

disaster to those who deprive the people. Even the lowest of people should not be slighted, and the most foolish among them should not be taken advantage of. Thus, throughout history, those who oppose the people sooner or later are defeated by the people. . . . How can anyone think of behaving with arrogance and self-deception? The enlightened ruler and the noble person will vie to practice good when they perceive it, and they will treat evil like an enemy if they hear of it. . . .

William Theodore de Bary,
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DONG ZHONGSHU

When the Han dynasty established an imperial system of government that was to persist until 1911, Confucian scholars of that day, among them Dong Zhongshu (195?–105? B.C.E.), articulated a vision of an omnipotent but disciplined sovereign, who sought to align the population with the norms of Heaven and Earth, based on the advice and counsel of scholar-officials versed in the classical traditions of antiquity. This ideal of the ruler as high priest and fount of wisdom contained within it basic patterns and tensions that came to define the relationship between the state and intellectual, center and periphery, power and authority, and politics and culture for centuries to come.

Confucian scholars were deeply engaged in the politics of their day. They sought to gain political power by influencing the policies and practices emanating from the emperor based on their textual interpretations. At the same

time, they endeavored to maintain an independent and critical voice based on the authority and prestige they derived from their mastery of the Confucian texts. To what extent would cultural endeavors restrain politics or be restrained by them? To what extent would other centers of regional power rival or reinforce the emperor's court in either literary prowess or military power? These unresolved tensions reemerged in every dynasty to follow. Moreover, some scholars would argue that, even after the abolition of imperial government in 1911 and the Communist revolution of 1949, many of these issues continue to shape the political culture of contemporary China.

Like his predecessors Lu Jia and Jia Yi, Dong Zhongshu sought to develop a rationale and a model of rulership appropriate to the new circumstances of the unified state. He vied for political influence and competed for literary patronage with devotees of esoteric learning and popular lore as diverse as the different areas over which the Han rulers now claimed sovereignty. Chief among them were the followers of Huang-Lao (the Yellow Emperor and Laozi),²² whose techniques and texts were favored by Emperor Jing (r. 157–141 B.C.E.), and the doctors, diviners, and magicians known collectively as *fangshi* (masters of technical methods or technicians), who bedazzled his successor, Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 B.C.E.) with their elixirs of immortality. The confluence of local cultural traditions at the Han court also gave rise to the cross-fertilization of philosophical ideas, cosmological principles, and political techniques among advocates of these various traditions. As they evolved in the pluralistic intellectual atmosphere, shifting political alliances, and changing imperial patronage of the Former Han, traditions — master-disciple lineages centering on a text or corpus of texts that transmitted a set of doctrines and techniques — were neither impermeable nor immune to other intellectual trends at court. Thus Dong Zhongshu's contributions to the Han ideal of rulership involved both the rejection and the absorption of ideas, principles, and techniques from other traditions. Nor were they unaffected by the personalities and proclivities of the successive Han emperors, empresses, and empress dowagers whose varying receptivity toward Confucian scholars often determined the critical difference between Confucian principle and practice.

Relying on two attitudes that characterized the Confucian scholar, a respect for the past and a veneration for the writings of Confucius, Dong hoped to reform imperial sovereignty by re-creating both history and text. Following his predecessors Lu Jia, whom Emperor Gao commissioned to write the *Xinyu* (*New Discourses*), and Jia Yi, who composed the famous essay "Guo Qin lun" ("The Faults of Qin")²³ during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 B.C.E.), he also sought to discredit the Qin dynasty. The demonic character of the

22. See ch. 9.

23. See ch. 8.

dynasty was a prominent theme in his writings and came to define traditional historiography for centuries to follow. This interpretation of the Qin provided an intellectual rationale for discrediting the political and religious framework of imperial sovereignty that had developed under the earlier regime.

It was through his interpretations of the Confucian texts that Dong delineated his program for renewed kingship. This was particularly true of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*) and the accompanying *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gongyang zhuan*), Dong Zhongshu's special focus of inquiry. He believed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* could resolve Qin excesses and endeavored to explicate how and why the text was relevant, indeed indispensable, to the creation of an alternative social, political, and religious culture for the Han. Consequently, Dong Zhongshu and his disciples read into the *Spring and Autumn Annals* a particular vision of history and ascribed to the text new modes of legal, ritual, and cosmological authority that were relevant to their reformist goals. His persuasive interpretations, among other factors, enabled Dong Zhongshu and other reformist scholars under Emperor Wu to end state support for the teaching of non-Confucian texts and to establish a text-based ideology represented in the first Confucian canon. Thenceforth, the Confucian canon played a prominent role in the doctrinal and political life of the traditional state. The designation in 136 B.C.E. of official posts known as the "Erudites of the Five Classics" and the establishment in 124 B.C.E. of the Imperial College, where these texts were taught as a basic prerequisite for training in the polity, were the institutional expressions of this canonization.

Here, too, the Han legacy was complex. For while Dong and other Confucian scholars sought to break with the past and discredit the political and cultural excesses of the preceding Qin dynasty, they also drew upon a number of pre-Qin ideals. Though scholars like Dong Zhongshu sought exclusive imperial patronage for the Confucian canon, their interpretations of these texts were influenced by the diverse techniques and doctrines represented at the central court and at competing centers of literary patronage across the empire.

Although traditionally ascribed to Dong Zhongshu, the *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu fanlu*) is most likely the product of an anonymous compiler who lived sometime between the third and sixth centuries. The received text preserves authentic writings as well as other materials not authored by Dong Zhongshu. Like many other philosophical works from China's classical period, the text is best understood as an anthology: a collection of materials authored by Dong Zhongshu and records of his doctrinal expositions to different audiences in diverse venues. But it also contains other writings, probably by his disciples and critics. Indeed, the authentic materials provide a retrospective view of Dong's thought as it evolved throughout his long political career, while those by his disciples shed light on their activities during the later years of the Han dynasty. Those composed by his critics indicate the contested areas of Han discourse. The translations that follow from the *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* represent what are generally accepted to be

the original teachings of this Han master. The final selection is from "Deciding Court Cases According to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*," another work of Dong's.

Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals
(*Chunqiu Fanlu*)

DERIVING POLITICAL NORMS FROM MICROCOSMIC
AND MACROCOSMIC MODELS

Like other intellectuals of the late Warring States and Han periods, Dong sought to legitimate his views of government based on natural models derived, on the one hand, from the macrocosm of Heaven and Earth and, on the other, from the microcosm of the human body. In the first essay, Dong correlates the conduct of the ruler with Heaven and that of the minister with Earth. In the second essay, he correlates techniques to regulate and nourish the body with those meant to order and vitalize the state. These forms of correlative thought had already appeared by the third century B.C.E. in the *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü* (*Lüshi chunqiu*) and were no doubt popularized by followers of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi in the early centuries of the Han.²⁴ As the next two essays demonstrate, they also represent important aspects of Dong Zhongshu's thought. Thus, while striving to secure exclusive patronage for the Confucian canon, Dong endeavored to synthesize many intellectual trends that had historically stood beyond the purview of the Confucian tradition.

THE CONDUCT OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The conduct of Heaven and Earth is beautiful. For this reason Heaven holds its place high and sends down its manifestations; conceals its form and reveals its light; arranges the stars and accumulates vital essence; relies on yin and yang and sends down frost and dew. Heaven holds a high position and so is honored. It sends down its manifestations and so is humane. It conceals its form and so is numinous. It reveals its light and so is brilliant. It orders and arranges the stars and so there is mutual succession. It accumulates vital essence and so endures. It relies on yin and yang and so completes the year. It sends down frost and dew and so brings life and death.

The norms of the people's ruler are derived from and modeled on Heaven. Therefore he values ranks and so is honored. He subjugates other states and so is humane. He resides in a hidden place and does not reveal his form and so is numinous. He appoints the worthy and employs the capable, observes and listens to the four corners of his realm, and so is brilliant. He confers office according to capability, distinguishing the worthy and stupid, and so there is

24. For similar themes, see the selections from the *Zuozhuan* (ch. 6) and the *Guanzi*, *Huang-Lao boshu*, and *Huainanzi* (ch. 9).

mutual succession. He induces worthy men to draw near and establishes them as his legs and arms and so endures. He investigates the true nature of the ministers' achievements, ranks and orders them as the worst and the best, and so completes his age. He promotes those who possess merit and demotes those who lack merit and so rewards and punishes.

For this reason Heaven clings to the Way and acts as the master of all living things. The ruler maintains constant norms and acts as the master of a single state. Heaven must be resolute. The ruler must be firm. When Heaven is not resolute, the arrayed stars become chaotic in their orbits. When the ruler is not firm, evil ministers become chaotic in their offices. When stars become chaotic, they stray from Heaven.²⁵ When ministers become chaotic, they stray from their ruler. Therefore Heaven strives to stabilize its vital force (*qi*), while the ruler strives to stabilize his government. Only when resolute and firm will the Way of yang²⁶ regulate and order others.

Earth humbles its position and sends up its vital energy; exposes its forms and manifests its true feelings; receives the dead and offers up the living; completes its tasks and confers its merit [on Heaven]. Earth humbles its position and so serves Heaven. It sends up its vital energy and so nourishes yang. It exposes its forms and so is loyal. It manifests its true feelings and so is trustworthy. It receives the dead and so hides away the end of life. It offers up the living and so enhances Heaven's brilliance. It completes its tasks and so enhances Heaven's transformations. It confers its merit on Heaven and so achieves rightness. . . .

The norms of the people's ministers are derived from and modeled on Earth. Therefore from morning to evening they advance and retreat, taking up various tasks and responding to various inquiries, and so serve the honored [ruler]. They provide food and drink, attend to him in sickness and illness, and so provide nourishment [to the ruler]. They entrust and sacrifice their lives and serve without thoughts of usurpation and so are loyal. They expose their ignorance, manifest their true feelings, do not gloss over their mistakes, and so are trustworthy. They maintain proper conduct even when facing death, do not covet life, and so relieve others in distress. They promote and praise his goodness, and so enhance [the ruler's] brilliance. They follow his orders, proclaim his grace, assist and complete him, and so enhance his transforming influence. When achievements are completed and tasks are finished, they confer their virtue upon the ruler and so achieve rightness.

For this reason Earth manifests its principles and acts as the mother of all living things. The minister manifests his duties and acts as the counselor of a single state. The mother must be trustworthy. The counselor must be loyal.

25. Literally, "to stray from Heaven" means that the stars will fall from the sky. Heaven also signifies the physical sky.

26. The Way of yang is synonymous with the Way of Heaven and the way of the ruler.

When the mother is untrustworthy, grasses and trees suffer injury at their roots. When the counselor is disloyal, treacherous ministers endanger the ruler. When the roots suffer injury, trees and grasses lose their branches and leaves. When the ruler is endangered, the ruler loses his state. Therefore Earth strives to expose its actions while the minister strives to manifest his true feelings.

[*Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 17:9b-12b — SQ]

COMPREHENDING THE STATE AS THE BODY

The purest vital force (*qi*) is vital essence.

The purest men are worthies.

Those who regulate their bodies consider the accumulation of vital essence to be a treasure.

Those who regulate the state consider the accumulation of worthy men to be the Way.

The body takes the mind-and-heart as the foundation.

The state takes the ruler as the master.

When vital essence accumulates at the foundation, the blood and vital force support one another.

When worthy men accumulate around their master, superiors and inferiors order one another.

When the blood and vital force support one another, the body is free from pain.

When superiors and inferiors order one another, the numerous offices each achieve their proper place.

Only when the body is free from pain can it achieve tranquillity.

Only when the numerous offices each obtain their proper place can the state achieve security.

Those who desire to accumulate vital essence must empty their minds-and-hearts and still their bodies.

Those who desire to accumulate worthy men must humble their persons.

Where the form is still and the mind-and-heart empty, vital essence collects.

Where there are humble and self-effacing rulers, humane and worthy men serve.

Therefore, those who regulate their bodies endeavor to maintain emptiness and stillness, and thereby accumulate vital essence.

Those who regulate the state endeavor fully to develop their humility, and thereby accumulate worthy and competent men.

Those able to accumulate vital essence achieve enlightenment and longevity.

Those able to accumulate worthy men widely extend their virtue and their states achieve ultimate peace.

[*Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 7:4b-5a — SQ]