

WHEN “RU-MO” MAY NOT BE “CONFUCIANS AND MOHISTS”:  
THE MEANING OF “RU-MO” AND EARLY INTELLECTUAL TAXONOMY

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Introduction

The expression “*ru-mo*” 儒墨 in early texts (ca. 4th – 1st century BCE) such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Master Zhuang), the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 (Master Han Fei), the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Master of Huainan), and the *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records) has received considerable attention in studies on early Chinese intellectual history.<sup>1</sup> Many of these draw on early “*ru-mo*” discourses to speculate on the relationship between Ru and Mo in early China. For example, Kang Youwei 康有為, Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, and Zheng Jiewen 鄭傑文 utilize “*ru-mo*” discourses to depict the history of Ru and Mo in the Han dynasty. Since the “Xian xue” 顯學 (Prominent Teaching) chapter of the *Han Feizi*, a purportedly pre-Han essay, states that the teachings of “*ru-mo*” were prominent,<sup>2</sup> Kang Youwei and Zheng Jiewen believe that the early use of “*ru-mo*” suggests the more or less equal popularity of Ru and Mo. Nonetheless, they part company on the actual status of Ru and Mo during the Han period. On the one hand, agreeing with the traditional view that Ru was dominant and Mo had waned in the Han,<sup>3</sup> Kang Youwei reckons that the Han use of “*ru-mo*” is a remnant of the Warring States perspective rather than an indication of the continued prominence of Mo alongside Ru.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Zheng Jiewen contends that the Han authors’ pairing of Mo with Ru attests to the continuing popularity of Mo.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Fukui argues that the compound “*ru-mo*” suggests a trans-

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1 E. g. Fukui 1970, 1–18; Goldin 2005, 103; Guo Moruo 1960, 295; Meng Wentong 1997, 110; 2006, 216; Nylan 2009, 1–20; and Zheng Jiewen 2006, 176–216.

2 Wang Xianshen 2003, 456.

3 As an example of this traditional view, see Dubs 1938; Liang Qichao 1926, 150; and Sun Yirang 2007, 680.

4 Kang Youwei 2007b, 216–221.

5 Zheng Jiewen 2006, 176–216.

formed relationship between Ru and Mo in the Han, which resulted from a theoretical synthesis. Fukui points out that the “Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan” 平津侯主父列傳 (Collective Biography of Marquis Pingjin and Zhufu) chapter of the *Shiji*, the shared biography of Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (200–121 BCE) and Zhufu Yan 主父偃 (d. 126 BCE), applies the phrase “*ru-mo*” to Gongsun Hong.<sup>6</sup> Since Fukui identifies Gongsun Hong as an eclectic Ru with Mo ideas, he argues that this “*ru-mo*” suggests a Han synthesis of Ruist and Mohist thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

While the studies above diverge on whether Han authors’ use of “*ru-mo*” either indicates the (past or current) equal status or the synthesis of Ru and Mo, they share the following assumption: Because the phrase “*ru-mo*” combines the terms “*ru*” and “*mo*”, it fundamentally means “Ru and Mo” or refers to thinkers affiliated with either Ru (Confucianism or Classicism)<sup>8</sup> or Mo (Mohism) traditions.<sup>9</sup> To facilitate the following discussion, some terminological remarks are called for: By “*ru*” and “*mo*” (in lower case), I denote early Chinese terms or concepts of *ru* and *mo* as pre-Han and Han Chinese understood them;<sup>10</sup> by “Ru” and “Mo” (in upper case), I designate terms or concepts that modern scholars use in discussing early intellectual history, which are often mentioned as “Confucianism” and “Mohism”. In contrast, I use the term “*ru-mo*” to refer to the two-character expression.

Three characteristics of early “*ru-mo*” discourses, however, encourage us to modify this long-held assumption about the term’s precise meaning. Firstly, early texts occasionally apply the term “*ru-mo*” to political advisors whose ideas or conducts do not fit with our

6 *Shiji* 112.2963.

7 Fukui, 1970. For a similar position, see Nylan 2009. For discussions on the early Ru-Mo synthesis, see Gentz 2009; Qin Yanshi 1994; Wallacker 1978; Xue Bocheng 2006, 87–116.

8 For the translation of “*ru*” as “classicist”, see Goldin 2011a, 1–6 and Nylan 2001, 364–365. On the meaning and ambiguity of “*ru*” in early China, see Feng Youlan 1984, 303–330; Xu Zhongshu 1998, 1216–1232; and Zhang Binglin 2003, 104–106. To avoid complicating the issue, I will not touch upon the ambiguity of the term “*ru*”. The reader, however, should bear in mind that the vague and ambiguous meaning of “*ru*” might have in some way contributed to the protean expression “*ru-mo*”.

9 Another assumption implicitly made by some scholars is that the “*ru-mo*” and “Kong-Mo” are roughly interchangeable. For instance, Zheng Jiewen argues that “*ru*” and “*mo*” are often paired in early texts by quoting “Kong-Mo” discourses as evidence. See Zheng Jiewen 2006, 176–216.

10 In other words, my intention is to simply refer to what early Chinese meant by the terms “*ru*” 儒 and “*mo*” 墨, not to use them in a particular sense. I therefore do not intend to claim any knowledge as to what the terms *precisely* meant in early China. Knowing their precise meaning is not necessary for distinguishing them from modern use of the same terms.

understanding of Ru and Mo. Secondly, *ru-mo* are often denounced as hypocritical, deceitful, or rebellious in situations involving political manipulation or a power struggle. Finally, "*ru-mo*" is typically used in contexts where "*ren yi*" 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness) is repudiated. These characteristics hint that "*ru-mo*" is at least *sometimes* used as a pejorative for those who abuse or hypocritically promote popular values such as benevolence and righteousness from ulterior motives – such as those who seek to acquire a moral reputation or amass political capital for themselves or for their ruler. The current paper seeks to highlight this unnoticed but important use of "*ru-mo*" in early texts (mainly of pre-Qin and Western Han periods). While I focus on the pejorative use of "*ru-mo*", I do not intend to deny that early Chinese occasionally used the phrase "*ru-mo*" to mean "*ru* and *mo*". My principle aim is to argue against the claim that early Chinese *always* use the phrase "*ru-mo*" to mean the conjunction of "*ru*" and "*mo*".

My paper is divided into three sections, which discuss, in turn, the referents, connotations, and significances of the pejorative "*ru-mo*". I argue in the first section that the expression "*ru-mo*" in early texts does not always unambiguously and exclusively denote what modern scholars might identify as Ruists and Mohists. While I believe that its referents may at times include figures typically deemed as Ruist and Mohist thinkers, I also wish to stress that its referential scope is sometimes blurrier than or even different from that of "Ruists and Mohists". Next, I argue that early Chinese may not have always used the expression "*ru-mo*" to mean "*ru* and *mo*". In a similar vein, I do not want to suggest that early Chinese categorically would not have applied "*ru-mo*" to what they regarded as the *ru* or the *mo*. Nonetheless, I would like to emphasize that early Chinese authors frequently employed this expression to indicate their suspicion or contempt of the intended referents. In a nutshell, "*ru-mo*" might have carried certain pejorative connotations. These pejorative connotations indicate that the expression "*ru-mo*" cannot always be understood as meaning simply "*ru* and *mo*" – otherwise we would also need to conclude that both "*ru*" and "*mo*" were primarily pejorative, too. Finally, I will use the *Shiji* as a case study to argue how my observation of the pejorative use of "*ru-mo*" is relevant to the research of early intellectual taxonomy.

## 1 The Elusive Reference of "*Ru-mo*"

It is worth remarking at the outset that *ru* and *mo* were perhaps the only named currents of thought in the Warring States.<sup>11</sup> In the surviving texts presumably predating the *Shiji*,

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11 On this point, see Goldin 2011b and Smith 2003. Li Rui 2005, however, contends that the author of the *Yinwenzi* 尹文子 (Master Yinwen) proposed this classification of schools be-

we encounter the names “*ru*” and “*mo*” and read narratives about scholars or political advisors who are identified by these labels. However, they do not use names such as “*Fa jia*” 法家 and “*Dao jia*” 道家. Sima Tan’s 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) discussion of the six approaches, as recited in the “*Taishigong zixu*” 太史公自序 (Self-narration of Grand Historian), is therefore believed to be the earliest account to characterize political thought by the now familiar “school” labels. These labels further may have been invented by Sima Tan as a synthetic approach for evaluating the then existing currents of political thought.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that *ru* and *mo* were very likely the only two famous traditions to be known by such labels before the *Shiji*. Considering this historical background, the expression “*ru-mo*” might not have been perceived by early Chinese (before the invention and wide circulation of other “school” labels) as only a phrase for selectively combining two school names, but also as a broad rubric for various groupings of specialists with certain common features.<sup>13</sup> “*Ru-mo*” might therefore have been used in other senses than to mean<sup>13</sup> “the *ru* and the *mo*”.<sup>14</sup>

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fore Sima Tan. Yet, as Goldin indicates, the authenticity of the *Yimwenzi* is more open to question. I consider Sima Tan’s statements – if only tentatively – to be the provenance of the intellectual classification with “school” names. For the early school classification and the meanings of various school labels, see Brindley 2009; Cheng 2001; Csikszentmihalyi & Nylan 2003; Nylan 1999; Queen 2001; Sivin 1978; and Van Ess 1993.

12 Csikszentmihalyi & Nylan 2003; Goldin 2011b; and Smith 2003.

13 As an illustration, it helps to consider the later expression “*sanjiao jiu liu*” 三教九流, which combines “*sanjiao*” (the three teachings) and “*jiu liu*” (the nine streams). “*Sanjiao*” refers to the three major religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and religious Daoism) and “*jiu liu*” to the nine significant political thoughts listed in the “*Yiwenzhi*” 藝文志 (bibliographical treatise) of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han). See *Hanshu* 30.1724–1746 and Linghu Defen 1971, 83. As the two terms “*sanjiao*” and “*jiu liu*” together include all the important spiritual and intellectual traditions, they were later combined to mean “people from different backgrounds” or “all fields of erudition”. Cf. Wang Jisi 1978, 6 and 144. Concomitant to the semantic vagueness was a change of evaluative connotation: Despite the neutral sense of “people from different backgrounds”, “*sanjiao jiu liu*” gradually became a euphemism for “riffraff”. It should be noted however that “*sanjiao*” might have different meanings in even earlier periods. See, for instance, Chen Li 1994, 369.

14 Hans van Ess’ interpretation of “*Huang-Lao*” 黃老 can be viewed as a case study of this linguistic practice. His analysis indicates that the names of the legendary figures Huangdi 黃帝 and Laozi 老子 (also labels for some branches of intellectual legacies) were combined to denote opponents of certain political policies. Additionally, this expression was occasionally used with some evaluative connotations beyond its neutral sense. See Van Ess 1993.

The reference of "*ru-mo*" occasionally appears to be more elusive than the understanding of "Ru and Mo" in the research of early Chinese thought. For one thing, when identifying the possible referents of "*ru-mo*" in early descriptions of the *ru-mo*, it becomes clear that the referential scope is broader or vaguer than that of today's understanding of "Ru and Mo". Apart from having an elusive referential meaning, these descriptions often convey views about the *ru-mo* that are not consistent with the usual understanding of Ru and Mo.

The fact that the expression "*ru-mo*" in early texts is often associated with widespread political-ethical values may suggest the fluidity of its reference.<sup>15</sup> The *ru-mo* are often depicted as promoting popular ideals such as emulating ancient sage-kings, caring for the people, employing the worthy etc. More often than not, they are also associated with the ethical notions of "benevolence" and "righteousness". For example, we read in the "Wu du" 五蠹 (The Five Vermin) chapter of the *Han Feizi*:

今儒墨皆稱先王兼愛天下，則視民如父母。何以明其然也？曰：「司寇行刑，君為之不舉樂。聞死刑之報，君為流涕。」此所舉先王也。[...]先王勝其法不聽其泣，則仁之不可以為治亦明矣。且民者固服於勢，寡能懷於義。<sup>16</sup>

Now the *ru-mo* all extol the former kings as caring for all under Heaven and treating the people as if they were the people's parents. How could one clearly show that it was so? [Those *ru-mo* will] say: "When the minister of justice enforces penalties, the lord would, on account of that, not have music and dances performed. Hearing reports of death penalties, the lord shed tears." This is how [those *ru-mo*] elevate the former kings. [...] [Nonetheless, the fact that] the former kings placed great emphasis on the statutes and were not affected by the crying clearly shows that benevolence cannot be used to achieve order. Moreover, the people will bow naturally to authority, but few of them can be conciliated by righteousness.

This passage states that all *ru-mo* praise former kings as "*jian ai*" 兼愛 (caring for all), and further implies that the practice of "*jian ai*" is one of many renditions of the principles of benevolence and righteousness. Yet the ideal of "*jian ai*", according to *Mengzi* 孟子 (Master Meng), a representative Ruist text, is antithetical to the way of benevolence and righteousness.<sup>17</sup> In short, not every Ruist and Mohist regarded "*jian ai*" as exemplifying benevolence

15 For example, *Han Feizi* 50; Wang Xianshen 2003, 457; *Huainanzi* 18; He Ning 1998, 1296–1297.

16 *Han Feizi* 49; Wang Xianshen 2003, 446. In this paper, all translations of Chinese quotes are mine unless otherwise indicated. Many have been revised based on suggestions from people I mention in the acknowledgements.

17 *Mengzi* 3/B/14; Jiao Xun 1987, 456–457.

and righteousness. This suggests that the phrase “*ru-mo*” in this *Han Feizi* passage is rather loose when compared with scholars’ usual understanding of “Ru and Mo”. It appears that Han Fei may have applied it to whomever he perceived to be advocating such political-ethical ideas of benevolence, righteousness, former kings, and caring for all.

This leads to the conclusion that the expression “*ru-mo*” might not exactly denote Ruists and Mohists (as they are currently understood), but rather have been employed nebulously by early authors to talk about advocates of popular values that were related to benevolence and righteousness in one way or another. In this regard, the phrase “*ru-mo*” may function as a metonymy (or synecdoche, depending on the exact role of *ru* and *mo* in the coinage of “*ru-mo*”) for those who propagated such values. Early Chinese combined “*ru*” and “*mo*” to coin this metonymy, probably because both the *ru* and the *mo* tended to appeal to widely approved political-ethical values when efforts were made to encourage political advocacy or articulate statecraft or strategic prescriptions.

Nonetheless, this tendency is not unique to what is typically considered Ru and Mo. Values or ethical expressions such as emulating the ancient kings, caring for the people, practicing benevolence and righteousness, and so forth, are indeed endorsed in well-known Ruist or Mohist texts. However, they are also ubiquitous to Warring States and early imperial political discourses. For example, the “Caomo zhi chen” 曹沫之陣 (Cao-mo’s Deployment), a manuscript from the Shanghai Museum collection, espouses the value of caring for the people and celebrates the ancient sage-kings’ morality.<sup>18</sup> The *Wuzi* 吳子 (Master Wu) contends that hesitating to attack enemies or weeping over a corpse does not qualify one to be righteous or benevolent.<sup>19</sup> The *Liu tao* 六韜 (Six Bow Cases) recommends a territorial ruler strategically practice “benevolence and righteousness” by consolidating internal and external allegiances.<sup>20</sup> And, the stele inscriptions sanctioned by the First Emperor of Qin eulogize the emperor for eliminating the eastern kingdoms out of “benevolence and righteousness”.<sup>21</sup>

Compared to early famous Ruist and Mohist texts, some early texts (especially strategic manuals) whose intellectual affiliations are difficult to determine appear to be more overt in propagating such values. The “plain” or even “extremist” promotion of popular political-ethical values probably reflects the discursive habits of early ruling elites better than the “philosophical” texts. Just as early rulers, propagandists, political advisors, and

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18 Gao Youren 2008, 39.

19 Fu Shaojie 1978, 42.

20 Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 41, 47, and 51.

21 *Shiji* 6.245.

strategic consultants may have frequently exploited popular ethical terms, "*ru-mo*", as a label for promoters of popular values, might have had an ambiguous referential scope: Someone who advised the ruler to "imitate former sage kings" or to "elevate the worthy" might be viewed as a *ru-mo*, and yet he may also not necessarily be identifiable as a Ruist or a Mohist.

This interpretation squares with the "Xian xue" chapter of the *Han Feizi*, the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" chapter of the *Shiji*, and the "Chao Cuo" 晁錯, so entitled after a Han political advisor, and "Bao xian" 褒賢 (Praising the Worthy) chapters of the *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 (Discussions on Salt and Iron). These texts are similar in that they do not confine "*ru-mo*" to what would generally be recognized as Ruists and Mohists.

The "Xian xue" passage may appear at first to strongly support the traditional assumption that the expression "*ru-mo*" denotes Ruists and Mohists, because it splits the expression and refers to Kongzi 孔子 and Mozi 墨子:

世之顯學，儒墨也。儒之所至，孔丘也。墨之所至，墨翟也。<sup>22</sup>

The prominent learning of our generation is *ru-mo*. The ultimate model of *ru* is Kong Qiu. The ultimate model of *mo* is Mo Di. (*Han Feizi* 50)

This splitting seems to suggest that "*ru-mo*" refers precisely to Ruists and Mohists. As indicated above, I certainly recognize that the referents of "*ru-mo*" may include figures currently deemed as Ruists or Mohists or who were deemed by early Chinese as the *ru* or the *mo*. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that the lexical ambiguity of "*ru-mo*", as well as the existing disputes between the members of *ru* and *mo* (or the adherents to Kongzi's and Mozi's teachings), are being exploited in the rhetorical construction of the "Xian xue" chapter to criticize advocates of mainstream values as a whole. In order to argue that the celebration of former kings' virtuous deeds leads to inconsistent practices, the "Xian xue" chapter invokes and splits the expression "*ru-mo*" to illustrate that the *ru* and the *mo* have conflicting articulations of antiquity and certain ethical notions. Not only the *ru* and the *mo* disagree with each other, but so do the members within each of these groups. The "Xian xue" chapter thus concludes that the values espoused by the *ru-mo* are inherently deceptive.<sup>23</sup>

In applying this rhetorical strategy, however, the "Xian xue" chapter does not direct criticism exclusively at what are usually consider Ruists and Mohists.<sup>24</sup> After stressing that

22 Wang Xianshen 2003, 456.

23 See also Pines 2013, 36.

24 The "Lie Yukou" 列禦寇 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* also applies the rhetorical strategy of split-

the *ru-mo*'s interpretations of the popular values are inherently inconsistent and deceptive, the "Xian xue" chapter continues to criticize their values as detrimental to the ruler's enterprise. It illustrates this point with a particular version of "righteousness", namely not joining the army or even sacrificing one hair for the benefit of the world.<sup>25</sup> The "Xian xue" chapter thereby insinuates that the value of "righteousness" has the potential to discourage people from fighting for their rulers. Such an interpretation of righteousness, however, is not traceable to either Ruist or Mohist texts, but is typically attributed to Yang Zhu 楊朱 (ca. 440–360 BCE).<sup>26</sup> This indicates that the *ru-mo* reproached in the "Xian xue" chapter may perhaps have been political advisors who utilized popular ethical notions in formulating their counsels, instead of Ruists and Mohists.

The second example is from the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" chapter of the *Shiji*. The panegyric to this biography states that Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (141–87 BCE) promoted the *ru-mo* at court and that Gongsun Hong was the leading figure of these promoted officials.

漢興八十餘年矣，上方鄉文學，招俊乂，以廣儒墨，弘為舉首。<sup>27</sup>

When the Han Dynasty had been established for more than eighty years, the superior [i.e. Emperor Wu] at that time was inclined toward classical learning and recruited the talented, and therefore promoted the *ru-mo*. Among them, [Gongsun] Hong was the leading figure.

As Gongsun Hong was known as a "*ru*", we may find it tempting to assume that this use of the term "*ru-mo*" refers to Ruist scholars. Nonetheless, another focus of this biography, Zhufu Yan, was neither known as a *ru* nor a *mo*. He was described rather in the *Shiji* as a specialist of diplomatic strategy (*changduan zongheng zhi shu* 長短縱橫之術) who also studied a few classics and the discourses of various experts (*bai jia yan* 百家言) later in his life. Given that Zhufu Yan was once favored and promoted by Emperor Wu and was put by Sima Qian in the same biography with Gongsun Hong, he was probably one of the *ru-mo* to which Sima Qian alluded.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, there is no substantive evidence that

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ting the phrase "*ru-mo*" to make a similar point. Chen Guu-ying 1983, 834.

25 Wang Xianshen 2003, 459.

26 See Graham 2003, 54.

27 *Shiji* 112.2963.

28 I would argue that Zhufu Yan is another "*ru-mo*" that Sima had in mind for two additional reasons. First, the "*ru-mo*" in this *Shiji* passage is plural, so there are supposedly other *ru-mo* (except Gongsun) mentioned in the same context. Second, like Gongsun Hong, Zhufu Yan has engaged in some cases of incriminating feudal kings and diminishing local powers. More

Emperor Wu had ever promoted Mohist scholars.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the intended referents of "*ru-mo*" in this "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" passage may not be what are now considered Ruists and Mohists. This example also indicates the unclear extension of the phrase "*ru-mo*" in the early textual corpus: Sima Qian might have applied "*ru-mo*" to whoever exhibited the loose features attached to "*ru-mo*" rather than to anyone who today might be unambiguously associated with the terms "Ru", "Mo", or any combination of them.

Further examples of murky references to "*ru-mo*" are also found in the "Chao Cuo" and "Bao xian" chapters of the *Yantie lun*, a record of the court debates during Emperor Zhao's 昭帝 reign (87–74 BCE) on a range of issues concerning imperial monopolies, foreign policies, and other political matters.<sup>30</sup> According to these chapters, the Grand Counsellor (*da fu* 大夫) at the debate stated that the political advisors participating in Chen She's 陳涉 (d. 208 BCE) rebellion against the Qin Empire and the Huainan-Hengshan 淮南衡山 rebellion against the Han Empire were "*ru-mo*". He also denounced these *ru-mo* for making beautiful speeches, while violating the values they claimed to cherish and instigating rebellions against the central authority.<sup>31</sup> It seems unlikely that the Grand Counsellor (or the compiler of the *Yantie lun*) used the term "*ru-mo*" to refer to Ruists and Mohists. If this is the case, it would be necessary to explain why he was convinced that the participants and agitators of these rebellions were all Ruists and Mohists. Similarly, this instance of "*ru-mo*" might not be interchangeable with "*ru* and *mo*". While the *Shiji* indeed states that some *ru* engaged in Chen She's rebellion,<sup>32</sup> no other early accounts testify that both Ruists and Mohists (or the *ru* and the *mo*) were either involved in

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details on this will be provided in the next section.

29 The traditional view holds that Emperor Wu set out some initiatives which became the foundation of the thriving of Ru tradition later. Some recent scholars have expressed doubts about this understanding. They argue that Emperor Wu's edicts had not effectively elevated the status of Ru to the so-called official orthodoxy. His edict of the recruitment of imperial academy students, for example, might not be an attempt to put exclusive stress on the Ru values. This edict certainly opened the way for classicists to advance to higher posts, but it is a different matter whether these classicists behaved or interpreted the classics following Confucian values. On the other hand, some court debates and memorials suggest that different ideological propensities still co-existed at court during and after Emperor Wu's reign. See Loewe 2012 and Wallacker 1978.

30 For an overview of the background and substance of the debate, see Loewe 1974, 91–112.

31 See Wang Liqi 1992, 113 and 241.

32 Some therefore suspect that this "*ru-mo*" refers to *ru* alone and that the "*mo*" is meaningless. See, for example, Guo Moruo 1960, 176–177.

or plotted these rebellions. In sum, the phrase “*ru-mo*” in these *Yantie lun* passages cannot be plausibly interpreted as referring to either “Ruists and Mohists” or “*ru* and *mo*”. Besides its murky referential scope, the phrase “*ru-mo*” also seems to carry certain negative connotations that the terms “*ru*” and “*mo*” do not have. I will therefore outline the connotational aspect of “*ru-mo*” in the next section.

## 2 The Pejorative Connotations of “*Ru-Mo*”

As demonstrated above, the label “*ru-mo*” for those who espoused widely accepted values was primarily used in a negative way.<sup>33</sup> Despite the moral desirability of such values, the *ru-mo* were often, implicitly and explicitly, criticized as being deceitful, hypocritical, or treacherous. The term was chiefly employed when the authors expressed doubts about the feasibility or sincerity of the promotion of benevolence and righteousness. Such a pejorative label could have gained acceptance because mainstream values were constantly manipulated and exploited by powerbrokers to further their agendas, or by those in power to justify their behavior and defend the indefensible. While high-minded scholars might have used these mainstream values as a means to restrain unscrupulous rulers or to trigger political unrest for bringing about a better future, those who actually undertook action based on the moral high ground were often ruthless rulers, treacherous ministers, or foreign forces. This harsh reality seems to have concerned early critics of the *ru-mo*. The *Han Feizi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Huainanzi*, for example, show a keen interest in narrating historical events that could be viewed as abuses of popular values or foolish emulations of ancient sages. For instance, the abdication of King Kuai of Yan 燕王噲 (d. 314 BCE) to Zizhi 子之 (d. 314 BCE) is alluded to five times in the *Han Feizi* and once in the *Zhuangzi*. This event is also mentioned in conjunction with references to “*ru-mo*” and “benevolence and righteousness” in the *Huainanzi*.<sup>34</sup> This story may have been considered relevant by the critics of the *ru-mo* because it seems to illustrate the “hypocritical” or “unwise” promotion of ancient sages and moral norms.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, whether with a benign will or evil intentions, the political agents involved in this satirical event all appealed to moral justifications and legendary models. For example, Lu Maoshou 鹿毛壽 advised King Kuai to emulate the sage-king Yao 堯 and to yield his state to Zizhi; King Kuai ac-

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33 Goldin notes that “*ru-mo*” were often targets of ridicule. See Goldin 2005, 103.

34 *Han Feizi* 7, 38, 29, and 44. Wang Xianshen 2003, 42, 375, 386, and 408. *Zhuangzi* 17. Chen Guu-ying 1983, 421. And *Huainanzi* 18. He Ning 1998, 1296.

35 For the development of abdication theories and the relevance of King Kuai’s case, see Defoort 2006 and Pines 2005.

cepted the advice with the intent of increasing his moral authority; and Mengzi gave the King of Qi a morally acceptable reason to attack Yan as a way of promoting benevolent governance and righteous war.<sup>36</sup> These kinds of behaviors might have motivated skeptical or cynical comments on ancient sage rulers and attacks on the advocates of benevolence and righteousness in general, ultimately leading to the usage of the pejorative "*ru-mo*". It was applied to hypocritical advocates of these values or abusers of the related ethical terms. The early "*ru-mo*" discourses, therefore, often express antagonism against disingenuous uses of moral language and antipathy toward sugar-coated accounts of usurpations, wars, or murderous struggles.

The pejorative "*ru-mo*" is found in pre-Han as well as Han texts. The examples we just saw in the *Yantie lun* use "*ru-mo*" in the sense of dishonest advocates of ethical norms and agitators of rebellions. Some more examples appear in the *Zhuangzi*, the *Han Feizi*, the *Huainanzi*, and the *Shiji*. The *Zhuangzi* contains pronounced criticisms against the ancient sage-kings, benevolence and righteousness, and the *ru-mo*. It emphasizes the destruction of states and the death of people caused by the highly esteemed sage-kings<sup>37</sup> and portrays them as predecessors of "great robbers", namely those who manipulate "benevolence and righteousness" to steal territory, legitimacy, and moral authority.<sup>38</sup> The promoters of "benevolence and righteousness" are accordingly considered as "minions" of great robbers because they safeguard the values that great robbers exploit. Following this line of thinking, the *Zhuangzi* rebukes the *ru-mo* for being shameless:

老聃曰：「昔者黃帝始以仁義撻人之心，堯、舜於是乎 [...] 愁其五藏以為仁義，矜其血氣以規法度。然猶有不勝也。堯於是放讎兜於崇山，投三苗於三峽，流共工於幽都 [...] 今世殊死者相枕也，桁楊者相推也，刑戮者相望也。而儒墨乃始離跂攘臂乎桎梏之間。意！甚矣哉！其無愧而不知恥也甚矣！」<sup>39</sup>

Lao Dan said: "In the past, the Yellow Emperor first used benevolence and righteousness to meddle with the minds of people. Yao and Shun accordingly [...] distressed their five vital organs in practicing benevolence and righteousness, exhausted their blood and energy in the establishment of laws and standards. But they still thought this unsatisfactory. Yao thus banished Huan Dou to Mount Chong, expelled [the Chiefs of] the Three Miao to San Wei, and exiled Gong Gong to You Du. [...] In the present, those who have been put to death lie heaped together, those who wear the cangue press on each other,

36 Jiao Xun 1987, 150–156 and *Shiji* 34.1555–1557.

37 Chen Guu-ying 1983, 108.

38 Chen Guu-ying 1983, 256.

39 *Zhuangzi* 11/27/3–12; Chen Guu-ying 1983, 273–274.

those who have suffered mutilation are never out of each other's sight. And now come those *ru-mo*, standing on their tiptoes and waving their arms, striding into the midst of the fettered and manacled crowd. Ah! This is too much! Their lack of embarrassment and sense of shame is immense!"

The *ru-mo* are rebuked as shameless because, even though brutal struggles and harsh penalties were brought about by these sage-kings in the name of benevolence and righteousness, the *ru-mo* still endlessly propagate these values, revere these ancient sage-kings, and advise the ruler to emulate the ancient sage-kings by practicing "benevolence and righteousness".<sup>40</sup>

Where the *Zhuangzi* describes the *ru-mo* as shameless and hypocritical advocates of "benevolence and righteousness" or ancient exemplary rulers, the *Han Feizi* implicitly suggests that the *ru-mo* are untrustworthy and treacherous and rebellious. Prioritizing the consolidation of the established power,<sup>41</sup> the *Han Feizi* is concerned that the practice of promoting popular values and celebrating former kings could undermine the contemporary rulers' authority. The "Zhong xiao 忠孝" (Loyalty and Filial Piety) chapter, for instance, states that praising the former kings' morality is tantamount to defaming contemporary rulers.<sup>42</sup> With this concern in mind, the "Wu du" chapter criticizes the *ru-mo* and implies that values such as benevolence and righteousness would be exploited by treacherous ministers for the sake of self-aggrandizement or covert treason:

今儒墨皆稱先王兼愛天下，則視民如父母。[...]是故亂國之俗，其學者則稱先王之道，以籍仁義，盛容服而飾辯說，以疑當世之法而貳人主之心。其言古者，為設詐稱，借於外力，以成其私而遺社稷之利。<sup>43</sup>

Now, the *ru-mo* all celebrate the former kings as caring for all under Heaven and thus treating the people as parents [would treat their children]. [...] Thus the custom of a chaotic state is this: The educated extol the way of former kings; they utilize "benevolence" and "righteousness", put on ornamental clothes, and adorn eloquent speeches to call into question the contemporary statutes and distract the minds of the rulers. Those who speak of antiquity spout deceptive speeches and exploit external forces in order to realize their own private agendas and ignore the benefits of the Altars of the Earth and Millet.

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40 Chen Guu-ying 1983, 382–283.

41 On this point, see Goldin 2013 and Pines 2013.

42 *Han Feizi* 51; Wang Xianshen 2003, 468.

43 *Han Feizi* 49; Wang Xianshen 2003, 446–456.

As this passage insinuates, the celebration of the former kings and the promotion of benevolence and righteousness are meant to disguise treacherous intrigues. Behind these lofty speeches, there is the intention to challenge the laws, deceive the rulers, and to secretly assist other political forces. The image of "ru-mo" (or the purveyors of benevolence and righteousness) in the *Han Feizi* is reminiscent of the image of the great robbers' minions depicted in the *Zhuangzi*. In short, the *ru-mo* also help the megalomaniac to steal power and gain legitimacy. As one can see, both the *Zhuangzi* and *Han Feizi* speak of "ru-mo" in an overtly negative tone. This negative attitude toward *ru-mo* might not in fact stem from the philosophical disputes between Ru, Mo, Dao *jia*, and Fa *jia* as researchers currently reconstruct them, but mainly from skepticism, cynicism, or an abhorrence of the tasteless, naïve, hypocritical, or manipulative promotion of benevolence and righteousness.<sup>44</sup>

Similar attitudes towards the *ru-mo* are also revealed in Han literature such as the *Huainanzi*, the *Yantie lun*, and the *Shiji*. In the *Huainanzi*, the *ru-mo* are said to be pretentious, deceitful, or solicitous of fame:

周室衰而王道廢，儒墨乃始列道而議，分徒而訟。於是博學以疑聖，華誣以脅眾，弦歌鼓舞，緣飾詩書，以買名譽於天下。<sup>45</sup>

When the Zhou house declined, the kingly way was abandoned. The *ru-mo* thus began ripping apart the [kingly] way, dividing up and disputing with each other. As a result, with their extensive knowledge, they pretend to be sages; with their specious speeches, they coerce the multitudes; by plucking strings and singing, beating drums and dancing, and by reciting and embroidering the *Odes* and *Documents*, they purchase their fame and reputation in the world.

The Grand Counsellor in the *Yantie lun* makes a similar criticism:

儒墨內貪外矜，往來游說，棲棲然亦未為得也？<sup>46</sup>

The *ru-mo* are avaricious on the inside but look dignified on the outside: Is not their roaming back and forth and lobbying incessantly also for achieving [what they desire]?

This image of "ru-mo" also appears in the *Shiji* narratives about some Han officials. The *Shiji* applies the label "ru-mo" twice in discussions of Han political events: One occurs in

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44 That said, I do not mean to reject any interpretation of the philosophical discrepancy between these traditions, but to stress that the critics of the *ru-mo* might have concerned themselves more with political perspectives and behavior than with various philosophical theses.

45 *Huainanzi* 2; He Ning 1998, 138–139.

46 *Yantie lun* 4, no. 18; Wang Liqi 1992, 231.

the “Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan” chapter, the other in the “Youxia liezhuan” 遊俠列傳 (Collective Biography of Wandering Knights)<sup>47</sup> chapter.

As indicated in the previous section, the intended referents of “*ru-mo*” in the “Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan” chapter might be Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan. Evidence suggests that Sima Qian invoked the pejorative “*ru-mo*” in line with the *Zhuangzi* and the *Han Feizi* to insinuate that Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan were duplicitous politicians and shameful “minions” of the “great robber” Emperor Wu. Gongsun Hong is depicted as hypocritical in the *Shiji*,<sup>48</sup> and Emperor Wu is portrayed in the *Shiji* as a successor to the putatively ruthless First Emperor of Qin,<sup>49</sup> or, to use the *Zhuangzi*’s words, an exemplary “great robber”. While the *Shiji* does not explicitly censure Emperor Wu’s duplicity, it quotes Ji An 汲黯 (?–112 BCE), who satirizes Emperor Wu as “having numerous cravings on the inside, while exhibiting benevolence and righteousness on the outside” 內多欲而外施仁義.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the *Shiji* presents a number of stories in which the emperor, attempting to increase centralized control, employs scholar-officials who are good at exploiting the classics and mainstream values to incriminate and eliminate his political threats (especially his own kin).<sup>51</sup> According to the *Shiji*, Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan were particularly “meritorious” in this regard.<sup>52</sup> Gongsun Hong’s most meritorious deed was in making a charge against Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), the king of Huainan Kingdom. This led to the suicide of Liu An and the subsequent abolishment of his kingdom.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, one of Zhufu Yan’s major contributions to the emperor’s machinations was

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47 I here conveniently follow Burton Watson in translating “*you xia*” 遊俠 as “wandering knights”. See Watson 1993, 409. I would like to note, however, that the *you xia* in the *Shiji* and other early Chinese texts were not mainly aristocrats (as the word “knight” may imply): They were rather often plain-clothed *outlaws*. These outlaws resorted to violence following their private codes of conduct, which might have been regarded by some as more noble behaviour than that of the noble himself. In this regard, James Liu’s translation “knight-errant” seems more suitable. See Liu 1967. The rendering “wandering heroic outlaws” could capture, in my view, the implicit positive connotations of the term “*you xia*”, although it fails to denote the literal meaning.

48 Sima Qian quoted Ji An to imply that Gongsun Hong was hypocritical. See *Shiji* 112.2951 and Vankeerberghen 2001, 25–27.

49 For a detailed analysis, see Friedrich 2009 and Van Ess 2014.

50 *Shiji* 120.3106.

51 On this point, see Vankeerberghen 2001, 10.

52 Gongsun Hong’s and Zhufu Yan’s negative images in the *Shiji* have been widely recognized. See, for example, Li Jingxing 1986, 105 and Wang Mingsheng 2005, 38.

53 This well-known case has been thoroughly studied in Vankeerberghen 2001, 27–35 and 49–78.

raising a legal charge against the King of Qi, which also led to the king's suicide and the demise of the Qi Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> Another one of Zhufu Yan's contributions was the proposal known as "Extending Grace Ordinance" (*tui en lin* 推恩令). This ordinance demanded every feudal king to bequeath his fief to all of his sons so that the fief that each king-to-be could possess would be shrunk considerably. While the real motive behind this ordinance was to weaken the power of feudal kings, Zhufu Yan glorified this policy with the righteous terms "benevolence" and "filial piety". He stated that the succession practice of the time – in which only one of a king's many sons would inherit the fief – had impaired "the *dao* of benevolence and filial piety" (*ren xiao zhi dao* 仁孝之道). The emperor should thus restore this "*dao*" by forcing feudal kings to divide up their fiefs and to pass them on to all of their sons:

願陛下令諸侯得推恩分子弟，以地侯之。彼人人喜得所願，上以德施，實分其國。不削而稍弱矣。<sup>55</sup>

I beg Your Majesty to issue an order allowing the feudal kings to extend their grace to all of their sons by making them lords of the fiefs. In this way, each [of the sons] will rejoice in the gratification of his desires and Your Majesty will be able to bestow [those sons] with your virtuous act while effectively dividing up their kingdoms. Thus, without your resorting to the forced dispossession of territory, the feudal kings will be gradually weakened.<sup>56</sup>

Sima Qian's narratives about Emperor Wu, Gongsun Hong, and Zhufu Yan in the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" chapter suggest that he deliberately used the expression "*ru-mo*" to express his contempt of Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan. The two men, according to these narratives, exemplified well the behavior of "*ru-mo*" as hypocrites and minions of great robbers. They manipulated ethical language to make beautiful speeches and to glorify the way they presented power-struggle strategies.

The pejorative connotations of "*ru-mo*" can also be detected in the "Youxia liezhuan" chapter. Guo Jie (or Guo Xie) 郭解, one of the central figures of this collective biography, was suppressed and ultimately executed by Emperor Wu. According to the *Shiji*, Zhufu Yan and Gongsun Hong were also partly involved in the suppression and execution of Guo Jie. Emperor Wu considered Guo Jie to be a thorn in his side because of his great political influence. In order to keep a close eye on Guo Jie and other dignitaries, the emperor ordered them to move to Maoling 茂陵. This order was initiated on the

54 Vankeerberghen 2001, 47–49.

55 *Shiji* 112.2961.

56 Translation adapted from Watson 1993, 204.

suggestion of Zhufu Yan,<sup>57</sup> who advised the emperor to move the wealthy and powerful families to Maoling<sup>58</sup> in order to cut off their local connections and to strengthen the emperor's surveillance of them. Though Guo Jie was neither rich nor held any offices, he was still coerced into moving to Maoling due to his political influence. This resulted in a series of murders that were committed by Guo Jie's admirers seeking to avenge him. The emperor became deeply concerned that some people would be willing to kill imperial servants for Guo Jie. Sensing the emperor's concern, Gongsun Hong then seized the opportunity to make a proposal that would further ingratiate him to his emperor. He provided the emperor with the following justification for executing Guo Jie:

御史大夫公孫弘議曰：「解布衣為任俠行權，以睚眦殺人。解雖弗知，此罪甚於解殺之。當大逆無道。」<sup>59</sup>

The Imperial Grand Counsellor Gongsun Hong contended: "Jie is a plain-clothed commoner, but he willfully resorted to private violence and exercised the authority to kill people for petty grievances. Though he did not know [about the murders], his guilt is greater than if he had killed [the victims] himself. He should be treated as a criminal of gross defiance and abandonment of the way."

Gongsun Hong contended that if Guo Jie had the power to make the emperor's people murder the emperors' servants, then he was a *de facto* criminal of "gross defiance and abandonment of the way" (*da ni wu dao* 大逆無道). Since this was the equivalent of the serious accusation of treason or rebellion, it is rarely seen in histories from the Han. In the *Shiji*, only two Han figures are said to commit "gross defiance and abandonment of the way",<sup>60</sup> namely Liu An and Guo Jie. As Gongsun Hong was behind both the cases of Liu An and Guo Jie, we should perhaps not be surprised that Sima Qian derided Gongsun Hong as the leading *ru-mo* at Emperor Wu's court, meaning that he was the emperor's most obsequious minion and henchman. With these stories in mind, we can better apprehend the enigmatic statement about "*ru-mo*" in the "Youxia liezhuan" chapter:

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57 *Shiji* 112.2961.

58 Zhang Tan 張湯 was in charge of the construction of Maoling City. According to the *Shiji*, this man was good at weaving a legal web to capture whomever the emperor desired. See Vankeerberghen 2001, 15–17.

59 *Shiji* 124.3188.

60 A similar criminal charge of "gross defiance" (*da ni* 大逆) was applied to the clan of Empress Dowager Lü, the kings engaged in Rebellion of Seven Kingdoms, and a high-ranking official Jian Xuan 減宣. Thus, Guo Jie's case seems exceptional: He was convicted with the most serious crime, though he was neither an official nor a member of an imperial family.

至如閭巷之俠，修行砥名，聲施於天下，莫不稱賢。是為難耳。然儒墨皆排擯不載。自秦以前，匹夫之俠，湮滅不見。余甚恨之。<sup>61</sup>

As to the knights-errant from village lanes and alleyways, they cultivate their conduct and polish their reputation so that it spreads over the world and no one fails to praise them as worthy men. This is indeed [commendably] rare. But all *ru-mo* ward off and cast away [the knights-errant] and do not narrate stories about them. From as early as the Qin onwards, [stories about] the commoner knights-errant have vanished and are no longer known. I deeply resent this!

The term "*ru-mo*" here thus does not seem to refer to Ruists and Mohists, or the *ru* and the *mo*, but alludes rather to those who had assisted the emperor to eradicate Guo Jie and other "outlaws". Sima Qian's emotional expression "I deeply resent this" reveals his indignation about the political despair, his profound sympathy for the "outlaws", and his abhorrence of the Han dynasty *ru-mo*. His sympathetic accounts of Guo Jie and negative depictions of Emperor Wu and Gongsun Hong spell out the view that even a "law breaker" is more admirable morally than those hypocritical advocates of ethical values.

### 3 The Taxonomy of Pre-Qin Masters in the *Shiji*

The foregoing analysis of the referents and the connotations of the pejorative "*ru-mo*" may yield clues as to how Sima Qian perceived and classified pre-Qin masters. In this section, I will argue that Sima Qian's classification of pre-Qin masters was influenced more by the *Zhuangzi's* and *Han Feizi's* discourses about "*ru-mo*" than by his father's (Sima Tan's) six-*jia* categorization.

While Sima Tan's six-*jia* categorization has profoundly shaped our understanding of pre-Qin intellectual history, it might not in fact have been adopted by Sima Qian in his arrangement of pre-Qin masters' biographies. Sima Qian clustered the pre-Qin masters under the titles of two collective biographies, namely the chapters "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" 老子韓非列傳 (Collective Biography of Laozi and Han Fei) and the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" 孟子荀卿列傳 (Collective Biography of Mengzi and Xun Qing). These two biographies do not seem to classify pre-Qin masters in terms of their *jia*-affiliations. Rather, they could be understood, respectively, as the biography of anti-*ru-mo* masters and the biography of masters who, Sima Qian surmised, might have been regarded as *ru-mo*. This interpretation is supported by Sima Qian's use of "*ru-mo*" in the *Shiji*.

The *Shiji* has a total of eight statements that put "*ru*" and "*mo*" side by side. The two statements in the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" and the "Youxia liezhuan" chapters have

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61 *Shiji* 124.3183.

been discussed previously. As to the remaining six statements, three could be taken to be about “*ru* and *mo*”, and the rest could be about “*ru-mo*” instead. Interestingly, the three statements about the *ru* and the *mo* are not Sima Qian’s own words: They are either quotes from the *Xunzi* 荀子 (Master Xun) or from Sima Tan’s discussion on the six-*jiu* (see Table 1).

Table 1: *ru* and *mo*

The <i>Shiji</i> chapter	The “ <i>ru</i> and <i>mo</i> ” discourse	Source
<i>Shiji</i> 23: “Treatise on Rites” <sup>62</sup>	故儒者將使人兩得之者也，墨者將使人兩失之者也，是儒、墨之分。Thus, that the <i>ru</i> will make people obtain both and the <i>mo</i> will make people lose both is the distinction between <i>ru</i> and <i>mo</i> . <sup>63</sup>	<i>Xunzi</i> 19 “On Rites” <sup>64</sup>
<i>Shiji</i> 130: “Self-narration of Grand Historian”	夫陰陽、儒、墨、名、法、道德，此務為治者也。 <i>Yinyang, ru, mo, ming, fa, and daode</i> , these endeavor to achieve order. <sup>65</sup>	Sima Tan
	采儒、墨之善，撮名法之要。 [ <i>Dao jiu</i> ] incorporates the strength of <i>ru</i> and <i>mo</i> and extracts the essence of <i>ming</i> and <i>fa</i> . <sup>66</sup>	Sima Tan

While the three statements referring to “*ru* and *mo*” are quotes, the other statements about “*ru-mo*” were more likely written by Sima Qian himself (see Table 2).

Table 2: Pre-Qin “*ru-mo*”

The <i>Shiji</i> chapter	The “ <i>ru-mo</i> ” discourse
<i>Shiji</i> 63: Collective Biography of Laozi and Han Fei	善屬書辭辭，指事類情，用剝削儒墨。 [Zhuangzi was] good at organizing writings and formulating expressions and at alluding to events and comparing realities, by means of which he attacked and exposed the <i>ru-mo</i> . <sup>67</sup>
<i>Shiji</i> 74: Collective Biography of Mengzi and Xun Qing	推儒墨道德之行事興壞。 [Xunzi] elaborated on the efficacy and degeneration of the practices of the <i>ru-mo</i> and the <i>dao-de</i> . <sup>68</sup>
<i>Shiji</i> 130: Self-narration of Grand Historian	獵儒墨之遺文。 [Mengzi and/or Xunzi] retrieved the surviving statements of the <i>ru-mo</i> . <sup>69</sup>

62 On the authenticity of “Treatise on Rites”, see Van Ess 2005.

63 *Shiji* 23.1163.

64 Wang Xianqian 1997, 349.

65 *Shiji* 130.3288.

66 *Shiji* 130.3289.

67 *Shiji* 63.2144.

68 *Shiji* 74.2348.

All three statements are about pre-Qin masters. The first statement occurs in the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" chapter; the second in the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter; and the last in Sima Qian's description of the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter. These statements suggest that Sima Qian conceived of pre-Qin masters' disputes as disputes between critics and advocates of popular political-ethical values, that is, between anti-*ru-mo* masters and masters who were susceptible to the anti-*ru-mo* criticisms.

As argued in the previous section, Sima Qian's use of "*ru-mo*" in the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" and "Youxia liezhuan" chapters follows the *Zhuangzi* and *Han Feizi* use of this phrase in the pejorative sense of hypocritical and treacherous political advisors. To make this point, the "Youxia liezhuan" chapter even quotes the "Wu du" chapter of the *Han Feizi* and the *Zhuangzi*'s mockery of "great robbers". Ironically, it was suggested, those who pay lip service to ethical language often enjoy great success in their political careers, while those who sincerely abide by benevolence and righteousness often end up being frustrated.<sup>70</sup> This implies that Sima Qian instilled his interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*'s and *Han Feizi*'s anti-*ru-mo* perspectives into his narratives about the politics in the Han. He subtly utilized their pejorative "*ru-mo*" to expose the duplicity, or even brutality, of Emperor Wu's officials. His interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*'s and the *Han Feizi*'s anti-*ru-mo* perspectives is also implicitly reflected in his arrangement of the pre-Qin masters' biographies.

Reading the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" and the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapters through the lens of the "school" taxonomy, one has the impression that the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" chapter is a collective biography of *Fa jia* (Han Fei and Shen Buhai) and *Dao jia* (Laozi and Zhuangzi) thinkers and the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter is a collective biography of *Yinyang jia* (Zou Yan), *Ming jia* (Gongsun Long), *Ruist* (Mengzi and Xunzi) and *Mohist* (Mozi) thinkers.<sup>71</sup> However, some of the masters re-

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69 *Shiji* 130.3314.

70 *Shiji* 124.3181–3182.

71 The considerations behind the groupings of pre-Qin masters in the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" and "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapters is a topic that has received much attention and been widely discussed. Various opinions regarding the topic are collected in Yang, Chen and Lai 1986, 555–569 and 582–592. Some of the opinions clearly presuppose the school categorization in analysing the significance of the two chapters. Kang Youwei argues that due to the predominance of Huang-Lao teaching, Sima Qian gave Laozi an independent biography and clustered the other masters under the category of "*ru jia*" 儒家. See Kang Youwei 2007a, 228. However, some masters recorded in the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter are also described as mastering the Huang-Lao techniques (see footnote below).

searchers' routinely associate with *Fa jia* or *Dao jia* (e. g. Shen Dao 慎到 and Tian Pian 田駢)<sup>72</sup> also appear in the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter alongside Ruists and Mohists. This indicates that the two collective biographies might not group pre-Qin thinkers within a framework that resembles Sima Tan's six-*jia* categorization. Instead, the two biographies might actually be arranged according to the masters' stances with regard to the issue of “*ru-mo*” – the “Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” chapter is about anti-*ru-mo* masters and the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter is about the masters who might either be regarded as *ru-mo* or as susceptible to the criticisms against *ru-mo*. This hypothesis squares with the three “*ru-mo*” discourses in the “Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” chapter, the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter, and the description of the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter.

Sima Qian not only used “*ru-mo*” in line with the *Zhuangzi* and the *Han Feizi*, but he also put them together in the “Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” chapter, which appears to be a biography of masters skeptical about the values promoted by the *ru-mo*. The masters recounted in this collective biography, such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Han Fei, were suspicious about such popular values as benevolence and righteousness.<sup>73</sup> In this collective biography, Sima Qian describes Zhuangzi's writings as follows:

莊子者，蒙人也，名周。[...] 其著書十餘萬言，大抵率寓言也。[...] 然善屬書離辭，指事類情，用剝削儒墨，雖當世宿學不能自解免也。<sup>74</sup>

The person Zhuangzi was from Meng and was named Zhou. [...] He composed writings that contained more than one hundred-thousand words, which primarily consisted of parables. [...] Nonetheless, he was good at organizing writings and formulating expressions and at alluding to events and comparing realities, by means of which he attacked and exposed the *ru-mo*. Even the established scholars at that time could not elude or defend themselves from these criticisms.

72 While the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter does not use the labels “*fa jia*” and “*dao jia*”, it uses “Huang-Lao” and “*dao de*” in describing Tian Pian's and Shen Dao's ideas. The same expressions are also applied to Han Fei and Shen Buhai in the “Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” chapter. This suggests that Sima Qian might distinguish Han Fei and Shen Buhai from Tian Pian and Shen Dao due to considerations that go beyond Sima Tan's *jia*-centered discussion.

73 There is an on-going debate over whether the Guodian *Laozi* is critical in reference to benevolence and righteousness. Still, many agree that even if the Guodian *Laozi* does not explicitly attack benevolence and righteousness, it still views the values as inferior. For this debate, see Chen Guu-ying 1999; Li Cunshan 1999; Wang Bo 1999; Xu Kangshen 2000; Pang Pu 2003; and Qiu Xigui 2006.

74 *Shiji* 63.2144.

Two of Sima Qian's remarks are noteworthy: First, Zhuangzi's writings were intended to attack the *ru-mo* and, second, even the established scholars at the time could not evade these attacks. The former remark suggests that Sima Qian took Zhuangzi's criticisms to be criticisms against the *ru-mo*, namely pre-Qin political advisors who manipulated and abused widespread values to advance their agendas or defend the indefensible. The latter remark seems to imply that since Zhuangzi did not specify his targets, many scholars were inevitably affected by his oblique insinuations. This suggests that while Sima Qian had no problem in identifying Han dynasty *ru-mo*, he was uncertain as to who might have actually been deemed by Zhuangzi as *ru-mo* in the pre-Qin period or whether Zhuangzi was simply vilifying sincere advocates of benevolence and righteousness.

Sima Qian's ambivalence toward the *Zhuangzi's* criticisms of "*ru-mo*" may come from an interpretive predicament: On the one hand, he sensed that Zhuangzi shared an antipathy toward hypocritical and malicious abusers of mainstream values; on the other hand, he realized that Zhuangzi's criticisms against "*ru-mo*" were so oblique that one could hardly tell whether Zhuangzi only intended to direct his criticisms at those who clearly deserved them. As Sima Qian noted in the "Youxia liezhuan" chapter, some adherents of mainstream values were indeed admirable. He believed that the duplicitous and cruel officials at Emperor Wu's court were surely "*ru-mo*", but he found it difficult to judge whether pre-Qin critics of "*ru-mo*" were right in all cases: Because pre-Qin critics were never explicit about whom they were attacking, their attacks accordingly might have appeared arbitrary and undifferentiated.

Sima Qian was therefore cautious about describing the masters in the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter. He tried to provide a more balanced view that admitted the existence of *ru-mo* while avoiding the appearance of being excessively cynical. The masters described in the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter may have been known for espousing such values as benevolence and righteousness sincerely, ostentatiously, or hypocritically. For example, the master who receives the most detailed discussion, Zou Yan 鄒衍 (c. 305–240 BC), is depicted in the biography as adhering to "benevolence and righteousness".<sup>75</sup> Zou Yan was also associated with *ru-mo* by the Grand Counsellor in the *Yantie lun*.<sup>76</sup> This Grand Counsellor, as mentioned earlier, called the agitators of the rebellions "*ru-mo*" and said that the *ru-mo* are avaricious and hypocritical. Although he did not assert that Zou Yan was a *ru-mo*, he nonetheless stated that *even* Zou Yan could not tolerate the ignorance of other *ru-mo*. The Grand Counsellor did not intend to praise Zou Yan, but

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75 *Shiji* 74.2344.

76 Wang Liqi 1992, 551.

rather to mock the *ru-mo* (perhaps including Zou Yan) for disagreeing with each other despite their ostensibly shared perspectives. This mockery is reminiscent of the criticism of *ru-mo* in the “Xian xue” chapter of the *Han Feizi*: Those who espouse “the same” values cannot reconcile their internal disputes and conflicting interpretations of the values.

Sima Qian, however, was making a more nuanced point. He decided that although the masters mentioned in the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter seem to appeal to “the same” ethical notions, not every one of them deserved to be harshly criticized for the deceptive and hypocritical promotion of ethical values. He conceded that while some masters won audiences and enjoyed patronage from the rulers, Mengzi was not favored by the latter because he refused to ingratiate himself to them.<sup>77</sup> Thus, according to Sima Qian, although these masters might appear to be the same in the eyes of the people such as Zhuangzi, they were in fact different. It seems plausible that Sima Qian put these masters in the same biography – “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter – because he either surmised that they were justly subjected to or innocently suffered from the attacks launched by the *Zhuangzi* or the *Han Feizi* on the *ru-mo*.

So far, all the “*ru-mo*” discourses in the *Shiji* have been discussed, except the two in the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter and Sima Qian’s description of this chapter. The above hypothesis is borne out by these two discourses as well. Sima Qian described the content of the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter as follows:

獵儒墨之遺文，明禮義之統紀，絕惠王利端，列往世興衰。作孟子荀卿列傳第十四。<sup>78</sup>

[Mengzi and/or Xunzi]<sup>79</sup> retrieved the surviving statements of the *ru-mo*, illuminated the integrated principle of ritual propriety and righteousness, put an end to King Hui’s thought of benefits, and outlined the prosperity and decline of the preceding generations. The Collective Biography of Mengzi and Xun Qing, the 14th biography, was composed. (*Shiji* 130)

According to Sima Qian, Mengzi and Xunzi collected the *ru-mo*’s accounts in order to utilize them to clarify the ritual and ethical standards and to illustrate the ruling principles. This account suggests that for Sima Qian, Mengzi and Xunzi were different from other

77 *Shiji* 74.2345.

78 *Shiji* 130.3314.

79 Since the descriptions of other biographical chapters are often about the central figures’ (whose names often appear in the chapter title) deeds, achievements, and speeches etc., I read this passage as deliberately omitting the names of Mengzi and Xunzi. Yet, it is possible that this description is primarily about Mengzi, because it mentions King Hui.

*ru-mo* despite their apparent similarity: Their statements might bear resemblance to those of the *ru-mo*, but their intention was to illuminate and salvage the ethical norms from exploitation. This is confirmed by the "*ru-mo*" discourse in the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter:

荀卿嫉濁世之政 [...] 如莊周等又猾稽亂俗。於是推儒墨、道德之行事興壞。<sup>80</sup>  
Xun Qing loathed the governance of the confused generation [...] and the lunacy and iconoclasm of people such as Zhuang Zhou [Zhuangzi]. He thus elaborated on the efficacy and degeneration of the practices of the *ru-mo* and the *dao-de*.

Sima Qian believed that Xunzi had approved of neither the *ru-mo* nor Zhuangzi. Just as Sima Qian stated in the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" chapter that Zhuangzi's writings were intended to castigate the *ru-mo*, he said in this "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" passage that Xunzi's writings aimed to counter both Zhuangzi and the *ru-mo*. In other words, Sima Qian did not view Xunzi as a *ru-mo*. Moreover, his terse comment about Xunzi seems to suggest that, as an adherent to the mainstream values, Xunzi thought that both Zhuangzi (and his ilk) and the *ru-mo* simply went too far: Zhuangzi repudiated the values merely because they were liable to manipulation, and the *ru-mo* manipulated these values to seek prominence or defend the morally indefensible.

From the foregoing analysis, it can be seen that the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" and "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapters are connected by Sima Qian's references to "*ru-mo*". While the former states that Zhuangzi's criticisms targeted the *ru-mo*, the later states that Xunzi was concerned with the chaos created by the *ru-mo* as well as Zhuangzi. This connection is further affirmed by Sima Qian's description of the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapter, which proclaims that this chapter aims to discuss the proponents of *ru-mo*'s ideas and values.

We have been able to arrive at these tentative conclusions based on a close examination of all the "*ru-mo*" discourses in the *Shiji*. The three discourses that can be better read as mentioning "*ru* and *mo*" (namely, using the phrase "*ru-mo*" as a simple compound) may be quotes from pre-existing literature rather than Sima Qian's own words. Nonetheless, the remaining five discourses about "*ru-mo*" reflect Sima Qian's own voices. In the "Pingjinhou Zhufu liezhuan" and "Youxia liezhuan" chapters, Sima Qian used the expression "*ru-mo*" in a way that was consistent with the *Zhuangzi* and the *Han Feizi*. He applied this label to hypocritical and treacherous officials, who ostentatiously propagated ethical values, while distorting them to help the emperor eliminate political threats. While

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<sup>80</sup> *Shiji* 74.2348.

Sima Qian was sure that the *Zhuangzi* and the *Han Feizi* used the phrase “*ru-mo*” as a pejorative and believed that these Han officials were certainly *ru-mo*, he was at the same time unsure about whether Zhuangzi was rightly condemning those deserving blame, or was simply pompously denigrating sincere advocates of benevolence and righteousness and cynically lambasting whoever made moralistic speeches. Thus, Sima Qian expediently classified pre-Qin masters in terms of their “superficial” similarities and dissimilarities. He grouped those with negative attitudes towards mainstream political-ethical values in the “Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” chapter, and those who spoke positively of such values in the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” chapter. He went on to add comments to remind readers that some masters in the latter biography might be reasonably regarded as *ru-mo*, while some might be easily misrecognized as *ru-mo*, and others still are difficult to judge. This arrangement made it possible for Sima Qian to credit Zhuangzi’s and Han Fei’s contribution of exposing the *ru-mo*, while preventing his audience from sinking into excessive cynicism. In sum, whatever the pivotal role of Sima Tan’s *six-jia* categorization may have played in the research of pre-Qin intellectual history, this categorization might not have profoundly influenced Sima Qian’s taxonomy of pre-Qin masters.

## Conclusion

This paper analyses an often overlooked use of “*ru-mo*”, arguing that it might have served as a pejorative label. The pejorative “*ru-mo*” does not unambiguously and exclusively denote Ruists and Mohists or the *ru* and the *mo*. It is sometimes applied to political advisors whose ideas and behavior are incongruous with our understanding of Ruists or Mohists. Its reference is often elusive, and its connotations are primarily negative.

The pejorative “*ru-mo*” is often associated with popular political-ethical notions (especially “benevolence” and “righteousness”) that recurred in Warring States and early imperial political discourses, which are not necessarily limited to Ruist and Mohist traditions. Thus, the referential scope of “*ru-mo*” in fact seems more blurred than that of “Ruists and Mohists”. Any scholar or political advisor who advocated “benevolence and righteousness” or related values could have been deemed a *ru-mo*.

In reference to such values, “*ru-mo*” however is often used in a derogatory sense. It is used to ridicule, disparage, or scold the intended targets, and has the connotation of a hypocritical, deceitful, or treacherous advocate of mainstream political-ethical values. This pejorative use of “*ru-mo*” can be found in the *Zhuangzi*, the *Han Feizi*, the *Huainanzi*, and the *Yantie lun*, and is utilized by Sima Qian to implicitly criticize Emperor Wu and his courtiers.

Sima Qian’s awareness of the negative connotations of the phrase “*ru-mo*” used in the *Zhuangzi* and *Han Feizi* is also reflected in his arrangement of pre-Qin masters’ biographies. Whereas Sima Qian’s father’s *six-jia* categorization has greatly influenced researchers’ depictions of early Chinese intellectual history, Sima Qian does not adopt his father’s

framework in classifying pre-Qin masters. He classes pre-Qin masters under the "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" and the "Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan" chapters. The former chapter is a collective biography for anti-*ru-mo* masters and the latter is for masters who might have been actually regarded as *ru-mo* or misrecognized as or associated with the *ru-mo*.

To conclude, this interpretation of "*ru-mo*" could enable us to make better sense of some of the "*ru-mo*" discourses in the *Zhuangzi*, the *Han Feizi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Yantie lun*, and the *Shiji*, and may yield clues to the taxonomy of pre-Qin masters in the *Shiji*.

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