

也。故置公卿大夫士。以飾法設刑。而天下治。其彊也。禁暴誅亂。而天下服。其弱也。五伯征而諸侯從。其剛也。內守外附。而社稷存。故秦之盛也。繁滋嚴刑。而天下振。及^其楚^越也。百姓怨望。而海內畔矣。故周五^{序得之道}序得^道。而千餘歲不絕。秦本末並失。故不長久。由此觀之。當先^之之統。相去遠矣。野諺曰。前事之不忘。後事之師也。是以君子爲國。觀之上古。驗之當世。參以人事。盛衰之理。審權勢之宜。去就有序。變化有時。故曠日長久。而社稷安矣。秦孝公

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The cover background is taken from the 1640 edition of the *Siji* (6.30b). It includes Sima Qian's observation that those who do not forget the past are masters of the future.

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A NEVER-STABLE WORD: ZHUANGZI'S ZHIYAN 卮言 AND 'TIPPING-VESEL' IRRIGATION

Daniel Fried

Introduction: "Goblet-words" as Metadiscourse

The *Entrusted Words* ("Yu yan" 寓言) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 has traditionally played a strong role in critical reception, not least because it marks the first occurrence of the compound *yuyan* 寓言 in extant texts. That chapter begins with a discussion of *yuyan* in conjunction with *chongyan* 重言 ("repeated words"), and *zhiyan* 卮言 (traditionally understood as "goblet words"), and opens as follows, with a statement of what appears to be the relative proportions of the linguistic modes in the text, and with an explication of their function, in what has been called a "Zhuangzian rhetoric":¹

寓言十九，重言十七，卮言日出，和以天倪。寓言十九，藉外論之。親父不為其子媿。親父譽之，不若非其父者也；非吾罪也，人之罪也。與己同則應，不與己同則反；同於己為是之，異於己為非之。重言十七，所以已言也，是為耆艾。年先矣，而無經緯本末以期年耆者，是非先也。人而無以先人，無人道也；人而無人道，是之謂陳人。

The entrusted words are nine of ten; the repeated words, seven of ten; "goblet words" come forth daily, and are harmonized with the heavenly divisions. As for the entrusted words which are nine of ten, these rely on external [figures] to make their points. A father does not act as his own son's matchmaker. For a father to praise his own son is not as [convincing] as a non-father's [praise]. This isn't my fault; it is the fault of people. People respond to what is like themselves, and oppose what is unlike themselves; the like they affirm and the unlike they deny. As for the repeated words which are seven of ten, these are used to end discussion, for they are the

1. For this phrase, the author would like to credit Geoffrey Lloyd, as well as an anonymous reviewer for *Early China*.

words of the venerable. One prior in years, and yet without warp or woof, start or end—he is not prior. If the person is not prior in this, he lacks the Way of being human; if the person lacks the Way of being human, then he is just called “old.”²

The description of the *zhiyan*, “goblet words,” will be analyzed at length below; for now, it is sufficient merely to note the context in which the term is introduced, and the importance of that context to traditional exegesis of the *Zhuangzi*. Both from cues in the passage itself, and also from the fact that the triad is stressed as a descriptor of Zhuangzi's oeuvre in the brief literary biography which appears in the final, “Tian xia” 天下 chapter,³ generations of readers have assumed that the three terms are offered as a uniquely useful moment of self-reference on the part of this cryptic text. The fine implications of the passage are not necessarily all clear, but despite irresolvable questions surrounding the applicability of all three terms, there is at least general consensus as to the meaning of the first two. *Yiyuan* seems to mean discourse which is “entrusted” to personae rather than spoken in the author's own voice, while *chongyan* is speech attributed to famous historical figures. Often, especially given the relative proportions of nine-tenths and seven-tenths accorded to the first two terms, the “repeated terms” are considered as a subset of the “entrusted words:” most of Zhuangzi's doctrines are attributed to fictional personae, and most such attributions are made to respected historical figures.

The passage is intriguing for several reasons. Because the “Tian xia” attribution of self-reflexive intent seems consistent with both this text itself and with its related intertexts in the “Qiwu lun” 齊物論, the passage in question does seem like a useful tool for analyzing the literary method of the early strata of the *Zhuangzi*. Moreover, the semiotic implications of “entrusting” an idea to seemingly foreign narrative immediately references the Zhuangzian critique of language which figures so prominently in the “Discussion on Making Things Equal” (“Qiwu lun”) chapter, and hence seems to act as a commentary upon the possible practical applications of that difficult-to-parse linguistic skepticism. Finally, of course, the status of this passage as offering the first extant instance of the compound *yiyuan* means that the passage is of further interest to assessing the later history of criticism. Of the three terms in the passage, the critical afterlife of *yiyuan* has obviously been the greatest; the modern usage of the word to mean “allegory” derives from its founding association with Zhuangzi's

actual literary practice, and of the three terms, *yiyuan* entered common critical parlance in a way that the other two did not.

However, while *yiyuan* may have been the most fruitful of the three terms in later critical history, the one which has always caused the most serious hermeneutical difficulties is the third, *zhiyan*. While the first two terms are both explained with relative clarity, and are obviously related in both being forms of attribution, the term *zhiyan*, apparently something other than attribution, is given exposition but no real explanation. The passage cited above continues on to give much more attention to the *zhiyan* than to the prior two terms:

卮言日出，和以天倪，因以曼衍，所以窮年。不言則齊，齊與言不齊，言與齊不齊也，故曰無言。言無言，終身言，未嘗不言；終身不言，未嘗不言。有自也而可，有自也而不可；有自也而然，有自也而不然。惡乎然？然於然。惡乎不然？不然於不然。惡乎可？可於可。惡乎不可？不可於不可。物固有然，物固有所可，無物不然，無物不可。非卮言日出，和以天倪，孰得其久！萬物皆種也，以不同形相禪，始卒若環，莫得其倫，是謂天均。天均者天倪也。

“Goblet words” come forth daily, and are harmonized with the heavenly divisions; through this they spread out and thus years draw to a close. If one does not speak, then there is evenness; but evenness [joined with] speech is uneven, and speech [joined with] evenness is uneven. Therefore it is said: don't speak. To speak without speaking, this is to speak one's whole life, to never cease speaking. If one never speaks, one has never not spoken. There is a source for the acceptable, and there is a source for the unacceptable; there is a source for [being]-so, and there is a source for [being]-not-so. How is it so? It is so because it is so. How is it not so? It is not so because it is not so. How is it acceptable? It is acceptable because it is acceptable. How is it unacceptable? It is unacceptable because it is unacceptable. Things certainly have that which makes them so, things certainly have that which makes them acceptable. Nothing is not so, nothing is not acceptable. If there were not goblet words to come forth daily, harmonized with the heavenly divisions, how could one last long? All things are seeds, and yield to each other through differing forms. Beginning and ending are as a loop, with no one to catch its principles: this is called the heavenly equality. The heavenly equality is the heavenly division.⁴

2. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Taipei: Dingyuan, 2001), 947–49.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

3. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1098.

4. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 949–50.

The curiously wrought gnomic verse which begins this passage previously appeared, in somewhat altered form, in the "Qiwu lun" chapter.⁵ Indeed, the linguistic and thematic similarities of the "Yu yan" and the "Qiwu lun" chapters are prime evidence for the generally-accepted position that the "Yu yan" passage, unlike most of the material in the "mixed chapters" (*za pian* 雜篇) should be accepted as material from the same early stratum of writing as the "inner chapters" (*nei pian* 內篇) generally.⁶ In regard to the description of the *zhiyan* cited above, all parts of the quasi-gnomic verse except for the first, the one which actually mentions *zhiyan*, are present in altered form in the "Qiwu lun," and also appear there conjoined with a similarly satiric attack on binary logic.

The "Qiwu lun" context is important, and will be invoked in the analysis below. However, because that earlier mention is less explicit, the definition of the term given in the "Yu yan" chapter has always been more prominent in commentarial history—a history both confused and confusing. Most commentators have construed the phrase as meaning "goblet words,"⁷ but the results of doing so are so uncertain that an alternate tradition, initiated by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (d. 306 C.E.) has read *zhi* 卮 as a substitution character for *zhi* 支, meaning that Zhuang Zhou's 莊周 words are *zhi* 支離, disorganized or chaotic.⁸ Much of the problem stems from deep confusion over what kind of vessel a *zhi* actually was. From the first extant commentary by Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312), the tradition has always had access to a very strange definition: "The *zhi* is a thing which tips over when full, and rights itself when empty, something which cannot remain stable" 夫卮，滿則傾，空則仰，非持固也。⁹ Not only is it difficult to understand what kind of a vessel would behave in such a way, but widely-distributed images of *zhi* from the late imperial period depict vessels that obviously would not behave in the way described by Guo. As early as the Song 宋-era art-historical catalogues *Kaogu tu* 考古圖 and *Xuanhe bogu tu* 宣和博古圖, the *zhi* is depicted as a

5. "Harmonize [antithomes] with the heavenly divisions; let them spread out through [such harmonization], and thereby will years draw to a close" 和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以壽年也 (Zhuangzi *jishi*, 108).

6. See, for example, A.C. Graham, "How much of Chuang Tzu did Chuang Tzu Write?" in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 294. More recently, Cui Dahua 崔大華 has suggested the reverse, namely, that the passage cited in n.5 is an editorial interpolation from the "Yu yan" chapter. See Cui, *Zhuangzi yanjiu* 莊子研究 (Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1999), 94. However, Cui does not attempt to account for the other similarities in the speculations on language in the "Yu yan" and "Qiwu lun" passages, and most studies dedicated to the *zhiyan* continue to treat the passage as "authentic" Zhuangzi.

7. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 948.

8. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 947.

squat and flat-bottomed bowl or vase which appears very stable.⁹ Later, the eighteenth-century *Xiqing gujian* 西清古鑑 depicts somewhat more rounded versions of the *zhi*, but these, too, are bottom-heavy and unlikely to tip spontaneously.¹⁰ Such images have been codified for modern readers by the entry on *zhi* (variant 卮) in the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典, which depicts short cylindrical vessels, excavated from a Phoenix Mountain (Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山) tomb, which appear similar to the pieces in the Song catalogues.¹¹ Given the problem of matching such images from the past millennium with older and apparently incompatible textual descriptions such as that of Guo, it is not to be wondered if the reception history has been somewhat muddled.

The multiplicity of meanings for the word *zhi* in early China will be traced in the next section. For now, it is only necessary to note that, while Guo Xiang's reading of an unstable vessel has always been available to traditional exegetes, and its influence has persisted into modern commentaries such as those of Zhang Mosheng 張默生,¹² Chen Guying 陳鼓應,¹³ and A.C. Graham,¹⁴ which all discuss the *zhiyan* as a metaphor based

9. Lü Dalin 呂大臨, *Kaogu tu* 考古圖, *Yingyin Wenyuan Siku quanshu* 景印文淵四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1983), 840.260; *Chongxiu Xuanhe bogu tu* 重修宣和博古圖, ed. Wang Fu 王黼, *Yingyin Wenyuan Siku quanshu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1983), 840.720–21.

10. Liang Shizheng 梁詩正 et al., *Xiqing gujian* 西清古鑑, *Siku yishu congshu* 四庫藝文彙書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1991), 841.763–74.

11. *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian, 1995), 1.918.

12. "The *zhi* is a funnel, and *zhiyan* is funnel-like language. A funnel is hollow and bottomless, so that if one pours in water, it immediately leaks out. . . . what Zhuangzi means by the *zhiyan* is that his language is without fixed opinion, like a funnel—it is simply channeling the sound of nature" 「卮」是漏斗，「卮言」就是漏斗式的話。漏斗之為物，是空而無底的，你若向裏注水，牠更立刻漏下，. . . 莊子卮言的取義，就是說，他說的話都是無成見之言，正有似於漏斗，他是替大自然宣洩聲音的 (Zhang Mosheng, *Zhuangzi xinshi* 莊子新釋, cited in Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今註今譯 [Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1977], 793). Zhang's explication is apparently an attempt to reconcile Guo with a passage from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 which will be discussed below.

13. "In my opinion, the *zhi* is a wine vessel, and when the *zhi* is full, it will naturally overflow. Hence Zhuangzi is using the "zhiyan" to explain that it isn't that his discourse is leaky, but that—because centerless—it flows naturally" 按：「卮」是酒器，卮器滿了，自然向外流溢，莊子用「卮言」來形容他的言論並不是漏卮的，乃是無心而自然的流露 (Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi*, 793).

14. "Spillover" saying, the most important, is traditionally, and this time plausibly, supposed to be named after a kind of vessel designed to tip and right itself when filled too near the brim. It is speech characterized by the intelligent spontaneity of Taoist behavior in general, a fluid language which keeps its equilibrium through changing meanings and viewpoints" (A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: the Inner Chapters* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1981], 107).

on vessels that tip; hence, this paper is not exactly a project of recovery. It is, rather, an attempt at clarification, for, although traditional and modern exegetes have acknowledged the *zhi* as a tipping-vessel, no one has yet explained what such a vessel was, or how it was used, and this absence has encouraged modes of critical explication which skip over the physical properties of the *zhi* too quickly. As a result, while there is widespread agreement on what Zhuangzi ought to be saying (that language is unreliable), there remains significant disagreement on the details. Thus, in recent Chinese-language scholarship, the *zhiyan* is variously explained as partially allegorical dialogue,¹⁵ as toast-like speeches ceremoniously offered to the reader,¹⁶ as words which are as endless as a circle¹⁷ as a circle encompassing *yuyin* and *chongyan* within itself,¹⁸ as a functional equivalent to the *fu* 賦 of *fu-bi-xing* 賦比興 poetic theory,¹⁹ and so on. English-language studies are fewer, but proceed upon similar lines: John Allen Tucker recognizes the nature of the vessel described by Guo but passes over the image itself for an immediate explication of Zhuangzi's semiotic vision,²⁰ more recently, and with more attention devoted to the commentarial history, Wang Youru has produced an engaging reading of the *zhiyan* which, perhaps because it argues against a semiotics of correspondence, declines to define the *zhi*.²¹ Perhaps most symbolic of the passage's reception history is Kuang-ming Wu, whose rhapsodic meditation on the *zhiyan* relegates the problem of the *zhi* itself to a footnote.²²

In such interpretations, there is general agreement that "goblet words" are unstable language, either a particularly unstable form of language peculiar to Zhuangzi, or Zhuangzi's conception of all language as an

inherently unstable phenomenon. But this is not a particularly difficult interpretation to make: any patient reader of the text knows very well, by this late chapter, what Zhuang Zhou thought of language, and the point is driven home again by the earnest speech against speaking which dominates the explanation of the "goblet words." Moreover, although one may never have seen a *zhi*, one knows it is some sort of vessel, and that it "pours out." Hence, we have a necessary conclusion of verbal fluidity, and the increasing frequency in the later imperial period of the use of the term *zhiyan* as an occasional term of modesty in self-deprecatory titles.²³

But unspecified instability is the easy part of interpretation. The problem, of course, is to understand how the instability of language is to be likened to the instability of a goblet. Is the choice of *zhi* a shorthand for all goblets, which are poured out by human volition upon certain occasions; and does the metaphor thereby signify human involvement in the universal instability of language? Or is the *zhi* chosen for some property peculiar to it, in which case "goblet words" would be the name of a literary mode? If the latter, is the mode separate from "imputed words" and "repeated words," or is it the category which encompasses both? And then again, what do the references to "day" and "year" signify? Are we to imply that this literary mode, or fundamental linguistic condition, is temporally inflected? How?

Most exegetes do not bother to answer such questions. We stick with what we know: the main point here is that Zhuang Zhou's language is unstable. The details are rather irrelevant, to be attributed to Zhou's poetically bewildering sense of humor. Or else the obscurity here is obscurity for obscurity's sake, to demonstrate the problems with language which are being asserted.

Moreover, it is hermeneutically satisfying to take the *zhiyan* as a sort of metadiscursive commentary upon its own inexplicability. This trick would be consistent with the technique of the prior passage: for the explanation of the "entrusted words" (*quyan*), is itself entrusted to a metaphor about the utility of matchmakers. The *chongyan* has no appreciable self-reflexive aspect, unless the exposition given is a quote from a now-forgotten source, but it is tempting to continue on and read the *zhiyan* self-reflexively nonetheless. When the text advocates a literary mode which is difficult to parse, but has something to do with instability and uncommunicativeness, it is easy to take one's own incomprehension as a demonstration of method.

15. Fan Mingguang 樊明光 and Zang Yaokai 臧姚科, "Huangniu yu jietuo—shixi Zhuangzi de jietuo zhi dao" 荒謬與解脫——試析《莊子》的解脫之道, *Luoyang daxue xuebao* 洛陽大學學報 19.1 (2004), 52.
16. Li Binghai 李炳海, "Zhuangzi de zhiyan yu xian-Qin zhujiu ci" 《莊子》的危言與先秦祝酒辭, *Shelun keji zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 1996.1, 191–96.
17. Gao Limin 高利民, "Yuyan de zhaoxia—Zhuangzi zhiyan chuyi" 語言的朝霞——《莊子》危言概議, *Lanzhou xuekan* 蘭州學刊 2005.2, 50.
18. Zhang Mei 張梅, "Chonggu Zhuangzi de yuyan yishu—zhiyan" 重估《莊子》的語言藝術—危言, *Dongfang luntan* 東方論壇 2003.2, 68.
19. Xiong Xianguang 熊憲光 and Chen Jln 陳勁, "Zhuangzi mimgming yishu shitan" 《莊子》命名藝術試探, *Xinan shifan daxue xuebao* 西南師範大學學報 1998.4, 85.
20. John Allen Tucker, "Goblet Words: The Chuang-tzu's Hermeneutic on Words and the Tao," *Chinese Culture* 25.4 (1984), 26.
21. Youru Wang, "The Strategies of 'Goblet Words': Indirect Communication in the Zhuangzi," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31.2 (2004), 195–218.
22. Kuang-ming Wu, "Goblet Words, Dwelling Words, Opalescent Words," *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 15.1 (1988), 6–7.

23. For example, the *Wild Words from an Arts Park* (*Yiyuan zhiyan* 藝苑危言) of Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–90), or the *Wild Words on Playing Stringed Instruments* (*Caoman zhiyan* 樂樓危言) of mathematician Mei Wendeng 梅文鼎 (1633–1721).

There is something to this line of reasoning, since the passage comes from the same linguistic playground as the "Qiwu lun," where such self-satirizing discourse clearly does operate. However, the metadiscursive possibility of this later passage has been accidentally exaggerated by loss of context: the word *zhi* is unstable, but not merely through Zhuang Zhou's cryptic usage. Rather, careful attention to other classical texts, combined with attention to recent archaeological research, can provide evidence that the polysemy of the word *zhi* is very old, and certain strands of traditional exegesis of the passage can be traced to misunderstandings of what a *zhi* was for the *Zhuangzi*.

The Possibility of an Evolving *Zhi*

Although the *zhi* has changed repeatedly in ways which will be described below, there has been little exegetical consciousness of the changes, or even of the possibility of change. Nonetheless, the uncertainty of the word did not have to remain a secret throughout the traditional period, as the first evidence of multiple definitions has always been available in the text of the *Han Feizi*. That text contains the only early metaphorical use of the word *zhi* besides the examples in the *Zhuangzi*. There is a double-narrative of the goblet, offered in the "Wai chushuo you shang" 外儲說右上 chapter:

堂谿公謂昭侯，曰：「今有千金之玉卮，薄而無當，可以盛水乎？」昭侯曰：「不可。」「有瓦器而不漏，可以盛酒乎？」昭侯曰：「可。」對曰：「夫瓦器至賤也，不漏，可以盛酒。雖有乎千金之玉卮，至貴，而無當，漏，不可盛水，則人孰注漿哉？今為人主而漏其群臣之語，是猶無當之玉卮也，雖有聖智，莫盡其術，為其漏也。」昭侯曰：「然。」昭侯聞堂谿公之言，自此之後，欲發天下之大事，未嘗不獨寢，恐夢言而使人知其謀也。

一曰。堂谿公見昭侯曰：「今有白玉之卮而無當，有瓦卮而有當，君渴，將何以飲？」君曰：「以瓦卮。」堂谿公曰：「白玉之卮美，而君不以飲者，以其無當耶？」君曰：「然。」堂谿公曰：「為人主而漏泄其群臣之語，譬猶玉卮之無當。」堂谿公每見而出，昭侯必獨臥，惟恐夢言泄於妻妾。

Duke Tang Xi said to Lord Zhao, "Now, suppose you had an opulent jade goblet, but it was open rather than stoppered [at the bottom]; could it be used to hold water?" Lord Zhao said, "No, it couldn't."²⁴ "If one had a clay vessel that did not leak, could this be used to hold

wine?" Lord Zhao said, "Yes, it could." [Tang Xi] replied, saying, "The clay vessel is extremely cheap, but as it does not leak, it can be used to hold wine. Though one has an opulent jade goblet, and though it be extremely precious, if it is not stoppered and leaks, it cannot even hold water, so who would pour liquor into it? Now, when you are the ruler of men, and you let leak the advice of your assembled ministers, this is like an unstoppered jade goblet: though you might have sagely wisdom which no one could desecr, it will leak out." Lord Zhao said, "It is so." After Lord Zhao heard the words of Duke Tang Xi, ever afterward whenever he wished to carry out some grand affair, he always slept alone, lest he spoke in his sleep and let people know of his plots.

Another version says: Duke Tang Xi saw Lord Zhao and said, "Now, if you had an unstoppered goblet of white jade, and a stoppered clay one, and you were thirsty, which one would you use to take a drink?" The prince said, "I would use the clay goblet." Duke Tang Xi said, "Though the goblet of white jade is beautiful, the reason you would not use it to drink would be because it is unstoppered?" The prince said, "Yes." Duke Tang Xi said, "To be the lord of men and let leak the words of one's assembled ministers, this is like an unstoppered jade goblet." Every time Duke Tang Xi appeared and let, Lord Zhao would be sure to sleep alone, as he was afraid lest he let his words leak to his wives or concubines.²⁴

The differences between these two versions of the story are not often remarked upon, because they are so similar, and because the moral of the story is clear and identical in both cases. For a reader interested in the *Han Feizi* as political philosophy, the difference between the versions is reducible to a quibble over precise wording.

However, if one is trying to trace the history of the *zhi*, there is a significant discrepancy between the versions. In the second version, both the jade and the clay objects are *zhi* while the first version of the narrative only considers the jade to be a *zhi* and makes it plain by contrast that the clay is some other kind of anonymous vessel (*qi* 器). The difference between clay and jade is not merely one of material, or even of class status: it is a difference in field of signification. If a *zhi* is a *zhi*, irrespective of the material, then *zhi*-ness consists only in form: the word must mean a drinking-vessel of a particular shape. If, on the other hand, a *zhi* can only be made of an expensive material, then class-associations, and perhaps ritual or ceremonial usage, are part of the word's basic

24. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Han Feizi jishi* 韓非子集釋 (Taipei: Guojia, 1983), 735–36.

signification. Presumably, the different sources from which Han Fei (or his early redactors) culled these narratives had different understandings about whether a *zhi* was simply a vessel of a given shape, or a vessel with definite class associations.

The point is important because there is abundant evidence that mutually contradictory understandings of the *zhi* were simultaneously in circulation, at least until the end of the Six Dynasties period. The earliest and best-attested usage of the word is to describe the sort of high-class jade vessel understood by the first of the Han Fei narratives above. In the *Records of the Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記), the vessel is almost always mentioned in the context of highly formal occasions, often in conjunction with toasts for longevity and ritual dedications or contracts. So, for example, in the history of Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202), Sima Qian 司馬遷 writes, “The Earl of Xiang went in to see the Duke of Pei. The Duke of Pei raised a goblet of wine to his health, and proposed a marriage [between their houses]” 項伯即入見沛公。沛公奉卮酒為壽，約為婚姻。²⁵ Or, more significantly, in the history of Gaozu 高祖 (Liu Bang 劉邦, 247–195): “When the Weiyang palace was completed, Emperor Gaozu assembled the nobles and ministers, and had wine set out in the Anterior Hall of the Weiyang Palace. Then Gaozu raised a jade goblet, and toasted the health of the Taishang huang (his father)” 未央宮成。高祖大朝諸侯？臣，置酒未央前殿。高祖奉玉卮，起為太上皇壽。²⁶ The same narrative is told in the *History of the Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), with slightly different wording but retaining the use of the *zhi*.²⁷ Moreover, the Later Han authority on rites, Ying Shao 應劭 (fl. 189–194) wrote in his commentary to these lines, “A regional drinking-vessel for ritual use; formerly made of horn, holding four *sheng*; formerly the word *zhi* 卮 was written *zhi* [or *di*] 觥” 鄉飲酒禮器也。古以角作，受四升。古卮字作觥。²⁸ According to the *Record of Luoyang Monasteries* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記), there were a number of elegantly carved red jade goblets (*chi yu zhi* 赤玉卮) among the treasures of the imperial house during the Northern Wei.²⁹ These are the earliest independent corroborations of the *Zhuangzi* and Han Feizi usages, as there are no other pre-Qin texts which speak of *zhi*.³⁰

25. *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982), 7312.

26. *Shi ji*, 8, 386.

27. *Han shu* 漢書 (1962; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975), 1, 66.

28. *Han shu*, 1, 66.

29. Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaoshi* 洛陽伽藍記校釋, ed. Zhou Zunuo 周祖彜 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963), 165.

30. Li Binghai has identified the Warring States *zhi* 卮 with the Shang and Western Zhou *zhi* 卮, usually described as bronze ware (Li, “*Zhuangzi* de *zhiyan*,” 192). The identification may be doubtful. However, if one were to accept it, then there are numerous

The ceremonial context is not necessarily the only possible field for conceiving the usage of the *zhi*-as-goblet. For example, the definition of the object given in the *Shuowen* 說文 is “a round vessel . . . used for moderation in drink and food” 卮，圓器也。所以節飲食。³¹ However, this rather odd explanation is not supported by other sources, and it is this decorous, high-class connotation, and connection with toasts for longevity which attached to the *zhi* in the mainstream of later literature. So, for example, Bao Zhao 鮑照 (c. 421–465) wrote, in one textual variant, “I offer you a goblet of fine wine” 奉君卮之美酒。³² In the Tang, we have Zhang Ji’s 張籍 (768–830) lines, “I place a jade goblet full of wine before you, and, bowing, wish you immortality” 玉卮盛酒置君前，再拜願君千萬年，³³ and Du Mu’s 杜牧 (803–852), “News of victory is congratulated at Cloud Terrace, the officials bow and offer longevity-goblets” 捷報雲臺賀，公卿拜壽卮。³⁴ In the Ming 明, Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500) writes in the preface to a birthday-poem, “As I was stuck at my post, I wasn’t able to toast the longevity of ‘Liangshan’ with a goblet. Therefore, I composed these lines as a [sort of] toast” 限於官守，不得奉卮酒為兩山壽。為作長句以壽之。³⁵ And so on; examples are numerous.

The great problem with this tradition is that it is apparently completely alien to the description of the *zhiyan* in *Zhuangzi*: “Goblet words come forth daily,” but the *zhi* of the mainstream tradition is not a container for daily use; it is a specialized goblet for elite usage on ceremonial occasions. Harmonizing the “heavenly divisions” might seem appropriate to a vessel with quasi-ritualistic association, but “[pouring] out” (*chu* 出) would not—the ritual associated with the *zhi* is ritual toasting, not libation. And again, *manyan* 曼衍 is hardly appropriate to the metaphor—it would be an awful mess if meant to describe alcohol. However, the real impossibility

references to the vessel in other relevant early texts. Most of these speak of the vessel as a high-class goblet, just as Sima Qian and Ban Gu 班固 later do of the other *zhi* 卮. For example, the *Record of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記) dictates, “The venerable are to raise goblets, and the subalterns to raise horns” 尊者舉卮，卑者舉角 (*Li ji Zhang zhu* 禮記鄭注 [Taipei: Xuehai, 1979], 7307). For a description and illustration of the *zhi* (卮), see Guo Baojun 郭寶鈞, *Shang Zhou tongqi qun zongtie yanjiu* 商周銅器群綜合研究 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1981), 144 and accompanying plates.

31. *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Taipei: Dingwen, 1993), 10, 1084.

32. “Ni Xinglu nan’ shiba shou” 擬行路難十八首, Bao Canjun 鮑參軍集注 (Taipei: Muddo, 1982), 224.

33. “Puange xing” 短歌行, Zhang Ji 張籍集注, ed. Li Dongsheng 李冬生 (Hefei: Huangshan, 1989), 73.

34. “Shaonian xing” 少年行, Du Mu 杜牧全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1997), 54.

35. “Shou Zhang fuzhou liushiyi shi xu” 壽張湖州六十一詩序, Baizhuazi quanji 白沙子全集 (Taipei: Heliuo tushu, 1974), 1, 247.

of reading the text as referring to the ceremonial *zhi* is the final phrase: "And thereby years draw to a close." The primary association of the *zhi* is its usage in proposing toasts of longevity—*qiongnian* 壽年, suggesting death, is exactly the wrong thing to say while holding a *zhi*—a context of toasting would presumably demand "lengthen years" (*qiannian* 延年) or something equivalent. If this text is subject to interpretation at all, it must be referring to something other than the goblet of the above-cited passages.

Thankfully for the work of interpretation, the same word is used to refer to very different kinds of vessels in the ancient period; and prior to the Tang, the above usage to describe ceremonial goblets co-exists with a usage to describe something very different, and much stranger: the self-tipping and self-righting vessel mentioned by Guo Xiang, above. This explanation is cryptic enough in itself, especially if one assumes that the *zhi* must be a ceremonial goblet. Later critics do indeed assume that, and are forced to understand Guo as saying that one tips a goblet (to drink from it) when it is full, and that one sets it upright on the table again when one has drained it dry. So, for example, the Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 632–650) subcommentary to Guo writes, "A *zhi* is a wine vessel . . . This *zhi* is tipped over when full, and is tipped when empty: its fullness or emptiness depend on things, and its tipped or upright state depend on people" 卮，酒器也。 . . . 夫卮滿則傾，卮空則仰，空滿卮物，傾仰隨人。³⁶ The subtle shift between Guo's and this gloss tells us what has been lost between the Han and the Tang: Guo Xiang does not feel the need to define what a *zhi* is, he only points out its most important property—instability. The note is laconic, and one cannot be certain of whether *qing* and *yang* are meant as active or passive verbs; nonetheless, the natural flow of the sentence implies no personal agency. Indeed, the final phrase militates against it: "one cannot hold it fast" would be a non sequitur. The implication of a natural reading of Guo is that the goblet is unstable in itself, not that it is tipped or righted by a human agent. Obviously unaware of any meaning of *zhi* other than that of the table-goblet, Cheng offers what must have seemed a sensible clarification of Guo: when it is full, one pours out the goblet (i.e., drinks from it); and when one has poured it all out, one stands it upright on the table again. Hence, the fullness or emptiness depends on the object itself, but its upright or inclined position depends on human agents.

However, Guo's actual reference is to an object described in greater detail in the *Xunzi* 荀子:

36. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 947.

孔子觀於魯桓公之廟，有敬器焉，孔子問於守廟者曰：「此為何器？」守廟者曰：「此蓋為宥坐之器。」孔子曰：「吾聞宥坐之器者，虛則欹，中則正，滿則覆。」孔子顧謂弟子曰：「注水焉。」弟子挹水而注之，中而正，滿而覆，虛而欹，孔子喟然而歎曰：「吁！惡有滿而不覆者哉！」子路曰：「敢問持滿有道乎？」孔子曰：「聰明聖知，守之以愚；功被天下，守之以讓；勇力撫世，守之以怯，富有四海，守之以謙：此所謂挹而損之道也。」

Confucius looked into the ancestral shrine of Duke Huan of Lu, and there was a tipping-vessel there, and Confucius asked of the shrine steward, "What is this vessel?" The steward answered, "This is a 'Vessel to Assist the Throne.'" Confucius said, "I have heard that 'Vessels to Assist the Throne' slant when they are empty, stand upright when half-full, and tip over when full." Confucius looked at it and said to his disciples, "Pour water into it." So his disciples brought water and poured it in: it stood upright when half-full, tipped over when full, and then slanted when empty. Confucius heaved a long sigh, and said, "Oh! How could there be that which is full and does not tip over?" Zilu said, "May I ask, is there a Way of maintaining fullness?" Confucius said, "Perceptiveness and sagely knowledge is to be kept by foolishness, a worldwide achievement is to be kept by yielding, bravery in protecting the world is to be kept by cowardice, the prosperity of the globe is to be kept by modesty, and this is what is called the "Way of Bringing through Losing."³⁷

Given a knowledge of the modern high-school level physics curriculum, it is not hard to imagine the design of such a vessel: the handles, acting here as the pivot point, must be located below the center of gravity of the vessel when full. Further detail will be left for the analysis of actual archaeological finds of such vessels given below; for now, it is enough to note that the similarity of Guo's phrasing to that of the *Xunzi* is unmistakable, and argues strongly for the identification of the *zhi* of *Zhuangzi* with the *qiji* (欹器) of *Xunzi*.

Such an identification is further supported by the *Wenzi* 文子, which attests: "The ancient monarchs had a warning-vessel, called an 'urging-goblet.' This righted itself when poured out, and turned over when filled" 三皇五帝有戒之器，命曰卮。其冲即正，其盈即覆。³⁸ The *Wenzi*, of course, a problematic text, and one needs to use it cautiously in attesting

37. *Xunzi* 荀子, ed. Liao Jiliang 廖吉康 (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 2002), 2:2145.

38. Xu Lingfu 徐靈府, *Tongxuan zhenjing* 通玄真經 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985), 56.

a pre-Qin identification of the *zhi* with the *qiqi*. Traditionally attributed to a student of Laozi named Xin Jian 辛鉞, the earliest extant text is from a Tang-era commentary by Xu Lingfu 徐靈府; for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the received text was considered a simple forgery by Xu. However, in 1973, a partial text of the work was discovered on bamboo strips in a Han-era tomb in Hebei, and this text was found to have numerous portions similar or identical to the Xu Lingfu text. Since the complete bamboo text remains were published in *Wenzu* 文物 in 1995,³⁹ research has accelerated,⁴⁰ and the emerging consensus is that the bamboo-strip text is probably a late Warring States document, and that the version received by Xu Lingfu was originally itself a commentary (partially derived from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子) in which the notes had been incorporated into the main text, and that this version of the text dates to the Later Han or Wei 魏.

The bamboo strip text is far from complete, with more lacunae than text and little survives from the section cited above, from the “*Jiu shou*” 九守 chapter of the Xu Lingfu text. It is reasonable to suppose that the citation is a later commentarial addition, rather than a legacy of a pre-Qin original. Apart from the relative stylistic fluidity of this text in comparison with the bamboo-strip version, the context of the chapter makes it obvious that this note on the “urging goblet” is a commentarial excursus with little relation to the main subject. However, the chapter should have reached something like its present form by the Wei at latest, for Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) cites a sentence from this section in his “Petition to be Re-united with Family” (*Qiu tong qinpin biao* 求通親表). The sentence, “Neither put prosperity first, nor favor misfortune” 不為福

始，不為禍先, is part of a longer extract,⁴¹ nearly identical to a passage in the seventh *juan* of the *Huainanzi*.⁴² However, Cao Zhi attributes it to the *Wenzi*, which suggests that even this admittedly spurious chapter still must have a relatively early provenance, most likely in the Later Han. For, in a series of cautious and detailed articles comparing the texts of the bamboo-strip *Wenzi*, the Xu Lingfu *Wenzi* and the Gao You 高誘 (c. 168–212) commentary on the *Huainanzi*, He Zhihua 何治華 has persuasively argued that major portions of the bamboo-strip text must date to the late Western Han, and that the Xu Lingfu text was fixed by the late Eastern Han.⁴³

Hence, while the *Wenzi* text is not a pre-Qin example of identification of the *zhi* with the *qiqi*,⁴⁴ and, like the slightly later Guo Xiang commentary, seems only to date such an identification to the Later Han, a careful reading of the *Wenzi* and the Guo Xiang *Zhuangzi* commentary in conjunction provides clear evidence that the identification is significantly older. The key is that both Guo Xiang and the *Wenzi* redactor have changed the *Xunzi* formulation, and both edits are apparently due to the misunderstanding of a received formulation. The first phrase in the *Xunzi* description, “it is upright when half-full” (*zhong er zheng* 中而正), is perhaps the most difficult to understand out of context, and Guo Xiang simply eliminates it from his description of the *zhi*. The *Wenzi* redactor apparently assumes a character substitution, and tells us that the vessel “pours out and is righted” (*chong ze zheng* 沖則正).⁴⁵ Both solutions accomplish the same thing: they take a text which describes a three-position vessel (upright,

41. Zhao Youwen 趙右文, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校注 (Taipei: Mingwen, 1985), 437.

42. Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jiyie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1985), 65.

43. These articles have been collected and reprinted, with slight revisions, in He Zhihua 何治華, “*Wenzi*” *zhuzuo nian dai xin zheng* 《文子》著作年代新證 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2004).

44. There is solid linguistic evidence that portions of both the bamboo-strip and the Xu Lingfu texts date to the Warring States era (cf. introduction to *Wenzi jiaozhu* 文子校注, ed. Peng Yushang 彭裕尚 [Chengdu: Sichuan, 2006], 2–4). Weighed against He Zhihua’s evidence, mentioned above, for a later date for other portions of the text, this pre-Qin linguistic evidence can at most point to a slowly-evolving text. For present purposes, it is merely helpful to note that evidence of partial Warring States provenance closely tracks with the partially-altered formulation from the *Xunzi* discussed below.

45. Alternatively, it is of course possible to assume with Peng Yushang, *Wenzi jiaozhu*, 67, and Zhao Yali 趙雅麗, *Wenzi sixiang ji zhuyuan* 《文子》思想與竹簡《文子》[Beijing: Beijing Yanshan, 2005], 88) that it is the *Wenzi* text that contains a character substitution. However, it seems that Xu’s addition of a “water” 水 radical is a less likely accident than his assumption of a dropped radical, especially as the reading of *chong* makes more sense for one who has not seen such a vessel.

39. Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo Dingzhou Han jian zhengli xiaozu 河北省文物研究所定州漢簡整理小組, “Dingzhou Xi-Han Zhongshan Huaiwang mu zhujian *Wenzi* shuwen” 定州西漢中山樞王墓竹簡《文子》釋文, *Wenwu* 文物 1995.12, 27–34. There is currently no published scholarly translation or monograph on the *Wenzi* in English, apart from two graduate theses (Paul van Els, “The *Wenzi*: Creation and Manipulation of a Chinese philosophical text” [Ph.D. diss., Leiden, 2006]; Inure Galambos, “The Dingxian *Wenzi*: Translation and Prolegomena,” [Master’s thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1998]). However, there is a French translation and analytical commentary by Charles Le Blanc, *Le Wen zi: à la lumière de l’histoire et de l’archéologie* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2000), which includes comparison with the *Huainanzi* version as well as some discussion of the reception history of the text.

40. See, for example, Zhang Fengqian 張豐乾, “Shulun zhujian *Wenzi* yu jinben *Wenzi* de guanxi” 試論竹簡《文子》與今本《文子》的關係, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 1998.2, 117–26; and Ge Gangyan 葛剛岩, “You chutu zhujian *Wenzi* kan jinben *Wenzi* de chengshu zuben” 由出土竹簡《文子》看今本《文子》的成書祖本, *Gujizhenshi yanjiu xuekan* 古籍整理研究學刊 2004.1, 10–18. The latter article in particular includes a brief but useful review of the scholarly literature to date.

inclining, or flipped) and edit it to describe a two-action vessel (self-righting or self-tipping). It is the sort of edit that would be made when no more such vessels are available to be known through experience, and the interpreter is attempting to deal with a received formulation.

This point is confirmed by a perhaps more obvious facet of the *Wenzi*: the fact that the "urging goblet" (*youzhi*) of the *Wenzi* passage cited above is described as a possession of the mythological kings (*sanhuang wudi* 三皇五帝) rather obviously precludes it being a common object at the time of the text's composition. Furthermore, since Duke Huan of Lu (d. 694 B.C.E.) was obviously not nearly ancient enough to be covered by such a phrase, the redactor was probably not working directly from the text of the *Xunzi* in writing this note.

Furthermore, we have direct evidence attesting that the tipping-vessel was an exclusively elite object by the Later Han, and that it entirely disappeared with the fall of the dynasty. According to the *jin shu* 晉書 biography of Du Yu 杜預 (222–285), that minister ran into difficulties when attempting a reconstruction of the *qiqi*: "The tipping-vessel of the Zhou ancestral shrine was still by the throne when the Han came to the Eastern Capital. In the chaos at the end of the Han, it was kept no longer, and [knowledge of the] form and construction were lost" 周鼎敬器，至漢東京猶在御坐。漢末喪亂，不復存，形制遂絕。⁴⁶ Not only do we learn from this quote that the tipping vessel itself was lost by the end of the Han, we know that it was exclusively a royal object by that point—if it was in common use, its form would have been common knowledge, and hence not susceptible to sudden loss. Indeed, this had probably been the case for centuries, as something similar must be implied by the *Xunzi* passage: Confucius has previously heard of the tipping-vessel, but never seen one until encountering the model on display in the ancestral shrine of Duke Huan.

Hence, by the Later Han there could not have been any clear idea of what a tipping vessel was or how it functioned among those who had not seen one at court. When both Guo Xiang and the *Wenzi* not-quite-accurately describe the *zhi* as a tipping-vessel, the vagaries of their understanding, as revealed by their misunderstandings of the phrase *zhong er zheng*, are not to be understood as evidence of any distinction between the *zhi* and the *qiqi*, but rather as simple ignorance of the exact function of that object, to which either name could be applied.

Even assuming the identity, or at least functional similarity, of the *zhi* with the *qiqi*, one would still gain no strong insight into the *Zhuangzi*

46. *Xinjiaoben jin shu* 新校本晉書, ed. Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 (Taipei: Dingwen 鼎文, 1976) ("Lie zhuan: Du Yu" 列傳: 杜預), 34.1028.

from textual evidence alone. For, as the above references demonstrate, texts alone, in the absence of direct experience of the object, only resulted in confusion. The *jin shu* text testifying to the loss of the *zhi* is given in the context of Du Yu's frustrating attempt to reconstruct one without a working model. Later imperial history is littered with references to similar attempts to recreate the object.⁴⁷ Time alone could only carry us farther from the source of Zhuangzi's reference, were we only to work from the same set of silent texts, never obtaining a model of the exact *zhi* to which the *Zhuangzi* refers, never knowing an origin or function that could have been referenced by the metaphor of the *zhiyan*.

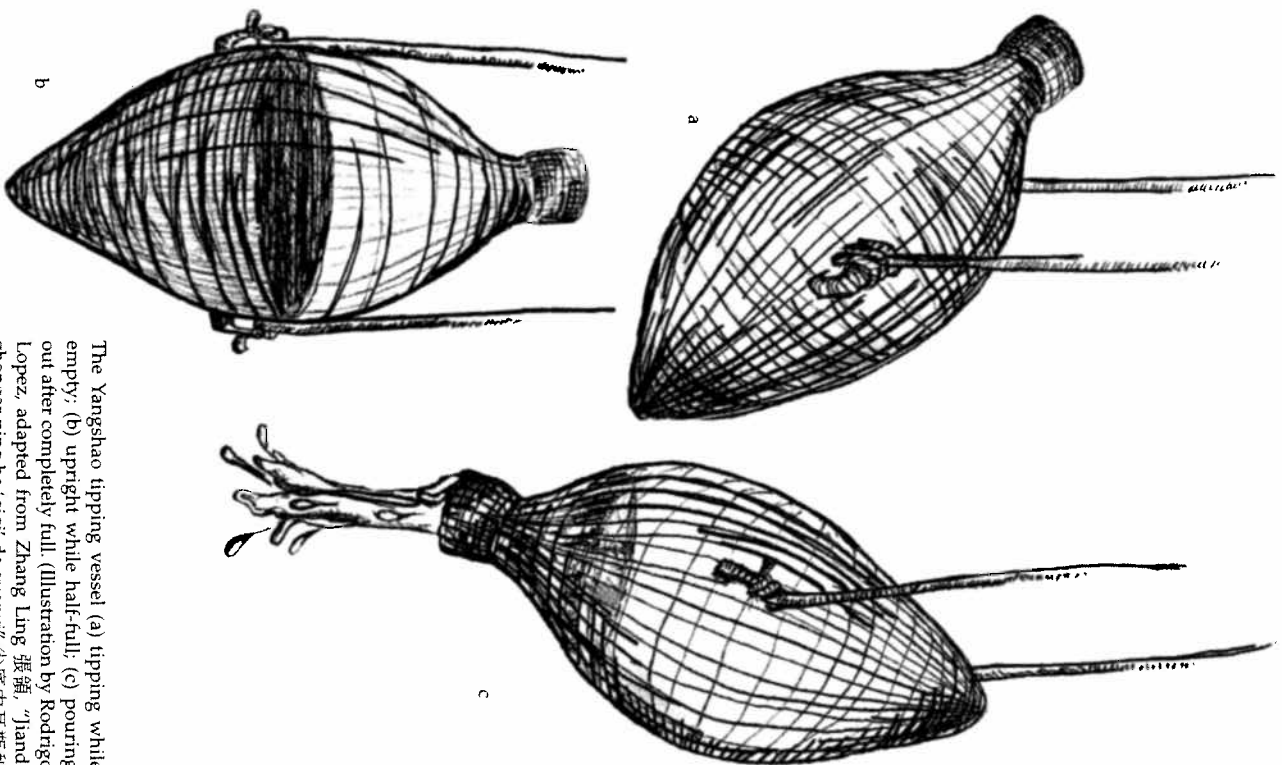
Yangshao Archaeology and Tipping-Vessel Irrigation

Fortunately, texts are not our only available resources, even for those of us who are primarily literary scholars. Mainland archaeological work of recent years allows us to approach a solution from the tangible sphere of material culture. The key element was the 1953 recovery of a narrow-bottomed ceramic jug of uncertain provenance by the Shanxi Cultural Affairs Bureau, and a subsequent 1958 article on the jug by one Zhang Ling 張嶺. Although there are problems with the paper, not least the total inability to date the jug or even detail the circumstances of its excavation, Zhang deserves credit for first proposing that this particular shape of narrow-bottomed jug was what was referred to in both the *Xunzi* passage on the *qiqi*, and the Guo Xiang commentary on the *zhi* (see Fig. 1).⁴⁸

The subject of the narrow-bottomed jug was dropped until 1982, when Huang Chongyue 黃崇岳, then of People's University, noted that narrow-mouth, narrow-bottomed jugs had been found at several sites

47. There were again several experiments at recreating the object in the Sui. Cf. Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., *Sui shu* 隋書 ("Tianwen zhi [shang]" 天文志 [上]) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973), 2.529: "At the beginning of the *Daye* reign period, Geng Xun made an ancient tipping-vessel, [which was] filled through a spout, and presented it to Yangdi" 大業初，取制作古敬器，以瀉水注之，獻于煬帝。Tang: cf. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al., *Xin-Tang shu* 新唐書 ("Taizong zhuizi liezhuan" 太宗諸子) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975), 112.3583: "Cao tried himself to create a tipping-vessel" 曩嘗自創意為敬器) and Song: cf. Luotuo 脫脫 et al., *Song shi* 宋史 ("Su Yijian liezhuan" 蘇易簡列傳) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985), 26.9172: "Another day, [Su] Yijian entered the palace, and was using water to try out a tipping-vessel" 他日，[蘇]易簡直禁中，以水試敬器；and *jian* 298 ["Yan Su] experimentally made a compass, two odometer-cars, and a tipping-vessel, and presented them [to the throne]" 燕肅嘗造指南、記里鼓二車及敬器以獻). Even as late as 1889, the Guangxu 光緒 emperor had a tipping-vessel manufactured; that artifact is now in Beijing, at the Palace Museum. See Li Songling 李松齡, "Qufu guilai hua qiqi" 曲阜歸來話敬器, *Beijing dang'an* 北京檔案 2003.12, 45–46.

48. Zhang Ling 張嶺, "Jiandi zhong'er ping he 'qiqi' de guanxi" 尖底中耳瓶和“敬器”的關係, *Shanxi shifan xueyuan xuebao* 山西師範學院學報 1958.1, 45–48.



The Yangshao tipping vessel (a) tipping while empty; (b) upright while half-full; (c) pouring out after completely full. (Illustration by Rodrigo Lopez, adapted from Zhang Ling 張翎, "Jiandi zhong'er ping he 'qiqi' de guanxi" 尖底中耳瓶和“敬器”的關係 *Shanxi shifanxueyuan xuebao* 山西師範學院學報 1 (1958), 45–48.)

of the Neolithic Yangshao 仰韶 culture (mid-5th millennium B.C.E.). Apparently, the jugs were often found in proximity to wells, and Huang speculated that the narrow mouth was used for regulating water flow in manual field irrigation.⁴⁹ At the time, Huang was apparently unaware of Zhang Ling's earlier speculation, and did not make any connection to the tipping-vessel or the *zhi*. Other work of the eighties noted the odd physical properties of the jugs, which had handles at or below the center of gravity of the jugs when full, but similarly made no connection to the vessels mentioned in early texts.⁵⁰

However, beginning in the late eighties, Huang and Sun Xiao 孫霄 of the Xi'an Banpo 半坡 site museum, which holds many of the Yangshao relics, published a series of articles based upon actual experimentation on the jugs, combined with some initial textual research. In those articles, Huang and Sun, along with additional occasional natural-science collaborators from Peking University, argued that the tipping-tendencies of the vessels could not have been intended to ease filling, as some had suggested, but must have another function,⁵¹ that the high center of gravity of the jugs relative to their handles do cause most to display the properties of the tipping-vessel as described in the *Xunzi* (namely, that it “slants when empty, stands upright when half-full, and tips over when full” 虛則欹，中則正，滿則覆);⁵² that oracle-bone and bronze inscriptions from the Shang 商 and Zhou 周 attest to both ritual and agricultural uses for the small-mouth, narrow-bottomed jug;⁵³ and that the use of the vessel in irrigation was driven by its ability to deliver a constant, low-flow stream of water, without the attention of the farmer, who held strings attached to the handles while the jugs tipped over of themselves.⁵⁴

This research explains the difficulty with the *Han Feizi* passage, mentioned above: namely, can there be *zhi* which are made of clay, rather

49. Huang Chongyue 黃崇岳, “Shuijing qi yuan chutan” 水井起源初探, *Nongye kaogu* 農業考古 1982.2, 130–35.

50. See Liao Cailiang 廖彩亮, “Jiandiping de kexue” 尖底瓶的科學, in *Zhonghua yuangu zuxian de faming* 中華遠古祖先的發明 (Guangzhou: Kexue puji, 1982), 47; and Wang Jinguang 王錦光 and Hong Zhenyuan 洪震寰, *Zhongguo yuangu yuandai wulixue shihua* 中國物理學史話 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1981), 48.

51. Sun Xiao 孫霄 and Huang Chongyue, “Banpo leixing jiandiping ceshi” 半坡類型尖底瓶測試, *Wenbo* 文博 1988.1, 18–24.

52. Wang Dajun 王大鈞, Tang Jin 唐瑾, Zhang Qing 張菁, Sun Xiao 孫霄, and Zhao Jiansheng 趙建剛, “Banpo jiandiping de yongtu ji qi lixue xingneng de taolun” 半坡尖底瓶的用途及其力學性能的討論, *Wenbo* 1989.6, 36–41.

53. Sun Xiao 孫霄, “Yiqi yu jiandiping kaolue” 敬器與尖底瓶考略, *Wenbo* 1990.4, 41–48.

54. Huang Chongyue and Sun Xiao, “Yianshi qi guan nongye yu qiqika” 原始器禮樂業與敬器考, *Nongye kaogu* 1994.1, 247–58.

than jade? Obviously, all of the objects analyzed as *qiqi* by the above archaeologists are ceramics, and this makes perfect sense if one follows the speculations as to usage by Huang and Sun. As for the development of the separate usage of the word *zhi* to mean "goblet," Huang and Sun offer interesting evidence from oracle bone and bronze inscriptions as a sidelight to two of their later articles.⁵⁵ This article also mentions, almost as an aside, that early oracle bone and bronze versions of the *you/jiu* 酉/酒 characters are remarkably similar in shape to the Yang-shao narrow-bottomed jugs found at Banpo and elsewhere, and that early wine-goblet versions of the *zhi* may have been so called because of a narrow bottom which was perhaps rounded out by the time of the *Shuo wen* definition of *zhi*: "The *zhi* is a round[ed] vessel" 卮，圓器也。⁵⁶ If one accepts this argument, then the terminological instability argued for earlier in this paper must have an extremely early provenance, and the word must have had an established multiple signification before the composition of the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi*.

Agricultural Cycles and the Transcendent *Zhi*

There is not enough evidence to trace any certain evolution of the word *zhi* in all of this, but there definitely is enough evidence to suggest that Zhuangzi would have had access to this alternative meaning of *zhi* as "tipping-vessel." The use of the word to mean "goblet," as became standard in the later literary tradition, was likely widespread during the Warring States, and one cannot assert *a priori* that "goblet words" is a linguistically impossible reading for *zhiyan*. But the reading, "tipping-vessel words," which would later become impossible through semantic shift in the word *zhi*, seems to have been an equally likely possibility during the Warring States period. It remains to trace how such a possibility may have affected the composition and phrasing of the *Zhuangzi* definition of *zhiyan* itself.

As mentioned above, the association of goblet-*zhi* with ceremonial wishes for longevity creates a number of serious contradictions with the *Zhuangzi* text. In contrast, a reading of *zhiyan* as meaning "tipping-vessel words," while perhaps not obvious or demanded by the text, is a better fit and solves hermeneutical problems which would otherwise remain mysterious. Not only does such a reading resolve the above-mentioned contradictions, the agricultural uses of the tipping-vessel as described by Huang and Sun reveal new and interesting properties of the *zhiyan* as

55. Sun, "Yiqi," Huang and Sun, "Yuanoshi qiguan."

56. *Shuowen jiezi*, 10:1084.

Zhuangzi formulates it. This fact allows us to go beyond mere assertions of linguistic instability, to understand how Zhuangzi characterizes such instability as a temporally-inflected phenomenon.

Let us return to the definition of the term, and begin at the beginning: "*Zhi*-words bring forth daily." Daily, and not occasionally: the *zhiyan* are the stuff of everyday Zhuangzian speech, the way language ought to be all the time, not formal words reserved for ceremonial usage. And these words "bring forth." This is awkward translation, but to a purpose. However one understands *zhi*, as goblet or as farm-implement, the word *chiu* really should be a transitive verb with no expressed object—i.e., the vessels, whatever they are, are pouring something out. But *chiu* is a bizarre word to describe the action of a goblet. One can conceive of a goblet as "pouring" wine into the mouth of the happy reveler, but normally such action, in Chinese as in English, is ascribed to the human rather than the vessel, and is called "drinking." The natural verbal function of most types of goblet is to hold, to contain. Vessels used in manual irrigation, however, do naturally "pour"—that is their function, and one does not conceive of them otherwise.

After the words are poured out, they "spread out" (*manyan*). In most traditional interpretations, metaphorical interpretations of this line are discounted: this is not part of the metaphor; it only describes the quality of Zhuangzi's words. Because the "goblet words" are unstable, they are able to spread out in space and time⁵⁷ to reach a larger audience. And of course, this is the only reasonable way to take the passage if one is reading "goblet" for *zhi*. But if the *zhi* is a tipping-vessel used for irrigation, then *manyan* is a natural extension of the basic metaphor. "Spreading out" water over the whole of a field is simply the definition of irrigation.

But what could Zhuangzi's words be irrigating? Seeds, of course:

非卮言日出，和以天倪，孰得其久！萬物皆種也，以不同形相權。

If there were not *zhiyan* to pour forth daily, harmonized from the heavenly beginnings, who could last long? All things are seeds, and yield to each other through differing forms.⁵⁸

All objects are seeds—a metaphor which makes little or no sense if their correlate words are fancy jade goblets, but which is entirely sensible if

57. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 304, for instance, transcribes the phrase as "leave them to their endless changes," a phrase which follows many of the traditional commentators, and which, if correct, should be an additional argument in favor of the temporal context argued for here.

58. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 950.

one has been speaking of agriculture from the beginning. Of course, this allegory is not schematic: it is not that the seeds of the material world attain the fullness of their being only through the irrigating effect of language. This would be to assert a linguistic idealism almost directly opposite to what Zhuangzi advocates. However, cyclical language, language which itself is unstable and does not grasp at nature, can participate in the self-productive cycles of the world of things. Things create each other, form yielding to form, in endless cycles. Words which are themselves timeless in their instability can help one go along for the ride, to "last long" by harmonizing the self with the flux of nature.

While it may be unreasonable to claim certainty for this agricultural reading, hopefully the above explication has made it more plausible. However, one still must explain the strange use of the term *tianni* 天倪. The word is meant to be something of a neologism—in one of the related passages in the "Qiwu lun" chapter, the narrator rhetorically asks, "What do I mean by 'harmonizing it by the *tianni*?' 何謂和之以天倪?"⁵⁹ Naturally, the answer he gives to his own question is unhelpful in deciding the original metaphorical character of *tianni*—he skips straight to the moral lesson, that one should "affirm negation, and 'so' the 'not-so.'" 是不是，然不然. Moreover, the problem is made worse by the end of the "Yu yan" chapter passage, where *tianni* is declared equivalent to the also-problematic *tianjun* 天均, "Heavenly evenness."⁶⁰ Most commentators, encouraged by that later equation, treat *tianni* as meaning "heavenly divisions"—i.e., the actual non-divisions of that undivided reality which lies beyond language, and the loss of which is narrated in the entrance into language which occupies the majority of this paragraph. In other words, it is understood that *zhiyan* are the kind of words which somehow acknowledge the natural continuity of the "ten thousand things" and thereby escape the categorizing, divisive function of language.

However, it must be noted that the phrase which actually equates the terms *tianni* and *tianjun* 天均者天倪也 comes at the very end of this passage and looks suspiciously like a commentarial note which has been at some point interpolated into the main body of the text. If this is so, then it obviously diminishes the authority of the equation as regards explication of the quasi-gnomic formula in which the *zhiyan* is initially explicated, and the apparent correlation with a *tianjun* meaning "heavenly equality" to produce a reading of *tianni* as "heavenly divisions" would be much less certain. However, even if one were to take this final

equation as being from Zhuang Zhou himself, the reading of *tianni* as "heavenly divisions" is very unlikely, precisely because *tianjun* does not in fact mean "heavenly equality."⁶¹ Consider the alternate version of this term located in one of the "Qiwu lun" passages closely related to this passage: "Therefore the sage harmonizes it by affirmation and negation, and rests in the heavenly potter's wheel" 是以聖人和之是以非而休乎天鈞.⁶² If one had only this latter sentence, one could reasonably argue the case in reverse, and propose that *jun* 鈞 is a substitute for *jun* 均, despite the attractiveness of the image of rest at the center of the spinning wheel. However, the spinning, cycling, loop-imagery from our primary text seems determinative: "All things are seeds, and yield to each other through differing forms, beginning and ending like a loop, with no one to grasp its principle—this is called *tianjun*" 萬物皆種也，以不同形相禪，始卒若環，莫得其倫，是謂天鈞.⁶³ Just as the potter's wheel produces ceramics from the eternally still center of a perpetual whir, allegorical language grows up out of the ceaselessness of ceaseless change.

If the temporality of such a formulation seems overstated, consider the connotations of *ni* 倪. The use of *ni* to mean "categorize" is possible, and attested within the *Zhuangzi* ("Qiu shui" 秋水 chapter): "When evil is complete, one distinguishes noble and mean; when evil is complete, one distinguishes smallness and greatness" 惡至而倪貴賤，惡至而倪小大.⁶⁴ But *ni* is a complex word, and one with plentiful temporal associations. The root meaning of the word, suggested by the radical, is "child," and there are also attestations of temporal usage within the *Zhuangzi*. So, for example, in "turning back and forth from start to finish, not knowing end from beginning" 反覆始終，不知端倪 (from a passage all about flux and metamorphosis, in the "Da zongshu" 大宗師 chapter), the context begs for a temporal reading.⁶⁵ Indeed, issues of temporality suffuse the chapter from which both of these texts are cited, along with other uses of *ni*, and one might even read the former example as describing the "origin" of noble and mean, smallness and greatness.⁶⁴

60. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 70.

61. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 950. *Lun lun* ("principle") may also be a pun on *lun lun* "wheel."

62. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 577.

63. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 268.

64. It must be noted that A. C. Graham postulates an interesting alternative reading, translating the phrase in question as, "The Potter's Wheel of Heaven" is the whetstone of Heaven" (*Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981], 107). The logic of Graham's translation is easy to follow, correctly taking *jun* 均 as *jun* 鈞, and postulating *ni* as a similar object. Perhaps also in favor of such a reading is the fact that the smoothing function of both machines suits their association with the

Given such a pattern of usage, therefore, it is entirely reasonable to consider *tianmi* as meaning “heavenly beginnings”—especially as it is structurally paired against *qiongrian*, “finishing out the year[s].” This does not make the passage suddenly lucid and self-interpreting, but it does create interesting implications for a reading of “tipping-vessel words.” If *zhiyan* are words which irrigate daily, if those days are the regular days of field-labor, then “heavenly beginning[s]” and “finishing the year[s]” suggest, at once, both the cycle of any given agricultural year from planting and watering to reaping and emptiness; and also the timelessness of that cycle, oscillating back and forth from the beginning until the end of time. As a Neolithic invention, the tipping-vessel was obviously archaic, and as the passage from the *Wenzi* cited above demonstrates, the object was known to be so ancient as to date from the time of the mythological kings—“heavenly beginnings,” indeed.

The *zhiyan* is thus being figured as a mode which is ineffably ancient, yet fit for commonplace, everyday usage. It is something which is unstable, certainly, which owes its essence to a constant tipping and consequent overflow—but which is unstable in cycles, and which has a rhythmic, eternal quality tied to the cycles of heaven and earth. Day in and day out, from the heavenly beginnings to the end of years, properly unstable speech carries the power to irrigate the seeds of the ten thousand things, to cooperate with nature in the metamorphoses of forms.

This idealized form of unstable, cyclical language is opposed to progressive, incremental language throughout the center section of this paragraph: “If one does not speak, then there is evenness; but evenness [joined with] speech is uneven, and speech [joined with] evenness is uneven. Therefore it is said: don’t speak”不言則齊，齊與言不齊，言與齊不齊也，故曰無言。The same sentiment is expressed more fully in several of the most difficult (and playful) passages on language in the “Qiwu lun,” including this famous one:

天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。既已為一矣，且得有言乎？既已謂之一矣，且得無言乎？一與言為二，二與一為三。自此以往，巧曆不能得，而況其凡乎！⁶⁵

Heaven and earth were born at the same time as I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me.

⁶⁵ “Qiwu lun.” However, it is harder to discern Graham’s linguistic basis for reading *ni* as a whetstone specifically, given that the most common early words for whetstone, *di* 砥 and *li* 礪, do not seem plausible character-substitutions for *ni*.

65. Zhuangzi *jishi*, 79.

We have already become one, so how can I say anything? But I have just said that we are one, so how can I not be saying something? The one and what I say about it make two, and two and the original one make three. If we go on this way, then even the cleverest mathematician can’t tell where we’ll end, much less an ordinary man.⁶⁶

Wrong modes of language simply pile up upon themselves, leading to distance, distinction, division of self from nature and language from self, and ultimately the futile attempt of cleverness to catch up with its own products. Better to stay still, to speak the speechless language of indefinite figuration.

Conclusion

Out of the great heap of textual and archaeological evidence given above, it is possible to produce the speculative history of a trope:

Once upon a time, at the beginning of history, farmers learned how to make a kind of clay vessel that would tip over automatically. They also realized that such a vessel was useful in evenly irrigating large fields, and it proved so useful that it was used for thousands of years. Such a widely-used object, with such remarkable “automated” behavior, was by the late Warring States credited with enough significance, or at least value as a curiosity, to be placed in ancestral halls such as that of Duke Huan, or at least to make such a placement plausible to the redactor of the *Han Feizi*. Somehow, this adoption and placement of the vessel in elite, ceremonial contexts apparently encouraged the application of its name, *zhi*, to be applied to another elite and ceremonial form of jade goblet; at the same time, popular agricultural use of the ceramic tipping-vessel was dying out, perhaps due to advances in agricultural technology, such as the introduction of the well-sweep for raising water from wells. At this time when popular usage was dying out, Zhuangzi—looking for a recognizable metaphor of both instability and timelessness—used the *zhi* as a metaphor for his own mode of speech. After usage of the agricultural *zhi* died out, and after multiple revolutions caused the elite tipping-*zhi* to be scattered and lost, cultural memory of the item—and its association with the word *zhi*—persisted into the Wei. However, by this point the only physical objects still known as *zhi* were jade goblets, and with the forgetting of the older meaning of the word, readers from this point on could only think of such goblets when reading the *Zhuangzi*.

Such a narrative can only be speculative, even though every step in it has been evidentially attested—such is the nature of histories in general,

66. Watson, *Chuang-tzu*, 43.

and early histories in particular. Accusatory lacunae infest all attempts to trace long-gone cultural phenomena, and doubt is a structural property of discourse.

But to the extent that the above narrative is a reasonable interpretation of available textual and archaeological evidence — perhaps the most reasonable interpretation when the full quota of all available evidence is considered — the secret history of the *zhiyan* comments on its evident linguistics. For, whether or not one ultimately accepts a reading of the *zhi* as irrigation-vessel, temporality is too strongly written into the *zhiyan* passage and its related texts in the “Qiwu lun” to be accidental. The *zhiyan*, whatever it is, is offered as a mode which pours forth daily, which starts from heavenly origins and finishes out the years, which allows one to last long, which follows the ten thousand things in their revolution through beginnings and endings. It is a mode which lies inside time, but chooses not to participate in history.

To the extent that exegesis of the passage has been contingent upon historical conditions, the *zhiyan* testifies on its own behalf in a more sophisticated fashion than as semi-nonsense advocating semi-nonsense. Following the object-world, it is subject to the loops of beginning and ending, growth and decay and metamorphosis. And yet it simultaneously has the power to escape the contingency of history — lying fixed in a textual amber, preserved for the ages of scientific advance, waiting for properly attentive, or credulous, scrutiny.

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