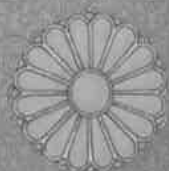


往年高歌

SONGS OF YESTERYEAR

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C.P.

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Once it so chanced that Master Meng¹ and a student from the nation of Wu² rode upon a carriage headed for another kingdom. They had not travelled far when the student turned to Master Meng and said, "I am little better than a ghost." Surprised, Master Meng replied, "How so?" The man became wroth, and exclaimed, "Do you not see?" Master Meng said, "No, we are not born knowing the ways of things." The student then said, "I have come many leagues to seek your teachings, and now I feel as if I no longer remain the same person as I was when I set off. I have suffered much to ride alongside you, yet I no longer know for whom I suffer. Is this not pitiable?" He then began to cry.

Master Meng considered this for some time, then said, "None but I know the dark and murky natures of the world, yet the mysteries of the human heart are beyond me.⁴ Still, it is easy for the mountains to change, but hard for one to change the base nature of oneself,⁵ and that is well-known amongst men."

"But I am lost," the student said, "and know not my base nature."

Master Meng said, "Once, Master Chuang dreamt of himself as a butterfly, and was at liberty as a butterfly.⁶ Now, we might say that your former self is dreaming as you, at liberty as a student of mine. Master Chuang was so overjoyed at being a butterfly, he forgot his former self, just as you forgot your former self in the pursuit of learning.

Even though Master Chuang and the butterfly possessed a great divide in intelligence and ability, it was difficult for him to conclude who dreamt as who. Yet you and your former self have no such great divide, thus might we not easily say that your true self had a brief dream that you were once a different person, and that you have now awakened from that dream?"

"But," the student said, "my former self was much lesser in learning than I am at present. Is that not a divide?"

"Then you should rejoice," Master Meng said, "for you dreamt you were a fool, and awoke of your own volition."

Interpretation

Section 33 is written in the form of a brief dialogue. This is similar to the *Analects* and other records of Chinese philosophy, while also bearing similarity to Socratic dialogues and transcriptions of Jesus' teachings in the Bible. Thus, the student in this section is almost certainly a nonexistent person, designed to string together recollections of the master's sayings.

What is notable about Section 33, however, is that Master Meng does not appear to be a real historical character. The extract itself deals with issues of time, identity, and continuity, bringing to mind Heraclitus' concept of *panta rhea* and the Ship of Theseus. The main metaphor of the piece, that the progression of time and the development of your identity can be equivocated to a dream, is troubled by the suggestion that, as with Master Chuang and the butterfly, this metaphor works both ways – just as the past self can dream of a future self, the future self can dream of the past in memories. And, of course, if even a dream of a butterfly is hard to distinguish from a butterfly dreaming of personhood, how might we distinguish which identity is the "true" one when comparing past and future selves?

In the end, Master Meng offers a somewhat opportunistic answer – the better, more learned self is the real one, absent of any evidence to the contrary. This seemingly pragmatic, almost Gordian approach to problem resolution is something we see reflected in the later sections as well, such as the Heavenly Bodies Problem in Section 44. This sets it aside from many of the comparisons earlier in this commentary, which purport to offer absolute answers, and perhaps becoming lesser in doing so.

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- 1 The ancient game of *weiqi* (known more popularly by its Japanese name "Go") is a common political metaphor. Here we see delicate political manoeuvring within the court of Wei (魏, sharing a romanisation with 圍 i.e. the "wei" in *weiqi* which means "to surround" but also having the same pronunciation as 偽 meaning "false") being represented by moves on the *weiqi* board. In this period *weiqi* stones were not necessarily black and white, and the board was a 17 by 17 grid rather than a 19 by 19 grid.
- 2 Here, on move 49, we see the beginning of a life or death combat for the survival of the now enclosed white group 3 and black group 4 (upper left quadrant of the board). The deadly nature of these moves is reflected by their name, "mortal struggle" (對殺).
- 3 Move 65 known technically as a *dian* (點, literally "to spot") collapses the remaining internal air available to white group 3 and depriving it of 2 eyes, a formation necessary to it to live. Once the *dian* is complete the limited space means that precalculated optimal moves for this internal formation (known as "knife-five", or 刀五) are available, and black always wins in this position. This is compared to the assassination of an important court official, depriving the emperor of Wei of his counsel, and directly leads to the death of group 3 some 6 moves later. Notably, this is the only major capture in this game, with the black player outfencing the white player in most cases without a fight.
- 4 Here the Emperor of Wei concedes, having lost his territory to the tactically superior Emperor of Zheng (正帝). Zheng is not a real kingdom, but is rather referring (again) to the name of the author of the book, demonstrating his victory in the ideological struggle through moves in *weiqi*.

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- 1 The characters used to represent the name of Master Meng, 夢子, differs from the characters used to represent the name of a real Mas-

ter Meng (Mencius), 孟子, although they share a similar pronunciation. These honorific titles consist of two parts: the first is the family name of the master, and the second (子) denotes their status as a master or teacher, and was historically romanised with the -cius suffix (hence Confucius, Mencius, etc.). Here the family name ("夢") is not any real Chinese family name, but the character for "dream", further suggesting that the personage of Master Meng in the story is fictitious and tying into the themes of unreality and dreaming.

- 2 The pronunciation of the nation of Wu (無國) resembles a real historical kingdom from the Late Zhou and Spring and Autumn Period. However, the character chosen in this case represents nothingness and emptiness (hence the name may be read as "no such country")
- 3 A quote from *Thoughts upon Pedagogy* by Han Yue: 人非生而知之者
- 4 A quote from *Ninth Opus - Huai Sha* by Qu Yuan: 世溷濁莫吾知，人心不可謂兮
- 5 Common Chinese proverb: 江山易改，本性難移
- 6 The episode *Master Chuang Dreams of a Butterfly* (莊子夢蝶) is a very famous part of *Chuang Tse*, one of the founding works of Chinese philosophy and literature before the unification of China under the Qin dynasty. In it, Master Chuang dreams that he is a butterfly, and is so joyous that he forgets that he used to be human. After he awakes, he can no longer discern if he dreamt of being a butterfly or if the butterfly is dreaming that it is him.

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- 1 The Legalists (法家) were an offshoot of the Confucians that took a strong authoritarian perspective on rule, believing that the people needed to be constrained by a strong set of laws. Here the author criticises their approach as a thief accusing others of thievery, suggesting that the authoritarian attitude springs out of a desire to commit wrongdoing.
- 2 A common Chinese proverb: 掩耳盜鈴
- 3 A common Chinese proverb: 愚公移山