Qin's book is the first step toward filling in the knowledge gaps we have on the important role of the Chinese Six Companies in Chinese American history and the role of Chinese Americans in the diplomatic history of the U.S. and China. The book successfully demonstrated the historical significance of this institution. However, as I pointed out above, its role in the Chinese American community is rather complex and at times even contradictory to its own organizational missions, if not detrimental to the welfare and rights of Chinese Americans. Other Chinese American leaders, such as Wong Chin Foo 王清福, Walter U. Lum 林華耀, and Ng Poon Chew 伍盤照, also took part in the fight against Chinese exclusion outside the circle of Chinese Six Companies and the Qing diplomats. Their contributions deserve to be included. In short, we need further comprehensive studies on this organization in the context of Chinese America.

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Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics. By Erica Fox Brindley. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. Pp. xxx + 207. $52.00.

Erica Brindley seems to have set herself an impossible task: to write a book about something that doesn't exist. One would be truly hard-pressed to find any such thing as "individualism" in early China, at least as that term is usually defined ("a social theory advocating the liberty, rights, or independent action of the individual").[1] As the author herself states, "there is no clear term in early Chinese that might translate consistently into 'individual'" (p. xxx). The concept of individual autonomy derives from the Enlightenment, and the English word "individualism" itself does not seem to predate the early nineteenth century. The title of this book is perhaps intended to be provocative, and in that it succeeds.

Brindley's decision to focus on the concept of individualism in early China is grounded in contemporary debates on "Asian values" and "Western-style human rights"; she concludes her Preface by saying she hopes that her work "will help pave the way for a more culturally sensitive approach to modern conceptions of human rights, individualism, and freedom for contemporary China as well as other cultures influenced by the early traditions of China" (p. xii). This is, in other words, a book with an agenda: the author's intent is to argue against the widespread notion that China has "a culture of

[1] *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language,* 2d ed., unabridged (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 974.

obligation rather than individual freedom" (p. ix). In order to make her case, Brindley redefines "individual" for the purposes of this book as referring to "early Chinese notions of self that concern not so much the subjective, psychological sense of self, but the particular qualities of a person that mark him or her as a single entity capable of exerting agency from within a web of human, social, and cosmic relationships" (p. xxx). Whether this redefinition is sustainable remains to be seen.

The book's subtitle—"Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics"—gives a more accurate description of the book's subject and content than the title itself. The analytical chapters of Brindley's book guide her readers through an examination of the corpus of early Chinese social thought to see what those texts have to say about "persons" (*ren* 人) and the "self" (*shen* 身), and the extent to which people can act as agents of their own volition. This is more promising territory: what, for early Chinese thinkers, was a "person"? What was a "self"? What were the parameters within which persons or selves could act in society? Brindley's book provides some very interesting and thought-provoking answers to these questions. At the outset, one must concede her point about the concept of an "individual"; early Chinese thought clearly was capable of accommodating the notion of single persons, or multiple persons considered singly. The concept of an "individual person" is therefore not in itself foreign to early Chinese thinking about such matters as society, government, and religion. Whether the concept of "an individual person" extends to encompass ideas of "individuality" and "individualism" is less clear.

Brindley begins her analysis with what are generally regarded as some of the earlier works of the Mohist school, particularly the three chapters entitled "Shang tong" 尚同 ("Upwards Conformity," Parts 1, 2, and 3). These chapters lay out the theory that social order will ensue if the ruler conforms to Heaven, the ministers conform to the ruler, and the common people conform to the ministers. Heaven is perfect, and so if this staged pattern of emulation is followed, human society will likewise be perfect. Where is there scope for individual agency in this theory? Brindley locates it, quite correctly I believe, in the fact that emulation, or conforming upwards, represents a positive choice on the part of individual persons. People are not automata in thrall to an inexorable "fate" or "destiny" (*ming* 命), such that they have no option but to conform to their superiors. Although the Mohists believed that only one set of choices would result in a perfectly ordered society, people could in fact choose other paths. A ruler who failed to conform to Heaven would precipitate social disorder but he was nevertheless not constrained to so conform. The possibility of individual agency meant that moral choices were available to persons further down the ladder of society: if a ruler chose not to conform to Heaven, ministers could choose not to conform to him; if deluded ministers chose not to conform to a Heaven-conforming ruler, the common people could choose not to conform to them. Only perfect conformity up and down the line would lead to perfect social order, but individual choice was not thereby precluded. This is an interesting point, especially in light of the high value placed on discipline and obedience within the Mohist movement itself.

In writing about the Mohists, Brindley introduces two terms in translation that

require some comment. She translates *yi* 義 (usually "righteousness," "rightness," "correctness") as "justice," which extends the meaning of the term in a surprising and not necessarily convincing direction. I am not at all sure that one could identify a substantial discourse on justice (understood as the fair and equitable treatment of individuals within society) in early Chinese social philosophy, nor that *yi* would be the correct term for "justice" to the extent to which that concept existed. The choice is not unprecedented; in his translation of Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy,* Derk Bodde translates *yi* as "standards of justice" in contexts referring to Xunzi and Han Feizi. But Brindley translates *yi* as "justice" with little comment, and I would be interested in learning more about her rationale for that choice. In this chapter she equates *yi* "justice" with "moral rectitude," while in some later contexts she translates *yi* more conventionally as "rightness," so it is difficult to understand clearly the range of meanings she attributes to *yi*. The other translation that strikes me as unusual and somewhat odd is "achieved man" for *xian zhe* 賢者 (more commonly "the honoured" or "the worthy"); "achieved man" sounds more like a translation of such terms, familiar from the vocabulary of Daoist self-cultivation, as *cheng ren* 成人 ("accomplished person") or *zhi ren* 至人 ("perfected person"). This matters, because the translation "achieved man" seems to imply a greater commitment to techniques of self-cultivation than one would usually expect to find in Mohist texts. Again it would be interesting to know what reasoning lay behind this unusual choice.

Brindley is correct, I think, in describing the Mohist concept of a well-ordered society as a meritocracy in which individuals, through effortful striving and moral accomplishment, can achieve their rightful place in the social hierarchy and are empowered to make choices (that is, act as agents) appropriate to their level of achievement: "although the notion of conformity to both Heavenly and sociopolitical dictates ostensibly determines individual behavior, just how one interacts with such higher authorities reveals a certain measure of individual freedom of choice" (p. 26).

In her analysis of Mohism Brindley introduces the concept of "mindful conformity," that is, conforming (e.g. to Heaven's will) as the result of a conscious choice. The idea of conformity is central to her next chapter, which describes a set of texts in which all persons (and not just the ruler in his capacity as Son of Heaven) are depicted as capable of conforming to Heaven through physical and mental self-cultivation. Although such texts as the *Laozi,* and certain chapters of the *Guanzi* such as "Techniques of the Heart-Mind, Part 1" ("Xin shu, *shang*" 心術上) and "Inward Training" ("Nei ye" 內業) might seem to be aimed exclusively at the ruler or the sage (effectively one and the same), they were in practice available to anyone who wished to employ their techniques of self-cultivation. They differed in their techniques, and especially in whether they regarded the physical body as the site for a re-enactment of the perfect and ineffable Way, or as an empty vessel to be filled by the Way. In either case, the conformity of the sovereign-sage to the all-encompassing will of Heaven is expressed in government through non-action (*wu-wei* 無為); "both stances implicitly acknowledged the enormous authority that might

be concentrated in the individual as either a body or a vessel that assumes a certain space and function, not necessarily as a person (or self) acting on his own" (p. 52). Brindley is surely correct in noting that "the shared focus in these texts on sovereign authority over the people constitutes an explicit appeal to centralizing aspirations and policies of the day" (p. 52).

These fourth-century B.C.E. tendencies toward centralism provoked a reaction from a number of thinkers, as Brindley demonstrates in Chapter Three of her book. Zhuangzi (or at least the Zhuangzi of the "Inner Chapters" [*Zhuangzi* 1–7], the oldest layer of that accretional text) offered various metaphorical accounts of his ideal of personal identification with the Way, merging the self with the universal in such a way as "to strip the self of its role as *actor,* or self-conscious agent, in the world" (p. 55). The goal becomes not a social ideal of conformity to the Heavenly-empowered sage ruler, but a personal ideal of identification with the Way. This is an apolitical and levelling vision; there is no essential difference between the cook who effortlessly cuts up an ox by channelling the power of the Way, and the king who learns from his example.

Mencius, on the other hand, was deeply concerned with the question of the self as instantiated in society. He famously enquired into the nature of human nature (*xing* 性), and envisioned that nature as embodying "sprouts of virtue" that would grow along paths of innate goodness unless harmed or perverted. For Mencius, "the motivation for moral behavior exists within each individual as a force that affirms both life and morality—a force that every individual can nourish physically on his or her own" (p. 66). Human nature is not an inexorable force, but it does have innate tendencies (toward goodness); whether one conforms to or defies the innate tendencies of human nature is a matter of individual agency.

Yang Zhu, about whom very little is known, served as a foil for Mencius, who deplored his supposed extreme egotism and selfishness. Yang Zhu is often held up as a sort of negative exemplar of "individualism" in early China, but since none of his putative writings survive and he is most familiar through the hostile portrait painted by Mencius, it is difficult to arrive at a fair characterization of his views. Brindley takes an optimistic view: "Yang Zhu was perhaps one of the first thinkers, like Mencius, to see *xing* and the self as a primary source of idealized individual agency and meaning" (p. 74). I would suggest a simpler interpretation, namely that in a time of pervasive disorder, Yang Zhu was unwilling to harm, or even risk, his own self for the sake of society: *sauve qui peut*.

Zhuangzi, Mencius, and Yang Zhu do all seem, in various ways, to place high value on the individual. In Chapter Four, Brindley looks at two third-century B.C.E. responses, "bodily agencies vs. claims for institutional controls." Here her protagonists are the "Primitivist" author of some later chapters of the *Zhuangzi,* and the tough-minded political theorist Xunzi. She sees the primordial communalism of the Primitivist as being both an embodiment and a consequence of physical self-cultivation, an era in which an enlightened, non-active ruler presides over a society that spontaneously arranges itself into a perfect and healthy order that has no need for virtue, ritual, or social means of control.

Thus human power and authority are seated "not in tradition, history, or knowledge, but in the cosmic operations inherent in one's own body and epitomized in the body of the Son of Heaven" (p. 86). Xunzi, on the other hand, will have none of that; for him, human nature is negative but malleable, and a well-ordered society depends on the attainments of the sages and on their ability to channel the natures of ordinary people in positive and productive directions. Han Feizi takes this one step further, arguing that "since most [humans] are neither wise nor moral, strict and punitive measures are needed to maintain social order" (p. 95). For Han Feizi, human nature is unchangeably bad. That does not mean that individuals lack agency, but that their actions need to be brought under strict control.

The final chapter in Brindley's historical survey of the concepts of individuality and agency deals with texts from the early imperial era, when a key focus of social philosophy lay in reconciling the competing claims of central political authority and individual agency. Brindley characterizes the *Zhong yong* 中庸 ("Doctrine of the Mean") as accommodating "claims for the value and importance of external as well as internal controls over behavior" while the "Syncretist" chapters of the *Zhuangzi* propose "a philosophy that incorporated standard institutional methods of control into a regime of individualized cultivation of the body" (p. 119). Both views served the interests of ministers striving to carve out for themselves an important and institutionalized role in the administration of a sovereign emperor possessed of nearly unlimited power.

In the end, I find myself impressed by Brindley's survey of the concept of human agency in early Chinese thought, but still unpersuaded that early Chinese thought incorporated any concept of individualism, fairly defined. When Brindley writes, "conformist behaviors in early China dignified the self by helping preserve individual responsibility with respect to a universal goal and cosmic relationship. Notions of conformity encouraged all individuals to participate in the public good through a collective system of justice, ethics, or cosmic power. Through conformity, one could fulfill one's particular religious role and responsibility. Thus it served as a critical means for individuals to achieve spiritual attainment and contribute to social order" (p. 128), that strikes me as a more than slightly Orwellian concept of individualism. That remains true even if one is willing to grant (as I am not) that "in China of the fourth century B.C.E., conformity in no way connoted what it often connotes today: a lack of personal choice, uniqueness, distinction, creativity, and will" (p. 128).

Throughout the book Brindley emphasizes the concept of conformity (e.g. to the will of Heaven or to the ineffable Dao) as an act of individual agency or choice. But a major failing of Brindley's analysis lies in her unwillingness to confront and account for the political, social, and religious factors that in fact would have operated in early China to enforce a conformity that was inimical to individuality. Nowhere do we find the author taking account of *Laozi*'s injunction, for example, that in ruling the people the sovereign sage should "empty their minds and fill their bellies," a policy surely aimed at producing a bovine obedience that is the antithesis of individualism. Nowhere do we find any

analysis that takes account of the social concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and the ways in which it limits individual agency. This unwillingness to confront negative evidence, together with Brindley's strategy of redefining "individualism" to fit what she finds in early China rather than enquiring whether what she finds in early China fits any commonly accepted definition of the term, undercuts her conclusions rather severely.

Nevertheless, Brindley does succeed in her larger enterprise of showing that individual persons in early China possessed the capacity for agency—that is, that they were capable of forming views and acting upon them, not always in conformity with the wishes of social, political, and religious institutions and groups. They were not in thrall to fate; Mozi's critique of *ming* had traction. The common stereotype of Chinese people waiting passively for whatever fate has in store for them is manifestly false and derogatory. Ordinary people in early China were not cattle (though their rulers might sometimes have wished them to be); if nothing else they were capable of following Mencius's advice to flee an ill-governed state in search of a well-governed one. The benefits of learning and of self-cultivation were increasingly available across class barriers, and it was not just in exemplary stories that some individuals rose from the ranks of the peasantry or the artisanal class to reach the highest rungs of the social ladder.

Brindley also accomplishes her goal of complicating the contemporary debate on human rights and Asian values. Even if there was less "individualism" in early China than she would like to see there, she raises some very tough questions for those who would argue that East Asians, by "nature" or by preference, see the world as members of groups rather than as individual human beings who are quite capable of asserting agency on their own. She shows quite clearly that arguments in favour of limiting human rights for contemporary Asians on the basis of supposed classical traditions are specious—and that is an important accomplishment.

Though I have raised questions about some of the arguments and conclusions in this book, overall I read it with interest and appreciation. It makes a genuine contribution to the ongoing effort to understand early Chinese debates on the nature of human nature, the concept of the self, and the role of the individual in society.

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The Mozi: A Complete Translation. Translated and annotated by Ian Johnston. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Pp. lxxxv + 944. $85.00.

This very welcome resource provides its own best motivation. Ian Johnston observes that the *Mozi* "embodied . . . the most serious challenge to the increasing dominance of Confucianism. It did this by presenting a coherent body of doctrine articulated in a