

REVEALING CONTINGENCY THROUGH SHUN'S 舜 ASCENSION TO THE THRONE

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Abstract

This article examines the story of Shun's 舜 ascension to the throne. This story has drawn considerable attention throughout Chinese history because of its significance with regard to political succession. However, in this article, I shed light on a different dimension of the story: its relevance to the issue of contingency. I investigate four texts, two excavated and two transmitted: *Qionгда yi shi* 窮達以時 (Failure and Success Depend on Times), *Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道 (The Way of Yao and Shun), the *Mengzi* 孟子, and the *Xunzi* 荀子. At one extreme, *Qionгда yi shi* highlights that Shun became a king by pure chance, while at the other extreme, *Xunzi* interprets the event as a necessary one, emphasizing that Shun cannot but succeed Yao. The other two texts fall somewhere in between the two extremes. I use these four texts to showcase different ways of thinking about areas over which humans are believed to lack control. My claim is that these four texts offer different accounts of the same event—Shun's ascension—because they see the event from different perspectives: from a perspective of the chosen, from a perspective of the chooser, from a *mise-en-scène*, and from a perspective of not of this world, respectively. I argue that the diverse perspectives of these texts entail the different understandings of several related issues such as the degree of human control over the event, the important features of the event, and the content of the moral and political lessons that we draw from the event.

Introduction

The story of Shun's 舜 ascension to the throne is one of the two most celebrated political narratives in China, the other being that of

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King Wen 文王 and King Wu 武王, the founders of the Zhou 周 dynasty.¹ The *Shu jing* 書經 (The Book of Documents) tells the story of how Shun, a man of humble origin, became a king.² Upon achieving peace during his reign, Yao 堯 began to look for his successor. His ministers recommended several candidates, one of whom was his eldest son, Dan Zhu 丹朱. However, Dan Zhu was disqualified due to his incompetence. The final candidate was Shun, recommended by Yao's minister, Si Yue 四岳. In Si Yue's description:

瞽子，父頑，母嚚，象傲，克諧以孝，烝烝乂，不格姦。

[Shun] is a son of a blind man. His father was wicked, his stepmother was deceitful, and his stepbrother, Xiang 象, was arrogant. But he was able to live in harmony with them through his filial piety and gradually transformed them so that they did not return to wickedness.³

Shun was the epitome of filiality, and this virtue was taken to be a qualification for ruling. However, Yao did not immediately pass on the throne to Shun. First, Yao married his two daughters to Shun in order to see whether Shun could manage an amicable relationship with his wives. Second, Yao spent three years observing Shun's administration of governmental affairs. Following twenty-eight years of regency, upon the death of Yao, Shun finally ascended to the throne and took the position of Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子).

The primary focus of this story is political succession: a virtuous ruler yields his power to a virtuous person. This so-called abdication (*shanrang* 禪讓) doctrine is at odds with the norms of the hereditary transfer of power (father-son succession). The non-hereditary succession by

1. Mark Csikszentmihalyi points out that in Confucian writings, much of the normative political discourse has been transmitted through stories rather than abstract theories. In a similar vein, Andrew Seth Meyer writes, "Anecdotes were not only instrumental for ancient authors engaged in the task of historiography (viz. the recording and interpretation of the past), but were a versatile and important component of the philosophical toolkit employed by the producers of Master's writings." Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Confucianism," in *God's Rule: The Politics of World Religion*, ed. Neusner Jacob (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 223–24; and Andrew Seth Meyer, "The Frontier between Chen and Cai: Anecdote, Narrative, and Philosophical Argumentation in Early China," in *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China*, ed. Paul van Els and Sarah A. Queen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 80. My analysis and comparison of four different versions of the story of Shun is also a way to find different philosophical implications.

2. This story appears in two chapters of "Yao dian" 堯典 (Canon of Yao) and "Shun dian" 舜典 (Canon of Shun) chapters of the *Shu jing*. *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokanji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980).

3. "Yao dian" 堯典 of the *Shu jing*. *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokanji*, 123, a.

abdication places moral excellence as the standard for political authority. Hence, Shun was able to ascend the throne from a humble origin owing to his virtue.⁴ This principle of rule by virtue, along with the doctrine of Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命), a belief that Heaven gives the sanction to rule the world to a virtuous person, became the centerpiece of Confucian political theory and the cornerstone of subsequent dynastic changes in China.⁵

Another way to understand this political narrative is to trace its curious development. According to Michael Nylan, the early chapters of the *Shu jing*, in which we find the story of Yao and Shun, were probably written later than most chapters on the Zhou period.⁶ If so, the story of the Yao–Shun transition may have been introduced later and then subsumed under the dominant doctrine of Heaven's Mandate of the Zhou dynasty. In this scheme, it appears likely that this ancient legend of Yao–Shun was presented as an ideal form of royal succession. Accordingly, early Confucians such as Mengzi and Xunzi tried to incorporate this ideal

4. Sarah Allan points out that Shun was not completely non-kin since he was a son-in-law of Yao. Accordingly, Shun's story is not diametrically opposed to hereditary rule, but instead, it plays a mediating role between the conflicting principles of virtue (without hereditary) and hereditary (without virtue). Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*, revised and expanded edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 38.

5. The doctrine of Heaven's Mandate has been generally considered a Zhou invention, particularly that of the Duke of Zhou 周公, a son of King Wen and a younger brother of King Wu. According to Herrlee Creel, the Duke of Zhou devised the discourse of Heaven's Mandate in order to legitimate the Zhou's conquest of Shang and to win over the remnants of the Shang people. Herrlee Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 85.

6. Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 133–36. However, according to Sarah Allan, although the date of the "Yao dian" 堯典 is probably late, it includes some material that has an early origin. Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 57–62. The earliest mention of Yao's elevation of Shun is found in "Shang xian" 尚賢 (Elevating Worthies), one of the core chapters of the *Mozi* 墨子. Excavated texts involving the issue of abdication include *Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道 (The Way of Yao and Shun) from the Guodian Chu Tomb One, *Zi Gao* 子羔 and *Rongchengshi* 容成氏 from the Shanghai Museum collection, *Bao xun* 保訓 (Cherished Instruction) from the Qinghua [Tsinghua] University collection, the newly found *Zhou xun* 周訓 (Instructions of the Zhou) from the Peking University collection, and other examples. For studies of these texts on abdication, see Yuri Pines, "Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign's Power," *T'oung Pao* 91.4–5 (2005), 243–300; Sarah Allan, *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); and Andrej Feč, "The Zhou xun 周訓 and 'Elevating the Worthy' (Shang Xian 尚賢)," *Early China* 41 (2018), 149–178. For a brief outline of the evolution of the legend of Yao and Shun, see Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 19, and Pines, "Disputers of Abdication," 245–52.

vision into their political theory of succession in one way or another. On the other hand, recent studies of excavated/discovered texts suggest that the story around the Yao–Shun transmission of power was not merely envisioned as an ideal form.⁷ According to Yuri Pines and Sarah Allan, during the middle Warring States period, the abdication of power by a virtuous ruler to a virtuous minister came to be seen as a viable alternative to hereditary rule.⁸ In contrast, for thinkers like Han Feizi 韓非子, Shun’s story was regarded as a ministerial usurpation of the throne.

In addition to the dynamic development and interesting political discourse surrounding the event of Shun’s ascension, the story has other fascinating elements of its own. The first is the unlikelihood and exceptionality of the story’s main event. It is hardly probable that an ordinary, or perhaps less than ordinary man in social strata, would rise up to assume the highest possible position of power in the human world.⁹ Second, like any other success story, this story perhaps gives us hope and the lesson: “if you work hard, you can succeed.” Third, this can be read as the story of justice delivered: good people flourish in the end. Interestingly, however, various early texts, both transmitted and excavated, give interrelated but different accounts of Shun’s ascension.

The texts under consideration are two excavated and two transmitted: *Qionгда yi shi* 窮達以時 (Failure and Success Depend on Times), *Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道 (The Way of Yao and Shun), *Mengzi* 5A5, and the chapter “Zheng lun” 正論 (Correct Judgments) of the *Xunzi*.¹⁰ Instead of setting them in a political framework of rule by virtue (abdication) versus rule by heredity, I will examine the way that these four texts deal with the particular event of Shun’s ascension in light of the issue of contingency: whether or not Shun’s ascension to the throne is a necessary event.¹¹ At

7. Sarah Allan makes an interesting observation that, in transmitted texts, the legend of the Yao–Shun abdication was presented in a way that supported the idea of hereditary dynasties, whereas in the excavated texts, we find more fluid and more diverse political stances. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 20.

8. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication” and Allan, *Buried Ideas*.

9. Yuri Pines notes that Shun’s rise is not only unlikely and exceptional, but also has an egalitarian appeal. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 273.

10. I focus on the parts of the texts that relate directly to the particular event of Shun’s ascension. In addition, the reason I selected these four particular texts among many is that they show marked differences in their perspectives, which will be explained below. In addition, it should be noted that the view that appears in the “Zheng lun” chapter is not consistent with other parts of the *Xunzi*, such as the chapter “Chengxiang” 成相 (Working Songs), which presents a similar view to that of *Qionгда yi shi*.

11. Contingency, in this article, broadly refers to what happens beyond human understanding and control. In early Chinese writings, contingency variously relates to

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one extreme, *Qionгда yi shi*, highlights that Shun became a king by pure chance. At the other extreme, Xunzi interprets the event as a necessary one, emphasizing that Shun cannot but succeed Yao. The other two texts fall somewhere in between the two extremes.

In what follows, I will analyze each text separately, focusing on the questions of what their interpretations of the event are, why they offer different interpretations, and what are the important ethical and political implications of their differing views. My claim is that these four texts offer different accounts of Shun's ascension because they see the event from different perspectives: that is, from a perspective of the chosen, from a perspective of the chooser, from a *mise-en-scène*, and from a perspective of not of this world, respectively. I argue that their different perspectives entail different interpretations of the issues of the degree of human control over the event, the important features of the event, and the content of the moral and political lesson that we draw from the event. A close analysis and comparison of various interpretations of the same event showcase the ways that early Chinese thinkers conceived of areas over which humans are believed to lack control.

Qionгда yi shi: Perspective of the Chosen

Qionгда yi shi (Failure and Success Depend on Times) was found in tomb no.1 of the Guodian Chu tombs 郭店楚墓 (roughly dating to 300 B.C.E). The text is short and well-preserved, written on fifteen bamboo slips, of which only two are slightly damaged.¹² The content and thesis of this text is clear and straightforward. It argues that because there are things in the world that humans cannot control, we should focus on what we

notions such as Heaven (*tian* 天), timing (*shi* 時), and fate (*ming* 命). One thing to be kept in mind is that what humans cannot understand and control is predicated on what humans can understand and control. For a more detailed discussion of the concept of contingency in the *Analects* and *Mengzi*, see Youngsun Back, "Confucian Heaven: Moral Economy and Contingency," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8.1 (Spring, 2016), 51–77. For a recent study on the concept of fate (*ming* 命) in early China, see Mercedes Valmisa, "The Reification of Fate in Early China," *Early China* 42 (2019), 1–53.

12. These slips are 26.4 cm long and were originally bound with two straps about 9.5 cm apart. On average, each slip contains 20 characters, and altogether the text contains 289 characters. See Jingmen shi bowuguan, ed., *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). For a detailed textual study of this text, see Dirk Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 53–76 and 269–82; and Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 429–64.

can control.¹³ Let's first turn to the text. In what follows, I have selected and rearranged the text in a way that elucidates the main thesis of the text focusing on the relevant case of Shun's ascension. The text begins:

Slip 1) 有天有人，天人有分。察天人之分，而知所行矣。

There is Heaven and there is man. Heaven and man have their own allotments. [Only] by investigating the [respective] allotments of Heaven and man, will one know what to act upon.

We are not entirely sure what Heaven and man refer to in this text, nor what their respective allotments or tasks are. Nevertheless, we are sure that the main aim of this text is to provide a lesson on how we should act and live our lives, which will be clarified at the end of the text.¹⁴ The text continues:

Slip 1) ... 有其人，無其 Slip 2) 世，雖賢弗行矣。苟有其世，何難之有哉？舜耕於歷山，陶拍 Slip 3) 於河澗，立而為天子，遇堯也。... Slip 11) ... 遇不遇，天也。

There might be the right man but not the right age. [In this case,] even if he might be a worthy [man], he cannot act out his worthiness. However, if there were indeed the right age, what difficulties could there be [for him]? Shun ploughed at the Mountain Li and he made pottery at the banks of the Yellow River. The reason he was established and became Son of Heaven was his encounter with Yao. ... To encounter or not, this lies with Heaven.

Here, the right man refers to a man of worth. As long as a man of worth is born in the right age, he can fully exercise his talent and ability. Shun's ascension to the throne is presented as the first of seven historical examples to support this proposition.¹⁵ A virtuous man, such as Shun,

13. This is the general theme, but scholars seem to have slightly different emphases: e.g., self-justification of failure, motivation for self-cultivation, and promotion of moral autonomy. See Mercedes Valmisa, "Beyond Our Control? Two Responses to Uncertainty and Fate in Early China," in *New Visions of the Zhuangzi*, ed. Livia Kohn (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2015), 16.

14. A similar theme regarding the distinction between Heaven and man appears in the "Dazongshi" 大宗師 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and the "Tian lun" 天論 (Discourse on Heaven) chapter of the *Xunzi*. For a comparison of these texts with *Qiongdā yī shì*, see Valmisa, "Beyond Our Control?" and Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 441–48.

15. The other six examples are the encounter of Shao Yao 邵繇 with Wu Ding 武丁, the encounter of Lü Wang 呂望 with King Wen, the encounter of Guan Zhong 管仲 with Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公, the encounter of Sunshu Ao 孫叔敖 with King Zhuang

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was able to become a king because he happened to meet Yao, a virtuous ruler. Had Shun not met Yao, he would have remained in a remote place plowing and making pottery. Just as the title of this text says, both success and failure depend on time (*shi* 時).¹⁶ This means that in order to succeed, one must live in the right age (*shi* 世); and the right age is an age governed by the right ruler.¹⁷ However, whether or not one will meet with the right age (*yubuyu* 遇不遇) is ultimately up to Heaven, an entity that is not explained in the text. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: because we do not understand how Heaven decides on this matter, at least from the perspective of humans, the kind of world we are born into is felt to be beyond our understanding and control.

We can conjecture what is meant by “man” mentioned in the introductory statement. If Heaven’s task is what we cannot understand and control, then man’s task is presumed to be what we can understand and control. The text presents the main concern of man’s task as one’s own virtue and worth. Hence, the final lesson we should heed is the cultivation of the self:

Slip 14) ... 窮達以時，德行一也。 ... Slip 15) ... 窮達以時，幽明不再，故君子敦於反己。

Failure and success depend on the times, [and yet] virtuous conducts remain the same. ... Failure and success depend on the times, [and yet] dark and bright do not alternate. It is for this reason that the gentleman does his best to reflect on himself.

of Chu 楚莊王, the encounter of Baili Xi 百里奚 with Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公, and finally, the encounter of the excellent horses with the excellent rider, Zao Fu 造父. In addition to these success stories, the demise of Wu Zixu 伍子胥 is presented as a supplementary case, with the lesson being that one’s failure is not due to one’s lack of worth.

16. In his study of *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, James Sellmann notes that in the pre-Qin texts, time (*shi* 時) does not refer to an objective condition, but rather to a historical interpretation with moral and cosmic lessons. In addition, he distinguishes two senses of time (proper timing): extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic timing is associated with the proper fit between the action and its performer, whereas extrinsic timing is associated with the proper fit between human actions and external conditions. In addition, Sellmann identifies three realms in which the art of rulership is concerned with proper timing in *Lüshi chunqiu*: that is, cosmic (natural environmental), political, and interpersonal realms. I think these categorizations are conducive to future research on timing and contingency. James D. Sellmann, *Timing and Rulership in Master Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi chunqiu)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

17. Identification of the right age with the right ruler seems to indicate that as long as the right ruler is in place, he is sure to recognize and employ the worthy. In other words, it posits a necessary connection between the presence of a sage ruler and his recognition of the worthy.

One who understands the respective allotments of Heaven and man focuses on his own virtue and worth. This is because even though success and failure may alternate according to the times, one's virtue does not fluctuate and remains within one's control. The text elaborates on this point with two analogies: fragrant flowers in a remote valley and precious gems hidden in a mountain. Flowers are fragrant whether or not people are present to smell them, and precious gems are beautiful whether or not people are present to appreciate them.¹⁸ Like flowers and gems, one's virtues are intact, complete, and pleasurable in themselves. Unlike success and failure, one's virtues are invulnerable to external conditions. Therefore, the gentleman concerns himself with his own virtue rather than with the pursuit of success. Even if nobody recognizes his virtue, he will have no resentment or regrets.¹⁹ This is what is called the "inward turn": the shift of interest from concern for successes and failures to self-cultivation.²⁰

So one should turn inward because this is what one can control, whereas the task of Heaven is not. For the author of *Qionгда yi shi*, there seems to be no necessary correlation between the task of Heaven and the task of man. In other words, Shun's success was the outcome of concurrence of the two conditions, the virtuous Shun and the right ruler

18. Slip 12) ... [芝蘭生於幽谷非] Slip 13) [以無人] 嗅而不芳。璠蒼堇逾寶山石，不為[，非人知其] Slip 14) 善倍己也。：“[The flower *zhilan* grows in dark valleys, and it is not because it cannot] be smelled by man that it is not fragrant. The beautiful stone of jade is covered in mountain stones, and it is not because of [no one knows its] goodness that it neglects itself.” This is Dirk Meyer's translation. See Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 271. Scott Cook, however, connects Slip 13 with Slip 15. Slip 13) 璠蒼堇逾寶山石，不為[非人見而] Slip 15) 不理：“Colorful gems and precious jades are concealed within mountain stones; they do not [fail to] hold patterns just because [no one sees them].” Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 462–64. The analogy of flower appears in the chapter entitled “You zuo” 宥坐 (The Right-Hand Vessel) of the *Xunzi* and the seventh chapter of the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳.

19. Slip 11) ... 動非為達也，故窮而不 Slip 12) 怨。隱非為名也，故莫之知而不吝。：“Thus, to move does not necessarily mean to succeed; from this follows that a man of worth does not harbor resentment even if failing. He simply hides and does not achieve his name; from this follows that he is without regret even if nobody recognizes him.”

20. The expression “inward turn” is used by Michael Ing to challenge the dominant interpretation of early Confucianism that moral cultivation is under one's control. Michael David Kaulana Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 74–78. Valmisa also employs a similar expression to describe the view of *Qionгда yi shi*: using the term, “turning inward,” as opposed to Zhuangzi's focus on “turning outward.” According to Valmisa, the “turn outwards” in the *Zhuangzi* is a means to take advantage of every single situation or embracing what you cannot control in order to make the most of it. Accordingly, it is more of making an opportunity rather than awaiting it as prescribed in *Qionгда yi shi*. See Valmisa, “Beyond Our Control?”

Yao. In this light, *Qionгда yi shi* presents Shun's ascension as an utterly contingent event.²¹ In relation to this, another point to be noted is that the intended audience of the text is prospective candidates for employment. The moral advice offered in *Qionгда yi shi* is not applicable to rulers, but exclusive to potential candidates to be chosen by the ruler. From the perspective of the chosen, one cannot but turn inward to cultivate one's virtue, awaiting the right ruler in a world of contingency.²²

Tang Yu zhi dao: Perspective of the Chooser

Tang Yu zhi dao (The Way of Yao and Shun), also excavated at Guodian, consists of twenty-nine bamboo slips with partial damage and consists of 709 characters in total, which makes it about twice as long as *Qionгда yi shi*.²³ Despite some disagreement on certain characters and slip order, scholars agree on the main message of this text: the advocacy of abdication. A ruler should yield his throne to a virtuous person. In contrast to *Qionгда yi shi*, this text seems to be specifically written for the ruler, particularly with regard to how the ruler should act during and at the end of his reign.²⁴ Accordingly, its focus is not so

21. Of course, if Shun were not a virtuous person, there would be no possibility for him to be recognized by the right ruler. In this sense, we cannot say that there is no connection at all between Shun's moral excellence and Yao's recognition of Shun. In my view, however, for the author of *Qionгда yi shi*, Shun's moral excellence is a precondition, because it gives the advice to the worthy. Once the precondition is met, Shun needs to be born in the right age governed by the right ruler, which is indeed beyond his control.

22. Accordingly, this text may have been written by a political advisor for candidates to office. I owe this observation to an anonymous reviewer.

23. These slips are 28.1–28.3 cm long and were originally bound with two straps about 14.3 cm apart. On average, each slip contains 25 characters. For a detailed textual study of *Tang Yu zhi dao*, see Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 521–64; and Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 79–133. Unlike *Qionгда yi shi*, this text does not seem to have corresponding parts in transmitted texts. According to Sarah Allan, the radical nature of the abdication doctrine promoted in *Tang Yu zhi dao* is hard to survive in history. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 80. In addition, while this text is generally considered to be a Confucian text, some scholars disagree and associate it with the Mohists or Yang Zhu 楊朱. See Carine Defoort, "Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh: the Middle Position of the Guodian Text 'Tang Yu zhi Dao,'" *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 76 (2004), 44–70.

24. In contrast, however, Sarah Allan raises the possibility that this text may have been addressed to the worthies, potential successors, rather than to rulers. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 116. In a similar way, in her analysis of the concept of *ming*, Valmisa reads this text in line with *Qionгда yi shi*. Valmisa, "The Reification of Fate in Early China," 38–44. I agree that both *Qionгда yi shi* and *Tang Yu zhi dao*, even including the *Mengzi*, do not present drastically different assumptions about the world and human agency. However, my goal is, instead of looking for the general assumptions they share, to find

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much on Shun's ascension, but on Yao's abdication to Shun. In order to facilitate comparison of this text with *Qionгда yi shi*, I have selected and rearranged the text focusing on the following questions: what is abdication? what are reasons for abdication? to whom should one abdicate? and, most importantly, what is the relationship between abdication and contingency?

The main topic of this text is defined as follows: "Abdication means that possessors of the highest virtue give the rule to the worthy."²⁵ The first question that comes to mind is why a ruler should abdicate. One immediate cause is the deterioration of physical strength of the ruler. The text says:

Slip 25) ... 古者聖人二十而 Slip 26) 冠，三十而有家，五十而治天下，七十而致政，四肢倦惰，耳目聰明衰，禪天下而 Slip 27) 授賢，退而養其生。此以知其弗利了。

In antiquity, the sages were capped at the age of twenty; at thirty they married; at fifty they orderly ruled all under Heaven; and at seventy they handed over the rule. As their limbs were exhausted, sharpness of hearing and clarity of sight weakened, they abdicated the world and delivered it to a worthy and retired to nurture their lives. Therefore, we know that they did not benefit from all under Heaven

During their prime, sage kings benefited the world by ruling it well. This is the primary task of the ruler. However, as the physical condition of their body deteriorates, they reach a point at which they are no longer able to benefit the world. At this point, the task of the ruler was to appoint a successor and step down. Otherwise, the world would fall back into turmoil, as warned in the *Record of Shun*, "If the great brightness does not come out, the myriad things will be in darkness. If the sage is not at the top, all under Heaven will inevitably collapse."²⁶ Accordingly, the task of ruler is to ensure the order of the world not only during his reign,

out what kinds of subtle and nuanced differences they present in their understanding of the world and human agency.

25. Slip 20) ... 禪也者，上德授賢之謂也。For discussion of the controversy over the characters 禪 and 傳, see Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 92–94; and Defoort, "Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh," 47–50.

26. Slip 27) 《虞詩》曰：「大明不出，萬物皆暗。聖 Slip 28) 者不在上，天下必壞。」According to Yuri Pines, this poem is not found in the *Shi jing* 詩經 (Book of Odes) and the language of this poem suggests its relatively late provenance. Pines surmises that this poem was created in order to bolster the theme of this text. Pines, "Disputers of Abdication," 262.

but also after his reign ends.²⁷ Therefore, abdication is necessary for the continuation of the good order and harmony.²⁸

To whom, then, should sage rulers abdicate their rule? Exactly what qualities constitute a worthy person? According to this text, the qualities are filiality (*xiao* 孝) and loyalty (*zhong* 忠). The worthies are those who love their parents (and family) and those who respect other worthies. The text demonstrates why these are important qualities:

Slip 6) ... 堯舜之行，愛親尊賢。愛 Slip 7) 親故孝，尊賢故禪。孝之方，愛天下之民。禪之傳，世亡隱德。孝，仁之冕也。 Slip 8) 禪，義之至也。六帝興於古，咸由此也。愛親忘賢，仁而未義也。尊賢 Slip 9) 遺親，義而未仁也。古者虞舜篤事瞽叟，乃戴其孝；忠事帝堯，乃戴其臣。 Slip 10) 愛親尊賢，虞舜其人也。

The conduct of Yao and Shun was to love relatives and respect worthies. They loved relatives, and so they were filial. They respected worthies, and so they abdicated. The implementation of filiality is to love all the people under Heaven. When transmission is done through abdication, no virtue remains hidden in the world. Filiality is the crown of benevolence; abdication is the utmost of righteousness. In antiquity, all the six thearchs who rose to power acted in this way.²⁹ If in loving relatives, one forgets men of worth, one is benevolent but not quite righteous. If in respecting men of worth, one omits relatives, one is righteous but not quite benevolent. Hence, Shun earnestly served his father Gusou, thereby bearing his filiality; he loyally served Yao, thereby bearing his ministerial obligations. Loving the relatives and respecting the worthy, Shun is this kind of person.

First, it is assumed that those who love their parents and family can extend their love to other people: "The implementation of filiality is to love all the people under Heaven." Therefore, filiality is an essential quality for being a good ruler, because it enables a ruler to benefit the

27. Given that this text tells us that a ruler resigns in order to nurture his own health, Carine Defoort connects this text with Yangists. I do agree that this nurturing dimension reflects a strand of Yangism. In my view, however, the ultimate aim of resignation is the continuation of social harmony and order, and the nurturance of a ruler's health may be secondary. Carine Defoort, "Mohist and Yangist Blood in Confucian Flesh."

28. Loubna El Amine reconstructs a political theory of early Confucianism focusing on the concept of political order, instead of rulers' virtue. Loubna El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought: A New Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

29. For the identification and implications of the six thearchs, see Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 102–4.

world during his reign. Those who achieve filiality attain the utmost form of benevolence (*ren* 仁). However, filiality is not enough to qualify someone as the successor. For a ruler must secure the wellbeing of the people even after his reign. Therefore, loyalty is demanded. It is assumed that those who respect the worthy will abdicate to another worthy when they are no longer able to ensure the order of the world. Those who achieve this task attain the ultimate form of righteousness (*yi* 義). The author of *Tang Yu zhi dao* emphasizes that to be an eligible successor, neither of these qualities can be missing.³⁰ In this, Shun is the perfect example: because he was devoted to his vicious family, Yao knew that the world would benefit from him, and because he was loyal to his ruler, Yao knew that Shun would yield his throne to a virtuous person when the time comes. As the story goes, Shun was successful in his administration and he abdicated his throne to another worthy, Yu 禹.

If the ultimate aim of rulership is to secure the wellbeing of the people and maintain the order of the world, then abdication to a virtuous person seems to be a logical conclusion. During his reign, a ruler should benefit the world, but when the time comes that he is no longer able to do so, he must find a replacement.³¹ This replacement must be a man of filiality and loyalty. Unlike *Qionгда yi shi*, which advises worthies to cultivate their own virtues, the author of *Tang Yu zhi dao* asserts that rulers should actively engage with the world, thereby benefiting the world and looking for a worthy successor. Importantly, the text also points out that only when a ruler has successfully handed over his rule to a worthy, has the ruler's virtue been perfected. In other words, a ruler obtains his sagehood in completing this final task of abdication. Hence, the text applauds abdication as the full realization of sagehood.³²

30. Many scholars point out a conflict between filiality and loyalty because to abdicate rulership to non-kin is against familial virtue. However, it seems to me that the author of this text does not present these two qualities as contradictory, but rather as complementary: filiality is required during any good reign and loyalty is required for abdication upon a ruler's retirement. Sarah Allan also makes a similar point by showing how abdication exemplifies both qualities of filiality and loyalty in *Tang Yu zhi dao*. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 98–102. For a discussion of reconciliation of these two values in *Tang Yu zhi dao* and other texts, see also Kenneth W. Holloway, *Guodian: The Newly Discovered Seeds of Chinese Religious and Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104–30.

31. Sarah Allan argues that the reason that a ruler should retire in old age is because his health is correlated with the celestial order as a natural organism. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 107–8.

32. Slip 1) 禪而不傳，聖之2)盛也。 In his analysis of *Tang Yu zhi dao*, Yuri Pines argues that abdication is praised for revealing the ethical value of a ruler rather than for political effectiveness. However, I think that the opposite is actually the case:

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Qionгда yi shi and *Tang Yu zhi dao* both deal with Shun's ascension, but they seem to give different advice to different audiences.³³ The moral lesson of *Qionгда yi shi*—that one should cultivate one's virtue, awaiting the right ruler—is intended for the worthy in a position to be chosen. The moral lesson, or even moral imperative, of *Tang Yu zhi dao*—that one should rule the world well and transmit this good rule to a worthy successor—is intended for the ruler, who is in a position to choose. These two texts combined together make a perfect, ideal case of the Yao–Shun transition, comprehensively describing how Yao, the chooser, and Shun, the chosen, fulfilled their respective tasks.³⁴ Depending on which perspective the text adopts, however, the same event is rendered quite differently. From the perspective of Shun, success is contingent upon his encounter with Yao, an occurrence that he cannot control. From the perspective of Yao, however, the abdication of kingship to Shun is an event that he could control once he had the opportunity to meet Shun.

One result of these different perspectives is that each text highlights different attributes of Shun. For example, in *Qionгда yi shi*, Shun's humble background comes to the forefront. His initial low status is contrasted with his ensuing kingship, highlighting the unlikelihood of his ascension. This huge leap in social status underscores the extent to which the event depends entirely on Yao's recognition and selection of Shun.³⁵ On the contrary, *Tang Yu zhi dao* highlights Shun's filiality and loyalty over his obscure background. As Yuri Pines rightly points out, abdication is presented as a “desirable and immediately applicable mode of political conduct” to incumbent kings.³⁶ The goal of this text is to persuade and convince rulers of the necessity of selecting a worthy successor. In this respect, the Yao–Shun transition cannot be depicted as a fortunate event or simply as an ideal past. Yao is obligated to

abdication is necessary for its political effectiveness, while its ethical value is derivative. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 258.

33. Accordingly, if *Qionгда yi shi* was written for prospective candidates for office, this text must have written for rulers in office or potential rulers.

34. Another discovered text, *Zi Gao*, makes exactly the same point. 子羔曰，堯之得舜也，舜之德則誠善 ... 與？伊堯之德則甚明與？孔子曰，均也。：Zi Gao asks [to Confucius], “That Yao obtained Shun, was it because Shun's virtue was truly good, ... or was it because Yao's virtue was extraordinarily brilliant?” Confucius answers, “They were equal.” See Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 175.

35. A description of the virtues of Shun, which must have drawn the attention of Yao, is absent in *Qionгда yi shi*. Another feature that is missing in *Qionгда yi shi* is the ability of Yao to recognize the worthy. Accordingly, the author of *Qionгда yi shi* seems to take for granted the virtues of both sages.

36. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 263. Sarah Allan also makes the same point that the proposal of abdication in this text is not presented as the ideal form only applicable to the pre-dynastic period, but for all era. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 82.

appoint Shun, a man of filiality and loyalty, as his successor. This is his moral requirement.³⁷

This moral requirement is not invulnerable to contingency, however. For Yao can choose a worthy successor only insofar as there is one to be chosen. Perhaps this helps us discern the meaning of the somewhat cryptic and ill-suited slips 14 and 15:

Slip 14) 古者堯生為天子而有天下，聖以遇命，仁以逢時，未嘗遇
[賢。雖] Slip 15) 及於大時，神明將從，天地佑之。縱仁聖可與，時弗
可及矣。

In ancient times, Yao was born to be the Son of Heaven and possessed all under Heaven. By being sagely, he encounters *ming*, and by being benevolent, he meets with the time. Though he has not yet encountered [the worthy], when the great moment arrives, the ghosts and spirits all obey, and the sky and earth assist him. Even though one's benevolence and sagehood can be given, as for the appropriate time, it cannot be made to arrive.

Ensuring the order of the world during his reign and abdicating to a worthy upon his retirement are things within Yao's control, as well as things that Yao actually did.³⁸ In this way, Yao perfected his sagehood. And yet, in order to succeed in this, he had to have encountered an opportune time: the presence of a worthy in his time.³⁹ Had he not met a virtuous person like Shun, Yao would not have been able to yield his throne to a worthy successor. And without completing this mission, Yao

37. For a comprehensive account of various descriptions of Shun, see Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*, 33–58.

38. According to my understanding of the text as a whole, “being sagely” in the above passage means that Yao can abdicate, and “being benevolent” means that Yao can benefit the world during his reign. However, both tasks are, to a certain extent, susceptible to external conditions.

39. The above passage is followed by a description of Shun: the appearance of a worthy person, whose virtue is not under the sway of external conditions. Slip 15) ... 夫古者 Slip 16) 舜居於草茅之中而不憂，身為天子而不驕。居草茅之中而不憂，知命 Slip 17) 也。身為天子而不驕，不專也。求乎大人之興，美也。今之戴於德者 未 Slip 29) 如此也。: “In ancient times, when Shun dwelled in a thatched hut, he was not resentful; when he himself became the Son of Heaven, he was not arrogant. That he dwelled inside a thatched hut and was not resentful is because he knew *ming*. That he himself became the Son of Heaven and yet was not arrogant is because he did not give himself up to pleasure. To prosper by being sought out by a great man is magnificent. As for those of the present day who emulate virtue, they are not yet thus.” This description of Shun aligns with the suggested message in *Qiongda yi shi*. This demonstrates that both texts basically share the same assumptions of the world, but with slightly different focus. I owe this observation to an anonymous reviewer.

would not have perfected his sagehood.⁴⁰ In this sense, Yao's sagehood is just as contingent as Shun's ascension.⁴¹ One significant difference, however, is that unlike Shun, whose ascension was completely contingent upon his encounter with Yao, Yao was in a position to make a choice when he encountered Shun. Based on this line of thinking, it may be said that from the perspective of Yao, his abdication was *partially* contingent, whereas from the perspective of Shun, his ascension was *utterly* contingent. A comparison of the two texts shows that, depending on which perspective the text takes, either the chooser or the chosen, the same event is interpreted differently in many respects including the degree of human control over the event, which features of the event are highlighted as important, and the lesson we learn from the event.⁴² The following text, the *Mengzi*, takes yet another perspective.

The *Mengzi*: *Mise-en-scène*

When his disciple, Wan Zhang 萬章, asked whether Yao actually yielded his throne to Shun, Mengzi responded with a flat-out denial: "No. The Son of Heaven cannot give the world to another person" (*Mengzi* 5A5).⁴³ His answer did not hit the mark, however (probably intentionally). Wan Zhang's question seems to deal with the factuality of the historical event,

40. This is one possible way of understanding this cryptic passage. For instance, Sarah Allan reads this passage in a different light because she follows the slip order in a different sequence. Her interpretation seems to be in line with the message of *Qionгда yi shi*. Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 108–9. Valmisa shares a similar view in her interpretation of this passage. Valmisa, "The Reification of Fate in Early China," 41–42. I believe that the correct ordering of slips and the precise deciphering of scripts are the most essential component of studying the excavated/discovered texts. At the same time, I believe that comparing them with other received and excavated texts and finding out their internal logic can contribute to a fuller understanding of these texts by adding other possibilities.

41. If a ruler's virtue is contingent upon external conditions, then it may be possible that the virtue of the worthy is also contingent upon external conditions. In other words, although the author of *Qionгда yi shi* seems to have believed that one's virtues are within one's full control, this may be an exaggeration. The emphasis on moral autonomy in the realm of self-cultivation may be a result of the emphasis on our lack of control in the realm of external success.

42. As I emphasized, even though the different perspectives of the texts render their understandings of various related issues different, it does not mean that they have completely different assumptions about human agency, moral development, and the role of contingency in political success. I owe this observation to an anonymous reviewer.

43. 否。天子不能以天下與人。 For the translation of the *Mengzi*, I generally follow and modify Irene Bloom's translation. Irene Bloom, *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

but Mengzi's answer is a normative claim: the world is not an object of transfer between individuals, regardless of how virtuous rulers and successors are. At any rate, Mengzi appears to be denying the abdication of Yao to Shun, at least on the surface. Accordingly, some scholars argue that Mengzi opposed royal succession by abdication, and instead, was inclined to support hereditary rule, which was the norm in his time.⁴⁴ This scheme of hereditary rule versus abdication to a worthy person is important in understanding political theories and political realities of early China. However, as mentioned, the event of Shun's ascension is also important in understanding how different thinkers understand the issue of contingency. In what follows, I focus on the question of how Mengzi interpreted Shun's ascension: was it a necessary event or a contingent event for him?

In a way similar to *Qionгда yi shi* (and to a certain extent, *Tang Yu zhi dao*), Mengzi declared that it was Heaven that transferred the rule to Shun.⁴⁵ Both texts, therefore, rely on the notion of Heaven in explaining Shun's ascension. In addition, just as *Qionгда yi shi* features Heaven in contrast to man, Mengzi takes the same approach in explaining Heaven. He says, "Things that could not be brought about by human beings are owing to Heaven" (*Mengzi* 5A5).⁴⁶ In fact, the demarcation between Heaven and man is a prevalent theme in early Chinese thought. In *Qionгда yi shi*, however, the line that divides Heaven and man is clear-cut and impermeable: what Heaven does and what humans do have not much to do with each another. On the other hand, in the *Mengzi*, the distinction between Heaven and man is much more complex, even porous and dynamic. Mengzi's account of Shun's ascension helps us understand his complicated conception of the relationship between Heaven and man.

According to Mengzi, even though Heaven transfers the rule from the reigning king to a successor, Heaven does not do so through a direct

44. One of the main reasons that Mengzi was believed to support hereditary rule is the stability of political authority. For a discussion of Mengzi's view on royal succession, see Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 530; El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought*, 37–44; and Sungmoon Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism: Mencius and Xunzi on Virtue, Ritual, and Royal Transmission," *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011), 371–99.

45. *Tang Yu zhi dao* does not mention Heaven (*tian*天), but it does mention times (*shi*時). The related concept of fate (*ming*命) is not mentioned in *Qionгда yi shi*, but it is mentioned in *Tang Yu zhi dao*. At any rate, these terms, *tian*天, *shi*時, *ming*命, and *shi*世, are all related to the notion of contingency in one way or another.

46. 非人之所能爲也，天也。Exactly the same phrase appears in *Mengzi* 5A6 as well. Valmisa has an interesting interpretation of this distinctive pattern of 非 X 也, Y 也, in reading *ming* as an agency. See Valmisa, "The Reification of Fate in Early China," 44–52.

command in words. Rather, Heaven's intention is indirectly revealed in particular affairs:

[萬章曰]，“然則舜有天下也，孰與之

[孟子]曰，“天與之。”

[萬章曰]，“天與之者，諄諄然命之乎？”

[孟子]曰，“否，天不言，以行與事示之而已矣。”

[萬章]曰，“以行與事示之者，如之何？”

[孟子]曰，“... 昔者，堯薦舜於天，而天受之，暴之於民，而民受之，故曰，天不言，以行與事示之而已矣。”

[萬章]曰，“敢問薦之於天，而天受之，暴之於民，而民受之，如何？”

[孟子]曰，“使之主祭，而百神享之，是天受之。使之主事，而事治，百姓安之，是民受之也。天與之，人與之，故曰，天子不能以天下與人。

[Wan Zhang asked,] “In that case, when Shun possessed all under Heaven, who gave it to him?”

[Mengzi] said, “Heaven gave it to him.”

[Wan Zhang asked,] “When Heaven gave it to him, did it ordain this through repeated instructions?”

[Mengzi] said, “No. Heaven does not speak. This was manifested simply through actions and affairs.”

[Wan Zhang] asked, “In what way was this manifested through actions and affairs?”

[Mengzi] said, “... In ancient times, Yao recommended Shun to Heaven, and Heaven accepted him. He presented him to the people, and the people accepted him. Therefore, it is said that Heaven does not speak but just shows its intention through action and events.”

[Wan Zhang] asked, “What do you mean by that Yao recommended Shun to Heaven and Heaven accepted him, and Yao presented Shun to the people and the people accepted him?”

[Mengzi] said, “Yao ordered Shun to officiate the sacrifice, and hundreds of spirits enjoyed it. This shows that Heaven accepted him. Yao ordered Shun to manage affairs, and affairs were well-managed, and the people felt relieved. This shows that the people accepted him. This is that Heaven and the people gave him the world. Therefore, it is said that the Son of Heaven cannot give the world to another person.” (*Mengzi* 5A5)

The particular affairs wherein we can confirm the intention of Heaven are ritual sacrifices and governmental administration, which are the two pillars of state governance in early China. Shun's acceptance by Heaven and the people signals his success in these grave tasks.⁴⁷ Shun

47. However, according to Sungmoon Kim's analysis, it was actually feudal lords and ministers of the noble families, not laypeople, who were entitled to approve royal power.

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was indeed a worthy, capable man. We must remember, however, that Shun only got this chance to prove himself owing to Yao's recognition. As described in *Qionгда yi shi*, Shun's way to the throne began with his very encounter with the right ruler, who, due to virtues of his own, was able to discern the worth of Shun.⁴⁸ Moreover, unlike Heaven and the people, who came to accept Shun after his effective service during, so to speak, governmental internship, Yao recognized the worth of Shun without this process. Yao expected Shun's excellence in governance by observing his filiality in the private realm. As Sarah Allan points out, this special ability of Yao is one of the qualities that legitimate his political authority.⁴⁹

If the ability to recognize the worthy is an important component of the virtuous ruler, what are the virtues of the successor? What kind of qualities actually enabled Shun to become a king? The answer lies in his excellence in governance. This is contrasted with the kind of virtue, described in *Qionгда yi shi*, which can be summarized as inward virtues. Inward virtues are something like a person's good character, which is invulnerable to external conditions. For example, Shun was filial even when his family tried to kill him, and he remained filial after he became a king. Shun was filial under any circumstances, like flowers are fragrant whether they grow in a remote valley or on the edge of a sidewalk. Of course, Shun's filiality is what enabled him to be recognized by Yao.⁵⁰ However, for Mengzi, Shun's familial virtues are not the principal cause of the approval by Heaven and the people. Shun earned approval

Sungmoon Kim. "Confucian Constitutionalism." And also see, Justin Tiwald, "A Right of Rebellion in the Mengzi?" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 7.3 (2008), 269–82.

48. In light of this pivotal role of Yao's recommendation of Shun, Yuri Pines points out that because any decision on to whom to transfer power is the prerogative of the reigning ruler, the idea of abdication is not supposed to undermine the absolute power of the ruler. Pines, "Disputers of Abdication," 280. Sungmoon Kim makes a stronger claim, "According to Mencius's most developed doctrine of abdication, therefore, the Mandate of Heaven is relegated to the will of the Son of Heaven, and the will of the Son of Heaven is placed, albeit tacitly, over the royal candidate's moral virtue and the people's approval." Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism," 384. I agree that Yao's recommendation plays an important role. Recall, however, that the very reason that Yao recommended Shun was Shun's virtue, and the primary reason for Shun's ultimate ascendancy was the people's acceptance of him.

49. Sarah Allan quotes a very relevant passage from the *Huainanzi* (13/15b): 未有功而知其賢者堯之知舜，功成事立而知其賢者市人之知舜也。 "To realize a man's worth before he has accomplished anything, this is the way in which Yao knew Shun. Knowing his worth when his merit was achieved and his affairs completed, this is how the men in the market knew Shun." Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*, 51.

50. In addition to filiality, as we have seen, *Tang Yu zhi dao* adds another qualification: loyalty.

through his active engagement with the people and the world, fulfilling the important tasks of ritual sacrifice and administration. As Mengzi explicitly states, “Shun conferred rich benefits upon the people” (*Mengzi* 5A6).⁵¹ Shun did not keep his virtues to himself nor confine them to the private realm. He actively exercised and demonstrated his virtues. Thus, his outward virtues—that is, his actual service to the people and the world—were that which enabled him to become a king.⁵²

To sum up Mengzi’s account of how Shun rose to power, the process owes first to Yao, the virtuous reigning king. With his great perceptive capability, Yao recognized Shun, appointing him as his successor. Secondly, Shun’s ascension was due to the virtues of Shun himself, the successor. Shun gained the people’s voluntary supports by acting upon his virtues in the world. These two main players and their respective virtues are the key to understanding Shun’s ascension. In addition, Mengzi relies on two small details to make his account more accurate and comprehensive. One is the duration of Shun’s regency, and the other is the existence of rival candidates for succession. Mengzi explains:

舜相堯二十有八載，非人之所能為也，天也。堯崩，三年之喪畢，舜避堯之子於南河之南，天下諸侯朝覲者，不之堯之子而之舜。訟獄者，不之堯之子而之舜。謳歌者，不謳歌堯之子而謳歌舜。故曰，天也。夫然後之中國，踐天子位焉。而居堯之宮，逼堯之子，是篡也。非天與也。太誓曰，‘天視自我民視，天聽自我民聽。’此之謂也。

Shun assisted Yao for twenty-eight years. This is not something that could have been brought about by man; this is Heaven. After Yao died and his three-year mourning was completed, Shun withdrew to the south of the South River in deference to Yao’s son. But the feudal lords of the realm came to pay homage to Shun, not to Yao’s son. The people brought a suit to Shun, not to Yao’s son. Singers sang the praise of Shun, not of Yao’s son. Therefore, I said that it is Heaven. Only then did Shun go to the center of the state and ascend the throne. If he had just moved into Yao’s palace and ousted Yao’s son, this would have been usurpation, not receiving it from Heaven. The “Great Declaration” [of

51. 施澤於民久。(*Mengzi* 5A6).

52. Here, the contrast between inward virtues and outward virtues are a matter of focus. It is not that there are two different types of virtues. For example, the filiality of Shun can be described as “inward,” if we focus on his character trait, but it can also be described as “outward,” if we focus on his actual service to his parents. It is actually Shun’s inward virtue that led him to fulfill his outward virtue. I think, Joseph Chan’s “service conception” of political authority pinpoints this aspect of outward virtue, the actual service to the people. See Joseph Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism: A Political Philosophy for Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 29–32.

the *Book of Documents*] says, 'Heaven sees with the eyes of its people; Heaven hears with the ears of its people.' This describes well what I mean. (*Mengzi* 5A5)

Shun was given a chance to benefit the people for twenty-eight years. Even with his virtue and worth, he may not have succeeded from the beginning. Through trial and error, Shun may have overcome various challenges, improving himself in the process, and the twenty-eight years of regency is surely adequate for this purpose. Apparently, Shun had to go through this learning process to ensure that the world would benefit from his rule. However, this extended period of time is not something that Shun could have brought about. For this, Mengzi said that this is owing to Heaven, a force beyond human control.⁵³ While this small but important prop may not have been a decisive factor, it was definitely a contributing factor facilitating Shun's rise to power. Another factor to which Mengzi draws attention is Shun's rival for succession. To return to the beginning of the story, there were other candidates, one of which was Yao's own son, Dan Zhu. However, Dan Zhu was disqualified due to incompetence. Supposing instead that Dan Zhu was a worthy candidate, the story may have had a different outcome.⁵⁴ In this sense, the unworthiness of rival candidates serves as another contributing factor in Shun's ascension, working not in a positive way, but in a negative way, by removing a hindrance to his rise to power.

Consequently, Shun's ascension was the outcome of a complex interplay between multiple factors. Both major and minor, the reasons for Shun's ascension include: 1) Yao's recommendation (Yao's virtue), 2) Shun's excellence in governance (Shun's virtue), 3) the long duration of Shun's regency, and 4) the inadequacy of the rival candidate. Since Mengzi specifically ascribes the last two minor factors to Heaven, we understand Shun's ascension as resulting from a combination of man and Heaven: what humans can control and what humans cannot control. Accordingly, in Mengzi's view, Shun's ascension is a *pretty* contingent event, especially in comparison to *Qionгда yi shi*. In *Qionгда yi shi*, what Heaven does and what humans do seem to have no correlation: Shun meets Yao by pure chance. However, in the *Mengzi*, Yao's virtue and Shun's excellence are important factors in the final outcome, albeit not decisive. In the account of Mengzi, Shun's ascension is partly

53. The reason for this extended period of regency is due to Yao's longevity. As Confucius says, "Life and death are a matter of *ming*; wealth and honor depend on *tian*" 死生有命，富貴在天。 (*Lun yu* 12.5).

54. This is actually what happened in the Yu-Yu's son transmission, as explained in *Mengzi* 5A6. Unlike Dan Zhu, Yu's son, Qi 啓, was worthy, and he became a king, instead of Yi 益, a minister appointed by Yu.

attributable to the virtues of Yao and Shun and partly to favorable external conditions.

In my view, the reason that Mengzi's interpretation differs from the other two texts is also a function of perspective. The author of *Qionгда yi shi* takes the perspective of Shun, a potential candidate for employment: for Shun, his success is utterly contingent upon his encounter with Yao. The author of *Tang Yu zhi dao* takes the perspective of Yao, a ruler who must select his successor: for Yao, his abdication to a worthy person is partially contingent upon his encounter with Shun. The *Mengzi* does not take either perspective. Instead, his account is relayed from the perspective of a third-person, who does not participate in the event. From the third-person perspective, Mengzi observes important elements affecting Shun's succession. I call this "*mise-en-scène*," the terminology that is employed in a theater or film production, referring to everything that appears on the stage or before the camera. Mengzi's explanation of Shun's ascension seems to be doing this job: arranging the main players, their respective attributes, and the minor but essential props of the event.

What kind of moral lesson can we learn if we take the Mencian approach of *mise-en-scène*? Shun is advised in *Qionгда yi shi* to turn inward, cultivating his own virtue and awaiting the right ruler. Even if he is never to meet with the right ruler, this is not his fault and his virtues will remain intact, complete, and sufficient in themselves. Now, if Shun departs from his own limited perspective and takes the third-person point of view as suggested by Mengzi, the world is no longer a completely contingent place. There is a connection, sometimes loose and sometimes tight, between what Heaven does and what humans do. Shun's success during his regency, for example, is a case of this very combination. As a result, parts of the world become comprehensible, and thereby he can act and/or expect to exert control. Thus, the scope of his responsibility is no longer restricted to his inward virtues.⁵⁵

As for Yao, *Tang Yu zhi dao* exhorts that he must select a worthy person as his successor because the continuation of order of the world is his responsibility. Now if Yao takes the Mencian approach, looking at his situation from a distance, he will realize that despite the fact that the heaviest burden remains still on his shoulders, the world is not something that can be controlled by any one person. This may be a reason for the straightforward remark of Mengzi, "The Son of

55. For example, Shun's virtue became strong enough to attract the virtuous ruler from a far. For this positive role of virtue, see and Youngsun Back, "Virtue and the Good Life in the Early Confucianism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46.1 (2018), 37–62.

Heaven cannot give the world to another person.”⁵⁶ Acknowledging the complex operations of the world may teach Yao an important virtue—the virtue of humility. In the cases of both Yao and Shun, what they can do and what they should do are not so different from what is recommended in *Qionгда yi shi* and *Tang Yu zhi dao*. Yet, their attitudes toward the world certainly stand to be different if they take the Mencian approach.

Consequently, concerning issues of the degree of human control, the important features of the event, and the content of the moral and political lesson, Mengzi’s comprehensive account gives us different answers. For Mengzi, Shun’s ascension is a pretty contingent event. It is the outcome of the complex interplay between what humans can control and what humans cannot control. Thus, it is neither completely beyond nor within human control. Moreover, unlike *Qionгда yi shi* and *Tang Yu zhi dao*, which focus on the main players of the event, Mengzi takes into consideration several other relevant factors to elucidate Shun’s ascension. Lastly, even though Mengzi’s lesson does not completely depart from the lessons of the other two texts—that is, self-cultivation and the selection of the worthy—his account provides us with a more subtle approach to the world, revealing a fine balance between a belief in human agency and the virtue of humility. This rich and nuanced account of Shun’s ascension that we find in the *Mengzi*, however, takes another turn in the *Xunzi*.

The *Xunzi*: Perspective of Not of this World

The story of the Yao–Shun abdication also appears in the *Xunzi*. Like Mengzi, Xunzi denied it. This has led some scholars to interpret Xunzi as opposing the abdication doctrine.⁵⁷ As we have seen, however, Mengzi did not deny that Shun succeeded Yao to the throne, nor did he believe that Shun usurped the rule of Yao. In this sense, we cannot simply assert that Mengzi objected to abdication *per se*. Rather, Mengzi’s claim is that the throne, the position of Son of Heaven, cannot be transferred by the decision of an individual person, even if the person is a sage. The transfer of political authority is a complicated process involving many factors, and thus, to a certain extent, it is beyond human control. Likewise, Xunzi’s denial of Yao’s abdication to Shun is not about the historicity of the Yao–Shun transmission; his intention seems to lie elsewhere. If Mengzi’s denial is to show the limits of human agency,

56. I do not think that this statement is a simple negation of the abdication doctrine.

57. Yuri Pines classifies the *Zhuangzi*, the *Han Feizi*, together with the *Xunzi* in an anti-abdication group. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 282–93.

then Xunzi's denial is, conversely, to show the insurmountable power of human agency. To put it more precisely, Xunzi intends to illuminate the capacity of a sage king's perfect rule. In the following, I will explain Xunzi's peculiar account of Shun's ascension, wherein Shun cannot but succeed Yao.

In the middle of the chapter "Zheng lun" 正論 (Correct Judgments), Xunzi brings up the popular claim that Yao abdicated the throne to Shun. Not only does Xunzi deny the claim, he vehemently criticizes it:

是虛言也，是淺者之傳，陋者之說也，不知逆順之理，小大、至不至之變者也，未可與及天下之大理者也。

This is empty talk. It is a rumor circulated by shallow people and a doctrine spoken by boorish people. They are people who do not understand the patterns of what is conflicting and what is agreeable, and do not understand what changes happen to greater and lesser entities, supreme and non-supreme ones. They are the people who have never been able to take part in attaining the great order of the world. (*Xunzi* 18.344–350)⁵⁸

For Xunzi, anyone who believes in the abdication story of Yao and Shun is foolishly mistaken, and they are incapable of understanding the workings of the world. For they cannot distinguish the changes of greater entities from those of lesser ones, or the changes of supreme ones from those of non-supreme ones. What does he mean by greater/lesser and supreme/non-supreme entities? We can discern these contrasts from a previous passage in the same chapter in which he discusses another political narrative, the revolutionary transfer of power as depicted in the story of the tyrant Jie 桀 and King Tang 湯王 and that of the tyrant Zhou and King Wu. Here, Xunzi explicitly explains what was meant by greater/lesser entities and also offers his conceptions of the "world" (*tianxia* 天下, literally "all under Heaven") and "Son of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子), and their relationship to the "sage" (*shengren* 聖人):

可以有奪人國，不可以有奪人天下，可以有竊國，不可以有竊天下也。... 是何也？曰，國，小具也，可以小人有也，可以小道得也，可以小力持也。天下者，大具也，不可以小人有也，不可以小力得也，不可以小力持也。國者，小人可以有之，然而未必不亡也，天下者，至大也，非聖人莫之能有也。

58. For translation of the *Xunzi*, I generally follow and modify Eric Hutton's translation, citing by chapter and line number as in Hutton's translation. Eric Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

It is possible that someone might snatch away a state when it belongs to another, but it is not possible that someone might snatch away the world when it belongs to another. It is possible that someone might steal a state, but it is not possible that someone might steal the world. ... Why is this? I say: the state is the lesser instrument. It can be possessed by a petty man. It can be obtained by petty ways. It can be maintained by petty strength. The world is the greater instrument. It cannot be possessed by a petty man. It cannot be obtained by petty ways. It cannot be maintained by petty strength. As for the state, a petty person can possess it, but he will not necessarily avoid perishing. As for the world, its size is supremely great. Nobody except a sage is able to possess it. (*Xunzi* 18.145–159)

Obviously, lesser/greater entities refer to regional states and the whole world, respectively. Xunzi draws a sharp demarcation between the two entities. Regional states can be possessed and governed by petty people, and the rulership of states can be a target of usurpation. On the contrary, the world is beyond the reach of petty people, and rulership of the world belongs to sages. Only sages can possess and govern the world. Why? This is because the task of the world is the weightiest, and the size of the world is vast, and the population of the world is immense:

天下者，至重也，非至彊莫之能任。至大也，非至辨莫之能分。至衆也，非至明莫之能和。此三至者，非聖人莫之能盡，故非聖人莫之能王。

Responsibility for the world is supremely heavy. Nobody except one who possesses supreme strength can undertake it. Its size is supremely great. Nobody except one who possesses supreme ability in making distinctions can divide it up properly. Its people are supremely numerous. Nobody except one who possesses supreme brilliance can harmonize them. As for these three “supremes,” nobody except a sage can fulfill them fully. And so nobody except a sage is able to rule as a king. (*Xunzi* 18.113–120)

Thus, the world is the supreme/greater entity, for the world has the absolute superiority in its tasks, size, and populace. Therefore, it is natural for Xunzi to conceive of governance of this supreme entity as being entrusted to a person with supreme capacity: a person who is accountable for grave tasks, who is perspicacious in establishing order, and who is brilliant enough to harmonize people. Such a person would be a sage and so only sages can be in charge of the world.

In contrast, Xunzi claimed that if someone without such capacity occupies the position of Son of Heaven, he is not truly a Son of Heaven.

Xunzi said, "If one thinks that, in terms of conventional procedure [by inheritance], Kings Jie and Zhou possessed the highest status in the world, then that is so. However, if one thinks, in terms of their own persons, they possessed the highest status in the world, then that is not so" (*Xunzi* 18.50–54).⁵⁹ According to Xunzi, Jie and Zhou may have inherited the throne from their forefathers, but they never truly possessed the world. Because of their lack of capacity, they were not able to govern the world. Without having been able to govern the world, they never qualified as the Son of Heaven.⁶⁰ In order to properly understand Xunzi's view, we need to make a conceptual distinction of the term, Son of Heaven: the Son of Heaven as an office and the Son of Heaven as a person who fills the office.⁶¹ It is the *office* of Son of Heaven—the service of the supreme governance of the whole world—that is of crucial significance in Xunzi's political thought. The person who holds this office can be called the Son of Heaven only when he fulfills the demanding tasks of the office, but not the other way around.⁶² For Xunzi, what makes a person a Son of Heaven is the person's capacity to rule the world, not his hereditary right.

The question that follows, then, is what sages do while in office? Xunzi says:

聖王在上，圖德而定次，量能而授官，皆使民載其事而各得其宜。

When a sage king rules above, he assigns rank by reckoning virtue, awards official positions by assessing ability, and in each case makes it so that the people undertake the right tasks and each gets what is proper for him. (*Xunzi* 18.271–274)

59. 以桀紂為常有天下之籍則然，親有天下之籍則不然，天下謂在桀紂則不然。

60. Similarly, Eirik Harris explains the different usages of the term *jun* 君 (lord) with the distinction of being descriptive and normative. He also offers a more complicated discussion of the term *qun* 群 (community) in light of this distinction. See Eirik L. Harris, "Xunzi's Political Philosophy," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi*, ed. Eric L. Hutton (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), 99–106.

61. For a brief discussion of the distinction between the ruler as an office and the ruler as a person holding the office, see Chan, *Confucian Perfectionism*, 30–31.

62. If Xunzi's primary expectation of the Son of Heaven was its nature as an office rather than an agent who holds the office, the following sentence in the *Xunzi* should be rendered differently: 天子者，執位至尊，無敵於天下，夫有誰與讓矣。 Eric Hutton translates it: "As for the Son of Heaven, his power and position are supremely revered, and there is no rival to them in the whole world. To whom could he yield the throne?" (*Xunzi* 18.259–262). In my view, an alternative translation would be, "As for the Son of Heaven, the power and position of this office is supremely high and there is no matching position in the world. Who could possibly yield this position [to another]?" The second translation emphasizes the point that the office of the Son of Heaven cannot be utilized. This office is the title given to the supreme governance of the whole world.

聖王在上故天子生，則天下一隆致順而治，論德而定次。死，則能任天下者，必有之矣。夫禮義之分盡矣，擅讓惡用矣哉？

While the Son of Heaven lives, the world exalts this one man, behaves with paramount compliance, and is ordered. He assigns rank by judging virtue, and when he dies, then whoever is able to assume responsibility for the world is sure to take possession of it. When the social divisions according to ritual and social norms are completely implemented, what use would be served by relinquishing the throne and yielding it to others? (*Xunzi* 18.289–295)⁶³

Sage kings establish the rules for society in a way that the more virtuous and the more worthy a person is, the higher are his rank and position.⁶⁴ In such a society, claimed Xunzi, the people are all transformed and “there are no hidden worthies and no unrecognized good deeds.”⁶⁵ Simply put, a society ruled by a sage king is a perfectly meritocratic society.⁶⁶ Therefore, upon the death of a reigning sage, a subsequent sage in rank and position will emerge to continue the rule. Similar to Mengzi, Xunzi seems to emphasize that political succession is not determined by the personal choice of a sage king. However, in contrast to Mengzi, Xunzi did not believe political succession to be the outcome of the interplay of diverse factors. For Xunzi, political succession was a part of a necessary process of the perfect rule instituted by sages. As Yuri Pines puts it, “the perfect mechanism based on ritual and propriety as envisioned by Xunzi requires no abdication and no transfer of power.”⁶⁷ For Xunzi, in the perfect world governed by the sage Yao,

63. In Hutton’s original translation, he transliterates *yi* 義, which is often translated into righteousness. Here, I follow Eirik Harris’s translation of *yi* as proper social norms, the major function of which is to set up the proper roles and titles. Harris, “Xunzi’s Political Philosophy,” 99.

64. To be more specific, according to Eirik Harris, it is the ruler’s ability to effectively facilitate the members within his society and gain the potential benefits together that justifies his rulership. Harris, “Xunzi’s Political Philosophy,” 117.

65. 道德純備，智惠甚明，南面而聽，天下生民之屬，莫不振動從服以化順之，天下無隱士，無遺善，同焉者是也，異焉者非也，夫有惡擅天下矣？(*Xunzi* 18.263–267).

66. Loubna El Amine argues that meritocratic principles do not extend to the position of king based on a passage in the *Xunzi* saying, “Although a man may be the descendant of commoners, if he has acquired learning, is upright in conduct, and can adhere to ritual principles, he should be promoted to the post of prime minister or counselor” (*Xunzi* 9.1). El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought*, 41. I think, however, that if Xunzi assumed that the incumbent king is the highest sage, then we may assert that the meritocratic principles cover all strata of society.

67. Accordingly, Yuri Pines notes that for Xunzi, abdication means a dysfunction of the perfect mechanism. Pines, “Disputers of Abdication,” 289–90. Sungmoon Kim calls Xunzi’s political institution *lizhi* 禮治 constitutionalism, as opposed to Mengzi’s *dezhi*

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a second worthy person is next in line for succession. The following scenario explains precisely what happened between Yao and Shun.⁶⁸

聖不在後子而在三公，則天下如歸，猶復而振之矣，天下厭然與鄉無以異也，以堯繼堯，夫又何變之有矣？

[When the sage king has died], if the sage is not among the king's descendants, and is instead among the three dukes, then the world goes and sides with him, as if returning and restoring a former ruler to the throne. The world remains calm, no different from before. One Yao succeeds another Yao, so what switch is there? (*Xunzi* 18.279–287)

When Yao passed away, the person most worthy and most capable of governing the world was not among his sons. Instead, his minister Shun was the person identified as having supreme capacity for the role. Therefore, the whole world aligned with him, and Shun maintained the rule of the former king with harmonious continuity.⁶⁹ In *Xunzi's* view, insofar as Shun was the highest sage, he would naturally have succeeded Yao to the throne because former sages established political institutions in such a way. Therefore, in the world of the sage Yao, Shun's ascension was very much expected.⁷⁰

If this is indeed *Xunzi's* view, how come his account differs so drastically from the other three texts?⁷¹ As we have seen, *Qionгда yi shi*, *Tang Yu zhi dao*, and the *Mengzi* all admit the existence of contingency in the world, albeit to differing degrees. In these texts, the world is more or less beyond human control and comprehension. In *Xunzi's* perfect

德治 constitutionalism, which relies on an individual king's personal charisma. Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism."

68. *Xunzi* mentioned two other scenarios including: 1) there are no sages left after an incumbent sage king has passed away and 2) when an incumbent sage king has passed away, the subsequent sage is among his descendants.

69. I think this passage clearly shows that even though *Xunzi* may be against the abdication doctrine, he is not against the non-hereditary rule by virtue.

70. Of course, someone may raise a question. The reason that Shun's ascension is very much expected is entirely because Shun lived in the world of the sage Yao. In other words, if Shun were born in the world of tyrants like Kings Jie or Zhou, the situation would have been different. This is exactly the main point of *Qionгда yi shi*. In my account, however, *Xunzi* would not agree with the view of *Qionгда yi shi*. In the same chapter, "Zheng lun," *Xunzi* also points out that the depravity of Kings Jie and Zhou would drive the people away from them and move the people toward the virtuous kings such as Tang and Wu (*Xunzi* 18.75–86). Accordingly, in *Xunzi's* envisioned world, either orderly or disorderly, Shun's moral perfection would have led him to ascend the throne.

71. I should qualify this claim as *Xunzi's* view within the chapter "Zheng lun." For example, in the chapter "Chengxiang" 成相 (Working Songs), *Xunzi* advocated a contingent view similar to that of *Qionгда yi shi* (*Xunzi* 25.161–169). Accordingly, I think the view presented in "Zheng lun" has a particular political purpose.

political world ruled by sages, however, there is no sign of contingency. In such a perfect world, Shun would not need to worry about whether or not he will be recognized by the right ruler, and Yao would not need to worry about finding a worthy successor. In addition, external conditions that may facilitate or hinder the succession process were of no concern for Xunzi. Insofar as Shun's virtue and worth surpass the virtue and worth of others, his succession to Yao is unquestionable.

In my view, Xunzi manages this unique understanding of the Yao–Shun transmission because his viewpoint is *not of this world*.⁷² In contrast, the descriptions of Shun's ascension in the three previous texts are from this world, wherein various individuals with particular characteristics live together and interact with one another. However, in the world described in the *Xunzi* passages above, there are people, but these people are devoid of any distinctive characteristics. As Sungmoon Kim aptly observes, "Despite his occasional allusions to the sage-kings, Xunzi rarely described the heroic moral virtue of particular sage-kings. Instead, he explains the personal characteristics of the sage-kings or sage in highly abstract and general terms."⁷³ This is why Xunzi was able to describe the succession of Shun to Yao as, "One Yao succeeds another Yao." Yao and Shun are indistinguishable in the sense that they are the same sage kings, reigning and succeeding in sequence, implementing and protecting the same benevolent policies. They are the holders of perfect virtue and supreme capacity, who are apt to fill the most exalted position, Son of Heaven.

Even more surprising, these holders of supreme virtues are said not to age. Xunzi remarkably said, "There is such a thing as old age for the regional lords, but there is no such thing as old age for the Son of Heaven" (*Xunzi* 18.339–341).⁷⁴ One way to make sense of this puzzling and unscientific statement is that, as mentioned earlier, we need to separate the notion of Son of Heaven as an office from the person who occupies it.⁷⁵ In a simple sense, human beings grow old, but the political office

72. In this sense, the distinction between lesser and greater entities, that is, states and all under Heaven, plays a critical role. It is probable that Xunzi's discussion of states is something of the actual world (or non-ideal condition), whereas his discussion of the whole world relates to something beyond (or ideal condition).

73. Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism," 391. Yuri Pines also points out that Xunzi avoids a historical discussion in favor of a theoretical one. Pines, "Disputers of Abdication," 290. Also, in her discussion of Xunzi's treatment of hegemony, Loubna El Amine makes a similar argument distinguishing Xunzi's theoretical account from the historical account. She argues, "What Xunzi offers in the comparison between virtuous kings and hegemony is an idealized model of the latter, which can be seen as building upon the historical hegemon's achievements, to imagine what their principles of government should have been like." El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought*, 58.

74. 諸侯有老·天子無老。(Xunzi 18.339–341).

75. In his translation, Eric Hutton footnotes that this should not mean literally. Instead, he suggests that the Son of Heaven lives so well that he does not experience

does not. Therefore, when Xunzi claimed that the Son of Heaven does not get old, he may not mean the physical body of the ruler, but the nature of the office itself.⁷⁶ Prior to this puzzling remark, Xunzi enumerates in meticulous detail a variety of luxuries that the office of Son of Heaven provides in terms of garments, scents, foods, music, residence, transport, and attendants—material luxury in such abundance that this office does not allow ageing. Loubna El Amine points out that in Xunzi's vision, "The ruler has to be able to assume the removed aura of an overseer."⁷⁷ I think that the office of Son of Heaven, furnished with unreachable opulence and splendor, serves to bestow the very removed aura upon the ruler.

To summarize, what we find in Xunzi's account of the Yao–Shun transmission is a description that is not of the real world. In the world of Xunzi, there are no real people; people do not have distinct personalities and people are invulnerable to ageing. His world is a world of imagination, which perfectly embodies his political vision.⁷⁸ This perfect world runs by the perfect rule instituted by sage kings. Accordingly, there exist neither fortunate nor misfortunate events, and a virtuous person such as Shun is sure to ascend to the throne. Unfortunately however, there are no real people who can enjoy such perfection. Xunzi's perfect world turns out to be far removed from the ordinary lives of real people.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The story of Shun has drawn considerable attention throughout Chinese history because of its significance with regard to political succession. This article sheds light on a different dimension of the story by focusing on its relevance to the issue of contingency. Shun's ascension to the

the ills of old age. Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, 193.

76. Sungmoon Kim is right in pointing out that it is "the imperishability of kingship" that Xunzi was highlighting, not the imperishable body of the king. However, I would like to modify his statement, "the healthy body of the king signifies a viable body politic." In my view, the body politic itself is Xunzi's primary concern, not the king's healthy body. Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism," 395–96.

77. El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought*, 122.

78. In his comparison of Mengzi's and Xunzi's thought, Sungmoon Kim defies the conventional reading that aligns Mengzi with realism and Xunzi with idealism. Instead, he tries to find common ground in their constitutional political theories. Kim believes that both thinkers developed fairly realistic political theories. Kim, "Confucian Constitutionalism." In my account of Xunzi's view, however, I am not sure in what sense we can call Xunzi's political ideal, at least presented above, realistic.

79. Then, we may understand the perfect world governed by sages (the supreme entity) reflects Xunzi's ideal theory, while non-supreme entity governed by non-sages concerns his non-ideal theory. Eirik Harris argues that we can find Xunzi's political philosophy both an ideal theory and a non-ideal one. Eirik L. Harris, "The Role of virtue in Xunzi's Political Philosophy," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.1 (2013), 93–110.

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throne following Yao is one case in which notions such as Heaven (*tian* 天), timing (*shi* 時), and fate (*ming* 命) appear.⁸⁰ Accordingly, I used the four texts to showcase different ways of thinking about areas over which humans are believed to lack control, and examined why they offer different interpretations of the same event and what kinds of moral and political lesson they try to draw from this.

According to *Qionгда yi shi*, Shun's ascension was an utterly contingent event, because whether or not Shun was to meet the right ruler was beyond Shun's control. The author of this text thus advises Shun to cultivate his virtue and await the right ruler. Recalling that this text starts by mentioning a distinction between Heaven and man, we are told that the gentleman is a person with a clear understanding of the respective allotments of Heaven and man. What should be noted is that here "man" does not mean "human" in a generic sense, but instead "man" refers to a specific person in the narrative. In this text, the man is Shun, a prospective candidate for office. From Shun's point of view, it appears that the cultivation of his virtue is in his own hands; in contrast, whether or not a ruler in Shun's time has cultivated virtue enough to recognize another worthy is out of Shun's hands. As a result, in *Qionгда yi shi*, "what human[s] can control" is restricted to "what Shun himself can control," and all other things are up to Heaven.

Along similar lines, *Tang Yu zhi dao* admonishes rulers to recognize a worthy and appoint him as his successor. This is the responsibility of a ruler and something that a ruler can control. However, whether or not there is a person worthy to be chosen is beyond the ruler's control. This is why Yao also had to meet with the opportune time during which to recognize a worthy successor. From Yao's point of view, the cultivation of his virtue and the selection of the worthy are in his hands, but the presence of worthy in his time is out of his hands. Consequently, in *Tang Yu zhi dao*, "what human[s] can control" is restricted to "what Yao can control," and all other things are up to Heaven.

To sum up, *Qionгда yi shi* is written from the perspective of a person in a position to be chosen and *Tang Yu zhi dao* is written from the perspective of a person in a position to choose. Despite the fact that in both narratives

80. According to Robert Solomon, we do not appeal to fate or fatalism in just any situation or just any event in our lives. He notes, "Particularly subject to fate are those definitive moments in life: birth, marriage, children, going broke, finding oneself at war, or being caught up in a natural calamity and, of course, death." Robert Solomon, "Fate and Fatalism," *Philosophy East and West* 53.4 (2003), 436. Likewise, Chinese thinkers did not appeal to *ming* or *tian* for ordinary human experiences. Accordingly, the fact that the terms such as *tian* and *ming* are frequently related to the story of Shun's ascension demonstrates its momentous significance in human lives.

the chooser and the chosen are limited by what they cannot control, the degree of limitation they confront is dissimilar. The ruler (chooser) has much more control over the flow of events than the chosen, because the ruler has a choice to make upon his encounter with the worthy. In contrast, the employment of the chosen completely depends upon the ruler's decision. That is to say, the ruler is an active agent, while the chosen is a passive recipient. In addition, sheer statistics also matter. It is much more probable for a ruler to meet a man of worth among all his people, whereas it is much less probable for a worthy candidate to meet the right ruler. *Qionгда yi shi* and *Tang Yu zhi dao* thus tell us that, depending on which perspective one takes, the areas which one can and cannot control are defined differently. Not only that, but the degree of human control that one possesses is measured differently as well.

If "man" in these two texts is confined to the perspectives of a particular individual, in the Mencian *mise-en-scène* approach, "man" (as opposed to Heaven) seems to refer to the generic notion of human beings. Yao's virtue and Shun's virtue are considered to be what humans can control, whereas the duration of Shun's regency and the existence of rival candidates are ascribed to Heaven. However, one may ask: if Yao's and Shun's virtues are what they can control, is not Dan Zhu's unworthiness also what Dan Zhu himself can control?⁸¹ Logically, yes! In short, Dan Zhu's virtue should be within the area of his own control. Mengzi's ascription of his unworthiness to Heaven, however, suggests that "what man can control" is not attributed to the generic sense of human beings, either. The focus of the Mencian *mise-en-scène* approach still rests on the two main players of the narrative, Yao and Shun. Therefore, "what man can control" refers to "what Yao and Shun can control," and all other things are up to Heaven. Consequently, the Mencian third-person perspective is not a completely objective one.

Only does the *Xunzi* evade any particular perspective of individuals so that finally "man" is taken in a purely generic sense. When Xunzi said "what man can control," he indeed meant what humans in general can control. However, what humans in general can control does not seem to mean the cultivation of virtue of individual persons. Rather what humans in general control means a quite different thing for Xunzi: that is, the construction of human artifact. With ritual and rule, humans can impose a necessary order upon the world, turning a contingent place into a predictable place. With perfect political institutions established

81. It is noteworthy that Xunzi brought up another popular saying that Yao failed to transform his own son, Dan Zhu, and Shun failed to transform his stepbrother, Xiang. According to this popular saying, Dan Zhu's unworthiness is also the responsibility of Yao. 世俗之爲說者曰，堯舜不能教化，是何也？(*Xunzi* 18.351–352).

by sage kings, humans can remove contingent factors from the world. Paradoxically, the perfect world that Xunzi envisioned has no actual place in this world. No real people live in his perfect world. Conversely, this seems to give us an important insight that contingency must be a necessary part of the real human world.

This analysis and comparison of these four texts show that the areas over which humans have/do not have control is amorphous in nature, and that the concept of contingency depends very much on perspectives. Specified perspective and concrete context can give certainty of form to this vague and protean notion. Accordingly, in my appraisal, it is almost impossible to discuss the notion of contingency in general or abstract terms, and it is extremely difficult to garner and pin down the exact nature of contingency from multifaceted accounts. Nevertheless, it may be only through investigating these diverse accounts of contingency in human affairs that we come closer to grasping this tricky notion. The study of the four texts provided here is one such attempt, and going forward, we can add more accounts to this showcase to have a fuller understanding of the concept of contingency.

對舜即位故事的各種解釋和其“命”有關的研究

白英宣

提要

本文考察了舜登基的故事。此故事因其對帝位繼承的重要意義而在中國歷史上引起了極大的關注。然而，本文闡明了故事的另一個層面：它與權變理論的關聯性。為此，我探討了四篇文獻，即兩篇出土文獻和兩篇傳世文獻：《窮達以時》，《唐虞之道》，《孟子》，《荀子》。《窮達以時》是一個極端的例子，強調了舜完全靠偶然的機會成為一國之君，而另一個極端是《荀子》，則將這一事件解釋為必要事件，並強調了舜不能不繼承堯。其他兩篇介於兩個極端之間。我通過這四篇文獻的分析展示了人們對未知領域的不同理解方式。我的觀點是，此四篇文獻對舜登基的同一事件提供了不同的解釋，因為它們從不同的角度看待這一事件：從被選者的角度，從選擇者的角度，從場景的角度，以及從超出這一世界的觀點。我認為這些文獻的不同觀點導致對幾個相關問題有不同理解，例如人類對該事件的控制程度，該事件的重要特點，以及該事件所具有的道德和政治教訓的內容。

Keywords: Shun, Yao, Mengzi, Xunzi, excavated texts, royal succession, abdication, contingency

舜, 堯, 孟子, 荀子, 出土文獻, 王位繼承, 禪讓, 命