THE MEANING OF QING 情 IN TEXTS FROM GUODIAN 郭店 TOMB NO. 1
ATTILIO ANDREINI
UNIVERSITY OF VENICE

I

Ninety per cent of all the ancient Chinese manuscripts discovered over the past years contain texts that have no transmitted counterparts. This is the reason why the palaeographic material recently unearthed in tombs dating from the IV to the II century B.C. are changing our perception of early Chinese thought, adding much important information about philosophical debate in pre-imperial China.¹

In this paper I shall confine myself to discussing the meaning of qing 情 in light of the bamboo slip manuscripts excavated in 1993 at Guodian 郭店, Hubei 湖北 Province. As far as dating the archaeological site is concerned, scholars concur on a period ranging from 350-270 B.C.;² this means the texts found are obviously copies of still earlier testimonies.

The significance of the Guodian find cannot be overstated. In addition to unearthing a series of manuscripts throwing new light on the genesis of the Laozi 老子, the excavation also revealed a huge number of Confucian (or, even better “Ru 儒” or “Classicist”) texts, many without transmitted counterparts.³ One of these, known as Xing zi

¹ See Andreini 2005.
² For a detailed discussion, see Allan and Williams (eds.) 2000; Zhongguo zhexue, 28; Chen Guying (ed.) 1999.
⁴ A volume reproducing the photos of all 730 individual bamboo slips was published in 1998. See Guodian Chumu zhuan 郭店楚墓竹簡. In addition to three documents covering about two fifths of the Laozi and the XZMC, the main object of our study, the Guodian excavations unearthed the following texts (all without titles and mainly unknown before the excavation): Taiyi sheng shui 太一生水 (a short cosmogonic treatise in a “Laozi” vein); Ziyi 章衣 (which follows the homonymous chapter taken from the Liji 章衣); Lu Mu gong wen Zi Si 魯穆公問子思; Qiong da yi shi 晴達以時; Tang Yu zhi dao 唐虞之道; Zhong xin zhi dao 忠信之道; Cheng zhi wen 靜志之論. ²
ming chu (Human Natural Dispositions Arise from the Decree), is of fundamental importance to the present study, as it provides a thorough disquisition on the concept of qing.

I.1

Qing is certainly one of the most complex and elusive terms in the Chinese philosophical and non-philosophical lexicicon. Even restricting the field of analysis to instances of the use of qing within the corpus of pre-Han works, doubts would remain, since it is a concept which incorporates a whole array of notions, as Anne Cheng recently demonstrated convincingly. I have referred to the pre-Han corpus as a hypothetical dividing line in the semantic field of qing, precisely because certain critics have maintained that this term acquired its most common meaning of 'passions, sentiments, emotions' only during the Han period. A.C. Graham, one of the first to doubt the equivalence between qing and emotions or passions, has claimed that 'in pre-Han literature ... it never means 'passions' even in Hsîn-tzu ... as a noun it means 'the facts' ... as an adjective 'genuine' ... as an adverb common in Mo-tzu 'genuinely'.' 6 Graham also wrote that the qing of X is "what is genuinely X in it", "what X essentially is". Qing is also related to the act of naming because the qing of X is what X cannot lack if it is to be called X. 8

Shun Kwong-loi has also substantiated Graham's reading, accepting qing as "what a thing is genuinely like", though hesitating to follow Graham's translation of qing as 'essence' partly because he doubted the legitimacy "of ascribing an Aristotelian framework to early Chinese thinkers and partly because it is unclear that early Chinese thinkers drew a distinction between essential and accidental properties". 9

For Sarah Allan, too, qing did not acquire the sense of passions or emotions until the Han. Before that time, qing simply meant one's natural endowment, "but not specifically one's passions". 10

According to Chad Hansen, the qing "of a thing are the reality-related, accessible criteria that practically guide use of its name... Qing, in sum, are all reality-induced discrimination or distinction-marking reactions in dao executors", 11 where dao 道 means the guiding discourses through which we interpret the world. Hansen states that even for Xunzi 孟子 (ca. 340-245 B.C.), qing refers not to passions, but to those pre-social, natural responses to reality inputs. 12

Maurizio Scarlari adopts the definition of the 'most instinctual component of human nature', coining the categories 'instinctual nature' and 'emotional nature', 13 indicating the non-premeditated activity of xing which includes emotions, desires and feelings.

Beyond its 'philosophical' implications, it is inevitable that every investigation into qing has to take the fundamental, dominant meanings of the term as its starting point: on the one hand we have 'emotions, passions, feelings' and on the other the idea of 'real, true, genuineness'. Provided it is permissible, if we were to try to mediate on the main meanings of qing (on the one hand 'intrinsic characteristic, reality, truth', on the other "passions, emotions, feelings"), to give a holistic definition to the term, we would be powerfully persuaded to conclude that the idea of "truth" inherent in qing corresponds precisely to that constitutive need to respond to external promptings towards satisfying those desires 14 that emanate from our instinctive nature. 15

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10 Allan 1997, p. 85.
14 There is a large number of occurrences in the philosophical literature of the compound qingyu 傷欲 'essential desires', 'intrinsic desires', which, as we find in the Lâshi chaoting 呂氏春秋, may be assimilated into a set of 'basic instinctual or instinctive desires'. See the Qingyu section in Lâshi chaoting 26/a-8a. (The editions of all the traditional received texts quoted in this article are those of the Sibu beiyao.)
15 This seems widely shared by the authors of the Shangginsha 隋君書 and the Xunzi. See Shangginsha, 25b; Xunzi 11/4/60. For a strictly technical definition of qing in the Xunzi, see 82/22/2/3, 82/22/6/3. There is then a famous passage taken from the Liji which must necessarily be taken into account, precisely because it is usually cited in support of identifying qing with 'passions, emotions'. See Liji 9/23.
To investigate the breadth of the semantic range of qing it is necessary to verify the terms of the discussion of this concept at the heart of the Ruit tradition, and especially to take in the richness of the ethical and moral implications. Indeed, the idea that qing is a kind of essential natural character, of ‘basic motivation structure’ as Antonio Cua defines it, faces us with all the moral ambiguity inherent in this concept. If on the one hand it is intended as identifying those characters which show ‘what’ a specific thing genuinely is and how it behaves and develops if given appropriate support, or a matter of fact, on the other it cannot be denied that qing as ‘reality’ risks concealing a truth that arouses perplexity. In the name of this absolute fidelity to a genuine essence or disposition, a possible moral drift therefore appears: as Xunzi states, if followed with blind tenacity, adherence to qing results in immoral behaviours and gives rise to conflictual outcomes.

This brings us to a fundamental point in our discussion of qing: the entire pre-Han debate among the Ruit offers strong clues to the contrast between that which man instinctively is and that which he must acquire or develop in order to fully achieve a level of morality that raises him above beasts. In this sense, there were thinkers who wanted to investigate man’s inherent characteristics and his psycho-physical and emotional dynamics as objective, undeniable facts and avoiding any recourse to reassuring idyllic formulations about the real make-up of human nature.

Some recently discovered manuscripts such as the XZMC develop this critical tension between natural predisposition and the moral accomplishments man strives for, offering new theoretical solutions which require careful reflection.

II

The precise affiliation of the XZMC within the Ru tradition is the object of lively debate at the moment. Several scholars have extended the initial hypotheses of Li Xueqin 李學勤 who asserts that some works from the Guodian tomb such as Zizi 經衣, Waxing 五行 and Lu Mu gong wen ZI SI 魯穆公文子思 would have originally been parts of

the work attributed by tradition to ZI SI 子思 (ca. 483-402 B.C., grandson of Confucius and disciple of ZENGZI 曾子), or rather, the lost ZI SI 子思子思.19

The discovery of the XZMC has therefore helped rekindle interest in ZI SI and, as a result, also in the Zhongyong 中庸, a work which CHENG YI 程頤 (1033-1107) also attributed, not by chance, to the same ZI SI. His name is associated by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513)20 to the Zhongyong and other works that came to form part of the LIJI 禮記 during the Han dynasty: Biaoji 表記, the already cited Zyi, and Fangji 方記. But that is not all. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 B.C.) in his SHIJI 史記 rediscovers a very close link between ZI SI (still recognized as the author of the Zhongyong) and MENGZI 孟子 (ca. 390-305 B.C.), who it would seem had one of ZI SI’s later followers as a teacher: it is on the basis of this ‘descent’ that the critics (starting perhaps with Xunzi)21 have isolated the so-called SI MENG pai 思孟派 ‘ZI SI and MENGZI lineage’.

Similarities have then also been identified between the XZMC, other documents unearthed at Guodian such as the LIJUE 六德 and the thinking of GAOZI 告子 (420-350 B.C.) as referred to by MENGZI.22 Finally, scholars like CHEN Lai 陳來 have spoken in favour of attributing the XZMC to the Confucians ZI YOU 子遊 or GONGSUN NI 子溫尼子.23

Numerous doubts also assail the structure of the text. The rearrangement of the original order of the slips, completely upset by the obvious cutting of the strings that kept the slips together, is still under way, to the point that various hypothetical versions of the XZMC have

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16 This need to look more closely into whether qing should be interpreted as shi 實 ‘reality’, fact or ‘emotions’ in the Ru works has been recognized both by CHEN Gu-yong 1999, pp. 402-411, and by LI Tianhong 2001.
17 Cua 1977, p. 381.
18 See Xunzi 89/2357.
19 The ZI SI is mentioned in passage 30/16b of the Hanshu 漢書. For a discussion on the link between the ZI SI and the Guodian texts, see Li Xueqin 1998, pp. 28-30; XING Wen 1998; JIANG Guanghui 1998 and 1999; Gao Yi 1998, p. 33. For the relationship between the MENGZI 孟子 and the Guodian texts, including the XZMC, see: Gao Qyong 1999; LIANG Tao (which actually deals with the Shanghai manuscript Xingqingshan).
21 Xunzi confirm the link between ZI SI and MENGZI; more importantly, he highlights how such a bond would exist precisely in virtue of the fact that both support the doctrine of the waxing ‘five modes of conduct’, and perhaps precisely according to the ways shown in the two waxing manuscripts of Mawangdui and Guodian. See Xunzi 16/6/10.
23 CHEN Lai 1999; Ding Sixin 1999 (where certain similarities to the Yueji 楚記 are also developed), and 2000.
been presented. At this stage, however, it is possible to respond to some important questions of a textual nature thanks to the discovery of another almost identical manuscript source on bamboo, the so-called Xingqinglun 性情論 (Treatise on Natural Disposition and Qing), held in the Shanghai Museum, together with other texts on bamboo, whose contents are in part now available.

II.1

We will now look directly at the XZMC. The work begins with the following statement:

凡人雖有性心無常志物而後作待悟而後行待習而後定

Although every man possesses xing 性 (natural inclinations or dispositions), the heart/mind (xin 心) does not have an established intention. Only after having entered into contact with things (the heart/mind) is activated; only after being gratified does it take action; only after having practised will it be established. (slips 1 and 2)

But what is the content of xing?

喜怒哀樂之氣性也

Natural dispositions are made up of the vital breaths of pleasure, anger, grief and sadness. (slip 2)

The XZMC continues thus:

及其見於外物取之也

Having reached the moment when it (xing or 'pleasure, anger, grief and sadness') becomes externally visible, it means that things have taken a hold on it (or 'them'). (slip 2)

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24 See for example Lian Shaoming 2000.
25 The text in question, edited by Ma Chengyan, is Shanghai bowuguan zang zongguo Chu Zhouhu 《上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書》, Vol. 1. In 1994, the Shanghai Museum acquired a group of about 1,200 inscribed bamboo slips from a Hong Kong antique market. These may have been stolen from one or more late-fourth or early-third century B.C. tombs in the area of the old state of Chu 趙 (the same as Chuqian). These bamboo slips include a group of unknown early Confucian texts on music, poetry and divination. The first volume of Shanghai bowuguan zongguo Chu Zhouhu includes only three texts: the Xingqinglun, another version of the Zizi and an unknown text, named as Kongzi shi lun 孔子詩論. The Kongzi shi lun starts out with the statement attributed to Confucius according to which 'Musical performances should not be separated from qing 情', which is manifested outwards and fits with ritual elegance (li 禮). This is therefore a process which moves from nei 内 'inside, in the middle') to wai 外 'outside, external'.

The XZMC clearly establishes the relationship between xing and qing in the following passage:

Qing springs from xing. (slip 3)

This is an extremely important point, which we find twice more in the Guodian texts: first in slip 40 of the XZMC, with a slight variant, and subsequently in section II of the Yutong 語通, slip 1. As Lian Shaoming 邵瑞名 points out, the link between xing and qing is perhaps exemplified by the stillness-movement (jing-dong 靜動) relationship, which may be compared to that between water and waves, as mentioned in sub-commentary (shu 誦) of the Zhongyong. I would

26 This interpretation recalls the passage 10.160/19 from Dadai lishi 大戴禮記; see also Yi Zhouhu (58/33/15). The commentary of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) to the Zhongyong states that 'pleasure', 'anger', 'grief', and 'happiness, joy' are qing, but until they are not expressed, they are identified with xing. See Sixu jizhu 四書集注, p. 18.

27 See Lian Shaoming 2000, p. 36; Chen Ligui.
also consider a passage from the Yuanshenqi 援神契 chapter of the Xiaoqing 孝經 according to which xing represents the root (ben 本) and qing the extremity. In saying that qing is mo 末 'the final extremity, the last visible, external appendix', allusion is made particularly to the fact that there is also an inner-outer relationship between xing and qing, as already shown in Zhu Xi’s discussion in his commentary of the Zhongyang, taken up recently by Chen Lai, Xiang Shiling 向世陵 and Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇.28

Qing springs from xing, because it is activated by xing, which in its turn is stimulated by things. The substantial difference between qing and xing seems that the former represents an explicit manifestation, while the other refers only to an internal dimension, a potential, latent state. This is clear from XZMC, slip 6:

雖然性心弗取不出
Although [man] possesses xing and xin, neither manage to manifest themselves until [things] take hold of them.

Qing thus seems to all intents and purposes to reveal the contents of xing:

始終近情
The initial conditions are close to qing. (slip 3)29

終者近義
The final ones are close to yi 义 ‘moral propriety, righteousness’. (slip 3)

知【情者能】出之
He who understands [what pertains to qing is able to] manifest it. (slips 3, 4)

Should qing be manifested? Or dao? I lean towards the latter reading, even though the author perhaps refers to the ability to manifest a qing that is in full accord with the dao.

知義者能納之
He who understands what pertains to moral propriety is able to accommodate it. (slip 4)

The text thus gives us to understand that there is a double action, a double cycle: an expression from within and a development by absorption from without. As Yucong section I states:

人之道心由中出或由外入
As regards man’s dao, in some cases it arises from the inside, in others it enters from the outside. (slips 19, 20)

And again:

由中出者仁信
When it arises from the inside there is humanity, conscientiousness and trustworthiness. (slip 21)

The manuscript of Yucong I, unfortunately damaged, continues with “when it penetrates from outside...”. In my view it is not unlikely that the text originally read yi 義 ‘righteousness’, sheng 盛 ‘sagacity, singleness’, and zhi 智 ‘wisdom’, which, together with humanity, conscientiousness and trustworthiness, constitute the six virtues to which the Guodian text identified as Liude 六德 (The Six Virtues) found at Guodian refers. The connection with the doctrine Mengzi attributes to Gaozi,30 based on the principle according to which “humanity is internal, moral rightness is external (ren nei yi wai 仁内义外), seems quite clear. Slip 26 of the Liude contains the same formula, which adheres closely to both the moral vision of the XZMC and the contents of slips 22 and 23 of section I of the Yucong, which reads:

仁生於義義生於道道生於仁
Humanity springs from man, moral propriety from the dao. The former springs from the inside, the other from the outside.

Let us now go back and examine the XZMC:

好惡性也
Love and hate are matters of the natural dispositions. (slip 4)

所好所惡物也
That which is loved and that which is hated are the things. (slip 4)

善不【善性也】
Being good and being not 【good, is a matter of natural disposition】

(slip 4)

The text suggests that the subject of the last line in slip 4 is once again xing,31 as confirmed by the Shanghai Xingqiuqian manuscript. If the reading proposed here is correct, then it is natural to underline a connection with the doctrine ascribed by Wang Chong 王充 (27-97) to the Confucian Shi Shi 世穎, who argued that “there is both good and bad in qingxing 情性”.32 These positions are a long way from those expressed in the Mengzi, to the point that Chen Ning came to assert

31 Leading scholars agree in holding that xing is indeed the topic. The exceptions are Lian Shaoming 2000, p. 36, who is in favour of yi 義, and Ning Chen 2000, pp. 28, 40, who is in favour of xin 心.
32 Lüzheng 楊政, 13/36/8.
that the Confucian texts from Guodian could be seen as "forerunners of Xunzi’s theory of human nature as being evil". Nevertheless, I prefer to interpret these texts from Guodian, including the XZMC, as representing that branch within the Ruist thinkers which held that xing is equal for all men, but "morally ambivalent... both normative and factual, as well as being both incipient and accomplished". Such 'duality' and such 'suspension' in the interpretation of xing were already implicit in the words of Confucius, according to whom "men are close to one another because of their xing; they diverge from one another as a result of practice (xi 修").

Let us look at what emerges from slip 18, where we find:

聖人...理其情而出入之然後復以教
The Sage... regulating his qing, ensures that it communicates with the inside and with the outside (manifesting and acquiring as much as is required, charu 出入); after that, he turns to the teachings (of the Sages of old).

教以生德于中者也
The teachings (of the Sages) are the means by which virtue can spring forth from within. (slip 18)

禮作於情
Ritual ceremonies are produced by qing. (slip 18)

This statement is supported by section II of Yucong, slip 1, where we read "Qing arises from xing (qing chu yu xing 情出於性), followed by "Ritual ceremony springs from qing (li sheng yu qing 礼生於情)". At this point it is crucial to understand why the text states that ritual behaviour comes from qing and not from xing. The reason probably lies in the fact that xing also includes elements which would give vent to excessive and harmful emotions, such as hate, sadness or fear, if suddenly released in a ritual context. The action should thus be conveyed to ceremonial ritual, which has its origin in that very faculty of human nature whose role is to appropriately attenuate the intensity of feelings and emotions. So it is important not to confuse cause and effect: qing is not the source of feelings, but it is responsible for their visible effect.

It is now clear why slip 20 states:

君子美其情
The exemplary person embellishes his qing.

Ruist thought constantly stressed the need for behaviour to be refined within the ritual context. The expression of emotions is a constituent feature of human beings; we all need adequate gratification of desires and feelings, but with necessary constraints in order not to damage the self or others. The purpose of morality (renyi 仁義), ritual ceremony (li) and musical performance (yue 樂), is to give harmonic expression to feelings, and to prevent excesses that may interfere with social order.

An echo of this specific attitude emerges from the XZMC (slip 20), where it is stated that "the exemplary person embellishes his qing." It cannot be ruled out that the need to embellish qing is derived from the fact that qing in itself refers to a natural neutrality which is not necessarily 'ugly' or reprehensible (as Xunzi affirmed); a method of responding that is perhaps elementary in its mechanical development. On occasion it might refer to a blind appetite, but more usually it concerns a condition of pre-cultural, basic reflexes where there is not much room for moral consideration.

Qing is the starting point of man’s moral experience: this is why the exemplary person embellishes his qing and not his xing. More precisely, xing describes a pre/or moral seat of basic emotions and desires latent in all individuals, while qing describes the mode by which these emotions and desires are articulated, so it is not necessary to embellish an emotion or a latent feeling, but rather to measure the impact of their externalisation at the level of qing. Hence, as a response to external phenomena, qing is an attitude that an individual consciously cultivates and refines.

The text seems to confirm that moral differentiation amongst men occurs at a level of qing (because it invests the faculty of the aesthetic and ethical embellishment of one’s response to outside stimulus) and of xin 'heart/mind', which directs the will on a moral level. In Xunzi’s view, the exemplary person and the petty man therefore share similar

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[33] Chen Ning 2002, p. 36.
[34] Chen Ning 2002, p. 18.
[35] See Lunyu 樂語 17.2. The XZMC (slips 12 and 13) confirms that "it is precisely practice which nurtures xing".
[36] On the relationship between qing and ritual ceremony, see Yucong I, slip 31, which reads “ritual ceremony are in accordance with man’s qing (li yin ren zhi qing 礼因人之情), which is echoed in passage 2.64-12 of the Guanzi 郭子, in passage 302 of the Li j and in the Wenzhi 文子, where in passage 8/4/14, however, qing is replaced by xing.
[37] The Liji 725 similarly says that “the exemplary person acts according to the rites in order to adorn (shi 饋) his qing".
natural dispositions (xing); but although their desires and aversions are the same, they diverge on the choices they make guided by xin. There is a convergence on this point in the XZMC, slip 9, which states that “within the lands lapped by the four seas, all men share the same natural inclinations (xing); they differ from one another in the use of their mental faculties (xin)”.

It is therefore possible to conjecture that, in the Xunzi as in the XZMC, xing is a natural, amoral endowment. The two texts, at least apparently, also converge in declaring that “the qing of man, how unlively it is (ren qing shen bu met 人之情甚不美)” and that “the exemplary person embellishes his qing” (slip 20). Nevertheless, Xunzi reduces qing to a collection of egoistic appetites to be subjugated, while the Guodian texts record the need for a ‘lighter’ make-up.

We will now look at slip 29:

凡至樂必悲哭亦悲皆至情也
In general terms, the utmost happiness is necessarily the harbinger of affliction, just as weeping in its turn expresses affliction. These coincide with exerting qing to the utmost level of intensity.

Similarly, slips 42 and 43 state that:

用情之至者哀樂為甚
Those who exert qing to the utmost, will be highly exposed to grief and happiness.

Slides 37-40 again present qing as a term defining the genuine participation of man in that which he does. In this sense, qing is contrasted by wei 備 “that which is artificial, false, conscious acquisition”:

人之不能以偽也可知也
Man cannot manage to conceal his falseness without others noticing.

【其】其十樂其心必在焉
When he continues to commit the same error, it necessarily means that his heart/mind intentionally persist in it. (slip 38)

察其見者情安失哉
Carefully observing that which a person reveals of himself, could his qing perhaps be withdrawn from view? (slip 38)

忠情之方也
Conscientiousness is the orientation of trustworthiness. (slips 39, 40)

信情之方也

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38 Xunzi 90/23/76-77.
39 A similar claim is made in Yucong II, slip 29.

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Trustworthiness is the orientation of qing. (slip 40)

Qing arises from natural disposition. (slip 40)

Slips 50-52, whose content according to Chen Lai refers to the sovereign, are quite relevant to our inquiry:

凡人情為可欲也
In general terms, men’s qing is something that can be pleased. (slip 50)

In this case qing is a kind of ‘true emotional nature’ whose needs necessitate being met, and may be met. But qing also evokes an appeal to more sincere and authentic impulses as a guarantee that goes beyond the actual results of the action, as shown by the passages that follow:

荷以其情難為不欲
If we consider the issue in terms of (adherence to) qing, though he errs, he will not be blamed. (slip 50)

不以其情難為不貴
Whenever he disregards qing, even if he manages to overcome difficulties, his deeds will not be held in great esteem. (slip 50)

Qing also alludes to a kind of loyalty towards oneself as a prerequisite for the trustworthiness (xin 信) acquired in the eyes of others. The term xin 信 already appeared in slip 40 in relation to qing, and slip 23 also confirms such a relationship:

凡情其出於情也
All the sounds, when emerging from qing, are trustworthy. (slip 23)

The lines that follow show how complete adherence to qing ensures that the desired effect is achieved even before the action takes place:

荷有其情而未之為斯人信矣
If one shows genuine emotional participation, then one will enjoy the faith of others even before acting. (slip 50)

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40 A similar claim recalls what is read in the chapter Miachenxian 鏡稱賢 of the Huainanzi 淮南子. See Huainanzi 10/2a. On the similarities between the XZMC and the Huainanzi, see Liu Yuexian, 2000.
41 This also emerges from slips 46 and 47, where it is read that “he who, though being mild and living joyfully in harmony and peace with others, shows that he has not fully exercised qing, will have reason for regret”.
42 For other references to the relationship between qing and xin 信, see Lunyu 13/4, Liji 32/9, 32/26 (see those passages which occur in the Biaoji chapter: xin jin qing 信近情 “trustworthiness is close to qing”; qing ke xin 情可信 “qing could be trusted”; qing you xin 情有信 “qing has trustworthiness”); Zhuangzi 魏子 16/629, 19/7/3.
未言而信有美情者也
When someone is trustworthy without having spoken it means that he
has a refined (or beautiful) qing. (slip 51)
未教而民惟性善者也
He who, without the influence exerted by education, ensures the people
of constancy (of heart/mind), possesses a natural inclination toward
good. (slips 51, 52)

The final two passages are decisive in understanding the sense of qing
and allow us to point out its difference from xing.

Xing, natural human dispositions, appears to be a crucial of emo-
tional impulses, contrasting feelings that require the guidance of
heart/mind in order to firstly be bent to the will and to education,
and finally expressed in a morally suitable form. Xing is a gift from
Heaven, and coincides with the combination of elementary, pre-
cultural, psycho-emotional faculties, ready to receive the prompting
of objects by way of the senses.

Qing, at least in the XZMC, is identified rather as a direct eman-
ation of xing, or perhaps it is better to say as its 'function'. Qing is also
the starting point of man's moral experience (dào) and the origin itself
which inspires traditional rules of ritual behaviour (li).

Conclusions

The Guodian manuscripts reveal how the philosophical debate on qing
and on natural dispositions within the Ruist tradition goes beyond the
picture emerging from received texts like the Mengzi and the Xunzi.
For obvious reasons these two works provide only partial views of the
entire intellectual framework of the 4th-3rd century B.C.; moreover
because they were subsequently arbitrarily edited, which could have
contributed to the radicalisation of the theories involved. It has been
seen that as far as the relationships between dào, li, xìng, xìn and
qing are concerned, the tones are far more muted and more nuanced
than the definitive claims (perhaps more apparent than real) expressed
in the famous slogans 'human nature is good', and 'human nature is
bad', and the underlying theories found respectively in the Mengzi and
in the Xunzi.

In the manuscripts I have examined, the concept of qing that
emerges does not fit so neatly into the inner parameter of uncontami-
nated purity, an inner reality, an essential nature. Rather it suggests
a natural faculty concerned with the outward expression of feelings,
emotional states or instinctive reflexes. Obviously, when the visible
results of actions are faithful to a sincere feeling, perfect adherenee
to qing is achieved. In this sense, qing (contrasted with wei), becomes
quite similar to another key value of Confucianism: chéng 誠, the idea
of total adherence to the natural reality of one's heart.

The Guodian texts, and the XZMC in particular, show us that man's
moral path is a long process aimed at harmonizing the need to express
his own natural qualities, and the equally fundamental need to develop
his level of response to external phenomena through constant devotion
by way of learning and emulating the Sages.

In this sense, the attainment of mature virtue depends on the
measured display of one's own basic impulses, and on sincere participation
in the social ritual ceremony. This occurs when qing is able to act as a
perfect osmotic filter between natural emotivity and the ability to
translate such impulses into concrete, morally blameless acts.

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