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Self-interest and self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi*

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Introduction

The terracotta army, commissioned by the first emperor of China *Qin Shihuang* 秦始皇 (259-210 BCE), provides us with a tangible representation of roughly 8000 individuals who sacrificed their life for their ruler. Although these warriors are made out of clay, they are emblematic for individuals who sacrificed themselves. Self-sacrifice is a theme that has sparked philosophical debate throughout human history and is often linked to questions of morality. For instance, should upholding moral virtues such as righteousness or loyalty compel individuals to sacrifice (parts of) themselves?

This thesis explores the conceptualization of selfhood, self-interest and self-sacrifice in ancient Chinese thought. Although these topics have been studied extensively, most scholarship focuses on the Confucian perspective. In order to highlight another perspective, this study focuses on the representation and interpretation of various acts of self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi* 韩非子 (Master Han Fei), a canonical text on ancient Chinese political philosophy dating back to the 3rd century BCE. More specifically, this study addresses the perspective of the *Han Feizi* on the relationship between self-interest and self-sacrifice. The *Han Feizi* claims that all individuals are solely motivated by self-interest. How does this relate to cases of individuals who are willing to mutilate their body, sacrifice their limbs, children, and even their lives? What motivates them to perform such sacrifices? What stance does the *Han Feizi* take regarding self-sacrifice? In order to answer these questions, this study will conduct an intra-textual analysis of anecdotes pertaining to self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi*. Through this approach, I will delineate multiple forms of self-sacrifice in relation to self-interest, and aim to contextualize broader notions of selfhood in early Chinese thought. By explicating the motivational factors that drove individuals in these anecdotes to perform various acts of self-sacrifice, as well as questioning the motives of the author to incorporate these anecdotes, I aim to explore the relationship between self-interest and self-sacrifice and consequently add to the body of scholarly work relating to the doctrine of self-interest as advocated by the *Han Feizi*.

I chose the five examples used in this study, because they provide valuable insight into the relation between self-interest and self-sacrifice, as well as the motivations behind sacrificing body parts, family members or one's own life. After coming across the example of the soldiers of Yue (discussed in chapter one) in the partial translation of the *Han Feizi* by Burton Watson that

instigated this study, I used the search function on the webpage of the Chinese Text Project to look for more relevant examples in the *Han Feizi*.[1] After scrutinizing the text via this website, and consulting the translations of Burton Watson and W.K. Liao, I narrowed down my research to five examples, that each correspond to one chapter of this thesis.[2] Chapter one describes soldiers who are willing to slit their own throat, because their king valued 'valor.' Chapter two introduces Shu Diao, a minister who castrated himself in order to gain access to the royal harem. Chapter three presents minister Yi Ya, who cooked his own son in order to gain his ruler's favor. Chapter four focuses on general Yue Yang, who eats his own son to prove his loyalty to his ruler. Finally, chapter five introduces minister Yu Rang, who, in the course of seeking to avenge his late ruler, mutilates his own face and commits suicide. Before we get to the analyses of these texts, I will introduce the political philosophy advocated by the *Han Feizi* (with a particular focus on the doctrine of self-interest) and provide a historical framework. Then, I will delineate the topics of selfhood, self-sacrifice, and death and place them in a historical socio-political context.

The doctrine of self-interest

The *Han Feizi* is an influential politico-philosophical text dating from the Warring States period 戰國 (453-221 BCE), a tumultuous period in Chinese history. A focal theme of this text (and of this thesis) is the so-called doctrine of self-interest. As Paul Goldin states, according to the *Han Feizi* the only genuine force in the world is self-interest: the competing and interacting interests of rulers, ministers and common men and women.[3] The following passage from the *Han Feizi* provides further illustration:

> A physician will often suck men's wounds clean and hold the bad blood in his mouth, not because he is bound to them by any kinship but because he knows there is profit in it. The carriage maker making carriages hopes that men will grow rich and eminent; the

[1] The Chinese Text Project is an online open-access depository of pre-modern Chinese texts. See
[2] Note on translation and transcription: For the *Han Feizi*, I have relied on the translations of Burton Watson and W.K. Liao (with some minor adaptations, which appear between square brackets). Both Watson and Liao use the Wade-Giles transliteration system. In order to maintain coherence, I have opted to replace all places and names with the Hanyu Pinyin Romanization of Chinese characters (excluding diacritical tone marks).
[3] Goldin 2001: 154. For more on the doctrine of self-interest see, among others, Graham 1989; Graziani 2015; Lundahl 1992; Pines 2009.

> carpenter fashioning coffins hopes that men will die prematurely. It is not that the carriage maker is kindhearted and the carpenter a knave. It is only that if men do not become rich and eminent, the carriages will never sell, and if men do not die, there will be no market for coffins. The carpenter has no feeling of hatred toward others; he merely stands to profit by their death.[4]
>
> 醫善吮人之傷，含人之血，非骨肉之親也，利所加也。故輿人成輿，則欲人之富貴；匠人成棺，則欲人之夭死也。非輿人仁而匠人賊也，人不貴則輿不售，人不死則棺不買。情非憎人也，利在人之死也。[5]

This excerpt shows that the *Han Feizi* regards human society as an interlocked network of self-interested profits and interests.[6] This stance is reflected in the philosophical thought of many (Western) thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith.[7] Although the *Han Feizi* states that all individuals are solely motivated by self-interest, the text also mentions examples of individuals willing to sacrifice a body part, a child, or their own life. Take, for instance, the following exemplary excerpt:

> Because the king of Yue admired valor, many of his subjects defied death.[8]
>
> 故越王好勇而民多輕死。[9]

These two examples illustrate a seemingly contradictory stance. Namely, it is not possible to be motivated by 'self-interest' if the 'self' is (partially) sacrificed in the process. This thesis explores this paradoxical relationship between self-interest and self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi* by analyzing and comparing relevant examples in the text. Before doing this, let us take a closer look at the historical context and the political philosophy of the *Han Feizi*.

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[4] Transl. Watson 1964: 86.
[5] *Han Feizi jijie*, 6.
[6] Liu 2006: 184. Liu adds that, although the text states that everyone is motivated by self-interest, it does not place a value judgment on these proclivities, merely pointing out that it is human's nature to be selfish.
[7] Adam Smith, an 18th century Scottish political economist and philosopher makes the assertion that "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." See Smith & Wight 2007: Book 1, 9-10.
[8] Transl. Watson 1964: 33.
[9] *Han Feizi jijie*, 28.

Historical framework and the political philosophy of the *Han Feizi*

As mentioned above, the Warring States period was a turbulent and bloody period in Chinese history. States formed alliances and fought each other, as the rulers of these states aimed to increase their power and become the new overlord, or 'hegemon' *ba* 霸. These wars promoted social mobility, as well as a shift of power within the individual states, leading to independent ministerial lineages contesting the overlord's power.[10] The officials of the courts were increasingly to be recruited from a new social stratum, called the *shi* 士.[11] In pursuit of gaining the upper hand, men in power would often invite advisers belonging to this *shi* stratum to carry on debates and offer their counsel.[12] The discourse of these debates was dominated by a search for the most efficient means to secure and reinforce monarchical authority.[13] This fertile intellectual climate provided the soil from which many great Chinese thinkers sprouted.[14] Among them was the son of a king of Han 韓, called Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280-233 BCE).[15]

The *Han Feizi* is a text consisting of 55 chapters ascribed to Han Fei. Although the authorship and authenticity of the text have been called into question, the common consensus is that Han Fei wrote most chapters.[16] Instead of concentrating on the authorship of individual chapters, I focus on the political philosophy presented in this text, regarding it as one entity. This political philosophy advocates an authoritarian style of governance that focuses on the supremacy of authority and centralization of power. In contrast to other thinkers of the Warring States period who emphasize the importance of proper moral conduct, the *Han Feizi* prioritizes the necessity of clearly established laws and the concomitant enforcement of reward and punishment.[17] According to the *Han Feizi* the moral proclivities of an individual are immaterial for the establishment of good governance. Angus Graham argues that the political philosophy of the *Han Feizi* could even

[10] Pines 2002: 43.
[11] For details regarding the problem of translating *shi*, see Creel 1970: 331-332.
[12] Lundahl 1992: 9.
[13] Graziani 2015: 156.
[14] In the early Han dynasty, the historian Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) divided the thinkers of the Warring States into Six Schools, including Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism.
[15] Which king of Han fathered Han Fei remains uncertain. It is known that his mother was not the queen, but a concubine. See Lundahl 1992: 44.
[16] For a detailed discussion on the authenticity of the Han Feizi, see Lundahl 1992.
[17] The *Han Feizi* refers to reward and punishment as the two handles (*erbing* 二柄), and claims that strict enforcement of these two handles is an essential prerequisite for maintaining social harmony.

be called amoral.[18] This amoral doctrine is highly influenced by the belief that all individuals are inherently motivated by self-interest, and can therefore not be trusted. In order to further understand this conceptualization of self-interest and its relationship to self-sacrifice, it is necessary to define selfhood in the context of ancient Chinese society.

Selfhood, self-interest, and self-sacrifice

Most scholarship pertaining to selfhood in early China focuses on the Confucian perspective.[19] This is partially the case, because Confucian values, such as the emphasis on morality and one's role in society, deeply influenced the social climate of ancient China. However, this Confucian perspective does not offer an accurate representation of all conceptualizations of selfhood in early China. Aside from the Confucian perspective on selfhood and self-sacrifice, I will therefore take a closer look at the less examined perspectives on selfhood, self-interest and self-sacrifice of two thinkers of the Warring States period: Yang Zhu 楊朱 and Han Fei.[20] These three perspectives represent ideologies of three major schools of thought (Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism) of this period.[21] In order to place these ideas regarding selfhood and self-sacrifice in a broader framework, the perspectives of Yang Zhu and Han Fei will be explained using the (Western) theories of ethical egoism and psychological egoism.

As Robert Eno points out, "many Western philosophers regard the self as an immortal soul. Either conceptualizing it as a spiritual substance (e.g. Descartes, Locke), as configurations of psychic functions (e.g. Freud), or as the stream of consciousness (e.g. James)."[22] Eno asserts that "traditional Western theories of the self are rooted in beliefs about the ontological status of human beings."[23] These theories tend to picture individuals as fundamentally atomic entities, and do not focus on whether social relations constitute an intrinsic part of the perception of

[18] Graham 1989: 267.
[19] Brindley 2010: xviii. See, for instance Ames 1991; de Bary 1998; Tu 1985.
[20] My aim in focusing on these three perspectives is by no means to present a complete summary of all conceptualizations of selfhood in early China (which would far exceed the scope of this thesis), but to focus on the predominating Confucian stance, as well as exploring views that oppose this Confucian conceptualization of selfhood and self-sacrifice by introducing the ideologies of Yang Zhu and Hai Fei.
[21] There are many issues with the anachronistic division of these schools of thought, mainly because it creates an artificial and oversimplified representation that does not accurately represent the status quo. For a detailed discussion on the shortcomings of the term 'legalism' see, among others, Creel 1970; Smith 2003; Hansen 1994.
[22] Eno 1990: 70.
[23] Eno 1990: 72.

selfhood.[24] In stark contrast, "early Chinese forms of selfhood do not generally focus on the radical autonomy of the individual, but rather on the holistic integration of the empowered individual with forces and authorities in its surroundings (i.e. family, society and cosmos)."[25] This conceptualization of selfhood as an integral part of one's role in relation to others is grounded in the philosophical thought of Confucius (551-479 BCE) and his disciples, which emphasizes one's role in society as an interlinked relationship with others.

There were several other thinkers who had different views concerning selfhood and self-sacrifice. To keep the scope of this study within manageable parameters, I will focus on two of these views, corresponding to what the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy calls ethic egoism and psychological egoism, that stand in opposition to the Confucian perspective.[26] In short, ethical egoism advocates that individuals should act according to what is in their own best interest. Psychological egoism states that all actions of individuals are inherently motivated by self-interest.

Yang Zhu (ca. 440-360 BCE?), a thinker who left behind no surviving works, but whose philosophy is represented in other texts, such as the *Liezi* 列子, is generally portrayed as an ethical egoist.[27] He states that individuals should do what is in their own self-interest.[28] By providing a physical definition of human nature, he suggested an alternative to the interrelated public and ritual roles that traditionally dominated and defined individuals in ancient Chinese society.[29]

The doctrine of self-interest propounded by the *Han Feizi* is in alignment with the theory of psychological egoism. There are myriad examples in the *Han Feizi* that frame individuals as inherently motivated by a selfish pursuit of personal aggrandizement, and therefore always in pursuit of self-interested goals.[30] This doctrine of self-interest shares many similarities with (contemporary) Western theories, such as, for instance, the 'selfish gene' theory advanced by Richard Dawkins, which examines the biological factors responsible for selfishness and altruism. Dawkins states that the evolutionary reproductive urge encoded in our genetic makeup has a

[24] Eno 1990: 72.
[25] Brindley 2010: xxvii.
[26] See Shaver 2017.
[27] The *Liezi* is a Daoist text ascribed to Lie Yukou 列圄寇, who lived during the 5th century BCE.
[28] Berkson 2000: 46.
[29] Emerson 1996: 533.
[30] Some examples will be discussed in the textual analysis section of this thesis (chapter 1-5).

selfish nature.[31] The work of Dawkins could therefore be seen as scientific evidence that corroborates the over 2000-year-old doctrine of self-interest advocated by the *Han Feizi*.

These different conceptualizations of selfhood in ancient Chinese society are reflected in their stances regarding self-sacrifice. For instance, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of adhering to virtues and subsequent proper conduct. Although self-sacrifice is not actively encouraged, there are circumstances where adherence to these virtues overrules the necessity to abstain from sacrificing a limb, a child, or even one's life.[32] In other words, from a Confucian perspective, upholding moral propriety can justify self-sacrifice.

We find a different approach in the works of Yang Zhu. Yang Zhu states that the world would be in order, if everyone would simply mind their own business and take care of themselves. This stance is best reflected in a statement incorporated in the *Mengzi* 孟子 that is most often quoted in relation to Yang Zhu's views.[33] The *Mengzi* criticizes Yang Zhu for not being "willing to pull out one hair to benefit the world" 拔一毛而利天下不為也.[34] Although this aphorism seems to promote an overly selfish attitude, it has also been interpreted as emphasizing the importance of not putting one's health at risk in pursuit of wealth, power, or status.[35] Burton Watson summarizes Yang Zhu's doctrine as: "keeping one's nature intact, protecting one's genuineness, and not tying the body by involvement with other things."[36] Whereas Confucian thinkers state that there are instances where upholding propriety is more important than one's own body or life, Yang Zhu argues that nothing is more important than life itself, and sacrificing (parts of) one's body is under no circumstance a sensible course of action.[37]

As mentioned before, the political philosophy promoted by the *Han Feizi* prioritizes the necessity of clearly established laws and the concomitant enforcement of reward and punishment over upholding moral propriety as a deciding factor for a stable society. This stance is reinforced by the belief that all humans are motivated by self-interest and therefore cannot be trusted.

[31] See Dawkins 2009. Dawkins uses the altruistic behavior of animals that benefits the survival of the species (such as bees and octopi sacrificing themselves for their peers) as evidence to support his argument.
[32] Berkson 2000: 34.
[33] The *Mengzi* is a Confucian text that promotes the political and philosophical thought of Mengzi 孟子, who lived during the fourth century BCE.
[34] *Mengzi Zhengyi*, 27.915, trans Lao 1970: 187.
[35] Berkson 2000: 46.
[36] Graham 1989: 221.
[37] A notable exception being when one body part would be sacrificed in order to save another body part or one's life. See Carine Defoort: 2015.

Consequently, it is not surprising that the *Han Feizi* often voices skepticism regarding the motivation behind acts of self-sacrifice. As this study will show, even suicide is not exempt from this skepticism. To better understand how suicide could be motivated by self-interest, it is necessary to explore the notion of death in ancient Chinese society.

Death in ancient Chinese society

David N. Keightley argued that death was regarded as an acceptable natural feature of life in early Chinese society.[38] This does not mean that individuals in early Chinese society did not value their lives, but it does indicate that they prioritized upholding propriety, most notably connected to ancestral worship, and moral values over their own life.[39] Moreover, the dead and the living were seen as a single community, held together by rituals that honored the ancestors.[40] Thus, the focus on ancestor worship and the endurance of the lineage in life and death, as well as upholding moral conduct in this regard, served to render the loss of the individual more palatable.[41]

Mark Berkson states that "while Confucians believe that one should seek to preserve life - one's own as well as others'- whenever possible, there may come times when this is not possible. In particular, if preserving one's life would require actions contrary to the virtue of "humaneness" *ren* 仁, or if putting *ren* into practice would require the sacrifice of one's life, then death must be accepted."[42] Regarding the same subject, Yuet Keung Lo argues that "the collective pursuit of intrinsic self-worth at the expense of one's own life had become a behavioral consensus, if not actually a moral axiom, among early Confucians."[43] This is very important in relation to the contradictory tension between self-interest and self-sacrifice that instigated the premise for this

[38] Keightley & Rosemont 2014: 271. "This is reflected in the themes that attracted early Chinese thinkers and mythologists, namely social order and social morality; whereas stories of dying and death were not emphasized."
[39] A notable exception being the ethical egoist Yang Zhu, who stated that "we are prohibited by punishment and exhorted by rewards, pushed by fame and checked by law. We busily strive for empty praise, which is only temporary, and seek glory that will come after death. […] Thus, we lose the great happiness of the present and cannot give ourselves free rein for a single moment. What is the difference between that and many chains and double prisons?" see Chan 1963: 310. Translated by James Legge.
[40] Rawson 2007: 120.
[41] Keightley & Rosemont 2014: 53.
[42] Berkson 2000: 34. 'Humaneness' is the cardinal virtue of Confucius and his later disciples. It generally refers to an ability to empathize with others and treat them with compassion. See Meyer 2010: 885.
[43] Lo 2011: 19.

study. Namely, if sacrificing one's life was in fact regarded as a means to gain intrinsic self-worth, I propose that, from an ancient Chinese perspective, the contradiction between self-interest and sacrificing one's life may not have been so apparent.

Yuet Keung Lo adds that, whereas suicide is typically disapproved of in most religions, ancient Chinese society did not judge individuals for taking their own life.[44] Therefore, "in early China suicide appears to be strictly a matter of personal choice vis-à-vis the here and now with regard to the suicide-taker himself and/or his relationship with others. Individuals often chose to sacrifice their own lives in pursuit of upholding certain moral values. By doing so, the objective might have been to issue a moral warning to posterity, but the consideration of a religious notion of afterlife was always out of the question."[45]

In sum, ancient Chinese society generally accepted death as a natural feature of life. Furthermore, in certain cases upholding moral propriety was considered more important than one's own body or life. Finally, since suicide was not stigmatized by (religious) moral commandments, the choice to end one's life may have been less controversial compared to societies where suicide was disapproved of.

Now that we have contextualized the conceptualization of selfhood, self-interest, self-sacrifice, and death, we can explore the motivational factors that instigated acts of self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi*. Before doing this, I would like to highlight the following two issues: When attempting to understand concepts such as selfhood in the context of ancient Chinese civilization, it is important to try and extricate oneself from any anachronistic and cultural biases one might be predisposed to have.[46] Furthermore, prior to analyzing and comparing anecdotes in ancient Chinese sources, it is important to realize the role anecdotes had in ancient Chinese society. As Sarah Queen and Paul van Els mention, anecdotes had an important rhetorical function as rich repositories for philosophical, political, historical, and cultural argumentation and debate in early

[44] Lo 2011: 2.
[45] Lo 2011: 2.
[46] As pointed out by David Hall and Roger Ames, "all of the important characteristics of Western cultural self-consciousness (including the term 'self,' 'person,' 'personality,' and 'individual') are 'vague' in the sense that they are open to rich and diverse interpretations. Furthermore, the definition of these notions depends on the history of the semantics of the concept and its referents, whose philosophical transmutations have been ramified by similarly 'vague' terms such as 'soul,' 'mind,' and 'agent.'" See Hall & Ames 1998: 3. Appropriating such 'vague' terminology to an ancient civilization must therefore be done with prudence.

China.[47] In addition, anecdotes could be molded to suit a range of rhetorical purposes and serve as powerful building blocks in arguments.[48] Moreover, as Roger Ames points out, the adaptation and alteration of existing anecdotes was a frequently used tactic to facilitate the propagation of the political agenda of the compiler of the text.[49] Bearing all that this introduction has discussed in mind, we now turn to the first example of self-sacrifice in the *Han Feizi*.

[47] Queen & van Els 2017: 24.
[48] Van Els 2017: 346.
[49] Ames 1983: xvi.

1 **The soldiers of Yue slit their own throats**

Perhaps the most striking example of individuals committing acts of self-sacrifice is that of the soldiers of the state Yue 越, who willingly sacrificed their lives for their king Goujian of Yue 越王勾踐 (r. 496-465 BCE) in a battle against Yue's nemesis: the state of Wu 吳. At a young age King Goujian suffered a humiliating defeat by adversaries from the neighboring state of Wu, but in 473 BCE he restored the power of Yue, vanquished Wu and became the hegemon of the southeastern part of the Zhou world.[50] On the one hand, king Goujian demonstrated considerable sensitivity and compassion towards his subordinates by introducing social, economic, and legal measures designed to benefit his subjects. At the same time, he was also reportedly capable of unbelievable cruelty towards his enemies as well as his own people.[51] Besides the *Han Feizi*, the anecdote that tells the tale of the soldiers of king Yue sacrificing their life for him appears in many early Chinese sources, including, in chronological order, the *Guanzi* 管子, *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, *Mozi* 墨子, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Shiji* 史記. Although a full cross-textual analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to mention that all these sources mainly use the anecdote to exemplify the degree of influence that a ruler can have over his subjects.

The following excerpt sheds light on the possible motivation for the subjects of Yue to willingly sacrifice their lives for their ruler:

> Because the king of Yue admired valor, many of his subjects defied death.[52]
> 故越王好勇而民多輕死。[53]

This statement claims that the admiration king Goujian had for men who exhibited 'valor' 勇 led many of his subjects to defy death. Could pleasing their king really have motivated these soldiers to sacrifice their lives? The following passage provides further insight:

> The King of Yue schemed to attack Wu. As he wanted everybody to make light of death in war, once when he went out and saw an angry frog, he saluted it accordingly

[50] Pines 2002: 316.
[51] Cohen 2009: 290.
[52] Transl. Watson 1964: 33.
[53] *Han Feizi jijie*, 28.

> [with a ceremonial ritual]. "Why should Your Majesty pay it such respects?" asked his attendants. "Because it possesses a courageous spirit," replied the King. Starting from the following year every year there were more than ten men who begged to offer their heads to the King. From this viewpoint it is clear that honor is sufficient to drive anybody to death."[54]
>
> 越王慮伐吳，欲人之輕死也，出見怒黿，乃為之式。從者曰：「奚敬於此？」王曰：「為其有氣故也。」明年之請以頭獻王者歲十餘人。由此觀之，譽之足以殺人矣。[55]

This passage states that 'honor' was a strong enough motivation for the subjects of king Yue to sacrifice their lives for him. The term *yu* 譽, 'honor' in Liao's translation of this passage, can also be translated as 'to praise.' In this context it refers to the act of king Goujian praising the angry frog with a ceremonial ritual (*shi* 式). This raises a question that is of particular pertinence to this thesis, namely: was posthumous honor, by receiving the praise of the king, reason enough for individuals to sacrifice their lives? And if so, how is this related to the concept of selfhood in relation to death? In other words, can sacrificing one's life still be considered self-interested if one consciously gives one's life in order to gain posthumous honor?

King Goujian praises this particular frog because it possesses (courageous) spirit (*youqi* 有氣). As this excerpt shows, king Goujian had a clear agenda for doing so, namely "wanting everybody to make light of death in war." Apparently this tactic proved to be quite successful, as it led individuals to go as far as offering their heads to the king in pursuit of his praise. Thus, even in times of peace, the prospect of attaining posthumous honor was motivation enough for individuals to sacrifice their life. The following passage provides further elucidation regarding the way that king Goujian used this yearning for posthumous honor to his advantage:

> According to a different source: king Goujian of Yue once saw an angry frog and saluted it, when the coachman asked, "Why does Your Majesty salute it?" In reply the

[54] Transl. Liao 1959a: 301.
[55] *Han Feizi jijie*, 87.

king said, "A frog having a courageous spirit as such does deserve my salute!"[56] Hearing this, both gentry and commons said: "The spirited frog was saluted by the King, to say nothing of the gentry and commons who are brave." That year there were men who cut off their heads to death and offered their heads to the king. Therefore, the king of Yue in order to wage a successful war of revenge against Wu experimented on his instructions. When he set fire to a tower and beat the drum, the people rushed at the fire because reward was due to the fire; when he faced a river and beat the drum, the people rushed at the water because reward was due to the water; and when on the war front, the people had their heads cut off and stomachs chopped open with no frightened mind because reward was due to combat. If so, it goes without saying that to promote the wise [worthy] in accordance with the law reward would be even more useful than on those occasions.[57]

一曰：越王勾踐見怒黿而式之。御者曰：「何為式？」王曰： 「黿有氣如此，可無為式乎？」士人聞之曰：「黿有氣，王猶為式，況士人有勇者乎！」是歲，人有自剄死以其頭獻者。故越王將復吳而試其教，燔臺而鼓之， 使民赴火者，賞在火也；臨江而鼓之，使人赴水者，賞在水也；臨戰而使人絕頭刳腹而無顧心者， 賞在兵也。又況據法而進賢，其助甚此矣。[58]

This excerpt emphasizes the reward that is due to those who 'rush at the fire,' 'rush at the water,' and 'have their heads cut off and stomachs chopped open in combat.' In effect, this passage offers a subtle criticism on the abovementioned tactic implemented by king Goujian. Although it is obviously not ineffective to motivate soldiers with the prospect of (posthumous) honor, perhaps an even better way could be to clearly stipulate which courageous act results in what kind of reward. Moreover, the *Han Feizi* emphasizes the importance of rewarding the 'worthy' (*xian* 賢) over those who merely exhibit any form of 'courageousness.' The concluding statement

[56] A remarkable characteristic of the *Han Feizi* is that it uses several versions of the same anecdote, taken from various older sources, and combines them into a syncretic text that serves as a base from which it delivers its views. Oftentimes it is impossible to discern with certainty where the anecdote stops, and the commentary begins.
[57] Transl. Liao 1959a: 302.
[58] *Han Feizi jijie*, 87.

sums up this stance taken by the *Han Feizi*; to promote the wise in accordance with the law is surely more useful than having individuals offer their heads to the king in the hope of receiving his praise. This stance corresponds with the political philosophy advocated by the *Han Feizi*, which emphasizes the importance of clearly stipulated laws as a prerequisite for maintaining social order.

However, another passage in the same chapter of the *Han Feizi* reminds the reader that prospective reward alone is not enough to maintain social order and motivate your soldiers. Besides reward, the other 'handle' of good governance, punishment, is of equal importance. This paints a different picture regarding the motivations of said subjects:

> The king of Yue once asked High Official Wen Zhong, "I want to attack Wu. Is it practicable?" "Certainly practicable," replied Wen Zhong. "Our rewards are liberal and of faith; our punishments are strict and definite. If Your Majesty wants to know the effect of reward and punishment, why should Your Majesty hesitate to try setting fire to the palace building?" Thereupon fire was set to the palace building, whereas nobody would come to put the fire out. Accordingly, an order was issued that: those who die in the suppression of the fire shall be rewarded like men killed by enemies in war, those who are not killed in the suppression of the fire shall be rewarded like men victorious over enemies in war, and those who do not take part in putting the fire out shall be held guilty as men surrendering to or escaping from enemies". In consequence, men who painted their bodies with mud and put on wet clothes and rushed at the fire numbered three thousand from the left and three thousand from the right. In this way the king knew the circumstances assuring victory.[59]
>
> 越王問於大夫文種曰：「吾欲伐吳，可乎？」對曰：「可矣。吾賞厚而信， 罰嚴而必。君欲知之，何不試焚宮室？」於是遂焚宮室，人莫救之。乃下令曰：「人之救火者死，比死敵之賞；救火而不死者，比勝敵之賞；不救火者，比降北之罪。」 人塗其體，被濡衣而走火者，左三千人，右三千人。此知必勝之勢也。[60]

[59] Transl. Liao 1959a: 299-300.
[60] *Han Feizi jijie*, 86.

The phrase 'those who die in the suppression of the fire shall be rewarded like men killed by enemies in war' is in alignment with the idea proposed at the beginning of this chapter, namely that posthumous honor motivated subjects of the king of Yue to sacrifice their lives. In this passage the emphasis is not only on the prospect of being rewarded for following orders bravely, but also the strict punishments that would be enforced if these orders were not followed. This introduces the element of fear as an additional motivator for the subjects of king Yue to endanger and sacrifice their life. From this perspective, the image of soldiers cutting their throats in battle for their ruler takes on a different shape. If the choice that they were offered was between cutting their own throat or being held guilty as a deserter, they didn't really have any choice in the matter.[61]

In sum, the *Han Feizi* tells us that there were individuals who were willing to sacrifice their life in pursuit of posthumous honor. Another motivational factor may have been fear of punishment. To state with certainty whether it was the hope of being rewarded or the fear of being punished that led the soldiers of Yue to cut their own throats is a matter that will forever remain open to interpretation. Regardless, both the motivational factors of gaining posthumous honor and fear are in line with the doctrine of self-interest.[62] Namely, if it was fear that guided the actions of the soldiers of Yue, this could still be regarded as an act of self-interest. By dying, they knew they would be remembered with honor. If we accept that posthumous honor was the deciding motivational factor in this case, the soldiers who willingly sacrificed their life for their king likewise seem to do so out of self-interested motives. This means that for them, the conceptualization of selfhood exceeded the boundaries of mortal life.

[61] Interestingly, there are also sources that explicitly state that the soldiers who cut their own throats in the attack on Wu were in fact convicted criminals and therefore didn't have any other choice. (see for instance the *Zuo Zhuan* ch. 51). The *Han Feizi* does not mention this, and therefore this angle is not included in this chapter.

[62] Note that king Goujian is also motivated by self-interest. As Roger Ames mentions, conferring rewards and honor upon subjects as a mercenary technique for exacting service is a characteristic element of so-called Legalist thought. See Ames 1983: 97.

2 **Minister Shu Diao castrates himself**

Minister Shu Diao 豎刁 was an adviser to Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685-643 BCE), the first and regarded as the most powerful hegemon of his days.[63] In ancient Chinese sources, Shu Diao is portrayed as a typical example of a duplicitous minister who is solely motivated by self-interest. In the *Han Feizi* he is often mentioned to make an argument for guarding oneself against treacherous and untrustworthy ministers. This is also the case in the following excerpt, which warns the ruler not to make his preferences known, as to avoid being manipulated by untrustworthy, power-hungry ministers.

> Because Duke Huan of Qi was jealous and loved his ladies in waiting, Shu Diao castrated himself in order to be put in charge of the harem. [..] Hence [..] Shu Diao [..], by catering to the ruler's desires, was able to invade his authority. As a result, [..] Duke Huan was left unburied for so long that maggots came crawling out the door of his death chamber.[64]
>
> 齊桓公妬而好內， 故豎刁自宮以治內。[..]故[..]豎刁[..]因君之欲以侵其君者也。[..]桓公蟲流出尸而不葬。[65]

Here, the *Han Feizi* unequivocally states that there is a causal connection between Shu Diao catering to the desires of Duke Huan and the subsequent demise of the latter.[66] At the time, the only way to enter the royal harem as a man was to undergo castration. This was enforced in order to guarantee that the children of the concubines were fathered by the legitimate ruler. As the following example shows, castration was regarded as an incredibly shameful act of dehumanization. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – 87 BCE), the famous grand historian who compiled the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian), after being pronounced guilty of trying to 'deceive the emperor,' had to choose between suicide and castration.[67] Although suicide was considered

[63] Pines 2002: 318.
[64] Transl. Watson 1964: 33.
[65] *Han Feizi Jijie*, 28.
[66] Indeed, the *Han Feizi* tells us that it was Shu Diao who, after gaining enough influence at the court, later successfully led a rebellion against Duke Huan. See *Han Feizi jijie*, 45, transl. Watson 1964: 68.
[67] Other forms of penal punishment included drilling through the head, pulling out the ribs, boiling in water, face tattooing, nose cutting, feet hacking and beating to death with sticks. See Fu 1996: 57-77.

the less shameful choice, he opted for castration in order to complete his life's work.[68] In a personal letter he states how humiliating this corporal punishment was.

> A man left a remnant from a mutilating punishment counts for nothing in others' estimation. Not only in one era has this been so. This has always been the case.[69]
> 刑餘之人，無所比數，非一世也，所從來遠矣。[70]

Despite having to experience this shame for the rest of his life, Shu Diao castrated himself in order to gain more influence at the court and thereby further his political career. Apparently, his self-interested attitude did not include either keeping his body intact or caring about how others perceived him.

Although Shu Diao is often portrayed as a typical example of an untrustworthy and self-interested minister, the *Han Feizi* does not seem to judge him for these proclivities. Rather, the text accepts that it is the inherent nature of (almost) all ministers to be motivated by self-interest. The following excerpt offers a detailed description of the dynamics between Duke Huan and his loyal minister Guan Zhong and sheds light on the stance taken by the *Han Feizi* regarding who is to blame for the fate of Duke Huan:

> Formerly, Duke Huan built two markets inside the palace and two hundred gates of harems between them. Every day he wore no hat and took drives with women. After he got Guan Zhong, he became the first of the Five Hegemonic Rulers. After he lost Guan Zhong, he got Shu Diao with the result that following his death worms crawled outdoors while the corpse still lay unburied. If success was not due to the ability of the minister, Duke Huan would not have attained hegemony because of Guan Zhong. Were it entirely due to the ability of the ruler, he would not have suffered any disturbance because of Shu Diao.[71]

[68] Durrant et al 2016: 3.
[69] Trans Durrant et al 2016: 23.
[70] *Hanshu* 62, 2725.
[71] Transl. Liao 1959b: 162.

昔者桓公宮中二市，婦閭二百，披髮而御婦人。得管仲，為五伯長；失管仲、得豎刁而身死，蟲流出尸不葬。以為非臣之力也，且不以管仲為霸；以為君之力也，且不以豎刁為亂。[72]

In this excerpt the *Han Feizi* emphasizes the need for a balance between the ability of the minister and the ruler. Duke Huan is portrayed as a frivolous philanderer who only attained the status of hegemonic ruler due to the abilities of his loyal minister Guan Zhong. On the other side of the spectrum there is the fraudulent minister Shu Diao, who wormed his way into the court and thereafter facilitated the demise of Duke Huan. The sincere loyalty of Guan Zhong is regarded as an anomaly by the *Han Feizi*, which claims that all ministers are self-interested and therefore untrustworthy.

In the subsequent passage, the *Han Feizi* blatantly blames Duke Huan for his own death due to his lack of insight and blind trust in his ministers, as well as his inability to detect duplicitous ministers.

> Supposing Duke Huan took Guan Zhong into service because he was sure he would never deceive him, then he could direct ministers who were not deceitful. However, though at one time he could direct ministers who were not deceitful, yet as he later entrusted Shu Diao [..] with the same affairs which he had committed to the hands of Guan Zhong with the result that worms crawled outdoors while his corpse lay unburied, it goes without saying that Duke Huan could not tell between ministers who would deceive the ruler and those who would not deceive the ruler. Nevertheless, so exclusively he put his trust in ministers when he took them into service! Hence the saying: "Duke Huan was a stupid sovereign."[73]
>
> 若使桓公之任管仲，必知不欺己也， 是知不欺主之臣也。然雖知不欺主之臣，今桓公以任管仲之專，借豎刁[..]蟲流出尸而不葬， 桓公不知臣欺主與不欺主已明矣，而任臣如彼其專也，故曰桓公闇主。[74]

[72] *Han Feizi Jijie*, 90.
[73] Liao 1959b: 166.
[74] *Han Feizi Jijie*, 92-92.

If he would have adhered to the rules as stipulated by the political philosophy of the *Han Feizi*, no minister could have accumulated the power and influence necessary to overthrow him. Instead, Duke Huan blindly entrusted the affairs of the state into the hands of his ministers. Therefore, according to the *Han Feizi*, it is Duke Huan's own fault that his corpse lay unburied with worms crawling around it.

Chapter 10 "*Shiguo*" 十過 (Ten Faults) offers further insight regarding the stance taken by the Han Feizi on the self-interested sacrifice undertaken by Shu Diao. In the following passage Duke Huan visits minister Guan Zhong, who has retired from office and is suffering from illness, to ask his advice regarding who he should choose as his aide. Guan Zhong states that he is too old to decide these matters and that the duke should make the choice himself, whereupon Duke Huan suggests several nominees. One of the ministers that Duke Huan suggests for the post is Shu Diao, but Guan Zhong advises against it.

> "Then what about Shu Diao?" asked the Duke, but Guan Zhong replied, "Impossible! It is only human nature to look out for one's own body. Yet Shu Diao, knowing that you are jealous and dote on your ladies in waiting, castrated himself so that he could be put in charge of the harem. If he cares so little for himself, how can he care for you?"[75]
> 公曰：「然則豎刁何如？」管仲曰：「不可。夫人之情莫不愛其身。公妬而好內，豎刁自獖以為治內。其身不愛，又安能愛君？」[76]

This passage makes it clear that Guan Zhong regards 'caring for one's master' as an underlying prerequisite for being a loyal minister. Furthermore, Guan Zhong emphasizes the necessity to be able to care for one's own body before being able to care for one's master. Since Shu Diao did not care for his own body, he was not able to care for his ruler and consequently could not serve as a loyal aide.

However, this stands in opposition to the views propagated elsewhere in the *Han Feizi*, which explicitly state that the relationship between ruler and minister is solely based on self-interest and calculated rewards. As seen, for instance, in the following excerpt that offers an explanation for the cause of the demise of Duke Huan:

[75] Transl. Watson 1964: 67.
[76] *Han Feizi Jijie*, 49.

> What caused this [his demise]? It is an example of the calamity that comes when the ruler reveals his feelings to his ministers. As far as the feelings of the ministers go, they do not necessarily love [care for] their ruler; they serve him only in the hope of substantial gain.[77]
>
> 此其故何也？人君以情借臣之患也。人臣之情非必能愛其君也，為重利之故也。[78]

Thus, the *Han Feizi* does not regard 'caring for one's ruler' as a necessary component for a stable bureaucratic apparatus and even states that the 'feelings' (*qing* 情) of ministers are immaterial since ministers only serve their ruler in the hope of personal aggrandizement. In addition, this passage also points out the danger of a ruler revealing his feelings to his ministers. As we have seen at the start of this chapter, the *Han Feizi* states that ministers are prone to use this knowledge to their advantage by fawning and manipulating their ruler.[79]

Besides refuting the views of Guan Zhong regarding the necessity of a minister to feel affection for his own body and thereby being capable of feeling affection for one's ruler in order to be a loyal minister, the *Han Feizi* categorically deconstructs this argument of Guan Zhong by pointing out the following contradiction:

> Some critics say: What Guan Zhong suggested to Duke Huan was not what an upholder of legal standards ought to have said. His reason for suggesting the removal of Shu Diao […] was that in order to meet the demands of his master he stopped loving [caring for] himself. "If he did not love [care for] himself," said he, "how could he love [care for] his master?" If so, then ministers who exert their strength to death for the sake of their sovereign, Guan Zhong would never take into service, saying, "If they did not love their lives and physical forces, how could they love [care for] their master?" This means that he wanted the ruler to remove loyal ministers. Moreover, if you infer their not loving their master from their not loving themselves, you will also infer Guan

[77] Transl. Watson 1964: 34.
[78] *Han Feizi jijie*, 28.
[79] The *Han Feizi* states that it was only because Shu Diao knew that "Duke Huan was jealous and loved his ladies in waiting," that he castrated himself.

Zhong's inability to die for the sake of Duke Huan from his inability to die for the sake of prince Jiu. This means that Guan Zhong himself also fell under the rule of removal.[80]
或曰：管仲所以見告桓公者，非有度者之言也。所以去豎刁[..]以不愛其身，適君之欲也。曰「不愛其身，安能愛君？」然則臣有盡死力以為其主者， 管仲將弗用也？曰「不愛其死力，安能愛君？」是欲君去忠臣也。且以不愛其身，度其不愛其君， 是將以管仲之不能死公子糾度其不死桓公也，是管仲亦在所去之域矣。[81]

This passage highlights a contradiction in the reasoning of Guan Zhong, since he himself was not willing to die for loyalty to his ruler prior to serving Duke Huan of Qi.[82] The passage continues by clearly defining the way that the enlightened sovereign (that is to say, the ruler who adheres to the doctrine propagated by the *Han Feizi*) should act.

The way of the enlightened sovereign is not the same, however. He establishes what the people want and thereby gets meritorious services from them, wherefore he bestows ranks and emoluments to encourage them. Similarly, he establishes what the people dislike and thereby prohibits them from committing villainy, wherefore he inflicts censure and punishment to overawe them. As bestowal and reward are sure and censure and punishment are definite, the ruler can raise ministers of merit and no crook can join governmental service. Then, even though there are crooks like Shu Diao, what can they do against the ruler?
明主之道不然，設民所欲以求其功，故為爵祿以勸之；設民所惡以禁其姦，故為刑罰以威之。慶賞信而刑罰必，故君舉功於臣，而姦不用於上。雖有豎刁，其柰君何？[83]

[80] Liao 1959b: 145.
[81] *Han Feizi jijie*, 81.
[82] See *Han Feizi jijie* 91, trans Liao 1959b: 164. "Guan Zhong did not die in the cause of loyalty to his first master, but surrendered himself to Duke Huan" 管仲不死其君而歸桓公; *Han Feizi jijie* 91, transl. Liao 1959b: 165. "Now Guan Zhong was originally a minister under Prince Jiu. Once he even schemed to assassinate Duke Huan, but in vain. Following the death of his old master, he served Duke Huan." 管仲，公子糾之臣也，謀殺桓公而不能，其君死而臣桓公.
[83] *Han Feizi jijie*, 81.

This passage clearly states that a ruler must never delegate the power of the two handles; reward and punishment. Furthermore, the text insinuates that villainous ministers will not be able to penetrate the court as long as 'bestowal and reward are sure and censure and punishment are definite.' The following excerpt sums up the stance taken by the *Han Feizi*:

> Moreover, ministers exert their strength to death to comply with the ruler's need; the ruler confers ranks and emoluments to comply with the minister's want. Thus, the relationship of ruler and minister is not as intimate as the bond of father and son; It is an outcome of mutual calculations. If the ruler follows the right way, ministers will exert their strength and no crook will appear. If he misses the right way, ministers will delude the sovereign on the one hand and accomplish their selfish designs on the other. Now, Guan Zhong did not explain these rules to Duke Huan. Supposing he successfully made him remove one Shu Diao, another Shu Diao would certainly appear. It was not the way to exterminate crooks.[84]
>
> 且臣盡死力以與君市，君垂爵祿以與臣市。君臣之際，非父子之親也， 計數之所出也。君有道，則臣盡力而姦不生；無道，則臣上塞主明而下成私。管仲非明此度數於桓公也，使去豎刁，一豎刁又至，非絕姦之道也。[85]

In other words, as long as the ruler follows the right way, his ministers will exert their strength to the point of sacrificing their life for him. However, if he does not follow the right way this will create cracks in the political system that will pave the way for self-interested crooks to enter the court.

In sum, the *Han Feizi* states that the sacrifice made by Shu Diao was indeed motivated by self-interest. Although his case is used throughout the *Han Feizi* to warn the reader against the duplicitous nature of ministers, the text does not blame Shu Diao for being this way. The analysis of the dialogue between Duke Huan and Guan Zhong tells us that Guan Zhong emphasizes the fact that castrating oneself is not in alignment with the fundamental human nature of 'caring for one's own body.' This led Guan Zhong to regard Shu Diao as an untrustworthy individual.

Further, through analyzing the varying stances that the *Han Feizi* incorporated into its corpus in reaction to the actions of Shu Diao, it has become clear that the text voices a critique on

[84] Liao 1959b: 145-146.
[85] *Han Feizi jijie*, 81.

both the deathbed advice given by Guan Zhong, as well as the actions of Duke Huan of Qi. Since the *Han Feizi* states that all ministers are inherently motivated by self-interest, the textual emphasis on the actions of the duke and his loyal minister, as opposed to emphasizing the untrustworthy nature of Shu Diao, is therefore understandable. As the *Han Feizi* itself states: "Supposing Guan Zhong successfully made Duke Huan remove one Shu Diao, another Shu Diao would certainly appear. It was not the way to exterminate crooks."[86] Once again the *Han Feizi* advocates a system of rule that is not in any way based on morality and leaves no room for revealing one's feelings or favoritism, but rather follows clearly stipulated laws and enforces them with respective rewards and punishments.

[86] See *Han Feizi jijie*, 81, transl. Liao 1959b: 146.

3 **Minister Yi Ya cooks his son**

The case of minister Yi Ya is another example of a minister who made a self-interested sacrifice in order to please his ruler and thereby further his political career. Besides his role as minister under Duke Huan of Qi, Yi Ya also served the duke as the principal cook of the court. Yi Ya is often praised for his abilities as a cook in ancient sources such as the *Mengzi*, *Xunzi* 荀子 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子, which regard him as a paragon of good taste.[87] However, this positive portrayal of Yi Ya has a counter-narrative in an anecdote that associates him with a sacrifice that involves cannibalism.[88] In the *Han Feizi* this story appears in the following excerpt:

> Because the duke was fond of unusual food, Yi Ya steamed his son's head and offered it to the duke. [..] Thus, if the ruler reveals what he dislikes, his ministers will be careful to disguise their motives; if he lets his desires be known, he gives his ministers a clue as to what attitude they had best assume. Hence [..] Yi Ya, by catering to the ruler's desires, was able to invade his authority. As a result, [..] Duke Huan was left unburied for so long that maggots came crawling out the door of his death chamber.[89]
> 桓公好味，易牙蒸其子首而進之[..]故君見惡則群臣匿端，君見好則群臣誣能。人主欲見，則群臣之情態得其資矣。故[..]易牙因君之欲以侵其君者也[..]桓公蟲流出戶而不葬。[90]

According to Roel Sterckx, some commentators invoke the image of sacrificing one's son to illustrate the ideal of absolute loyalty and servitude over the attachment to one's own kin, while other commentators condemn Yi Ya's actions as a sign of perverse loyalty or travesty of fatherly duty.[91] In this chapter, I analyze several passages in the *Han Feizi* to determine the stance taken by the text on this matter.

Since both Yi Ya and Shu Diao served under Duke Huan and made self-interested sacrifices in order to gain the favor of their ruler, it is not surprising that their cases are often mentioned together in order to make an argument for guarding oneself against treacherous and

[87] See, for example *Mengzi Zhengyi*, 22.764; *Huainanzi jishi*, 12.829.
[88] Sterckx 2011: 74-75. For more on cannibalism in ancient China, see Chong: 1990.
[89] Transl. Watson 1964: 33-34.
[90] *Han Feizi jijie*, 28.
[91] Sterckx 2011: 75.

untrustworthy ministers in the *Han Feizi*.[92] Both ministers are represented as harboring ulterior motives, which they try to conceal by their actions. In other words, they are used to exemplify the archetypal duplicitous minister that a ruler needs to guard himself against. Moreover, they are willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve these ulterior motives. Although they seem to have shared similar motives, the nature of their sacrifice is quite different (offering the head of one's son versus cutting off one's body part). Comparing the reactions to their sacrifices will help shed light on the stance taken by the *Han Feizi* regarding their respective sacrifices.

For instance, after suggesting Shu Diao as his aide in the passage that describes the dialogue between Duke Huan and Guan Zhong (see chapter 2), Duke Huan suggests Yi Ya as an alternative candidate.

> "What about Yi Ya?" asked the duke, but Guang Zhong replied, "He will not do. He was in charge of supplying your table with delicacies and knowing that the only thing that you never tasted was human flesh, he steamed the head of his own son and presented it to you. You know this as well as I. There is no one who does not feel affection for his son, and yet here is a man who would cook his own son and present him on a tray to his ruler. If he does not love his son, how can he love you?"[93]
> 公曰：「然則易牙何如？」管仲曰：「不可。夫易牙為君主味，君之所未嘗食唯人肉耳，易牙蒸其子首而進之，君所知也。人之情莫不愛其子，今蒸其子以為膳於君，其子弗愛，又安能愛君乎？」[94]

Here Guan Zhong objects to the duke's suggestion by using a similar line of argumentation as when remonstrating against the appointment of Shu Diao. Firstly, he challenges Yi Ya's humaneness by stating that there is no one who does not feel affection for his son, yet Yi Ya cold-bloodedly murdered his own kin. This is used as the base for the main argument, namely the inability to feel affection for another, more specifically one's ruler, if one cannot feel affection for one's own kin. Once more, Guan Zhong emphasizes the importance of being able 'to feel

[92] After gaining influence and power at the court, Yi Ya took part in the rebellion against Duke Huan led by Shu Diao.
[93] Transl. Watson 1964: 67.
[94] *Han Feizi jijie*, 49.

affection for your master' as a necessary component of a loyal minister, a stance which does not correspond with the doctrine of self-interest propagated by the *Han Feizi*.

Thus, Guan Zhong condemns the actions of both Shu Diao and Yi Ya on the basis of them being in opposition to fundamental human nature. As chapter two has shown, the *Han Feizi* includes several passages that criticize this stance by Guan Zhong and reiterate that 'feeling affection' is not related to efficacious governance, as the relationship between ruler and minister is solely based on self-interest and calculated rewards.

The following passage in the *Han Feizi* discusses the motives behind self-inflicted 'punishments' in more detail, emphasizing the need for scrutiny when it comes to determining the intrinsic motivations that led individuals to perform acts of self-sacrifice.

> Gongsun You cut off his feet and thereby recommended Bai Li; Shu Diao castrated himself and thereby ingratiated himself with Duke Huan. Their punishing themselves was the same, but the motives behind their self-punishment were different. Therefore, Huizi said: "An insane person is running eastward and a pursuer is running eastward, too. Their running eastward is the same, but the motives behind their running eastward are different." Hence the saying: "Men doing the same thing ought to be differentiated in motive."[95]
>
> 公孫友自刖而尊百里，豎刁自宮而諂桓公。其自刑則同，其所以自刑之為則異。慧子曰：「狂者東走，逐者亦東走。其東走則同，其所以東走之為則異。故曰：同事之人，不可不審察也。」[96]

The author of this passage chose to structure his argument by evoking an example of individuals that share a similar characteristic or action, yet differ in motive. In the case of Gongsun You and Shu Diao, the passage states that they share the act of 'punishing oneself' (*zixing* 自刑), but they differ in their motives (*wei* 為).[97] The absence of minister Yi Ya in this excerpt is striking, since

[95] Transl. Liao 1959b: 243.
[96] *Han Feizi jijie*, 53.
[97] Unfortunately, not much is known about the details of this incident involving Gongsun You and Bai Li. For the purpose of this argument, it suffices to know that Gongsun You differed in motive from Shu Diao. However, if Gongsun You did indeed cut off his feet to benefit Bai Li, this could be an interesting case of self-sacrifice without self-interest.

Shu Diao and Yi Ya are always mentioned together in other parts of the *Han Feizi* that try to warn the reader against duplicitous ministers. I think the author may have reasoned that including the sacrifice of Yi Ya would not further substantiate his line of argumentation, since the focal point of the argument is not centered on the treacherous nature of ministers, but rather on the juxtaposing of similar actions to differing motives.

Another reason for omitting Yi Ya from this passage could be related to a differentiation between the type of sacrifice of Shu Diao and Yi Ya. Both Gongsun You and Shu Diao 'punish themselves' by cutting off a body part. As Yi Ya did not cut off any body parts, his sacrifice can be regarded as different. Nevertheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, both the act of castrating oneself, as well as killing one's own son are described as being in opposition to fundamental human nature. Thus, these acts are also regarded as being similar. This suggests that either there is a certain scale of 'punishing oneself,' or that sacrificing one's child is not regarded as a form of self-sacrifice at all. It depends on the way that 'self' is defined in this context; in other words, whether it extends to include the collective identity of the family or not.

In sum, the *Han Feizi* regards Yi Ya as an archetypical duplicitous minister who will go to extreme lengths to achieve his self-interested motives. The case of Yi Ya is often paired with the case of Shu Diao to warn the reader against this type of manipulative conduct, lest it lead to the lessening of the rulers' position of power and subsequent demise.[98] Guan Zhong, when warning Duke Huan of Qi against the treacherous nature of Yi Ya, uses a similar line of argumentation as when he heeded him against the installment of Shu Diao as his aide. Guan Zhong emphasizes the importance of "feeling affection for your ruler" as a prerequisite for being a loyal minister. This stance is not in accordance with the doctrine of self-interest propagated by the *Han Feizi*.

Finally, the omission of Yi Ya in the passage that accentuates the different motives individuals have for performing an act of 'self-punishment' may suggest a differentiation between several types of sacrifices. In this regard, punishing oneself seems solely applicable to the severance of body parts; yet does not extend to include the sacrifice of one's child for personal aggrandizement. In fact, the argument could be made whether sacrificing your child can be considered as a form of self-sacrifice at all. This depends on the way that 'self' is defined in this context.

[98] In the case of Duke Huan it even led to his remains being left to rot without a proper burial.

4 **General Yue Yang eats his son**

Yue Yang 樂羊 was a general in the service of Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (424-387 BCE). In 400 BCE he attacked the neighboring state of Zhongshan 中山.[99] The army of Zhongshan held his son hostage and threatened to kill him if Yue Yang wouldn't lift the siege.[100] Yue Yang refused, and in response was sent a soup that contained the head of his son. The *Han Feizi* recounts what happened afterwards in the following passage where Marquis Wen discusses the actions of general Yue Yang with his counselor on martial affairs Du Shizan 堵師贊:

> Yue Yang commanded the Wei forces in attacking Central hills [Zhongshan], when his son was in that country. The Ruler of Central Hills steamed his son and sent him the soup. Yue Yang, then seated beneath the tent, supped the soup and drank up the whole plateful. Marquis Wen said to Du Shizan: "Yue Yang on account of His Highness ate the flesh of his son." In response to this Du Shizan said: "Even his own son he ate. Who else then would he not eat?" When Yue Yang came back from the campaign in Central Hills, Marquis Wen rewarded him for this meritorious service but suspected his mind.[101]
>
> 樂羊為魏將而攻中山，其子在中山，中山之君烹其子而遺之羹，樂羊坐於幕下而啜之，盡一杯，文侯謂堵師贊曰：「樂羊以我故而食其子之肉。」答曰：「其子而食之，且誰不食？」樂羊罷中山，文侯賞其功而疑其心。[102]

This passage tells us that Marquis Wen is initially impressed by general Yue Yang's sense of loyalty; choosing his loyalty to his ruler over his filial love. In response, his counselor questions the propriety of Yue Yang's decision to eat his own son, arguing that a man who is capable of eating his own son cannot be deterred from eating others — and hence despite his professed loyalty he may even come for Marquis Wen. Such a man cannot be trusted, according to the counselor. Therefore, although general Yue Yang was lauded and rewarded for his achievements

[99] See *Shiji* chapter 44 "Wei Shijia" 魏世家 (Hereditary House of Wei), transl. Yang & Yang 1967: 47-59.
[100] For a detailed study on hostages in Chinese history, see Yang: 1952.
[101] Transl. Liao 1959a: 237.
[102] *Han Feizi jijie*, 49.

upon victoriously returning from his conquest of Zhongshan, his intention was henceforth suspected (yi qi xin 疑其心).[103]

Both the cannibalistic sacrifice and the 'suspecting of intentions' are reminiscent of Yi Ya (see chapter three). Although there is no textual evidence that explicitly connects the perceived untrustworthiness of general Yue Yang to his actions not being in accordance with fundamental human nature (as is the case with Yi Ya), there nevertheless is a discernable parallel in the line of argumentation used in this passage and that used to question the trustworthiness of minister Yi Ya. In other words, both general Yue Yang and minister Yi Ya sacrificed their own son and were henceforth regarded as untrustworthy individuals.

However, although they both sacrificed their son in a cannibalistic way and thereby aggrandized themselves, they may have had differing motives that drove them to commit such a sacrifice. In the case of Yi Ya, the *Han Feizi* classifies his actions as the typical behavior that is to be expected of duplicitous self-interested ministers. Could it be that general Yue Yang was motivated by a sincere sense of loyalty to his ruler? In order to understand the stance taken by the *Han Feizi* regarding the motivation of Yue Yang's sacrifice, it is helpful to analyze the subsequent anecdote about Meng Sun 孟孫 that is contrasted with the anecdote of Yue Yang in the *Han Feizi*.

> Meng Sun went out hunting and got a fawn. He then ordered Qin Xiba to bring it home. On the way the mother deer followed along and kept crying. Unable to bear that, Qin Xiba gave the fawn back to its mother. When Meng Sun arrived and asked for the fawn, Xiba replied: "Unable to bear the mother's crying, I gave it back to her." Enraged thereby, Meng Sun dismissed him. In the course of three months, he recalled him and appointed him tutor of his son. Out of wonder his coachman asked, "Why did Your Excellency blame him before and has now called him back to be the tutor of the young master?" "If he could not bear the ruin of a fawn," replied Meng Sun, "how would he bear the ruin of my son?"[104]

[103] The character *xin* 心, which is translated as 'mind' in this excerpt, can also be translated as 'heart' or 'intention.' In my view, 'heart' or 'intention' are better choices in this context because they emphasize that it is the duplicitous nature of general Yue Yang's character that caused people to question his intentions.
[104] Transl. Liao 1959a: 238.

孟孫獵得麑，使秦西巴持之歸，其母隨之而啼，秦西巴弗忍而與之，孟孫歸，至而求麑，答曰：「余弗忍而與其母。」孟孫大怒，逐之，居三月，復召以為其子傅，其御曰：「曩將罪之，今召以為子傅何也？」孟孫曰：「夫不忍麑，又且忍吾子乎？」[105]

In this case, Qin Xiba, despite not successfully carrying out the task that he was ordered to fulfill, was praised and rewarded for his empathic nature. The passage concludes by contrasting the example of Qin Xiba to that of general Yue Yang.

Hence the saying: "Skillful deception is not as good as unskillful sincerity." For instance, Yue Yang despite his merit incurred suspicion while Qin Xiba despite his demerit increased his credit.[106]
故曰：「巧詐不如拙誠。」樂羊以有功見疑，秦西巴以有罪益信。[107]

By referring to the sacrifice of general Yue Yang as skillful deception, the *Han Feizi* suggests that he ate his son as with a clear agenda, namely, to gain his ruler's favor and thereby further his career. This rules out the option that general Yue Yang might have been motivated by a sincere sense of loyalty. Thus, the *Han Feizi* regards the sacrifice of Yue Yang's son as a calculated show of supposed loyalty in a skillful attempt to mask his true ambitions.

Although this thesis predominantly focuses on the *Han Feizi*, in this case it nevertheless is worthwhile to compare this anecdote to a version that is incorporated in the *Huainanzi*, a somewhat later syncretic text compiled under the supervision of Liu An 劉安 (ca. 179-122 BCE), as it may further elucidate the motivations of general Yue Yang.

The Wei general Yue Yang attacked Zhongshan. His son was held in the city, and those in the city hung up his son to show Yue Yang. Yue Yang said, "The rightness of ruler and minister does not allow me to have selfish concern for my son." He assaulted [the city] even more vigorously. Zhongshan then cooked his son, sending him a cauldron of soup containing his head. Yue Yang touched it and cried over it, saying, "This is my

[105] *Han Feizi jijie*, 50.
[106] Transl. Liao 1959a: 238.
[107] *Han Feizi jijie*, 50.

son." He knelt before the emissary and drank three cups [of the soup]. The emissary returned and reported. [The ruler of] Zhongshan said, "This is one who is bound to the spot and will persist unto death; we cannot endure." Thus he surrendered to him. [Yue Yang] had greatly expanded Marquis Wen of Wei's territory; he possessed merit. [Yet] from this point on, he was daily less trusted. This is what is called "having merit and falling under suspicion."[108]

魏將樂羊攻中山，其子執在城中。城中縣其子以示樂羊。樂羊曰：「君臣之義，不得以子為私。」攻之愈急。中山因烹其子，而遺之鼎羹與其首。樂羊循而泣之曰：「是吾子！」已，為使者跪而啜三杯。使者歸報，中山曰：「是伏約死節者也，不可忍也。」遂降之。為魏文侯大開地，有功。自此之後，日以不信。此所謂有功而見疑者也。[109]

Compared to the passage in the *Han Feizi*, this version of the anecdote gives a more lively and detailed account of the event. Furthermore, this version in the *Huainanzi* seems to offer insight that is relevant to the motivation of general Yue Yang that is not present in the *Han Feizi*. In particular the phrases 'The rightness of ruler and minister does not allow me to have selfish concern for my son,' as well as 'Yue Yang touched it and cried over it, saying, "This is my son"' portray the general as a duty-bound, loyal, and humane individual. This is quite different from the calculative and selfish portrayal of Yue Yang in the *Han Feizi*. However, a certain level of scrutiny is necessary when comparing these two versions of the same anecdote as a tool to determine the motives of general Yue Yang. As mentioned in the introduction, Sarah Queen and Paul van Els state that anecdotes had an important rhetorical function as rich repositories for philosophical, political, historical, and cultural argumentation and debate in early China.[110] In addition, anecdotes could be molded to suit a range of rhetorical purposes and serve as powerful building blocks in arguments.[111] Moreover, as Roger Ames points out, the adaptation and alteration of existing anecdotes was a frequently used tactic to facilitate the propagation of the

[108] Transl. Major et al. 2010: 725.
[109] *Huainanzi jishi*, 18.1251.
[110] Queen & van Els 2017: 24.
[111] Van Els 2017: 346.

political agenda of the compiler of the text.[112] In this case, that could explain why Liu An chose to include and emphasize 'the rightness of ruler and minister' (*jun chen zhi yi* 君臣之義), as well as portray general Yue Yang as a humane individual. Namely, the *Huainanzi* frequently emphasizes the indispensability of 'rightness' (*yi* 義), often paired with 'humaneness' (*ren* 仁) to effective political and social organization.[113] The text also states that the teaching and practice of 'rightness' is superior to the use of force or 'rewards and punishments' as an instrument of state power. In this regard, the political doctrine of the *Huainanzi* differs greatly from that advocated by the *Han Feizi*.[114] Hence, both the *Huainanzi* and the *Han Feizi* incorporated an adapted version of the anecdote that suited their respective political doctrines. Whereas the *Huainanzi* focuses on the 'rightness' and 'humaneness' of general Yue Yang, the *Han Feizi* utilizes this anecdote to prove that all individuals are motivated by self-interest and therefore cannot be trusted. The only way to deal with this feat, according to the *Han Feizi*, is by implementing an amoral authoritarian rule of law that strictly enforces rewards and punishments.

In sum, the *Han Feizi* regards the sacrifice made by general Yue Yang as an act of self-interest. In both the cannibalistic nature of the sacrifice, as well as the subsequent suspicion that the act induced, this sacrifice is comparable to the sacrifice made by minister Yi Ya. By contrasting the act of general Yue Yang to that of Qin Xiba the text emphasizes the deceptive nature of Yue Yang's character, thereby condemning him as an untrustworthy individual. Due to the adaptation of the anecdote, and the resulting emphasis on different character traits of general Yue Yang in order to promote the political ideology of the author, it is difficult to discern the 'real' (i.e. historically accurate) motivation that led general Yue Yang to eat his son. At the same time, these different versions of the same anecdote tell us that, for the *Han Feizi* it was clearly a calculated act to further his self-interested aspirations, cleverly disguised under the guise of loyalty.

[112] Ames, 1983: xvi. In the case of the *Huainanzi*, according to Ames, Liu An set about the task of combining the practical vocabulary of Legalist theory with basic Daoist and Confucian principles in order to convince the Han court that there is a workable alternative to totalitarian control.
[113] 'Rightness' is a cardinal virtue of Confucius and his later disciples that refers to acting in a morally correct way. It is closely linked to the virtue of 'humaneness,' which generally refers to the ability to empathize with others and treat them with compassion. See Meyer 2010: 885.
[114] Major et al. 2010: 908.

5 **Minister Yu Rang mutilates himself and commits suicide**

Yu Rang 豫讓 was a minister in the state of Jin 晉.[115] He served Fan 范 and Zhonghang 中行, two prominent clans in that state. When his talents went unrecognized, he shifted his allegiance to a third clan, Zhi 智. Under the tutelage of the Earl of Zhi (Zhibo) 智伯 (d. 453 BCE), Yu Rang's abilities were recognized. When Zhibo was defeated by Viscount Xiang (Xiangzi) of Zhao 趙襄子, Yu Rang escaped to the mountains. The *Shiji* describes his lament in the following passage:

> Yu Rang fled and hid in the mountains. He sighed and said: "A man will die for one who understands him, as a woman will make herself beautiful for one who delights in her. Zhibo understood me. Before I die, I will repay him by destroying his enemy! Then my spirit need feel no shame in the world below."[116]
> 豫讓遁逃山中，曰：「嗟乎！士為知己者死，女為說己者容。今智伯知我，我必為報讎而死，以報智伯，則吾魂魄不愧矣。」[117]

By comparing 'dying for one who understands [and appreciates] you' to 'making yourself beautiful for your lover' Yu Rang is portrayed by the *Shiji* as regarding the act of sacrificing one's life for someone who appreciates you as a self-evident matter. The phrase 'Then my spirit need feel no shame' is especially relevant in the context of the conceptualization of selfhood. For Yu Rang it is of the utmost importance that he does what is honorable (even if that costs him his life), so that his spirit need not feel any shame. Thus, because Yu Rang believed that his actions would affect his spirit in the afterlife, he was willing to sacrifice his life in order to make sure that he would not feel shame.

Interestingly, Sima Qian, the compiler of the *Shiji*, when lamenting the fact that he was castrated, used a slightly altered version of the same proverb to make a different point.

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[115] Fan, Zhonghang, Zhi, Zhao 趙, Han 韓, and Wei 魏 were all high ministerial families of Jin. In the middle of the fifth century BCE, when these events took place, Zhibo wiped out the Fan and Zhonghang families and was in turn destroyed by Zhao, Han, and Wei, who overthrew the ruling family of Jin and divided the state into three parts. See Watson 1969: 48.
[116] Tr. Watson 1969: 48.
[117] *Shiji* 86.2519. Most excerpts in this chapter are taken from the biography of Yu Rang in the *Shiji*. This is done in order to recount the events surrounding his self-sacrifice, as well as to provide a point of reference that can be compared to the representation and interpretation of Yu Rang in the *Han Feizi*.

> A man will do his utmost for someone who appreciates him, as a woman will make herself beautiful for one who delights in her. But in cases like mine, when the body has been mutilated beyond repair, things are different: even if the person possesses the fine qualities of Sui's pearl or He's jade, and conducts himself as well as Xu You or Boyi, he can never achieve honor and glory. He would only provoke ridicule and besmirch himself.[118]
>
> 士為之已用，女為說已容。若僕大質已虧缺，雖材懷隨和，行容伯夷，終不可以為榮，適足以發笑而自點耳。[119]

Here Sima Qian states that no amount of fine qualities or honorable behavior can save a person from the (eternal) humiliation of bodily mutilation. Moreover, he adds that he has disgraced his forebears and will never be able to 'brazenly ascend the grave mound of his parents.'[120] This contradicts the views of Yu Rang, who later chose to mutilate his body in order to allow his spirit to not feel shame. Apparently, for Yu Rang carrying out revenge (*bao* 報) outweighed bodily mutilation in terms of honorability.

Intent on revenge, Yu Rang changed his name, branded his face and cut off his nose to disguise himself as a convict-laborer, and successfully infiltrated the palace of the lord of Zhao.[121] He was given the task of plastering the privy, where he planned to assassinate Xiangzi. Upon entering the privy, Xiangzi acted on a premonition and had him seized. Yu Rang admitted that he had intended to avenge his late ruler, Zhibo. Whereupon Xiangzi stated:

> "He is a righteous man. From now on I will simply take care to keep him at a distance. Zhibo and his heirs were all wiped out. If one of his retainers [ministers] feels compelled to try to avenge his death, he must be a worthy man such as the world seldom sees." So he pardoned Yu Rang and sent him away.[122]

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[118] Transl. Durrant et al 2016: 22. This excerpt is taken from a personal letter written by Sima Qian.
[119] *Hanshu* 62.2725.
[120] *Hanshu* 62.2736. See Durrant et al 2016:14.
[121] Branding one's face (tattooing) and cutting of one's nose were among the so called 'five punishments,' which were enforced as early as the Shang dynasty (1600 – 1046 BCE). For more on corporal punishment, see Fu 1993: 109.
[122] Transl. Watson 1969: 49.

「彼義人也，吾謹避之耳。且智伯亡無後，而其臣欲為報仇，此天下之賢人也。」卒釋去之。[123]

Undeterred, Yu Rang concocted a new plan. In order to assure that no one would recognize him, he lacquered his body to produce skin ulcers and swallowed charcoal to hoarsen his voice. Disguised as a beggar, he set out once more to avenge his late lord. On the marketplace, he ran into an old friend.

His friend began to weep. "With your talent, you could swear allegiance and take service under Xiangzi, and he would be sure to make you one of his close associates. Once you got close to him, you would have a chance to accomplish your aim. Would that not be easier? Destroying your body and inflicting pain on yourself in order to carry out your revenge-is this not doing it the hard way?" Yu Rang replied, "To seek to kill a man after you have sworn allegiance and taken service with him amounts to harboring traitorous thoughts against your own lord. I have chosen the hard way, it is true. But I have done so in order to bring shame to all men in future generations who think to serve their lords with treacherous intentions!"[124]

其友為泣曰：「以子之才，委質而臣事襄子，襄子必近幸子。近幸子，乃為所欲，顧不易邪？何乃殘身苦形，欲以求報襄子，不亦難乎！」豫讓曰：「既已委質臣事人，而求殺之，是懷二心以事其君也。且吾所為者極難耳！然所以為此者，將以愧天下後世之為人臣懷二心以事其君者也。」[125]

This excerpt further illustrates that Yu Rang is willing to mutilate his body on account of his principles. Furthermore, he states that 'harboring traitorous thoughts against your own lord' is shameful. This stands in stark contrast to the stance held by the *Han Feizi*, which holds that treacherous intentions are inherent to the human nature of all ministers.

[123] *Shiji* 86.2519.
[124] Transl. Watson 1969: 49.
[125] Shiji 86.2520.

After bidding his friend farewell Yu Rang hides under a bridge, waiting for Xiangzi to cross it. However, upon approaching the bridge, the horses pulling the viscount's carriage flinch and Yu Rang is captured once more.

> Xiangzi began to berate him. "You once served both the Fan and Zhonghan families, did you not? And yet when Zhibo wiped them out, you made no move to avenge their deaths, but instead swore allegiance and took service under Zhibo. Now that he too is dead, why are you suddenly so determined to avenge his death?" Yu Rang replied, "I served both the Fan and Zhonghang families, and both of them treated me as an ordinary man would. But when I served Zhibo, he treated me as one of the finest men of the land, and so I have determined to repay him in the same spirit."[126]
> 於是襄子乃數豫讓曰：「子不嘗事范、中行氏乎？智伯盡滅之，而子不為報讎，而反委質臣於智伯。智伯亦已死矣，而子獨何以為之報讎之深也？」豫讓曰：「臣事范、中行氏，范、中行氏皆眾人遇我，我故眾人報之。至於智伯，國士遇我，我故國士報之。」[127]

This passage illustrates the prevailing attitude that ministers had regarding their sense of loyalty toward the ruler during the Warring States period. As the political center of gravity shifted and independent ministerial lineages became more powerful, the notion of loyalty became more personal. During this period, advisers often wandered from one state to another in pursuit of a ruler who was prepared to appreciate their worth and put their ideas into practice.[128] Shifting allegiances in order to look out for one's own interests was a common occurrence among ministers during this era, and ministers would only be bound to a ruler if that ruler benefitted the minister's own interests in return. As Yuri Pines points out, the emphasis on profound understanding (*zhi ji* 知己, literally 'to understand the other as you understand yourself') as a precondition for pledging one's loyalty to a ruler, is an indication of the increasing demand for reciprocity in ruler-minister relations.[129] As Burton Watson puts it, "faithfulness, honesty and

[126] Transl. Watson 1969: 50.
[127] *Shiji* 86.2521.
[128] Lundahl 1992: 9.
[129] Pines 2009: 166.

sacrifice were due not to just any lord, but only to the successful lord, the lord who appreciated and used his men well."[130] In the case of minister Yu Rang, Zhibo had recognized his abilities and respected him, therefore Yu Rang felt obliged to avenge him, even at the cost of his own life.

> Xiangzi sighed a deep sigh and tears came to his eyes. "Ah, Yu Rang," he said, "the world already knows of your loyalty to Zhibo, and I have already pardoned you all I need to. You had best take thought for your end [consider how you wish to die]. I can pardon you no more!" He ordered his men to surround Yu Rang. "They say that a wise ruler does not hide the good deeds of others," said Yu Rang, "and a loyal subject is bound to die for his honor. Formerly you were gracious enough to pardon me, and all the world praised you as a worthy man. For today's business I have no doubt that I deserve to be executed. But I beg you to give me your robe so that I may at least strike at it and fulfill my determination for revenge. Then I may die without regret. It is more than I dare hope for, yet I am bold to speak what is in my heart." Xiangzi, filled with admiration at Yu Rang's sense of duty [righteousness], took off his robe and instructed his attendants to hand it to Yu Rang. Yu Rang drew his sword, leaped three times into the air, and slashed at the robe, crying, "Now I can go to the world below and report to Zhibo!" Then he fell on his sword and died. That day, when men of true determination in the state of Zhao heard what he had done, they all wept for him.[131]
>
> 襄子喟然嘆息而泣曰：「嗟乎豫子！子之為智伯，名既成矣，而寡人赦子，亦已足矣。子其自為計，寡人不復釋子！」使兵圍之。豫讓曰：「臣聞明主不掩人之美，而忠臣有死名之義。前君已寬赦臣，天下莫不稱君之賢。今日之事，臣固伏誅，然願請君之衣而擊之，焉以致報讎之意，則雖死不恨。非所敢望也，敢布腹心！」於是襄子大義之，乃使使持衣與豫讓。豫讓拔劍三躍而擊之，曰：「吾可以下報智伯矣！」遂伏劍自殺。死之日，趙國志士聞之，皆為涕泣。[132]

Once again, Yu Rang asserts that 'a loyal subject is bound to die for his honor.' He readily accepts his fate, but begs to ceremoniously fulfill his determination for revenge, so that he may

[130] Watson 1958: 21.
[131] Transl. Watson 1969: 50.
[132] *Shiji* 86.2521.

die without regrets. The act of 'leaping into the air three times' (*san yue* 三躍) may be another way to refer to the action of 'stamping the feet three times' (*san yong* 三踊), which was a part of the ritual method of expressing grief after one's lord had died. Yu Rang evidently put off performing this action until he had made every attempt to avenge his lord.[133]

This account of minister Yu Rang's life in the *Shiji* portrays him as the paragon of a 'loyal minister' (*zhongchen* 忠臣), who mutilated his body and sacrificed his life out of a sense of loyalty to his ruler. This portrayal of minister Yu Rang as an exemplary figure is reflected in most ancient Chinese sources. However, the *Han Feizi* takes a different stance.[134]

> Take the case of Yu Rang. When ministering to Zhibo he could not counsel the lord of men and make him clearly understand the principles of law and tact, rule and measure, so as to avoid disasters, nor could he lead and control his masses so as to keep the state in safety. When Xiangzi had killed Zhibo, Yu Rang branded his face and cut off his nose, thus destroying his facial features in order to avenge Zhibo on Xiangzi. In this wise, though he earned the reputation for destroying his features and sacrificing his life for the cause of the lord of men, yet in reality he rendered Zhibo not even such a bit of benefit as the tips of autumn spikelets. Such a man is what I look down upon, whereas rulers of the present age regard him as loyal and exalt him.[135]
>
> 若夫豫讓為智伯臣也，上不能說人主使之明法術度數之理以避禍難之患，下不能領御其眾以安其國。及襄子之殺智伯也，豫讓乃自黔劓，敗其形容，以為智伯報襄子之仇。 是雖有殘刑殺身以為人主之名，而實無益於智伯若秋毫之末。此吾之所下也，而世主以為忠而高之。[136]

Contrary to the more neutral stance taken regarding the inherent deceitfulness of other self-interested ministers (see for instance Shu Diao), the text offers a clear value judgment on the actions of Yu Rang. Whereas 'rulers of the present age regard him as loyal and exalt him,' the

[133] Nienhauser 1994: 323.
[134] It is important to point out the following anachronism: Although it is not clear when exactly the *Han Feizi* was compiled, we know that Han Fei died in 233 BCE. Since the *Shiji* was completed around 100 BCE, the two texts are separated by roughly one century.
[135] Transl. Liao 1959a: 130.
[136] *Han Feizi jijie*, 71-72.

Han Feizi on the other hand clearly states that it 'looks down upon' minister Yu Rang. Firstly, Yu Rang failed in his duties as a minister to Zhibo, as he was not able to provide the counsel that his ruler needed in order to stay in power. Furthermore, the *Han Feizi* questions the motivations behind Yu Rang's self-inflicted mutilation and sacrifice of life since it did not render Zhibo 'even such a bit of benefit as the tips of autumn spikelets,' but on the other hand earned Yu Rang a reputation as an honorable and righteous individual.[137] Therefore, the text deems these actions to be motivated by self-interest and portrays Yu Rang as a self-interested individual whose main goal was attaining (posthumous) honor under the guise of loyalty towards his late ruler.

In sum, minister Yu Rang has entered Chinese history as a loyal and worthy minister who was willing to sacrifice anything to uphold his fealty to his ruler. Yu Rang's sacrifices did not only include self-amputation and mutilation (branding his face, cutting off his nose, lacquering his body and swallowing charcoal), but even encompassed the sacrifice of his own life. The fact that Yu Rang willingly sacrificed his life in the course of avenging his ruler, as well as his remarks regarding his 'spirit not feeling shame,' tell us that his conceptualization of selfhood transcended mortal life.

Contrary to the positive portrayal of Yu Rang in the *Shiji*, the *Han Feizi* voices a critique regarding the motivations behind Yu Rang's actions. By emphasizing that he was unable to provide his ruler with the counsel that he needed in order to govern well (and stay alive), the text states that Yu Yang perhaps was not as worthy as many might think. Furthermore, his self-mutilation and self-sacrifice did not benefit his already deceased ruler but did earn him the reputation of being a loyal minister. Therefore, according to the *Han Feizi*, Yu Yang is a self-interested, duplicitous minister who tricked others into believing that he was motivated by a sense of loyalty, while his true intention was to be lauded for all eternity for his martyrdom.

[137] 'The tips of autumn spikelets' is a metaphorical reference to something very minute. In this case meaning that Yu Rang did not benefit Earl Zhi in even the slightest way.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the *Han Feizi* uses examples of self-sacrifice to promote its political philosophy, most notably the need for clearly stipulated laws, rewards, and punishments in order to sustain a functional system of government that leaves no room for deceitful individuals to exert their influence. Due to the fact that the *Han Feizi* propagates the idea that all individuals are motivated by self-interest, it is not surprising that the text questions the motives of self-sacrificing individuals. Consequently, these hidden motives are used to reinforce the need for the standardization and enforcement of laws and regulations. Although at times the text voices a clear moral judgment against individuals who disguise their true motives (for instance in the case of Yue Yang and Yu Rang), the emphasis of the text seems to be on the fact that all individuals are inherently prone to act in their own self-interest. In order to further analyze the relation between acts of self-sacrifice and the doctrine of self-interest, this chapter summarizes the main findings of this study by dividing the five examples of self-sacrifice into three categories: (1) sacrificing one's son; (2) bodily mutilation and amputation, and (3) sacrificing one's life.

Sacrificing one's son

The two case studies involving the sacrifice of one's son provide insight regarding the conceptualization of loyalty during the Warring States period. In the case of general Yue Yang this is especially pertinent, since he was forced to choose between the love for his son and the loyalty to his ruler. He chose to honor his commitment to his ruler based on the fact that 'the rightness of ruler and minister' wouldn't allow him to have selfish concerns for his son. This means that his allegiance was determined by the specific role that defined who he was in a given dilemma, in this case a loyal general first and a father second.[138] Most records of this anecdote mention the emphasis on 'rightness,' a cardinal virtue propounded by Confucius, as a guiding principal for the choice made by Yue Yang. His choice was therefore not a selfish one but founded on the prevalent moral principles of his time.

However, the *Han Feizi* states that the true motivation behind the sacrifice was self-interest. The text criticizes the 'rightness' that led to general Yue Yang's sacrifice by referring to his actions as 'skillful deception.' The *Han Feizi* claims that Yue Yang ate his own son in order to

[138] Lo 2011: 12.

gain the ruler's favor and thereby further his career. In other words, the text regards his sacrifice as a calculated act to further his self-interested aspirations, cleverly disguised under the guise of 'rightness' and loyalty.

In a similar fashion, the sacrifice made by minister Yi Ya is also regarded with ambivalence. Whereas some commentators invoke the image of sacrificing one's son to illustrate the ideal of absolute loyalty and servitude over the attachment to one's own kin, other commentators condemn Yi Ya's actions as a sign of perverse loyalty or travesty of fatherly duty.[139] Once again, the *Han Feizi* states that his sacrifice was motivated by self-interest, and thereby adopts the anecdote to strengthen its doctrine of self-interest.

Despite increasing their political power by sacrificing their sons, both general Yue Yang and minister Yi Ya were henceforth regarded as untrustworthy. As Guan Zhong states in response to the sacrifice made by minister Yi Ya: "there is no one who does not feel affection for his son, and yet here is a man who would cook his own son and present him on a tray to his ruler."[140] This presents us with the following paradox; on the one hand it is considered honorable to do what is 'right' according to one's obligations and sense of loyalty on the basis of one's position and allegiances. On the other hand, if the 'right' thing to do involves the sacrifice of one's son, you would henceforth be regarded as untrustworthy. It seems that under these circumstances there is in fact no right choice.

Moreover, by comparing the anecdote in the *Huainanzi* to that in the *Han Feizi*, I argue that a certain scrutiny is necessary when relying on these texts to establish general truths about the perception of said sacrifices. Both texts incorporate an adapted version of the anecdote that suits their respective political doctrines. Whereas the *Huainanzi* focuses on the "rightness" and humaneness" of general Yue Yang, the *Han Feizi* utilizes this anecdote to prove that all individuals are motivated by self-interest and therefore cannot be trusted.

Bodily mutilation and amputation

In ancient Chinese society, mutilating punishments were not only considered shameful in this life, but also continued to haunt the afflicted in the afterlife. As Sima Qian, after being castrated, put it, "I have disgraced my forebears. How will I ever be able to brazenly ascend the grave mound of

[139] Sterckx 2011: 75.
[140] See *Han Feizi jijie*, 49, transl. Watson 1964: 67.

my parents."[141] Knowing this, how can it be explained that both minister Shu Diao and minister Yu Rang voluntarily resorted to bodily disfigurement? The answer provided by the *Han Feizi* unequivocally states that both ministers were motivated by self-interest. However, the text does not address the apparent contradiction that arises from the knowledge that amputation was regarded as shameful in relation to self-interest. The easy answer would be that both minister Shu Diao and minister Yu Rang simply did not care about how their actions were perceived and how this would (eternally) shame them, provided that they achieved their self-interested ambitions.

Perhaps this explanation is sufficient in the case of minister Shu Diao. All ancient Chinese sources regard him as the archetypical duplicitous minister that will go to extreme lengths in order to fawn his ruler to increase his position of power. He knew that the only way to gain control over the royal harem, and thereby increase his power and influence at the court, was to castrate himself. As minister Guan Zhong pointed out, the inability to feel affection for one's own body opposes fundamental human nature.[142] In this way, minister Shu Diao might be diagnosed as a power-hungry sycophant who cares little for how society reacts to his actions, or how his actions will influence his remembrance. He therefore serves as the perfect example to substantiate the claim put forth by the *Han Feizi* that all individuals are solely guided by self-interest.

Whereas the actions of Shu Diao can be understood by classifying him as a power-hungry sycophant who is not affected by how his actions are perceived by society, textual evidence does not provide a similar explanation regarding minister Yu Rang. Unlike minister Shu Diao, minister Yu Rang is mainly regarded as the paragon of a loyal minister. Throughout the course of his self-inflicted tribulation he is portrayed as a man of principle who will do whatever it takes to avenge his late ruler. As he himself said, "a man will die for one who understands [and appreciates] him."[143] Yu Rang is lauded for his adherence to the concept of 'rightness.' In fact, Xiangzi pardons him for his first assassination attempt on the basis of him being a 'righteous man.' The fact that he mutilated his body and amputated his nose in order to achieve his goal seems to contradict our understanding of the shamefulness of undergoing mutilating punishment in ancient Chinese society. Apparently, for Yu Rang, carrying out revenge outweighed bodily mutilation in terms of honorability. He even explicitly states that he is willing to undergo such self-sacrifice

[141] See *Hanshu* 62.2736, transl. Durrant et al 2016:14.
[142] See *Han Feizi jijie*, 49, transl. Watson 1964: 67.
[143] *Shiji* 86.2519, transl. Watson 1969: 48.

"in order to bring shame to all men in future generations who think to serve their lords with treacherous intentions." [144] Therefore, Yu Rang seems to regard the shame of bodily disfigurement of lesser importance than the shame of not upholding his fealty to his ruler.

Contrary to the positive portrayal of Yu Rang in most ancient Chinese sources, the *Han Feizi* "looks down upon" minister Yu Rang for concealing his true, selfish, intentions behind a façade of "rightness" and loyalty. According to the *Han Feizi*, minister Yu Rang failed his ministerial duties while his ruler was still alive, and since his sacrifices did not benefit his late ruler in any way the text concludes that they must be motivated by self-interest. Hence, the case of minister Yu Rang is likewise used to substantiate the *Han Feizi*'s doctrine of self-interest.

Sacrificing one's life.

This study has analyzed two examples of individuals sacrificing their life for their ruler: the soldiers of Yue and minister Yu Rang. In the case of the soldiers of Yue, I explicated the following two motivating factors: posthumous honor and fear. Although we cannot determine which was the deciding factor that led the soldiers to cut their own throats, I argue that, for the *Han Feizi*, both scenarios corroborate the doctrine of self-interest. Namely, they died with the knowledge that they would be remembered with honor. Therefore, we can determine that for the soldiers of Yue the conceptualization of selfhood exceeded the boundaries of mortal life. Furthermore, similar to the way that the *Han Feizi* 'frowns upon' the mutilation and amputation undergone by minister Yu Rang in pursuit of his quest for revenge, this study has shown that the text also regards his suicide as an act of self-interest.

By placing the apparent contradiction between self-sacrifice and self-interest that instigated this study in a historical socio-political context, I argue that this contradiction was not as palpable during the time that the texts were written as it is today. In a society that valued propriety over life itself, and "was not encumbered by the possibility of offending the supernatural by sacrificing one's life, suicide appeared to strictly be a matter of personal choice vis-à-vis the here and now with regard to the suicide-taker himself and/or his relationship with others."[145] This study has shown that for most individuals attaining posthumous honor and upholding a moral sense of propriety provided ample motivation to sacrifice their life.

[144] *Shiji* 86.2520, transl. Watson 1969: 49.
[145] Lo 2011: 2.

In conclusion, the motivational factors that led individuals to perform acts of self-sacrifice in the five examples that this thesis has analyzed include the pursuit of (posthumous) praise, fear of punishment, loyalty, personal aggrandizement, and pleasing one's ruler. I have argued that the *Han Feizi* advocates a most critical stance regarding these respective motivations. Whereas other ancient Chinese sources often praise acts of self-sacrifice for their adherence to moral propriety and loyalty, the *Han Feizi* counters these views by asserting that in all cases, the notions of loyalty and upholding moral values were cleverly used in order to achieve the respective self-interested goals of these individuals. This skepticism regarding the intrinsic motivation of individuals who perform acts of self-sacrifice highlights the amoral doctrine of self-interest that the *Han Feizi* promotes. This stance stands in stark contrast to the prevalent Confucian perspective that promotes morality and adherences to virtues such as 'rightness' and 'humaneness.' The *Han Feizi* challenges this Confucian doctrine by asserting that the self-interested nature of mankind will motivate individuals to sacrifice not only their limbs, but also their children and even their lives in pursuit of personal aggrandizement.

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