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COPULATING WITH ONE'S STEPMOTHER—OR BIRTH MOTHER?

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In a brief but highly influential study, Sir Keith Thomas limned the significance of jokes and laughter for the study of cultural history: “to study the laughter of our ancestors, to go on reading until we can hear the people not just talking but also laughing is to gain some insight into changing human sensibilities.”¹ Anyone who has spent time in a different culture has had the bewildering experience of hearing someone say something that was obviously funny—because everyone else immediately burst out laughing—but failing to catch the joke. Historians, especially those who specialize in distant times and places, face something akin to this bewildering experience every time they open a primary source and discover a cultural feature that does not seem straightforwardly explicable by today’s standards and conventions. Cultural historians are thus always interested in strange or incongruous details, however minor, because they could prove to be entryways to understanding whole paradigms that differ from one’s own. Oddities like the Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin² or those Roman jokes that just do not seem funny today³ have revealed aspects of past cultures that might not have been noticed by cleaving to the master narrative.

In the field of early China, one such oddity is *zheng* 蒸, or copulating with a deceased father’s concubine.⁴ Not surprisingly, copulating with a deceased father’s concubine does not appear in any of today’s various lists of paraphilias, including the relatively short list in the current (fifth) edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*.⁵ Certain social structures, notably institutionalized polygyny, must be in place before one can even have a concept of copulating with a deceased father’s concubine, and therefore the very existence of the word tells us immediately that we are dealing with a culturally specific form of perversion. The presence and absence of words in a language impart information about the concerns of its speakers, not because language determines thought in any simplistic manner, but because people naturally invent words for the things they need to talk about. The latest research

indicates that there really are many Inuit words for “snow,”⁶ even if this cliché was once sternly challenged. It is a safe bet that Proto-Austronesian, which was spoken on the island that we now call Taiwan,⁷ did not have dozens of words for “snow.”

The most lurid records of *zheng* are found in the *Zuo Commentary to the Springs and Autumns* (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳), the longest of the three canonical commentaries to the chronicle known as *Springs and Autumns* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), which covers affairs in Lu 魯 from 722 to 481 BCE (the *Zuo Commentary* carries the narrative down to 468 BCE).⁸ Although the text does not state the principle explicitly, its narratives convey that offspring born of *zheng*, like those of other incestuous or adulterous unions, tend not to have a happy end. When it occurs in the sovereign's palace—and a disproportionate number of records pertain to the palace, since the *Zuo Commentary* is concerned with affairs of state—*zheng* can have the added consequence of disrupting dynastic succession.⁹ A case in point is the story of Lord Xuan of Wei 衛宣公 (r. 718–700 BCE):

Before [coming to the throne], Lord Xuan of Wei 衛宣公 committed *zheng* with Jiang of Yi 夷姜 [his father's concubine]. She gave birth to Jizi 急子, whom [Lord Xuan] entrusted to the Right Prince.¹⁰ [Lord Xuan] found [Jizi] a wife from Qi 齊, but since she was beautiful, Lord [Xuan] took her [for himself]. She gave birth to Shou 壽 and Shuo 朔. [Lord Xuan] entrusted Shou to the Left Prince. Jiang of Yi hanged herself. When Xuan's other wife and Prince Shuo slandered Jizi, Lord [Xuan] sent him to Qi, and sent thugs to wait for him at Xin 莘, where they were to kill him. Shouzi informed [Jizi], and told him to flee. [Jizi] refused, saying, “If I reject my father's command, of what use am I as a son? If there were such a thing as a state without a father, it would be acceptable.” When it came time to go, [Shouzi] intoxicated [Jizi] with wine. Shouzi went ahead of him, carrying his banner, and the thugs killed him.

When Jizi arrived, he said, “It is I whom you seek; what was his crime? I beg you to kill me!” They killed him too.¹¹

Lord Xuan's disorderly sexual relations stand in stark contrast to the scruples of the three members of the household who either kill themselves or engineer their own deaths: Jiang of Yi, presumably out of shame; Jizi, because he is unwilling to continue living when his father wishes him to die; and Shouzi, because he vainly hopes that he can spare his half-brother's life by sacrificing his own.¹² Years after Lord Xuan commits the supremely unfilial act of appropriating his father's concubine, Jizi, the son born of that union, displays true filial conduct, but in the most tragic mode possible.

Classical readers would have inferred another grave lesson: the succession in Wei has been severely compromised, because the sole surviving son is culpable

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for the deaths of the other two. When Lord Xuan dies in 700, Shuo succeeds him (with the posthumous title Lord Hui 惠公), but is soon deposed by the Left and Right Princes, who bore responsibility for Shouzi and Jizi, respectively:¹³

The two Princes thus resented Lord Hui. In the eleventh month, Left Prince Xie 洩 and Right Prince Zhi 職 installed Prince Qianmou 黔牟 [as Lord of Wei]. Lord Hui fled to Qi.¹⁴

Lord Hui remained in exile for eight years until he was finally restored in 688. One of his first acts upon returning to Wei was to put the Left and Right Princes to death.¹⁵ All this bloodshed, we are given to understand, sprang from Lord Xuan's transgressive sexual relations across generational lines: first copulating with his father's concubine, and then marrying the woman originally intended for his son.

In commenting on this affair, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE) linked it to another famous story from antiquity:

When I read the words of the hereditary houses, I come to the part where Lord Xuan's Crown Prince was put to death on account of a woman, and his younger brother Shou promoted his own death by trying to take his place. This [example] is like that of Crown Prince Shensheng of Jin 晉太子申生 [d. 656 BCE], who dared not bring to light the misdeeds of Lady Li 驪姬. Both [Jizi and Shensheng] hated to violate their father's will, and thus ultimately perished. How poignant! Sometimes fathers and sons kill one another and brothers exterminate one another. Why indeed?¹⁶

It cannot be a coincidence that the hapless Crown Prince Shensheng—whose name literally means Born Again¹⁷—was also a product of *zheng*. We cannot say what version of the *Zuo Commentary*, if any, Sima Qian had before him,¹⁸ but he does seem to have absorbed the lesson that *zheng* generates ill-starred children. Shensheng's father, Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676–651 B.C.E.), had congress with Jiang of Qi 齊姜, his own father's concubine; although this could hardly have been regarded as proper, Shensheng was still installed as the legitimate Crown Prince. Lord Xian, who had several other sons by wives and concubines, later had a change of heart and wished to elevate Lady Li, one of his concubines, to the rank of legitimate wife and name their young son, Xiqi 奚齊 (r. 651 BCE), as Crown Prince instead of Shensheng.¹⁹ Seizing the opportunity, Lady Li framed Shensheng for attempting to poison Lord Xian, and although Shensheng saw through the plot, he perceived that his father was disinclined to investigate who was really at fault, and therefore committed suicide.²⁰

One can only suspect that Shensheng's peculiar name has something to do with the next scene, in which he appears as a revenant after Yiwu 夷吾 (i.e. Lord

Hui of Jin 晉惠公, r. 650–637 BCE), one of his half-brothers, has him gratuitously disinterred and reburied elsewhere. The meaning of Yiwu's own name, Destroy Me, leaves little doubt as to his fate.

The Marquis of Jin [i.e., Yiwu] moved the tomb of Crown Prince Gong 共太子 [i.e., Shensheng]. In the autumn, Hu Tu 狐突, [Shensheng's former subordinate,] was going to the lesser capital, when he happened upon [the ghost of] the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince made him climb into [his carriage] and act as his charioteer. He said to him: "Yiwu has no propriety. I have made a request of the Thearch: I will bestow Jin unto Qin 秦, and Qin will cultivate me."

[Hu Tu] replied: "I have heard, 'Spirits do not consume what is not of their kind; people do not cultivate what is not of their lineage.' Will sacrifices to you not be vain? Moreover, the people are without guilt; you will be punishing them wrongfully and nullifying their sacrifices. Lord, please reconsider this."

Lord [Gong] said: "Very well, I shall make another request. In seven days, there will be a shaman on the western side of the New City; you will have an audience with me through him." [Hu Tu] assented to this, and [the ghost] disappeared. When he went [to the shaman] at the appointed time, he was told: "The Thearch has assented to my punishing the guilty one. He will be wracked at Han 韓."²¹

The ghost thus presages the famed Battle of Han (645 BCE), where Yiwu is ignominiously defeated by Qin. One telling detail in the litany of misdeeds justifying Qin's attack is that Yiwu was asked to shelter a certain Lady Jia 賈君, but, far from living up to this obligation, committed *zheng* with her instead. The verb *zheng* might lead one to believe that Lady Jia was another one of Lord Xian's concubines, but some commentators state that she was Shensheng's widow, and *zheng* is applied in an extended sense.²² More commonly, copulating with a brother's or uncle's concubine is called *bao* 報 rather than *zheng*,²³ but in this case, because Shensheng was formerly the Crown Prince (and Yiwu added the outrage of violating his grave), the act might have been considered as egregious as *zheng*. Yiwu's shameful defeat at the Battle of Han is represented as due requital for his shameful conduct beforehand.

Zheng highlighted the precarious status of concubines, who lay somewhere between wives and chattel. On the one hand, a son who inherited his father's estate may have looked forward to taking possession of the concubines as well; on the other hand, because of their personal relationship with the father, they were not quite like furniture or horses, which the son could have used or sold as he wished. Suspended like this between recognition and nonrecognition, freedom and unfreedom, a concubine would have had little hope of resisting an abusive new master. Accordingly, the matter of consent never arises in these

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narratives; a concubine was simply not free to grant or withhold it—though the actions of Jiang of Yi leave no doubt that she was an unwilling participant.

In later times, *zheng* was unquestionably criminal (if inconsistently prosecuted),²⁴ but in the world depicted by the *Zuo Commentary*, the legality is hazy. No one is ever punished explicitly for having committed *zheng*; at best, the text shows indirectly, as in the examples above, that *zheng* has disastrous consequences in the long run (though often for the victims and progeny rather than the reckless perpetrator himself). Moreover, attentive classical readers may have noticed that the narratives involving *zheng* appear relatively early in the chronicle.²⁵ Perhaps one is supposed to infer that it was an archaic and barbarous custom, which more civilized generations ceased to practice.

Western Han (206 BCE—9 CE) princes were often accused of *zheng*, but, as I have argued elsewhere, it was typically a pretext, and perhaps an invented one, for the central government to eliminate them and seize their lands. One reason why so many members of the imperial house are depicted as sex fiends is that it was easier to discredit a sex fiend than a dignified lord who might one day become a credible pretender to the throne. *Zheng* must have been one of the most revolting and unfilial crimes for which one could plausibly indict a prince. Liu Jian 劉建, Prince of Jiangdu 江都王 (r. 127–121 BCE), who had a particular reputation for debauchery, was accused of having committed *zheng* in the mourning lodge while his father's corpse lay unburied. He was soon forced to commit suicide.²⁶

In none of these cases was the female the birth mother (*qinmu* 親母) of the male; usually, she was a concubine of the male's father, sometimes a stepmother (*jimu* 繼母 or *houmu* 後母), and therefore possibly closer in age to the son.²⁷ But it did not take long for literati to imagine that especially depraved souls copulated with their birth mothers as well.²⁸ Consider this fragment from a lost text called *Handling the Cithern* (*Qincao* 琴操):²⁹

Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 [b. ca. 50 BCE] was the daughter of Wang Rang 王穰 of Qi. At the age of seventeen *sui*, her body and deportment were exceedingly beautiful, and she was known throughout the realm for her chastity. Various dignitaries sought her [hand], but Wang [Rang] would not permit it; instead, he presented her to Emperor Yuan of Han 漢元帝 [r. 48–33 BCE]. The Emperor was inattentive and could not distinguish among his “bedchamber curtains” [i.e., members of his harem]. Zhaojun was shamed and angered by this.

It came to pass that the *chanyu* 單于 [i.e., Huhanye 呼韓邪, r. 58–31 BCE] sent an emissary [to court]. The Emperor ordered the palace ladies to adorn themselves and come out for the emissary to select one of them. The Emperor said to them: “Whoever wishes to go to the *chanyu* should rise.” Zhaojun drew a long breath and arose from her mat. When the

Emperor looked at her, he was astonished and regretful, but by this time the emissary had also seen her and could not be forestalled, so she was granted to the *chanyu*. The *chanyu* took delight in her and gave her many precious objects.

Zhaojun had a son named Shiwei 世違. When the *chanyu* died, Shiwei succeeded him. Among the Hu 胡, when the father dies, the son takes his mother as his wife. Zhaojun asked Shiwei: “Are you going to be a Han? Or are you going to be a Hu?”

Shiwei said: “I wish to be a Hu.” Thereupon Zhaojun killed herself by swallowing poison.³⁰

Many details in this fantastic story need to be unpacked. Huhanye, the *chanyu*³¹ or chief of the Xiongnu 匈奴 confederacy,³² requested aid from the Han government as he fended off rivals on the steppe,³³ and a gift of an imperial concubine—once again, they are treated like wives in some respects and chattel in others—was supposed to cement the happy alliance. Instead, the emperor regrets his “inattentiveness” as he finally appreciates Wang Zhaojun’s beauty just as he must bid her farewell. Perhaps this much was true.³⁴

The rest of the tale, however, is pure fiction. The Xiongnu are called Hu, literally “bearded”—a sign of their uncouthness. According to Chinese sources, their custom was indeed for sons to inherit their father’s concubines,³⁵ but not their birth mothers. Thus *zheng*, or practices like it, might have been a general Eurasian cultural feature,³⁶ which was retained by groups such as the Xiongnu, but reviled as barbaric in the highly self-regarding Chinese empire. At any rate, Wang Zhaojun’s son did not become the next *chanyu* and she was not obliged to marry her own son. We know from more credible sources that Huhanye was succeeded by his eldest son, by a different wife. This son then wished to follow the Xiongnu custom and marry Wang Zhaojun, who was, of course, unrelated to him, and clearly something of a trophy. She petitioned the Chinese court to return home, but was told to stay and obey. Far from swallowing poison, she did as she was bidden, and bore her new husband two daughters.³⁷

In fact, Wang Zhaojun’s son could not have become the next *chanyu* or intended to marry his mother because he would have been scarcely more than two years old. Impossible chronologies are a hallmark of inventive Chinese anecdotes that are more interested in the moral dynamics of a scene than the historical accuracy of its details.³⁸ Even the name Shiwei is dubious. Like Shensheng and Yiwu, it has an irrepressible meaning: “The Generation Is Deviant,” as any Chinese reader would have recognized. Nor can I find any references to Shiwei in other documents. Wang Zhaojun did have a son by Huhanye, but his name was Yituzhiyashi 伊屠智/知牙師 (Old Chinese *ʔij-dʰa-tre(s)-mɣʰra-srij), which really must have been a Xiongnu name, because it makes no sense in Chinese. One can only suspect that Shiwei was invented, and if Chinese readers did not

object to such licenses, it was because Shiwei behaves precisely as they imagined a barbarian would. Obviously barbarians copulate with their mothers. Why wouldn't they?

Even the venerable legends were not immune to subversion. But first, some background: polygyny was enshrined in myth. The Sage King Yao 堯, we read, was so impressed by the commoner Shun 舜 that, rather than bequeathing the throne to his son, he abdicated in favor of Shun, and also made him a son-in-law by bestowing two daughters on him, Ehuang 娥皇 (August Woman) and Nüying 女英 (Brilliant Girl). Why did Yao esteem Shun so highly? To the extent that the surviving scraps of information can be pieced together³⁹—by their nature, myths appear, in Chinese as in Greek literature, in the form of allusions rather than comprehensive narrations⁴⁰—Shun's extraordinary achievement seems to be that he endured the schemes of his invidious family without losing his moral bearings. Shun's father, Gusou 瞽叟/瞽 (Blind Old Man), remarried after the death of Shun's mother,⁴¹ and the unnamed stepmother wished to have her own son, Xiang 象 (Elephant), installed as the Blind Old Man's heir.⁴² (As we have seen, concubines and stepmothers in Chinese literature often scheme on behalf of their natural sons.)⁴³ They unleash various plots and booby traps, but Shun always manages to escape while maintaining filial and fraternal devotion, as in *Mencius* 5A.2:

His parents sent Shun to repair a silo; they removed the ladder, and Blind Old Man set fire to the silo. They sent him to dredge a well; they went ahead and shut it, [not knowing that] he had already gotten out. Elephant said: "The merit for the schemes against the 'City-Constructing Lord' [i.e., Shun] is all mine. His oxen and sheep will go to my parents; his storehouse and silos will go to my parents; but his shield and spear will be mine; his zither will be mine; his bow will be mine; and his two wives will be made to manage my household." Elephant went to Shun's residence. Shun was on the bed, playing his zither. Elephant said: "I have been anxiously longing for you, my lord." He was sheepish.⁴⁴

Shun is aware that the dissembling Elephant intended to kill him (and then commit *bao* with his wives), but, unperturbed, he asks Elephant to join him in government: "These are all my ministers—may you manage them for me." Yao must have reasoned that someone who can still cherish his family in the teeth of such offenses is a prime candidate for the throne. Moreover, Shun is indirectly praised for shaming Elephant into *not* killing him. Shun's patience is not that of a dolt or coward; rather, it is the best means to make his family reflect on their conduct and desist from committing further crimes.

Literati adored every aspect of this legend, including the polygyny. Surely, if anybody deserves to have two wives, it is a Confucian paragon like Shun. Thus it must have stung when Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE), one of the most out-

spoken anti-Confucians in history, alleged that, after coming to the throne, Shun “turned his mother into his concubine” (*qie qi mu* 妾其母):⁴⁵

Outside [the home], this Shun turned his lord into his servant. Inside [the home], he turned his father into his servant and his mother into his concubine; he married his master's daughters. Thus, renowned adventurers do not run their families [properly] within [the home]; they bring disorder to generations and cut off their own progeny. Outside [the home], they presume upon their lord.⁴⁶

For a staunch dynast like Han Fei, the legend of Shun represents a distressing precedent because it offers adventurers the hope that, by ingratiating themselves with their lord and feigning outstanding virtue, they might usurp privileges to which they have no proper claim.⁴⁷ The fact that Shun's father and former sovereign were both alive during his reign is a telling embarrassment, for such a situation is not supposed to arise in a hereditary monarchy. Reigning kings typically do not have living fathers. This is what is meant by the statement that Shun turned his lord and his father into his servants.

But the charge that he turned his mother into his concubine is harder to explain, because many reigning kings did have living mothers. First, it is impossible to judge whether *mu* refers to Shun's mother or stepmother. In one version of the legend, we recall, Shun's birth mother died when he was young, and his chief enemy was his stepmother. If Han Fei expected his audience to know this tradition, then the accusation, strictly speaking, is that Shun committed *zheng*. Significantly, however, the text does not say this; it says that he turned his mother into his concubine.

Some commentators opine that *qie* need not connote a sexual relationship, and can refer generally to a female servant.⁴⁸ Western scholars are divided on the matter,⁴⁹ but it seems obvious that ancient readers would have had to entertain the possibility that Han Fei might be accusing Shun of illicit congress with his mother. Han Fei was one of the most colorful writers of his period, and was especially fond of witticisms involving sex.⁵⁰ Considering that the charge appears in a chapter entitled “Loyalty and Filial Piety” (“Zhongxiao” 忠孝), we must take it as a bitter attack on Confucian moralists. They may prate about loyalty and filial piety, but they are hypocrites: their patron saint turned his own mother into his whore. There may also be a subtler argument lying underneath: since Shun did not really exist, one can hardly prove that he did not sleep with his mother. As long as we are inventing culture heroes, we can invent whatever details we wish.

One point evinced by the above array of examples is that the commonplace of copulating with one's mother—whether a stepmother or one's birth mother—was deployed as a token of barbarism.⁵¹ Within the Chinese cultural sphere, it was used to distinguish rulers who know how to control their urges from those whose dissipation knows no bounds, and also to distinguish proper

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Chinese mores from those of benighted barbarians. If barbarians who copulate with their mothers cannot, in fact, be found, the remedy is easy: just make them up. The same goes for culture heroes like Shun. If this all seems alien and peculiar, remember that we usually do not have supporting evidence when we call someone a motherfucker.⁵² And yet we say it.

NOTES

1. Thomas, “The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England,” 77–81.
2. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*.
3. For a fine recent study, see Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome*.
4. The etymology is unknown and is not broached in Schuessler’s magnificent *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*. Lin Yutang (1895–1976), *Lin Yutang’s Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage*, s.v., proposed: “probably from 蒸 heat goes up” (because *zheng* 蒸 can mean “to steam” or “to braise”). But other meanings of *zheng* 蒸 include “many” and “to offer,” so perhaps the word means “to multiply” or “an offering.”
5. Bering, *Perv: The Sexual Deviant in All of Us*, 110f., explains that most (zoophilia, necrophilia, etc.) are simply subsumed under the capacious but analytically useless *DSM-5* category of “paraphilia not otherwise specified.”
6. E.g., Krupnik and Müller-Wille, “Franz Boas and Inuktitut Terminology for Ice and Snow,” 377–400. In literature, one of the best-known applications of the “Eskimos know their snow” commonplace is Peter Høeg’s *Froken Smillas fornemmelse for sne*, released in English as *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*. It was also made into a motion picture.
7. Cf. Melton et al., “Genetic Evidence for the Proto-Austronesian Homeland in Asia,” 1807–1823.
8. The most judicious discussion of the date of the *Zuo Commentary* is Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*, 33–59.
9. Cf. Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, 26ff.
10. Nothing more is known about the Left and Right Princes (other than their names, revealed below), but one can infer from their titles, *gongzi* 公子, that their father(s) held the rank of *gong*, and thus they were uncles or brothers of the present lord.
11. Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, vol. 1, 146 (Huan 桓 16=696 BCE). Compare the translations in Watson, *The Tso chuan*, 13f., and Legge (1815–1897), *The Chinese Classics*, 5:66f.
12. It is ironic that the names Jizi and Shouzi mean Endangered and Long-Lived, respectively. On meaningful names in early Chinese texts, see Goldin, *After Confucius*, 6–11. I confess that, since writing this piece, I find meaningful names virtually everywhere (including below).
13. Cf. Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*, 251n2.
14. Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1:147. Compare the translation in Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 5:67.
15. Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1:168 (Zhuang 莊 6=688 BCE).
16. Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記, 37.1605 (“Wei Kangshu shijia” 衛康叔世家). Compare the translations by Scott Cook in Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, 1:261f.; and Watson, *The Tso chuan*, 15.
17. I owe this insight to Jens Østergaard Petersen (private correspondence). The name could also mean “born of a woman of the Shen lineage”; cf. Zhang Yachu 張亞初, “Xi-Zhou

mingwen suojian mou sheng kao". I am indebted to Edward L. Shaughnessy for this reference. Thomas Emmrich, *Tabu und Meidung im antiken China*, 19, suggested Born in Shen.

18. For a classic study of this question, see Jin Dejian, *Sima Qian suo jian shu kao*, 105–111 and 116–121; also Gu Lisan, *Sima Qian zhuanxie Shiji caiyong Zuozhuan de yanjiu*.

19. Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1:238f. (Zhuang 28=666 BCE). Incidentally, in *A Patterned Past*, David Schaberg writes that Lady Li's ethnicity was Di 狄, but the text states that she was from "the Kingdom of Li-Rong" 驪戎國 (151).

20. *Ibid.*, I, 296ff. (Xi 僖 4=656 BCE). Cf. Li, 250ff. Lady Li's plot also appears in *Guoyu* 國語; see Xu Yuangao (1876–1955), *Guoyu jijie*, 7:264–267 ("Jinyu yi" 晉語一).

21. *Ibid.*, I: 334f. (Xi 10=650 BCE). Compare the translations in Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*, 166–167; Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 73; and Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 5:157.

22. See Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1: 351f. (Xi 15=645 BCE), with Yang Bojun's comments regarding the identity of Lady Jia.

23. As in phrases like *baosao* 報嫂, "to marry one's elder brother's widow." I cannot find any pre-Han usages of *bao* in this sense, however, so the distinction between *zheng* and *bao* might be anachronistic for the *Zuozhuan*. This sexual sense of *bao* might be explained by the basic etymon of "requit."

24. Cf. Zhang Shuyi, "Zhangjiashan Hanjian suojian Handai hunyin jinling," 5:11–12. For a discussion of cases regarding corrupt officials in the Zhangjiashan strips, see Barbieri-Low, this volume.

25. The only other instances of *zheng* (in the sexual sense) in the *Zuo Commentary* are Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1:266 (Min 閔 2=660 BCE) and 2:804 (Cheng 成 2=589 BCE). In other words, there is not a single case in the entire second half of the text.

26. See Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, 88ff.

27. For a study of various types of maternal relationships in a slightly later period, see Zheng Yaru 鄭雅如, *Qinggan yu zhidu*. I am indebted to Debby Huang for this reference.

28. The following section is expanded from Goldin, "Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China," 230.

29. On the authorship of *Qincao*, see Ma Meng, "*Qincao* zhuanzhe kaobian," 61–66. It seems likely that there was more than one text by that name in antiquity, and sorting out which fragment belongs to which author may well be impossible with our limited knowledge today. An author of one text called *Qincao* was the famed Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192 CE).

30. The text is related in the commentary of Liu Jun 劉峻 (462–512 CE) to *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語. See Yu Jiaxi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 19: 665 ("Xianyuan" 賢媛). Compare the translation in Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, 364. The story is discussed in Tao Ketao, *Zhanxiang chunqiu—Xiongnu pian*, 208f.; and Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 181–201.

31. The likeliest explanation of this title is still Pulleyblank, "The Consonantal System of Old Chinese (II)," 256–257, where it is associated with the later steppe titles *tarqan*, *tarxan*, and so on. See also Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 128. According to the system in Baxter and Sagart, *Old Chinese*, *chanyu* would have been *dar-ŋʷa in Old Chinese.

32. For some thoughts on the origin of this name, see Atwood, "The Qai, the Khongai, and the Names of the Xiōngnú," 34–63.

33. See, e.g., Chen Xujing, *Xiongnu shi gao*, 307–317.

34. For a comprehensive account of Wang Zhaojun's life and her role in later literature, see Cui Mingde, *Zhongguo gudai heqin tongshi*, 79–99.

35. According to a lost geographical text called *The Register Encompassing All the Lands* (*Kuodi pu* 括地譜), the progenitor of the Xiongnu was Xunyu 獯粥, the son of the tyrant Jie 桀 (the last ruler of the Xia 夏 dynasty), who married one of his deceased father's concubines. Thus *zheng* was in their very blood. See the commentary by Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (ca. 656–720) in *Shiji* 110.2880n1 (“Xiongnu liezhuan” 匈奴列傳).

36. Cf. Jennifer Holmgren, “Observations on Marriage and Inheritance Practices in Early Mongol and Yüan Society,” 155.

37. See “Xiongnu zhuan” 匈奴傳, *Hanshu*, 94B.3807; and “Nan Xiongnu liezhuan” 南匈奴列傳, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965), 89.2941.

38. Cf. Goldin, “Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric,” 79–96.

39. The extant sources are conveniently assembled and translated in Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, 74–76.

40. Cf. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 14.

41. This crucial detail appears in *Shiji* 1.32 (“Wudi benji” 五帝本紀). Whalen Lai, “Unmasking the Filial Sage-King Shun,” 167 and 178f., writes that Shun's *father* is sometimes taken to be a stepparent, but provides no references, and I know of no evidence for such a tradition.

42. All the personal names in the myth are meaningful, but the significance of Elephant eludes me. Gusou could mean Blind Old Man or simply Blind One, depending on whether it is construed as 瞽叟 or 瞽瞍. Yao means Lofty. It would be tempting to associate Shun (Old Chinese *stun/rs) with *shun* 順, “docile” (Old Chinese *Cə.luns), but a phonological connection is hard to establish. Homophones of the sage's name include *shun* 薜/穉 (hibiscus) and *shun* 瞬 (to blink). I am indebted to my colleague Adam Smith, who has shown me his unpublished work on the name Shun.

43. It was enough of a concern that there is a relevant commandment in *Mencius* 6B.7 (attributed to Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公, r. 685–643 BCE): “Execute the unfilial; do not change the [Crown] Prince once he has been established; do not turn a concubine into a wife” 誅不孝，無易樹子，無以妾為妻。Compare Chen Li (1809–1869), *Gongyang yishu*, 29.11a–12a (Xi 3=657 BCE).

44. Jiao Xun (1763–1820), *Mengzi zhengyi*, 19: 619–622. Compare the translations in Lau, *Mencius*, 195ff.; and Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2: 2:346f.

45. The following discussion is expanded from Goldin, “Appeals to History in Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric,” 89.

46. Chen Qiyou, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu*, 20.51.1154 (“Zhongxiao” 忠孝). Compare the translation in Liao, *The Complete Works of Han Fei tzu*, 2: 314f. The significance of this passage has been largely unappreciated; it is not discussed, for example, in Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*, 136–139.

47. Cf. Pines, “Submerged by Absolute Power,” 73.

48. See the opinions in Chen Qiyou, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu*, 20.51.1156n14.

49. See the references in Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, 169n66.

50. Consider Chen Qiyou, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu*, 10.31.624f. (“Nei chushuo xia” 內儲說下), where an adulterous wife hoodwinks her credulous husband, and, for good measure, persuades him to bathe in excrement. The story is discussed in Harper, “Warring States, Qin, and Han Manuscripts Related to Natural Philosophy and the Occult,” 246.

51. For a medieval tale of an unfilial son sleeping with his birth mother, see Knapp, this volume.

52. Incidentally, it is far from certain that this word originally referred to incest, and it is still worth citing Eldridge Cleaver's comment, as quoted in Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time*: "I've seen and heard brothers use the word four and five times in one sentence and each time the word had a *different* meaning and expression" (408; emphasis in original). Seale's own theory: "Motherfucker actually comes from the old slave system and was a reference to the slave master who raped our mothers." A "(bad) motherfucker" was someone who slept with other people's mothers, not his own.

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