Warring States synthesis – Xunzi

Reading

- Yulan Fung (Youlan Feng), *A history* …, i. 279-311
- John Knoblock, *Xunzi: a translation and study of the complete works* (1988-94). Please refer to the pages indicated below.

Please note that my translation often differs from Knoblock's.

1. Towards canonisation and orthodoxy.

- Changing meanings of `learning' (i. 139)
- Where does the learning begin? Where does it end? Speaking about the technique of learning, it begins from reciting the canonical texts and ends with reading the records on Li. Speaking about the purpose of learning, it begins from becoming an officer and ends with attaining the Sainthood.
- *Documents* set out the main outlines of handling the political affairs; *Odes* record the appropriate sounds; and the records on Li stipulate the broad classification of laws and principal distinctions among people.
- When Li inculcates the reverence for civilization; when music inculcates the sense of appropriate harmony; when *Odes* and *Documents* equip one with the comprehensive knowledge; and when one has the perceptiveness and subtlety through the study of the *Annals*, then that is all there is to be learned by man.

2. Various schools and Xun Zi's criticism (found in chapters □ □□□, □□, □□)

- Shen Zi: To uphold law to the degree of lawlessness, to downplay the need for self-cultivation and to resort to

statecraft. Whatever they are told from their superior, whatever they hear from the street, they put down in writing all day long and keep composing law codes.

- Those who roughly emulate the ancient kings but do not know the overarching principle. However, they have great talents and lofty ambitions. With their broad and diverse learning, they use the old texts to put together their novel theories which they call `the movement of five elements'. But their theories are so seriously wrong as to be peerless; apparently profound and subtle but non-sensical; and they lead to dead-ends and straightjacket without a way-out. In an attempt to embellish and worship their theories, they say, `These are the true sayings of the late noble man.' Zi Si (grand-son of Confucius; □□) started this and Meng Ke joined in. In every ditch out there, you could find half-blind `scholars' noisily debating together without knowing what is wrong. Transmitted in this manner, the saying of Zhong Ni and Zi Gong became shrouded in a thick, dark veil from the later generations. This is the crime of Zi Si and Meng Ke.

  `Base scholars' (i. 229)

  – Wearing a big hat almost covering one's nose, with an air of specious seriousness in their speech, they walk like Wu and quicken their pace on their tiptoes like Xun. They are the base scholars of Zi Zhang's school.

  – Neatly wearing their hat and apparel, with a solemn face, they sit tight all day long without a word. They are the base scholars of Zi Xia's school.

  – Being unscrupulous scholars but timorous when faced with an actual affair, they shamelessly endulge in food and drinks and say `A noble man does not labour with muscles'. They are the base scholars of Zi You's school.

- *Shen Zi* had a conservative view of things; he did not see the progressive aspect of things. *Lao Zi* saw the point of lying low; but he did not see the point of standing up and coming out. *Mo Zi* saw the point of equality; but he did not see the point of distinctions. *Song Zi* saw the point of reducing; but he did not see the point of increasing. (iii. 22)
- *Mo Zi* was blinded by utility and did not appreciate the culture. □□□□□□□□□. Song Zi was blinded by the question of desire and did not appreciate the fulfulment.□□□□□□□□ □ *Shen Zi* was blinded by law and did not appreciate the talent.□□□□□□□□□ *Hui Zi* was blinded by language and did not appreciate the reality. □□□□□□□□□ *Zhuang Zi* was blinded by Heaven and did not appreciate man. □□□□□□□□□ (iii. 102)

3. State-centred Political philosophy

- The King – the leading ruler – a ruinous ruler
- If a ruler promotes Li and honours the talented, he will be the king. If he relies on law and loves people, he will be the leading ruler. If he likes profits and often resorts to fraudulent means, he will be in danger. (iii. 20)
- If a ruler estalishes himself with rightness, he is the king. If he establishes himself with loyalty of the allies, he is the leading ruler. If he establishes himself with machinations, he will be ruined. (ii. 150)

4. Political legitimacy

- If a ruler cannot manage to nourish and provide for people, he will be estranged by the people. If he cannot manage to maintain the distinctions and rule the people, people will not be at peace. If he cannot manage to praise and promote people, people will not be pleased. If he is not elaborate and does not know how to embellish people, people will not be glorious. If he

fails in these four main tasks of rulership, the whole world will leave him. Then he is to be referred to as an ordinary bloke. (ii. 182)

- When the Way exists, then the country exists. When the Way perishes, then the country perishes. (Ibid.)
- When the whole world returns to the man, he is to be called `the king'. When the whole world deserts him, he is to be called `a ruined man'. As *Qie* and *Chu* had lost the whole world, it is not that Tang and Wu killed a ruler. It was like executing a loner. (iii. 35)

5. Employment policy

- A noble man will assess each one's virtue and grade them accodingly; gauge their ability and confer the right post; and allow the talented and the lackeys to find their suitable position. Then the capable and the incapable can all obtain the appropriate post. Everything can find its right place. (ii. 72)
- Social distinctions may not be rigidly fixed; but the clear and obvious differences must certainly be recognised. Suppose the king, the dukes, the senior and the junior ministers or the officers have the offspring. If they cannot be worthy of their place according to Li and rightness, they should be ranked with the ordinary people. Suppose the ordinary people have the offspring. If they are learned and cultured, upright in their conduct and worthy of the [exalted] place according to Li and rightness, they should be ranked with the Great counsellors, senior and junior ministers and officers. (ii. 94)
- Even those whose speech and arguments are extreme, whose conduct and ability are troublesome, and those who had escaped from neighbouring countries' imposts and subversive ones should be given a post. They should be reformed for a while and observed. If they manage well, they should be recompensed. If they persist in

wrongdoing, they should be punished. If they stick to their post, they should be kept. If they cannot stick to their post, they should be discarded. Those who are disabled at birth need to be provided for. According to their talents, they should be employed and given the post, food and cloths. Everybody should be covered without leaving out anyone. (ii. 95)

- If a country adopts a magnanimous employment policy, it will become big. If it has a petty employment policy, it will become small. … Magnanimous employment policy means to put the rightness before benefit. It means, unhindered by the distinctions between the close and the remote and between the noble and the lowly, to seek people according only to their truthfulness and ability. (ii. 154-155)

6. Li and law

- Law cannot stand on its own; precedents cannot enforce themselves. When they are employed by good persons, they can survive. When they lose the good persons, they perish. Law is the starting point of good governance. But noble men are at the source of the law. In the hands of a noble man, therefore, even a schematic law can have a fair result. In the absence of a noble man, however, even a well-equiped law can cause disruption, for when the relative weight of the provisions is not properly taken into account, one cannot adequately cope with the changing circumstances. Those who do not understand the meaning of law and yet decide the matter resorting to the power of law will, even if they may be widely learned, cause disruption when faced with actual cases. (ii. 175-176)
- If Li is used to strighten the country, it is as if a balance is used to determine the lightness and heaviness of things; as if a chalk line is used to determine the straightness and crookedness; or as if a square and a

compass are used to determine the angle and the circle.
(ii. 155)
子曰：「可與共學，未可與適道；可與適道，未可與立；可與立，未可與權。」 (Lunyu 9.30)

7. Xun Zi’s philosophy of Language (iii. 130-131)

Names do not have inherent accuracy. They are what is named on the basis of convention. When the convention is widely accepted, we say that the name is accurate. If
the use of name is different from the convention, we say
that the name is not accurate.
Names do not have inherent truth. On the basis of convention, they are used to name things. When the convention is widely accepted, we say that the name is true.

There are things which have the same appearance but occupy different locations; or have different appearances but occupy the same location. These are to be distinguished.
When the appearance changes without affecting the thing itself but making it different, we say that the thing is
` transformed’
` To kill a thief is not to kill a man’: This is to
confuse the names through a misleading use of names. By investigating why names are there and by observing their usual usage, this confusion can be prevented.
` Mountains and lakes are on a level’: This is to confuse
the names through a misleading use of things. By investigating whether or not there are differences between the things referred to and by observing the usual correspondence between a thing and a name, this confusion can be prevented.
` Horse is not a horse’: This is to confuse the things
through a misleading use of names. By investigating the convention for the name in question and if we are to reject that which is incompatible with what we accept, this confusion can be prevented.

8. Metaphysical questions

- The movements of Heaven are constant. They do not exist because of Yao. They do not perish because of *Qie*. In response to them, if men govern themselves, it will be auspicious. In response to them, if men misgovern, it will be omenous. (iii. 14)
- To achieve without doing, to obtain without seeking – this is what we call the job of Heaven. Deep as it is, man cannot think about it. Great as it is, man cannot carry it out. Sophisticated as it is, man cannot investigate it. This is what we call `not to dispute with the job of Heaven'.Heaven controls the time, Earth has the materials, man has the government. This is what we call the three participants. To abandon the proper role in this triad and to seek to participate in the other's doing, is to invite disruption. Celestial bodies follow their courses, the sun and the moon alternate, four seasons come with regularity, Yin and Yang transform everything, the wind and the rain broadly benefit things. When each of these things obtains harmony, it lives. When each of them obtains nourishment, it grows and matures. Man cannot see this business but can see the results. This is what we call godly. Although everyone knows the author of all these, its shapelessness permits no human knowledge thereof – That is what we call the Heaven. The Saint will not seek to know the Heaven. (iii. 15-16)
- Good or bad government is not the work of Heaven, is not the concern of the Earth. (iii. 17)
- Heaven does not stop the winter simply because man hates the cold weather. The Earth does not stop being vast simply because man loathes the distance. A noble man does not stop his conduct simply because the petty and the lowly cavil at it. The Heaven has its constant Way; the Earth has its constant methods; a noble man has his constant framework. (Ibid.)

- When stars fall and trees make sound, the people of the country are all scared and say, `What's the reason?' But I will say, `For no reason.' Although it is rare, such things do happen as a result of the changes in the Heaven and the Earth and as the Yin and the Yang interact. One may treat them as extraordinary. But it is wrong to be afraid of them. … What is to be feared, however, is `human monstrosities'. To lose the right timing for farming and thus lose the harvest; to have a violent government and thus lose the people; to have the arable land turned into wilderness and have poor harvest; to have the hyper-inflation and to have the people starve; to have the streets littered with dead bodies. These are human monstrosities. (iii. 18)
- Suppose *yu* (the ritual for praying for rain) is followed by rain (*yu*). What is the reason? I would say, `For no reason.' It is just like having the rain when no *yu* ceremony has been done. When there is a solar or lunar eclipse, people do a ritual to fend it off. When there is a drought, people do *yu* ceremony to pray for rain. People also do divination and resort to oracles before making major decisions. But these are not meant to give the solutions. They are cultural gestures. Thus, a noble man would treat them as cultural events whereas the people will treat them as having the godly efficaciousness. If one approaches them as cultural expressions, they will be auspicious. If one approaches them as godly affairs, they will be ominous. (iii. 19-20)
- Funeral ceremonies are aimed at sending off the dead with a broad likeness of the living. Hence, it should be as if the person is now dead, now alive; now present, now absent. (iii. 67)
- What is to be retained in ancestral sacrifices is the sentiments of yearning and love. For a noble man, they are human being's business. But people treat it as a ghostly business. (iii. 72)

- To serve the dead as if they are alive, to serve the absent as if they are present. This is to portray the shapeless and the shadowless. That is the hallmark of an elaborate culture. (iii. 73)
- A noble man has reverence for what is in him. He does not yearn for what is in the Heaven. (iii. 18)
- He who clearly understands the distinction between Heaven and man may be called the ultimate man. (iii. 15)

9. Natural mind, emotions, desires and mind

- What makes a living being as it is, we call `nature (*xing* 性)'. When the nature is joined to a creature, emotions are put together and feelings arise in response but when that is not artificial but natural, we call it `natural mind (*xing* 性)'. Likes, dislikes, joy, anger, sorrow and delight of the natural mind, are called `emotions'情. While emotions may arise just like that, when the mind does the choosing and retaining, we call it `to think'慮. When, with a thinking mind, we proceed to act, we call it `to make a conscious effort'僞. With accumulated thoughts and through practice, achievements can then be made – they are what I call `conscious efforts'. If benefit is the main concern when such efforts are made, we call it an `affair' 事. If rightness is the main concern when such efforts are made, we call it a `conduct 行. That with which one can know these affairs and conducts in people, is called `knowledge'. That in which knowledge is put together, is called `intelligence'. When intelligence enables one to do things, we call it `ability'. When abilities are put together, we call `to be capable'. (iii. 127)
- Natural mind itself is something I cannot do anything about. But I can transform it. Emotions are something I do not own. But I can do something about them. [Practice and habits which are developed and single-mindedly repeated over a long time will transform a person.] Man

becomes a Saint, therefore, through what he has accumulated. … If a person follows the dictates of emotions and natural mind and does not sufficiently inquire and learn, he becomes petty and lowly. (ii. 81-82)

- Man is born with desire and only death will put an end to it. The amount of desire is a question of emotions. Orderly or disorderly government is a question of what the mind permits or prohibits, not a question of what and how much the emotions desire. (iii. 135)
- He who is inwardly cultivated will treat outward things lightly. A noble man have the things work for him; the petty and the lowly work for things. (i. 154)
- Natural mind is as Heaven would have it. Emotions depend on the quality of natural mind. Desires are the responses of emotions. (iii. 136)

10. The Way and wu wei

- A noble man rightly responds to the changes because he knows when to bend and when to remain straight. (i. 175-6)
- Everything is a part of the Way. Each thing is a part of everything. Stupid people treat a thing as an isolated piece. (iii. 22)
- What we call the Way has the constant framework but constantly changes. It is impossible to take one corner of it and try to lift the whole thing up. Those who have distorted knowledge see one corner of the Way. While their knowledge is not enough to understand the Way, it is enough to allow them to embellish their knowledge. Their knowledge, however, is full of self-contradiction. And it misleads others too. What they say here hinders what they say there. (iii. 103)
- Confucius had wonderful wisdom and he was unhindered. His learning, therefore, had his technique under control. … He was not hindered by what he has achieved

or by what he has acquired. … A saint knows the danger of having his mind occupied by technique, sees the harm of being hindered and stuck. Therefore, he harbours no desire, no aversion; no beginning, no end; no closeness, no remoteness; no comprehensiveness, no shallowness; no past, no present. He approaches everything at the same time and rightly weighs all of them. (Ibid.)

- What is it `to weigh’ ? That’s the Way. The mind, therefore needs to know the Way. If the mind does not know the Way, one cannot talk about the Way; one may instead disparage the Way. (Ibid.)
- How do we know the Way? It depends on the mind. How does the mind know the Way? Through emptiness, oneness/wholeness and serenity. (iii. 104)
    - As we live, we acquire knowledge. With our knowledge, we form fixed ideas. Fixed ideas are stored. It is, however, possible to talk about emptiness. When what is already stored does not hinder what will be stored, we may refer to it as **emptiness**.
    - As we have mind, we have knowledge. As we have knowledge, we distinguish. To distinguish is when we know two things at the same time, we know that they are two different things. It is, however, possible to talk about oneness. When one thing does not hinder the other, we may refer to that as **oneness/wholeness**.
    - When our mind is left lying around, we dream about things. Those who are unscrupulous will go ahead and do as they fancy. Those who use their imagination will conspire. Our mind is thus never at rest. It is, however, possible to talk about serenity. When what we fancy does not disrupt our knowledge, we may refer to it as **serenity**.
- When the mind is empty, new things can enter. When the mind is one (whole), one can be thorough. When the mind is serene, one can observe. He who knows how to observe

the Way, how to proceed along the Way and thus embodies the Way, can be called empty, whole and serene. That is what we call `SUPREME CLARITY'.□□□ (Ibid.)

11. Xun Zi's fallacies

- Man's natural mind is bad; what makes it good is man's conscious efforts. (iii. 150)
- Even if you may lay the firewoods in one heap, the fire will proceed to the dry ones first. Even if the ground may be level, water will proceed to the damp corners first. (i. 137-138)
- A Noble man maintains his arguments untainted. Thus, the same kind of men will agree. His speech is good. Thus, similar kinds of men respond. This is just like when a horse brays hee, another horse responds haw. That is not because the horse has the knowledge but because that is how the influence works. (i. 177)