

Chapter 1: Rethinking the Concept of *Shi*

Lao Zi,⁸ the philosopher of ancient China and the central figure in Taoism, uses the word *shi* in his *Dao de jing* to refer to the environment. He writes,

The *Tao (Dao)* engenders them,
And its *Te (de)* cultivates them;
The physical world gives form to them,
And their environment completes them.⁹

In this Western translation, *shi* is interpreted as “environment,” and specifically as a reference to the “surroundings in which each thing dwells, such as the changes in the Earth, the differences in climate, and the dissimilarities in the water and land.”¹⁰ An alternative interpretation of *shi* might consider it to be the external shaping force of the environment that molds each object contained within that environment.¹¹ Another view could interpret *shi* as an internal structuring force that radiates from within each object.¹² However, if both the environment and the object are taken to be a *disposition* at a moment in time, then *shi* can be construed as an innate, shaping force that emerges

⁸ Livia Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, part 4, (Leiden, 2000), p. 4. According to Chinese tradition, Lao Zi lived in the 6th century BC. Historians variously contend that Lao Zi is a synthesis of multiple historical figures, that he is a mythical figure, or that he actually lived in the 4th century BC, concurrent with the Hundred Schools of Thought and Warring States Period.

⁹ Ch'en Ku-ying, *Lao Tzu: Text, Notes, and Comments*, Roger T. Ames & Rhett Y. W. Young, trs., (Republic of China, 1981), p. 232, 道生之 德蓄之 物形之 势成之

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Robert G. Henricks, *Lao-Tzu Te-Tao Ching, a New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-Wang-Tui Texts*, (New York, 1989), p. 124.

spontaneously from that disposition. In this case, *shi* naturally *completes* the objects in the world.

Shi as a shaping force are conveyed in contemplations by the different philosophical schools of thought during the Warring States Period. The militarist Sun Zi, in his *The Art of War*, for example, describes a *shi* that manifests as a clever combat disposition used in warfare to gain an advantage over one's opponent. The Legalists Shen Dao and Han Fei purport an *shi* that is a controlling power inherent in political hierarchies. The Confucian philosopher Xun Zi argues that authoritative ritual power (*shi*) is an effective and determining strength that stems from ritual dispositions (i.e., from the correct performances of Confucian rites). Zhuang Zi, on the other hand, supports a self-so-doing (*shi*) that is understood as an intrinsic tendency of a disposition. Self-so-doing *shi* is attained by letting the intrinsic tendency to guide one's action in the ever changing dispositions. It transcends both the philosophical concept of an advantageous *shi* and of an authoritative *shi*.

These philosophical concepts of *shi* (i.e., the advantageous *shi*, the authoritative (or ritual *shi*) *shi*, and the self-so-doing *shi*) is explored in detail because they provide interesting insights into the various fields in architecture. The advantageous *shi* is reflected as a utilization of clever tectonics to benefit a construction circumstance. The authoritative *shi* (or ritual *shi*) finds similar connotations in many Fengshui theories, suggesting that landscape and built environment dispositions are the embodiment of corresponding cosmological

power. The self-so-doing *shi* is examined as how architectural elements are built to harmoniously merge with nature.

Advantageous *Shi* as a Cunning Strategy

Sun Zi, in his theory of warfare, emphasizes *shi* as the efficacy, or potential that is born from a cunning battle setup and leads to a swift victory, with minimal destructive face-to-face confrontation. Sun Zi explains *shi* in chapter five of *The Art of War* as follows:

The *shi* of the warfare is nothing but the constant manipulation of the endless potentialities springing out of two dispositions in the warfare: the oblique and the frontal.¹³

An oblique attack employs cunning strategies, such as concealing the true disposition of one's troops to surprise the enemy, instead of using an expected frontal attack in face-to-face battle. In Sun Zi's view, the artful manipulation of the oblique over frontal attacks by the troops would by themselves be enough to achieve victories, because the *shi* generated from the oblique catches the enemy off guard. This is analogous to rolling boulders down a mountain when the enemy is positioned like a sitting duck at the foot of the mountain. In this case, a simple effort results in massive destruction. Therefore, victory in warfare results from the

¹³ Sun Bin, "Sun zi hui jie," *Zhongguo bin shu ji cheng wu jing qi shu hui jie di yi ce*, Liu Lumin, ed., (Shenyang shi, 1987), p. 175. The original Chinese text is: "战势不过奇正, 奇正之变, 不可胜穷也. Note: in Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access Strategy and Meaning in China and Greece*, (New York, 2000), pp. 36-37, the word *zheng* (正) is translated as 'direct' or 'straight.' The word *qi* (奇) is translated as 'oblique' or 'circuitous.' Such a understanding is used by the author.

use of a vigorous force that represents a maximum balance between oblique and frontal dispositions.

The *shi* obtained through contrasting the oblique with the frontal disposition is inexhaustible.¹⁴ According to Sun Zi, such a boundless *shi* is also analogous to the following:

The music notes are only five in number but their combinations are so numerous that one cannot hear them all. The primary colors are only five in number but their combinations are so infinite that one can not visualize them all. The flavors are only five in number but their blends are so various that one cannot taste them all.¹⁵

Sun Zi's military theory stresses the idea that, "*shi* consists in organizing circumstances in such a way as to derive *li* (利)." The word *li* means advantageous, beneficial, or profitable.¹⁶ *Lishi* means the advantageous potential that emerges when oblique troop dispositions are configured in the various phases of warfare. Sun Zi's emphasis on advantageous *shi* leads him to negate the conventional view about combat, which assumes the paramount benefit of greater manpower and individual strength should be used to predict the outcome

¹⁴ Ibid., the original Chinese text is "战势不过奇正，奇正之变，不可胜穷也。奇正之变，不可胜穷也" which means that the dynamic (*shi*) generated from (contrasting) the frontal attack and the oblique attack are endless, none can comprehend them all.

¹⁵ Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu The Art of War*, (Oxford, 1963), pp. 91-92. The original Chinese text is extracted from Sun Bin, "Sun zi hui jie," *Zhongguo bin shu ji cheng wu jing qi shu hui jie di yi ce*, p. 175. "声不过五，五声之变，不可胜听也；色不过五，五色之变，不可胜观也；味不过五，五味之变，不可胜尝也。" For the explanation of the meaning of this passage in relation to frontal and oblique see Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access Strategy and Meaning in China and Greece*, p. 39.

¹⁶ Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things*, p. 32. Jullien's translation of this sentence is, "*Shi* [in as much as it is a concrete deployment or setup] consists in organizing circumstances in such a way as to derive profit from them." The original Chinese text is: "势者，因利而制权也，" extracted from Sun Bin, "Sun zi hui jie," *Zhongguo bin shu ji cheng wu jing qi shu hui jie di yi ce*, p. 86.

for victory. On the contrary, Sun Zi deemphasizes individual strength, as well as other human factors, and highlights the automatic or effortless action directed by the advantageous *shi* of the battle disposition. He assumes that a large troop is equal to a smaller troop in the sense that its size does not necessarily equate with strength or destiny to win. Conversely, a troop with fewer soldiers is not necessarily weaker; rather, it has an equally good chance of defeating its more massive opponent.

This principle also is reflected in Lao Zi's writing, *Dao de jing*, in which he says, "The soft and weak subdue the brittle and strong."¹⁷ Things that seem to be soft or weak because of their internal structure and disposition, in fact, tend to be relatively more pliable or more durable. On the other hand, things that seem to be brittle or strong because of their internal structure tend to have a more temporary existence. Therefore, the weak possesses a winning *shi* and can suppress or defeat the strong, which loses its *shi*. Similarly, Sun Zi believes a cunning combat disposition can create a winning *shi* that transforms weakness into strength. As a consequence, a skilled general will not depend on the strength of his subordinates, "even cowardice and bravery are not regarded as innate characteristics of individuals. When troops gain a favorable *shi*, the coward is brave."¹⁸

Sun Zi's theory therefore emphasizes advantageous *shi* as the efficacy of the cunning oblique dispositions. The *Craftsmen's Record* (*Kao gong ji* 考工记), a

¹⁷ Ch'en Ku-ying, *Lao Tzu: Text, Notes, and Comments*, Roger T. Ames & Rhett Y. W. Young, trs., p. 182.

¹⁸ Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu, The Art of War*, p. 93.

book that documented the handicraft industry and standards during the last part of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC), also suggests that to cleverly utilize *shi* is an indispensable aspect of the various crafts. The utilization of *shi* in handicrafts is explored in this chapter by discussing the deployment of *shi* in manipulating materials according to the circumstances of construction.

The Propensity of Materials and Its Crafty Applications

Like the general who sets up his troops in an oblique disposition to gain a swift victory, the craftsman in ancient China employs his materials in a clever way. The maximal efficacy is achieved through the subtle exploitation of the propensity of that material; this process is often aided by the use of clever tools. On the other hand, when the propensity of a material is not correctly manipulated according to the *shi* born out of the construction disposition, the *shi* is considered lost, thus adversely affecting the outcome. The first chapter of *Kao gong ji* opens with the following statement:

Inspecting the *qu* [current condition of the material], considering the *shi*, manipulating the materials, and crafting them into various useful utensils, are the trades of the artisan in the many different handicrafts.¹⁹

In this quote, the skills of the craftsman are identified both in terms of inspecting the current condition of the materials and in terms of considering the *shi* that determines the propensity of a material and how the material is to be

¹⁹ This is the author's translation. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Dai Wusan, *Kao gong ji tu shuo*, (Jinan shi, 2003), p. 19. <<周礼·冬官考工记第六>> “审曲面执，以飭五材，以辨民器，谓之百工。” The meaning of this sentence is studied in Chen Zhengjun, “‘Shi’ yuan kao - jian lun ‘shen qu mian shi’ han yi,” *Suzhou da xue xue bao (gong ke ban)*, Vol. 22, No. 6: p. 3.

manipulated. As explained next, the propensity of a material contrasts with the property of a material. The craftsman needs to master both the properties and propensity of the material if he wants to construct effective end products out of the raw materials. *Lu shi chün qiu*, written in the 3rd century AD, states that the essential property (*xing*, 性) of a material is its physical qualities, which are determined by heaven:

The essence of the stone is hard and the essence of the red pigment is redness. Even though the stone can be broken into pieces, their essential quality of hardness is still there; similarly, no matter how fine the red pigment is grinded, the essential quality of the redness cannot be taken away. Those essential properties of the materials are given by heaven (tian, 天). They are fixed and cannot be changed.²⁰

Yet the material also has a dynamic propensity that is directed by the *shi* arising from a particular condition. This can be observed in the property of clay. Raw clay is pliable and absorbent to moisture; however, when placed in a kiln subjected to a high temperature, the clay displays the propensity of becoming hard and impervious to moisture. The *shi* born out of a crafty disposition (i.e., the kiln setting) transforms the property of clay into the opposite yet useful propensity. Therefore, the most important factor in the success of a craft is how the *shi* derived from a particular condition transforms the properties of materials used in that craft into a favorable propensity.

²⁰ This is the author's translation. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Gao You, "Lü shi chün qiu xuan duan," *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, Pan Lusheng, Ni Jianlin, Zhang Shu, eds., (Jinan, 2002), p. 57. <<吕氏春秋·季冬纪>>

“石可破也，而不可夺坚；丹可磨也，而不可夺赤。坚与赤，性之有也。性也者，所受于天也，非择取而为之也。”

Cunning Intelligence in the Manipulation of the Propensity of Material

The favorable propensity of a material is obtained with cunning intelligence, which exploits the advantageous *shi* emanating from a construction circumstance, thus further leads to the effective and successful construction of various artifacts. The cunning intelligence is an adeptness that defies the obvious or the conventional. For example, to make the carriage, a straight piece of wood is adeptly steamed and bent to be made into a wooden wheel. The wooden wheel is further cleverly crafted according to the advantageous *shi* of the varied situations. A carriage capable of traveling in a swamp, the outer rim of the wooden wheel is shaped uniform and sharp, thus the wheel can pass through the muddy terrain like a blade cutting through the mud without the mud attaching to it. To make a carriage travel in a windy and mountainous stone road, the wooden wheel is built robust so that it will not fall apart nor become thinned out due to the abrasion and constant vibrations.²¹ Furthermore, a carriage designed for warfare has large tall wheels so the horses pulling it can maneuver with utmost quickness. On the other hand, a carriage designed for taking passengers has wheels that are made to be low so it is easier for the riders to climb on and off.²² Thus, through the various adept manipulations directed by the advantageous *shi*,

²¹ This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Dai Wusan, *Kao gong ji tu shuo*, p. 25. <<周礼.冬官考工记第六>>
凡为轮，行泽者欲杼，行山者欲侷。杼以行泽，则是刀以割涂也，是故涂不附。侷以行山，则是搏以行石也，是故轮虽敝不齟于凿。

²² This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Ibid., pp. 25-26.
<<周礼.冬官考工记第六>>
轮已崇，则人不能登也，轮已庳，则於马终古登阨也。故兵车之轮六尺有六寸，田车之轮六尺有三寸，乘车之轮六尺有六寸，六尺有六寸之轮，轺崇三尺有三寸也，加轸与鞮焉，四尺也。人长八尺，登下以为节。

different efficacy and functions are achieved using the dynamic propensities of the same wood material.

The use of crafty skills is assisted by various intelligent instruments. In the case of the art of making a carriage, a compass is used to make sure the wheel is perfectly circular; a carpenter's square is employed to ensure the platform is perfectly square; a plumb line is used to examine if the spoke is perfectly straight; and a water level is used to verify the evenness of the mass of the carriage by checking if the carriage can float and sink evenly.²³ Although gifted craftsmen can use their eyes to judge straightness matching the precision measured with plumb line, tools can give more accurate readings.²⁴ Legends and folklore credit the ancient Chinese carpenter Lu Ban, who was later sanctified as the patron saint of builders, with the invention of a water level tool. He created this tool to assist the sage King Yu in detecting the route taken by a flood and to redirect the flow of the water toward the ocean. Folklore also says Lu Ban advised a master mason, who was puzzled about how to move a colossal stone from the mountains to his construction site, to move the stone by sliding it on ice.²⁵ Folklore reflects how clever skills such as these are used in the practical realm, using intelligent and effective strategies to achieve the desired results with minimal effort.

²³ This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<<周礼·冬官考工记第六>> “是故规之以眡其圆也，蒿之以眡其匡也。县之以眡其幅之直也，水之以眡其平沈之均也。”

²⁴ This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Han Fei, “Han fei zi gong yi pi yu,” *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, Pan Lusheng, Ni Jianlin, Zhang Shu, eds., (Jinan, 2002), p. 39. <<韩非子有度第六>> “巧匠目意中绳，然必先以规矩为度。”

²⁵ Liu Feibai, *Zhongguo gong yi chuan qi*, (Taipei, 1987), p. 27 & p. 35.

On the other hand, working against the *shi* or losing *shi* can result in extreme exertion, accomplish little, or even lead to disaster. One way of losing the *shi* is through an incorrect understanding of the propensity of that material. The other way is through imprudent or braggart cleverness, resulting in the creation of useless artifacts.

The first way of losing *shi* is reflected in a story told in *Lu shi chün qiu*. A certain gentleman in the story desires to quickly finish the construction of a house and asks the carpenter to apply paint on the newly erected timber structures.

The carpenter advised: “This is not the right moment to paint the structure since the wood is still curing. If applying paint on it now, the structural members will not cure properly and will curl eventually. Although it will look nice now, in the long run the building will fall.” The gentleman dialectically responds, “According to your words, the house will not collapse. The dried curled wood is stronger. The dried paint is lighter and exerts less load on the strengthened curled structure, so it will not collapse.” The carpenter has nothing to say but follow the order and soon after the house collapsed.²⁶

The owner of the house misunderstood the propensity of the wood material within the context of building. Outwardly, a piece of withered wood is stronger compared to its raw state. The dried paint is lighter compared to its wet

²⁶ This is the author’s paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Gao You, “Lü shi chün qiu xuan duan,” *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, p. 59.

<<吕氏春秋。似顺论第五。别类>>“高阳应将将为室家，匠对曰：未可也。木尚生，加涂其上，必将挠。以生为室，今虽善，后将必败。高阳应曰：缘子之言，则室不败也。木益枯则劲，涂益干则轻，以益劲任益轻则不败。匠人无辞而对，受令而为之。室之始成也善，其后果败。高阳应好小察，而不通乎大理也。”

state. However, the wooden structure of the building supports the load of the roof, rather than the weight of the paint applied on the structural members. When the wooden structure is not cured properly, structural wooden columns curl incapable of carrying the load of the roof evenly resulting in its collapse.

Misunderstanding the propensities of materials can lead to a fatal disaster.

The second way of losing *shi* is through the rash use of crafty cleverness. Han Fei and many other philosophers of the Warring States Period (e.g., Mo Zi) warned that all clever skills must be used humbly and economically.²⁷ Employed skills beyond their functional requirements can result in licentious craftiness (*yinqiao*, 淫巧), which must be discouraged and punished because the results are not effective and require more effort than necessary.²⁸ Han Fei told the following story:

Mo Zi once spent three years in crafting a wooden bird which one day it went up to the sky and flew for a while. Then the wooden bird fell down on the floor and broke. His disciple praises: “the crafty skill of my master is incomparable that you can make a wooden bird fly.” Mo Zi responds, “My skill is not as superb as the craftsman who makes the *ni*²⁹ for the carriage. The *ni* of the carriage is made with a small piece of wood within a day’s labor, but its creation facilitates the carriage to travel a long distance and

²⁷ Mo Zi, “Mo zi jie yong pian,” *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, Pan Lusheng, Ni Jianlin, Zhang Shu, eds., (Jinan, 2002), p. 18.

²⁸ Gao You, “Lü shi chün qiu xuan duan,” *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, p. 55.

²⁹ *Ni* (輓): 古代大车车轅前端与车衡相衔接的部分.

carry heavy loads. The wooden bird takes me three years to make, but is destroyed in one day.”³⁰

To be useful for man, crafts must be clever, as a clever craft exploits the advantageous *shi* and uses minimum effort to achieve maximum efficiency. A clumsy craft is the opposite, expending much energy to accomplish little.

Another illuminating example from *Lu shi chün qiu* compares the superiority of a useful object crafted of rough and inferior materials with the inferiority of a useless object made out of expensive materials. A container without a bottom, even if fashioned out of jade with elegant carvings, is clumsy and useless. On the other hand, a container has a bottom seamlessly joined to its body, even if made of burned clay, ungainly as it may look, is dexterous and useful. Meanwhile, the over-crafting of unnecessary decorations also detracts from the natural, simple, yet elegant beauty of the raw material. Applying these man-made “crafty” decorations to artifacts will spoil them instantly.

In summary, just as a general gains victory by exploiting advantageous *shi*, a craftsman manipulates his materials according to the *shi* inherent in the conditions of construction and produces effective, economical, and successful artifacts. Losing *shi* results in a general’s downfall in the combat zone and in the failure of a craftsman’s artistic productions.

³⁰ This is the author’s paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Han Fei, “Han fei zi gong yi pi yu,” *Zhongguo gong yi wen xian xuan bian*, p. 44. <<韩非子·外储说>> “墨子为木鸢，三年而成，蜚一日而败。其弟子曰：“先生之巧，至能使木鸢飞。”墨子曰：“吾不如为车輓者巧也。用咫尺之木，不费一朝之事，而引三十石之任，致远力多，久于岁数。今我为鸢，三年成，蜚一日而败。”“惠子闻之曰：“墨子大巧，巧为輓，拙为鸢。”

Chinese Advantageous *Shi* and Greek *Metis*

The efficacy of advantageous *shi* on the battleground and in the handicrafts produced by the ancient Chinese culture has its parallel in the Greek concept of *metis* and the Roman concept of *sollertia*.³¹ The Greek word *metis* is etymologically derived from the goddess Metis. Metis was the first wife of Zeus, a goddess who possessed cunning wisdom and who also counseled Zeus during the war of the Titans to attain victory. Later Zeus swallowed the pregnant Metis in the fear of a prophecy that Metis would give birth to a son that could overthrow his throne. By consuming Metis, Zeus acquired the cunning intelligence of Metis, which led to Zeus' supremacy over the gods. Thus, the term *metis* represents the traits of the goddess Metis: a cunning intelligence that tactically attains the advantage in continually changing situations. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant dedicate an entire book to explaining the efficacy of cunning intelligence in ancient Greek culture.³² While acknowledging the importance of *metis* in the Greek myth, Jullien emphasizes the differences in status between the Chinese advantageous *shi* obtained by exercising the oblique dispositions and the Greek *metis*:

It was not by deliberately resorting to *metis* that the Greeks regulated their armed conflicts. More importantly still, the kind of intelligence manifested in this taste for detour, this *agnkulomētēs*, “always appeared more or less

³¹ Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access Strategy and Meaning in China and Greece*, pp. 41-42. Jullien in this book moves between the rhetoric traditions of ancient Greek and China to investigate how a detoured approach gives access to the world of symbolization and truth. In this context, Jullien discussed the advantageous *shi* generated from cunning battle setups in comparison with the Greek concept of *metis*.

³² Marcel Detienne, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Janet Lloyd, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society European Philosophy and the Human Science*, (Chicago, 1991), pp. 57-60.

‘submerged’...” Unlike Chinese obliqueness,³³ *metis* remains in the shadows of reason, appearing clearly only in myth. Repressed by speculative thought, it is not the object of any Greek theory.³⁴

Although the efficacy of *metis* on the battleground in Greek culture was later overshadowed by the military theory of heroic, face-to-face confrontation, the concept of *metis* burgeoned in other fields, such as in the art of building. This development can be attributed to the other characters of *metis*. *Metis* also represents technical and tactical prowess in realizing practical efficiency, such as in devising tools and construction techniques. Athena, the Greek patron goddess of wisdom, war, arts, industry, and skills, and the daughter of Metis and Zeus, exhibited the qualities she inherited from her mother. She demonstrated her cunning by inventing the farmer’s plough for the Atticans, after Demeter invented corn and awarded it to them. Only after Athena’s clever invention of the plough could the Atticans harvest the gift they received from the earth goddess Demeter.³⁵ Thus, *metis* was also the intelligence that generated crafty wonders. In the early Roman culture, *metis* was called *sollertia*.

In the Western architectural tradition, being equipped with the knowledge of cunning (*metis* or *sollertia*) is considered to be one of the virtues of a capable architect. This is discussed by Vitruvius in his *Ten Books on Architecture*. In book one, chapter one, on the education of the architect, Vitruvius used the word

³³ The Chinese word for the obliqueness is *qi* (奇). In the context of *The Art of War*, the deployment of obliqueness leads to the attainment of the advantageous disposition, therefore the advantageous *shi*.

³⁴ Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access Strategy and Meaning in China and Greece*, p. 42.

³⁵ Marcel Detienne, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Janet Lloyd, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society European Philosophy and the Human Science*, p. 178.

sollertia in a passage, the meaning of the key words is interpreted by Marco Frascari as, “construction (*fabrica*) is a meditated carrying out of buildings. Theory (*ratiocination*) is a graphic illustration (visual knowledge) devised to explain cunningly constructed objects. *Sollertia*, an act of cunning judgment, is an essential intellectual procedure required to build any construction (*fabricated sollertia*).”³⁶

In the last book of the *Ten Books on Architecture*, Vitruvius tells a story about how the *sollertia* of an architect helped win a war, which interestingly parallels the Chinese philosophical explanation of militarists’ advantageous *shi*. The story begins in Rhodes, where the post of city architect is taken away from Diognetus and reassigned to Callias, an architect from Arados, after Callias demonstrates his model of a fortification wall. Atop this wall in his model is a machine that can snatch up a siege tower advancing toward the wall and bring it inside the fortification. King Demetrius, with the aid of a famous Athenian architect, Epimachus, decides to wage war on Rhodes. Epimachus devises a gigantic siege tower (Figure 1.1) whose height is 120 feet, whose width is 60, and whose weight is 360,000 pounds. The siege tower is “reinforced with goatskins and rawhide, so that it could withstand the impact of a 360-pound shot launched from a ballista.”³⁷

The Rodians immediately ask Callias to prepare a machine that can grasp the siege tower inside, as shown in his model. Callias in his plodding analysis

³⁶ Marco Frascari, “Sollertia,” *Off Ramp*, vol. 1, issue 5, p. 52.

³⁷ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Ingrid D. Rowland & Thomas Noble Howe, eds., (Cambridge, 2001), p. 133.

says he cannot do this. The scaled model, in which everything seems to make perfect sense, cannot be enlarged into full-scale reality.

The Rodians throw themselves at Diognetus' feet. Diognetus agrees to help, and cleverly has the route of the siege tower secretly flooded at night with water, mud, and sewage. On the next day, when the siege tower advances toward the city wall, it churns up a sinkhole and stops dead, unable either to advance or retreat. The Athenian architect Epimachus sees that he has been outwitted by the wisdom of Diognetus and he retreats with his fleet.³⁸ Therefore with *sollertia*, Diognetus used the most humble materials to attain much efficacy, in contrast to Callias who exerts much effort to achieve very little.

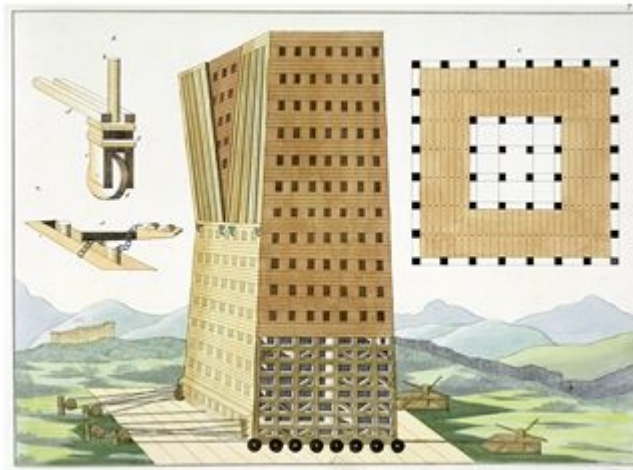


Figure 1.1. Tower of Demetrius Poliorcetes during the siege of Rhodes in 305 BC, poster by Friedrich Martin Von Reibisch, 1842, <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/war/Helepolis.htm>.

Technical and tactical cunning wisdom has been applied to the art of solving problems in building construction and to the art of maneuvering materials, both in ancient and contemporary times in the Western architectural tradition. In

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

ancient times, *metis* enabled the Greek architects to develop mechanisms for moving and hoisting colossal stones to build massive and striking temples to their patron gods.³⁹ According to Vitruvius, the *sollertia* of the Greek architect Hermogenes allowed him to invent the eight-columned, or pseudodipteral, temple. The dipteral temple removed the inner row of thirty-four columns to save expense and labor in the construction of temples, without detracting from the building's outward splendid form and appearance.⁴⁰ Simultaneous with the subtraction of the inner columns, Hermogenes made room for a walkway and portico around the cella. The added space was advantageous because it provided ample room for people to circulate within the temple and around the cella, when crowded.⁴¹

From the above accounts, it is evident that advantageous *shi* and *metis* infuse their critical effectiveness into the various crafts in both the Eastern and Western cultures of ancient times. Today, the efficacy of *metis* and *sollertia* in the field of architecture in the West has not faded away; rather, it has been reemphasized by Carlo Scarpa. In a lecture given at the University of Venice on January 13, 1976, Scarpa indicated that the intelligence necessary for an architect is precisely this *metis*, or cunning knowledge, which he says is “a double mind, a triple mind, the mind of a thief... It is what I [Scarpa] call quick witted [arguzia], an attentive tension to understand what is happening and what

³⁹ J. J. Coulton, *Ancient Greek Architects at Work: Problems of Structure and Design*, 2nd edition, (Ithaca, 1982), p. 143.

⁴⁰ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Ingrid D. Rowland & Thomas Noble Howe, eds., p. 50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

will happen.”⁴² Marco Frascari further probes the understanding of this special kind of knowing required by the crafty art of architecture:

Traditionally, there are two classes of erudition recognized within the discipline of architecture. On the one hand, there is verbal knowledge, i.e., the many statements made by architects, critics and amateurs of architecture to explain the constructed world. On the other hand, there is visual knowledge of the many monuments built and drawn by architects and amateurs during the past centuries. These two classes do not define the real understanding of architecture, although they can open the gates to it: there is also a crafty knowledge which has been considered the cardinal virtues of architects. Without comprehension of the role of this witty fabrication, authentic work can no longer be done in the field of architectural theory.⁴³

In the above account, the paramount role of *metis* or *sollertia* in Western architectural theory and practice is made explicit. This Western understanding raises the question of how the concept of advantageous *shi* functions in the crafting of traditional Chinese doors. This is further investigated in chapter three, in a discussion of the door and the advantageous *shi*.

⁴² Marco Frascari, “The Compass and the Crafty Art of Architecture,” *Modulus*, vol. 22, pp. 2-16. Also see Marco Frascari, “Sollertia,” in *Off Ramp*, vol. 1, issue 5, pp. 51-57, where further insight is provided as “*sollertia* is mobility of thought and caution of execution, or seeing in the past and in the future at the same time. This multiple dual nature of *sollertia* is essential to any craftsman in producing contrivances that will become significant attributes for those who possess them.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Authoritative *Shi* as Power Embodied in a Disposition

Meditating on *shi* as authoritative power stemming from a ruling position is a view that was held by the Legalist philosophers Shen Dao and Han Fei. The ruling position of the king, or the presence of the king's throne, automatically establishes the king's supremacy over the mass, even if the king himself might be just a common person. The authoritative *shi* is the means to establish order in a society. However, the Confucian philosopher Xun Zi implies that *shi* is a shaping force that comes from habitually situating one within the correct Confucian ritual disposition. This shaping force not only effectively enforces order in society, it also forges a special physical behavior that automatically embodies the power of benevolent virtues (*ren*, 仁) capable of suppressing authoritative political power. The power born from a Confucian ritual is termed ritual *shi*. The respectful manner of the official in front of a gate (see Figure 1.2) is formed by the ritual *shi* generated from the Confucian rite of "Greeting Guests," and is also an embodiment of the ritual *shi*.

Similarly, this connotation of authoritative *shi* and ritual *shi* parallels many



Figure 1.2. Welcoming official in front of a gate, Richard Rudolf, *Han Tomb Art of the West China*, 1951.

of the traditional Fengshui theories. Landscape configurations and built environments were construed as a series of settings that reveal deeply embodied cosmological powers. The art of Fengshui lies in the correct diagnosis of the implicit cosmological *shi*, based on contemplating the

external landscape and building disposition.

***Shi* in the Legalist School of Thought**

Shen Dao, a Taoist as well as a Legalist, takes efficacious *shi* into the practical realm of politics.⁴⁴ He metaphorically compares the self-initiated and “effortless” action of the human body with the efficacy of the *shi* emanating from the positions of a political body. *Shen Zi*, a work attributed to Shen Dao, describes the self-directed actions of the feet, the grasping of the hands, the act of listening by the ears, and the act of seeing by the eyes as spontaneous “actions” that are not controlled by any forceful thinking or reaction.⁴⁵

Shen Dao then deduces the concept of *shi* as the authority that spontaneously emanates from political dispositions, in a manner akin to that of the natural and spontaneous actions of the human body. Shen Dao explains his concept of *shi* by using the example of a king who is a king because of the authoritative *shi* of his position, just as a dragon is a dragon because of the *shi* generated from the misty clouds on which the dragon rides. Once the king loses his *shi*, he loses the political authority of his position and becomes a commoner. Once a dragon loses its supporting clouds, it becomes as ordinary as a cricket or as insignificant as an ant.

⁴⁴ Liu Guancai, *Zhu Zi Bai Jia Da Ci Dian*, (Beijing, 1994), p. 279.

⁴⁵ Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde, tr., 2nd edition, vol. 1, (Ithaca, 1952), p. 155. Fung Yulan’s quotation of Shen Dao in Chinese text is translated by Derk Bodde as: “When birds fly in the air and fish swim in the deep, they do not do so through any conscious art. Therefore birds and fish do not themselves, know that they are capable of flying and swimming; if they knew this, and set their minds on doing it, they would inevitably fall down and be drowned. It is likewise with the moving of man’s feet and grasping of his hands, the listening of his ears and seeing of his eyes. At the time of their moving, grasping, hearing and seeing, these act so of their own accord at the proper occasion, and so not to wait for the act of thinking before doing so. If they had to wait for thought before acting, they would become exhausted.”

A flying dragon rides on the clouds, and a floating snake travels on the mist; but when the clouds disperse and the mist lifts, the dragon and the snake are not different from a cricket or an ant, because they have then lost the element on which they rode.⁴⁶

The disposition that supports an entity emits a power, or *shi*, that can far overshadow the strength of the entity itself. Shen Dao probably emphasized the importance of the disposition rather than the merits of the individual entity because his idea is based on the ancient doctrine of the equality of things. In the book *Zhuangzi*, Shen Dao is said to have mastered the idea that all things in the world are equal:

To be impartial and non-partisan; to be easy-going and unselfish; to be decisive but without predetermination; to be compliant without double-mindedness; not to pay heed to anxiety, not to plan with knowledge; to make no discrimination in things, but simply to move within them: these were some aspects of the Way (*Tao*) of ancient times. Peng Meng (彭蒙), Tian Pian (田骈) and Shen Dao (慎到) heard of them and were delighted with them. They started their teaching with the equality of all things. They said: "Heaven can cover things but can not sustain them. Earth can sustain, but can not cover them. The Great Way (*Tao*) comprehends but cannot distinguish between them." They knew that for everything there is that of which it is capable and of which it is incapable. Hence they said:

⁴⁶ Ibid., Fung Yulan's quotation of Shen Dao. Derk Bodde, tr., p. 318.

“Selection involves exclusion; instruction involves incompleteness; the *Tao* omits nothing.”⁴⁷

Because no differences exist between the *ten thousand things* in their own nature, any disparities must result from differences in their dispositions.

Disposition thus plays a major role in defining one’s authority. With respect to human society, the position of ruler and the position of being ruled demarcate people in a hierarchy. Shen Dao uses a series of analogies to debate his point about the *shi* arising from a political hierarchy:

If men of talent are subjected by worthless men, it is because their authority (*shi*) is weak and their position low, whereas if the worthless can be subjected by men of talent, it is owing to the authority (*shi*) of the latter being strong and their position honored. Yao [the legendary ruler], if he were an ordinary citizen, would have been unable to govern three people [not mention the entire country], whereas Chieh [the tyrant] as the Son of Heaven was able to bring the whole empire into disorder. From this I know that it is authority (*shi*) and position that should be relied upon, whereas talent and wisdom are not respected. If a bow being weak, an arrow is yet was carried high, it is because it is speeded up by the wind; if a person being of no worth, his orders yet carry, it is because they are assisted by the masses. When Yao was of low rank, the people did not listen (to his teaching); but when he was sitting with his face to the south and was king

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 153-154. The meanings are comparable to the translation in Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, (New York, 1968), pp. 369-371.

over the empire, his orders carried, and his interdicts had force. From this I see that talent and wisdom are not sufficient to subdue the masses, but that authority (*shi*) and position are able to subject even men of talent.⁴⁸

Shen Dao claimed the ability for a king with limited talent to rule over people with many talents is based on the king's ability to hold the *shi* of the superior position. Without the power of *shi*, even the legendary sage King Yu (禹) would just be a common person without a voice. Shen Dao bases his premise of *shi* on the power of authority arising from political hierarchies. Following Shen Dao, another Legalist philosopher, Han Fei, although accepting the concept of *shi* proposed by Shen Dao, advocates enforcing the ruler's control so that nothing he encounters can resist him. Nonetheless, Han Fei stresses that the merits of the ruler also contribute in a critical way, arguing that "no matter how dense the clouds, an earthworm, unlike the dragon, could never be supported by the clouds and rise into the air."⁴⁹

Despite these different views on the role of rulers, *shi* generally is taken from the Legalist perspective to be the political power embodied in a hierarchical position. Once the position is owned, the power is possessed.⁵⁰ Therefore, *shi*, in the Legalist school of thought, is the authoritative power generated from political dispositions. Such a *shi* is an authoritative *shi*. The position can be in the form of

⁴⁸ Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde, tr., 2nd edition, Vol. 1, p. 318.

⁴⁹ This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: Han Fei, *Han fei zi*, (Shanghai, 1989), p. 134. <<韩非子. 难势第四十>>

“飛龍乘雲，騰蛇遊霧，吾不以龍蛇為不託於雲霧之勢也。雖然，夫釋賢而專任勢，足以為治乎？則吾未得見也。夫有雲霧之勢，而能乘遊之者，龍蛇之材美也。今雲盛而蟭弗能乘也，霧醜而螻不能遊也，夫有盛雲醜霧之勢而不能乘遊者，蟭螻之材薄也。”

⁵⁰ This is the author's paraphrase. The original Chinese text is extracted from: *Ibid.*, p. 149. <<韩非子. 八经>> “君執柄以處勢，故令行禁止。柄者，殺生之制也；勢者，勝眾之資也。”

a symbolic image (e.g., the dragon's supporting clouds, the king's throne, or the emperor's south-facing direction). The image's representation of the position conveys authoritative control so that the simple presence of this power symbol (e.g., the imperial seal) is sufficient for any related ordinances and bans to be carried out. The authoritative *shi* is related to the advantageous *shi* in that both emphasize the importance of a disposition.

The Ritual *Shi* in Xun Zi's Theory on Rites

By the third century BC, the concept of *shi* was well developed in both the militarist and the Legalist schools of thought. The Confucian philosopher Xun Zi, reflecting on the established ideas about *shi*, debated against both understandings of *shi*. Xun Zi uses one chapter, "Debating Military Affair," to dispute operating with stealth and deception to gain advantage *shi*, and he downgraded such *shi* as a matter for feudal lords, not for a true king. The tyrant Jie (桀) can never win over the sage King Yao (尧), who manages the country with benign humanity no matter how hard Jie tries to practice the art of deception.⁵¹ The Legalist concept of authoritative *shi* is also questioned by Xun Zi, using the example that, although the tyrant King Jie used to own the authority (*shi*) as the most powerful king, that did not prevent those who possess no equivalent *shi* to tilt his kingdom. Therefore, neither the cunning strategies employed in war nor the fearsome power from a positional hierarchy can establish order in society. Rather, for Xun Zi, it is the power of benevolent virtue that can make society into a harmonious state.

⁵¹ Xun Zi, *Xunzi Basic Writings*, Burton Watson, tr., (New York, 1963), p. 57.

Xun Zi replaces the advantageous *shi* in cunning strategies and the fearsome authoritative *shi* arising from political positions with the Confucian benevolent virtues, as exemplified by the rule of the great sage King Yao.⁵² Xun Zi further replaces the deceitful setup of warfare and various controlling positions of power with the ritual dispositions, such as the correct performance of the Confucian rites, which automatically cultivate an individual's virtue.

The rites were unique to the Chinese culture.⁵³ The early ideogram for rites (*li*, 礼), which was inscribed in the ancient oracle bones (see Figure 1.3), collaged multiple specific utensils used in performing ritual offerings to the supernatural powers or gods while praying for good harvests.⁵⁴ Abiding by these rites meant they must be executed in the specified order so that the gods or other supernatural powers would respond favorably. The Confucian rites were not invented by Confucius and his followers; rather, they were derived from various ancient ritualistic sacrificial and offering customs. Correctly performing those rites became the means to effectively produce the power to nurture one's benevolence and promote social order.⁵⁵ Therefore, although Confucius himself considered sacrificial rituals important, it was the practice of these rites—not the ancestors nor the sacrificial objects offered to the ancestors—that resulted in an orderly society. Those participating in the rituals were constrained to act in highly



Figure 1.3,
Ideogram for *li*
drawn by the
author.

⁵² Xun Zi, *Xun zi yi zhu*, (Shengyang shi, 1996), p. 214. The original Chinese text is: <<荀子。议兵篇>> “仁人之兵，王者之志也。”

⁵³ Gu Xijia, *Yi li yu zhong guo wen hua*, (Beijing, 2001), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁴ Ibid. In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, *li* is explained as, “礼，履也，所以事神致福也。”

⁵⁵ Sun Zongwen, *Zhongguo jian zhu yu zhe xue*, (Nanjing shi, 2000), p. 51.

regulated ways. By doing so, they could realize and act instinctively upon their social and ethical obligations. The appropriate, orderly, and rigid performances of rites generate a molding tendency—a powerful ritual *shi* that possesses equivalent authoritative regulating power and is an intrinsic aspect of the ritual itself.⁵⁶

The effectiveness of ritual *shi* shapes one's behavior to naturally be in accordance with the fixed order of the society at a specific moment in time. Once the rules defined by the rites are put into action by an individual, the ritual *shi* can automatically elicit behavior aligned with that of a gentleman (*Junzi*, 君子). This is described as follows:

His cap sits high in his head, his robes are grand, and his demeanor is pleasant and relaxed, brave and correct while still comfortable and at ease, magnanimous and broad-heart/minded, enlightened and calm.⁵⁷

The effects of performing rites go beyond the individual to the larger community. When people in a community all behave according to the ancient models set up by the rites, the efficacy of ritual *shi* can result in harmony and the community will be a well-ordered entity. This pleasant society, according to Xun Zi, is reflected in the manner in which the drinking ceremonies of the community are carried out.⁵⁸ Without the guidance of the rites, a drinking ceremony would be

⁵⁶ Patricia B. Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China, a Social History of Writing about Rites*, (Princeton, 1991), p. 16. Also see Sun Zongwen, *Zhongguo jian zhu yu zhe xue*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ Xun Zi, *Xun zi yi zhu*, p. 248.

⁵⁸ Xun Zi, *Xunzi Basic Writings*, Burton Watson, tr., p. 93.

drunken chaos, but with this ritual guidance, according to Xun Zi, everyone behaves in a proper way and respectful order prevails.

Xun Zi further emphasizes the efficacy of the Confucian ritual disposition by stating the following two points. First, “If a gentleman is well versed in rites, he cannot be fooled by deceit and artifice just like when the plumb line is properly stretched, then there can be no doubt about crooked and straight.”⁵⁹ Second, situating the body in the Confucian ritual disposition can also transform the nature of a commoner’s body into that of the cultivated body of a gentleman. This topic appears frequently in Xun Zi’s teachings. Xun Zi argues that the sage King Yao, the tyrant Jie, and the common people are similar in the sense that their eyes can see multiple things, their ears can hear myriad sounds, and their mouths can identify various tastes. However, Yao becoming sage, Jie becoming a tyrant, and the common people becoming craftsmen or merchants are the natural result of their respective circumstances.⁶⁰ Yet, at a deeper level, if these different circumstances can be reconfigured into Confucian ritual dispositions and subjected to the force of the ritual *shi*, the sage Yao, the tyrant Jie, and the common people all could be similarly transformed into respectful gentlemen. Such a shaping force stemming from rites can restructure individuals over a lifetime and can set order into the society.⁶¹ The efficacy of the shaping force to a person or a community can be understood as a piece of wood that is straight as

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 95. The original Chinese text is

<<荀子。礼论>>“故绳墨诚陈矣，则不可欺以曲直；衡诚县矣，则不可欺以轻重；规矩诚设矣，则不可欺以方圆；君子审于礼，则不可欺以诈伪。”

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

⁶¹ Wang Tianhai, *Xun Zi Jiao Yi*, (Shanghai, 2005), p. 153. <<荀子 荣辱篇第四>>

故先王案为之制礼义以分之，使有贵贱之等，长幼之差，知愚能不能之分，皆使人载其事，而各得其宜。

a plumb line but can be steamed and bent into the shape of a wheel rim and end up as perfectly curved as a compass arc. Even after drying out in the sun, the wood will not return to its former straightness.

Ritual *shi*, defined here as the shaping force arising from ritual dispositions, holds great influence in Chinese culture. Not only does it form a main component of late 12th century orthodox neo-Confucian teaching, but the Chinese domestic houses in Huizhou built between the 16th to 19th centuries were constructed to both express the ritual *shi* and to accommodate the practice of family rituals at home. This is further explored in chapter four.

The Embodied Cosmological *Shi* of Landscape Dispositions

Interpreting *shi* as power or a shaping force arising from a disposition, as explained above, has analogies in the traditional Fengshui theories in which the dispositions of landscape and building elements are considered to embody cosmological power *shi*.

The *Book of Burial*, attributed to Jin dynasty Fengshui master *Guo Pu* (郭璞 276–324 AD), claimed, “Observing from a thousand foot one perceives *shi*, observing from one hundred foot one recognizes the shape (*xing*, 形).”⁶² What is the *shi* visualized by the Fengshui master from one thousand feet? In the *Book of Burial*, Guo Pu offered some vivid images describing *shi* of the landscape configurations for burial.

⁶² Guo Pu, “Book of Burial,” *Gu dai feng shui shu zhu ping*, Wang Yude, ed., (Beijing, 1992), p. 70.
千尺为势 百尺为形

If the *shi* of the landscape disposition resembles ten thousand horses galloping down from the sky, such a burial site can benefit the family to produce a future king. If the *shi* of the landscape disposition resembles a stretch of turbulent water with mountain peaks layered one in front of another, such a burial site can benefit the family to produce grand officials... If the *shi* of the landscape disposition resembles dagger or spear, such a burial site would cause a death in the family or result in imprisonment of a family member; if the *shi* of the landscape disposition resembles escaping water, such a burial site would cause all living family members to become deceased.⁶³

The *shi* perceived from afar could be metaphorically described as dynamic actions (e.g., “ten thousand horse galloping down from the sky”) or as the static images (e.g., the shape of “dagger and spear”). The dynamic actions portray movements in the landscape disposition: its beginning and ending, its progressions, its changes, and its developments. The static images are the grasped totality of the landscape disposition. Both disclose the embodied cosmological *shi* that affects the lives of the family.

How, then, can a landscape disposition embody the cosmological *shi*? The answer to this question involves an explanation of the unique Chinese cosmological concept of *qi* (气). *Qi* generally is construed to be the breath, or vital energy, that is continually circulating through and animating everything in the

⁶³ Guo Pu, “Book of Burial,” *Gu dai feng shui shu zhu ping*, Wang Yude, ed., p. 85.

“势如万马，自天而下，其葬王者。势如巨浪，重巖叠嶂，千乘之葬。势如降龙，水绕云从，爵禄三公。势如重屋，茂草乔木，开府建国。势如鸢蛇，屈曲徐斜，灭国亡家。势如戈矛，兵死刑囚。势如流水，生人皆鬼。”

physical world. The specific quality of *qi* is derived from its origin. For example, the *qi* of water has the quality of water, and the *qi* of fire possesses the quality of fire. It can be said that “the *qi* of *yang* is *yang qi*, and the *qi* of *yin* is *yin qi*.” The *qi* of heaven’s constellations thus possesses the quality of the related constellations and controls the worldly things including the landscape forms that fall under its reign through the eternal circulation of *qi*.

When a piece of land is under the control of a certain constellation, then the *qi* of that constellation flows within the soil of that land and stimulates the soil into a certain disposition according to the corresponding cosmological arrangement. Therefore, using the cosmological *qi* as a medium, the disposition of a landscape embodies the controlling cosmological factors (e.g., the constellation in the sky). The *Book of Burial* states that the landscape is enlivened by the vital energy of *qi* flowing in the earthly terrain.⁶⁴ In the eyes of the Fengshui master, a landscape disposition reveals the powerful influences of the dominating cosmological origin (i.e., the cosmological *shi*).

Various methods of correctly diagnosing the implicit cosmological *shi* were developed by one of the two schools of Fengshui, which is known literally as the School of Form. A Ming dynasty Confucian scholar, Wang I (1323-1374 AD), traces the School of Form back to Yang Yunsong (杨筠松), a 9th century Fengshui master practicing in Jiangxi Province.⁶⁵ Several Fengshui treatises, including *Han long jing* and *Yi long jing*, have been credited to Yang. According to legend, Yang

⁶⁴ Guo Pu, “Book of Burial,” *Gu dai feng shui shu zhu ping*, Wang Yude, ed., p. 69.
“土形气行，物因以生。”

⁶⁵ Lee Sang Hae, *Feng-Shui: Its Context and Meaning*, (Ithaca, 1986), p. 163.

was the imperial geomancer, but due to turmoil in the royal court, he stole the *Book of Burial* and fled to Jiangxi to teach and practice the art of Fengshui. As the first master of the School of Form, Yang did not try to explain the meaning of *shi* in the *Han long jing* treatise. Rather, he pointed to *shi* as the implied cosmological power manifest in the overall landscape disposition. Master Yang was especially concerned with the methods for identifying embodied *shi* correctly, which involved carefully examining the dispositions of the landscape elements.

The *Han long jing* treatise deals exclusively with the hidden cosmological influences of nine stars in the sky. The nine stars include the seven stars of today's Big Dipper plus two nearby stars. The Big Dipper can be used throughout the year as a celestial clock, whose annual swing completes the full circle of a

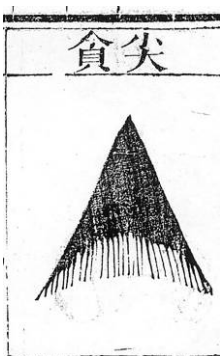


Figure 1.4.
Landscape formation under the cosmological *shi* of the Covetous Wolf, Yang Yunsong, *Han long jing*, 1834.

year, and whose four quarters indicate the arrival of the four seasons. The seasons can be used to demarcate time and guide the life cycles of man. The nine stars are named Breaker of Armies (破军), Military Activities (武曲), Purity and Righteousness (廉贞), Cultural Activities (文曲), Wealth Preserved (禄存), Huge Gate (巨门), Covetous Wolf (贪狼), Left Assistant of the Celestial Emperor (左辅), and Right Assistance of the Celestial Emperor (右弼).⁶⁶ In this treatise, the master warns of the importance of identifying the auspicious and inauspicious

⁶⁶ Joseph Edkins, "Feng Shui - the wind and water superstition of the Chinese," *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, 4, pp. 275-277.

influences of the nine stars on human lives.⁶⁷

The image in Figure 1.4 is from an 1834 manuscript print of *Han long jing* identifying the landscape disposition that embodies the cosmological influence from the Covetous Wolf. Illustrations of other landscape dispositions embodying the same cosmological forces are also reproduced in Figure 1.5.⁶⁸ The



Figure 1.5. Landscape formations under the cosmological *shi* of the Covetous Wolf, Yang Yunsong, *Han long jing*, 1834.

geomancer uses these illustrations as references to infer implicit *shi* or hidden cosmological forces.⁶⁹ Reading the shapes of the landscape to diagnose the correct *shi* is a cunning and specialized art. In Figure 1.5 from *Han long jing*, the mountain contour disposition, although visually similar to a bamboo shoot, is further categorized into twelve variations, of which five are said to be lucky and seven unlucky. The lucky contours are described as pointed, round, flat, straight, and small mountainous contours. The unlucky contours are described as not in the middle, crooked, one-sided, precipitous, turned over, broken, and empty. The details in each category are described in the text: “The pointed is shaped like a bamboo sprout. The round is complete on all sides. The flat is perfectly level like a lying silk worm. The straight

⁶⁷ Yang Yunsong, “Han long jing,” *Han long jing and yi long jing*, (Jing du liu li chang cang ban, 1834), p. 19.

⁶⁸ Stephan D. R. Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy*, (Vithagna, 1974), p. 161.

⁶⁹ Joseph Edkins, “Feng Shui - the wind and water superstition of the Chinese,” in *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, 4, pp. 275-277, pp. 291-299 & pp. 316-320 & p. 317.

indicates absence of one sidedness.”⁷⁰ The accurate visual interpretation of an explicit landscape disposition is an important first step in grasping its implied *shi*. Every slight variation in the disposition of the landscape could mean a significant difference in the alluded force or cosmological *shi*.

Hill or mountain dispositions not only reveal the implied cosmological influences of heavenly constellations (e.g., the nine stars), but they can also indicate the influence of other cosmological elements, such as the Five Phases (i.e., wood, fire, metal, water, and earth). A round or oblong hill contour often implies the *shi* of the Metal Phase; a formation with a round head and long body implies the *shi* of the Wood Phase; an alive, crooked, and moving hill formation indicates the *shi* of the Water Phase; a square contour represents the *shi* of the earth Phase; and a conical and pointed contour connotes the *shi* of the Fire Phase (Figure 1.6).⁷¹

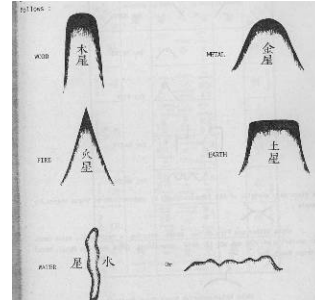


Figure 1.6. Landscape formations under the cosmological *shi* of the Five Phases, Stephan Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy*, 1974.

Therefore, the explicit shape and the implied *shi* are intimately connected in the sense that the *shi* is the internal structuring force of the external shape. The geomancer must have the skills to correctly differentiate the subtleness of the external shapes in order to properly infer the implied *shi*. Once the *shi* has been diagnosed, it can be manipulated to suit the intended event. For example, if

⁷⁰ Yang Yunsong, “Han long jing,” *Han long jing and yi long jing*, (Jing du liu li chang cang ban, 1834), pp. 19-20.

⁷¹ Joseph Edkins, “Feng Shui - the wind and water superstition of the Chinese,” in *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, 4, pp. 275-277 & pp. 291-299 & pp. 316-320.

a cosmological force is believed to exert a bad influence, then the disposition of the landscape can be altered so the new setup embodies a beneficial cosmological power.

The Fengshui treatise *Xin ke shi han ping sha yu chi jing* (新刻石函平砂玉尺经), which is attributed to Liu Bingzhong of the 13th century, sheds further light on how *shi* can be construed and identified. According to legend, Liu was dissatisfied with late-Jin dynasty rule and became a reclusive Taoist. He

subsequently became a Buddhist monk and extensively studied history, geography, geomancy, and other sacred arts. Later in life, Liu served as the chief adviser of the great King Kublai Khan and was in charge of the planning and building of

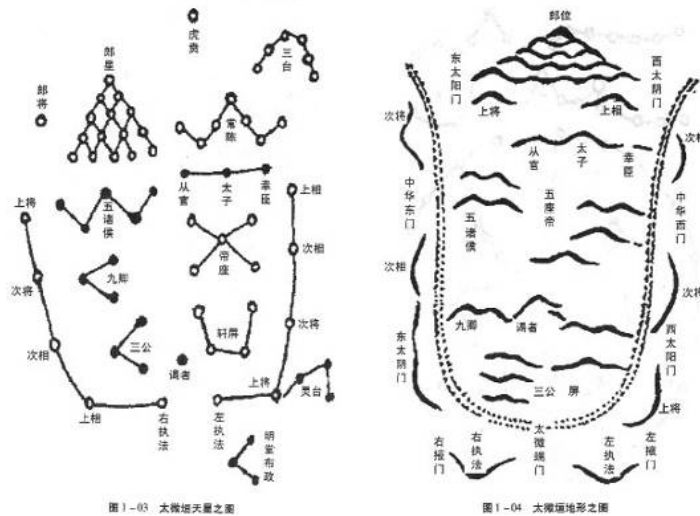


Figure 1.7. *Tai wei* constellation and the landscape formation under its cosmological influence, Liu Bingzhong, *Xin ke shi han ping sha yu chi jing*, ed., Li Feng, 2003.

the capital city, the forbearer of today's Beijing. The first chapter of Liu's treatise *Ping Sha Yu Chi Jing* begins with a discussion of *observing shi* (审势篇). Similar to the description in Yang's *Hang long jing* treatise, the observed *shi* is said to be an implied cosmological power. Liu begins by explaining how the cosmological forces infused their power into earthly landscape dispositions at the very beginning of cosmological creation: "The vital energy *qi* of the Five Phases—

Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth—forms the star-images in the heaven; the vital energy of *qi* of the Five Phases develops into various landscape dispositions on the earth.”⁷² Figure 1.7 shows the earthly landscape dispositions under the control of the *Taiwei* Constellations.⁷³



Figure 1.8. Water course formation under the cosmological *shi* of the *hua gai*, Jiang Pingjie, *Shui long jing*, ed., Li Feng, 2003.

Many of the later Fengshui treatises reiterate and implicitly reinforce the idea that a landscape disposition embodies a certain cosmological *shi*. Figure 1.8 is from the 17th century Fengshui treatise, *The Water Dragon Classics* (*Shui long jing*). The left side shows the composition of the landscaped water courses. The right side is juxtaposed with the

cosmological origin—the constellation named Glamorous Canopy (*hua gai*, 华盖), indicating that this water course formation is influenced by the cosmological *shi* of the constellation Glamorous Canopy. The *Water Dragon Classics* is designed as a pattern book to teach the Fengshui practitioner to correctly identify the invisible power *shi* arising from various earthly dispositions. Figure 1.8 is just one among many examples offered in *Water Dragon Classics* to show the correlation between the constellations and corresponding earthly dispositions. After the cosmological *shi* of the site has been recognized, it can be cleverly maneuvered.

The alteration of the physical landscape disposition of a water course

⁷² Liu Bingzhong, *Xin ke shi han Ping sha yu chi jing*: [6 juan], (Haikou, 2003), p. 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11. The original Chinese text is:

[审势篇第一][原文]天分星宿，地列山川。仰观牛斗之墟，乃见众星之拱运；俯察冈阜之来，方识平原之起迹。五行之气，在天成象，而日月星辰见焉。紫微太极起于亥子之中，天市东垣起于寅卯之区，少微西在坤兑之间，太微南极在巽巳丙之首。中有一星，尊居于内，而二十八宿环绕于外。故斗牛之墟，左为帝星所居之处，其列宿则随斗柄所指而拱向之，附天而行，是谓天经。五行之气，在地成形，而为山冈瓌阜，散而为平原都郡，流而为江淮河汉。故山川之流，莫非是气之凝布。然平原旷野，皆根于冈，分布四维而成形，故察冈阜之所来，则知平原之发迹也。

corresponds to a change in the corresponding *shi*. These dynamic and spontaneous relationships between the explicit disposition and the implied *shi* are critical for Fengshui masters to perform the art of siting.

In addition to arising from landscape disposition, cosmological *shi* can also be generated from a built environment; for example, through the disposition of the architectural element of a door. The appropriately oriented and properly sized door was traditionally believed to possess cosmological *shi* that affected the lives of the residents living within. This is discussed in detail in chapter four in the section about the embodied cosmological *shi* of doors born from their dispositions.

The Self-so-doing *Shi*

The third philosophical view on *shi* is discerned through analyzing the writings of Zhuangzi. In *Zhuangzi*, a book named for its purport author, the meaning of *shi* as shaping force generated from certain dispositions (e.g., the Militarists' advantageous *shi*, the Legalists' authoritative *shi*, and the Confucian ritual *shi*) is not advocated.⁷⁴ Rather, self-so-doing is embraced. Self-so-doing

⁷⁴ The word *shi* is only used a few times in *Zhuangzi*, mostly in the Outer Chapters. *Shi* generally means an internal and external shaping force springing out from circumstances which defies any human efforts. In *Zhuangzi* chapter seventeen, it states: "The infinitesimal is a subdivision of the small; the colossal is an extension of the great. The two falls in different categories. This is because of the innate tendency." The "innate tendency" is translated from the Chinese word *shi* in the original Chinese text. *Shi* is a internal shaping force. The above translation is quoted from: *Zhuangzi, Chuang Tzu Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*, Herbert Allen Giles, tr., (London, 1961), p. 161. The original Chinese text is:

“夫自细视大者不尽，自大视细者不明。夫精，小之微也；郭，大之殷也；故异便。此势之有也。”

In the same chapter in *Zhuangzi*, *shi* is also used in the context as, “非知失也：时势适然，” which is translated as: “In the troublesome times, there are people who are talented but can not deploy their talents because of the circumstances of the situations.” The “circumstances of the situation” is translated from the Chinese word *shi* in the original Chinese text. *Shi* in this context is the external shaping force.

denotes that if something acts in a given way, it is because this occurred in accord with the natural tendency without any need for human imposition. The self-so-doing *shi* is the self-so-doing efficacy arising from a self-so-doing disposition. It is metaphorically interpreted as, “[throwing a piece of stone in] surging water does not generate minute ripples, and a withered tree does not have shade.”⁷⁵ Self-so-doing *shi* can overpower the advantageous or authoritative *shi* because self-so-doing *shi* transcends the cunning craft into an art, and turns a biased ritualistic or political disposition into an impartial and free aesthetic expression.

In the technical realm of various crafts, exploiting the advantageous *shi* of material circumstances requires crafty intelligence. This type of technical craftiness is considered limited in *Zhuangzi* because it only displays an outward expedient efficacy, not an innate harmony. The product of such outward expedient efficacy can blind and mislead people. For example, using compass and plumb lines to make various extravagant patterns and designs to decorate an object superficially displays a technical adeptness, yet the gaudy achievements can adversely dazzle the eyes of people and conceal the object’s intrinsic beauty and simplicity espoused by nature. Thus in *Zhuangzi*, it states:

In *Zhuangzi* chapter twenty, it tells the story about an ape: “When the ape was in the woods, it will twist and twirl among the branches even the best archer Yi and Feng Meng cannot catch a glimpse of it. If it is put in a bramble bush, it will move cautiously with sidelong glances, trembling with fear. Not because the muscles of the ape turn weak in the plains, but because the position put it in disadvantageous positions. It was also under these circumstances, that Pi Kan was disemboweled.” The above translation is from: *Zhuangzi, Chuang Tzu Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*, Herbert Allen Giles, tr., p. 195. The original Chinese text is:

“王独不见夫腾猿乎？其得楠梓豫章也，揽蔓其枝而王长其间，虽羿、蓬蒙不能眇睨也。及其得柘棘枳枸之间也，危行侧视，振动悼栗，此筋骨非有加急而不柔也，处势不便，未足以逞其能也。今处昏上乱相之间而欲无怠，奚可得邪？此比干之见剖心，徵也夫。”

⁷⁵ Translation is by the author, original Chinese text is in Liu Xie, *Wen xin diao long*, (Beijing, 2005), p. 201. <<文心雕龙·定势>> “譬激水不漪，槁木无阴，自然之势也。”

Wipe out patterns and designs, scatter the five colors, glue up the eyes of Li Chu,⁷⁶ and for the first time the people of the world will be able to hold on to their eyesight. Destroy and cut to pieces the curve and plumb line, throw away the compass and square, shackle the fingers of the Artisan Chui,⁷⁷ and for the first time the people of the world will possess real skill.⁷⁸

In this line of thinking, the obsession with the external superior talents or cunning techniques fetters the realization of the internal self-so-doing skill--the real skill. Therefore, the image of the clever Artisan Chui biting his fingers symbolizes the determination of eradicating the hindrance of the superficial crafty intelligence to achieve an innate harmony with the craft process which resembles the creation of nature.⁷⁹ The self-so-doing skill transcends the cunning craft and transforms it into an art. In *Zhuangzi*, a story is told about the art of the wheelwright Bian:

When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel slides and won't take hold. But if they're too hard, it bites in and won't budge. Not too gentle not too hard – you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Li Chu is a legendary figure who has sharp eyesight and aids the legendary emperor Huangdi to search the black pearl *xuanzhu* in Chinese myth.

⁷⁷ Yang Yongsheng, *Zhe jiang lu*, (Beijing, 2004), p. 001.

Artisan Chui is a skilled craftsman of the Zhou dynasty. According to legend, he is the inventor of compass, carpenter's square, bow, arrow and various tools for agriculture.

⁷⁸ Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 111. The original Chinese text is:

灭文章，散五彩，胶离朱之目，而天下始人含其明矣；毁绝钩绳，而弃规矩，攬工倕之指，而天下始人含其巧矣。

⁷⁹ Liu Kangde, *Huai nan zi zhi jie*, (Shanghai, 2001), p. 350. “故周鼎垂，使銜其指，以明大巧之不可为也。”

⁸⁰ Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 153.

In this example, the wheel making process as a disposition generates a self-so-doing *shi*, if utilized in a self-so-doing manner (i.e., neither too gentle, nor too hard), effortlessly leads the effective product. In such an artful stage of crafting, the hands are no longer being directed by an intellectual mind that is purposefully searching for a cunning technique or strategy. Rather, the hands and the entire body of the artisan are allowed to be at ease and follow the rhythm of the guileless self-so-doing *shi*. Exploiting the self-so-doing *shi* involves a spontaneous perception and proficiency that can be transmitted but not appropriated; that can be grasped but not seen. To attain the self-so-doing *shi* of crafting, one needs to forget the existence of one's physical body (*zuowang* 坐忘),⁸¹ which is explained in *Zhuangzi* as “smash up limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the *Dao*.”⁸² All these extreme actions to discard the various aspects of the physical body are aimed at obtaining an unintended body united with the *Dao*.

In *Zhuangzi*, the chapter, the manner of the butcher Ding carving an ox effortlessly with no errors represents the realization of the self-so-doing *shi*. The way his hand touches the ox, his shoulder leans against it, his foot treads on it, and his knife moves within the ox to rip off the meat is flawless. The sounds from his various gestures are described as tempered and harmonious as the ancient

⁸¹坐忘, literally meaning, “sitting and forgetting the body.”

⁸² Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 90. The concept of *zuowang* appears in chapter six of *Zhuangzi* as:

“颜回曰：“回益矣。”仲尼曰：“何谓也？”曰：“回忘仁义矣。”曰：“可矣，犹未也。”他日复见，曰：“回益矣。”曰：“何谓也？”曰：“回忘礼乐矣！”曰：“可矣，犹未也。”他日复见，曰：“回益矣！”曰：“何谓也？”曰：“回坐忘矣。”仲尼蹴然曰：“何谓坐忘？”颜回曰：“堕肢体，黜聪明，离形去知，同于大通，此谓坐忘。”仲尼曰：“同则无好也，化则无常也。而果其贤乎！丘也请从而后也。”

sacred musical composition of the Mulberry Grove Dance. The butcher Ding, it is said, “left his skills behind, and reunited with the *Dao*.”⁸³

Ding goes through three stages as he learns to carve oxen, ranging from the cunning craft to the artful state and from consciously noting his body and bodily actions to the state of forgetting the existence of his physical body. In the first stage, he sees only a whole ox. The butcher’s body is knowingly positioned at a far distance and feels detached from the body being manipulated as the “other.” At this stage, various tricks and skills are employed to facilitate his manipulations. In the second stage, he sees the real and particular ox as numerous parts and not as a whole. His own body zooms in closer to the body he is manipulating. The conscientious mind has less influence on his act. The “otherness” turns into “partial otherness.” In the last stage, his own body is abandoned. He does not see the body of the ox as the “other.” He altogether forgets his own body and the “otherness” of the ox’s body. In this state, he does not see with his eyes; rather, he perceives the ox through *shen* (神), a flowing and innate spiritual communication that brings his body into the body of the ox.⁸⁴

⁸³ Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi in Library of Chinese Classics*, (Wuhan, 1999), p. 45.

⁸⁴ Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Tradition of China and Greece*, p. 98. The English translation of the original story about the butcher Ding in *Zhuangzi* is accouted below: “*Laying aside of his knife, the butcher replied, “what I love is the Tao, which is much more splendid than my skills. When I first split oxen, I could see nothing but the whole oxen, but after three years of practice I never saw the ox as a whole but in parts. Now I proceed by intuition and do not look with my eyes. My sense ceases to function, the intuition takes over. In accordance with the natural grain, I cleave along the main seams and thrust the knife into the big cavities. Following the natural structure of the oxen, I never touch the veins, arteries and tendons, much less the big bones. A good butcher changes his knife once a year because he cuts the flesh; an ordinary butcher changes his knife once a month because he hacks the bones. Using this knife for nineteen years, I have carved thousands of oxen, but the edge of my knife is still as sharp as if it had just come from the whetstone. There are crevices between the joints, but the edge of my knife is very thin. When I insert the thin edge of my knife into these crevices, there is plenty of room for it to pass through. That is why, after nineteen years, the edge of my knife is still as shape as if it had just come from the whetstone.”*”

The butcher's intuition moves with ease within the ox's body and the butcher takes his knife to carve without difficulty. This effortless action, united with *Dao*, reaches a state of liberty and peace. At this stage, no tricks are necessary; rather, the self-so-doing *shi* turns the skill into an effortless art.

Forgetting one's own physical body is a way to open oneself to attain the self-so-doing *shi*. To forget one's own body requires one to first let the body at ease: "Forgetting all about right and wrong, the heart and mind can be ease. You neither change your mind nor follow others because you are at ease with the outside world. To be always at ease and never ill at ease is the ease of forgetting about being at ease."⁸⁵

Besides crafty skills can be transformed into an art by gaining the self-so-doing *shi* with the technique of forgetting one's body, the products created in accordance with the self-so-doing *shi* are not crafty, but are natural and divine which emulate those created by the *Dao*. In the chapter, *The Way of Heaven*, in *Zhuangzi*, a passage says,

"Oh, my teacher, my teacher (*Dao*), you blend everything in the world, but not out of righteousness; you bestow ever-lasting favors but not out of humaneness. . .you sustain the earth and sculpt everything but does not pretend to be crafty or clever."⁸⁶

The *Dao* creates everything in a natural way without resorting to any cleverness. Creations of the *Dao* possess a natural simplicity. This natural

⁸⁵ Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi in Library of Chinese Classics*, pp. 311-313.

⁸⁶ Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi in Library of Chinese Classics*, p. 202.

simplicity was further developed by Han dynasty philosophers in the realm of aesthetics as the simple beauty and graceful essence of materials that do not need any artificial decorations,⁸⁷ and as the internal harmony among the different components within a disposition.⁸⁸ Both aesthetic ideas have great influence in Chinese culture, which regards various crafts as a means not to amend the natural beauty possessed by an object, but rather to enhance its innate quality or internal harmony through the work of human hands.

Zhuangzi also criticizes Legalists and the Confucian mechanical authoritative and ritual *shi*. The Legalist view of *shi* as a political power is mocked as being concocted for the dead not for the living because this authoritative *shi* drives the action of man and society as if they have no life of their own.

Men of ability laughed at him [Shen Dao] and said: “they [including Shen Dao] emphasized on law but had no law.”⁸⁹

In *Zhuangzi*, a dialogue takes place between two characters named No-feet and Know-harmony. No-feet takes wealth and authoritative *shi* as advantageous for men; in contrast, Know-harmony points out how indulgence in material goods and mundane power can be the source of upheaval and turmoil.⁹⁰ Furthermore the indulgence in material things and the power of *shi* is pitiful

⁸⁷ Yuan Jixi, *Liu chao mei xue*, (Beijing, 1989), pp. 140-141. The artificial decoration is “错采镂金” and the natural simplicity and beauty is “天工之美.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸⁹ Fung Yulan, *Chuang-Tzu a New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Xiang*, p. 159.

⁹⁰ Fang Yong, Lu Yongpin, *Zhuang zi quan ping*, (Chengdu, 1998), p. 123.

“且以巧斗力者，始乎阳，常卒乎阴，泰至则多奇巧；以礼饮酒者，始乎治，常卒乎乱，泰至则多奇乐。凡事亦然，始乎谅，常卒乎鄙；其作始也简，其将毕也必巨。言者，风波也；行者，实丧也。夫风波易以动，实丧易以危。故忿设无由，巧言偏辞。兽死不择音，气息勃然于是并生心厉。”

because material things and authoritative *shi* are temporal and prone to change. Also, one who possesses *shi* is not necessarily noble, and one who does not possess *shi* is not necessarily humble.⁹¹

According to the book of *Zhuangzi*, the inadequacy of the authoritative *shi* can also be seen as the result of the fact that political authority is limited at all times. There is always another power stronger than this power, but the former power is not recognized by one who possesses the latter power. It is stressed that *shi* as authoritative power is biased and conveys a narrow myopic knowledge and thus must be abandoned. The extreme position in *Zhuangzi* advises people to donate the *shi*.⁹² In the physical world, all things are equal. Possessing *shi* is equal to eradicating *shi*. This tendency is the same in one circumstance as it is in another circumstance. Paradoxical elements do not conflict with each other if the value attached to their ultimate purpose is abandoned; rather, the process of actualization is stressed. Everything is equal if all is allowed to be developed according to one's own course and so that it is in accordance with self-so-doing *shi*. The unification of the opposites is achieved by staying neutral and natural through the spontaneous actions of self-so-doing.

⁹¹ Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang zi yi zhu*, (1993), p. 489.

The original Chinese texts are:

《庄子·杂篇·徐无鬼第二十四》“钱财不积则贪者忧，权势不尤则夸者悲，势物之徒乐变。遭时有所用，不能无为也，此皆顺比于岁，不物于易者也。驰其形性，潜之万物，终身不反，悲夫！”

《庄子·杂篇·盗跖第二十九》“故势为天子，未必贵也；穷为匹夫，未必贱也。贵贱之分，在行之美恶，势为天子，而不以贵骄人；富有天下，而不以财戏人。”

⁹² Fang Yong, Lu Yongpin, *Zhuang zi quan ping*, p. 531. The original Chinese texts are:
《庄子·外篇·山木第二十》“削迹捐势，不为功名。”

The book, *Zhuangzi*, refuted the ability of ritual *shi* born from Confucian ritualistic configurations to put society into a harmonious order. Xun Zi, on the other hand, stated that the effects of performing rites go beyond an individual person to the larger community. Once people in a community are all behaving according to the models set up by the ancient rites, ritual *shi* can mold the community into a well-ordered entity. According to Xun Zi, this pleasant society is reflected in the way the community's drinking ceremonies are carried out. This is refuted in the book of *Zhuangzi*, claiming that in reality, although a drinking ceremony normally starts with ritualistic and proper order, it always ends up in chaos. The ritually formed body is not in harmony with the natural self-so-doing body; rather, the body needs to be liberated to allow it to be relieved from any social norms.

Freeing the body from the rules imposed by Confucian rites can be seen in the story about the eccentric scholar Liu Ling, one of the seven sages of the Bamboo Grove of the 3rd century. When Liu Ling sits naked in his hut, people see his weird action and laugh at him. Liu objects, saying, "I used sky and earth as my house, my house is my clothes, why then do you enter here into my pants?"⁹³ Liu not only acts defiantly against the rigorous behavior pattern set up by the Confucian rites, but his actions reveal the idea of letting the body be itself. A situation in which the body can be natural does not generate any mundane shaping powers; rather, it gives birth to a self-so-doing *shi* that further nurtures

⁹³ Yuan Jixi, *Liu chao mei xue*, (Beijing, 1989), p. 148.

the spontaneity of the body. Only this freed body can accurately grasp the essence of being natural.

As the preceding discussion indicates, self-so-doing *shi* has two layers of meaning. First, it challenges the purposeful efficacy *shi* of the cunning crafts and emphasizes the self-so-doing *shi* of natural crafts. Secondly, it elevates a free, self-so-doing body over a Legalist imposing body and a Confucian ritualistic body. Only a self-so-doing body can receive the *Dao* and truly appreciate the aesthetic beauty of nature. Architecturally, self-so-doing *shi* is investigated by looking at un-purposeful doors—meaning doors that are neither intended to emit power nor to craftily achieve functional needs. Rather, self-so-doing doors are built to alleviate the ritual bonds imposed on the body and to resituate the body in nature. In old Chinese houses, the route of circulation is created in a way that emulates the aesthetic experience of the body. Many of the room doors within a house are positioned to introduce a meandering route within the enclosed space, establishing an aesthetic experience by merging body with nature.

***Shi* and the Contemporary Concept of Weak Ontology**

The complexity of the Chinese concept of *shi* in divergent philosophical contexts nevertheless reveals a simple essence. *Shi* is the potential or force born from a particular disposition situated at a specific point in time. The various efficacies of *shi* are ultimately the natural outcome of the disposition at that moment. Thus, by nature, *shi* is *amorphous* because it is spontaneous within the

ever-shifting disposition and *weak* because it is temporary and transitory within fleeting time. This nature of *shi* is analogous to the theory of weak ontology.

The theory of weak ontology was developed by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo after he studied Nietzsche's nihilism and Heidegger's philosophy on ontology. Nietzsche's nihilism questions the existence of absolute truth. The Western traditional metaphysical "truth" (e.g., God or soul) in nihilism's view, is simply taken as expressing the subjective values at a certain historical moment. The demise of the absolute "truth" means everything encountered in the experience of the world is nothing but an elaboration of one's own subjective values. Therefore, nihilistic thinking holds that the only world that can be experienced is a world of *difference*, or a world of "*subjective interpretations*."⁹⁴

Heidegger, on the other hand, revised Nietzsche's emphasis on unchallenged subjectivity, or the individual's *will to power*, by stressing that "ontological differences" exist between things or beings and that these are not simply or solely a subjective product of the will to power. Rather, the exclusive focus on subjective values sometimes conceals the true essence of such beings, thereby leading to the "forgetfulness of Being." For example, at first glance, the subjective value imposed on the ontology (or Being) of modern technology is as an instrument for human beings. With the help of modern technology, modern man is given the power to manipulate things. However, paradoxically, that which makes human beings powerful (i.e., technology itself) is not an instrument. "In

⁹⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity, Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, (Baltimore, 1988), p. xii.

truth, however, technology would be degraded in its essence, when it is looked upon instrumentally as a means or even as a tool.”⁹⁵ On the contrary, the effect is the reverse in reality. Modern technology pulls human beings invisibly as their instrument. Heidegger thus defines the ontology of modern technology as an “ordered revealing,” or “Gestell (enframing),” the essence of which paradoxically dominates modern man.⁹⁶ This idea of Heidegger has interesting similarities with traditional Eastern thought, as argued by Chan Wing-Cheuk, professor of philosophy, who calls it largely a hermeneutic application of many ancient Chinese Daoist texts. The concept of the enframing of modern technology parallels a story told in *Zhuangzi*: “The swamp pheasant has to walk ten paces for one peck and a hundred paces for one drink. Unexpectedly it is caught in a cage. Though it looks great, it is not good.”⁹⁷ Similarly, modern technology is for man like the cage was for the swamp pheasant. Although drink and food are provided with much ease through the aid of technological advancement, the human being is still remains encaged (enframed).

Vattimo’s concept of weak ontology builds upon Nietzsche’s nihilism and Heidegger’s thinking on ontology. After Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God, or the vanishing of the absolute value, Vattimo infers that the system of values in human society becomes an infinite process of transformation in which no value can appear to be “higher” or more “authentic” than any other.

Meanwhile, inheriting Heidegger’s philosophical concept of ontology, Vattimo

⁹⁵ Wing-Cheuk Chan, "Phenomenology of Technology East and West," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* vol. 30, (March 2003), pp.1-18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17, endnote 60.

further deduces that it is the flux of values and their transformation and multiple interpretations that cause the traditional metaphysical Being to dissolve and disappear. That is, the infinite interpretability of reality led to “the weakening of the cogent force of reality or the traditional Western ontology” because it has made “all that is given by traditional western metaphysics as real, necessary, peremptory or true into simply another interpretive possibility among a plethora of such possibilities.”⁹⁸ The formerly “strong” thoughts (e.g., truth, Being, and logic) consequently have been “weakened” because they have been turned into a potentially interpretable experience that carries no absolute value of truth. The “strong” ontology is therefore transformed into a “weak” and “hermeneutic” Being that is distinguished as ephemeral and subject to interpretations with the passage of time.

The idea of weak ontology leads back to the investigation of the essence of the aesthetic experience by Vattimo. Vattimo contends that the experience of the truth of art (including architecture) is a *momentary experience* that arises, like Being itself, as an interpretation rather than as a stable structure of meaning endorsed permanently in the artwork. The aesthetics of a piece of artwork, therefore, constantly open up for further readings with the passing of time. Vattimo notes that the “aesthetic consciousness in Western culture today only offers us a weak experience of truth, an ephemeral trait of a fleeting, weakened existence and is always concerned with the effects of temporality.”⁹⁹ In the

⁹⁸ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity, Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, p. xxii, & p. 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

domain of architecture today, this way of thinking has a very direct translation in the experience and production of architectonic form and has been termed “weak architecture” by De Sola-Morales.¹⁰⁰ A weak ontology means the central core of the traditional, permanent, and “strong” Being has now become a temporary and “weak” Being, and De Sola-Morales asserts that the centrality of “weak architecture” also is based on the dissimilarity between the traditional and contemporary time.

“Contemporary time is expressly “a time,” as opposed to “*the* time” of the classical age. It is presented as a fragmented reality overlapping the virtual and the “real,” and is characterized as discontinuous and transient.” The experience of certain recent architectures is explained by De Sola-Morales as the result of this definition of time.

Some of the buildings are not constructed by means of an order, but by means of operating on disarrayed pieces or fragments. At times, the pieces may be juxtaposed or ultimately touching one another, may approach one another, or may not touch but be infused with the tension of convergence and draw nearer to one another without ever making contact. The experience of such architecture is therefore discontinuous and fragmentary in relation to the experience of fleeting and fragmented time.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ignasi de Sola-Morales, “Weak Architecture,” *Differences Topographies of Contemporary Architecture*, Graham Thompson & Sarah Whiting, eds., (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 57-73.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Both weak ontology and weak architecture thus fundamentally reverse the classical “strong” notion of permanency and totality and make it into a “weak” notion of temporality and fragments, based on a differently construed reality of time. The traditional Chinese concept of *shi* can be seen as sustaining Vattimo’s theory of weak ontology. *Shi*, as the potential born from a particular disposition, does not support any solitary or complete system. Rather, it upholds the manifold and open instances, each of which individually exists and is concurrent with the situation at a given moment of time. The generated *shi* from a situation is not stable or lasting; instead, *shi* dynamically morphs with the transformation of the condition over time.

Advantageous *shi* is spontaneous in accordance with changes in the disposition. Ritual and cosmological *shi* are animated with time. For example, the Confucian rites were not permanent rules, but subject to manipulations and revisions over time to fit the changing cultural context. The cosmological *shi* rendered by the nine stars in the sky, transforms due to the movement of its celestial position during the year. The self-so-doing *shi* is completely spontaneous with the natural tendency of the disposition and focuses on temporality to achieve harmonious union with nature in every instance. This temporality and spontaneity of *shi* make it an amorphous and weak concept. Due to these essential qualities, *shi* effectively and simultaneously casts its influence on the various fields of traditional Chinese architecture because each field is composed of a different circumstance belonging to a different design or

construction moment. All the different aspects of *shi* examined in the dissertation display this elusive nature.