

Introduction

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In order to illustrate the basic aim of this edited volume about the relationship between forgetting and memory in ancient China, I would like to begin by drawing the reader's attention to the famous short story, "Funes the Memorious," by Jorge Luis Borges. The main character, Ireneo Funes, loses the ability to forget at the age of nineteen, after being thrown from a half-tamed horse and left paralyzed. The text, written as an obituary (a meaningful detail) by an anonymous narrator, describes the consequences of being cursed with infallible memory. At the beginning of the story, Funes is presented as a mnemonic prodigy who, after the accident, can recite by heart a book he borrowed only the previous day. As the story progresses, however, the problematic and even dramatic aspects of Funes's new condition are increasingly obvious. He remembers everything, but instead of making his world and his life bright and intense, this perfect memory breaks it down into its tiniest elements. Ireneo Funes dies only two years after his accident.

The cause of Funes's death is, in medical terms, congestion of the lungs, but the narrator—and the reader—inevitably supposes that his premature death is somehow connected with the burden of exceptional memory that has become impossible to bear. Toward the end of the obituary, the anonymous narrator adds these few lines: "I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details."¹ Among other

things, Borges's story highlights, with its dramatic plot, the important role played by forgetting in cognitive terms, how necessary its intercession is for perception and knowledge. As the story suggests, the advantages of forgetting are not only limited to this cognitive sphere, but they also affect existential matters and the way we lead our lives. Although it is clearly in the domain of fiction, Borges's story takes up Théodule-Armand Ribot's idea that "forgetfulness, except in certain cases, is not a disease of memory, but a condition of its health and life,"² or William James's famous observation that "in the practical use of our intellect, forgetting is as important a function as recollecting,"³ thus elaborating on experiences noted in clinical psychology in the early years of the twentieth century and only confirmed in more recent research.⁴

Nobody wishes for a poor memory. The pangs of frustration we feel when we forget a colleague's name, an appointment, a friend's birthday or the precise location of an important quotation from an essential text motivate the desire to have all of our memories constantly available; too often forgetting is understood just as a scourge, a nuisance, a breakdown in an otherwise efficient mental capacity.⁵ Yet, one only needs to skim the fictional case of Funes to appreciate the pain and complications associated with being unable to control which memories spring to mind, or with the loss of our capacity to forget. Forgetting is to lose our cherished past, to suffer confusion where there was understanding, or it is to neglect one's responsibilities to oneself or to others. It is something that one rarely does on purpose but is, rather, a human frailty to be avoided or overcome. However, forgetting is precisely what we want and need to do very often. Life is filled with unpleasant, even traumatic experiences that we would prefer to forget if we only could. If the existence of a duty to remember is controversial, the duty of forgetting seems a much more acceptable idea.⁶ From this perspective, forgetting can be a positive force in human life, one that plays a decisive role in our existence.⁷

The reader's surprise at finding this implicit positive depiction of forgetting in Borges's story is partly due to the fact that our culture, like any other, tends to celebrate remembrance and forget about forgetting. Indeed, forgetting is often cast aside, naturally banished to occupy a marginal or inferior position, and simply thought of as being the negative converse of memory. From a conventional point of view that is tenaciously acceptable even today, memory has been presented as the radiant hero in the limelight while forgetting, defined as losing remembrance of something or ceasing to retain it in one's memory, has therefore been

associated with the shady villain lurking behind the scenes.⁸ By tradition, it is this focus of exclusionary opposition between the two phenomena that has prevailed until recent dates, in the academic world as well. Hence, the emphasis has been on its negative effects, its destructive powers, and the impossibility of constructing around it a technique or art equivalent to what memory inspires.⁹ It is as if we somehow have nothing to say about forgetting, or if we can only refer to it in negative terms as a loss, something taken, an omission, lack, or distraction. This at least partially explains the extraordinary abundance of readily available scholarly works which, from several scientific disciplines, take as their object of study the various aspects of memory, whether it is from the individual or collective point of view, by contrast with the incredible scarcity of published monographs about forgetting.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that, over the last two decades, the solidly distinctive quality of this exclusionary opposition when considering the relationship between remembering and forgetting has been diminishing in favor of a more comprehensive, less simple representation of the two processes. In this new perspective, remembering and forgetting tend to be understood as complementary forces rather than as antithetical processes that cancel each other out, and even as integral aspects through which cultural memory is formed and transformed.¹⁰ Hence, in many of the disciplines coming together under the heading of the humanities, it has been understood that the study of forgetting and the study of memory cannot be separated in categorical and dichotomous ways.¹¹ Aleida Assmann, one of the pioneers in urging this change of paradigm, points out that, on all of its levels, memory should be defined as being an intricate interaction between remembering and forgetting, so that, “when thinking about memory, we must start with forgetting.”¹² Accordingly, such different authors as the historian and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov and the anthropologist Marc Augé have recently drawn attention to the dangers inherent in certain rigid forms of the cult of memory and in unconditional and absolute praise of it, while also speaking out for the need always to include interaction with the positive forces of oblivion as they have much to contribute to an optimal management of memory.¹³

From this standpoint, we can claim that our sense of what memory is, then, seems to be defined by unstable oscillations between the latent and the explicit, the persistent and the momentary, the purposeful and the inadvertent, the remembered and the forgotten.¹⁴ And although

studies exclusively focused on memory continue to attract the attention of scholars, it is now clear that it is no longer possible to banish forgetting and that, accordingly, any rigorous research into the many aspects of memory must necessarily take into account the usually marginalized and forgotten dimension of oblivion. It is not surprising, then, that far from the exclusionary polarization that has prevailed until recently, Mary Carruthers, in the preface to the second edition of her celebrated study of Western medieval mnemonics, should state that it is necessary to explore “a kind of forgetting that itself results from an activity of memory,”¹⁵ or that Anne Whitehead, even more explicitly, should conclude her guide to the field of memory studies with the statement that “forgetting, paradoxical as it may seem, constitutes a crucial if not an essential element in the future trajectory and direction of memory studies.”¹⁶ Forgetting, together with other forms of ignorance, loss, and deliberate or negligent suppression, which comprise a novel field of academic research called agnotology, is now increasingly validated as scholars are calling for a more complete, thorough, and accurate understanding of the cognitive, emotional, social, and political selection processes of past and present cultures.¹⁷

This less restrictive trend has also been reflected in several recent contributions in the study of ancient civilizations. The seminal works of the French scholar in ancient Greece, Nicole Loraux, in which she revived the crucial role played by the notion of forgetting just after the tyranny of the Thirty, in around 404 BCE at a particularly dramatic juncture in the political history of Athens, should be cited first of all.¹⁸ Also important are the contributions of Charles W. Hedrick Jr. and of Harriet I. Flower who analyzed the subtle way in which memory and oblivion were interwoven in the political, penal, and social culture of the Roman Empire.¹⁹ The clear significance of this new perspective is even reflected in publications that, once solely focused on aspects of memory, are now including reflections about oblivion, as if the idea of conceiving and examining memory as an autonomous phenomenon independent of forgetting is no longer so evident or natural. This is the case, for example, with the volume, edited by Luca Castagnoli and Paola Ceccarelli which, devoted to elucidating the concepts central to and underlying the theory and practice of memory in ancient Greece, which includes two chapters devoted to forgetting in a broad epigraph titled “Memory and Forgetting in the Classical Period”;²⁰ and the volume devoted to the study of memory in Graeco-Roman literature, edited by

Katherine Mawford and Eleni Ntanou, which also includes a section titled “Oblivion,” with three contributions dealing with the relationship between memory and forgetting.²¹ The basic aim of our book is none other than to take up the changes we are now seeing in the study of memory and to move them into the domain of ancient China.

Naturally, memory is also perceived as an essential element playing a key role in many of the ritual, pedagogical, political, philosophical, and institutional expressions of classical Chinese civilization. In the intellectual landscape of ancient China, the virtues of memory are insistently emphasized from a standpoint which, in terms of both the individual and the collective, is at once political, social, and moral. There can be no doubt that memory is important for the life of individuals. It enables them to construct identities over time, despite the changes they will necessarily have to confront. But, moreover, self-cultivation, or the meticulous process of moral training by means of which an individual manages to become optimally integrated into the social and political structure in accordance, for example, with what is set out in the so-called Confucian school (*ru jia* 儒家), is inseparable from the constant exercise of memory, and recovering what was said and done in the past.²² These patterns of individual reminiscences are in turn inserted into the broader narrative of the family. Organized to a great extent around the ancestor cult, the profusion of rites, offerings, and ceremonies, which have linked the world of the living with the realm of the dead since the earliest dynasties, gives particular prominence to genealogies, to history, and to stories about members of the lineages and ancestors.²³ This makes it possible to include the individual in a narrative of greater density and time span.

Given this background, it is hardly surprising that educational activity is also organized around the same desire to transmit acquired knowledge, to conserve the past, and to reactivate or recall it in order to apply it to the present.²⁴ Understood as the effective transmission of a cultural legacy endowed with political and moral significance, education revolves around memorizing texts and teachings that one must know how to apply properly. Memory plays an essential role, not only in this “mental” instruction but also in the achievement of a body molded by means of reiterated protocols and somatic movements codified in a series of rituals that organize political and social life. Hence, the ancestor cult, the virtue of filial respect, the techniques for self-cultivation, and the optimal development of interpersonal relations within a ritually codified

hierarchical order require that nothing should be forgotten: the memory of one's progenitors, the master's teachings, instructions of superiors, codes of ceremonial behavior, the legacy of the sages of antiquity, relevant events of the past, and so on. It is a matter of recovering the lessons handed down by past sages,²⁵ of not forgetting the past so that it can become a model, a source of inspiration for the future.²⁶ This explains the fact that forgetting appears so frequently and in a good part of the classical literature with the exhortation of a negative nature and imperative value, as "do not forget" (*wu wang* 勿忘) and equivalents.²⁷

Since memory has been assigned such a central role in Chinese civilization, it is mainly this that has attracted the attention of scholars in the last few decades and which, as a result, has also taken up a considerable part of their analytical efforts. Accordingly, there are several recent works that have offered a deepened understanding of the various aspects related to memory from the standpoint of the history of ideas. I would highlight as paradigmatic examples of this the two monographic studies, now classics in the field, by K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* and *Public Memory in Early China*.²⁸ Together with these seminal works, other monographic studies and collective volumes have appeared in the last few years examining several facets of memory from varying perspectives.²⁹ Circumscribed by the phenomenon of memory, conceived as an autonomous element, none of these important and rich contributions includes reflections on the relations that should be woven between remembering and forgetting. Of course, this does not mean that Western sinology is entirely bereft of relevant contributions on the relationship between oblivion and memory in ancient China, but it must be admitted that, by comparison, they are much less abundant. Moreover, with very few exceptions,³⁰ when seeking to shed light on this phenomenon, they tend to refer to the way it is presented in a single extraordinary textual source, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.³¹

This edited volume aims to fill, at least partially, the main gaps detailed above by offering a selection of studies that not only consider that forgetting is an essential element for the further development of memory studies but also take as a general premise the idea that remembering and forgetting in ancient Chinese civilization should not be understood as isolated phenomena. Instead of conceiving of these two domains as belonging within a diametric and excluding opposition, our volume is founded on the idea that it is much more fruitful to analyze the sophisticated ways in which they interlink and overlap. This means,

then, offering a perspective that allows the best possible illustration of the dynamics, tensions, and transitions between forgetting and remembering in a setting of cultural memory where centripetal forces of conservation met centrifugal forces of dispersion. Accordingly, the fundamental premise of this book is the need to lay aside this narrow notion of forgetting, which is understood as a purely negative, unidimensional process, in order to explore the wealth of alternative forms it can adopt in the cultural context of ancient China. Hence, following in the wake of seminal works by such scholars as Paul Connerton and Aleida Assman³² who suggest several ways of classifying and accounting for the various facets of forgetting, the contributions making up this volume deal with such widely varying aspects of the phenomenon as erasure, cultural amnesia, selective forgetting, absentmindedness, concealment, obliteration, neglect, or pathologic and therapeutic oblivion.

Nevertheless, for all its pioneering and innovative nature, the aim of the volume is modest since it is limited to offering a sufficiently comprehensive sample of precursor works that integrate various aspects of forgetting into the study of memory. Hence, far from aspiring to present an all-encompassing survey that will cover every aspect of the issue, the purpose is to explore, from a variety of focuses covering an ample range of disciplines, perspectives, traditions, and periods, some of the ways in which the different ideas (and practices) of forgetting and remembering interact. Through the interdisciplinarity nature of this volume and the multiplicity of approaches of its essays we will try to shed new light on the features of the mechanisms of preservation and loss in ancient Chinese texts. The volume therefore brings together a wide range of contributions, methodologically structured around textual analysis and covering a good part of the predominant genres of the intellectual landscape of ancient China, which include historiographical writings, political discourses, philosophical essays, ritual treatises, religious documents, and literary pieces, both transmitted and excavated. We are of course aware that the ordering of this material into three sections (historiographical and political narratives, philosophical writings, and ritual treatises and literary texts) admits variations since, given the very condition of the texts being analyzed, which are irreducibly heterogenous in many cases, these taxonomies should not be understood rigidly. For example, a ritual treatise may contain passages that refer to a philosophical or literary dimension, just as a literary piece may draw on historical material and offer political lessons.

We present, then, a flexible ordering which, in keeping with an approximate chronological scheme for the chapters in each of the three parts, makes it possible to give the whole an organized structure. This is a set of texts whose coherence, as I have noted above, is shaped by the shared objective of shedding light on some of the many facets of forgetting and its links with memory. Moreover, their unity seems to be reinforced by a mesh of internal connections that bring the individual contributions together. Hence, as the reader will discover, although they can be read separately, the volume as a whole represents a fertile and congruent discussion among the twelve chapters that comprise it.

Part I: Historiographical and Political Narratives

No practice of memory is innocent or innocuous. All acts of remembering respond to a specific objective and, accordingly, it should not be assumed that someone decides to record facts simply for the sake of recording them. To the extent that every exercise of memory always involves a process of selection, whether deliberate or unintentional, from the moment a person (or a collective) ponders what to remember or what specific memories to preserve, decisions are also made about what must be forgotten, omitted, and silenced; memory is always an active process that involves selecting, reorganizing, and suppressing scraps of memories.³³ In fact, almost the only thing that the members of a society share is what they have forgotten, so that, as Joël Candau points out in this respect, society is less united by its memories than by its forgetting.³⁴ From this perspective, the dialectics of memory and forgetting take on different values in keeping with the various contexts wherein they apply but it is evident that, in any case, conservation and transmission of the past are always in line with religious, aesthetic, ethical, political, and rhetorical purposes that necessarily end up shaping the historic discourse while, at the same time, pointing to certain forms of forgetting or omission.³⁵ The chapters in part I are structured around several questions. How does forgetting play a role in the preservation, transmission, or restoration of historical memory? In such cases, should one speak of fertile ground for forgetting? If this is so, what kinds of forgetting can be beneficial or stimulating for those who actively participate in the preservation of memories? And what excessive aspects of forgetting and memory are recorded in documents with a historical vocation?

In chapter 1, “Cultural Amnesia and Commentarial Retrofitting: Interpreting the *Spring and Autumn*,” Newell Ann Van Auken discusses the anxiety caused in later readers by the loss and forgetting of precise knowledge about the original sense of a good part of the *Spring and Autumn* 春秋—a register of individual events composed in the ancient state of Lu 魯 from 722 to 481 BCE and arranged chronologically—and also describes how two of the most important commentaries on this text, the *Gongyang* 公羊 and the *Guliang* 穀梁 traditions, set out to remedy the matter. It is the process of forgetting old ideas, that is, of “cultural amnesia” that makes commentaries necessary. Cultural amnesia transforms the past into a foreign country and, likewise, transforms texts written in the past into foreign writings. Just as we read texts in a foreign tongue through the interpretive medium of translation, we also read texts of a different time through the hermeneutical lens of a commentary. However, the *Spring and Autumn* reflects practices that were rooted in cultural norms of an earlier time, cultural norms that had apparently been largely forgotten by the time the *Gongyang* and the *Guliang* commentaries were composed. Although commentaries are often understood as simply explaining and elaborating on the original text, in fact, as Van Auken notes, they explain works whose meaning has been lost (or is in the process of being lost) and infuse old texts with new ideas. By presenting two case studies dealing with linguistic and interpretive changes, this chapter illustrates the ways whereby early commentaries offered new interpretations of an old text, which were only permitted after cultural amnesia had wiped the slate clean and thus opened up new ways of reading it.

In chapter 2, “Elision and Narration: Remembering and Forgetting in Some Recent Unearthed Historiographical Manuscripts,” Rens Krijgsman addresses the question of remembrance and forgetting as it appears in two historiographical manuscripts that have recently surfaced: the *Rongchengshi* 容成氏, from the Shanghai Museum and the *Xinian* 繫年, from Tsinghua University. By offering a detailed comparative reading of these two looted bamboo-slip manuscripts, the chapter provides a nuanced description in which their differences in form and aim structure their approach to selection, amplification, and elision of memory and, consequently, frame their respective narratives. While previous scholarship has focused on how forces such as institutionalization, ritualization, and canonization have shaped cultural memory, in his contribution Krijgsman analyzes how specific target collections of historical narrative amalgamate local historiography. According to his reading of these new materials, both

manuscripts provide stories and narrative in detail hitherto unseen in transmitted or unearthed preimperial historiographical documents while, at the same time, eliding information not immediately germane to their narrative. Krijgsman provides an analysis of how narrative triage influences the dynamic of remembering and forgetting and how these selections are themselves a function of the access texts had to particular memories and the contingencies inherent to textual transmission in early times.

In chapter 3, “Shaping the Historian’s Project: Language of Forgetting and Obliteration in the *Shiji*,” Esther Sunkyung Klein addresses the complex relationship woven between memory and forgetting in the work of Sima Qian by starting from a crucial question that structures and permeates her chapter: can forgetting perhaps have a positive function in a historiographical text like the *Shiji* 史記, which is to say a work that is devoted to the conservation and exaltation of memory? For Klein, the answer is affirmative, but it requires a more nuanced understanding of forgetting that involves distinguishing different levels of meaning within the historian’s project. Her contribution is therefore organized into three sections that correspond to each of these levels of meaning around forgetting. First, she gives a detailed textual analysis of the term *wang* 忘, which tends to be translated as “forgetting,” in order to demonstrate that its negative treatment in the *Shiji* is due to the fact that it does not so much suggest loss or obliteration as carelessness or negligence. The second section consists of a study of a series of terms that play a much more positive and relevant role in Sima Qian’s project and that refer, precisely, to the inevitable nature of loss, a loss that pulsates powerfully in especially relevant parts of the text, such as the Qin bibliocaust, the ritual procedures fallen into oblivion, or the extinguished fame of certain remarkable individuals. Finally, Klein highlights the important role of active or deliberate forgetting, in the form of “silence,” which also shapes Sima Qian’s project, while referring to everything that is necessarily left out in the process of selection and transmission.

In chapter 4, “The Ice of Memory and the Fires of Forgetfulness: Traumatic Recollections in the *Wu Yue chunqiu*,” Olivia Milburn discusses the interplay between memory and forgetting in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue*, a Han dynasty (202 BC–220 CE) text structured around the prolonged and devastating political and military conflict between King Helü 吳王闔閭 (r. 514–496 BCE) and King Fuchai 吳王夫差 (r. 495–473 BCE) of Wu and their nemesis, King Guojian 越王勾踐 (r. 496–465 BCE) of Yue. In Milburn’s account, during the desperate

struggle for survival between the states of Wu and Yue, King Fuchai consistently sought not merely to forget the traumas of the past, but to kill and then obliterate the memory of anyone who reminded him of them. In Milburn's detailed analysis of the story, his character presents a sharp contrast to that of King Goujian of Yue, who seems determined to remember everything and everyone who has played a role in deciding his fate. King Fuchai's forgetfulness eventually leads to his ignominious demise and the collapse of his kingdom, while King Goujian's excellent memory proves to be very dangerous for friends and foes alike. As Milburn's careful reading of these anecdotes suggests, forgetting nothing can ultimately be as damaging as forgetting too much, so this text is highly ambivalent about the role of memory and oblivion.

Part II: Philosophical Writings

Remembering and forgetting are not only complementary processes in any given society, but they can also be instruments of subjugation or resistance to its underlying power institutions and structures. The mechanism of inclusion and exclusion of meaning tends to be controlled by the hegemonic ideology or the dominant social group, in such a way—as Michel Foucault surmised when he coined the term *contre-mémoire*—that, as in the case of knowledge, there is also a close relationship between memory and power.³⁶ In part II, we bring together contributions that are based on examination of rather peripheral philosophical texts that are a long way from the ideological emphasis, which, in the study of ancient China, tends to focus on the so-called Confucian school. These outlier texts share the characteristic of a desire to endow the different forms of forgetting with positive attributes and nuances, which very rarely occurs in other doctrinal corpuses in which reverence for memory prevails.

In chapter 5, “The *Daode jing*'s Forgotten Forebear: The Ancestral Cult,” K. E. Brashier describes how the ancestral cult ritualizes forgetting. Recent ancestors who are individually remembered fade upward into the corporate lineage that then terminates at the lineage of the progenitor who most embodies De 德 and who acts as formless heaven's counterpart. On the other hand, the Dao 道 discourse philosophizes forgetting. It juxtaposes the named, fractured, ten thousand things in our conventional world with the singular De and, ultimately, with the nameless, blurry, unified Dao. In other words, both the ancestral cult and

the Dao discourse trace out a spectrum that moves from individuation to unity, from tangible definition to loss of dualistic knowledge. However, as Brashier shows, these spectrums are not only parallel but they also explicitly overlap because the *Daode jing* 道德經 uses the ancestral cult to explain itself. After briefly outlining the relevant spectrums in both the ancestral cult and the Dao discourse, this chapter explicates a consistent number of passages in the *Daode jing* that directly rely on the ancestral cult, demonstrating that ritualized and philosophical forgetting both conclude in a shared oblivion. In the end, this chapter hypothesizes that the *Daode jing*'s basic argument is abstracted from the existing ancestral cult.

From early times, Chinese philosophers were convinced that self-cultivation techniques needed to address not only how a person makes deliberate judgments and chooses to act but also the patterns of attention, salience, and construal that determine how the world appears. Consequently, how the world appears conditions the overt values and choices we make, and even what we name as things and facts. In chapter 6, “So Comfortable You’ll Forget You Have Them on: Attention and Forgetting in the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi*,” Franklin Perkins initially focuses on forgetting as obliviousness or failing to attend. In the first part of the chapter, he examines this sense of forgetting as an attention failure, placing it in the context of a broader concern with the optimal conditions for perceiving the world as it appears. On the basis of detailed analysis of some passages from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and contrasting them with partially supportive ideas from the *Xunzi* 荀子, Perkins outlines a theory of the conditions required to put into practice unbiased perception and comprehensive attention that would ideally exclude all forms of disturbance and neglect. In the second part of the piece, he shows how oblivion could be dangerous but also a desirable state to be cultivated and strengthened. This is precisely the case in the *Zhuangzi* where, as he demonstrates, the point is that oblivion serves several distinct functions that include advice for what he labels as selective attention and even for a kind of total forgetting. This more radical forgetting enables a stronger sense of impartiality when dealing with the present in its singularity and can liberate us from rigid fixations when experiencing life.

In chapter 7, “The Practice of Erasing Traces in the *Huainanzi*,” Tobias Benedikt Zürn reconstructs the intellectual background of an important and ubiquitous expression in the early literature, that of being traceless (*wu ji* 無跡) and, more specifically, explores how it relates to

both practices of embodiment and debates on remembrance, recording and erasure in the *Huainanzi*. In a first step, he provides a comprehensive philological analysis of the earliest connotations of the term *traces* beyond its literal meaning linked to the tracks of animals and other beings, to see the word as also referring to valuable receptacles that enshrine the actions and deeds of the past. From this basic understanding of traces as the actions and deeds of the past, Zürn extends his analysis to the realm of words, writings, and records that were thought to capture the knowledge, the forms of action, and discourses preserved in the traces of sages and rulers from bygone times. Finally, the chapter discusses how this accepted discourse about writings and records of past actions, words, and deeds expressing the wisdom of the past became contested in texts like the *Huainanzi*, which stresses the idea that perfect rulership and true sageliness are achieved by eradicating or hiding these traces. By introducing the idea of “tracelessness,” texts like the *Huainanzi* justified not only their regime of body-politics but also powerfully rejected the culture of remembrance characteristic of the so-called Confucian school (*ru jia*) and other intellectual factions.

No doubt, many ancient Chinese political and philosophical writings gravitate around a pedagogical project that seeks to transform the individual into an accomplished subject by means of a firm commitment to memory. Nevertheless, even with this overwhelming presence of memory and its virtues, in some of the most important written works of ancient Masters literature (*zi shu* 子書) it is possible to find critiques and even sabotage of these prevalent ideas. In chapter 8, “The Oblivious against the Doctor: Pathologies of Remembering and Virtues of forgetting in the *Liezi*,” Albert Galvany analyzes the sharp criticism of abuse of memory and the rehabilitation of oblivion that can be found in this often neglected, almost “forgotten” text. First, he discusses a set of anecdotes where forgetting occupies an essential place, showing that some stories in the *Liezi* 列子 fiercely attack the supposed virtues of memory and the associated notions that are upheld in some of the most influential philosophical doctrines of the times, while highlighting the negative consequences (political, epistemological, and ethical) deriving from the inability to forget. Then, with a comprehensive analysis of a vivid anecdote about a man who is suddenly stricken with amnesia, he shows how this text challenges ordinary perceptions of both memory and forgetting and holds out an alternative reading of the essential virtues that are concealed in oblivion.

If writings handed down from the past tend to be conceived, as suggested above, as traces that potentially harbor the capacity to express the sense of words proffered and deeds accomplished by the sages of antiquity, in chapter 9, “Wang Bi and the Hermeneutics of Actualization,” Mercedes Valmisa reflects on the conditions and premises that allow the process of intermediation with the present to take place. Starting from her analysis of the concise and influential essay written by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) as part of his commentary on the *Zhouyi* 周易, “Clarifying Images” (“Ming xiang” 明象), Valmisa shows how Wang Bi presents a novel, fertile theory of interpretation, which she calls the Hermeneutics of Actualization. This is a theory about how to properly understand the meaning of a text that has been inherited from the authoritative voices of earlier sages. In order to interpret correctly the signs transmitted from the past, the reader must reject a relation of identity where the sign is equal to itself and welcome the gap onto which a new actualization of meaning can be grounded in the present. As Valmisa puts it, signs store and communicate the author’s intentions but, in receiving them, the reader cannot stay at the superficial level of what the sign literally says but needs to search for the meaning in between the lines by paying attention to equivalences and structure. Reading in between the lines, which allows the reader to have access to the intention and thus to actualize the text, implies, as Valmisa demonstrates, a subtle dialectic and simultaneous relationship between getting and forgetting.

Part III: Ritual and Literary Texts

The third and final section comprises contributions that explore writings of ritual vocation (including not only documents that have been passed down but also recent unearthed material) and literary aspiration. The relationship between memory and forgetting unfolds into other polarities like omission and transmission, or loss and conservation, which ultimately refer to disappearance and survival. Hence, from this perspective, the crucial role played in ancient China by mourning ceremonies in the set of practices regulated by ritual brings to light an essential tension between the duty of honoring and preserving the memory of deceased loved ones and the need to ease pain by means of their disappearance in the gradual stages of forgetting. In keeping with this question and from a

standpoint marked by a poetic sensibility, the limited and mortal nature that determines human existence is transformed into elaborate material for reflection about the possibility of tempering and even transcending, with procedures akin to forms of forgetting, the distress caused by acute awareness of this condition.

Within the disparate range of early Chinese writings on the theory of ritual there are ambiguous viewpoints on the nature of forgetting. The possibility of forgetting even such important figures as one's deceased parents appears as a fundamental threat against which ritual militates, although elsewhere it is acknowledged as a natural human tendency. Forgetting one's "root" (*ben* 本), alternately construed as one's basic nature or origins, poses a constant, existential danger, yet the ability to "forget" one's immediate circumstances may open the way to superior attainment. In chapter 10, "Embodied Memory and Natural Forgetting in Early Chinese Ritual Theory," Paul Nicholas Vogt shows that the dialogue of forgetting is bound up with conceptions of the body, in terms of both its sensual needs and sensory capacities and, through it, with what might be called the early Chinese "phenomenology of memory." His contribution takes as its launching point the collection known as the *Liji* 禮記, or *Records of the Rites*, exploring the ambiguity of its statements on forgetting as both an intrinsic process of the human organism and an obstacle to be combated through the structuring influence of ritual. Linking these formulations to pre-Qin and Han discourses on the self and the senses, it examines how early Chinese ritual theory explained the combined problem and opportunity of forgetting in both present and imagined past, sketching out the value of ritual as a response to the intrinsic vagaries of the human body.

Rather than texts including theoretical descriptions of ritual practices with prescriptive ends, the next chapter studies a type of entombed artifacts, the tomb-quelling texts, which were used with practical intent in funerary rites. In chapter 11, "Exile and Return: Oblivion, Memory, and Nontragic Death in Tomb-Quelling Texts from Eastern Han Dynasty," Xiang Li examines the conception of oblivion in tomb-quelling texts from the Eastern Han period and its relationship with a renewed understanding of death. Three layers of tomb-quelling texts verify that people considered oblivion as a process that involves both the erasure and revival of memories. The textual content of tomb-quelling texts presents oblivion as the expedient removal and the final retrieval of

memory. The spatial dimension of tomb-quelling texts is seen in various strategies of placing these artifacts in a tomb with the aim of facilitating or reversing the process of oblivion. Moreover, tomb-quelling texts were employed as ritual tools in funerals that partly removed the dead from living people's memory while redefining the deceased as immortal entities. These artifacts clearly display the deceased as a group that is exiled from the earthly world but has the potential to return. By using them, survivors were not only exempted from painful memories of the deaths of their loved ones but are also enabled to call the dead to mind when necessary. The notion of nontragic death, implying reconciliation between the deceased and the living, is therefore made possible. The analysis of these materials explains why people in the Eastern Han were so expressive on the topic of dying, evanescing, and vanishing.

Finitude and mortality are also at the core of the last chapter in this volume. The fifth century poet and intellectual, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?-427), also known as Tao Qian 陶潛, was keenly aware of the constraints entailed in being an embodied creature with a finite life span. As Michael D. K. Ing shows in chapter 12, "Lost in Where We Are: Tao Yuanming on the Joys of Forgetting and the Worries of Being Forgotten," he found delight in activities that enabled him to temporarily forget these limitations. They included drinking ale in the company of like-minded people (some only found in the pages of books), which fostered a communion of sorts as the boundary between self and other became more porous. According to Ing, in these circumstances, ale served to loosen the boundaries between things—destabilizing the sense of a self that is rooted in a particular time and place. In contrast with others in his era, Tao Yuanming was skeptical about the possibility of immortality. However, ale seemed to allow him a glimpse into immortal life—a temporary shedding of time's restraints. The loss of an end point to his life was tied to the loss of a firm conception of his self, as his identity was at least partially predicated on awareness of an end. For him, this forgetting of Time's limitations induced a realization of a new self, a communal self that endured like the heavens and the earth. In this regard, ale is a sacred drink, immortalizing and sanctifying those who consume it, in such a way that the fetters of the self that often limit the individual from communing with other things separated by time and space are cut away. For Tao Yuanming, ale is, then, a kind of holy communion; a communion of forgetting limitations that may give us some relief from the tyranny of time.

Notes

1. “Funes the Memorious,” translated into English by James E. Irby, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths. Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 69–74, 75.
2. T.-A. Ribot, *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1882), 61.
3. W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Holt, [1890] 1980), 648.
4. The pioneering contributions of Alexander R. Luria in *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1968] 1986) should be mentioned in this regard. Notable among many recent works is the study by Simon Norby, “Why Forget? On the Adaptive Value of Memory Loss,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 5 (2015): 551–78.
5. J. S. Nairne and J. N. J. Pandeirada, “Forgetting,” in *Learning and Memory: A Comprehensive Reference*, ed. H. L. Roediger (Oxford: Elsevier, 2008), 179–94, 179.
6. See, for instance, David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).
7. For an excellent compilation of positive reflections and assessments on the phenomenon of forgetting from the perspective of various experts in neurology and cognitive sciences, see Lauren Gravitz, “The Importance of Forgetting,” *Nature* 571 (2019): 12–14.
8. Jens Broekmeier, “Remembering and Forgetting: Narratives as Cultural Memory,” *Culture and Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2002): 15–43, 15.
9. This is precisely the position expressed by Umberto Eco in his much-cited article “An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It!,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 103, no. 3 (1988): 254–61.
10. See Sybille Krämer, “Das Vergessen nicht vergessen! oder: Ist das Vergessen ein defizienter Modus von Erinnerung?,” *Paragrama* 9, no. 2 (2000): 251–75. On the interplay between the art of memory and the art of forgetting, see also Louisa Passerini, “Memories between Silence and Oblivion,” in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 250.
11. See Roberto Cubelli, “A New Taxonomy of Memory and Forgetting,” in *Forgetting*, ed. Sergio Della Sala (New York: Psychology Press, 2010), 42.
12. A. Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 220. See also “To Remember or to Forget: Which Way out of a Shared History of Violence?,” in *Memory and Political Change*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 68.

13. See T. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1995), 14; and M. Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli* (Paris: Rivages, 2001), 21.

14. Geoffrey Cubitt, *Memory and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 77.

15. M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1998] 2008), 6. See also Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance. Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

16. A. Whitehead, *Memory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 157. In the field of social psychology, David Middleton and Steven D. Brown also stressed the necessity to adopt a new perspective that could lead us “to a view of remembering and forgetting as interdependent ways of actualising and virtualising experience rather than its presence or absence.” See D. Middleton and S. D. Brown, ed., *The Social Psychology of Experience. Studies in Remembering and Forgetting* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), viii.

17. With regard to the aims and domains of agnotology, I refer the reader to R. N. Proctor and L. Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) and, more recently, Renata Salecl, *A Passion for Ignorance. What We Choose Not to Know and Why* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

18. N. Loraux, *La Cité divisée. L'oubli dans la mémoire d'Athènes* (Paris: Payot, 1997).

19. C. W. Hedrick Jr., *History and Silence. Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), esp. 89–130; H. I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

20. L. Castagnoli and P. Ceccarelli, eds., *Greek Memories. Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). The chapters specifically devoted to forgetting are those by Andrea Capra, “Lyric Oblivion: When Sappho Taught Socrates How to Forget,” 179–94; and by Ynon Wygoda, “Socratic Forgetfulness and Platonic Irony,” 195–215.

21. K. Mawford and E. Ntanou, eds., *Ancient Memory: Remembrance and Commemoration in Graeco-Roman Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021). In this case, the chapters devoted to forgetting are those by Hannah Burke-Tomlinson, “Ovid’s Labyrinthine Ars: Pasiphae and the Dangers of Poetic Memory in the Metamorphoses,” 219–46; A. D. Morrison, “Divine Memory, Mortal Forgetfulness and Human Misfortune,” 247–66; and Carlos Hernández Garcés, “Forgetfulness as a Narrative Device in Herodotus’ Histories,” 267–91.

22. Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 99–146.

23. See, for instance, Roderick Campbell, “Memory, Power, and Death in Chinese History and Prehistory,” in *The Archaeology of Ancestors: Death, Memory,*

and Veneration, ed. E. Hill and J. B. Hageman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), 81–101. As Martin Kern has pointed out, the sophisticated material and discursive paraphernalia of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice served at once for communication with the spirits of former generations and representation of the past as foundational for the present; it constituted the “aesthetics of memory” that governed the ritual performance and religious expression of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice. See M. Kern, “Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shijing* and the *Shangshu*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou,” in *Early Chinese Religion. Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143–200, esp. 197.

24. Among other contributions, see Andrea Schmölz, *Vom Lied in der Gemeinschaft zum Liedzitat im Text: Liedzitate in den Texten der Gelehrtentradition der späten Chou-Zeit* (Egelsbach: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 1993); Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 54–63; Jean Levi, “Éducation et Mobilité à l’Époque des Royaumes Combattants,” in *Éducation et Instruction en Chine: Aux Marges de l’Orthodoxie*, ed. Christine Nguyen Tri and Catherine Despeux (Paris: Peeters, 2004), 5–22; and Constance A. Cook, “Education and the Way of the Former Kings,” in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, ed. Li Feng and David P. Branner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 302–36.

25. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 1.2 (“Quan xue” 勸學).

26. This is the sense of the refrain cited by Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 BCE), “Matters of the past must not be forgotten so that they can be teachers in matters of the future” (前事之不忘，後事之師也). By means of this, at least in part, he sought to explain the premature collapse of the Qin dynasty. In his view, the dynasty’s leaders had been unable to learn or to extract valuable lessons from the past of the Zhou dynasty. See Yan Zhenyi 閻振益 and Xia Zhong 鍾夏, *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 3.12 (“Guo Qin xia” 過秦下).

27. See, for instance: Gao Heng 高亨, *Shijing jinzhu* 詩經今注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980), 412 (“Sheng min zhi she” 生民之什) and 497 (“Min yu xiao zi” 閔予小); Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, *Shangshu jingu wen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 344 (“Da gao” 大誥); Shanghai Shifan daxue guji zhengli zu 上海師範大學古籍整理組, *Guoyu* 國語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 8.295 (“Jin yu er” 晉語二); Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 588 (Wen 12), 658 (Xuan 2), and 845 (Cheng 9); Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 10.657 (“Li qi” 禮器) and 24.1209 (“Ji yi” 祭義); Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 138 (“Teng wen gong xia” 滕文公下) and 206 (“Wan zhang shang” 萬章上); Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 9.173 (“Wang zhi” 王制).

28. K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011); *Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2014).

29. Among the recent contributions, see the monograph by Li Min, *Social Memory and State Formation in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), as well as these two edited volumes: F. Allard, Yan Sun and K. M. Linduff, eds., *Memory and Agency in Ancient China: Shaping the Life History of Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and W. Swartz and R. F. Campany, eds., *Memory in Medieval China: Texts, Ritual, and Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

30. As far as I know, one of the few academic contributions that have set out to clarify the relationship between memory and oblivion in a work other than the *Zhuangzi*, in this case a study devoted to analyzing the social changes occurring from the Eastern Zhou to the Han periods with regard to the way in which the Western Zhou past was remembered, disremembered, and forgotten, is the paper by Wang Ming-ke (王明珂), “Western Zhou Remembering and Forgetting,” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (1999): 231–50.

31. Claude Romano, “Un étrange oubli,” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 27 (2005): 161–67; Romain Graziani, “Optimal States and Self-Defeating Plans: The Problem of Intentionality in Early Chinese Self-Cultivation,” *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 4 (2009): 440–66; Livia Kohn, *Sitting in the Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010); Mark Berkson, “Death in the *Zhuangzi*: Mind, Nature, and the Art of Forgetting,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. A. Olberding and P. J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 191–224; Chris Fraser, “Heart-Fasting, Forgetting, and Using the Heart Like a Mirror: Applied Emptiness in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Nothingness in Asian Philosophy*, ed. J. Liu and D. Berger (New York: Routledge, 2014), 197–212; Livia Kohn, “Forget or Not Forget? The Neurophysiology of *zuowang*,” in *New Visions of the Zhuangzi*, ed. L. Kohn (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines, 2015), 161–79; Linna Liu and Shihao Chew, “Dynamic Model of Emotions: The Process of Forgetting in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2019): 77–90; Chris Fraser, “The Ferryman: Forget the Deeps and Row!,” in *Skill and Mastery. Philosophical Stories from the Zhuangzi*, ed. K. Lai and W. W. Chiu (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 163–81; Youru Wang, “Therapeutic Forgetting and Its Ethical Dimension in the Daoist *Zhuangzi*,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 48, no. 4 (2021): 1–16.

32. P. Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59–71; A. Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

33. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 40.

34. J. Candau, *Anthropologie de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

35. David Schaberg, "Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59, no. 2 (1999): 305–61, esp. 359–60.

36. M. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, II, 1976–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 85.