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# Political Strategies for Maintaining Power: Power and Nature in Chapter 20 of the Chunqiu fanlu

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Abstract:

‘Bao wei quan’ 保位權 (‘Preservation of position and power’) (hereinafter: BWQ) is an essay advising rulers on how to preserve their position of power and maintain control over the bureaucracy. It is a part of one of the most authoritative premodern Chinese texts, the Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露 (The Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals), which is traditionally ascribed to pivotal Han dynasty scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 195–115 BCE). This paper argues that the BWQ establishes a type of naturalistic approach to rulership. In this vision, the state and its social and political order is rooted in the constitution of humannature, and is perceived as a place where human tendencies can be followed and fulfilled, but also controlled. In addition, the BWQ’s political discourse and its view of government is built around complementary processes, such as reward/punishment, political power/moral power, non-action/action, actuality/fam etc. The art of rulership thus consists of keeping these opposites in balance.

KEYWORDS

Power; rulership; Chunqiu fanlu; manipulation; desires; wu wei; Han Feizi; ziran; bureaucracy

## 1. Introduction

The ‘Bao wei quan’ 保位權 (‘Preservation of position and power’) (henceforth: BWQ) is a political essay advising rulers on techniques for maintaining power and methods they can use to organize and control the bureaucracy. It is the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of major premodern Chinese ethical-political compendium the Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露 (hereinafter: CQFL); this text, usually rendered as *The Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, had a great impact on the development of Chinese Confucianism. This lengthy, 82-chapter composite work is traditionally ascribed to pivotal Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 195–115 BCE), who was a famous exegete of the Gongyang zhuan 公羊傳 of the Chunqiu 春秋. While tradition attributes the authorship of the CQFL to Dong Zhongshu, recent studies suggest that, while he may have authored some chapters of the CQFL, others should be certainly ascribed to different sources. (See Gentz, 2001; Loewe, 2011; Queen & Major, 2016)

Sarah A. Queen, Gary Arbuckle and John Major argued that the BWQ belongs to a unit of the text (chapter 18–22) that expresses an intellectual viewpoint that differs significantly from the rest of the text. As they correctly noted, whereas the first seventeen chapters of the CQFL are based on close readings of the Chunqiu, this unit rarely mentions the Chunqiu. These chapters focus on the problem of statecraft in a highly syncretic manner. They discuss the role of ruler and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. They present various

perspectives on techniques rulers can use to attain power and position. The technical terms used in these chapters either do not appear in other chapters or carry a different semantic connotation. (Arbuckle, 1991; Queen & Major, 2016) Written by different authors, these chapters develop the theory of rulership by synthesising elements from various different sources. (Queen & Major, 2016, pp. 185–186).

Sarah Queen notes the unique characteristics of the BWQ chapter within this unit. ‘This chapter does not seek to justify his advocacy of particular statecraft techniques; the ability to keep the ruler in power at the top is its own justification.’ In addition, she notes ‘the harsh and utilitarian tone of these essays, and their complete lack of concern for objectivity and impartiality’ (Queen, 1996, p. 92). Queen, Major and Su Yu additionally point out that the BWQ was influenced by Han Feizi. (Queen & Major, 2016, p. 191; Su, 1992, p. 172).

This paper offers a different view on the BWQ chapter. It is true that the BWQ presents an autocratic vision of government, built around the notion of safeguarding the ruler’s position of power. However, a peculiar characteristic of the BWQ is its harmonious, balanced, and moderate approach to rulership, as only this kind of rulership, will enable the ruler to safeguard his position of power. The BWQ grounds this position in a view of the political cosmos and bureaucracy as being composed of opposing pairs/processes. The main thesis of the BWQ is that the system functions only if both pairs of opposites are kept in balance—the art of rulership thus consists of maintaining this balance. In this context, the BWQ advocates benefitting the people; the moderate approach in rewarding and punishing people which is a criticism of the Han Feizi’s vision of excessive rewards and punishment. It also places importance on the notion of kindness and elucidates the ethical concern of not producing resentment in others. It stresses objectivity in rewarding ministers, demanding performance from officials according to reality rather than reputation. It proposes a social and political order that is derived from human tendencies, but one that is also perceived as a place where they can be fulfilled. This is the grounds on which the BWQ develops a type of naturalistic and utilitarian approach to rulership, with a vision of the political cosmos and bureaucracy built around these opposing pairs.

In order to reconstruct and explain the BWQ’s positions and arguments of rulership, the research methodology will consist of an examination and contextualisation of the BWQ’s main concepts and arguments within the broader corpus of its textual sources.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The importance of maintaining shi

Although it is mentioned only once in the entire BWQ chapter, a pivotal concept of the theory of statecraft proposed by the essay is shi 勢, ‘political force’, ‘strategically advantageous position’, ‘political advantage/purchase.’ The importance of shi is clear from the opening passage, which reads as follows:

‘If people do not have what they like, the ruler will not have the means to encourage (quàn) [them]. If people do not have what they dislike, the ruler will not have the means to frighten [them]. If the ruler does not have the means to encourage and frighten [them], he will not have the means to prohibit and control. If he does not have the means to prohibit and control, the ruler and the people will stand at the same level and have an equal positional advantage, and then the ruler will not have the means to become dignified.’<sup>2</sup> (CQFL 6.7/27/7-8, Lau, 1994)

290 I. BULJAN

The opening passage advises a ruler how to maintain the highest degree of shi. It prescribes those conditions which, if left unfulfilled, will lead to the ruler and his people having equal shi. From the passage, it is clear that the importance of shi is not being asserted,

but is rather assumed to be an established fact. What is discussed are the conditions which must be fulfilled in order for a ruler to retain the strategically advantageous position (shi) of the throne. Thus, in order to understand the peculiar perspective of the BWQ's political thought, the notion of shi requires further elaboration. To this end, what follows is a brief discussion of its etymology and an explanation of its usage in early literature.

James Sellman points to the agricultural roots of the concept of shi 'denoting the force or leverage one gains in "grasping and planting". This discloses the interrelatedness of the active subject "making" one's world by properly allocating and taking advantage of spatio-temporal conditions' (Sellmann, 2002, p. 195). Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1902/1903–1982) suggested that the term shi was first used by Sun Bin 孫臏 and Sunzi 孫子 in the sixth century B.C.E., and had a strong military connotation (Kuan, 1975, p. 143). Analysing shi in the text Sunzi, Roger Ames discerns various shades of its meaning. Firstly, shi means both 'the compelling force of circumstances' and 'conditions.' Secondly, often used synonymously with xing 形 (shape), it means 'physical disposition', 'configuration' and 'shape' in connection with deployment of troops. Thirdly, it means 'occupation of a superior position and access to the potential advantages it confers.' In this respect, shi can refer to the 'strategic advantage' inherent in a superior position, as well as the manipulation of this advantage. Shi, therefore, can be both an indicator and predictor of the effectiveness of combat and a predictor of the outcome of war (Ames, 1983, pp. 67–68).

The concept of shi later gained political connotations and in this context, it can be rendered as 'position of power', 'positional advantage', 'political force', "political purchase." It is first emphasised by Shen Dao 慎到 (c. 350—c. 275 B.C.E.), as well as featuring as an important concept in the Shangjun shu 商君書, Guanzi 管子, Han Feizi 韓非子 and Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 (henceforth LSCQ) (Hsiao, 1979, p. 375). As Ames states, shi used in these texts refers to political advantage and one's capacity to influence others on the basis of one's specific social and political status and position. It implies one's position of influence or situation as well as one's power and is a natural condition of all political or social status. Shen Dao claimed that regardless of one's wisdom and capacities, if one does not have access to authority and position, one would be unable to rule. A person of superior character will be subjugated by one of inferior character, if he lacks authority and position. Han Feizi stresses that, in a well-ordered state, one's shi is contingent to the position and function one holds. The degree of shi is gradual, culminating in the position of the ruler himself. If the ruler loses his shi, people will not assist him and he will be controlled by his ministers (Liao, 1939, ch 21, book 7). For these thinkers, preservation of the ruler's supreme shi is the most important task of the statesman. These writers' efforts to find effective techniques to maintain a ruler's shi arose from this initial position.

Now, referring back to the BWQ, its theory of statecraft begins with the presupposition that shi assures ruler's continued place on the throne. Accordingly, the shi garnered by the throne should be the ruler's exclusive property. If the ruler fails to retain his shi and allows it to be shared among other people, his downfall is inevitable. Thus, it is vital for the ruler to protect his exclusive property and not allow others to take it. Taking this position, the BWQ focuses on describing the proper techniques through which to ensure that this goal is met. This shows that the final goal of rulership is maintaining ruler's exclusive position of the throne and that the BWQ builds its political theory from the perspective of the ruler and with his interest in mind. It is indicative, as Sarah Queen noted, that BWQ does not justify its political theory, but it posits the concept of maintaining the ruler's interest as a justification in and of itself (Queen, 1996, p. 92).

### 3. Rewards and punishments as the means to preserve shi

In keeping with the presumption that shi is ‘what makes a ruler a ruler’, and should accordingly be his exclusive property, the BWQ opens by establishing the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for the ruler to keep his distinct political status (shi) intact. The argument has an ordered structure, being entirely built on the chain of negative causal conditionals which are paralleled with their complementary pairs. The opening passage is the thesis of the first section of the essay, setting forth the main argument of its political theory.

It holds a view that people have likes/preferences (hao 好) and dislikes/aversions (wu 惡)

through which they can be encouraged (quan 勸) or frightened (wei 畏). By these two means, they can then be controlled or restricted, i.e. ruled. When the ruler has the means to control and restrain people, his position of power will be preserved and his positional advantage will not be compromised. While making the main point on the art of rulership, the opening passage reveals the foundation of its theory of statecraft. It argues that a distinct political advantage of the ruler rests on his ability to control and restrict the populace which are based on the likes and aversions of the people.

So, ruler’s shi can be preserved thanks to the fact that the human nature consists of likes and dislikes. The ruler’s preservation of shi is based on manipulating with these psychological tendencies. This shows that the BWQ’s theory of rulership is grounded in principles of human nature/disposition, i.e. in applied psychology. As success in government is based on psychological tendencies of people, the BWQ concludes that the way a sage ruler should administer his state is by following these tendencies:

Therefore, in governing the state, the sage follows the natural disposition of Heaven and Earth as they are, and those things from which the bodily organs naturally benefit; using them to establish a system of the honored and the unworthy and to establish rank differences between the dignified and the lowly. He establishes the ranks and salaries of officials and provides benefits to the five tastes/flavors, makes the five colours flourish and brings the five tones into harmony; in order to control what one sees and hears he personally commands the pure and the impure to be clearly different forms, and the glorious and the disgraceful to obviously contradict each other; in order to move the hearts of the people. (CQFL 6.7/27/8-10, Lau, 1994)

An important aspect of the BWQ’s political theory is emphasized in this conclusion: the principle of ‘following/adapting to (yin 因) the natural disposition (xing qing 性情) of Heaven and Earth’ is perceived as a principle of effective rulership. As the passage states, a sagely rulership is based on complying with nature and adapting to the natural course/pattern of things. The sage follows ‘things from which the sense organs (kong qiao 孔竅, literally “empty holes”) naturally benefit (li 利).’ The text uses the term li, an important category in Early Chinese texts, which means (material) ‘benefit’, ‘advantage’, ‘profit’, and here is used verbally. Andrew Meyer glosses it: ‘The character itself depicts a stalk of grain and a knife, indicating that it was meant to be understood in strictly material terms: harvested grain. Profit thus denotes material necessities like food, clothing, and shelter that are the mainstays of life’ (Major, Queen, Meyer & Roth 2010, p. 879). The LSCQ writes of what appeals and benefits to the sense organs: ‘the desire of the ear for the five sounds, of the eye for the five colors, and of the mouth for the five flavors, belongs to our essential nature’ (Knoblock & Riegel, 2001, p. 84). Thus, the BWQ’s ruler ‘provides benefits to the five tastes/flavors, makes the five colours flourish and brings the five tones into harmony.’ Following these natural tendencies/sensual desires, the sage establishes the social and political order, conferring ranks and salaries. That people are naturally drawn to ranks and salaries was a common view among early Chinese philosophers. For an example, the Lun yu 論語 states that ‘riches and honors are what men desire’ (Lau, Wah, & Ching, 1995, 4.5/7/13). According to the BWQ, ruling is about moving/guiding human hearts/mind (xin). Hence, ruler’s decrees and measures should be in accordance with human desires in order to satisfy them.

This passage establishes a type of naturalistic and utilitarian approach on rulership. The social and political order is not only derived from human tendencies, but it is also perceived to be the place where they can be fulfilled. It can be noted that there is

a reciprocal relationship between social/political order and human desires. The human tendencies and natural desires serve as the basis for social and political order and correlatively a well-ordered society is a place where the tendencies of human nature and sensual desires can be fulfilled. In the view that the ruler benefits the people's senses can be recognised a utilitarian position according to which actions are right if they have a tendency to promote benefit of the people.

Such a sociopolitical order will in turn ensure safeguarding the ruler's position of power. The BWQ's approach to power thus underlines a relationship between the structure of society and power: safeguarding the ruler's position of power is based on the structure of political and social order which is designed to fulfill human appetites.

The BWQ also suggests that for functioning of political and social system the ruler needs to control what one sees and hears. It is important that the opposites which do form a pair, as it metaphorically states, 'the pure and the impure' (qing zhuo 清濁) and the 'glorious and the disgraceful' (rong ru 榮辱), 'contradict each other' and are 'clearly distinguished.'

Chinese commentators disagree whether the notions of 'pure' and 'impure' and 'glorious and disgraceful' here denote aesthetic or ethical categories (Su, 1992, p. 173). I hold a view that they refer to the aesthetic categories, regarded as the core values of the society. What is 'pure' and 'glorious' have to be distinguished from their opposites, so the people know these values and can follow them. When there is a clear distinction between the opposites, then the behavior that motivates the quest for the 'glorious' and the 'pure' is encouraged. Hence, this implies that the ruler not only fulfills but also guides and orients people's bodily senses toward what is 'pure' and 'glorious.'

Such a naturalistic, organic and utilitarian view that political and social order should be grounded in the fulfillment of human desires endorses the view of human beings in their natural state as being motivated primarily by self-regarding desires, such as the desires for life, wealth, and honor. Following this concept of human nature, the BWQ asserts that success in government and preservation of position of power lies in following human nature and, hence, fulfilling the people their desires. However, the final goal of BWQ's political project is not happiness and well-being of people, but to make people satisfied serves only as the instrument to ensure power and authority of the ruler. On the other side, the BWQ does not recognise the moral autonomy of the people and does not acknowledged that man is capable of moral learning. It is silent as to whether people have the capacity for moral choice.

Such a radicalized and reduced view of human nature, combined with the final intent of its political program, i.e. safeguarding the ruler's power, results in the BWQ's advocacy of rewards and punishment (shang-fa) as the two main complementary forces of rulership: 'Only when they have what they like can they be encouraged. Therefore, the sage establishes rewards in order to encourage them. If the people have what they like, then they must have what they dislike. Only when they have what they dislike can they be frightened. Therefore, the sage establishes punishments to frighten them. Only when they have both what encourages them and what frightens them can they be controlled.' (CQFL 6.7/27/10-12, Lau, 1994)

BWQ in its advocacy of rewards and punishments as the two complementary forces of rulership can be compared to Shang Yang 商鞅 (390–338 BCE), Guanzi and Han Feizi's thought. They claimed that humans lack the capacity for good and can only be motivated through rewards and punishments. As Heiner Roetz remarks, for Han Feizi man is a 'thoroughly selfish being only superficially molded by culture, tradition, and social bounds' (Roetz, 1993, p. 258). As these texts show, the BWQ's program of government does not recognize limits of a system of rewards and punishments as a form of motivation of the people. In BWQ's project, ruling is limited to controlling and restricting people, ruling does not have a role of educating, guiding or transforming the people. Following this, such a program of government does not stress an importance of performing rituals, music and establishing standards of righteousness in managing the people.

For the role of punishments in Legalists thoughts, Heiner Roetz properly pointed out their preventive aspect: 'The existence of punishment has frightening effect and thus acts as an anti-criminal behavior'. As Roetz states: 'By way of deterrence, crime can be nipped in the bud, and finally it will be possible to abolish punishment by punishment' (Roetz, 1993, p. 260). Though it is being applied due to what has been done in the past, punishments and rewards are about the future. As punishments serve to threaten and rewards serve to encourage people, political order based on punishments and rewards is not limited to acting ex post, penalizing deeds that have committed, but they also have effects on actions ex ante, before they were committed. They are the means of achieving further goals. These instruments of ruler's power accommodate the nature of individuals, influencing individual's emotions and motivation.

It is interesting to note that such a position on punishment has an echo in Michael Foucault's (1926–1984) view of the role of the system of penalties in a disciplinary society. Foucault states that 'the penalty must have its most intense effect on those who have not committed the crime' (Foucault, 1991, p. 95). In his reflection on the notion of power, Foucault also asserts that the system of penalties is the method of carrying out power. In fact, the penal system exists to defend the power of the ruling classes. (Ibid., p. 23.) Similarly, in BWQ the system of punishing (as well as the system of rewarding) serves to defend and preserve power and position of the ruler.

#### 4. Rewards and punishment should be dispensed with measure

Since the ruler's control of the people, and his subsequent preservation of his shi, depends on the system of reward and punishment, the BWQ argues that the system of reward and punishment should be well-regulated. The first rule of dispensing rewards and punishment is that they should not exceed in measure the crime or merit for which they are being dispensed: 'One who controls (zhi) the people controls what they like, and for this

294 I. BULJAN  
reason, he should not be excessive in encouraging through rewards. One who controls the people controls what they dislike, and for this reason, he should not be excessive in frightening through punishments.' (CQFL 6.7/27/12/, Lau, 1994). Only if rewards and punishments are moderate and dispensed with measure will the ruler be able to preserve his position and maintain order in the state. On this point, the BWQ differs from Shang Yang's maxim that 'rewards should be rather scanty, but punishments should be severe even for small offences' (Roetz, 1993, p. 260). Application of heavy and numerous penalties will make people to stand in awe, while light and rare rewards will make people to love the ruler. So, if light offences are regarded as serious, punishments will be abolished and the country will be strong (Pines, 2017, p. 210). As for the rare rewards, Shang Yang states that doing good is a basic responsibility of all citizens, and therefore it does not have to be rewarded, and that rewarding people for doing what is expected of them would be like rewarding them for not stealing. (Ibid, p. 213.)

Whereas Shang Yang advocates the extremes of severe punishment and scanty reward, Han Feizi takes the same position on punishing but a differing one on reward. He recommends the dispensement of generous rewards, arguing that only generous rewards will make people work hard and tirelessly and fight fearlessly against their enemies in war. In addition, generous rewards will not only affect the meritorious recipient but will encourage other people as well (Liao, 1939, ch. 37, book 15).

On the other side, Confucius criticises rule that implements harsh punishment and oppressive governance as destructive. According to the Liji 禮記, he says: 'Oppressive government is more terrible than tigers' (Legge, 1961, 1.190). The Zuozhuan 左傳, also criticizes harsh punishment and excessive rewards, claiming that both extremes are inappropriate because they can affect the undeserving. Excessive rewards could be given to the bad, while harsh punishments could be meted out upon the good (Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhengyi, 1993, 襄公二十

六年). Like the Zuozhuan, Xunzi criticizes rule that implements rewards and punishment unfitting of the good deeds or crime for which they were handed down (Knoblock & Zhang, 1999, vol II, 24.3, pp. 779–781). He believes that the benefits of excessive rewards may reach evil men while the injury of excessive punishment may reach good men (Knoblock & Zhang, 1999, vol I, 14. 9, p.449).

Similar to the Liji, Zuozhuan and Xunzi, the BWQ holds a view that rewards should not be too generous, nor punishment too excessive. Both must remain in measure with the good deed or crime for which they are dispensed. It argues that excessive rewarding and punishing will lead to a state in chaos: 'If what is liked is in abundance, then it will create luxury. If what is disliked is present beyond the appropriate measure, then it will create terror. If terror is created, then the ruler will lose his power (quan), and then all individuals under heaven will mutually hate each other. If luxury is created, then the ruler will lose his generosity, and then all individuals under heaven will mutually destroy each other.' (CQFL 6.7/27/13-14, Lau, 1994)

The BWQ's argument against excessive rewarding and punishing consists of causal claims, establishing relationships between a cause and its effects. The BWQ argues that excessive rewarding and punishing are harmful because they cause a chain of negative effects, where one negative phenomenon is a cause of another negative phenomenon. It claims that (1) excessive rewarding and punishing cause fu 福 'luxury' and wei 威 'tyranny', 'oppressive fear', (2) luxury and tyranny cause the ruler's loss of de 德 and quan 權, (3) the ruler's loss of de and quan cause hatredness and animosity among people. Thus, rewarding and punishing will cause countereffect if it is excessive, their final effect is a state in chaos. This argument offers an implicit criticism of Shang Yang and Han Feizi's view. (Ibid, p. 82.) Excessive rewards and punishments, the two governmental measures Han Feizi promotes, are harmful because they create two complementary extremes: fu and wei. These concepts have negative connotations. Fu can be understood as luxury, in a sense as Christopher Berry defines luxury, as something inessential, but conducive to pleasure. It is 'something we can do without, it is not needed' (Berry, 1994, p. 25). Wei can be understood as its antonym, it denotes a state of discomfort, poverty and suffering, when someone has less than his needs. In arguing against these two extremes, the BWQ stresses two complementary forces, de and quan, both of which denote ruler's ability and power to cause others to act (Buljan, 2016, p. 82). The BWQ claims that luxury and tyranny will cause a ruler's loss of de and quan, what will lead to hatredness and animosity among people. De, originally denoting potency, is phonetically related to de 得, meaning 'to get', 'to obtain', and is the opposite of shi 失, 'lose.' As Griet Vankeerberghen defines it: 'De seems to refer to the ability of individuals, or states to further their own cause, to shift the situation to their own advantage regardless of how they do so' (Vankeerberghen, 2001, p. 128). There is a certain difference between the Confucian and Daoist interpretations of de. Whereas in Confucian texts de has a sense of virtue, denoting 'moral excellence', the Daoists interpret de in the cosmological sense as 'virtuous potency' (Svarverud, 1998, p. 234). Both of them stressed the efficacy of de for statesmanship. Confucian texts, in their understanding of de, implemented the idea that kindness causes the other to act in the same. Confucius stresses that people are attracted by one's moral qualities, thus one who rules through the means of his de attracts the people and causes them to follow his example (Lau et al., 1995, 2.1/2/25). On the other side, in the Daoist sense, as Henrique Schneider pointed, the term de does not have a 'normative sense of virtue', but it "conveys a value-neutral meaning of 'power' over situation, or the personal qualities of acting in a specific situation or 'situational-intelligence' (Schneider, 2013, p. 267). Han Feizi follows the Daoist sense of de. As Schneider states, for Han Feizi de is also 'value-neutral' and has 'an instrumental sense.' It is 'through de that the ruler adapts his skills to a given situation, and it is through the ruler's actions in de that the natural way of the dao unfolds itself.' (Ibid., 269.) The same can be said for the connotations of de in the BWQ's thought: de is not related to the ethical implication of virtue and it has an instrumental sense, being at the core of a ruler's actions.



The second concept the BWQ uses in its argument for moderate rewards and punishment is *quan* 權, the term which encompasses a wide range of meanings as 'expediency', 'balance', 'weighing up', 'moral balance', 'heft', 'tactics', 'political weight', 'political power', or 'authority'. Andrew Meyer explains its basic meaning: 'The *quan* is the weight used in conjunction with a steelyard or a set of balanced scales or, by extension, the entire weighing apparatus' (Major, Queen, Andrew., Meyer, & Roth, 2010, p. 884). The Legalist flavoured texts argued that people will obey the ruler if his political power is taken seriously.

The BWQ advocates the importance of both powers, *de* and *quan*, while the BWQ criticizes Han Feizi's program of excessive rewarding and punishing, at the same time it follows Han Feizi's line of reasoning by stressing efficacy of *de* and *quan* for statesmanship. Namely, Han Feizi stresses 'two handles' by which the ruler controls his ministers, *de* 德 and *xing* 刑, punishment. *Xing* refers to executing people/punishment and *de* refers to favor/rewarding people (Liao, 1939, ch 7, book 2). The BWQ's usage of the concepts of *de* and *quan* is apparently similar to Han Feizi's usage of the concepts of *de* and *xing*. As *de* and *xing* in Han Feizi's thought, *de* and *quan* in the BWQ have an instrumental sense, and are at the core of a ruler's actions. They are political means/instruments of guiding and controlling people and ordering the state. *De*, as ruler's potency, refers to the ruler's power which arises from bestowing of rewards. Hence, it can be comprehended as ruler's generosity toward his people. *Quan*, similar to Han Feizi's notion of *xing*, refers to the ruler's political power/authority which arises from bestowing punishments. The BWQ argues that the ruler will lose his *quan* if tyranny/oppressive power is created.

Both, *de* and *quan*, are of crucial importance for the ruler's maintaining order in the state, regulating people's behaviour as well as preserving ruler's power. The BWQ warns that the loss of *de* will result in *yuan* 怨. *Yuan* is 'a comprehensible antonym of *de* in the more political as well as cosmological interpretations of *de*', in Confucian as well Daoist inspired texts, points out Rune Svarverud (Svarverud, 1998, p. 270–271).<sup>4</sup> It is a negative ethical concept of 'resentment', 'anger', 'enmity', 'hatred', 'complaint' as the Shuowen lexicon defines it: 怨: 恚也 ('The term *yuan* means anger/indignant.'). (Xu, 1963 Shuowen Jiezi, 心部, p. 221.) As the negative sentiment *yuan* 'is to be avoided or eliminated', and Confucian texts stress the ethical concern with not producing and furthering resentment in the other people, points out (Nelson, 2013, p. 294).

If the ruler loses his *de*, people will harbor 'resentment' and 'anger' and the ruler's life will be threatened, warns BWQ. The BWQ implements this insight in its theory of preserving power and advocates the ruler to rule with *de* because this is the way to win reverent submission of people. So, moderate rewarding is not recommended because of the concern for the people, but because political success lies in being generous. As for the loss of *quan*, the BWQ states that if the ruler loses *quan*, it will lead to *zei* 賊, 'injure', 'murder.' In order words, there is a danger that the ministers will kill him.<sup>5</sup>

Preserving *de* and *quan*, two forces of rulership which can be safeguarded only if rewards and punishment are meted out in measure, can be regarded as a political strategy recommended by the BWQ. One point stated here is that the use of measure in administering rewards and punishment is of vital importance if the ruler is to preserve his position and maintain order in the state. So, the BWQ's political program advocates the concept of fulfilling the desires of the people, but also of refraining and moderating them. It advocates the systematic limitation of the fulfillment of desires to an appropriate degree as a political survival technique. In both ways, when the ruler gives the people what they either like or dislike, this will not go beyond what is necessary/appropriate (*guo jie* 過節) and they will obtain only what is needed/sufficient (*zu*). As a result, there will be neither indulgences nor extreme suffering, and the people will only get what is sufficient.

The BWQ's discourse on the concept of regulating desires uses the metaphor of 'crossing' or 'exceeding' a limit (*guo jie* 過節). Edward Slingerland has noted that the metaphor of 'crossing' is perhaps the most common way of conceptualizing moral error in

Warring States thought. Morality was conceptualized as a bounded space schema, and moral behavior was determined as operating within a bounded space, without the physical transgression of boundary lines (Slingerland, 2007, p. 56). For example, in the Lunyu 2.4. moral behavior is described as an achievement of ‘following the heart’s wishes without overstepping the bounds of carpenter’s square’ (yu ju 踰矩) (Lau et al., Lunyu: 2.4/3/2). On the other hand, the BWQ uses the metaphor of ‘exceeding a limit’ in the sphere of legality, conceptualizing people’s fulfillment of wishes as a bounded space schema. The ruler allows the people to follow and fulfill their desires, but without transgressing the limits of what is needed. Another concepts used in the context of ruler’s control of people’s desires are the concept of sufficiency (zu) and honesty and simplicity (dun pu 敦樸) associated with Laozi. Mark Csikszentmihalyi noted that Laozi’s phrase ‘knowing sufficiency’ spread widely during the Han dynasty: ‘In the Han, the Laozi’s strategy of knowing sufficiency was related to understanding the omnipresence of change, and limiting one’s desires in light of this’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 99). The BWQ uses this term in order to express the idea that sufficiency is a criterion in the ruler’s fulfilling of desires. Pu 樸, literally ‘uncarved wood,’ is usually translated as ‘simplicity.’ The attainment of simplicity is mentioned as an ideal in Daodejing 道德經 (henceforth DDJ): ‘Realigned with this nameless scrap of unworked wood, They would leave off desiring. In not desiring, they would achieve equilibrium, And all of the world would be properly ordered of its own accord’ (Ames & Hall, 2010, 37.134). Though it shares the same concepts, the BWQ in its point differs from the DDJ. As Zhong Zhaopeng points out, unlike in the DDJ, the BWQ’s ‘sage in administering the state follows the nature of the people and makes them simple and honest, but he cannot demand people to be without wishes’ (Zhong, 1994, p. 316).

## 5. Retaining a firm hold on de and wei

The BWQ argues the importance of retaining a firm hold on the de and wei:

What makes a country a country is generosity (de), what makes a ruler a ruler is majesty (wei).

Therefore, generosity should not be shared, and majesty should not be sundered. If generosity is shared, then kindness (en) will be lost. If majesty is divided, then power (quan) will be

lost. If power is lost, then the ruler will not be respected. If kindness is lost, then the people will dispersing. If the people disperse, then the country will be in disorder. If the ruler is not respected, then the ministers will rebel. For this reason, one who acts as a ruler of men firmly guards his generosity in order to attract his people, and he firmly grasps his power in order to correct his ministers. (CQFL 6.7/27/15-18, Lau, 1994)

As earlier arguments, this argument has an ordered structure, being built on the chain of causal conditionals which are paralleled with their complementary pairs. This passage argues that if the ruler shares these two complementary powers de and wei with common people or his ministers, then he will not be able to attract his people and correct his ministers. So, it is through the ruler’s actions in de that the ruler attracts his people, and through his actions in quan that he corrects his ministers. Since the loss of de and wei will result in the scattering of the people and the rebellion of his ministers, the ruler is advised to retain possession of these two tools, which should be the exclusive property of the ruler. Since de and quan are the result of the ruler’s conferring of rewards and punishment, this actually means that the power to confer such rewards or punishment should be the exclusive property of the ruler. This insight is also stated in Confucian classics, e.g. in the ‘Great Plan’ (Hong Fan 洪範) chapter of the Shang Shu 尚書: “It belongs only to the sovereign to confer dignities and rewards, to display the terrors of majesty, and to receive the revenues (of the kingdom). There should be no such thing as a minister’s conferring dignities or rewards, displaying the terrors of majesty, or receiving the revenues. Such a thing is injurious to the clans, and fatal to the states (of the kingdom); smaller affairs are thereby managed in a one-sided and perverse manner, and the people fall into assumptions and excesses” (Legge, 1879). Similarly, the Han Feizi states that if the ability to reward and punish does not

remain in the hands of the ruler, his position could be threatened (Liao, 1939, ch 21, book 7). The BWQ's argument that *de* should be the exclusive property of the ruler incorporates the ethical concept of *en* 恩, 'kindness', 'grace'. It warns that if *de* is shared, then kindness will be lost. The BWQ implements the notion of kindness in its project of rulership stressing demographic consequences of ruling without kindness. It warns that the ruler who does not show kindness to his people, will lose them and the state will fall into chaos (*luan* 亂). Finally, sharing of *de* will bring a state into chaos.

## 6. Wu wei

The BWQ maintains that *wuwei* 無為 'effortless action', 'non-action', 'lack of exertion' is the proper posture of the ruler in administration:

'One who acts as the ruler of men occupies a place of non-action, conveys his instructions without the use of speech, he is tranquil (*ji*) and soundless, he is still (*jing*) and formless, he grasps one without end and acts as the wellspring of the country.' (CQFL 7.6/27/22-23, Lau, 1994)

In almost every major late Warring States political texts, *wuwei* is considered to be the ideal way of ruling the world, in which a ruler avoids any deliberate action and acts naturally, following the Way (Pines, 2009, p. 106). Mark Csikszentmihalyi observed that 'The ideal of nonaction continued to be important in Han China, but its adaptation to an increasingly bureaucratic state caused it to be understood in new ways' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 49).

At first glance, the BWQ's usage of the concept of *wu-wei* appears to follow the DDJ.

The quotes statement borrows heavily from it. As in DDJ, in the BWQ, as Csikszentmihalyi states 'self-negating language' is used to describe this way of ruling: sage is 'non-active',

'soundless', 'formless' and 'speechless.' (Ibid, p. 49.) Tranquility (*ji*) and stillness (*jing* 靜) are also manifestations of this posture. *Wu-wei*, *ji* and *jing* mentioned here, are defined in the Zhuangzi as 'the perfection of the Dao': 'Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction—these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way and its Inner Power.'

(Zhuangzi 莊子·13·1·3.). They are, then, the 'root of all things.' The BWQ says that by

taking the position of *wu wei*, the ruler 'grasps the One (*zhi yi* 執一) without end' (*wu duan*

無端). Throughout the early Chinese corpus, 'the One without end' is often used as

a metaphor for the Way, and accordingly, 'holding fast to the One' as a metaphor for the ruler embodying the Way. By taking the position of *wu-wei*, the ruler serves as the

'wellspring of the state' (*guo yuan quan* 國源泉). As for the BWQ's author(s), wellspring (*yuan quan*) was an inspiration for early Chinese thinkers (Allan, 1997, p. 24). In comparing the ruler with 'wellspring' the BWQ attributes the ruler a pivotal role in the state. As the 'wellspring', the ruler gives life and nourishment to all.

Whereas the ruler's behaviour is described through the 'language of absence', i.e.

through 'wu-forms', as absent of action (*wu-wei*), soundless (*wu sheng*) and formless

(*wu xing*), his ministers are described through the 'language of presence'. They represent 'the heart/mind' (*xin*), their statements (*yan*) 'voice', *sheng* and their deeds 'form',

*xing*: 'On the basis of regarding the country to be the body, and the ministers to be the heart, he regards the ministers' language as a sound, and regards the ministers' deeds as a form.' (CQFL 6.7/26/23-24, Lau, 1994). Metaphorically speaking, if a state can be

conceived of as a body (*shen*), then the ministers can be conceived of as its emotional and cognitive center (*xin* heart/mind). The sharp distinction between the roles of the ruler and his ministers indicates the Shen Buhai-Han Feizi's application of the concept of *wu-wei*. The role of the ruler and ministers in the administration is sharply divided,

but complementary. In their vision of an ideal government, the ruler represents 'nonaction' whereas the ministers represent 'action.' Ruler controls the state while the

ministers are burdened with administrative affairs. As in their vision of government,

the BWQ's advocacy of wu-wei can be conceived to be a political strategy for controlling the bureaucracy and defending his own position of power.

From his resting position of non-action wu-wei, the ruler observes those deeds and words of the ministers that are not obvious, in order to confer rewards and punishment: 'Therefore, one who acts as a ruler empties his mind and remains quiet, listens acutely to their echo, watches their shadow sharply, in order to make a model (xiang) of rewards and punishment.' (CQFL 6.7/27/25-26, Lau, 1994). The ruler must have an empty mind (xu xin) and dwell in stillness (jing chu)—only from this kind of non-interfering position can he confer rewards and punishments. This states that the ruler must be careful when applying rewards and punishments, i.e. he must make judgments based not only on what is apparent at first glance but also on what is not so obvious.

While the ministers' words represent the state's 'voice' and their deeds its 'form', the existence of the 'voice' and 'form' implies the existence of an 'echo' and a 'shadow.' The BWQ stresses that the sound is not the same as its echo, and that the shape is not the same as its shadow. Everything is constituted of opposites such as 'pure and impure', 'straight and crooked': 'What replies from the echo is not only one kind of sound. What casts the shadow is not only one kind of form.' (CQFL 6.7/27/25). Therefore, a ruler must carefully listen to the 'echo' and watch for the 'shadow.'<sup>6</sup> These metaphorical expressions in BWQ indicate that the ministers behaviour is comprised of opposites, and the ruler is advised to observe and monitor these opposites, i.e. all sides and aspects of the reality of his ministers. While on the one side this means that ruler should implement rewards and punishments according to objective standards, on the other side wu wei is the ruler's tactic of gaining a knowledge about his ministers, and rewarding/punishing on the basis of this body of knowledge. From the context of the whole BWQ, it can be concluded that it is a strategy of controlling officials aimed to protect the interest of the ruler.

It is interesting to compare the strategy of wu wei with Foucault's notion of surveillance in his discussion of constitution and support of power and those with power. Foucault's notion of surveillance is 'the production of knowledge about and supervision of people in bureaucracy.' It includes activities in the 'collection and storage of information (presumed to be useful) about people or objects' (Dandeker, 1990, p. 37). Similarly, wu wei is the ruler's tactic of monitoring people and gaining a knowledge about them. In his examination of disciplinary power, Foucault underlines the relationship between surveillance, knowledge and power. He argues that knowledge plays an important role as a fundamental aspect of power and that surveillance supports those with power (Purdy, 2015, p. 5). Similarly, the BWQ rationalizes the ruler's non-activity with the need to maintain power. Foucault stresses that the control of surveillance mechanisms is a major source of productive power in the realm of discipline and behaviour modification. As a result of being under constant surveillance, people ended up disciplining themselves. Wu wei and surveillance are similar because they are a mechanism through which one gains knowledge about people in bureaucracy; secondly, as techniques, surveillance and wu wei both result in the orderly behaviour of those individuals who work in bureaucracy. Finally, they play a role in supporting those with power.

## 7. Ming/shi

The BWQ argues that rewards and punishments should be based on the actuality of performance of an official, and not on his reputation: '[In examining an official], he questions his nature on the basis of his reputation in order to examine his actual situation.' (CQFL 6.7/27/27). Here, using binary opposed terms ming-shi, the BWQ draws on the terminology of Shen Buhai (Creel, 1970, pp. 88-91). Ming means 'title', the name of the office bestowed upon an official, and the reputation it carries. Sometimes it means 'speech', or more concretely the statement of an official. Shi, literally 'fruition', means 'actuality' and refers to the performance of the officials, fruits of their effort (Sellmann, 2002, p. 193). Similar to Shen Buhai, BWQ uses these terms in connection with personnel control, advocating the practice of comparing an officer's 'actual' performance with the duties implied by his 'title'. It stresses that the performance of an official should be congruent with the objective definition of his title. Following this, the BWQ states that the ruler's task is to confer rewards and punishments based upon an examination

of the relationship between the title of an official and the nature of his performance. In this way 'rewards are not given for nothing and punishments are not handed down for nothing.' (CQFL 6.7/27/27).

As the result of implementation of this technique (shu) is well-administered country, where duties are discharged, achievement is produced and the ruler will gain a firm control over bureaucracy. The final result is the self-regulating, automatic bureaucracy in which the ministers will maximise their productivity, and by the means of this, the ruler's way will be preserved. In this kind of bureaucracy, the ruler reaches the proper equilibrium attaining middleness/appropriateness (zhong) required for peace and order. This suggests that balance is achieved:

.his many many ministers divide their tasks and so the country is governed, each respectfully carries out his duties and strives for and advances his achievement, and makes visible and expands his own reputation, and then the ruler of men attains and holds their appropriateness/middleness. This is the technique by which to naturally bring forth achievement. (CQFL 6.7/27/27-28)

## 8. Naturalistic administration

Having analyzed the main concepts and tenets of the BWQ's theory of rulership and administration, the unstated presumption underlying it will be examined. One important perspective of the BWQ's theory of statecraft is its Daoist genealogical cosmogony which underlines it. In this respect, the BWQ follows Shen Buhai's theory of administration. Basing his view on the common presupposition that the same principles govern both the natural and political world, Shen Buhai's ideal administration manifests the principles of nature and ruler's techniques (shu) embody the principles of nature. In this manner of administration, the ruler embodies the Way, taking the position of effortless action (wuwei). He rules over the 'self-inspiring administration.' The same can be said of the BWQ's ideal administration. Similar to Shen Buhai's vision of government, the BWQ's political theory is built around the following Daoist concepts and metaphors: wu-wei, zi-ran spontaneity, yin (adaptation), you (following), qing yuan (wellspring), yi (one) and jing (stillness).

In Daoist literature, the Way is presented as a source from which myriad things emerge and receive nourishment. It is assumed that the world is self-sustaining and selfgenerative. Applying this concept of the Way and the world in its vision of rulership

and bureaucracy, the BWQ states that the ruler who rules by wu wei grasps the Way and becomes, metaphorically speaking, the 'wellspring of the state.' The ruler therefore nourishes his subject's life like a wellspring. The image of wellspring also shows early Chinese philosophers' fascination with and inspiration from water, which is rooted in the assumption that the same principles govern both the human and natural world. Also, if we look at the nature of the techniques (shu) of governing promoted by the BWQ, these techniques are described as ziran 自然, literally, 'what is so of itself', 'so-ness' or spontaneous. The notion of ziran refers to the activity of the Way, which can be described as perfect spontaneity. The BWQ follows the thought of Shen Buhai, who applied the idea of ziran to his vision of governance. Ziran is how an effective administration functions: this administration is self-generative and automatic. It functions by itself, without any effort by the ruler, and the proper order emerges within it spontaneously, and achievement is something that occurs in it naturally. The source of this kind of government is a non-active ruler who embodies the Way. His techniques of governance are grounded in the most authentic root, the Way, and, thus, are 'so of themselves.' Achievement (gong) exudes from his ministers while fame (ming) is returned to the ruler, the 'wellspring of the country.' Daoist thought also contains the principle of 'returning (gui) to nature', 'returning to the source' (Xiang, 2016, p. 502). The BWQ evokes this principle, raising the idea that non-directed administration causes fame to be returned to the ruler, who acts as the source of everything. The idea of effortlessness in governance is also described using the concept of yin 因, 'to accord', 'to go

along with.' To express the idea that the sage complies with the nature of heaven and earth, the author employs the term yin, which belongs to a group of metaphors for wu wei (Jones, 2008, p. 110).

Also, an important perspective of classical Chinese cosmology is that the cosmos is ordered into binary oppositions, with one member yin and the other yang (Graham, 1989, p. 330). Because of this, polarism has been a distinguishing presupposition and a major principle of explanation of classical Chinese philosophy. Roger T. Ames explains it as 'a symbiosis: the unity of two organismic processes which require each other as a necessary condition for being what they are' (Kasulis, Ames, & Dissanayake, 1992, p. 159). This cosmological assumption affected the BWQ's political discourse and its vision of government. It is constructed around complementary/polar pairs: likes/dislikes (hao/wu), encouraging/frightening (quan/wei), rewards/punishment (shang/fa), political power/moral power (quan/de), pure/impure (qing/zhuo), glorious/disgraceful (rong/ru), non-action/action, coming out/returning (chu/gui), actuality/fame (shi/ming), achievement/fame (gong/ming), ruler/ministers (jun/chen), noble/base (gui/jian), body/mind (shen/xin), honored/humbled (zun/bei), luxury/tyranny (fu/wei), sound/echo (sheng/xiang), shape/shadow (xing/ying) (Buljan, 2016, p. 80). The BWQ is founded on the premise that the system functions only if both pairs of opposites exist, are applied and are in harmony. The ruler has to be aware of these complementary pairs, and the art of the rulership consists in balancing these two opposites. As the BWQ states, the ruler holds the middleness (zhong). This suggests that the system works in order only if these two complementary forces are kept in balance. Through cosmological connotations of political terminology, natural status is ascribed to these instruments of control.<sup>7</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

The BWQ is a political essay directed towards the interests of the ruler, and its final purpose is the political survival of the ruler. It starts from the position that the key task of government is to preserve the ruler's advantageous position on the throne. The BWQ itself demonstrates the interrelationship of (the ruler's) power, human nature, and social/political order. It generates a type of naturalistic and utilitarian approach to rulership in which political and social order is designed to follow, fulfil, but also control human appetites, thus making reward and punishment the main methods of rulership.

The BWQ builds its view of government by synthesising concepts from pre-Han sources and creating its own vision of rulership and statecraft. It integrates the notion of advantageous position (shi), the notion of reward/punishment, the notion of techniques of rulership (shu), Shen Buhai's wu wei doctrine and his congruence between titles/reputation and actuality/performance. Though the BWQ draws heavily from pre-Han sources, the BWQ differentiates from these sources because it organizes these concepts into an ordered structure/framework of government. Its vision of the political cosmos and bureaucracy is built around opposing pairs. In this vision, balance and order are the ideal state, and the art of rulership consists of keeping these complementary concepts in harmony. Although it presents an autocratic vision, it argues for a harmonious, balanced, and moderate approach. The BWQ supports this balanced vision by incorporating the concept of kindness, moderation in distributing rewards and punishment; it stresses the importance of a government that does not engender resentment in people, claiming that this model will ensure a strong and stable state. In addition, it argues that rewards and punishments should be based on the objective standards, i.e. on the actuality of performance of an official, and not on his reputation.

Its vision of government, particularly its employment of a reward-punishment theoretical framework of political order, can be understood/interpreted as an adjustment to the needs of the Han empire. It stresses their moderate application and adjusts it to a different historical context, creating a unique vision of rulership. Its criticism of the creation of oppressive terror can be seen as an implicit criticism of the brutality of the Qin dynasty's penal system, which led to its downfall, and was typical of Han writings (See Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 24). Thus, as a Han text written after the fall of the Qin dynasty,

the BWQ relies on Legalist texts on the one hand while modifying and criticising these texts on the other, stressing balance and order as political ideals and as a necessity.

## Notes

1. This article builds and develops on insights presented in my previous article Buljan (2016), pp. 85–86. in which I have demonstrated that the BWQ develops its theory of rulership by synthesizing elements from different sources.
2. Hereafter all the English translations of the BWQ are from Buljan (2016), pp. 73–100. This translation is based on: D.C. Lau [Liu Dianjue] 劉殿爵 – Chen Fangzhen 陳方正, *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin 春秋繁露逐字索引*, in: D. C. Lau (Ed.), *A Concordance to the CQFL, The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series Classical Works No. 6*, Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994.
3. Most of the CQFL editions have *quan*, 權 power. Dong Tiangong and Su Yu noted that 權 is a mistake for *quan* 勸, ‘encourage/stimulate’ (Dong, 2001, 捌輯, pp. 2–220). Su (1992, p. 172). I follow Dong Tiangong and Su Yu.
4. The Daodejing states: 報怨以德. (‘Requite enmity with potency’) (Ames & Hall, 2010, 63.175).
5. Similarly, Han Feizi stresses that if ruler loses his *quan*, it will lead to the lost of control and ruin of the state (Liao, 1939, ch. 11, book 4).
6. Qing dynasty (1644–1912) scholar Su Yu noted that these statements are reminiscent of the passage of the Liezi 列子, who quotes the Book of the Yellow Emperor (Su, 1992, p. 175).
7. Queen and Major hypothesized that the BWQ ‘consists of three short essays that recommend different techniques’, not necessarily by the same author (Queen et al., 2016, p. 191). Unlike Queen and Major, I hold a view that the BWQ can be taken as a unity. I base my view on the argument from the content and its style. It is true that there can be observed three thematic units in the BWQ: 1) the notion of *shi*, and relationship between ruler and his people, 2) the notions of *de* and *wei* and the relationship between the ruler and his people and his ministers, 3) *wu wei* and the ruler/ministers relationship in bueraucracy. However, the BWQ presents a coherent program for maintaining royal sovereignty. Secondly, its way of argumentation—making chains of causal claims which are paralleled with their complementary pairs are obvious in the first and second unit. Thirdly, the BWQ’s political cosmos is coherently built on the complementary pairs.

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