claim to be only transmitting, he elsewhere states that he is instead a creator. He thereby implies that he, like Confucius, is an unrecognized sage.

All these passages share the notion that only sages create, and that to declare oneself a creator is therefore to proclaim oneself a sage. Confucius modestly states that he did not create; Mencius, in claiming that Confucius did in fact create, suggests that Confucius was a sage in spite of his never having been crowned king; and Sima Qian plays with these claims to intimate that he, like Confucius, is an unrecognized sage. What gives these statements their force is the implication that only sages should create.

It is, then, with some degree of surprise that one reads the Mohist invectives against the Confucian views:

(The Confucians) also say: “A superior man complies, but does not create (*zuo*).”

⁹ *Shiji*, Zhonghua shuju edition, 120.3299–300.

¹⁰ *Shiji*, 120.3300.

¹¹ *Shiji*, 120.3301–20. See Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien: The Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 90–91. Watson also correctly points out that in similar contexts Ban Gu, a far more orthodox historian than Sima Qian, always used the term *shu* 述 (“transmit”) instead of *zuo*; see Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien*, p. 223 n. 31. I would also read Ban Gu’s statement that Sima Qian created (*zuo*) the “Benji” section (*Hanshu* 100B.4235) as an implied criticism of Sima Qian. These points are discussed in full in my manuscript, “The Tragedy of Creation: Sima Qian’s Narrative of the Rise of Empire in Early China.”

I respond: "In ancient times, Yi created the bow, Yu created armor, Xi Zhong created chariots, and Qiao Chui created boats. As such, then does it follow that the tanners,¹² armorers, wheelwrights, and carpenters of today are all superior men, while Yi, Yu, Xi Zhong, and Qiao Chui were all petty men? Moreover, some of the people with whom the (Confucians) comply must certainly have created things. As such, then it follows that that with which they comply is the way of the petty man."¹³

The author quotes the Confucians as saying that in general superior men should not create; it interprets Confucius not to have made a statement of modesty but to have claimed instead that creation is in itself bad. The Mohist then shows the absurdity of such a position: if superior men cannot be creators, it would follow that culture was created by petty men, and that superior men are simply those who comply with the creations of such petty men. This would mean that the highest calling for a Confucian would be to comply with a culture created by inferiors.

The claim that the Mohist chapter attributes to Confucius is, of course, quite different from what actually appears in the *Lunyu*. After all, in modestly stating that he is not a creator, Confucius claims neither that the sages of the past were not creators, nor that creation is in itself bad. Moreover, as we have seen, in the Confucian tradition the passage was read as claiming precisely that the sages were creators, and that calling oneself a creator is thus tantamount to the hubris of proclaiming oneself a sage. The Confucians are every bit as committed as the Mohists to the notion that sages were creators.

But if the Mohist attack is unfair, it is nonetheless important to explore why the Mohists find the Confucian position problematic. For the Mohist formulation of the concept of creation and the Mohist critique of the Confucian view came to be highly significant in the later debates.

To begin with, the Mohists are concerned about the degree to which the Confucians see innovation as dangerous. In a tradition that sees their master as having claimed to be only a transmitter, innovation is clearly devalued: if even Confucius could not claim to be a creator, who among his followers ever could? The Mohists make this point strongly in another invective against the Confucians:

¹² Reading *bao* 鮑 as *pao* 鞫.

¹³ *Mozi*, "Fei Ru, xia," SBBY, 9.12b-13a.

Gong Mengzi¹⁴ said: "The superior man does not create (*zuo*) but only transmits."¹⁵ The master Mozi said: "Not so. The least superior among men neither transmit¹⁶ the good things of the past nor create good things for the present. The less superior do not transmit¹⁷ the good things of the past but do create when they have something good, desiring that good things emerge from themselves.¹⁸ Now, transmitting but not creating is no different from not liking to transmit and instead creating. Desiring for goodness to increase all the more, I believe in transmitting the good things of the past and creating good things for the present."¹⁹

This passage again represents the Confucian position unfairly, but the point of the criticism is nonetheless clear. The Mohist argument is that neither creation nor transmission is in itself good or bad; as long as one has standards for goodness, one can create whenever it is beneficial to do so and transmit from the past anything that is beneficial to maintain. The problem with the Confucians, according to the Mohists, is that their position leads to an over-reverence for the past: they present creation in such a way that no one could ever dare claim to do it.

There is, however, another element to the Mohist critique, one aimed not at attacking the Confucians for being too submissive toward the past but rather at attacking the Confucian view of what creation itself involves and what it means for a culture to be created.

¹⁴ Nothing is known about Gong Mengzi, other than that in the *Mozi* he is considered a follower of Confucius. Robert Eno has suggested from the figure's name that he may be a caricature of Mencius; see his *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 257 n. 38. In terms of chronology this is certainly possible: nothing in the passage would prevent one from dating it fairly late in the fourth century B.C., when Mencius was active. However, it seems more likely that Gong Mengzi is an early Confucian about whom we know nothing, and that he is simply being used here to spout stock Confucian lines for Mozi to demolish. If the author was in fact portraying Mencius, one would expect him to have Gong mention some of Mencius's doctrines, and to have Mozi refute Mencian theory.

¹⁵ Reading *shu* 術 as *shu* 述. Because of their phonetic similarity, these are commonly interchanged in early texts. Both belong to the same word family; Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1957), p. 136, word family #497.

¹⁶ Reading *zhu* 誅 as *shu* 述, based again on phonetic similarity.

¹⁷ Reading *sui* 遂 as *shu* 述. The reconstructed pronunciations of the words are again almost identical: /sdjedh/ for *sui* and /djet/ for *shu*. See Axel Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 591 and 565 respectively.

¹⁸ In other words, they want all good things to be created by themselves, and thus refuse to transmit anything from the past.

¹⁹ *Mozi*, "Gengzhu," 11.12b.

In its discussion of *zuo*, the first *Mozi* passage quoted above gives as examples of creation the invention of specific implements and utensils: bows, armor, chariots, and boats. This same characterization of the creation of culture recurs throughout the *Mozi* chapters. The “Ciguo” chapter, for example, provides an account of how the sages of the past created (*zuo*) houses,²⁰ clothing,²¹ agriculture,²² boats, and chariots²³ so as to improve the life of humanity.²⁴ The “Jieyong, shang” chapter attributes the creation (*zuo*) of armor, shields, and the five weapons to sages as well.²⁵ What the sages of the

²⁰ *Mozi*, “Ciguo,” 1.10b–11a.

²¹ *Mozi*, “Ciguo,” 1.11b.

²² *Mozi*, “Ciguo,” 1.12b.

²³ *Mozi*, “Ciguo,” 1.13a.

²⁴ There has been a great deal of debate as to whether or not the “Ciguo” chapter belongs among the core chapters of the *Mozi*. Although it is outside of the core chapters in the extant version of the text, Wang Huanbiao 王煥鏢 has claimed that it may be the missing “Jieyong, xia” chapter; see his *Mozi jiaoshi* 墨子交釋 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Wenyi chubanshe, 1984), pp. 176–86. The basis for the claim is that the chapter is very closely related in both argument and vocabulary to the “Jieyong, shang,” chapter 20. On the other hand, A. C. Graham, after an extensive and quite convincing textual study, concluded that “Jieyong, shang” was rather a somewhat later essay misplaced into the core chapters; see his *Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of the Mo-tzu* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1985), pp. 4, 16–17. It seems likely, then, that both the “Ciguo” and “Jieyong, shang” chapters postdate the core chapters and develop some of the ideas found therein in more detail. For example, one of the core chapters, “Jieyong, zhong,” chapter 21, contains a narrative of the creation of palaces and houses very similar to that given in the “Ciguo” chapter (6.4a), but the “Ciguo” chapter develops the argument at much greater length.

The argument and vocabulary seem to date the “Ciguo” to the fourth century B.C., probably not too much later than the core chapters. The terms *yin* and *yang*, for example, are simply used in the chapter to refer to the modulations of nature (1.14a). This resembles the usage in another fourth century B.C. work, the *Zuozhuan*, where, in a speech attributed to physician He, *yin* and *yang* are referred to, along with wind and rain, dark and light, as the six vapors of Heaven (Duke Zhao, year one). As A. C. Graham, following Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, has argued, *yin* and *yang* in such contexts are simply used as opposites, and should perhaps be simply rendered by the literal translation of “shade and sunshine.” It is not until the third century B.C. that the terms are utilized as part of larger cosmological systems. See Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 70–71, and Xu, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1969). Another reason for dating the “Ciguo” to the fourth century B.C. is that it lacks the concern for logical rigor that dominates the later canon, which Graham dates to roughly 300 B.C.; see his *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1978), p. 23. Moreover, the chapter does not show a concern for any of the issues that come to dominate the debate over creation in the third century B.C.

²⁵ *Mozi*, “Jieyong, shang,” 6.1a–1b.

past created were the implements, utensils, and technologies of humanity,²⁶ those inventions that enabled humanity to rise above the animals and achieve the status of life proper to man.²⁷

In criticizing the Confucians for believing that superior men ought not *zuo*, therefore, the Mohists are referring to a very different process than were the Confucians. Even if Confucians felt that sages should *zuo*, they did not think of sages as creating artifice in the Mohist sense. Indeed, the *Lunyu* shows no interest in the subject of the invention of crafts and technologies, and what it says about the initial emergence of human culture is sharply different from the Mohist vision. In one passage, for example, Confucius states the following about Yao, whom he recognized as the earliest sage king:

The master said: “Great indeed was the rulership of Yao. So majestic—only Heaven is great, and only Yao patterned himself upon it. So boundless—the people were not able to find a name for it. Majestic were his achievements. Illustrious are his patterned forms (*wen zhang*).”²⁸

Yao’s rule was great because he and he alone patterned himself on Heaven. As a consequence, his “patterned forms” (*wen zhang*) are illustrious and, the text implies, worthy of emulation. The first sage king was thus the one who brought the patterns of Heaven to the realm of humanity.

²⁶ Indeed, metaphors of craft—of building, constructing, and fashioning—are so prevalent in the Mohist writings that a number of commentators have argued that the Mohists were a school of artisans. On this issue, see in particular Fang Shouchu 方授楚, *Mo xue yuanliu* 墨學源流 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1937), pp. 15–17; Watanabe Takashi 渡邊卓, “Bokka no shūdan to sono shisō” 墨家の集團とその思想, *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 70 (1961): 1221–23; and A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, pp. 6–15. It may, however, be dangerous to attempt to determine the social class of an entire school based upon the analogies it chooses to use. The text, after all, does not provide detailed instructions in how to build a boat but uses the analogy of construction to discuss the actions of past sages. Such analogies are widespread among early Chinese discussions of the origins of culture. Considering this, the various claims made about the social position of the members of the Mohist school seem to be lacking in convincing evidence. It is true that some stories pose Mozi himself as a craftsman (such as, for example, the “Luwen” chapter, 13.8a–8b), but it is impossible to know if these should be read as accurate representations or as expressing a view within the school. Moreover, even if Mozi himself was an artisan, there is no basis for saying that the later Mohist school was composed predominantly of artisans.

²⁷ For example, the “Ciguo” chapter portrays the sages as creating woven clothing because they felt such things as wearing skins to be inappropriate to the essence (*qing*) of man (1.11b).

²⁸ *Lunyu*, 8/19.

The *Lunyu* presents Confucius's project of transmission along similar lines:

When the master was in danger in Kuang, he said: "King Wen has died, but are his patterns not here? If Heaven had wanted to destroy these patterns, then those who died later would not have been able to participate in the patterns. Since Heaven has not destroyed these patterns, what can the people of Kuang do to me?"²⁹

Although King Wen has died, his patterns (*wen*) survive and have been obtained by Confucius. The patterns were originally taken from Heaven by sages, and their transmission to later generations is made possible by Heaven itself.

Another passage from the *Lunyu* similarly stresses the significance of transmitting patterns: "The master said: 'I prefer not to speak.' Zigong said: 'If the master does not speak, then what shall we lesser ones transmit?' The master said: 'Does Heaven speak? The four seasons proceed from it; the hundred things are born from it. Does Heaven speak?'"³⁰ The issue posed is again that of transmission: Confucius proclaims his desire not to speak, but he also argues that his preference does not prevent transmission to later generations. The argument is couched in an analogy: Heaven does not speak, yet it is from Heaven that the four seasons proceed and the hundred things are generated. What can be transmitted, in other words, is patterned behavior: true transmission, Confucius is claiming, is not through words but rather through replicating the patterns that were initially found in Heaven.

These examples illustrate what the Mohists were responding to. It is not simply that the Confucian position would deny men of the present day the ability to *zuo*; the problem is that it is not clear that any Confucian sage could ever be allowed to *zuo* in the sense that the Mohists want to use the term. The sages as discussed in the *Lunyu* did not create new inventions, new technologies, or new implements: they simply imitated the patterns of Heaven and brought

²⁹ *Lunyu*, 9/5.

³⁰ *Lunyu*, 17/17. Although many scholars see chapter 17 as relatively late, the content of this passage is consistent with the passages discussed above from the earlier portion of the book. In general, I agree with Robert Eno's statement that, unlike chapters 16 and 18, chapter 17 probably contains a great deal of older material. See his *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 242 n. 6.

those patterns to the world of man. Culture, in other words, is defined in the *Lunyu* in terms not of invented arts and technologies but rather of ritualized behavior, and this culture is established not through conscious acts of creation but rather through an imitation of the patterns of nature. What is at stake for the Mohists is not just that Confucius wanted to follow the ancient sages; it is that for Confucius even the ancient sages were not creators of artifice in the Mohist sense: creation, in the specific Mohist understanding of making inventions to raise humanity from the world of nature, has no clear place in Confucius's thought.

The *Mengzi* and *Shiji* use *zuo* in ways that are equally removed from the specific Mohist understanding. When Mencius is quoted as stating that Confucius did *zuo* the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, his claim is that Confucius correctly recognized the patterns of history and brought these to humanity through the composition of the text. Since Mencius was committed to the notion that culture was not an arbitrary construction but rather a realization of natural potentialities given by Heaven, he clearly was not claiming that Confucius had invented some kind of artifice by creating the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.³¹ So it was with Sima Qian: in implicitly portraying himself as a creator, he was implying not that he was an inventor of artifice but rather that he, like Confucius before him, had correctly discerned and brought into narrative form the patterns of history. In short, *zuo* is not being used in this line of thought to refer to conscious acts of creating artifice.

And this is precisely the point that angers the Mohists. The Mohists view the concept of creation as central to their understanding of both culture and sagely activity, and are claiming that the Confucians simply fail to account for it: insofar as the Confucians overemphasize the greatness of past tradition, they wrongfully denigrate the notion of innovation, and insofar as they wrongfully see culture

³¹ In the same passage in which Mencius discusses Confucius's composition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he critiques the Mohists, as well as the Yangists, for creating false doctrines in the mind (3B/9). Since Mencius is committed to the argument that rituals and morality are natural growths from the Heaven-given mind, his claim that the Mohists are creating false doctrines is clearly meant to imply that they are departing from the true, and fully natural, doctrines. Confucius, in contrast, did not, according to Mencius, create in this sense at all. For a full discussion of these issues, see my book manuscript, *The Ambivalence of Creation: The Rise of Empire in Early China*.

as simply ritualized behavior imitated from Heaven, they neglect the importance of the artifice of invention. For the Mohists, the Confucians are slaves to the past and are unable to account for the material culture that they enjoy.

The Mohist critique was to be historically important, for the notion of *zuo* as conscious invention was to become the main source of the debate in the late Warring States period. If *zuo* is to be so defined, then should such a notion be embraced, should the term be re-thought, or should the relationship of culture to nature be reposed? In the ensuing debate, these questions became topics of increasing concern. Issues about which the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* made only a handful of pithy statements would become, by the late Warring States period, objects of lengthy treatises.

THE NATURE OF CULTURE: THE LATE WARRING STATES DEBATE

The latter part of the Warring States stands out in the intellectual history of early China, in particular for having some of the first attempts among a large number of authors to ground culture within larger cosmological frameworks. These frameworks themselves varied greatly, ranging from five-phase speculation to monthly ordinances to attempts to place culture within general cosmogonic schema. Although their approaches differed, most of the frameworks involved definitions of nature in terms of spontaneous, regularized activity and defined culture as normatively related to, if not indeed an inherent part of, such a natural process.

Within this context, the Mohist definition of created culture became highly important precisely because it posed such a problem for many of these formulations. For how can culture be both a conscious human creation and a part of a natural, spontaneous process? As the Mohist critique of early Confucian views pointed out, it is not easy to reconcile the claims that culture is a creation of the sages and that culture is also an imitation of natural patterns. Once so many late Warring States thinkers took the additional step of defining culture, normatively, as a part of nature, such a reconciliation was rendered all the more problematic. As the *Laozi*,³² an

³² The dating of the text of the *Laozi* has been subject to a great deal of debate. Some of this

influential text during this period that became a locus classicus for critiques of notions of conscious action in general, stated:

When the great Way is discarded,
 There is humaneness and righteousness.
 When cleverness and knowledge emerge,
 There is great artifice (*wei* 偽).³³

Any kind of conscious activity on the part of humans leads to the creation of artifice (*wei*) and, according to the *Laozi*, a rejection of the spontaneity of the Way:

The Way constantly does nothing, yet nothing is not done.
 If lords and kings are able to hold to it, the myriad things will transform themselves.³⁴

In short, the Way is uncreated and unfashioned, and any act of craft or artifice (including not just creation but also conscious action, knowledge, cleverness, etc.) is thus a transgression against it. The sage is therefore called upon to reject artifice and imitate the Way in its spontaneity and lack of conscious action.

Although many thinkers in the late Warring States period would argue strongly against the positions of the *Laozi*, the author's general argument that human activity implied a potential break from the

debate was sparked by the story, told in a number of texts, that Confucius visited Laozi. It was on this basis that the *Laozi* was claimed by some to have predated the *Lunyu*. For a fascinating reconstruction of the development of the legend about Laozi and Confucius, see A. C. Graham, "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan," reprinted in Graham, *Studies of Chinese Philosophy* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 111–24.

In terms of the content of the *Laozi*, it clearly postdates the early debates between the Confucians and Mohists, for it criticizes both sides and, indeed, attempts to undermine the terms of the debate itself. However, it could not have been written much later than around 250 B.C. To begin with, the work is mentioned by name in the *Xunzi* (chapter 17, SBBY, 11.14a) and the *Lüshi chungiu* (chapter 17/7, SBBY, 17.15b). The former of these was written within a few decades of the mid-third century B.C., and the latter was composed around 240 B.C. Moreover, the work exerted a tremendous influence on numerous texts dating from the latter part of the third century B.C. Thus, although its exact date of composition (in either the fourth or the early third century B.C.) is unclear, the crucial point for our purposes is that, by around the mid-third century B.C., the text was being widely circulated in intellectual circles, and soon thereafter became highly influential.

³³ *Laozi*, chapter 18.

³⁴ *Laozi*, chapter 37.

natural world was to have a profound impact. As such definitions of nature in terms of spontaneous processes became increasingly predominant, the Mohist understanding of culture as a conscious creation of sages became a recurring topic of debate. Confucian thinkers who wished to maintain the basic vision from the *Lunyu*—that culture was a product of the sages, and that it was nonetheless linked to the natural world—took up the problem of creation in order to counter a Mohist critique that was, by this time, potentially quite damaging. Several other authors, such as Han Feizi, embraced the strong Mohist definition of *zuo* as a means of both asserting certain claims about kingship and innovation as well as rejecting much of the increasingly-dominant naturalistic thought of the day. And many other thinkers, particularly those influenced by the *Lao-zi*, took over the Mohist definition for the opposite reason: it became a useful way of arguing that human acts of creation were a transgression against the natural world, and hence that culture was not a created object at all and that true sages were never creators of anything. In tracing these different positions, I will start with some of the attempts to counter the Mohist critique by figures who defined themselves within the Confucian lineage, and then go on to analyze the other facets of the debate.

THE SAGE AS ARTISAN: XUNZI

One of the most important and intellectually intriguing thinkers during the third century B.C. to discuss the issue of *zuo* was Xunzi.³⁵

³⁵ Most readers accept that the majority of the chapters of the *Xunzi* were written by Xunzi himself. The only chapters that seem to be exceptions to this are “Ruxiao,” “Yibing,” and “Qiangguo,” all of which refer to Xunzi in the third person, and hence were presumably written by his disciples. See Liang Qichao 梁啟超, in *Gushibian* 古史辨, ed. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 et al. (1926–1941; rpt., Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1982), 4:110.

There has, however, been a minority opinion, advanced by Yang Yunru 楊筠如 (*Gushibian*, 6:130–47) and defended by Eno (*The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 136–137), that the *Xunzi* is a product of several authors. Eno’s specific argument is that the text was composed by several Confucians (one of whom might have been Xunzi himself, and the others may well have been inspired by Xunzi) writing at, and hence questioning some of the main theorists of, the Jixia Academy during the third century B.C.

In terms of the text itself, there is no particularly compelling evidence either way to solve the question of authorship, so the only criterion can be the admittedly subjective impression of the reader as to whether the chapters seem to represent the thought process of a single in-

Xunzi fervently defended the notions that culture should be defined in terms of ritual and morality, that its emergence should be attributed to sages, and that, because the sages' activities were ultimately rooted in Heaven, the culture they created was not arbitrary. To respond to both the Mohist vision of sagely creation as well as the widespread trend toward naturalistic thinking among his contemporaries, Xunzi developed a full explanation of how the sages initiated culture and how culture was nonetheless related to the natural world.

Xunzi was strongly committed to arguing that culture, defined in moral terms, had been constructed by sages, and hence that it was artificial. As he bluntly states, "Goodness results from artifice (*wei*)."³⁶ Instead of opposing the *Laozi*'s claims that morality is a product of artifice, Xunzi agrees with it fully while declaring that this is proper. Xunzi's position is made even more significant by his acceptance of the definitions of nature common at the time: "Not acting (*wuwei* 無為) and yet completing, not seeking and yet obtaining, this is called the work of Heaven."³⁷ While Xunzi embraces the view of nature as based in spontaneous, non-conscious (*wuwei*) processes, he opposes the idea that the sage ought therefore imitate nature and hence act non-consciously.

Xunzi's overt rejection of any attempt to conflate ritual and

dividual. My own impression is that the traditional interpretation is correct: the chapters do seem to reflect the developing thought of a single figure working through some of the tensions of the time. Although the chapters are not as uniquely distinctive as, for example, the "Inner chapters" of the *Zhuangzi*, they do nonetheless convey a fairly consistent level of originality and uniqueness, qualities that would be difficult (although not impossible) to maintain with separate authors.

The issue of authorship has important consequences for dating the *Xunzi*. The most careful recent attempt to date the individual chapters was made by John Knoblock in "The Chronology of Xunzi's Works," *Early China* 8 (1982-83): 28-52. Since the evidence for dating the chapters is relatively limited, the assumption of single authorship forms a critical part of his analysis. The assumption allows him to arrange the chapters relative to each other in terms of how they seem to reflect the developing thought of a single figure. Thus, even if only a few chapters contain clues for dating, Knoblock can still, once he has arranged the chapters relative to each other, make educated inductions about the date of other chapters for which clues do not exist. In general, his conclusions do seem to be plausible hypotheses.

³⁶ *Xunzi*, "Xing'e," SBBY, 17.1a.

³⁷ *Xunzi*, "Tianlun," 11.9b.

morality to the world of nature led him to his famous opposition to Mencius's position that ritual and morality are rooted in the nature that Heaven gives each human: "Now, human nature comes from Heaven; it cannot be learned, it cannot be gained through effort. Rituals and righteousness are what the sages generated (*sheng* 生); they can be learned by man and completed through effort."³⁸

But if ritual and morality are not rooted in nature but are rather products of the artifice of the sages, then are they not arbitrary? This question is taken up explicitly in Xunzi's discussion of how culture was formed by the sages:

Someone asks: "If man's nature is evil, from where are rituals and righteousness generated?" I respond: "All rituals and righteousness were generated (*sheng*) from the conscious activity of the sages. They were not originally generated from the nature of man. Thus, a potter works³⁹ clay and makes (*wei*) vessels; as such, the vessels are generated from the conscious activity of the craftsman, and were not originally generated from the nature of man. Thus, a craftsman carves wood and completes implements; as such, the implements are generated from the conscious activity of the craftsman, and were not originally generated from the nature of man. The sages accumulated their considerations and thoughts and practiced⁴⁰ conscious activity (*wei*) and precedents; they thereby generated rituals and righteousness, and made laws and standards arise. As such, rituals, righteousness, laws, and standards were generated from the conscious activity of the sages, and were not originally generated from the nature of man."⁴¹

The sages' initiation of culture is, according to Xunzi, like a potter in relation to his pots, or an artisan in relation to his implements. In employing this analogy of craftsmanship, Xunzi might at first glance appear to be accepting a generally Mohist conception of creation, even while defining culture in terms of ritual and morality. In other words, even if he is staying close to Confucius's definition of culture, he would appear to be moving far away from Confucius's brief description of the initial emergence of this culture in terms of the sages patterning themselves upon Heaven. This erroneous impression is strengthened by the rhetorical posture Xunzi is taking vis-à-vis Mencius's argument that ritual and morality are rooted in

³⁸ Xunzi, "Xing'e," 17.2a.

³⁹ Yan 延 means "to stretch," a meaning clear throughout the word family (as in yan 延, "to lengthen, extend"). The sense here is to pull and stretch the clay, i.e., to work it.

⁴⁰ "Practiced" in the sense of making them habitual or customary.

⁴¹ Xunzi, "Xing'e," 17.2b-3a.

the nature given to humans by Heaven, and is further strengthened by the position Xunzi is taking against the *Laozi*'s critique of artifice. If Xunzi is claiming that ritual and morality are not based on nature but are rather an artificial construct of the sages, and if Xunzi portrays such a sagely construction as comparable to the construction of artisans, then he would certainly appear to be moving toward the notion of sagely creation advocated by the Mohists.

However, Xunzi's analogy is actually quite different from that employed by the Mohists, and herein we get our first hint of his full argument. Unlike the Mohists, Xunzi has little interest in the initial creation of specific implements and crafts. The institution of culture for Xunzi is not comparable to the original creation of, for example, pot-making in general; instead, it is comparable to the everyday, seemingly mundane activity of making individual pots. In other words, he defines culture not in terms of innovation but rather in terms of the activity of everyday craft. What interests Xunzi is the type of conscious activity that produces culture, the same type of carefully trained activity used by an artisan in producing implements.

Thus, Xunzi does not claim that the sages created (*zuo*) culture like the innovators who created crafts. Instead, he argues that culture is generated (*sheng*) from the conscious activity (*wei* 偽) of the sages, just as implements are generated (*sheng*) from the conscious activity (*wei*) of the artisan. The terminological shift is significant: the term *sheng* means "to give birth" or "generate," and is used to refer to the natural processes of, for example, a mother giving birth to a child. The central issue for the sages, according to Xunzi, was to develop their conscious activity correctly, for once this was done culture would be generated naturally, as implements are generated from the correct activity of the artisan. The question, then, turns to what exactly this conscious activity is for Xunzi.

In the "Zhengming" chapter, Xunzi gives one of his most complete descriptions of how conscious activity emerges. He defines human nature in terms of spontaneity, and conscious action as what arises once the mind starts working on this spontaneity:

That which is used as it was from birth is called human nature. The part of human nature that harmonizes with what was born, is concentrated, is accommodating, and resonates and responds spontaneously (*ziran* 自然) and without interference (*bu shi*

不事) is also called human nature. The likes, dislikes, happiness, anger, sorrows, and joys of human nature are called emotions. When the emotions are thus, and the mind acts (*wei*) upon them and makes choices, this is called thinking. When the mind thinks and is able to act (*wei*) upon them (i.e., its thoughts) and move, this is called conscious activity.⁴²

Conscious activity, then, is the mind acting upon one's natural givens and putting one's thoughts into practice.

In the "Tianlun" chapter, Xunzi goes so far as to define the sage's work in terms of using correctly the faculties granted to him by Heaven.⁴³ The passage in question begins with a discussion of the nature of man as produced by Heaven:

When the work of Heaven has been established and the accomplishments of Heaven have been completed, the form is prepared and the spirit is born. Likes, dislikes, happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy are stored within him: these are called the Heavenly emotions. The ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and body each have that with which they connect, but they cannot substitute for each other: these are called the Heavenly faculties. The mind resides within the central emptiness so as to rule the five faculties: this is called the Heavenly ruler. It makes into produce what is not of its species in order to nurture its species: this is called the Heavenly nurturance. Those who accord with their species are called fortunate, and those who oppose their species are called unfortunate; this is called the Heavenly governance.⁴⁴

Xunzi thus describes the birth of man in terms of Heaven. He defines the various faculties as Heavenly faculties, and the mind as the Heavenly ruler. He then goes on to discuss the proper way to use these Heavenly-given faculties and mind:

To darken one's Heavenly ruler, bring disorder to one's Heavenly faculties, discard one's Heavenly nurturance, disobey one's Heavenly governance, turn one's back on one's Heavenly emotions, and thereby destroy the Heavenly accomplishments: these are called great inauspiciousness. The sage clears his Heavenly ruler, rectifies his Heavenly faculties, prepares his Heavenly nurturance, accords with his Heavenly governance, nourishes his Heavenly emotions, and thereby brings completion to the Heavenly governance. If he does so, then he knows what he is to do

⁴² Xunzi, "Zhengming," 16.1a-1b.

⁴³ The "Tianlun" chapter has been discussed recently by a number of scholars. See in particular: Philip J. Ivanhoe, "A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ethical Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.2 (Summer 1991): 309-22; Edward J. Machle, *Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A Study of the Tian Lun* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 154-67. See n. 47 for some of my disagreements with Eno's interpretation.

⁴⁴ Xunzi, "Tianlun," 11.10a.

and not to do. Heaven and earth then perform their functions and the myriad things serve him. His movements are fully ordered, his nurturance fully appropriate, and his life is without injury. This is called knowing Heaven.⁴⁵

The sage's actions are described in terms of clearing, according, and nourishing the faculties given to him by Heaven. Once the sage correctly cultivates these faculties, he will know what to do and what not to do. Heaven thus gives man the faculties which, if used properly, will guide his actions. In order to further highlight the implicit teleology here, Xunzi refers to the final stage of this process of cultivation as "knowing Heaven."

Such an implicit teleology is also apparent in the "Lilun" chapter, where Xunzi declares that the joining of human nature and conscious activity is generative of order in the same way as the joining of Heaven and earth are generative of life and the joining of *yin* and *yang* are generative of changes and transformations:

Therefore I say that human nature is the basis, beginning, material, and substance; conscious activity is the pattern, principle, abundance, and flourishing. If there were no human nature, there would be nothing for conscious activity to add to. If there were no conscious activity, human nature would be unable to beautify itself. Only when human nature and conscious activity combine are the names of the sages unified and the accomplishments of all under Heaven completed. Therefore, I say that when Heaven and the earth combine, the myriad things are born; when *yin* and *yang* join, changes and transformations arise; when human nature and conscious activity combine, all under Heaven is put in order. Heaven can give birth to things but cannot distinguish things; the earth can bear man but cannot put men in order. Within the universe, the myriad things generate those who belong to the human race; they await the sage and only then are they differentiated.⁴⁶

The initiation of order by the sages is thus part of the generation of the world. The sages using their Heaven-generated faculties correctly to work on human nature and generate order is as necessary as Heaven mating with earth, or *yang* joining *yin*.

We are now in a position to begin to understand what Xunzi means when he describes the initial establishment of culture by the sages. Instead of speaking a language of sages creating, Xunzi talks about the trained use of their Heaven-generated faculties. The process of the sages training themselves to use these faculties correctly is

⁴⁵ Xunzi, "Tianlun," 11.10b.

⁴⁶ Xunzi, "Lilun," 13.10a.

comparable to the process of an artisan training himself to produce implements: both cases deal with a highly regulated activity that must be carried out only in a particular way. Once this training of natural abilities was undertaken, the sages were then able to generate culture.

Although Xunzi has thus opposed the claim that sages initiated culture by simply imitating the external patterns of nature, he has nonetheless rooted culture in nature to a greater degree than his own rhetoric suggests. Far from claiming that culture and nature are fully distinct, he presents the two as related, albeit indirectly: Heaven generates the faculties in man, and man, if he can use those faculties correctly, will develop the conscious activity that will generate culture. For Xunzi, the “artifice,” or *wei*, of culture is by no means an arbitrary construction on the part of sages.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Here it may be worthwhile to comment on the interpretation of Xunzi's works by Robert Eno. In many ways, Eno's work is among the most careful explications that has been done on the text, in large part because he poses his questions in terms of discovering the basic concerns that led the author (or, for him, authors) to make particular statements on a given topic. On the problem of how Heaven is presented in the *Xunzi*, Eno has recognized that the treatment appears contradictory, with Heaven at times treated as value neutral and distinct from humanity, and at other times as a provider of the faculties that allow humanity to develop correctly. See Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 144–69.

Nonetheless, I must voice some disagreement with Eno's explanation of the apparent contradictions. He argues that such inconsistency reveals that the authors of the text were uninterested in Heaven as a concept, and that they simply used Heaven in different ways in different contexts in order to counter other thinkers of the time: in some places it was rhetorically advantageous to counter naturalistic claims by arguing that nature was value-neutral and that culture was distinct from it, and in other places it was advantageous to argue that nature formed the normative basis for ritual. See Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 154, 168–69.

While I agree that Heaven is described in distinct ways in the text, and that many of these descriptions of Heaven should be understood in terms of a response to the naturalistic approaches of the time, I do not think that these seemingly contradictory statements can be explained simply as different responses in different contexts to the naturalistic challenge. On the contrary, I would argue that the differing approaches to Heaven given in the *Xunzi* are structurally related: the author (who I believe was Xunzi himself) was trying to show that the problem of discontinuity and creation could be posed in different ways than those attempted by the naturalists—that, to sum up the claims made in the main text, culture could be seen as related to nature without thereby allowing for a conflation of the two. Xunzi, then, was trying to steer a middle course between extreme positions that would call for either a pure conflation of nature and culture or a complete discontinuity between the two. (As I show below, Xunzi's recognition that these extremist positions were realistic options was prescient: later authors would indeed take these positions.)

In Xunzi's highly sophisticated explanation of the origin of culture, the origin is, at least implicitly, rooted in Heaven: the sages established culture, but they were not inventors of artifice in the Mohist sense. Xunzi instead defines culture in terms of ritual and morality, and argues that its emergence was in no sense an arbitrary creation. In fact, the production of culture did not involve acts of *zuo* at all. Although culture was consciously made by the sages, and although such a conscious making was outside the realm of nature, culture is nonetheless, when properly instituted, the teleological (if not immediate) product of Heaven. It is for this reason that Xunzi consistently contends that the rites, duties, laws, and standards instituted by the sages were generated (*sheng*), not created (*zuo*), by the sages.

In light of Xunzi's explication of the sages' formation of ritual and morality, the question arises as to how he accounts for the issues raised in the Mohist argument about the invention of arts and technologies. Intriguingly, Xunzi responds to the critique by defending the very point that the Mohist portrayed as absurd: according to Xunzi, those who utilized the invented implements of the past were indeed superior to the inventors themselves. "Chui created (*zuo*) the bow and Fou You created arrows, but Yi concentrated on archery; Xi Zhong created the chariot and Cheng Du created the yoking of horses, but Zao Fu concentrated on driving."⁴⁸ The invention of specific implements is secondary to the way they were later employed. Contrary to the Mohists, Xunzi contends that the most significant figures in the history of the creation of implements were not those who invented them but rather those who concentrated their minds and focused on how such implements should be utilized. Xunzi's point here is that the Mohist emphasis on the creation of implements and technologies is misplaced. For Xunzi, the crucial things that were produced in the past were ritual and morality, and these were not created but rather generated from the Heaven-given mind. In turn, this is the kind of mind that should be used to decide how created implements should be employed.

But if this is Xunzi's argument on the problem of the artifice of creation, what about the other side of the Mohist critique, namely,

⁴⁸ Xunzi, "Jiebi," 15.7b.

that of innovation—the claim, in other words, that Confucians are so committed to transmitting the practices of the sages of the past that they fail to accept the need for innovation? On this point, Xunzi in part concurs: although he calls for compliance with the rituals of the earlier sages, he also believes it necessary for a new sage to arise and create at least partially new institutions. Unlike the passages where he discusses the initial emergence of culture, in this context Xunzi does indeed employ the term *zuo*, “creating anew,” as his discussion of names illustrates:

Now the sage kings are gone. Names are maintained laxly, strange phrases arise, names and reality are confused, and the forms of right and wrong are not clear. . . . If a king were to arise he would surely comply with old names and also create (*zuo*) new names.⁴⁹

Xunzi here acquiesces to one of the Mohist critiques, arguing that, although complying with the past is important, innovating, *zuo*, is at times necessary as well. An act of *zuo*, however, is highly problematic for Xunzi, and he devotes much of the remainder of the chapter to explaining exactly how a sage goes about doing this. The chapter thus presents us with one of the first attempts by a figure in the Confucian tradition to explain what it would mean for a sage to *zuo*.

Throughout the chapter, Xunzi attempts to restrict the act of creation according to the same processes discussed above: the sage can create new names only after he has correctly used his Heaven-given faculties. Xunzi rhetorically asks, “What does one rely upon in order to distinguish similarities and differences?” To this he responds, “One relies upon the Heavenly faculties.” Then, after describing how each faculty apprehends similarities and differences among objects, he states: “The mind has an inquiring knowledge. The inquiring knowledge then relies upon the ears and is able to know sounds; relies upon the eyes and is able to know forms. But the inquiring knowledge must await the Heavenly faculties’ (data) and match it with that already registered for that category; only then is it acceptable.”⁵⁰ It is on this basis that the sage assigns names:

⁴⁹ Xunzi, “Zhengming,” 16.2b.

⁵⁰ Xunzi, “Zhengming,” 16.3a–3b.

This is what should be relied upon in order to differentiate similarities and differences. Only then can one follow and order them. . . . He knows that different things require different names, and he therefore makes it such that all different things have different names. This cannot fall into disorder. In the same way, he makes it such that all similar⁵¹ things have similar names.⁵²

Names are created by a sage only after he has correctly differentiated reality by properly using the faculties with which he was born. Thus, Xunzi has limited the act of creation on the part of the sages by rooting the act in the conscious activity of the mind, and, in what now appears a consistent pattern of argument, has limited the arbitrariness of such conscious activity by defining it normatively as the process of correctly using one's Heaven-given faculties.

Xunzi next explains how the sage, after defining particular names, builds up language:

Names are the means by which one designates and binds reality. Phrases connect the names of different realities so as to express a single idea. Disputation and explanations do not differentiate realities and names, and are used to make understood the way of movement and stillness. Designated names⁵³ are the instruments of disputation and explanations. Disputation and explanations are the mind's representing the way; the mind is the artisan and supervisor of the way; the way is the standard and principle of rule. The mind accords with the way, explanations accord with the mind, and phrases accord with explanations.⁵⁴

Xunzi thus roots the actions of the mind in the way. He defines the way as the standard and principle of rule and, sticking to one of his favorite analogies, defines the mind as the artisan and supervisor of the way. By according with the correct way of rule, the mind, as artisan, puts names together to express ideas and represent the way.

The sage thus categorizes nature properly and grants names to it when he uses his Heaven-given faculties correctly; he then builds up larger elements of language by using his mind in accord with the way. In response to the Mohists, Xunzi is agreeing that sages must now arise and innovate (*zuo*), but he strongly limits the ways in which sages can do so: innovation must be based in the correct usage of the faculties given by Heaven, and these faculties, correctly

⁵¹ Emending *yi* 異 to *tong* 同 in order to maintain the parallelism.

⁵² Xunzi, "Zhengming," 16.3b-4a.

⁵³ Reading *ming* 名 for *ming* 命.

⁵⁴ Xunzi, "Zhengming," 16.6a-6b.

used, will allow the sage to discern accurately similarities and distinctions in the natural world.

In both of these discussions, Xunzi develops a sophisticated version of the basic vision that appeared in the brief passages of the *Lunyu*: the sages' acts of creation involve not arbitrary inventions but rather the bringing to humanity of a normative order rooted, ultimately, in Heaven. The sages are thus said to have initially "given birth" (*sheng*) to ritual and morality, not to have invented it (*zuo*). Xunzi uses the term *zuo* only to refer to the act of creation in the sense of innovation, but he then carefully restricts how the sage innovates—that is, by correctly using the Heaven-given faculties.

Of particular interest in these chapters is the degree to which the term *zuo* has become a topic of debate: the authors of the *Lunyu* had no interest in defining how exactly the sages initiated culture, nor any interest in defining what it would mean exactly to say that the sages did *zuo*. By Xunzi's time, these issues are being explicitly confronted. As someone committed to the claims that sages initiated culture and that such a culture is neither arbitrary nor definable in terms of created crafts, Xunzi is at pains to work around a term that he sees as highly problematic.

THE SAGE AS EMULATOR: THE "YUEJI"

Another attempt to respond to the Mohist critique is found in the "Yueji" 樂記 chapter of the *Liji*. Here much of the argument has a strong Confucian tone, as seen particularly in the emphasis on ritual and music, and as a whole the chapter resembles the "Yuelun" chapter of the *Xunzi*. Nonetheless, the specific character of the "Yueji" response differs significantly from that in Xunzi's writings. The section germane to the issues at hand begins with a reworking of the statement found in the *Lunyu* that the Mohists mocked:

Therefore, those who understood the fundamentals (*qing* 情) of rituals and music were able to create (*zuo*); those who know the patterns (*wen*) of rituals and music are able to transmit. Those who created are called sages; those who transmit are called intelligent (*ming* 明). Intelligence and sageliness are names for transmitting and creating, respectively.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Liji zhengyi*, "Yueji," SBBY, 37.9a.

The author maintains that sages did in fact *zuo*, while the intelligent ones are those who transmit the patterns (*wen*) created by the sages. Like Xunzi, he wishes to define culture in Confucian terms. Nonetheless, he departs from Xunzi in the description of how that culture emerged: unlike Xunzi, the author here wants to claim not that the sages generated (*sheng*) culture but rather that they created (*zuo*) it. He responds to the Mohists not by redefining what the sages did but rather by redefining the term *zuo* itself: the sages did *zuo*, but this did not involve the invention of artificial constructions.

The passage cited defines the sages as having created only after they understood the fundamentals of ritual and music. The author then immediately explains what these fundamentals are: "Music is the harmony of Heaven and earth; rituals are the order of Heaven and earth. Because of harmony, the hundred things undergo transformation; because of order, the groups of things are differentiated."⁵⁶ The author defines music in terms of harmony, and ritual in terms of order. The sages based their creation of ritual and music on Heaven and earth respectively:

Music was created (*zuo*) from Heaven; rituals were formed (*zhi* 制) by means of the earth. If they had excessively given forms, there would have been disorder; if they had excessively created, there would have been oppression. Only after they were clear about Heaven and earth were they able to raise up (*xing*) rituals and music.⁵⁷

The sages based their creation of music on Heaven and their formation of rituals on earth. The author's choice of the two verbs *zuo* and *zhi* in this passage is of interest, for both are associated with active construction: *zuo* has a strong sense of construction, and *zhi*, "to form," has connotations of regulating and cutting. The term *zhi* seems appropriate for the explanation of the emergence of ritual: since the author is arguing that ritual is based on order and differentiation, his use of the term *zhi* tends simply to underline the regulating activity of the sages. The use of *zuo*, however, is surprising: since the author defines music in terms of harmony and envisions it as coming from Heaven, acts of conscious creation would not appear to be an appropriate means of accounting for its emergence. Even Xunzi, who has no trouble emphasizing the artificial aspects

⁵⁶ *Liji zhengyi*, "Yueji," 37.9a.

⁵⁷ *Liji zhengyi*, "Yueji," 37.9a–9b.

of sagely actions in initiating culture, shies from using a term such as *zuo* when talking about the emergence of culture. Why, then, would an author explicitly interested in the degree to which the sages simply imitated Heaven in composing music use a term that, at least since the time of the Mohists, has such a strong sense of conscious creation? The reason becomes clear when the author describes the process as a whole as one of “raising up” (*xing* 興) rituals and music. Yes, the author is arguing, the sages did indeed *zuo* music, but in doing so all they did was take a harmony in Heaven and bring it to the world of humanity. The author is thus using *zuo* in its alternate sense of “making arise,” rather than in the Mohist sense of consciously fashioning anew. The sages did *zuo*, but they did so by imitating nature rather than by constructing something in a Mohist sense.

That the author is using the term *zuo* in the sense of “making arise” becomes clearer as the argument progresses, for the author alternates the terms *zuo* and *xing* in his discussion of the emergence of music. In several places, he maintains his usual diction: “As for the kings, when their work was completed they created (*zuo*) music; when their rule was settled they formed the rituals.”⁵⁸ There are, however, some intriguing shifts in the usage of these terms:

With Heaven high and the earth below, the myriad things dispersed and differentiated, rituals were formed (*zhi*) and put into practice. Flowing without stopping, combining together and transforming, music was made to arise (*xing*) therein.⁵⁹

Rituals are still described as being formed, but here the verb *xing*, “to make arise,” is used instead of the verb *zuo* to discuss the initiation of music. The verbal play here reiterates the basic point made in the explanation of what the sages’ action entailed: the sages did not actively construct music but rather lifted harmony from the natural world and brought it in the form of music to the world of humanity.

In the next sentence, the author states the following: “In spring things arise (*zuo*) and in summer they grow; this is humaneness. In autumn things are gathered in and in winter they are stored; this is righteousness. Humaneness is close to music, and righteousness is

⁵⁸ *Liji zhengyi*, “Yueji,” 37.9b.

⁵⁹ *Liji zhengyi*, “Yueji,” 37.11a.

close to ritual.’’⁶⁰ The author explicitly defines morality in terms of the natural seasons. While making such a claim, he uses *zuo* in its intransitive sense of “arise” to refer to the activity of springtime. Throughout this section, therefore, he consistently uses the term in the sense of “arising” or, in its transitive sense, “making arise.”

The author then sums up many of his themes concerning the emergence of music and ritual as follows:

Music esteems harmony, obeys the spirits, and follows Heaven; ritual differentiates appropriateness, resides with ghosts, and follows earth. Therefore the sages created music to respond to Heaven and formed rituals to correspond to earth. Rituals and music illuminate and complete the work of Heaven and earth.⁶¹

The sages created and formed music and ritual in order to respond and correspond to Heaven and earth respectively, and music and ritual thus complete the work of Heaven and earth. The author is here explicit on the point that has been implied throughout: music and rituals are not the conscious creations of the sages but are rather based upon and, indeed, complete Heaven and earth.

By defining the creation of music as an act of *zuo*ing from Heaven, the author may well be playing on a common theme in the cosmologies of the late Warring States, which commonly associate Heaven with the attribute of *zuo* (“activity”) and earth with the attribute of *jing* 靜 (“stillness”). For example, one finds in the *Shiliu-jing* 十六經, the second of the four texts attached to the Mawangdui 馬王堆 *Laozi* B:⁶²

⁶⁰ *Liji zhengyi*, “Yueji,” 37.11a.

⁶¹ *Liji zhengyi*, “Yueji,” 37.11a.

⁶² Tomb three of the Mawangdui site, where the manuscripts were discovered, has been dated to 168 B.C. The *Laozi* B, as well as the attached texts, avoid the taboo character *bang* 邦 from the reign of Liu Bang, but they do not avoid the taboo character of his successor. This means that they were copied sometime during the latter’s reign, between 194 B.C. to 180 B.C. As to when they were actually composed, numerous hypotheses have been advanced. Tang Lan 唐蘭 argues that, based on similarities with some of the Shen Dao fragments, the texts should be dated to around 400 B.C. See his “Mawangdui chutu Laozi yiben juan qian guyishu de yanjiu,” 馬王堆出土老子乙本卷前古佚書的研究, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1 (1975): 7–38. This date, however, is much too early. Although the authors may have used some of Shen Dao’s statements, the overall system presented in the texts is comparable to texts (such as some of the chapters from the *Lüshi chungiu*) dateable no earlier than the mid-third century B.C. A reasonable date would have to be sometime from roughly 250 B.C. to the very early Han, a view shared by the large majority of scholars who have worked on the texts. See, for example, Wu Guang 吳光, *Huang-Lao zhi xue tonglun* 黃老之學通論 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang ren-

Earth nourishes⁶³ virtue with stillness (*jing*); Heaven corrects names with activity (*zuo*). Stillness and action nourish each other. . . . When *yin* and *yang* are complete and things transform and change, there is then generation.⁶⁴

Stillness is associated with earth, and activity with Heaven; each forms one part of the differentiated world, and their mutual interaction forms the generative process.⁶⁵

Since *zuo* in the intransitive sense of “activity” was commonly associated with Heaven, the author of the “Yueji” argues that sages, in imitating Heaven during the creation of music, also undertook acts of *zuo*, in the sense of “making the patterns arise.” The verbal play here would again underline the degree to which the sage is simply emulating Heaven: the sages’ acts of *zuo* are not only not a transgression against the spontaneity of Heaven; they are in fact directly comparable to one of the attributes of Heaven.

As with Xunzi, therefore, the author argues that culture, initiated by the sage, serves to complete Heaven and earth. But the author here responds to the Mohist critique in a fundamentally different way than had Xunzi, and it was a response that was ultimately to be the more influential. Xunzi admitted that human culture was artifice but then restricted the implied discontinuity of such a claim by

min chubanshe, 1985) and Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, “Senshin ni okeru hōshisō no tenkai” 先秦における法思想の展開, *Shūkan tōhōgaku* 集刊東方學 47 (1982): 1–10. Because they seem to fall into the same intellectual context as the *Lüshi chungiu*, and because none of the works refers to the imperial unification, I view them as late Warring States texts. Indeed, in many of the chapters of the texts the authors assume a Warring States political situation. See, for example, *Jingfa*, “Liu fen,” and *Shiliujing*, “Ben fa.” Although one could perhaps try to argue that such chapters might be referring to wars between the centralized government and rebellious enfeoffed kingdoms during the early Han period, this would lead to extremely forced readings of the passages. For a full discussion of the issue, see my *The Ambivalence of Creation: The Rise of Empire in Early China*.

⁶³ Following the editors in reading *su* 俗 as *yu* 育, based upon their phonetic similarity.

⁶⁴ *Shiliujing*, in *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), p. 66, lines 96b–97a. All references to the *Shiliujing*, as well as to the *Cheng* later in this essay, are to the 1980 version of the *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, an edition that incorporates a great deal of the textual work that has been done on the manuscripts. Since each page contains a large amount of text, I have for the sake of convenience followed Peerenboom’s method of adding the original line number as well. See his *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

⁶⁵ Similarly, in a fragment from the *Shenzi* 申子 (attributed to Shen Buhai 申不害) quoted in the *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔, one finds the statement that: “The way of the earth is not to be active (*zuo*). It is thus constantly still (*jing*). Being constantly still, it is thus correct and square”; (1888 edition; rpt., Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), 157.2a.

arguing that the actions of the sages involved simply a careful usage of their Heaven-given faculties. In contrast, the author of the “Yueji” redefines the term *zuo*: instead of using it with the sense of conscious creation, he employs it with the sense of “making arise”; instead of defining the process as one of creating or constructing anew, he defines it as one of imitating, and completing the work of, Heaven and earth.

CULTURE AS CRAFT

But if Xunzi and the author of the “Yueji” represent two attempts within the Confucian tradition to work around or redefine the notion of *zuo*, other authors in the late Warring States period were to utilize the term in precisely the way that the Mohists employed it. Several late Warring States writers explicitly defined culture in terms of the arts and crafts created by the sages, and made no attempt to claim that the culture so created was correlated with the natural world. The opening section of the “Kaogongji” 考工記 chapter of the *Zhouli* 周禮,⁶⁶ for example, takes a position on the issue of creation highly reminiscent of the Mohist position. The passage germane to this discussion involves yet another play on the statement attributed to Confucius in the *Lunyu*:

The knowledgeable (*zhi* 知) fashioned (*chuang* 創) things. The skillful (*qiao* 巧) have transmitted and maintained things through the generations; they are called artisans. The affairs of the hundred artisans are all creations (*zuo*) of the sages. Some smelt⁶⁷ metal to make knives; some harden the earth to make implements; some build chariots to travel over hills; some build boats to travel over water. All of these are things that were created (*zuo*) by the sages.⁶⁸

Thus, unlike Xunzi, who describes the activity of the sages in terms of the work of artisans, the author here, in a Mohist fashion, describes the sages as the creators, not the practitioners, of craft. Like the author of the “Yueji” chapter, he asserts that sages did in fact *zuo*, but, unlike the “Yueji” chapter, he makes no attempt

⁶⁶ According to traditional accounts, the “Kaogongji” chapter was added to the *Zhouli* during the reign of Han Wudi. As for its date of composition, most scholars see it as a product of the late Warring States period. See the convenient summary given in William Boltz, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, pp. 24–32.

⁶⁷ Reading *shuo* 鑠 as *shuo* 鑠.

⁶⁸ *Zhouli zhengyi*, “Kaogongji,” SBBY, 74.7a–7b.

either to root culture in the natural world or to redefine the notion of creation to mean simply introducing the patterns of nature into the world of man. Absent here is any concern with correlating sagely activity with the natural world in general. In short, the author, like the Mohists, poses *zuo* as referring to acts of conscious creation, and discusses culture in terms of the crafts thereby created by the sages. The differences between this passage and the “Yueji” chapter read almost like a late Warring States version of the debate between the Mohists and the early Confucians.

Several other authors utilized such Mohist definitions of *zuo* explicitly to assert that in the past sages did consciously create and therefore ought to do so now as well. For example, the “Wudu” chapter of the *Han Feizi* provides a narrative of the rise of culture comparable to that seen in the “Ciguo” chapter of the *Mozi*:

In the earliest times, when the people were few and the birds and beasts numerous, the people could not overcome the birds, beasts, insects, and snakes. Then there appeared a sage who created (*zuo*) the building up of wood to make nests so as to hide the masses from harm. The people were pleased with him and made him king of all under Heaven, calling him the “One Having Nests.” The people ate fruits, berries, mussels, and clams; they were so rank, rancid, bad, and foul-smelling that they hurt their stomachs, and many of the people became sick. Then there appeared a sage who created (*zuo*) the boring of wood to get fire so as to transform the rank and rancid food. The people were pleased with him and made him king of all under Heaven, calling him the “Fire Man.” In the time of middle antiquity, all under Heaven was greatly flooded, and Gun and Yu opened channels (for the water). In the most recent period of antiquity, Jie and Zhou were oppressive and chaotic, and Tang and Wu campaigned against them. Now, to have the building up of wood and the boring of wood in the time of the Xia would certainly have made Gun and Yu laugh, and to have the opening of channels in the time of the Yin and Zhou would certainly have made Tang and Wu laugh. As such, to exalt the way of Yao, Shun, Tang, Wu, and Yu in the present age would certainly make the new sages laugh. This is why sages do not try to cultivate the ancient ways and do not model themselves on constancy.⁶⁹

The passage opens with a narrative of the sages’ creation of the arts of civilization. Han Feizi has no concern that such a movement entails a disjunction from the natural world; he in fact defines culture in terms of disjunction: the rise of culture is based on the sages’ inventions, the explicit goal of which is to allow humanity to move

⁶⁹ *Han Feizi*, “Wudu,” SBBY, 19.1a.

away from animals, to cook and thus transform foods, to control flooding, etc. In other words, he defines culture in terms of the series of inventions that allow a movement from, and a control and domestication of, the natural world.

Moreover, Han Feizi uses the argument to assert the importance of innovation: just as he expresses no interest whatsoever in linking the creations of the sages to the world of nature, he strongly opposes any attempt to follow the actions of previous sages. The only criterion that he employs for evaluating when innovation should occur is the question of whether or not the action is appropriate to the times: the moral concerns found in the Mohist chapters are gone here, as are the careful attempts to designate the proper method of sagely innovation found in Xunzi. And since Han Feizi defines culture simply as the inventions created by the sages in reaction to the changing times, he is concerned here neither with the problem of transmitting what the earlier sages created nor with the issue of artifice. Creation, Han Feizi is claiming, is necessary and unproblematic.⁷⁰

DIVORCING THE ACT OF CREATION FROM THE SAGE

The late Warring States texts thus far discussed repeatedly convey the view that human activity marks a potential break from the natural world. This view solidified a point implicit in the Mohist critique of early Confucianism, namely, that human creation and accordance with nature were difficult positions to reconcile. We have thus seen how two authors with Confucian sympathies attempted to work around these issues, one by rooting artifice in the faculties

⁷⁰ Qi Sihe 齊思和 has argued that it was a fundamental notion in the Warring States period that sages were defined as creators, and that Han Feizi is one of the first figures to work out a narrative sequence of their creations. See his “Huangdi zhi zhiqi gushi” 黃帝之制器故事, reprinted in *Zhongguo shi tan yan* 中國史探研 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 201. From our analysis of the development of the debate, however, it would appear that both of these points are suspect: far from working out for the first time a discussion of the inventions of the sages, Han Feizi was presenting a particular position in a long-standing debate, and far from giving voice to a common sentiment, he was presenting a radical position that few other thinkers of the time would follow. In particular, the claim that people in the Warring States saw sages as creators needs qualification, as will become clear in the following section of this article.

given by Heaven, and the other by redefining the term *zuo* so as to reduce the disjunctive elements. We have also seen how two authors attempted to assert a Mohist definition of *zuo* as the conscious creation of artifice and in the process rejected the concern of according with nature altogether. A large body of other texts from this period, however, took the opposite conclusion: if *zuo* is imbued with the Mohist sense of the creation of artifice, then any such act would by definition be a transgression against the natural world, and thus no sage could ever *zuo*. Such authors therefore employed the word *zuo* with a strong sense of conscious creation for purely negative reasons: *zuo* was utilized with such a sense precisely because it enabled the authors to define what a sage ought not do.⁷¹ For example, one finds in the “Zhubeiyou” of the *Zhuangzi*:

Heaven and earth have great beauty but do not speak; the four seasons have bright laws but do not discuss; the myriad things have completed patterns but do not explain. The sage finds his source in the beauty of Heaven and earth and penetrates the principles of the myriad things. It is for this reason that the utmost man does not act consciously (*wuwei*) and the great sage does not create (*zuo*). This is the meaning of observing Heaven and earth.⁷²

Here, the author openly declares that sages do *not* create. Moreover, the reason that they do not create is precisely because they are imitators of the processual movement of the natural world: nature is defined in terms of patterned activity, and the sage is called upon simply to observe, and thus emulate, these patterns. In short, this passage is asserting the very point for which the Mohists unfairly attacked the early Confucians: the author is claiming that the sage simply imitates the patterns of the natural world, and thus would never perform acts of conscious creation (*zuo*).

⁷¹ It has become fashionable to refer to the kinds of texts that I will be discussing in this section as “Huang-Lao.” Since such a term does not appear in any pre-Han text, however, I prefer to avoid using this label in discussing of Warring States issues.

⁷² *Zhuangzi*, “Zhubeiyou,” SBBY, 7.23a–23b. A. C. Graham, in his *Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 148–49, argues that this passage was wrongly placed by the editor of the work into chapter 22, a chapter devoted in part to denying the importance of knowledge (*zhi*). He instead places it with a number of passages involved in what he calls “rationalizing the way.” There is, however, nothing in the passage that defends the use of knowledge, and, if other texts utilizing this general framework are any guide, the author would probably be very much against the use of knowledge. The textual emendation is thus unnecessary and, perhaps, misleading.

Indeed, the passage is in some ways reminiscent of some of the statements in the *Lunyu* that may well have raised the Mohists' ire. The line that Heaven and earth do not speak is probably a reference to *Lunyu* 17/17: "The master said: 'I prefer not to speak.' Zigong said: 'If the master does not speak, then what shall we lesser ones transmit?' The master said: 'Does Heaven speak? The four seasons proceed from it; the hundred things are born from it. Does Heaven speak?'" And the critique of conscious activity (*wei*) may well be a reference to *Lunyu* 15/5: "The master said: 'Not doing anything (*wuwei*) and yet putting things in order, this was Shun. What did he do? He made himself reverent, was rectified, and faced south; that is all.'" But unlike the *Lunyu*, the passage from the *Zhuangzi* takes the step that the Mohists accused the Confucians of moving toward: if the sage simply emulates the patterns of the natural world, then he could not also *zuo*.

Similar claims that the sage ought not create are found in numerous late Warring States texts. For example, the author of the "Tianze" chapter of the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, states: "Neither fashioning (*chuang*) nor creating (*zuo*), he (the sage) combines his virtue with Heaven and earth."⁷³ Both of the attributes that we saw

⁷³ *Heguanzi*, "Tianze," SBBY, 1.5b. Dating the chapters of the *Heguanzi* is difficult. The work was widely believed to be a post-Han work until the discovery of the four silk manuscripts attached to the Mawangdui Laozi B. Textual parallels between these texts and the *Heguanzi* have led to a widespread (and very plausible) belief that the work, like the four silk manuscripts, dates to the late Warring States or early Han. As a consequence, the work has been subject to a number of studies in recent years by early China specialists, most notably: Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Mawangdui boshu yu *Heguanzi*" 馬王堆帛書與鶡冠子, *Jiangnan kaogu* 江漢考古 2 (1983): 51–56; A. C. Graham, "A Neglected Pre-Han Philosophical Text: *Ho-kuan-tzu*," *BSOAS* 52.3 (1989): 497–532; and R. P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 273–83. The consensus of all of these scholars except Graham is that the work is a composite of distinct essays, and that the individual chapters must accordingly be dated separately.

Graham, in contrast, argues that the entire work is the product of a single author whose thought underwent a number of changes during the composition of the work. Because of this claim, Graham is able to use the few clues about dating that exist in various chapters (such as the use in chapter 9 of Chu titles that disappeared after the unification, and the avoidance in chapters 1 and 2 of the word *zheng* 正, a taboo character during the Qin dynasty) to determine a date for the entire work. He argues that one section (including, among others, chapters 1, 2, and 9) was written just before the Qin unification and during the Qin empire itself, another was written just after the fall of the Qin dynasty, and the final one just before the reunification under the Han. The chapter in question here would be from the second of these sections,

ascribed to the sage in the “Kaogongji,” *chuang* and *zuo*, are thus rejected: sages link themselves with the natural world, and hence do not create anything.

These two passages from the *Zhuangzi* and *Heguanzi* utilize the strong Mohist definition of *zuo* in order to describe what a sage does not do. But such a position only makes the Mohist critique all the more imperative: if one argues the position that the Mohists unfairly ascribed to the Confucians, namely, that sages should not *zuo*, then one must ask, as the Mohists pointedly did, who created culture? This question was taken up by a number of related texts from this period, all of which were responses to the Mohist definition of culture.

One attempt to answer this question was made through an extreme claim concerning the argument that conscious creation is inherently opposed to the spontaneity of the Way: if sages do not create, then the creation of implements and utensils was a transgression against nature. To some extent, the beginnings of such a radical opposition to created culture can be traced back to the *Laozi* itself. Because the text voices an opposition to conscious activity and

which Graham characterizes as an attempt to place a generally Legalist framework into a larger cosmological system. Most likely, he argues, this project was undertaken immediately after the fall of Qin by someone who was disillusioned by the dynasty's fast collapse and hoped to place its institutions into a more successful framework.

However, Graham's argument raises several questions. His claim of single authorship seems to be more of a convenient device for dating the entire work than a convincing argument based upon the actual chapters. Unlike the *Xunzi*, for which a claim of single authorship might be appropriate because the chapters do seem to represent the development of a single figure's ideas, many of the chapters of the *Heguanzi* do not fit neatly into the scheme devised by Graham. This is of some import, for much of Graham's framework for periodization is based upon this claim of single authorship. For example, he dates chapter 4, the chapter in question here, to the Qin-Han interregnum simply because it attempts to define culture in terms of a larger cosmological framework. Since the chapters that he places in the pre-Qin section are more straightforwardly Legalistic, it seems reasonable, if one assumes that the text represents a single individual's thought process, to read such works as reflecting a rethinking, in light of the fall of Qin, of that author's earlier Legalistic views. If one does not assume a single author's personal development, however, the argument breaks down. For example, the primary concern of chapter 4, to place culture into a cosmological framework, was clearly in evidence in the pre-Qin period. Read on its own terms, chapter 4 offers no internal evidence for interpreting it as a critique of the Qin empire. Rather it reflects the same intellectual concerns as those that characterize many of the *Lüshi chungiu* chapters (some of which will be discussed below). Therefore, a late Warring States date for the chapter seems somewhat more plausible.

artifice, it also expresses suspicion against the use of cultural implements—a suspicion, in other words, of the very definition of culture found in texts like the *Mozi*:

Make the state small and the people few. Make them have utensils for tens and hundreds but not use them. Make them regard death as important and not go to distant places. Although they have boats and carriages, no one will ride them. Although they have armor and weapons, no one will display them. Make the people return to knotted ropes and use them.⁷⁴

The author advises the ruler to prevent the people from using the many implements that have already been created, specifically chariots, boats, weapons, and writing. These are among the very implements the *Mozi* emphasized in describing the rise of human culture.

Several texts take this primitivist tendency to a radical extreme, calling for a rejection of created culture altogether. This approach is evident in portions of the *Zhuangzi*⁷⁵ as well as several chapters from

⁷⁴ *Laozi*, chapter 80.

⁷⁵ Graham argues that chapters 8, 9, 10, the first part of 11, and a few sentences of chapter 12 from the *Zhuangzi* represent a related block that can be referred to as “primitivist.” See his “How Much of *Chuang-Tzu* Did *Chuang-Tzu* Write?,” reprinted in *Studies of Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 301–7, building on the work of Guan Feng 關鋒, *Zhuangzi zhexue taolun ji* 莊子哲學討論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), pp. 61–98. Graham further argues that the chapters can be dated “with surprising precision” to the Qin-Han interregnum (p. 307). The first piece of evidence for this is an implicit reference in chapter 10 (4.9a–9b) to the fall of Qi, a fall which occurred in 221 B.C. Thus, the chapter would have to date to sometime after the Qin unification. Moreover, the fragments that Graham considers “primitivist” from chapters 11 and 12 seem to refer to the resurgence of the Confucian and Mohist schools. If one assumes that these sentences were written at the same time as chapter 10, and hence date to after 221 B.C., such a resurgence could only have occurred between the fall of the Qin empire and the beginning of the Han. Graham thus feels that the Qin-Han interregnum would be the most reasonable time to date the chapters and fragments in question.

Graham assumes that all of the chapters in question were written at the same time, and thus that pieces of evidence can be taken from different chapters to build to a final conclusion. He also assumes that sentences can be taken out of the chapters in which they appear in the *Zhuangzi* and placed into others. Thus, sentences from chapter 12 and sections of chapter 11 can be placed together and read in relation to chapters 8 through 10. Both of these assumptions strike me as questionable, and, as a result, it would seem possible for chapter 10 to date to the early Han, and for chapters 8 and 9 to date anywhere from the late Warring States to the early Han.

the *Heguanzi*.⁷⁶ The position seems to have grown more radical as state centralization grew more extreme. Indeed, one of the most powerful statements of such tendencies appears in a text composed during the reign of Han Wudi, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. The “Benjing” chapter of the *Huainanzi*, after arguing that human action ought to correspond to the generative relations between Heaven and earth, claims: “In ancient times, when Cang Jie created (*zuo*) writing, Heaven rained grain and the ghosts cried all night. When Bo Yi created (*zuo*) wells, the dragon ascended to the dark clouds and the spirits perched on Kun Lun.”⁷⁷ The creation of writing and wells destroyed the proper balance of nature, with the result that grain was rained down from Heaven instead of sprouting from the earth and the dragon ascended at the wrong time. The author thus presents the act of creation as inherently transgressive against and destructive of the generative relations of nature. Unlike Xunzi, who viewed the creation of implements as a lesser, although still helpful, kind of *zuo*, the author here poses such a creation as necessarily transgressive: conscious creation is defined as being outside the realm of nature and, since humanity is called upon to model itself after nature, it is also outside the normative realm of humanity.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Graham argues that chapters 12 and 13 from the *Heguanzi* are primitivist. See his “A Neglected Pre-Han Philosophical Text: *Ho-kuan-tzu*,” *BSOAS*, 52.3 (1989): 527–29. He feels that these chapters were probably written at the same time as the primitivist chapters of the *Zhuangzi*: during the Qin-Han interregnum, presumably a time of fairly intense political despair. Although Graham seems to have successfully isolated the orientation of these chapters, I would, for the reasons mentioned in n. 73, be somewhat more hesitant to follow Graham’s dating of the chapters: without the assumption of single authorship that Graham posits, there is no compelling reason to date the chapters in this way. While the political situation outlined by Graham would certainly be a possible time to expect the writing of such chapters, the calls for a conflation of culture to nature is clearly a theoretical possibility by the late Warring States. Elements of this conflation are evident as early as the *Laozi*, and Xunzi clearly recognized that much of the naturalistic thinking of the time could easily lead to such a position. There is, then, no reason to posit a direct link between primitivist theorizing and political instability. After all, the primitivist “Benjing” chapter of the *Huainanzi*, which I will discuss below, was probably written around 140 B.C.—during a high point (relative to what had preceded) in the centralized power of the Han empire.

⁷⁷ *Huainanzi*, “Benjing,” SBBY, 8.4b.

⁷⁸ For a full discussion of the various ways that creation is posed in the different chapters of the *Huainanzi*, see my article manuscript, “Nature and Culture in the *Huainanzi*.”

THE MINISTER AS CREATOR:
THREE CHAPTERS FROM THE *LÜSHI CHUNQIU*

The radical opposition to created culture, however, was only one of several positions taken in this general framework of divorcing acts of creation from the sage. Another attempt to work within a generally Laozian terminology while still supporting a Mohist definition of culture can be seen in three chapters from the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋.⁷⁹ The first of these, the “Junshou” chapter, opens by defining the sage as having the attributes of stillness and lack of knowledge: “The one who obtains the way is necessarily still (*jing*). The one who is still is without knowledge. One who knows that he is without knowledge can be spoken to about the way of the ruler.”⁸⁰ In reaching this state of stillness, the ruler obtains the same characteristic that defines Heaven: “The great stillness of Heaven, since it is still and also peaceful, can be used to serve as the corrector of all under Heaven.”⁸¹ The author thus claims accordance between the sage and Heaven, and, like the *Laozi*, devalues knowledge (*zhi*), the very word used in the “Kaogongji” to define the sage.

Continuing to draw a parallel between the characteristics of Heaven and the sage, the author makes a similar point in the following passage: “Therefore, I say: Heaven is without form, yet the myriad things are thereby completed. The utmost essence is without image, yet the myriad things are thereby transformed. The great sage does not interfere (*wu shi* 無事), yet the thousand officials fully use (their) abilities.”⁸² Just as Heaven’s lack of form is that by which the myriad things are completed, so does the lack of interference on the part of the sage lead the officials to use fully their abilities.

The probable source of this characterization of the sage as still and not interfering is the *Laozi*. This probability is increased in light

⁷⁹ The *Lüshi chunqiu* is a work commissioned by Lü Buwei 呂不韋, the chief minister of the state of Qin from 247 to 237 B.C. and was written around 240 B.C. The three chapters discussed here, the “Junshou,” “Renshu,” “Wugong,” are similar in style, argument, phrasing, and diction—so similar that they may well have been written by the same author.

⁸⁰ *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Junshou,” SBBY, 17.4a.

⁸¹ *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Junshou,” 17.4a.

⁸² *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Junshou,” 17.4b.

of the fact that the same chapter takes several lines almost verbatim from the *Laozi*. In order to note how and why the author is working from this earlier text, it may well be worthwhile to quote from a few of the references in the *Laozi* concerning stillness. For example, one finds the statement: "If you are clear and still, then you can serve as the corrector of all under Heaven."⁸³ Another set of lines reads:

I do not consciously act, yet the people are of themselves transformed,
I enjoy stillness, yet the people are of themselves corrected.
I do not interfere, yet the people of themselves prosper.⁸⁴

The *Lüshi chungiu* statements quoted above were probably modeled on these lines from the *Laozi*. However, while the *Laozi* attributes these characteristics to the sage, the "Junshou" chapter of the *Lüshi chungiu* discusses the characteristics in relation not only to the sage but also to Heaven—a point to which I will return.

With this as his frame, the "Junshou" chapter then turns to the issue of creation:

Xi Zhong created (*zuo*) the chariot, Cang Jie created characters, Hou Ji created agriculture, Gao Tao created punishments, Kun Wu created pottery, Xia Xuan created walls. That which these six men created was appropriate. However, this is not the way of the leader. Therefore I say: Those who create are agitated (*you* 憂); those who accord (*yin* 因) are even (*ping* 平). It is this way of the ruler that obtains the fundamentals of fate.⁸⁵

The term *zuo* is used here in its strong Mohist sense of the conscious creation of crafts and implements. Unlike the primitivist texts, the author here affirms that what these figures created was important: it was appropriate, presumably in the Mohist sense that they were helpful to humanity. However, and this is the crucial point for this author, these creators were not rulers. In contrast to the creator, who is agitated, the way of the ruler is to accord (*yin*) and be even (*ping*). As in the texts discussed in this section, creation is divorced from the highest position.

⁸³ *Laozi*, chapter 45.

⁸⁴ *Laozi*, chapter 57.

⁸⁵ *Lüshi chungiu*, "Junshou," 17.5b–6a.

The chapter “Renshu” contains a closely parallel passage, focusing on the problem of conscious action (*wei*) rather than conscious creativity (*zuo*):

As for the kings of antiquity, those things that they consciously did were few, but those things to which they accorded (*yin*) were many. According is the technique of the ruler, consciously acting is the way of the minister. If one consciously acts, then one is agitated,⁸⁶ if one adapts then one is still (*jing*).⁸⁷

The kings of antiquity adapted and were still, while the ministers acted consciously and were agitated.

The “Wugong” chapter follows a similar line of argument, again explicitly associating the ruler with stillness: “In general, the ruler resides in evenness (*ping*) and stillness (*jing*) and employs virtue and transformation so as to follow his needs. In this way, he gives form to nature (*xing*).”⁸⁸ The author then turns to the issue of conscious creation:

Da Nao created the *jiazi* (system), Qian Ru created (the practice of) capturing heads, Rong Cheng created the calendar, Xi He created the prognostication of days, Shang Yi created the prognostication of months, Hou Yi created the prognostication of years, Hu Cao created clothes, Yi Yi created the bow, Zhu Rong created markets, Yi Di created wine, Gao Yuan created houses, Yu Xu created boats, Bo Yi created wells, Chi Ji created bowls, Sheng Ya created charioteering, Han Ai created the driving of chariots, Wang Bing created the domestication of oxen, Shi Huang created maps, Wu Peng created (the art of) healing, and Wu Xian created milfoil divination. These twenty officials were the means by which the sages governed all under Heaven. The sage kings were not able to perform the activities of these twenty officials. However, they caused the twenty officials to use fully their skillfulness and bring to completion their abilities. This is why the sage kings were above.⁸⁹

Once again, creation is not the way of the sage. And once again, the sage is above precisely because he is able to use those who do create.

Clearly, the author or authors of these three chapters have concerns directly comparable to those seen in the other texts discussed in this section: concerns with defining the sage as being in accord with the natural world, and hence with claiming that, insofar as con-

⁸⁶ Reading *you* 憂 for *rao* 擾.

⁸⁷ *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Renshu,” 17.7b.

⁸⁸ *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Wugong,” 17.10b.

⁸⁹ *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Wugong,” 17.8b-9a.

scious acts of creation are apart from the natural world, sages do not create. Nonetheless, the authors want to account for, and even support, such acts of creation, and they do so by ascribing the acts to ministers. And, to argue that such acts were not fully disruptive to the natural order, the authors rework the cosmology of the time to make such acts acceptable. This latter point deserves elaboration.

As I noted in discussing the “Yueji,” the dominant cosmology in the late Warring States period associated Heaven with the attribute of *zuo* used in the intransitive sense of “activity,” and earth with *jing*, “stillness.” The author of the “Yueji” utilized this cosmology in the attempt to reinterpret the meaning of sagely acts of *zuo*: sages *zuo*, used in the sense of “make arise,” just as Heaven *zuos*. In contrast, these *Lüshi chungiu* chapters reverse the dominant cosmology: they associate Heaven with stillness (*jing*), and then use this attribute to describe the sage as well. The lower position in the hierarchy is then granted the attribute of *zuo*, here used in the strong Mohist sense of conscious creation.

And here we can return to the issue of how the three chapters from the *Lüshi chungiu* use the *Laozi*. As I have noted, the three chapters consistently use Laozian language to describe the sage. However, we should not forget the context in which these statements were made in the *Laozi*. When the *Laozi* emphasizes the importance of stillness (*jing*) it does so as one of a series of reversals of widely accepted oppositions: “The female constantly uses stillness (*jing*) to overcome the male. Using stillness, she is below.”⁹⁰ The *Laozi* associates stillness with femininity and with the position of being below; by celebrating these the author intended to reverse accepted dualisms. The *Laozi*, in other words, was written as a celebration of the feminine, defined in such terms as stillness, lack of interference, and lack of knowledge, at the expense of the masculine.

When those late Warring States authors influenced by the *Laozi* attempted to utilize Laozian terminology within a cosmological framework, the usual tendency was also to favor the lower position, but to continue to see it as the lower. A clear example can be seen in *Cheng* 稱, another of the four texts appended to the Mawangdui *Laozi* B: “Heaven is *yang* and earth *yin*. . . . Interfering (*you shi* 有事) is

⁹⁰ *Laozi*, chapter 61.

yang, not interfering (*wu shi*) is *yin*. . . . The ruler is *yang*, the minister *yin*. . . . Male is *yang*, (female *yin*).’’⁹¹ Heaven and the ruler are associated with *yang*, interference, and masculinity, while earth and the minister are associated with *yin*, lack of interference, and femininity. Both sides of the dualism are, by definition, necessary for the continuation of the generative process:

All of the *yang* are modeled on Heaven. Heaven values correctness; transgressing correctness is called treacherousness. [Four graphs missing] offered and then reversed. All of the *yin* are modeled on earth. The virtue of earth is peaceful, slow, correct, and still (*jing*). The soft measure is determined first, being good at giving and not struggling. This is the standard of earth and the measure of the female.⁹²

The author of *Cheng* grants priority to the female side of the dualism, but nonetheless still maintains the more common cosmology.

In contrast, the authors of the three *Lüshi chungiu* chapters reverse the entire cosmology and associate the favored attributes with Heaven and the ruler: they associate Heaven and the ruler, not earth and the minister, with stillness and a lack of interference (*wu shi*). They interpret the distinction between *jing* and *zuo* as a division between stillness and conscious creativity (as opposed to being simply a distinction between stillness and activity), and, unlike the numerous texts derived from Confucian and Mohist concerns, they contend that it is the ministers, not the rulers, who *zuo* in this sense. They thus define the sage in terms of the various attributes granted the Laozian sage, while the minister performs the act of consciously creating cultural implements.

Thus, the three *Lüshi chungiu* chapters make the same argument found in other texts influenced by the *Laozi*, namely, that conscious acts of creation cannot be ascribed to sages. But instead of then taking an oppositional stance toward acts of creation, these *Lüshi chungiu* chapters employ the same vocabulary as the *Laozi* and related texts to make the opposite claim: by ascribing the creation of culture to ministers, they are able to divorce such acts of conscious creation from the sage himself while still asserting that they were made under the sage’s supervision, and hence are still accept-

⁹¹ *Cheng*, in *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), p. 83, lines 164b–165a.

⁹² *Cheng*, 83:166a–167a.

able.⁹³ This Laozian framework, in which the sage, though still, utilizes figures who are active, is used to assert the primacy of the generative nature of the cosmos while retaining the notion of conscious creation.⁹⁴

THE ACT OF CREATION

AS ROOTED IN THE NATURAL PROCESS: THE "XICI"

Thus far, we have noted a number of attempts in the third century B.C. to deal with the problem of creation while preserving a view

⁹³ It was also during the late Warring States period that authors began ascribing the creation of implements of statecraft associated with warfare and the use of force to figures who had been portrayed negatively in previous narratives. For example, several texts during this period portray Chi You, who first appeared in fourth century B.C. records as a rebel, as the creator of weapons. Similarly, late Warring States texts ascribed the creation of city walls to Gun, who had been presented in earlier texts as having been exiled after mistakenly trying to end the flood by building dams. The impetus behind these ascriptions is comparable to that seen in the three *Lüshi chungiu* chapters under discussion, namely, to divorce acts of creation from sages. In these cases, however, rebels, rather than ministers, are utilized insofar as the inventions are seen as more problematic. For a full discussion of this theme of rebel-creators in the late Warring States period, see my article manuscript "Sages, Ministers, and Rebels: Narratives from the Warring States Period Concerning the Emergence of the State."

⁹⁴ In contrast, Hsiao Kung-ch'üan argues that much of the *Lüshi chungiu* can be read as a critique of the Legalist policies of the state of Qin. Hsiao reads the chapters under discussion here as a questioning of the authoritarian rulership existing in the state, arguing that the texts "conceal the intent to promote a 'titular monarchy,' " in other words, a system in which the minister, rather than the monarch, would perform the actual administering of the state. Hsiao further attributes these views to the minister Lü Buwei himself. See his *A History of Chinese Political Thought. Volume One: From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.*, trans. Fredrick W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 566.

Leaving aside the question of how directly we can read particular statements made in specific essays of the *Lüshi chungiu* as representing the thought of Lü Buwei himself, the crucial issue here is that the three chapters in question do not advocate the political vision that Hsiao attributes to them. While it is true that the framework set up by these authors would result, in practical terms, in a system in which the minister would perform most of the actual administering of a state, it is nonetheless important to reiterate that the statements concerning the ministers appear in the context of larger claims about the relation of the sage to Heaven and his importance in the generative process of nature. The granting of credit to officials for various acts of creation is not so much a politely worded exhortation to the king to sit back and let the ministers do their work as it is an attempt to divorce such acts from the world of the quiescent sage, perfectly in tune with the processes of nature. The sympathies of these chapters are with the sage-king, not the minister, and the proper way to contextualize the works is in terms not of the proposed personal views of Lü Buwei but rather of the larger debate of the time concerning the relationship of culture to nature and the ensuing problem of how to conceptualize conscious human innovation.

of culture as standing in relation to nature (defined in generative, processual terms). Xunzi accomplished this by rooting the emergence of culture in the faculties generated from Heaven; the “Yueji” by redefining the term *zuo* to emphasize the degree to which sages were simply emulators of nature, not creators of artifice; and the three *Lüshi chungiu* chapters that I have dealt with accomplished this by divorcing acts of creation from the sages. Another work of this period, the “Xici” 繫辭, or so-called “Da Zhuan” (“Great Appendix”) to the *Yijing*,⁹⁵ also attempted to articulate a view of culture as standing in relation to the movement of the cosmos. The author of this text, however, not only wants to maintain the view that culture was a conscious creation of the sages, but also wishes to embrace the Mohist claim that what the sages created were the arts and crafts of humanity. Instead, then, of divorcing notions of creation from his view of culture or from his definition of the sage, he, like the author of the “Yueji,” attempts to redefine the notion of creation itself. To trace his method for doing this, it will be helpful first to discuss the author’s view of the relationship between nature and culture.

The general cosmology presented by the author of the “Xici” is a variant of the one common at the time. He describes the basic components of the universe in terms of pairs of opposites (Heaven and earth, hardness and softness, *yang* and *yin*), and the changes as a consequence of the mating of the two. He then presents the changes in the hexagram lines of the divination text known as the *Yi* as mirroring the changes that occur in the natural world. He thus portrays the text as a microcosm of the processual changes of the universe itself.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Until recently, the date of the “Xici” was uncertain. Gu Jiegang (*Gushibian*, 3:36–43, 45–69) claimed that in all likelihood it postdated the *Huainanzi*, a work that was completed by 139 B.C. (when Liu An, Prince of Huainan, presented the work to Han Wudi). In the early 1970s, however, a copy of the work was found among the silk manuscripts from Mawangdui. This proves that the work could have been written no later than the very early Han. In terms of when it was actually composed, the work seems to belong to the same late Warring States intellectual context that we have been discussing, a context defined in part by an overt concern with cosmological speculation.

⁹⁶ See, for example, *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, “Xici,” SBBY, A/2. For an excellent discussion of the “Xici” cosmology, see Willard J. Peterson, “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations’ of the *Book of Change*,” *HJAS*, 42.1 (1982): 67–116.

For our purposes, the most important aspect of the “Xici” involves the explanation of how the sages created the *Yi*: the sages were able to map the changes of the natural world by patterning themselves on the generative processes of nature.

Therefore Heaven and Earth generated the spiritual things; the sages patterned themselves on them. Heaven and Earth changed and transformed; the sages imitated them. Heaven hung down the images and revealed auspiciousness and inauspiciousness; the sages represented them. The He produced the map, the Lo produced the writing; the sages patterned themselves on them.⁹⁷

The author describes the sages in purely passive terms: they did nothing but imitate and pattern themselves on what the natural processes had generated. The author has clearly been influenced by the numerous texts discussed above, wherein the sages are called upon to replicate the patterns of the differentiated world.

The fullest explanation of this act of replication is given in the discussion of the invention of the trigrams by the sage Baoxi. The author portrays the sage as creating the trigrams after looking at the images in Heaven, the models on earth, and the patterns of the birds and beasts:

In ancient times Baoxi [i.e., Fuxi] was the king of all under Heaven. Looking up he observed the images in Heaven, and looking down he observed the models on Earth. He observed the patterns (*wen*) of the birds and beasts and the suitability of the earth. . . . He thereupon first created (*zuo*) the eight trigrams in order to penetrate the virtue of the spirit and brightness and in order to categorize the qualities (*qing*) of the myriad things.⁹⁸

Baoxi creates (*zuo*) the eight trigrams based upon his observation of the patterns (*wen*) of nature. This is a view quite reminiscent of the one found in vague form in the *Lunyu*, wherein Yao was portrayed as having imitated the patterns of Heaven. It is also clearly a rejection of the many late Warring States texts that argue that acts of *zuo* are inherently transgressive of the spontaneity of nature. By claiming that the sage, in creating the trigrams, has simply replicated the patterns he has observed in the natural world, the author is denying the connotations of artifice that the term *zuo* had acquired by this time. Here, the act of *zuo* does not involve conscious creation at all:

⁹⁷ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, “Xici,” A/11.

⁹⁸ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, “Xici,” B/2.

once the sage has observed the patterns and models of nature, he simply lifts out those patterns to form the trigrams. Conscious manufacturing, therefore, is not involved in the act; indeed, there is nothing here that would contradict the statements made earlier in the text to the effect that the sages ought only pattern themselves on nature. The usage of the term *zuo* in the “Xici” thus seems related to the attempt by the author of the “Yueji” to employ *zuo* with a sense of “make arise”: in both texts, the act of *zuo* is simply a process of imitating the patterns of the natural world.

However, the author of the “Xici” wishes to take one additional step in this debate, namely, to account for the Mohist claim that sages created the crafts and arts of humanity. In other words, he wants to maintain the view of culture as something that is created while still claiming that this model does not entail a separation between humanity and a natural world of spontaneous processes. He does this by claiming that sages created (*zuo*) or made (*wei*) cultural implements and arts only after they were inspired to do so by the lines in a hexagram. Baoxi, for example, was inspired by the image of hexagram Li to envision that meshes and woven rope could be used to make nets: “He [Baoxi] created (*zuo*) the knotting of rope and made (*wei*) nets and snares for hunting and fishing. Now, he took this from the hexagram Li.”⁹⁹ The sage thus, in a sense, lifted the pattern out of the hexagram to create a net.

The author next turns to the sage Shennong, who likewise took from hexagrams:

Baoxi died, and Shennong arose. He carved wood to make (*wei*) a ploughshare, and bent wood to make (*wei*) the plough handle. The benefits of ploughing and weeding were thereby taught to all under Heaven. He took this from the hexagram Yi. With the sun at midday he made (*wei*) markets and caused all of the people under Heaven to assemble all of the goods under Heaven. They bartered and exchanged, and everything found a place. He took this from the hexagram Shi He.¹⁰⁰

When Shennong died, according to the author, Huangdi, Yao, and Shun arose:

They hollowed out trees to make boats and sharpened wood to make oars. The benefit of boats and oars was that they could thereby cross to what was before out of

⁹⁹ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, “Xici,” B/2.

¹⁰⁰ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, “Xici,” B/2.

communication. They could reach distant areas and thereby benefit all under Heaven. They took this from the hexagram Huan. They tamed oxen and yoked horses. Carrying heavy loads, they reached distant places, and thereby benefited all under Heaven. They took this from the hexagram Sui.¹⁰¹

The author then discusses the creation of heavy gates and ringing bells (for defense), pestles and mortars, bows and arrows, palaces and houses, inner and outer coffins, and writing.

Thus, the sages' acts of creating (*zuo*) and making (*wei*) implements simply involved lifting out the pattern implicit in the hexagrams. The transgressive implications of such acts have been strongly limited. The hexagrams were inspired by the patterns of nature and the cultural implements were inspired by the hexagrams; the sages' institution of culture through this process therefore at no point entailed the introduction of artifice or arbitrariness. Each stage of the process simply involved lifting the pattern out from the previous stage, a process that can be traced back ultimately to the patterns of the natural world itself.

By systematically rooting the invention of implements in the natural world, the author is able to claim that the sages did in fact create human culture without, thereby, breaking from nature. Whereas various passages discussed above, in texts ranging from the *Zhuangzi* to the *Lüshi chungiu*, held that the act of *zuo* entailed a potential transgression against the spontaneous processes of nature, the author of the "Xici" has defined the act such that no discontinuity from the natural world is implied. Like the three *Lüshi chungiu* chapters discussed above, the "Xici" was written in order to posit a generative notion of the natural world while still maintaining an approval of the creation of cultural implements. Unlike the *Lüshi chungiu* chapters discussed here though, the "Xici" has maintained the claim that the authors of such implements were sages, not ministers, and has denied any aspect of arbitrariness in the creation of these implements.

The author of the "Xici" pulls together into one system the various strands of the debate that had covered the last three centuries: yes, he argues, culture is defined by craft and such crafts are creations of the sages, but the process of creating crafts is fully based on

¹⁰¹ Zhouyi zhengyi, "Xici," B/2.

the patterns of the natural world. The act of creation is simply a process of raising up what was implicit in the patterns and bringing it into the realm of humanity. The solution propounded by the author is thus a syncretistic merging of arguments from a number of diverse sources, including both early Confucian claims of how the sages' formation of culture was based upon replicating the patterns of the natural world and Mohist claims that sages created the crafts and arts of humanity.¹⁰²

¹⁰² One of Gu Jiegang's main reasons for claiming that the "Xici" postdated the *Huainanzi* (see n. 95) was based on the fact that "Fanlunxun," chapter 13 of the *Huainanzi*, contains a discussion of the creation of utensils by the sages that is quite similar to that in the "Xici." The "Fanlunxun," however, does not mention the notion, so central to the argument of the "Xici," that the creations of the sages were based on the hexagrams. Gu finds this particularly surprising, since, he argues, Liu An, the figure who commissioned the composition of the *Huainanzi*, was a follower of the *Yi*: if the "Xici" had been in existence at the time, the model found therein would assuredly have been used (see in particular Gu, 3: 41, 61). As a consequence, Gu claims, it must be that the "Xici" was modeled on the "Fanlunxun," rather than the other way around. This claim is not entirely convincing, as Hu Shi pointed out soon after Gu's argument first appeared (*Gushibian*, 3: 84–88). The Mawangdui find later proved beyond a doubt that the "Xici" predated the *Huainanzi* by at least fifty years, and quite possibly by as much as a century.

Even if Gu was wrong about the date of the "Xici," however, his general point concerning the content of the two works is worth pursuing. To begin with, the "Fanlunxun" discussion of the creation of utensils by the sages is similar in content to that seen in the "Xici" (see *Huainanzi*, "Fanlunxun," SBBY, 13.1a–2a). The authors of both works build upon a generally Mohist vision of the sages creating civilization through their inventions of specific utensils and implements. The two works further share a similarity that Gu Jiegang overlooked, namely, that the authors of both works wish to pose such acts of creation as not leading to a discontinuity from the generative relations of the natural world. These similarities sustain Gu's fundamental argument, that one of the texts is based upon the other. Since it is now clear, from archaeological efforts, that the "Xici" is the earlier of the two, it will be worth posing the question of whether we can account for the issue that concerned Gu Jiegang: the fact that the author of the "Fanlunxun" does not follow the "Xici" in basing such acts of creation in the hexagrams.

Hu Shi, for his part, also argues that it was the "Fanlunxun" that was modeled on the "Xici," and that the reason the author of the former did not mention the hexagrams was simply due to a different set of interests (pp. 84–85, 86). I will try here to elaborate on what these different interests might have been. To begin with, regardless of whether Gu is correct in claiming that Liu An himself was a devotee of the *Yi*, divination is posed in a number of the *Huainanzi* chapters as being a problematic activity. Although it is seen as a possible method for connecting one's actions to the natural world, and hence as laudable, such a calculated means of connection is presented as lower than a purely spontaneous harmonization with nature (see, for example, *Huainanzi*, "Benjing," 8.1a). Such a formulation seems applicable to the "Fanlunxun" chapter as well. On the one hand, the chapter, like the "Xici," argues that sages were creators. In a play on the famous Confucian quote of transmitting and not creat-

CONCLUSION

In the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, his influential dictionary completed in 100 A.D., Xu Shen 許慎 defines *zuo* as *qi* 起, “to rise.” That Xu Shen took this definition from the “Xici” is made clear in the preface to the work. He begins by recounting, verbatim, the passage from the “Xici” about Fuxi’s “lifting up” of the trigrams and the later establishment of certain aspects of culture.¹⁰³ He then tells of the introduction of characters by Cang Jie. Just as Fuxi introduced trigrams by “raising up” (*zuo*) the patterns of nature, so did Cang Jie introduce characters by imitating the distinctions found in the tracks of birds and beasts.¹⁰⁴ By doing so, Xu Shen claims, Cang Jie was the “first to raise up (*zuo*) writing.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Cang Jie introduced characters according to the same imitative process described in the “Xici.” Here too the term *zuo* is used for the act of lifting up natural patterns and bringing them to the realm of humanity, a process that involves no sense of discontinuity from nature, and hence no notion of artifice. Like the author of the “Xici,” then, Xu Shen wants to define the term *zuo* away from its associations with creation and toward a less problematic (for such a philosophy) sense of “lifting, causing to arise.”

This is the strain of early Chinese thought that was to become so influential in later times: culture as continuous with nature, sages as undertaking acts of *zuo* but not in the sense of a conscious invention of artifice. But, as we have seen, such conceptions were solidified only in response to the strong notions of *zuo* as a conscious act of creation posited by the Mohists and later taken up by such figures as Han Feizi. The elaborate discussions that have been traced in this essay, including the influential one given in the “Xici,” were all

ing, one sentence of the chapter reads, “Great men create and disciples comply” (*Huainanzi*, “Fanlunxun,” 13.6a). On the other hand, the author, again like that of the “Xici,” wants to root such actions in the generative processes of nature. However, instead of following the “Xici” in using the mediating device of the hexagrams, he roots the sages’ actions in nature by arguing that the true sage creates only when he is moving spontaneously with the changes of the natural world (13.6a–6b, 13.22b–23a).

¹⁰³ *Shuowen jiezi zhenben*, SBBY, 15a.1a.

¹⁰⁴ *Shuowen jiezi zhenben*, 15a.1b.

¹⁰⁵ *Shuowen jiezi zhenben*, 15a.2a.

reactions to the claim that culture was created and therefore discontinuous from nature. The solutions proposed varied, from trying to reject created culture altogether, to ascribing the acts of creation to ministers, to ascribing them to sages whose acts of creation were fully rooted in the natural world. Even Xunzi, who kept his distance from much of the cosmological concerns expressed in the other texts just discussed, was at great pains to show that, although culture was distinct from the spontaneous world of nature, there was nonetheless a hidden teleology wherein the culture generated by the sages fulfilled the normative order of Heaven. But all of the solutions were responses to the claim that creation was potentially an act of discontinuity from, if not a full transgression against, the natural world.

Particular claims of continuity between nature and culture became orthodox in such diverse areas as Han philosophy, Han imperial ideology, and later aesthetic theory. Yet, as a close analysis of the early use of the term *zuo* shows, these claims do not represent a general "Chinese" assumption but rather developed out of the debate of the late Warring States period. And Xu Shen's oft-cited definition of *zuo* represents not the basic meaning of the word but rather the definition that came into prominence during the course of that debate.