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herausgegeben von
Wolfgang Kubin und Li Xuetao

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Qin Pieces Made by Gentlemen in Misery: Reconsidering the Meaning of *Cao* in Cai Yong's *Qincao**

Dorothee Schaab-Hanke**

Introduction

The Han scholar Cai Yong 蔡邕 (ca. 132–192) was certainly one of the most famous and probably also one of the most honoured *ru* of the late Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The biography Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) has reserved for him in the *Hou-Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han) depicts him as a quite multi-facetted man, who left behind him over a hundred texts, among them historical, epigraphic, lyrical and other works.[1] The biography also emphasizes Cai Yong's special talent in music, and it also mentions that Cai Yong's first invitation to come to the capital of Luoyang was due to his being renown already then for his special talent in playing the seven stringed zither called *qin*:

> [蔡邕]少博學，師事胡廣，好辭章、數術、天文、妙操音律。桓帝時，宦者徐璜等擅權，聞邕善鼓琴，白於天子勒陳留太守督促發遣，邕行至偃師，稱疾而歸。
>
> [Cai Yong] was broadly educated already in his youth, and his teacher was Hu Guang. He was good in compiling texts, as well as in numerology and astronomy, and he was an excellent musician. At the time of Emperor Huan, while the eunuch Xu Huang and others had arrogated power (at court), they had heard of (Cai) Yong's expertise in *qin* playing and persuaded the emperor to send a summons to the major of Chenliu[2] that (Cai

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* This text is a revised version of a paper the author had presented at the School of History and Culture of Shandong University, Jinan, on 19.09.2017 (Chinese title: "Feng luanshi zhi shi suo zuo de *qinqu*: *cao* zai Cai Yong *Qincao* zhong de hanyi" 逢亂世之士所作的琴曲：「操」在蔡邕《琴操》中的含義).

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1 *Hou-Han shu* 60B.1979-2013.

2 Chenliu was a commandery to the southeast of modern Kaifeng, where Cai Yong was born.

> Yong) should hasten to the capital (to give a *qin* recital). Cai set off, but on arriving at (the city of) Yanshi, he pleaded illness and (was given the permission) of returning home.[3]

The fact that Cai Yong was not only an important Confucian scholar, but also a famous *qin* player explains why among the works he has been credited with is also a text which has so far received comparably little attention, namely the *Qincao* 琴操.[4]

The focus of this study will be put on the meaning of the term *cao* 操 in the context of the *Qincao*, a collection of stories introducing the contents and composers of the *qin* titles assembled in it. As I am presently preparing a book on Cai Yong and the *Qincao* in which this topic will be discussed more in depth, I will confine myself in this study to what I have presented in my paper.[5]

1 Occurrences of the Term *Cao* in the *Qincao*

In the *Qincao*, which consists of the collection of *qin* pieces and the stories related to them and of Cai Yong's preface to that text, the term *cao* is nowhere defined.[6] It is only used there as a designation for the *qin* pieces proper. In his preface, Cai Yong lists up the *cao* as one of altogether four genres or categories of *qin* pieces assembled in his collection. There we read:

> 古琴曲有詩歌五曲 [...]；又有一十二操 [...]；又有九引 [...]；又有河間雜歌二十一章。
>
> As to old pieces for the *qin* there are five *shige* [...], and besides there are twelve *cao*, [...] and further there are nine *yin* [...]; and finally there are twenty-one unclassified songs from (the area) between the Rivers (Hejian).

3 *Hou-Han shu* 60B.1980.

4 As I have already discussed in my MA thesis, authorship of the *Qincao* has not only been attributed to Cai Yong, but also to Huan Tan 桓譚 (c. 43 BCE –50 CE) and Kong Yan 孔衍 (268–320), but as I will show in my forthcoming book, seen precisely from an exegetical perspective, there is good reason to assume that Cai Yong was not only the author of the preface to the *Qincao*, but also the compiler of the collection of stories introducing the *qin* pieces itself.

5 For an earlier discussion of the meaning of *cao*, see also my MA thesis, Schaab-Hanke 1988. In my forthcoming book, Schaab-Hanke 2020, a carefully revised translation of the *Qincao* will be presented along with a comprehensive analysis on Cai Yong and the *Qincao* from an exegetical perspective.

6 The text of the *Qincao* has come down to us in several editions. The edition on which this analysis is based is the Duhuazhai congshu 讀畫齋叢書 edition.

Apart from the *cao* there is the category *shige*, which can easily be identified to refer to songs from the classical "Book of Songs" (*Shijing* 詩經), the *yin* 引, to be rendered as "laments", and the Hejian *zage* 河間雜歌 which assembles songs from the "Area between the Rivers" and may thus be taken as a collective designation for folk songs. So the question to be raised here is how the category *cao* should be rendered as compared with the other three? As mentioned before, the *Qincao* text proper gives no explanation for what a *cao* is. However, an important hint at a somehow moralizing or at least educating aspect of the instrument *qin* and its effect upon a player is expressed right at the beginning of Cai Yong's preface. There it is said:

> 伏羲作琴，所以禦邪僻防心淫，以脩身理性，反其天真也。
> Fu Xi made the (first) *qin*, as a means to ward off the evil and depraved and to guard the heart against low desires, in order to cultivate one's person and to regulate one's nature, to make one return so what is truly heavenly in him.[7]

2 Explanations of the Term *Cao* in Other Han Sources

Let us now take a closer look at what we find in other early sources about these more subtle meanings of the term *cao*.

In his "Bielu" 別錄 (Separate Records), Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 BCE–6 CE) discusses the meaning of the term *cao* saying:

> 君子因雅琴之適，故從容以致思焉。其道閉邪，悲愁而作者，名其曲曰操。言遇災害不失其操也。
> A gentleman relies on the way of the elegant zither. This is why he may entrust his thoughts to (his play) while being completely relaxed. A piece that was composed by someone who was in sorrow and anger because his way was obstructed, is called a *cao*. It means that someone even when he encounters misery will not lose his principles.[8]

As can be clearly seen from this quote, *cao* must mean more than simply a "piece" here. It has attained a moral category – something one will not lose even though one is in very bad circumstances. To use a modern formulation, one might even speak of "inner balance", which a *qin* player

7 *Qincao* 1.1b ("Xu"); cf. Van Gulik 1940[1969], 42.
8 Liu Xiang, "Bielu" 別錄 (*Hou-Hanshu*-K 35.1201); cf. Li Jiemin 1992, 317.

should never lose, but the word "principle" chosen for this translation might do here, because it implies some moral values which a scholar should never forget, probably Confucian values, and this fits well with our given context.

The fact that *cao* has attained the meaning of a noun describing the inner attitude of someone who is in trouble but still preserves his moral countenance, is confirmed by another Han scholar. Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 43 BCE–50 CE), author of the *Xinlun* 新論 (New Discussions), and also known to have been a *qin* player himself, in a chapter called "Qindao" 琴道 (The Way of the Zither) writes about the meaning of *cao* 操:

> 古者聖賢，玩琴以養心。夫遭遇異時，窮則獨善其身而不失其操，故謂之「操」。
> The sages and worthies of the ancient past played the zither to cultivate their hearts. When they were confronted with awkward times, they would devote themselves wholly to perfecting their own persons and to not losing their principles, and this is why (these pieces) are called *cao*.[9]

And again, we find an almost verbatim repetition of this basic idea of what a *cao* is in Ying Shao's 應劭 (ca. 140–ca. 204 CE) *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義:

> 其遇閉塞，憂愁而作者，命其曲曰「操」。「操」者、言遇菑遭害，困厄窮迫，雖怨恨失意，猶守禮義，不懼不懾，樂道而不失其操者也。
> Someone who composes a piece while suffering obstructions and pain will call this piece a *cao*. *Cao* means that a man who has encountered calamities and who is thus in misery and pain, even though he is full of resentment and without any hope, will still sustain his morality and righteousness without ever hesitating, he will enjoy the Way and not lose his principles (*cao*).[10]

So in all three sources quoted above the composition of a *cao* is associated with the idea that it was composed while its composer was in as somehow difficult situation, perhaps even in a crisis of his life. We will now look at the stories assembled in the *Qincao* and keep the question in mind if this

9 *Xinlun*, "Qindao" (*Quan Hou-Han wen* 15.9a), Pokora 1975, F 169, 181.
10 *Fengsu tongyi* 6.14/45/21-23.

definiton of a *cao* is mirrored by the composing cirumstances of the *qin* pieces contained in the category *cao*.[11]

3 *Qin* Composers in Misery: A Closer Look at Stories Related to the Section *Cao*

As said before, the section *cao* in the *Qincao* contains the titles of altogether twelve *qin* pieces, accompanied by stories informing the reader (or player) about the circumstances under which the given piece was first performed and who the composer was.[12] If one takes a closer look at the persons who are indicated there to be the composers of these pieces, one finds that the first three pieces were all ascribed to Master Kong as their composer.

The first piece in the section *cao*, "Jianggui cao" 將歸操 (About to Return, *Qincao* 2.1), is introduced in the *Qincao* with an anecdote which will rendered in full below:

〈將歸操〉者，孔子之所作也。
The piece "About to Return" was composed by Master Kong.

趙簡子循執玉帛以聘孔子，孔子將往，未至，渡狄水，聞趙殺其賢大夫竇鳴犢，喟然而嘆之曰：「夫趙之所以治者，鳴犢之力也。殺鳴犢而聘余，可丘之往也？夫燔林而田，則麒麟不至，覆巢破卵，則鳳皇不翔，鳥獸尚惡傷類，而況君子哉？」
Zhao Jianzi had sent jade and silk (gifts) and invited Master Kong. Master Kong was about to travel there, but shortly before getting there, he heard, while crossing the Di River, that Zhao had executed his worthy minister Dou Mingdu. Upon this he sighed saying: "The force by which Zhao was able to rule, was based upon Mingdu. If he calls for me after killing Mingdu, what use would it have for me, Qiu, to proceed there? If one tries to culti-

11 The situation is further complicated by the fact that not only in the category *cao* proper, but also in the categories *shige* and *Hejian zage*, some pieces are denoted as *cao*, namely: 1.1 ("Luming cao"), 1.2. ("Fatan cao"), 1.3 ("Zouyu cao") and 1.5 ("Boju cao"). – The story of 1.4 is lost, but the title would certainly have been "Yingchao cao". Also, in Category 4, *Hejian zage*, we have the following pieces ending in *cao*: 4.1 ("Jishan cao"), 4.10 ("Cuizi du he cao"), 4,14 ("Liangshan cao"). The question if the pieces called *cao* in these other three categories have been intentionally also called cao to distinguish them from others will have to be deferred to my forthcoming book, for the sake of brevity in this study.

12 Of the story accompanying the last of the pieces, "Huailing cao" 壞陵操, is only one sentence left intact saying that it was composed by Boya.

vate fields by burning down the forests, the unicorns will not come; where the nests of birds are turned upside down so that the eggs are broken, the Phoenixes will not fly up. When beasts and birds detest that damage was afflicted to their species, how much more gentlemen should do!

於是援琴而鼓之云：
Upon this he took his *qin*, played it and sang:

「翱翔於衛，/復我舊居，/從吾所好，/其樂只且。」
"I am setting off for Wei, / turning back to my old abode; /I'll do what I like to do, / This is also a kind of joy!"[13]

To sum up, the anecdote is about Master Kong's frustration when he heard of the misbehavior of Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子 of the state of Jin, when he was just on his way to offer him his services. Upon hearing this, Confucius in utter despair turned his carriage and played the *qin*.

Quite similarly, the second piece of the category *cao*, "Yilan cao" 猗蘭操 (The Orchid, *Qincao* 2.2), is about Master Kong's general experience that none of the rulers of the various feudal states of the time called the "Spring and Autumn Period" (722–481 BCE) was interested in his services to assist him in the government. On his way back he came through a lonely valley where he saw a beautiful orchid standing alone inmidst of "vulgar" grasses and said sighing:

「夫蘭當為王者香，今乃獨茂，與眾草為伍，譬猶賢者不逢時，與鄙夫為倫也？
This orchid should have shared her fragrance with true kings, but now she florishes all alone, with only simple herbs by her side. She is like a worthy who has not found his place during his lifetime and who has only vulgar men as his companions!"

So he identified himself with the orchid, took his *qin*, played and sang.[14]

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13 The last two lines of this song are quoted from earlier sources: "I'll do what I like to do" (*cong wu suo hao* 從吾所好) is from *Lunyu* 7.12; "This is also a kind of joy!"(*qi le zhi qie* 其樂只且) is from *Maoshi* 67.

14 The fragrant orchid as a metaphor for morally good officials, as contrasted to bad officials without virtue, is already found in the *Chuci* 楚辭. Even the idea that an orchid spreads its fragrance even when nobody is there to perceive it, is formulated already there. Vgl. *Chuci* 4.31b. A connection between Confucius and the solitary orchid is established in the *Kongzi jiayu* where Master Kong, in the context of his being arrested between Chen and Cai, in a talk with his disci-

The third piece, "Guishan cao" 龜山操 (Mount Gui), tells the famous story of how Kong Qiu's career – he had indeed attained a position at the court of the ruler of Lu – was shortly hereafter brought to a sudden end by the intervention of Ji Huanzi 季桓子, a member of one of the three families arrogating power in the state of Lu, who had sent female singers to the court of Lu and thereby provoked protest on part of Master Kong. After he had left the court of Lu, he looked back and saw that Mount Gui (Guishan 龜山) obstructed his view back onto Lu, and he thus compared the mountain with the Ji family usurping power in Lu, played the *qin* and composed a song about it.

To sum up, the stories related to the three first pieces of the section *cao* all describe Master Kong in an awkward situation while he was travelling from one state to the other in the hope to be received by one of the states' leaders as his advisor or minister. In all these situations he takes hold of his *qin*, strums it and sings. We will thus tentatively call these three initial pieces of the *cao* category the "Master Kong in misery sequence".

As for the other stories contained in the *cao* section of the *Qincao*, most of them are said to have been composed under similarly awkward circumstances.

The piece "Juyou cao" 拘幽操 (Incarcerated, *Qincao* 2.5), for example, was composed by King Wen of Zhou dring the time had been put in jail by Zhou Xin, the last (and bad) ruler of the Shang dynasty, in Youli. During the time of his incarceration he composed a long song in which he attacked the last ruler of the Shang for his misbehavior and presaged that he, Chang, margrave of the West, would in the end overcome the Shang as the new ruler.

The (piece) "Lüshuang cao" 履霜操 (Treading on the Frost, *Qincao* 2.7) was composed by Bo Qi 伯奇, the son of Yin Jifu 尹吉甫. Boqi who was badly slandered by his stepmother and thus chased away by his own father composed a *cao*, full of anger and resentment because of the injus-

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ple Zilu 子路 says: 且芝蘭生於深林，不以無人而不芳，君子修道立德，不謂窮困而改節。為之者人也，生死者，命也。„Irises and orchids grow in the deep forests. It is not that they will not emit their fragrance if nobody is around. The noble man reforms his ways and cultivates his virtue, but he would never, even under awkward circumstances, deviate from his moral standards."

tice he had suffered. The story has a happy end in that the father was on an excursion together with King Xuan and the king heard Boqi's song in the wilds and turned his father's attention to this, so that the father in the end rehabilitates his son and instead orders his second wife to be killed.

Some of the stories tell the reader of a very personal suffering and loss, as for example the piece "Zhichao fei cao" 雉朝飛操 (Pheasants on Their Morning Flight, *Qincao* 2.8). There we learn of Master Du Mu 獨沐子, a man from the state of Qi, who bemoaned that at the age of 60 he had still not found a wife. When searching for firewood in the wilds early in the morning, he saw pairs of pheasants following each other in the sky and moved by this scenery, he composed a *qin* tune.

Another piece is about Master Shangling Mu 商陵牧子, called "Biehe cao" 別鶴操 (The crane flies away, *Qincao* 2.9). After five years of marriage, his wife still had not been able to give life to a son, and so his father and his elder brother urged him to take a new wife. His old wife knew of the plan, and in the night before she was being driven way, she got up and cried bitterly. Shangling Mu heard her and composed a *qin* tune in which he used the metaphor of a crane flying away in order to express his sad feelings.

As all these examples illustrate, there are people from all strands of society in early China who are suffering slander, are blocked by people who did not recognize the value of someone who had offered his services ors simply did not want to give the reins of government into other persons' hands. What the protagonists of these stories, however, all have in common is that by entrusting their negative feelings to the instrument, composing pieces and singing songs they overcome their anger and frustration and thus regain their inner balance and countenance.

4 Was the Installment of a *Cao* Section in the *Qincao* Inspired by an Old Anecdote about Master Kong?

In various sources datable mostly to the Han and arguably written prior to the *Qincao*, the story about Confucius who, on his way to the state of Jin to meet Zhao Jianzi, received news that Zhao Jianzi had just killed his wise minister Dou Mingdu, and thus frustratedly turned his back to Jin (*Qincao* 2.1) is told in a very similar manner as in the *Qincao* text. The anecdote is contained in the *Kongcongzi* 孔叢子 and the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔

子家語,[15] and is also in a very abbreviated form mentioned in the "Kongzi shijia" 孔子世家 Chapter of the *Shiji* 史記 and in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑.[16]

In the *Kongcongzi* the story goes as follows:

> 趙簡子使聘夫子。夫子將至焉。及河，聞竇鳴犢與舜華之見殺也，迴輿而旋之衛。息鄹，遂為操，曰：
> Zhao Jianzi (of Jin) had sent a messenger to invite the Master. Master (Kong) was ready to travel there. When he came to the (Yellow) River, he heard that Dou Mingdu and Shun Hua had been killed (by Zhao Jianzi), and so he had his carriage turned around and went back to Wei. He made a stop in Zou where he then composed a *cao* and sang:
>
> 「周道衰微禮樂陵遲。文武既墜。吾將焉歸。周遊天下。靡邦可依。鳳鳥不識。珍寶梟鴟。眷然顧之。慘然心悲。
> The way of Zhou has declined, / rites and music have deteriorated, / The civil and the martial (elements) have fallen, / what then is there for me to follow? / I have toured around the world, / but there was no place for me to stay. / The phoenix is not recognized, / (instead) the owl is regarded as a treasure; / I am anxiously concerned, / my heart is deeply grieved.
>
> 巾車命駕。將適唐都。黃河洋洋。攸攸之魚。臨津不濟。還轅息鄹。傷于道窮。哀彼無辜。
> The Master of the Royal Carriage had ordered me (to come), / and I was on my way to the capital of Tang; / the Yellow River was so vast, / and the fish innumerable; / I approached the ford but did not cross it, / but turned my carriage shafted and stopped in Zou,/ I am sad that my way was blocked,/ and bewail those who had no guilt.
>
> 翱翔于衛。復我舊廬。從吾所好。其樂只且。」
> [...] Taking wings for Wei, / I am turning back to my old abode; /I'll do what I please,/ This is a special kind of joy![17]

As a comparison will illustrate, the whole *Kongcongzi* passage, including the song text, is almost verbatim parallel to the story contained in the *Qincao*. But whereas in the *Qincao* story, the master is reported to "take his *qin*, strum it and sing to it, here in the *Kongcongzi* it is explicitly formulated

15 *Kongcongzi* 2.2/10/25-29; *Kongzi jiayu* 22.2/42/29-43/5.

16 *Shiji* 47.1926; *Shuoyuan* 13.3/101/19-24. Im *Shuoyuan* ist von einem Lied mit dem Titel „Panqin" 槃琴 die Rede, im *Shiji* heißt es, Kong Qiu habe das Stück „Zoucao" 鄹操 komponiert.

17 *Kongcongzi* 2.2/10/25-29.

that Master Kong "made a *cao*" (*wei cao* 為操). This formulation suggests that the expression *wei cao* in connection with precisely this story in either this or another of the anecdote collections of the early to mid-Han that preceded the compilation of the *Qincao* may have inspired Cai Yong to install a whole section with *cao* pieces in his *Qincao* and to select the "Jianggui cao" as the first piece of that section. In other words, it is Master Kong in his situation as someone who failed to find his place in his time became the role model for scholars who suffered a similar fate and who, very much like Master Kong himself, under such circumstances took their *qin* and entrusted their feelings to the sounds of their instruments.

5 *Qin* Pieces Made *for* Men in Misery: A Side Look at the Story of Yongmen Zhou and the Lord of Mengchang

We have so far only talked about the connection between *qin* players as composers and players of *qin* pieces who have somehow encountered a bad fate and suffered injustice and misery. But we should at least shortly also take a look at the important idea that is likewise often found in early Chinese sources that the *qin* was especially meant to be played *for* people being in misery. The locus classicus is the anecdote about the famous *qin* player Yongmen Zhou who was invited by Lord Mengchang to play the *qin* for him. When Yongmen Zhou had arrived and wanted to play the *qin* for him, Lord Mengchang told him that it was his wish that he would bring him to tears with his *qin* playing. Upon this, Yongmen Zhou tries to explain to him that only people who while listening to his playing were suffering some kind of bad fate will be moved by his *qin* playing. In the version contained in the *Shuoyuan* Yongmen Zhou lists up different groups of people who encountered such sad circumstances:

> 臣之所能令悲者，有先貴而後賤，先富而後貧者也。
> As for whom I can make sad, there are those who were at first highly ranked and afterwards fell deeply, who were at first rich and afterwards poor.
>
> 不若身材高妙，適遭暴亂，無道之主，妄加不道之理焉；
> But these still cannot be compared with those who in person were highly and excellently gifted, but then met with (times of) dictatorship and chaos, those who without having any guilt, have been treated badly by rulers without principles.

不若處勢隱絕，不及四鄰，詘折儐厭，襲於窮巷，無所告愬；
But these still cannot be compared with those who lived hidden and secluded, without any intercourse with their neighbors, but then were forced to join the public and were then driven into poor alleys, without anyone to whom they could complain.

不若交歡相愛無怨而生離，遠赴絕國，無復相見之時；不若少失二親，
But these still be cannot compared with those who have their loved ones with whom they have no quarrel but from whom they are parted in their life, who have to go to a faraway country without any point in time to see each other again.

兄弟別離，家室不足，憂慭盈匡。
And these still cannot be compared with those who, when still young, have lost both parents, whose elder and younger brothers live parted from them, whose home is insufficient so that they are filled with sorrow and anger.

凡若是者，臣一為之徽朥援琴而長太息，則流涕沾衿矣。
As to people such as these, I need only draw forth my lute and heave a deep sigh, and their tears will flow down immediately and soak the collar of their gown.[18]

It is precisely here that Yongmen Zhou makes a sharp cesura, and turning now to the Lord of Mengchang, he tries to explain him why he, Yongmen Zhou, would certainly not be able to move him, the rich and mighty Lord Mengchang, to tears with his *qin* playing. The fact that in the end, in spite of the given situation, Yongmen Zhou Zhou indeed moved the Lord of Mengchang to tears is a matter of his, and the lord's, empathic abilities, but will not interest us further in the given context.

However, it is important to bear in mind that a good *qin* player will be able not only to comfort himself in a given situation by bringing the circumstances in which a *qin* piece is said to have been first composed back to life, but that he will with his own playing move others who are in comparably miserable circumstances.

Kenneth J. DeWoskin who in his book *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* has tried to explain the effect that the playing should have on the player, taking the second piece of the category *cao*, "Orchid", as an example. He wrote:

18 *Shuoyuan* 11.14/89/22 (for a German translation, see also Stumpfeldt 2011, 441f); cf. the version in Huan Tan's „Qindao", quoted in the commentary to *Sanguo zhi* 42.1040; cf. *Xinlun* 16.67-70.

> When performing the piece, there should prevail a sense of reenacting the disciplined response of Confucius, through a reenactment of his tuning, his fingerings, and his appreciation of the orchid. The skilled player relieves the emotional processes of the sage. The tune embodies the model for its own appreciation."[19]

Of course, we don't know how much of the idea of a Confucius strumming his *qin*, and teaching his pupils to play the instruments in times of crisis, is fact and how much fiction. However, what we can know for sure is that Confucius, at least as far as we may trust in what his early disciples have record about his teachings in the Lunyu 論語, has explicitly admonished his students to go into service only in times in which this was morally correct – in other words, in times of good government –, whereas in times of bad government one should instead retire from service and try to enjoy his life in one's privacy. The quote from *Lunyu* I am referring to is the following:

> 子曰：「富而可求也，雖執鞭之士，吾亦為之；如不可求，從吾所好。」
> If wealth were to be obtained as a correct pursuit, I would go into service even if it were only as a simple carriage driver. But if it is not to be regarded as a correct pursuit, I'll do what I like to do.[20]

Remarkably, the words "I'll do what I like to do" are, as we remember, part of the song that Master Kong, according to the anecdote contained in the *Kongcongzi* text, sang to the accompaniment of his *qin* zither right after he had decided not to go to Jin to meet Zhao Jianzi but instead to return to Wei. May we thus read this song as the appropriate song to be sung by Confucian scholars who have encountered a bad fate and will thus prefer to live in retirement instead of being in office? And to push this one step further, could it be that Cai Yong, the Confucian scholar, compiled the *Qincao* with its introductory stories to *qin* tunes and the accompanying songs as educational materials for students whom he not only told how to play the *qin* but also conveyed to them a subtle philosophico-moral message? In this case, by referring to these words assigned to Master Kong, Cai Yong obviously encouraged his students to act cautiously in times of bad government. Rather than

19 DeWoskin 1982, 176.
20 *Lunyu* 7.12.

becoming a sad hero or to make a martyr of oneself, it seems that his message was that one should better keep "low profile" in times of turmoil and instead of taking an office rather try and go into retreat.

Final Remarks: A Glance at Cai Yong's Personal Life Tragedy

If one takes the above said as the point of departure of what may justly be called Cai Yong's life philosophy – so to say: Maintain your principles regardless of how the times develop, but only strive for a position in times of a good ruler, otherwise try to keep aloof! –, one is tempted to ask if Cai Yong himself, at least as far as we may conclude from his biographical account or, even better, from his autobiographical statements, was able to follow such maxims or not.

If one reads Cai Yong's biography in the *Hou-Hanshu*, one indeed gains the impression that Cai did his best to keep away from the court in Luoyang where eunuchs had arrogated power, at least as long as he was able to do so. As had been quoted from his biography at the outset of this essay, he was first summoned to the court of Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r. 146–168) by Xu Huang 徐璜, one of the eunuchs who had the *defacto* power at that time, after he had heard of Cai Yong's extraordinary talent as a *qin* player.[21] This was in the year 159 CE, when Cai Yong was about 25 years old. We then learn that Cai departed to Luoyang in a carriage, but shortly before he arrived there he pleaded illness and was given the permission of returning home.[22]

Several early anthologies contain a prose poem, "Shuxing fu" 述行賦 (*Fu* Recounting a Journey), combined with a preface by Cai Yong that testifies not only that this poem was written by him soon after his return from his trip to Luoyang but also that he was keenly aware of the political problems caused by the dominant eunuchs in the capital. He mentions in this preface that during Emperor Huan's reign, Liang Ji 梁冀 (ca. 88–159), an important general who had been much honored under the preceding emperor, was forced to commit suicide by the eunuchs at Huandi's court,

21 *Hou-Han shu* 60B.1980.

22 The place were Cai Yong had made the carriage stop was called Yanshi 偃師. As Asselin writes, this place was but a dozen kms away from his destination Luoyang. The distance from Chenliu, Cai Yong's home commandery, to Luoyang was a trip of about 200 kms. See Asselin 2010, 304, n. 10.

and that newcomers had acquired high positions in his place. He further reflects on the fact that a luxurious park to the west of Luoyang had been constructed on the eunuchs' demand, for which they conscripted laborers from among the people of whom many died from hunger or cold during these exhausing works. He then concludes his preface writing:

> 璜以餘能鼓琴，白朝廷，敕陳留太守發遣余。到偃師，病比前，得歸。心憤此事，遂託所過，述而成賦。
> Huang told the court about my ability to play the zither. [The emperor] commanded the governor of Chenliu to dispatch me. When I arrived at Yanshi, I became ill, and being unable to proceed, I obtained leave to go home. My heart was so filled with resentment towards this affair that, based on the places I had passed, I wrote this *fu* recounting it.[23]

It is more than obvious that the resentment (*fen* 憤) that filled Cai Yong's heart when he was on his way to Luoyang and perceiving the misery of the people due to the demanded corvée labor, was the reason for his sudden feeling of illness that caused him to ask for the permission to turn the carriage and travel back to his home place. And it is certainly no coincidence that the last words of Cai Yong's prose-poem,

> 言旋言複，我心胥兮
> Now I turn back, head for home / And my heart is filled with joy,[24]

sound a bit like reverberations of the above-quoted passage from the *Lunyu*.

And there is at least one further important document that may be adduced here in favor of the argument that Cai Yong had tried his best in order to avoid an appointment to the Imperial court at Luoyang as long as he could, namely the "Shi hui" 釋誨 (defense against an admonition). As we learn from the *Hou-Han shu* biography right after the account of Cai Yong's return to Chenliu after the eunuchs had tried in vain to summon him to the court, Cai Yong had stayed idly at home, immersed in his studies of the olden ages and without any contacts to

23 Cai Yong, "Shuxing fu xu" 述行賦序, here quoted after the Hongkong concordance edition (*Cai zhonglang ji* 蔡中郎集 11.2/58/19-20). For translations, see Knechtges 1989, 147, and Asselin 2010, 302. In the *Hou-Han shu* biography, neither the prose-poem nor the preface to it is included.

24 Translation following that of Knechtges 1989, 151; cf. Asselin 2010, 326.

people of his present times (*xianju wan gu, bujiao dangshi* 閑居翫古，不交當世).[25] This text, as we also learn from the *Hou-Hanshu,* was written in the tradition of similar texts written by Dongfang shuo 東方朔 (160–93), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) and others, all in the context of the criticism expressed by some visitors (ke 客) why one would hide away from the world instead of being engaged in the service of one's ruler. As David R. Knechtges summarizes the content of this fictitious dialogue, written in 163, between a "Young-Gentleman Devoted to the World" (*wu shi gongzi* 務世公子) and a "Hoary-Headed-Old Man" (*huadian hulao* 華顛胡老), the young man criticizes the old man for his unwillingness to serve the state in a time when good order prevailed under the Heaven. The old man then instructs him about the real situation in the empire; he informs him about the unjust selection of descendants from well-established families for the throne, the corruption among the officials and the unsafety of one's fate after one had attained a higher position, and finally he convinces the younger man that it is wiser to know when to become active and when it was better to hide away.[26]

So Cai Yong managed to live almost ten more years in freedom and leisure, and it was only in 171, i. e. at an age of almost forty years, that he attained his first office at the central court, which was, as Knechtges writes, a result of the fame he had acquired for his writing of grave inscriptions for prominent persons. From now on Cai Yong's destiny took its inevitable course. Aafter having been appointed palace gentleman *(langzhong* 郎中) in 172, Cai Yong worked as textual editor in the Dongguan 東觀 library on compiling the history of the Later Han; in 175, after he was appointed gentleman consultant under Emperor Ling 靈帝 (r. 168–189), the emperor encouraged Cai to submit a confidential petition pointing out current problems at the court; Cai then frankly summarized such problems he had evidenced, even noting down the names of persons involved in cases of corruption, and submitted this to the emperor, but somehow the document fell into the hands of the criticized court officials, and so Cai Yong himself was soon accused of slander himself and sentenced to death. Due to one eunuch's plea on

25 *Hou-Han shu* 60B.1980.

26 Knechtges and Chang 2010, 60f.

Cai's behalf and because the emperor was moved by Cai Yong's letter of self-defense, the death penalty was changed to permanent exile as a convict laborer in the area that is nowadays' Inner Mongolia. In 189, Cai Yong tried once again to avoid a summon, which in this case came from Dong Zhuo 董卓(138–192), a military general and warlord who tried to seize control over Luoyang, by pleading illness. This time, however, he failed and made a quick career under Dong Zhuo whose advisor he became in 190 when Dong gained control over Luoyang and moved the emperor to Chang'an. After Dong Zhuo's death in 192, Cai Yong was arrested and put in prison where he died.

So one might end here with what is, of course, common wisdom, namely that it is not so easy to put that aspect of Master Kong's ideas into practice that advises his pupils to "do what one likes to do" and keep away from politics in times of turmoil and bad government. Cai Yong should thus, in my view, certainly be regarded as a good Confucian who tried to put into practice the maxims that the anecdotes assembled in the *Qincao* taught the young *qin* adepts. He tried to keep "low profile" and live in retirement, only concerned with his studies and hobbies, but unfortunately he lived in times in which he could simply not avoid playing his part as a gifted official at the court of Luoyang, so that he thus got more and more involved in and finally fell victim to the political turmoil in the closing years of the Han dynasty.

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