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**Christopher Lupke/The Magnitude of Ming**

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# Diverse Modes of *Ming*

## An Introduction

CHRISTOPHER LUPKE

Of the few truly defining concepts that pervade all of Chinese culture, *yin* and *yang* 陰陽, ritual *li* 禮, the *dao* 道, *ren* 仁 (benevolence), and *xiao* 孝 (filiality), among others, most have been the subject of extended study, essay volumes, or both. However, one concept that generally has not received extensive attention, with some exceptions and despite its pervasiveness in Chinese discourse, is *ming* 命, translated as “command,” “allotment,” or “fate.” This volume of essays systematically explores *ming* in its diverse incarnations. The terms “*ming*” and “*tianming*” were ubiquitous in the discourse of pre-Qin China. Early in the *Analects*, Confucius mentions that in the stages of life “at fifty, one understands the commands of heaven” 五十而知天命, an adage that any schoolchild can recite. One of the best-known classic examples of the Confucian appeal to *ming*, one that is discussed by several of the contributors in this volume, is Confucius’ lament over the death of his stellar pupil Yan Hui’s 顏回 *duanming* 短命 (shortened life). Mencius described *ming* as “whatever happens without one’s causing it” 莫之致而致者，命也. Zhuangzi spoke of the need to follow or “go along with one’s *ming*” 順命. *Ming* appears in the work of virtually all the pre-Qin philosophers, though interpretations of it certainly vary. *Ming* is also evident in the work of most or all of the early works of Chinese history. *Ming* occurs in, and even informs, the narrative trajectory of vernacular fiction of the late imperial age such as *huaben* 話本 short stories and the longer *zhanghui* 章回 works. It is frequently found in contemporary works of literature and film, and its presence is manifest in Chinese sayings such as “If it is one’s fate to die in a well, then drowning in a river will not be fatal” 命該井裡死，河裡淹不煞; “If one’s fate is eight inches, it is difficult to attain a foot” 命裡八尺，難求一丈; “If it is one’s fate to have no money, one cannot attain it by force of will” 命裡沒錢不強求; and “If it is one’s fate is to be unprosperous one should accept poverty, for wealth and honor are forged in heaven” 命裡無財該受窮，富貴都是天鑄成. Each of these popular maxims implies that one’s

fate is what is it and one should accept it for what it is; one should not expect to reap the benefits of a fate that one has not been allotted. Yet, does this necessarily mean that Chinese culture is by and large fatalistic? Does it mean that *ming* necessarily shares a one-to-one sameness with the Western notion of fate? Not necessarily. *Ming* is far more complex than that, and its complexity has led in part to its centrality in Chinese discourse. How has *ming* been understood and managed throughout Chinese civilization? In this volume, we attempt to provide an initial answer to just this question from the perspective of disciplines as diverse as philosophy, religious studies, anthropology, literary studies, and cultural history. Our aim has been to focus primarily on essential discourses surrounding the concept, particularly those which appear in paradigmatic classical sources and later narrative literature. As a result, this book primarily is concerned with what people thought and said about *ming* as well as Daoist practices of prolonging life and predetermining its outcome.

The volume includes twelve essays arranged largely in a chronological fashion. While no book could possibly encompass the entire variety of ways in which *ming* has influenced Chinese culture, and ultimately no collected volume can apply the sort of systematicity to the concept that it deserves, the value of this volume will be that the common thread of *ming* is traced through a range of texts and a broad spectrum of Chinese history spanning the earliest times to the present, and that it is pursued by a group of individual scholars whose own perspectives are brought to bear on the concept of *ming* as it appears in Chinese texts. The gaps that are left in the wake of this collective effort reveal more about *ming*'s pervasiveness than they do anything else, and hopefully will be filled by scholars building upon our pioneering work.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I covers the period of early China and comprises essays by David Schaberg, Lisa Raphals, Michael Puett, and Mu-chou Poo. The essays are concerned with writings from the *Shijing*, the *Zuozhuan*, the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Daybook* of Shuihudi, and other texts of the age. The second part deals with the Late Han and Six Dynasties Period and is represented by two essays on esoteric Daoism, one each by Robert Campany and Stephen Bokenkamp, and one essay on the poet Tao Qian by Zong-qi Cai. Essays by Patricia Sieber on the illustrious but tragic career of Jin Shengtian and by P. Steven Sangren on *The Investiture of the Gods* make up the third part. The volume concludes with an essay on contemporary Chinese philosophy by Woei-Lien Chong and one essay each on modern Chinese literature by Deirdre Sabina Knight and myself, Christopher Lupke.

David Schaberg's essay on the origin of the term "*ming*" is a tour de

force. In detailing the etymology, early pronunciation, synonyms, usage, and meaning of *ming*, Schaberg surveys a broad range of early texts that include bronze inscriptions, the *Shijing* and the *Shujing*, and the *Zuozhuan*, as well as modern scholarly investigations on early China.

Schaberg begins and ends his essay with a problem: if the term “*ming*” has come to be understood as meaning “life span,” and thus by extension something roughly associated with the term “fate,” then why in early texts does it refer quite specifically to the notion of “command,” and how does this shift from “command” to “life span” occur? His answer to this question is offered in a careful reconstruction of the early usage first with reference to the etymology of the word. Building on the work of Bernhard Karlgren, William Boltz, and especially Constance Cook, among others, Schaberg establishes a consistency of usage in the term “*ming*” that involves calling or naming. In early texts, *ming* is found to be synonymous with *ling*, the other half of its bound form in the modern compound “to command.” Thus, the usage of *ming* in early China served to mark off a special form of language—as Cook puts it, an “official notice of empowerment.”

From this discussion of *ming* as a sign of the ritual language of the sovereign that commands, calls, or names, Schaberg moves into a detailed inquiry into the way *ming* is invoked in the inscription of bronze vessels. In the course of this inquiry he discovers that *ming* is closely aligned with terms denoting “giving” such as *de* 德, which in turn is associated with its homophone *de* 得. Schaberg describes how the bronze vessels functioned as gifts from Zhou rulers, distributed as parts of enfeoffments and other major gift-giving festivals that included feasting. A *ming* would be inscribed on the vessel itself that commemorated the ceremony. The specialized or ritual language inscribed on the vessels was, as Schaberg goes on to analyze in detail in the next section, highly formulaic in nature. It disclosed a close association between *ming* and *de*, the term that now means “virtue” but then was taken as “gift.”

The gift-giving festivals or commemorations of bounty were enshrined in the language of the *Shijing*, and Schaberg’s last major section is a treatment of the prosody and rhyme schemes of certain of the older *Shijing* poems, in particular ones found in the “great praise” *daya* section. While *ming* at points shares aspects of its meaning with the Greek term “*moira*” and the Latin “*fatum*,” Schaberg distinguishes between these two and the more proscribed *ming*, which always allows for some limited play in its pronouncements and could even be considered an “appeal” of sorts. His analysis of the prosody reveals in certain types of texts, the ones to which the *ming/ling* pronouncements belong, a high degree of consonance in the language. The sound patternings that are common to the poems also arise in many of the

famous speeches recorded in bronze inscriptions. Thus, Schaberg discovers that a common pattern links the bronze inscriptions with the writings of the *Shijing* and *Shujing*. Indeed, he asserts that *ming* is “perhaps the most common patterning word in the Western Zhou texts.”

Schaberg concludes from this richly detailed discussion of early Chinese texts that *ming*, essentially meaning “command,” marks a special designation for speech used in divination and investiture. In these commands, he continues, there is always an element of the difficulty of executing commands and a certain lack of confidence in executing them. Therefore, along with the bestowing of the command from the sovereign comes the necessary compliance to the command, a process that often carried with it considerable anxiety. In fact, many of the commands entailed the risk of death, as did that of Duke Wen of Zhu first mentioned at the outset of his essay. In a way, then, following an order would be especially exemplary if the liege were required to perform some sort of death-defying feat in the process. It is perhaps from this practice of executing such tall orders that the term “*wenming*” 聞命, “to follow an order, especially if this order means death,” has come about. And it is perhaps from there, Schaberg surmises, that the association of *ming* with death, as in the case of Confucius’ “acceptance” of *ming* in the death of his prized pupil Yan Hui, has arisen. For what could be more important in life than following the ultimate order, the acceptance of one’s mortality?

If this notion of following the order of mortality, the acceptance of one’s fate, is the goal of the sage, then Lisa Raphals’ essay, though rather different in its intent and procedure, picks up where Schaberg leaves off. Raphals suggests that “understanding fate is the defining characteristic of a sage.” She presents us with the most comprehensive picture to date of “the whole semantic field of meanings contained in the word ‘fate.’” Raphals’ essay offers the reader a full taxonomy of the meaning of *ming* in its various contexts, and she compares and contrasts its combination forms in Chinese with those of the Western notions of *moira* and *fatum*. She cautions that viewing Chinese notions of fate through a Western prism could lead to the mistaken characterization of Chinese thought and culture as “passive, quietistic, and fatalistic.” Her contribution will help to dispel such notions, which tend to prevail in modern accounts of China’s alleged “stagnant” past.

Raphals’ essay is more than a mere exposition of the various contexts both within and without Chinese thought where fate is employed; it demonstrates the spectrum in which *ming* in the Chinese context and *moira* in the Greek were employed in contrasting as well as complementary ways. There was, for example, as much debate in the early Chinese philosophical context over the status of *ming* by schools such as the Mohist, Daoist, and Confucian

as there were agreed-upon understandings of what *ming* signified. One can find discourses on “understanding,” “establishing,” “following,” “returning to,” and “controlling” *ming*, and Raphals’ essay systematically organizes and classifies these nuances and usages. She extends her classification to include some discussion of the evolution of *ming* in Han Confucianism, Song and Ming neo-Confucianism, and even modern China in the work of Fu Sinian.

In addition, Raphals discusses other Chinese terms that have meanings related to “fate,” and she lays out a description of the development of the fate concept in the Greek semantic field, identifying a watershed that occurred in the fourth century, prior to which fate was accepted as the central notion of “lot” or destiny and was often depicted in a personified form. After the fourth century, fate was broadly debated in all the major philosophical schools and was opposed, for example, by early Christian philosophers. Raphals finally notes that some common notions of fate existed in the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions, but “attitudes toward fatalism” contrasted significantly. For the Chinese, *ming* did not necessarily amount to the demise of free will. Within one’s set life span there was room for maneuver. For the Greeks, in contrast, fate was essentially associated with fatalism. To accept it was to reject the possibility of free will. Thus, fate increasingly became anathema to Western philosophical discourse. Raphals ends with a useful table outlining a complex array of similarities and dissimilarities as well as the usages found in the semantic field of fate.

Michael Puett’s essay illustrates the evolution of the notion of *ming* from the early Chinese period into the Han dynasty by way of an interesting conundrum. The problem that Puett sets out is the question as to whether *ming* is moral or not. It is easy enough to follow the commands of Heaven when it is clear that they have a moral purpose and function according to an ethical calculus. But as Puett observes, most passages in the Confucian texts are associated with random and usually unfortunate events. How does one resolve this discrepancy between the imperative to act in accord with the commands of Heaven and the fact that Heaven itself does not always apparently reward such moral behavior?

In answering this question, Puett offers a comprehensive rereading of the Confucian and Mencian understandings of *ming* and eventually illustrates how the Han philosopher Dong Zhongshu reinterpreted the heavenly command as something less problematic and tension-filled in an effort to institutionalize its use. That there is an apparent inconsistency in Confucian thought has been noted by scholars such as Ning Chen and Ted Slingerland in recent essays. However, Puett takes issue with their respective explanations for the tension between moral behavior and the seeming randomness of some acts attributed to *ming*. He suggests that “two distinct usages of *ming* are not

necessary,” that the term can be understood in these texts in a consistent manner. He also endeavors to refute Slingerland’s assertion that there exist an external and an inner realm, and that humans need only concern themselves with the internal realm in fulfilling their moral duty. In Puett’s reckoning, Heaven does not always seem to act according to the notion that ethical conduct will invariably be rewarded and evil always punished.

Puett argues that the “relationship of Heaven and humanity is charged with tensions,” aligning himself with and even extending the work of Lee Yearley. The relationship between Heaven and humans is a complicated one that is not tantamount to an easy one-to-one system of rewards and punishments. It is entirely within the realm of reason, one could surmise from reading the early Confucians, that one could follow the commands of Heaven, a prerequisite for the gentleman or *junzi*, and still end up with an unfortunate *ming*. In fact, Puett ventures to argue that Heaven may “at times work to prevent the completion of the command.” It seems that Confucius emphasizes not only that events lie outside the control of humans, but that they may even be outside one’s understanding. Confucius advises that humans should strive to accept the mysterious ways of Heaven and to function in accordance with its commands.

Mencius, too, counseled that one should accept Heaven, even though he might have a difficult time doing so himself. Puett argues that the tension implicit in the *Analects of Confucius* threatens to turn into outright conflict between Heaven and humans in Mencius. Reminding the reader that Mencius was frustrated in his attempt to become an adviser to the king of Qi, Puett indicates that Mencius might even have thought that what happens is not necessarily something we don’t comprehend, but may not even be right. Nevertheless, it is the duty of humans to accept it. It may be difficult to understand why Heaven may even work to “block the path of the sage,” as Puett phrases it, but one must never go against the will of Heaven.

It seems that Dong Zhongshu may have recognized the possible crisis in the relationship between Heaven and human beings, for how long could societies be expected simply to resign their fates to the whims of a greater power which may or may not be just? Thus, in institutionalizing the commands of Heaven, Dong seeks to resolve the tensions of Confucius and the potential conflicts of Mencius. Dong reads the Confucian-authored *Spring and Autumn Annals* as a work that, in Puett’s words, “provides the principles by which omens can be understood.” Thus, Dong has insured a secure role for the sage class, the scholars who are exclusively trained to interpret omens. They form a select body, who do not rule but rather advise the rulers whose power derives more arbitrarily from heredity. Puett’s ultimate argument is that, in resolving the conundrum of Heaven’s dispassionate hand versus the

moral imperative of individuals, Dong Zhongshu denies the tensions existing between the two and installs in their place precisely the group of intellectuals who first viewed themselves as disenfranchised by *ming*, the sagely class.

Mu-chou Poo's essay provides the perfect complement to the first set of four, as it takes as its primary subject matter a text that at most was probably designed for the middlebrow reader in ancient China, the *Daybook* of Shuihudi. These fairly recently discovered texts were part of a genre of "almanacs," presumably read by farmers, soldiers, craftsmen, and low-ranking government officials. As such, Poo surmises that these texts "could have represented the mentality of the lower-middle social stratum." The question is, then, did they indeed reflect the kind of mechanistic worldview that one tends to associate with the notion of *ming*? The answer is an intriguing one, for although the term "*ming*" itself is not present within the extant texts, the governing thought structure seems to be.

Poo agrees with both Raphals and Puett that "fate" in the Chinese context is not "unalterable." For while, interestingly, Poo observes that "nowhere is the idea that *ming* can be changed explicitly mentioned" in early Chinese discourse, it seems to be understood that it is not a completely fixed term either. A paradoxical situation exists for humans. Though one's fate may not be "fixed," one could go so far as to suggest it is "prescribed." The *Daybook*, an accumulation of practical guides to daily life, played a very useful role for the common people in early China. Just as the Confucian sage, at least by the time of Dong Zhongshu, could offer guidance to the sovereign on how best to accord with *ming*, so these popular texts served as a manual for ordinary people in a range of activities.

The *Daybook* can be divided into two types of texts, the "calendrical" texts and texts that offer "detailed predictions." Both of these sets of texts offer insight into the Chinese conception of fate. They serve as a sort of finite "map of human action" not dissimilar to the *Yijing*, though the latter was not calendrical in structure. However, it is similar in the sense that conceivably one could chart out all the possible actions available to humans on an intricately arrayed palette. If this is so, then isn't human action, in the Chinese conception, determined? In reconciling the paradox of the seemingly deterministic view with some sort of basic agency, Poo explains how the *Daybook* offers suggestions of ways in which one could improve if not fundamentally alter one's fate.

Poo suggests that while the basic structure of human events may be fixed, "one could have control over one's fate, with the *Daybook* in hand." While there may be an "overarching" scheme that is determined in the last instant, by performing certain acts or avoiding certain prohibitions, one can enhance one's chances with the cold hand of fate. Poo gives several examples

of such actions, which range from choosing or avoiding certain dates for engaging in certain activities (which, of course continues to the present) to performing “magical” measures such as burying an infant’s placenta. He concludes that, far from indicating that all human activity is fated, the *Daybook* paradoxically acknowledges the extraordinary power of fate, which one could presume is *ming*, yet at the same time offers methods for enhancing, or remedies for ameliorating, the fate one is dealt. While the *Daybook* shows little concern for the workings of a moral universe as found in the Confucian texts, it attempts to show the common people certain avenues through which the results of assigned fate may be negotiated.

By the time we get to the third and fourth centuries, beginning with Robert Campany’s essay, *ming* has become a central issue in philosophy and religion and, indeed, one of the problems that “early esoteric and later Daoist methods were designed to resolve.” In fact, as Campany describes it, *ming* is no longer a philosophical category that can be reduced to abstraction; it has taken on an ontogenetic role, determined during the very binding of the fetus. In other words, *ming* is intertwined with the very nature of conception.

Two other aspects of the issue of *ming* distinguish it from earlier accounts. First, by the time of the medieval Daoists, a whole array of methods had sprung up by which one could attempt to lengthen or even “dodge” the inexorable finitude of *ming* and remain alive. As the stories and prescriptions that Campany describes in his essay attest, these “earthbound” methods of transcendence were as complex as they were deceptive. Second, if *ming* emerged from philosophical and historical discourse of the earliest Chinese texts, by now it had taken on an even greater textual presence. One’s *ming* was inscribed in ledgers, recorded as one might perhaps record a debt. Unless one did something to alter the books, just as one might doctor an account book, then one was going to the grave as preordained. Thus, in the writings of Gan Bao, Ge Hong, and Wang Chong, one finds an interesting reversal in the logic of language; for while one customarily thinks of language as describing or depicting living realities, in these cases one could actually alter the reality by first reinscribing the text. The act of representation was thus turned around, just as if altering one’s checkbook might somehow result in more money in the bank.

Nonetheless, transcendence of one’s *ming* could not be affected by altering texts alone. Procedures were required that often involved drinking an elixir and writing a talisman, “escape by means of a simulated corpse,” known as *shijie*, wherein either someone else’s body had to be provided as a substitute for one’s own or some other feigning had to occur accompanied by certain accoutrements, such as clothing, a sword, or another device. One’s name had to be changed, and one had to move far away, abandoning all, and not

return for as long as several generations. And, finally, Daoist adepts were employed to assist in the process. This assistance had political implications. Rival Daoist groups would compete for the reputation of most qualified, and these groups were initiated in a system of esoteric rituals, thus setting them apart from the broader society.

Another solution to the *ming* problem was sought through self-refinement. It was believed that one could advance to an “embryonic version of oneself,” to achieve a “new, purer state of one’s former body” that would “release” one from “one’s corpse.” Though all these methods supposedly involved deception to one degree or another, Campany points out that there is another way to read this altering of the records, switching bodies, changing names, drinking elixirs, and the performance of various esoteric formulae. According to the *Taiping jing*, he shows, some argued that there was no way to improve one’s *ming* “off” the books as it were. The only way to do so would be “on” the books, through a systematic accounting of the merits and sins of one’s life, through confession, and through sincere repentance. This text acknowledges the *shijie* adepts but argues that “any longevity is the result of their merit” and not the machinations in which they engage. Thus, it is not Heaven that is deceived into extending the proscription put on life by *ming*, but rather humans who are deceived into thinking that anything other than merit would afford such an extension.

Moving beyond the connections that *ming* might have to the continuum of determinism versus free will, Stephen Bokenkamp’s essay delves deeply into *ming* as a constitutive element of the human body. *Ming*, according to early medical texts and other accounts of embryonic development, is a “coalescence of *yin* and *yang*” that became fixed within the fetus. Bokenkamp further investigates the range and depth of the Daoist ability to “adjust” *ming*, as it were, claiming that for these celestial masters *ming* was “more manufactured than assessed.”

The Daoist masters of the medieval period contended that they were in possession of certain privileged and exclusive understandings of the ways of Heaven, and these understandings afforded them immunity from fate. By employing psychosomatic techniques that allowed them to alter their own *ming*, they died only “apparent” deaths. These texts suggest there were record-keeping spirits that actually inhabited the body. The spirits could at any time ascend to heaven to report on misdeeds, thus leading to a shortened life span. If, however, one properly nourished one’s bodily *qi*, such spirits might remain within the body and insure that long life and safe passage through death was effected.

Bokenkamp goes on to explore this manipulation within the body through discussions of Daoist embryology and physiognomy. Working with

the writings of Yang Xi, Bokenkamp observes that what the Daoists would do was essentially re-create or even reverse the process of gestation along with the meditative techniques designed to prolong the human lives of fetuses. An adept was to visualize external deities merging with internal bodily spirits. They would join together as one and be guided to the proper bodily area in need of rejuvenation through meditative practices. It is important to note that these techniques could not be carried out by amateurs, for the deities in question were quite different from inborn spirits; in fact, they were the deities originally responsible for fashioning the human body, along with its inborn spirits. Only the Daoists had the skill to access these spirits. Intriguingly, this Daoist practice was designed to lead the body back to the moment of conception. The whole process was, essentially, a re-conception of the self, but not just a newly rejuvenated self—a self that was “etherealized.” The Daoist masters’ manipulation of *ming* enabled them to re-create themselves in a primordial form. Another embryological technique was that of the “perfected embryo,” that is, an “untying of the embryonic knots.” This intricate reconstitution of embryonic development “followed standard medical accounts of fetal development” at the time. One could venture to say that the discourse of the Daoists on this count seemed to differ little from what could be characterized as an esoteric combination of religious ritual with obstetric techniques. Thus, although these techniques were based on common conceptions of fetal development, they were also closely guarded, for Daoist manuals were peppered with injunctions that the secretive meditative techniques not be revealed to the laity.

Remonstrations against the popularization of techniques to alter human destiny also accompanied Daoist instructions concerning the techniques of physiognomy. This “body divination,” as Bokenkamp calls it, experienced a resurgence during the fourth century. But in reading the Shangqing texts and their discussion of “Lord Azure Lad,” Bokenkamp discovered that the practice of physiognomy was really no less opaque than embryonic re-conception. The reason for this is that the so-called physical traits that indicated one’s destiny, and could be altered as well, were only bare outside markings that telegraphed one’s fate. Far more important were the internal traits, to which only the privileged Daoists enjoyed access. In addition, though the signs might be altered, they were mere indications of the “merit inherited by ancestors.” One of the facts that Bokenkamp’s inquiry reveals is the profound extent to which *ming*, whether in Daoist circles or in the society at large, was seen as determined by family connections and lineage.

With Zong-qi Cai’s essay on Tao Qian and the “multiple vistas” of *ming* that influenced his work, there is a shift in the volume from religious,

philosophical, and to an extent political themes to more literary ones, though the political element remains. Cai explores how four different interpretations or “horizons of meaning” came to play a significant role in Tao’s poetry and his view of life. In fact, as he concludes at the end of his detailed account, “to fully understand the transformative power of Tao Qian’s poetry” one must comprehend how these multiple vistas of *ming* interacted with Tao’s life at various stages.

Like Schaberg’s essay, Cai begins his with a reflection on one of the earliest discussions of *ming* in Chinese discourse: Duke Wen’s famed “understanding of *ming*” in the *Zuozhuan*. Cai sees the term as actually containing four different dimensions, each of which is distinguished from the others. *Ming* could mean the demands that Heaven puts on one, one’s actual life span, one’s destiny in life, or the natural course that one should follow. He then goes on to demonstrate how each of these “horizons”—demands, life span, destiny, and natural course—plays out in the poetry of one of the great masters of the Six Dynasties period, Tao Qian.

Cai argues that, especially in Tao’s miscellaneous poems, *zashi*, and in his imitative ancient verse, *nigu*, the poet at the very least is wistful about human transience, though not necessarily obsessed with the finitude of his own life span. Cai then connects this wistfulness with a “hedonist” view of life, one in which one values the corporeal over other dimensions of existence. These poems express sorrow over the evanescence of life. However, far more crucial to Tao’s worldview is what Cai refers to as the struggle between a destiny-centered theory of *ming* and one that emphasizes the demands put on one to act in accordance with Heaven’s wishes. He offers his own broad survey of the historical development of the notion(s) of *ming*, particularly in Confucian texts. In the course of this survey he discovers a gradual loss of faith in a just Heaven’s ability to articulate and effectively reward behavior based on the demands it puts on its subjects. As such, the notion of *ming* gradually experiences a reconceptualization, and a meaning closer to “destiny” or “purposeless predeterminism” gains currency. Cai’s survey culminates in a discussion of Dong Zhongshu and Wang Mang’s accounts of *ming*, the former of which establishes an all-inclusive, vertical system of responsibility and the latter of which incorporates augury telling into the *ming* framework as a way of legitimizing the overthrow of the Han throne. Plaintive rhapsodies by Sima Qian, Li Kang, Tao Qian, and others have come to represent the paradox of the conflict between the “demands” of Heaven and an understanding of one’s irrevocable destiny, but these poems are far different in mood and content from the philosophical discourse. Rather, they exhibit a personal tone in their expression of a real existential

dilemma, the resignation to one's destiny with a simultaneous commitment to fulfilling the demands bestowed by Heaven. Cai's account is an interesting complement to Puett's.

Zong-qi Cai sees Tao Qian as firmly in the tradition of Sima Qian: one who embraces the "demands-centered" theory of *ming* espoused by the Confucians; one who, like the great historian, yearns for an immortal name that will transcend the mutability of physical existence. As an act of defiance against the vagaries of "destiny," Tao returns to his reclusive life on the farm and views poverty as a virtue—much like the Confucian exemplars Bo Yi and Shu Qi as well as Yan Hui. His eremitic poetry provides an opportunity to turn the punishment of destiny—that is, the lack of reward in this life—into a chance to establish a great name for himself as one who persevered against his fate and inscribed it in the elegant language of poetry and prose.

In the process of establishing this identity independent of but not inconsistent with the conventional Confucian path, Tao Qian established the fourth and final horizon of *ming*, basing it on a *xuanxue* (Abstruse Learning) reading of Zhuangzi that one "do what they are naturally inclined to do," to follow one's "inner tendencies." Cai provides a reading of one of Tao Qian's poems of the Dao on returning to a farming life and suggests that it bears a close thematic resemblance to Guo Xiang's reading of Zhuangzi. The result of this understanding is that one should adopt a stoic attitude toward life and follow the natural course of things "without fear or exultation." At one time or another, and sometimes simultaneously, Tao's poetry adheres to one or another of these four shifting horizons in the meaning of *ming*, which together form a complex vision of life.

As an anthropologist, Steven Sangren is particularly interested in the relationship between texts and the cultural context that has produced them. It is with this in mind that he approaches the Ming dynasty epic *The Investiture of the Gods*. Sangren's analysis of the chapters that relate the story of Nezha, a half-immortal, half-human warrior whom legend has it is sent to assist Jiang Ziya with the preordained overthrow of the Shang dynasty, focuses on the issues of transcendence and narrative uses of fate. Like other great late dynastic narratives, such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Investiture of the Gods* narrates historical events whose outcomes are already known and determined. Interest in them as narratives stems from their ability to relate in detail how fated events that the readership is familiar with have come to be.

The narrative posits several hierarchical levels, each of which transcends the previous one: in the human realm, powerful officials transcend ordinary people, and above them is the transcendence of the imperium. Beyond this level still is the transcendent level of the gods. But the theme of

transcendence and fate truly comes into play when one realizes, as Sangren notes, that “not even the gods can withstand the immutability of” Heaven’s decree that the Shang must fall. In the inexorable logic of *tianming*, the transcendent power of history has determined what the outcome will be. However, as Sangren goes on to ponder, in the realm of narrative other transcendent powers are in play, namely the author of the narrative itself.

Drawing upon Terence Turner’s reformulation of the notion of transcendence, an inquiry into the nature of hierarchies, where the upper levels are generative yet are viewed from below, through the lower levels, Sangren describes how each ever more transcendent level appears simply to be implementing the command of Heaven, even as each level forces the lower ones to submit to its own will. All this is perceived as possible only if one accepts the ultimate authority that transcends one’s level—that is, as long as one suspends disbelief in the notion that *tianming* itself is a product, not of Heaven, or even of gods, but of human culture. On the level of the narrative, the enthralling nature of the literary work, similarly, is possible only as long as one is willing to suspend disbelief in its veracity by ignoring the role of an author, who is not representing a preexisting reality but constructing an imagined world itself not “fated” to correspond to anything other than the principles of good fiction writing. Although the author of the work controls how the narrative develops, his own creative powers are represented in veiled form as the workings of Heaven; he therefore attempts to subordinate his authority to a supposed higher, transcendent power. Believability, not to mention the narrative cohesion of the epic, rests on that appeal.

Perhaps not since the fateful acknowledgment of Duke Wen’s understanding *ming* has one’s life so depended upon this notion as has that of the illustrious literary critic Jin Shengtan, the subject of Patricia Sieber’s contribution to our volume. Sieber’s treatment of the relationship between *ming* and *cai* 才 (talent) in late imperial critical discourse shows how one’s literary talent can negatively or even mortally affect one’s public career, as Jin’s public beheading testifies. Indeed, some Qing critics would go on to take an accusatory stance toward *ming*, bemoaning the resentment that Heaven exhibits toward those who possess exceeding talent and achieve a resultant premature vanquishing of their existence. Like many who touch upon the *ming* theme, these critics cited the confluence of *ming*, *cai*, and *de* 德 (virtue) in the person of Yan Hui, Confucius’ favorite disciple.

The material that Sieber chooses for the substance of her discussion is “ledger literature,” copious in-text commentaries on literary works that began with Daoist texts, notably those written by Yuan Huang, Zhuhong Yunqi, and Liu Zongzhou. Yuan Huang argued that *ming* could be altered through human intervention and seemed to grow out of the tradition of

Daoist thinkers that claim the attention of Campany and Bokenkamp. Zhu-hong Yunqi went so far as to develop a complex scheme of penalties and rewards, a point system in fact, according to which the actions one took here on earth would affect one's longevity. When one adds to this Liu Zongzhou's imperatives to adhere strictly to Confucian rituals, what one brings away from these critics is a new sense of how texts are to be produced, reproduced, and distributed. "Proper textual production" would be rewarded, while punitive measures could be taken against those who disseminated to the public texts that were considered inappropriate.

The punitive tone that pervades the works of these early ledger writers is mirrored by the strict rules of censorship imposed on fictional and dramatic literature by the early Ming emperors. Although this eased somewhat in the mid- and late Ming dynasty, the effects of printing and reprinting on the "fates" of scholars was a constant concern for all the prominent collectors and editors of the era. Nevertheless, their dissemination of texts destined to be classics continued unabated. The key to successfully promoting controversial texts such as the *Xixiang ji* and *Shuibu zhuan* was to somehow maneuver around the prohibitions against the propagation of "slandorous" material, as many of the most popular works of the day were considered by the censors. The contribution of Li Zhi in this regard was immense, as he actively sought out texts that had been considered too risky for promotion, or even taboo, by early Ming critics. Li Zhi railed against the "falseness of human relations" that resulted from the overly aggressive pursuit of wealth. In its place, Li advocated *zhen* 真 (authenticity), the expression and cultivation of true feelings in literature. He argued that the best literary representatives of this were the *Shuibu zhuan* and the *Xixiang ji*. He also defended commentaries on these and other texts as well as their dissemination "on the basis of genuine feeling being fostered." His endorsement of these texts facilitated their proliferation. Thus, his work was an excellent example of how one might negotiate the risky business of the injunctions against vernacular fiction and drama. Of course, his suicide is a clear indication that the promotion of such texts could have a drastic effect on one's *ming*.

In the final portion of her essay, Sieber develops an insightful argument that attempts to explain, on the one hand, why it is that Jin Shengtan, a writer of ledgers on the *Shuibu zhuan* and *Xixiang ji*, himself risked death by propagating these dangerous texts and, on the other hand, why he actually invoked punitive discourse in a poem written just before his death. Jin essentially agreed with the censors in arguing that "unless one is a sage one should not write" and, indeed, "one ought to be executed and have his writings burned." But what Jin was attempting to do in fact was turn the tables on the censors in an effort to rescue these much maligned texts. By invoking

the punitive discourse himself, he “preempts any accusations” of salacious activities of his own. He identifies in this *jueming ci*, or “poem written on the eve of execution” (which could be more closely parsed as the “severance” of one’s *ming*), with Confucius—Confucius the censor as Sieber points out. By accepting the censor’s remonstrances against publication and propagation unless one is a sage, Jin actually trumped their accusations and instilled doubt about the justness of their death sentence upon him. He thereby was able to “save” these great texts for posterity even though he himself met an untimely and premature end.

The essays thus far in the volume have tended either to highlight the complexity and cultural/historical situatedness of *ming* or have contested outright the easy equation between this Chinese signifier and the Western concept of fatalism or determinism, preconceived notions that a Western reader could easily mistake for *ming*. In Woei Lien Chong’s essay, we have the first example of a discussion of scholars who are self-consciously anti-*ming*, at least insofar as that would entail a moral position of fatalistic indolence. Chong discusses the work of three contemporary Chinese philosophers—Li Zehou, Liu Xiaofeng, and Liu Xiaobo—delineating how each has attributed China’s modern predicament to a “hubris” in Chinese thought and political action. What constitutes hubris shifts somewhat between the three thinkers, but they all agree in maintaining that modern China is emerging from a stage of severe crisis, and that this crisis has arisen as a result of its general reliance on traditional modes of thought and behavior.

Li Zehou, Chong observes, attributes the great catastrophes of the Mao era to what she refers to as “voluntarism”: the belief that the purified moral will is capable of transforming both physical and mental reality and regulating the cosmic order of things. Li does not locate this type of hubris in a radically antitraditional Maoism, as might be conventionally suggested; rather, he argues that the problem with Maoist thought is that it is too beholden to Confucian thought, in particular Wang Yangming’s strand of neo-Confucianism. Wang allowed for the dynamic role of the human subject, an idea eventually seized upon by Mao but that can be traced from Confucius, who integrated shamanistic rituals into a moral philosophy predicated upon harmony, through Dong Zhongshu, who elevated the human moral will to cosmic proportions, through Wang Yangming and even Kang Youwei, down to Maoism, whose most radical strain advocated marshaling a superhuman will against the forces of nature and history. The only problem was that history and nature would not bend that far.

Liu Xiaofeng also identifies a kind of hubris in traditional Chinese philosophy and maintains that the basic attitude of traditional Chinese

thought, especially Zhuangzi, is “indifference,” an indifference that stems from the overbearing presence of *ming*. But Liu is not satisfied with leaving the critique here. He also suggests that the highly practical or worldly quality of Chinese philosophy, and the absence of a transcendent god, have led traditional Chinese thought to place too much responsibility in the hands of human beings. In particular, this has created a “deification of finite entities,” that is, an elevation of human institutions such as aspects of the government, including the imperium, to the celestial level. As there is no distinction between the heavenly and the human realm, then, Liu Xiaofeng notes that the attempt to make a “heaven on earth” (by deifying the human—the cult of Mao) in the form of the Cultural Revolution was a catastrophe almost fated to occur, given the way traditional Chinese philosophy has developed.

An emphasis on how certain continuities in traditional and post-1949 Chinese thought have led to modern crises is also evident in the work of Liu Xiaobo, an atheist existentialist who advocates “total Westernization.” Western literature and philosophy are superior to Chinese, Liu maintains, precisely because they do not domesticate or embrace notions such as *ming*, but rather view them as anathema to the true building blocks of a modern society: freedom and individualism. Liu Xiaobo’s mixture of British liberalism, with its key concept of liberty, and atheistic existentialism, which challenges the individual to define one’s own essence separately from institutional identities, is an antidote, he would argue, to the modern manifestation of “Chinese despotism,” which he considers only superficially removed from that of imperial China.

All three of these philosophers distance themselves from the traditional notion of *ming*. Although they do not directly attack or criticize it, as may be the case in modern Chinese literature, Woei Lien Chong argues that they certainly see the various “hubrises” of socialist China as functioning in concert with what they would consider the stifling character of *ming* ideology. The three thinkers are different from one another in significant ways. Li Zehou and Liu Xiaobo would not advocate Christianity; the two Liu’s are less teleological than Li. According to Li Zehou, the fundamental source of hubris in Chinese thought is the idea that both knowledge and action are direct and unmediated—misconceptions which, he holds, have fostered an unbridled belief in the ability of the moral hero to mold the cosmos purely by means of his willpower. In contrast, Li follows Kant in his emphasis on the mediated nature of both knowledge and action: empirical knowledge is mediated by the categories of the knowing subject, and human action in the real physical world is mediated by labor and technology. For this reason, Li argues, Mao’s preoccupation with ideological campaigns and mass mobilization as motors of social progress was bound to lead to disaster: it was merely

the most recent form of ancient Chinese belief that there is no ontological rift between mind and matter, and that both are equally malleable by the morally purified human will.

Liu Xiaofeng also locates the origin of Chinese hubris in the field of ontology, but in a different way. In his view, the mistake made by Chinese thought was, rather, that no ontological difference was thematized between humankind and a transcendent, personal divinity. As a result, in Liu's view, the Chinese lack a sense of original sin, and they therefore tend to put humankind on a par with the divine. This has given rise to a strong tendency to deify finite entities such as history, the state, and mortal leaders.

The motif that the absence of a belief in original sin has had far-reaching consequences for China's (political) culture is echoed by Liu Xiaobo, although, unlike Liu Xiaofeng, his idea of authentic personhood is not Christian in origin, but predominantly shaped by atheistic existentialism; in reaction against the utopian frenzy of the Maoist past, he scorns any form of organized narrative that seeks to provide life with a collective meaning. He holds that life has no intrinsic meaning—every attempt to fill this void is fraudulent and based on hubris.

Sabina Knight's essay addresses the relationship between *ming* and gender in Chinese literature by discussing in detail three works from the twentieth century and inquiring into how *ming* "mystifies gender-based oppression" and encourages resignation in the face of the seeming inevitability of such oppression. She prefaces her literary analysis with some remarks on Ding Ling's well-known essay "Thoughts on March Eighth," written in 1942, a watershed year for Chinese literature as it signaled the turning point in the relationship between the educated elite's ability to express itself and the control of the Chinese Communist party led by Mao Zedong. In fact, Ding Ling's essay, in addition to a couple of short stories she wrote around the same time, did not sit well with the party's high echelon and formed in part the impetus for this tectonic reining in of the literate class. While this has all been documented before, Knight's contribution is to dwell in particular on the deployment of *ming* as a way of "militating against thinking about internalized and external oppression." She also notes with some irony that "discourses of inevitability" have changed over time, with more room for maneuver actually being accorded to *ming* in traditional times and a greater sense of resignation in the face of *ming* occurring in the twentieth century, a point that is implicitly upheld by a number of the essays in this volume. In the Tang dynasty classical tale "The Story of Ying-ying," for example, she observes that an appeal to inevitability absolves the male protagonist from any guilt over abandoning a lover, but oddly the moralistic tone of the work undercuts itself, as it portrays Ying-ying sympathetically.

Such ambivalences are less in evidence in the twentieth century, as Knight's inquiry into the late-Qing novel *Sea of Regret*, the Republican-era short story "Crescent Moon," and the post-Mao novella "Soft Is the Chain" establishes. In *Sea of Regret*, the author, Wu Woyao, in constructing a narrative of two failed attempts at arranged marriage, leaves open the question of what destroys the marriages: the individual's inability or unwillingness to change or society itself. Dihua, the female protagonist of one of the narratives, seems unable to entertain alternatives, and although she blames herself for the demise of her marriage, she also is all too willing to attribute her predicament to fate. Her abject devotion to her departed husband and refusal to entertain any options underscore the extent to which she is conditioned to adhere to an ideology where *ming* rationalizes and reinforces social oppression; and, as Knight suggests, it is no solace that in the parallel story line the male protagonist Zhong'ai renounces the world, for his resignation is depicted as being a matter of choice rather than submission to deterministic forces.

The tension of Lao She's "Crescent Moon" lies in the young female protagonist's desperate attempts to seek control over her life in the face of certain doom. The image of the moon serves as a punctuation mark to the theme of determinism by accentuating the feelings of fatalism and cyclicity more present with each failed effort of the protagonist to liberate herself from her lot as a prostitute. As a Marxist, Lao She ultimately would argue that the solution to one's unfortunate fate cannot come from individual effort but must be sought in collective action, though his own despicable treatment at the hands of the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution raises doubts over how realistic this solution may actually be. Dai Houying's work takes up the post-Cultural Revolution era and most poignantly raises the question of whether progress in history is possible. While *ming* is used to mark life's turning points for the protagonist Wen Ruixia, a young widow, and tends to "script" her notions of what love, marriage, and mothering should be, the reader is left wondering at the end of this work whether she is not an anachronism, caught in the final throes of a feudalistic era that, hopefully, do not obtain in the case of her own child or in that of other modern subjectivities. But this is a question that probably will remain for later generations not so closely connected with our times to decide.

My own essay, the final one in the volume, treats the question of Chinese cultural continuity, particularly in the immediate contemporary situation, and how it impacts on the status of Taiwan vis-à-vis mainland China. That the status of Taiwan is a burning political issue is clear to all who read the newspapers, but a deeper question is—how is this issue informed and contested by the cultural framework of what constitutes being Chinese? I

cannot in this forum provide a complete answer to this question, but what I venture to do is to isolate the example of *ming* and in the process argue that when one begins to scrutinize particular manifestations or signs of culture, such as a concept that has operated throughout history and transcends class, one finds, at least in the case of *ming*, considerable cross-strait continuity. That is the general picture. Naturally, there are permutations in the way *ming* is deployed or invoked in texts. But these differences, I believe, are more nuances among individual authors than they are essential cultural differences that form a pattern distinguishing Taiwanese literature from that of mainland Chinese literature.

I begin my essay by illustrating just how pervasive *ming* is in contemporary Chinese culture through the example of Gao Xingjian, his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and his magnum opus, *Soul Mountain*. Through textual analysis I illustrate that in fact the issue of *ming* served as the impetus for Gao's writing of this expansive narrative, for it was his (mis)diagnosis as having cancer and resultant "retrieval" of his *ming* from the jaws of death that caused him to rethink the way he was living his life, to redirect his energy and eventually write the book. From there, I essentially discuss four narrative texts, two from Taiwan and two from mainland China. Each has its unique tendencies and trajectories, but each also shares some bedrock notions as well. *Ming*, for contemporary Chinese writers, still signifies the kinds of fatalistic proscriptions and prohibitions one finds in May Fourth literature, such as some of that Sabina Knight discusses. But it also seems to inform part of the psyche, the subjective makeup of some of the characters in the stories I read, such as Madame Qian in Bai Xianyong's "Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream" or the unnamed protagonist in Zhang Xinxin's "Dreams of Our Age." In these two works the protagonists fight against the unremitting logic of their *ming*, but at the same time *ming* then becomes a trope of identity, in a manner of speaking, not just a part of life but the essential part. Added to this, then, is a sense that *ming* is a life-giving force, that which constitutes life even though one may struggle against its strictures. Thus, when Fugui, in Yu Hua's *To Live*, for example, narrates the sorrowful story of his family, each picked off by the vagaries of *ming*, one also comes to note that in spite of our attention to the life-limiting aspect of *ming* we should still treat it with respect, because it is also the life-giving force.

Finally, each text in its own way is shaped in terms of plot progression, style, and structure by the gravity that *ming* exerts upon it. In Wang Wenxing's *Backed against the Sea*, for example, the ultimately failed attempt on Wang's part to create a language that defies the laws of determinism is actually foregrounded and even mocked in part by the action of the story, the totally random and irreverent appropriation of fortune-telling paraphernalia

by the antihero who, in a simple act of trying to make a little money, actually, or perhaps necessarily, comes up with a prediction on the lives of four individuals too uncannily close to the mark for comfort. That is the irony of *ming*: the more one searches in Chinese discourse for ways around it, for avenues of escape or at least avoidance, the more the necessity of its ubiquity is confirmed.

As I mentioned at the outset of this introduction, a volume of collected essays can scarcely exhaust the nearly boundless material on *ming* that exists in Chinese discourse, any more than it will lay to rest debates about the nature of *ming*. One of the interesting features of editing such a book is the opportunity to observe how the book itself is in some ways shaped by conditions outside one's grasp—conditions that tempt one once again to refer the reader to *ming* for an explanation. A crucial factor in the ultimate form of this volume was the extent to which scholars were able or unable to contribute to it, and much of those determinations resided in the coincidental circumstances of each individual. That the volume does not therefore presume to be comprehensive or conclusive is itself a result of the *ming* of this project. That said, there are some major areas in which we would have liked to delve but for one reason or another were unable. Future treatments of *ming* must address the relationship between it and the practice of divination. Richard Smith has already published on this subject, and his eagerly awaited forthcoming article on the subject updates his findings (Smith forthcoming). Lisa Raphals has embarked on a book-length study comparing divination practices in the Chinese and Greek civilizations. These works will help to fill this gap. It also would have been ideal had we been able to include a chapter on the relationship between the indigenous notion of *ming* as a Chinese concept and the Buddhist notion of karmic retribution. Jacques Gernet has argued that, “thanks to certain analogies” such as that between *ming* and karma, Buddhism was more readily absorbed into Chinese practices of belief (Gernet 1982: 215). It would be worthwhile to hear from the perspective of a Buddhist scholar what the ways are in which *ming* and karma are similar and different. The implications for this discussion are quite great in Chinese thought and literature, for the interaction of the two concepts becomes evident not only in popular religion and social practice but in late imperial narrative and neo-Confucian thought (see Metzgar 1977: 127–134 and Hou 1983). In any case, it is my hope that this volume will not put an end to discussions concerning *ming* but will serve to engender more, and that this diverse set of perspectives has produced a work of value to readers in Chinese studies and comparative cultures, scholars and students alike.