

Introduction

Life and death, beginning and end, are indeed the great laws of the universe. Yet the similarities and differences of things are not uniform. Some are this and some are that. Tens of thousands of varieties are in constant change and transformation, strange and without any definite pattern. Whether things are this way or that, whether they are regular or irregular in their essential and subsidiary aspects, cannot be reduced to uniformity.⁹

—Ge Hong, *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (*The book of the master who embraced simplicity*)

In his *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) Sima Qian documents that under the State of Qi at the close of the fourth century BC, thousands of scholars from all corners of the land traveled to the capital city of Linzi to join the “Gate of Qi”—the common name of the intellectual magnet of the era, namely, the Jixia Academy 稷下學宮. Imagine the intellectual brainstorming that took place within the “boundaries of a gate”—a singular amalgamate of spatiality, architecture, research, and philosophy.¹⁰ The academy’s location near the western gate of the city notwithstanding, the reasons for referring to it as a “gate,” I argue, lie deep in the roots of Chinese thought and its manifestations in material culture.

This book invites the reader to take a deep dive into the “boundaries of the Chinese gate”—as an innovative prism through which to observe ancient Chinese thought and culture; it analyzes gates from the perspective of their states (between open and closed), as well as their respective idealities, philosophical inclinations, or political agendas. This means that the reader will encounter such gates as water sluice gates

that might have contextually developed to be the pivot between chaos and order, gates in a continuous open and closed state that constitute the center of creation—both in the natural (evolution of living things) and the human spheres (textual creation), gates that open out to an undifferentiated cognitive state, gates of the private Chinese home that correlate with the mouth and body-mind, architectural gates that were erected with the aim of achieving sociopolitical order (and thus are closed by default), half-closed gates that are depicted on Han period tombs symbolizing the fantasy to break gender distinctions in the after-world, or gates that need to be destroyed because they still constitute a trace of duality . . .

This versatile array of gate-related interpretations necessitated a multidisciplinary approach to begin with—in order to enable an investigation of various dimensions and fields in parallel. In Chinese context, however (as shall be discussed ahead), an interdisciplinary approach exposes a deeper interrelation that exists a priori, namely, correlative thinking. Notwithstanding, due to its wide scope, it needed a counter line that will give it boundary—and the one chosen was historic: the beginning of China’s intellectual timeline. The study therefore constitutes an exploration of concrete (in tangible form) and abstract (textual, metaphorical, cognitive) gates in early China, that is, between the semi-legendary Xia dynasty (2070–1600 BC) and the Jin dynasty (晉朝 265–420).¹¹ It aims at understanding the ways in which gates conferred coherence and significance in the workings of the ancient Chinese and their semantic universe. The “behavioral mechanism” of Chinese gates in the above dimensions has revealed it to constitute a “bio-philosophical membrane” that exists in close association with some of the most fundamental ideas of Chinese intellectual framework, namely, *dao*, emptiness, change, chaos and order, as well as questions debating boundaries, methods of self-cultivation, epistemological queries, and more. This introduction thus includes some necessary background on these principles—with some comparative reflections to Western thought. It consists of some preliminary “infrastructures” as part of “paving the way” toward the proposed thesis, as follows: laying down some of the rudimentary characteristics of gates, drawing an outline of Western-Chinese cultural gaps and metaphorical interpretation, and discussing Chinese *xiang* thinking and correlative thinking as the contextual framework of the study and a key to its exegesis. I will then present a succinct summary of the conceptualized thesis

of the Chinese gate presented in this book; this will be followed by a list of the primary textual sources analyzed. Finally, I will explain the rationale behind the arrangement of the book and a succinct summary of its chapters. But first and foremost, the first tier: What makes gates an important subject of inquiry?

What Is Significant about Gates?

Swiss architect Mario Botta famously said, “the first gesture of architecture is to draw a perimeter; in other words, to separate the microclimate from the macro space outside. This in itself is a sacred act. Architecture itself conveys this idea of limiting space. It’s a limit between the finite and the infinite” (Mortice 2008). Indeed, it is in the appearance of this demarcating line between any two spheres that the intensity and significance of architectural and metaphorical boundaries lie. And in recent years, as Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar say, “the concept of boundaries has been at the center of influential research agendas in anthropology, history, political science, social psychology, and sociology” (2002, 167).¹² In this context, the significance of gates stem from their inherent function as an apparatus that either allows for continuity or breaks it; it is probable that well before man-made doors and gates started to be built, natural “gate-like” formations had appeared on man’s way and planted the seed of entrances, openings, or barriers in his mind. Think of openings in rock precipices, caves mouths, or narrow passages between mountains—as cultures worldwide testify, such naturally occurring openings even acquired legendary reputation as entrances to “worlds beyond.”¹³

An important part of the conceptualization of the Chinese gate as presented here, is indeed the contextualized part of openings, creeks, and narrow passages in the early Chinese imagination. They have caught the attention of the early Chinese in a particular way—as part of their meticulous observation and documentation of earth’s phenomena, with special attention to “flowing substances” such as water, wind, and *qi*. Figure I.1 is one of the finest examples of this captivation with “natural openings to otherworldly lands”: the Gate of Heavens *tianmen* in Zhangjiajie geological park (Hunan Province)—a place that continues to attract the (Chinese) multitudes who ascend the stairs to get a glimpse of the foggy mist of the “heavens” through this natural “gate.”



Figure I.1. Natural “Gate of Heaven.” *Source:* Author provided.

In chapter 1 I delve further into the significance of such openings, with special attention to *qi*, water, and wind as formless substances that pass through them. To continue with rudiments of gates in general, it is important to consider their uniqueness in comparison with other architectural components that connect the inside and outside (*wai/nei* 外/内), such as windows, for instance. Note that as opposed to windows, gates constitute a structure that completely *envelopes* the person passing through—thereby constituting a metaphor for a process or change *one goes through*. A gate’s basic structure is made out of a structured frame of two vertical posts and one or more horizontal girders on top, with either an

empty space within or single- or double-leaved doors inside. The passage through gates positions one on paths and ways (in the Chinese context, to *dao*) along which a “before” and “after” are connected—both in the temporal dimension (i.e., remembered past and unknown future), and naturally, the spatial one, that is, the invisible space that lies ahead or beyond. It thus inevitably centers gates in a heavily invested mental and emotional environment that ranges from curiosity as to what lies ahead to fears and doubts; in addition to all these characteristics, gates present *possibilities* to the treader on the path, that is, a choice must be made (i.e., enter through if open, force-open if closed, forsake it altogether, and more)—taking us to the intriguing subject of decision theory.

Indeed, the *liminal locale* of gates has served extensively as an ubiquitous element of architecture, but also as a metaphor in multiple literary works, expressions, and idioms—not only in China but cultures worldwide.¹⁴ However, as will be argued ahead, as components of *boundaries*, gates not only signify, detect, and shed light on deep elements within a particular culture, but can, in effect, venture outwardly right into the gaps in between cultures and ways of thought.¹⁵ In his book *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger discusses the ancient Greek deity Hermes, who crosses *thresholds of meanings* to create a real “transformation of thinking” (1971, 42). Intriguingly, the very etymological root of “hermeneutics” is Hermes—who presides over *liminal* spheres and border-crossing. It is only through authentic intertextuality and openness, Heidegger stressed, that one can in fact enter a dialogue across huge linguistic, cultural and historical gaps.¹⁶

This treatise on Chinese gates is thus to no lesser extent about *cultural meaning*—as the ways in which “a particular system of symbols . . . confers order, coherence, and significance upon a people, their surroundings, and the workings of their universe” (Basso and Selby 1976, 3). As the gate inhabits the space in between dimensions and spheres—or cultures, for that matter, it is necessary to allow some space to a comparison between characteristics of Chinese and Western thought; however, it is by no means an attempt to cover or discuss this wide and complex subject in depth, but to direct the torchlight to a few paradigms that bear impact on hermeneutics and philosophical perspectives—especially when some gaps constitute, as Roger Ames dubs it, a “fundamental character of cultural difference” (Olberding and Ivanhoe 2011, 117; the final discussion of the book includes further implications from a comparative Chinese-Western point of view).

Cultural Gaps in Interpretation

Edward Slingerland remarks that it is becoming more and more clear to sinologists that instead of “translating” Chinese arguments into rational Western propositions (modeled by formal logic), “the key to grasping arguments and concepts in early China is to focus on and unpack the specific metaphors and images that are deployed in the texts” (2011, 3). Indeed! But then why not take it one step further? What about metaphors that are still taken by many scholars (in general) and Sinologists to be conceptual, that is, universal? The specific, cultural, physical (bodily), and cognitive contexts of metaphors constitute the key to unlocking their meanings—instead of (consciously or not) interpreting them on the basis of dogmas, conventional concepts, or deep-rooted presumptions of the interpreter’s cultural background. Benjamin Schwartz, for instance, aptly describes the cultural gap between Western and Chinese thought in the context of Confucian thought: “The very effort to translate this vision [of the *Analecets*] into modern Western discourse may inevitably involve the kind of distortion that would result from filling empty spaces of a sparse Chinese landscape painting with the details of a Dutch painter” (1985, 62).

But does that indicate incommensurability? If indeed individuals are able to relate to and embrace ideas born out of a completely different background to their own, it necessarily means that the cognitive potential is there . . . but in some cases (e.g., cultural and academic circles) it might be locked behind a closed gate. A good instance might be the Mencian metaphor of “sprouts” (*duan* 端) that, according to Slingerland (*Mind and Body in Early China*, 2019), suggests that Mencian thought contained “internal essences and natural teleologies,” meaning that sprouts, and plants in general, grow for a certain purpose or end goal. Jim Behuniak responded in the following way: “that is false. I have thought about evolution. I am thinking about plant life right now without essence and teleology. Why could Mencius not have had similar thoughts? Is his mind so different than mine?” and then adding that “I find it altogether plausible that Mencius was able to break free from the baseline cognitive tendencies that we share” (2019, 311).

I agree. Individuals can indeed relate to concepts and categories different to their own background, but, as mentioned in the semipersonal preface, when it comes to wider circles of nations, cultures, and disciplines, sometimes we see an almost automatic transference of those

inherent presumptions and conceptual roots. Such gaps between Western and Chinese thought seem to be especially wide in the context of epistemological enquiries and subject-object relations—two topics that relate to the body-mind question that extensively resurfaced in association with gates.¹⁷ Indeed, the many and varied sources analyzed illustrate the Chinese body to be an organic and holistic whole in the sense of interconnectivity (nothing in it operates separately or independently, including the mind or the soul), but—just as any in any biological, living system, there must also be distinctions, confined spaces, and barriers—which means a qualitative gradation in degrees of perviousness. The fact that the early Chinese talked of mind and soul does not mean, in my eyes, that they constitute a different entity that resides in mind and soul or is ontologically made of a different substance.

A good example of such conceptual gap is the metaphor of “body sensation” that has been called “universal conceptual metaphor” by Lakoff and Johnson, two influential scholars who define it in the following way: “each of us is a container . . . bounded off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us” (1980, 29).¹⁸ To me, the problematic point in this “closed body” schema is (again) its claim to universality—isn’t it highly culture-specific? I argue that in the context of Chinese thought, the above scheme loses ground in light of multiple textual descriptions that differ greatly from a “container bounded off from the rest of the world.” Jane Geaney similarly argues that according to numerous Chinese texts the body is “far from being a closed system that only occasionally ingests and expels things . . . bodies in early Chinese texts are like a constant interface, any firm sense of interiority is an achievement not a given” (2012, 18). This conclusion is enforced by my own findings: an emphasis on the protection and guarding of “internal space” in several correlating circles, for example, the state, the city/village (against foreign invasion and intruders), one’s privacy at home, and finally, body-mind. Indeed, it has been one of the most interesting aspects of the study to repeatedly encounter that the *cause* for this deep need to protect the inside is feelings of anxiety and fear from “what is out there” in early Chinese civilization.

The way cultures conceptualize body and mind bears heavily on other subjects, such as the question of free will versus determinism—yet another Western dichotomic pair of either-or that is alien to early Chinese conceptualization of the individual and his or her will. Indeed, the

individual, as a variety of opinions and philosophies from early China indicate, is not a separate agent and thus the *will* cannot be completely devoid or “free” of (unconditioned by) multiple factors in this complex matrix we call life; it is constantly affected by internal factors such as the body itself (from which is *not* separated) or by external circumstances (see, for instance, a discussion of Mencian will *zhi* 志, in chapter 5).¹⁹

In order for a “clean” approach to the ideas of a different culture, I believe we can learn from Chinese *yinyang* complementarity: it can only work when each side lets go of its own principles and transforms to become the other. Tetragram number 57 (“Guarding”) from the *Taixuan jing* 太玄經 (*The Canon of Supreme Mystery*) remarkably illustrates this point:

(when) *yin* guards the door and *yang* guards the gate,
(subsequently) things cannot mutually correspond.

陰守戶，陽守門，物莫相干

Cleverly manipulating the inherent Chinese conceptualization of *yinyang* as continuously and mutually intermingling, the author demonstrates what happens when they don’t . . . this line can take up different interpretations depending on context (in chapter 2, the context is the *yinyang* of natural creation), but when it comes to an attempt at a dialogue, clearly it cannot take place when each side zealously protects its own concepts or beliefs.

All the above themes that shed light on gaps between Chinese and Western thought stem from different approaches to objects and things, that is, “a being bound in form” versus “that which is in between” or absent. In other words, it all goes down to one of the most important root ideas of Chinese thought—emptiness. Pre-modern Western thought had a complex relationship with emptiness (and in certain areas it still does), and was even abhorred because it opposes being, presence, and substance. Parmenides said that “void is non-existent” and Aristotle joked in *Physics* VI 8 216a 26–27 that “even if we consider it in its own merit, the so-called vacuum will be found to be really vacuous,” and coined the phrase “nature abhors a vacuum” with regard to early Christians who forbade the usage of zero (if God is omnipresent, there cannot be a zero). It was modern scientific investigation that embraced emptiness: from early mathematicians to present-day biologists and physicists (particularly quantum physicists) who recognize it as the essence of the universe—from outer space to the atom level.²⁰

The subject of emptiness brings us back to the various ways we construct our own mind . . . whether full of distinctions between “this or that” or empty of absolute values, ideas, and beliefs. A mind that is stuck in a *form* is known as an “either-or” thinking of radical dichotomy (a separation of traits that do not actually exist or apply in the world). Indeed, in his work *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (translated 1978), Jacques Derrida maintained that Western thought has been founded upon the “logic” of binary oppositions, such as mind/body, rational/emotional, freedom/determinism, nature/culture, and sacred/profane, stressing that part of the problem is the elevation of one term over the other or the awarding of a privileged position to one side, which is “the way ideologies are created.”²¹

Traits of “binary thinking” are interlocked with the Western conceptualization of “being” (Greek, *ousia οὐσία*) versus Chinese “becoming,” as Liu and Berger point out: “while the history of Western philosophy began primary with concerns involving the constituents and fundamental nature of being and existence, the notion of nothingness or emptiness plays a central role in Asian philosophical traditions from the start” (2014, 6). This unreconciled line between opposites is also conspicuous in Western (and monotheistic) attitudes to the “sacred and the profane”; Cassirer refers to this pair of opposites, emphasizing that “only in this separation does it achieve an individual religious form. All movements into and out of this ring are governed by very definite sacral regulations” (1955, 104).²²

As briefly mentioned in the semipersonal preface, an additional characteristic of early Chinese scientific-like scrutiny and understanding of the world is, as Joseph Needham states, “the lack of orders of a superior authority external to themselves”—as opposed to Abrahamic beliefs. Indeed, Needham stresses that it has been Western science and modern “philosophy of the organism” that have come to “a new understanding of cosmic, biological and social evolution” (1956, 582), thereby getting closer to the Chinese worldview. See the discussion for further elaboration.

Chinese Correlative thinking, *xiang* Thinking, and Concentric Circles

It is due to Chinese correlative thinking, *xiang* thinking, and the Chinese gate’s characteristics of a “form that contains *potential* formlessness” on the edge of conceptual boundaries, that three themes have repeatedly and

stubbornly surfaced, namely, image *xiang* 象, form *xing* 形, and pattern *li* 理. “*Xiang* thinking” rests upon a deep layer in our cognitive perceptions, namely, concreteness and visibility—qualities that are different from conceptual and rational thinking (particularly in its avoidance of strict provisions of conceptual boundaries); it means a tendency toward relativity, or, as Man-to Tang calls it, the “Abstract West” and the “Concrete East” from a linguistic point of view (2018).²³ Interrelated to *xiang* thinking is Chinese correlative thinking—a term which in modern terms might be called “associative thinking”; this type of thinking does not analyze things and phenomena separately but constitutes a widthwise cut through (from the object studied outwardly).

This is expressed in the fields of cognitive studies and education—and the conceptual boundaries between disciplines; for instance, what lies behind the necessity to coin the (relatively new) term of “interdisciplinarity” in Western scholarship? The answer lies in the (default state of) strict separation between them. . . . Indeed, William H. Newell claims that interdisciplinarity “is the latest response to the dominant Western intellectual tradition of rationality and reductionism (i.e., specialization) that is ultimately grounded in dichotomous (i.e., either-or) thinking” (2010, 360). This study had in fact purposely begun as interdisciplinary research, but with time the gate has shed its conventional boundaries and emerged as a “semiotic apparatus” that cuts through disciplines and resonates *ganying* 感應 through the various dimensions (or concentric circles).

Chinese *ganying* means the principle “by which things belonging to the same class or category *lei* 類 influence each other” (Pregadio 2010, 1:56). For instance, if we have previously discussed gaps in conceptualizing the body, Chinese correlative thinking sees correspondence between the universe and the body in relation to boundaries and gates. Vivienne Lo demonstrates this through the following passage from medicinal texts of the Western Han period: “Ostensibly the *neiguan* in the Western Han period relates to the perception of the body as a microcosm of the imperial body politic. In early imperial times the most important *guan* ‘passes’ were the *wuguan* ‘Wu Pass’ and the *hanguguan* ‘Hangu Pass’ through the mountain barrier as you travelled from the Yellow River plain through modern day Shanxi into Shaanxi, which was then the land ‘west of the pass’” (2000, 22). Such passes indeed marked boundaries of land beyond which lay lands unknown, dangerous regions or just unfamiliar territories, but similar boundaries exist in the body itself (in fact, the very term for the afterlife as the world beyond is *daxian* 大限, literally, “the great

boundary”). Chunyu Yi, a physician of the early Western Han period, stated, as another instance, that when an illness has progressed to the *neiguan* “inner pass,” it means that it “has entered a deeper space where it is more difficult to treat” (V. Lo 2000, 15).

Such correlations did not stop there: paralleling the unobstructed flow of *qi* in the body through gate-equipped meridians (strategic points), the *Art of War* (*Sunzi*) says that “whether (through) mountains or forest, dangerous and blocked swamps and marshes, all these make the roads (*dao*) difficult for travel—a ruined terrain” (山林、險阻、沮澤，凡難行之道者，為圯地). Such efficacious operations through homologous dimensions, or correlative cosmology, constitutes, as A. C. Graham states, the “primordial and quintessential expression of the ‘Chinese mind’” (Fung 2010, 296), and Roger Ames sees it as an idea “that parallels the defining force of metaphysical realism in shaping the categories and grammar of the Western philosophical narrative” (2011, 119). John E. Wills emphasizes that within this quintessential way of Chinese thinking, order and boundaries resonate through all concentric circles: “At every level from the skin as the boundary of the human body to visions of the cosmos, Chinese thinkers insisted on the importance of boundaries and at the same time of proper relations across them, so that order within and openness to the outside remained compatible” (2007, 192). One of the most remarkable texts that exemplifies Chinese correlative thinking and concentric circles is the well-known passage from the “Great Learning” *Daxue* 大學:

In ancient times, those who wished to ascertain the fulfillment of the “inherent potency” of the whole world, first had to govern their own states in an orderly way; wishing to govern their states in an orderly manner, they first had to do the same with their own households; wishing to govern their own households, they first had to cultivate their bodies; wishing to cultivate their bodies, they first had to rectify their hearts; wishing to rectify their hearts, they first had to have sincerity in their thoughts; wishing to have sincerity in their thoughts, they first had to extend their knowledge; extending knowledge lies in studying the “underlying principle.”

古之欲明明德于天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意；欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物。

These (correlating) concentric circles start from the macrocosm and go deeper and deeper to the innermost sphere of the mind, only to start again in the opposite direction.²⁴ As said in the beginning, what resonates among them is the need to put order and harmony *he* 和 into each, because each is the consequent result of the former and a prerequisite for the latter.²⁵

Playing on the same theme and principle, the study found strong correlations between concrete life and the afterlife expressed through gates and doors depicted on the inner walls of ancient tombs; the tomb of Marquis Zeng-hou Yi (early Warring States), for instance, exhibits small doors constructed in the walls of the casket to connect different burial chambers (see figure I.2). Mu-Chou Poo says that “although the doors were perhaps only symbolic and without any practical function, the meaning seems clear: the souls of the deceased were expected to move around in the tomb through the doors, much as they did in a house when alive” (Olberding and Ivanhoe 2011, 16).



Figure I.2. Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, Hubei Province, China. Hubei Provincial Museum. Creative commons.

I suggest also that this *resonating* worldview and concepts of continuity are interlinked with “how it all began,” that is, the various creation myths that refer to the origin of the world and man. In China, as opposed to Judeo-Christian traditions, the first creation or the beginning of all phenomena was not marked by a miraculous appearance of forms (by a transcendental entity) which proceeds linearly, but by a process of endless transformations that take place in between heavens and earth. Even after separation, the heavens and earth continuously correspond and intermingle as the *yinyang* model of complementary opposites.²⁶

Importantly, it is this space in between heavens and earth that man “inhabits” as part of the trinity of “heavens-man-earth” (*tian di ren* 天地人). Observing the gate within this Chinese context elucidates its *benmo* 本末: the hidden roots that feed its bifurcated branches. This image of roots and branches can serve us in setting a visual and conceptualized background to the Chinese interconnectivity of form, text, and potentiality.

The Warp and Weft of the Chinese Gate: A Succinct Abstract

The study conceptualizes Chinese gates (whether abstract or concrete) as efficacious apparatuses at the center of a tight warp-and-weft contextualized matrix, which functions as a “bio-philosophical membrane” for the realization (fulfillment of potentiality) of natural and human lives; the potentiality of the gate stems from its ability to embrace all states between open and closed—which determines tendencies and idealities between the formed (ordered) and the formless (chaotic), openness and closedness, inclusion and exclusion, continuity and discontinuity, and others—in any dimension whatsoever. According to this contextualized model and in Chinese terms, I propose that the Chinese gate inhabits the threshold or pivotal space in between *dao* 道 and *de* 德—efficaciously manifesting inner potential into the concrete and actual.

The efficacy of the Chinese gate stems from its singular setting right at the highly potential center between convergence to the threshold and emergence of boundaries, and their “states of potentiality” or “degrees of perviousness” between outside/inside *wai/nei* 外/內 determine the relationship between various pairs of complementary opposites, such as chaos/disorder (*hundun* 渾沌 and *luan* 亂) and order *zhi* 秩. In this context, order means a state of distinct forms around which the system is organized and ordered,

while chaos means a state of formlessness. This model correlatively functions through all concentric circles, for example, spatial and temporal (past-future) realms, the natural world and the cosmos, down to the political/national circle, yet further inside to the social circle, the family, and the individual (possessing the innermost circle of the body-mind).

The relation of the above characteristics to self-actualization resembles the biological phenomenon of *homeostasis*—as key to the survival of every organism and each and every living cell. Homeostasis means that a cell will survive only if its specific orderliness is created as rapidly as it degrades into disorder—and for that to happen, a careful close-open monitoring of gates and channels between the inside and the outside need to take place. In the Chinese human world, this close-open, chaotic-ordered adjustment corresponds to the manifestation of different *idealities*, for instance, cosmo-philosophical, political, cognitive, or medical. These idealities rarely stay abstract . . . they are concertedly fulfilled through practical strategies, techniques, and skills *shu* 術 that can pertain to the individual, society, or the world at large.

Among the various methods encountered in association with the gate, two skills distinctly stand out, namely, *shi* 勢 and *shi* 時—the first relates to a unique feeling of the shaping force and propensity of materials and the immediate environment, while the second refers to “right timing.” The meaning of actualizing an ideality is the manifestation of potentiality in the concrete world that, in Chinese philosophical vernacular, is intrinsically linked with some of early China’s centermost ideas, namely, *dao* 道, its manifestations into actuality *de* 德, and the process of self-cultivation *xiu-yang* 修養.²⁷ The Chinese gate is involved in the theme of decision-making (or decision-gating) as it is inseparable from ways and path (*dao*) and thus presents before the man walking (living) multiple choices and possibilities; intriguingly, the different concepts or strategies of “decision-gating” elucidate the very diversity of Chinese philosophical schools, for example, Daoist-inclined *wuwei* or the learned and calculative ritualistic (*li*) behavior of the Confucian school.

Some Chinese characters resurfaced repeatedly in association with Chinese gates, conveying their conceptual infrastructure, if you like, or the semantic field that is associated with them; the following is a nonexhaustive list: characters of emptiness, namely, *wu* 無, *xu* 虛, and *kong* 空 (void; used also in Buddhist context), as well as the important character *jian* 間—denoting the empty gap within a gate in both the temporal and

spatial dimensions. Other characters of contextual importance are related to cracks, gaps, rifts, clefts, or openings, such as *xi* 隙, *xi* 巖 (also meaning dangerous passage between mountains), *qiao* 竅 (hole, orifice, etc.), *xue* 穴, and of course, *bu* 卜, the cracks on the oracle bones. In this context, *tong* 通 is also significant as the “breakthrough for unification”—that is, “going through empty passageways and uniting everything.”

Some senses and actions are emphasized in association with gates (containing the gate radical), such as to listen and hear (*wen* 聞), or ask questions (*wen* 問). As for the former, it is said in the *shuo wen jie zì* dictionary that it means “something from the inside that could be heard from outside and the outside from inside,” thus is directly related to the inside/outside of the gate and to skills and techniques around it; for instance, “to hear the sound” (“聞, 知声也”) carries an added meaning of “sniffing an odor”—a way of describing an attempt to gain information at the gate. The list continues with *Bai* 捭—“forcing a gate open” that appears in various sources, such as the *Guiguzi* and the *Yijing*, and is related to the concept of seizing opportunities; *he* 闔 and *kai* 開 or *pi* 闢—as the acts of closing and opening a gate; *kai* has been especially significant as synonymous to the first act of creation.

Guan 關—traditionally rendered as the verb “to close” but which, as I argue throughout, refers to a “strategic pass” (the character inside the “gate” radical is *guan* 緝, which fascinatingly means “to run threads though a web in weaving”). The original meaning of *guan* is thus to connect the two doors of a gate and lock them, or, on the other side, “to connect two sides before and after the gate”. Either way, it manifests an image of a “warp and weft” net or fabric, which has been suggested as the Chinese gate’s framework (with pivot, hinge, center, and axis as the gate’s synonyms). In addition, characters pertaining to two types of *forms* appeared closely with gates, namely, skin-like membranous shape, such as *nang* 囊, and storage rooms filled with *qi* or water that function as a gate’s hinge, such as *dou* 斗 or *fu* 腑—in medical texts.

The metaphor of “warp and weft” is in fact a well-known Chinese image; it is said in *Huainanzi*, 7.1, “heaven as father, Earth as mother, *yin* and *yang* as warp, the four seasons as weft” (Major et al. 2010, 242), demonstrating a remarkable image of the universe as a woven fabric—all interconnected. In the very midst of this “double-emptiness” at the gate, a trigger-like efficacy has the potential to possess and encapsulate all situational possibilities—between the widely open and the tightly closed.

List of Primary Sources

Although the architectural gate constitutes a significant part of this book, the study did not venture into the technical aspects of the craft since it is, first and foremost, a philosophical study but also because my premise conceptualizes Chinese architecture as a concrete manifestation of philosophy and ideology, as is hinted in multiple textual sources; Cai Yong, for instance, a scholar of the Eastern Han, said that “the eight doors represent the eight trigrams (of the *Yijing* [Book of Changes])” (Tseng 2011, 67)—this constitutes an analogy between architecture and text (the *Yijing*) and between door and transition/change: an example of architectural symbolism that is metonymic *and* metaphorical.²⁸

The attempt to study gates in ancient Chinese architecture is challenged by the fact that, beyond excavated gates in archeological sites, there is a paucity in primary textual sources; as for secondary sources (whether Chinese or Western), these tend to concentrate on later periods or on technicalities. Among those, I have studied the following: the *Qingnanjing* 青囊經 (*Green Satchel Classic*)—the earliest manual of *fengshui* composed in the ninth century AD by Yang Yunsong; the Zhou dynasty *Jiangren* (匠人), which was composed “for the purpose of inspecting, evaluating, and maintaining the quality of handicraft production” (Feng 2012, 26); the *Lu Ban jing* 魯班經 (*The Mirror of Woodwork Craftsmen*) composed by Lu Ban; and the *Yingzao Fashi* 營造法式, composed by Li Jie 李誠 in the Song dynasty.

TEXTUAL GATE MEN 門

Chinese intellectual history has produced a vast “cognitive library” that has branched and evolved out of its pre-Qin textual roots. The first stage of the study was thus devoted to searching the character *men* 門, and some of its significant compounds in as wide as possible a range of texts—to enable a selection of the most interesting and significant gate-related passages. The following list is the result: the *Yijing* 易經, commentaries of Wang Bi (226–249 AD) and Kong Yingda (574–648 AD), the *Shi Jing* 詩經 (*Book of Poetry*), the *Shang Shu* 尚書 or *Shu Jing* 書經 (*Book of Documents*), the *Li Jing* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*), the *Chun Qiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*), the *Zhou li* 周禮 (*The Rites of Zhou*) and *Yili* 儀禮 (*Etiquette of Rites*), the *Taixuan jing* 太玄經 (*The Great Mystery*), the *Daode jing* 道德經, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Lunyu* 論語, the *Mengzi* 孟子,

the *Mozi* 墨翟, *Yuan Dao* 原道 (the first chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子), *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, the *Sunzi bing fa* 孫子兵法 (*Master Sun's Military Methods*). Also included are the hagiographies of Laozi (老子), as follows: the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (*Immortals' Biography*) by Liu Xiang 劉向 dated 100 BC, the *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (*Biographies of Spirit Immortals*) by Ge Hong 葛洪 dated 320 AD, and the *Laozi ming* 老子銘 (*Inscription for Laozi*) by Bian Shao 邊韶 dated 165 AD. I have also analyzed passages from the *Lunheng* 論衡 (first century AD) composed by Wang Chong, and the *Heshang gong* 河上公. Outside the historical framework notwithstanding, I have decided to include the thirteenth-century Chan Buddhist text *Mumonkan* 無門關 (*The Gateless Barrier*) for its significance in any study of the gate metaphor. This list is not exhaustive—additional sources are used and quoted, such as Liu Hsie's *The Literary Mind and the Carvings of Dragons*, and it goes without saying that, even within the historical framework, not to mention beyond it, a long list of primary sources that are “heavily gated” await interpretation as well as specific themes that have been found to be associated with gates but exceeded the space and scope of this volume.²⁹

The Rationale Underlying the Arrangement of the Book and a Succinct Description of Its Chapters

The arrangement of the book reflects my wish to present the exegesis of the gate through Chinese correlative thinking instead of locking it in strict domains of knowledge, that is, arranging the chapters according to “architecture,” “philosophy,” or “religion.” Such conventional categorization would fail to “bring out to the light” its shared roots and efficaciousness in all dimensions. Thus, out of several ways or options according to which the various gates could be presented, I chose the gate's degrees of perviousness or “states of potentiality,” such as double-leaved gates in continuous interchange of open *and* closed, gates in a state of open *or* closed, and closed gates by default (barriers). Importantly, this arrangement also stems from the finding that a certain gate-method (e.g., close the gates) might serve two entirely different viewpoints or ideological outcomes.

Chapter 1 (“Chinese Gates in Fourfold Context: Observation, ‘Existential Thought,’ Spatiality, Etymology”) presents my argument that the idea of the gate, its metaphorical significance, and its concrete

construction in early China might have stemmed from the very life conditions on the early Chinese on their land, for instance, rivers and topographical patterns, combined with their unique skill of observation—with emphasis on *qi*, water, and wind. I suggest that the attention given to water (particularly in the form of rivers, as said), wind, and *qi*, and the fascination these substances held for the early Chinese, stems from their common unique characteristic, namely, possessing the highest efficacy for the sustainment of life, but simultaneously having *no form*. I thus present the gate idea through the contexts of existential thought in early China, which looks at the very conditions of life on the Chinese land with emphasis on rivers and floods, and the unique way in which the early Chinese observed the natural world; a short discussion of the systemized formulation of *fangshui*, and a suggested framework for the idea of *dao*; this is followed by a discussion of spatial ideas in early China and their implementation in architecture, and finally, an enquiry into the etymological meanings of *men*.

Chapter 2 (“Gates of Creation: Correlates between Man, Text, and Cosmos”) introduces “prototype gates” that are located in between complementary opposites and which relate to creation in parallel dimensions, namely, cosmic, mental, and textual. Significantly, the “opening gate” to the successive analysis of gates in this book is from the *Yijing*—as I find both gates (the text and the gates mentioned in it) to constitute roots of ancient Chinese thought.

Chapter 3 (“Gates to Inner Formlessness”) discusses the gate as metaphorizing the need to go backward to the formless and the chaotic (as was found in Daoist philosophies and the *Taixuan jing*). Although intuitively we would assume that an aspiration to the formless state would necessitate open gates . . . in many cases (particularly with Daoist sources) it is actually the opposite: the advice is to close the openings of the body.

Chapter 4 (“Should I Open or Close My Gate? An Individual’s Home, Mouth, and Mind”) looks at the opening/closing of the gate as an act placed in the hands of the individual and is presented through the correlative circles of the front gate, the mouth, and the mind. I have included the front gate of Confucius in this chapter as well.

Chapter 5 (“Gates to Sociomoral Order and Distinctions”) looks at the gate as metaphorizing the need for order and appropriateness as was found in the classics and humanistic philosophies.

Chapter 6 (“The Gate as Authority: The Construction of Order and Control”) discusses the gate in its closed state, that is, a barrier which is controlled by external forces; it includes gateways on inland roads (paralleling real-to-imagined journeys), gates of cities, and gates in “legalist” thought.

Chapter 7 (“Destroy the Mind Barrier! An Opportunity for Personal Transformation”) studies the phenomenon of destruction of the gate barrier as a manifestation of the wish to eliminate all traces *ji* of dichotomy (*Zhuangzi*), or an internal barrier that needs breaking through (*wumenguan* and the hagiographies of Laozi).

The “Discussion and Further Reflections” expounds further on the practical applicability of the suggested “gate philosophy” for current human lives by exploring its potentiality in cognitive psychology, decision-making, personal growth, and more. It also discusses parallels between ancient Chinese thought and modern scientific finds on the natural world and the universe.