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Chapter 6

At the End…: There Are Only Two Fathers

I would like to end our discussion of the Confucian fantasy with a reading of the first story in the *Ershisi xiao*.

Story 1—“Xiaogan dongtian 孝感動天” (“The Feeling of Filial Piety Moved Heaven”)

Shun舜 of the Yu虞 dynasty was surnamed Yao姚 and named Chonghua重華. [He was] a son of Gu Sou瞽瞍, and had a disposition to be extremely filial. His father was ignorant, his mother was stupid, and his younger brother Xiang象 was arrogant. Shun farmed the land on the Mountain Li (li shan厯山). Elephants helped him to plough; birds helped him to weed. His feeling of filial piety was great to such a degree [that it moved the animals]. He made pottery on a river bank; these wares were not of poor quality; he fished in the Lake of Lei (lei ze雷澤) and would not be lost in the fierce winds and thunderstorms. Although he devoted his entire energy and became totally exhausted, Shun felt no resentment. Having heard about Shun’s deeds, Yao堯 appointed him the leader of officials, sent nine of his sons to serve him and married two of his daughters off to him. After Shun had assisted Yao for twenty-eight years, the emperor abdicated the throne in favour of Shun.

Herds of ploughing elephants;

Flocks of weeding birds;

The heir of Yao succeeded to the throne;

The feeling of filial piety moves the heart of Heaven.
Judging solely from the text, we can hardly see how this story is related to filial piety, since there is no any description of the interaction between the son and his parents. In order to understand this story, we must turn to its inter-textual background. According to the biography of Shun written by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 BCE) in the Shi ji 史記 (The Grand Scribe’s Records), Shun’s father Gu Sou was blind; his mother was dead. Gu Sou married another woman who gave birth to a son called Xiang. The basic story line is: Shun was not only ill-treated by his parents, but also threatened by death. With the help of his later wife and Xiang, Gu Sou plotted to kill Shun. Despite their hostility towards him, Shun obediently served his father, his stepmother and his younger brother, working hard to support them. Later, Shun’s filial devotion was rewarded by the sage king Yao who married his two daughters off to Shun and finally made him the heir to his throne. What is crucial but untold in the Ershisi xiao text is Gu Sou’s intention to kill his own son. It is in relation to this murderous father that Shun’s “extraordinary” characteristics can be understood. Because this crucial event is omitted from the Ershisi xiao, I will base my following discussion on the Shi ji text.

One of the salient features of this story is the “abnormal” father-son relationship. In the Ershisi xiao, the father is usually either missing or weak, who is thus unable to impose a threat on the son’s life. When an unloving father—such as the father in story 19—is involved, the father-son tension is usually undeveloped in the narrative. Another murderous father in the Ershisi xiao is Guo Ju (in story 13) who, in order to support his mother, attempts to kill his own son. However, in this case, Guo Ju himself is defined not as a father, but as a filial son. Hence, Gu Sou—an absolute murderous father—is unique to the story of Shun. Besides, unlike other narratives in which the son is situated in a relation with one father, story 1 features a triangular relationship: Shun has actually two fathers—his birth father (Gu Sou) and his father-in-law (Yao). Lacan
throughout his career speaks about different fathers with respect to the three registers of the Real, the imaginary and the symbolic. To what extent can we compare these different fathers articulated in Lacanian theory with the two fatherly figures in the story of Shun? If, according to Lacan, there have always been three domains, we would expect to identify three fathers. It raises the question as to which father is “missing” in the story. How should we account for this absence of the third father? In what follows, I attempt to provide some answers to these questions.

I

The Repressed Gu Sou

To say that there are two fathers in the Shun story is not entirely correct, because, if we look into the early texts, we will find that the figure of Gu Sou is split into two opposing images. An earlier version of the murderous Gu Sou is found in the Confucian classic—the Meng zi,\(^5\) where the tension between the father and the son is already evident. However, there is another totally different portrait of Gu Sou-Shun relationship. According to Mark E. Lewis, the first reference to Gu Sou is probably found in the historical book Zuo zhuan \(^6\) (The Chronicle of Zuo),\(^6\) in which one passage states: “From Mu up to Gu Sou there was none who went against the command [of Heaven]. Shun doubled this with his brilliant virtue/power.”\(^7\) The word “double” in the text makes it clear that the relationship between Gu Sou and Shun was characterized not by a father-son struggle, but by a continuity, since Shun simply doubled what his ancestors were or did.\(^8\)

The figure Mu 蒙 mentioned in the Zuo zhuan was allegedly an ancestor of Gu Sou and Shun, who, in the Guo yu \(^9\) (Discourses of the States),\(^9\) is identified as a courtly musician. In early China, a courtly musician served an important function, and was more often than not
associated with a sage. Following this early tradition, the Guo yu ranks Mu alongside another sage king Yu. This family connection with a courtly function is also connoted by Gu Sou’s name. Both characters in his name have a double meaning: the character gu 盲 means “blind” and “a courtly musician”; the second character sou 瞽 means “blind” and “an official providing the court with poems.” Hence, his name per se indicates that, during early times, Gu Sou may have “originally” been viewed as a blind but culturally accomplished musician serving a sagely function at the king’s court. This understanding is supported by Jao Tsung-i’s study of early Chinese culture. He points out that “the Chou dynasty commissioned official musicians, who were usually blind, to survey weather condition on the basis of their knowledge of musical notation”; “the ability to listen to the wind and so understand musical pitch was considered to be sagely in ancient times.” Actually, a text in the Lüshi chunqiu 吕氏春秋 (Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals) clearly states that Gu Sou was hired by Yao, working to improve the music instruments, and inventing a new-styled zither. (And, Shun was employed thereafter.)

This positive, even sagely, image of Gu Sou disappears in the Meng zi and other texts composed under its influence. In line with this tradition, the biography of Shun in the Shi ji highlights the father-son tension and translates it into an opposition. It starts with the following sentences: “The one called Shun of Yu was named Chong Hua. His father was called Gu Sou”; “Shun’s father Gu Sou was blind.” It seems that this text works to privilege one connotation of Gu Sou’s name over another: he is defined simply as a blind man, whose function as a courtly musician is left unmentioned. Shun’s other name Chong Hua 重華 has a particular significance, which literally means “double pupils,” alluding to the “doubled visual acuity.” As pointed out by Roel Sterckx, “Shun, son of the morally inept Gu Sou, was said to have two pupils in his eyes granting him doubled visual acuity and hence increased moral authority over the blind father that
tried to murder him” (196). Understood in this way, the father-son relationship is defined as the opposition between blindness and “visual acuity,” and that between “moral authority” and “moral ineptitude.”

This reading actually follows the Confucian hermeneutic tradition. According to Kong Anguo’s commentary on a passage in the Shang shu (Classics of Documents)—another Confucian canon, “having no eyes means gu. Shun’s father had eyes, but cannot distinguish between good and evil. Hence, his contemporaries called him gu, and added the character sou. Sou is the word for ‘without eyes’.” This Confucian redefinition of “gu” and “sou” has several significances. First, these two characters are conceived of strictly as depicting a physical character, and stripped off their spiritual and cultural dimensions. Second, this physical character is directly related to a cognitive failure: being blind—having no “eyes”—means not being able to know the difference between good and evil. Finally, this commentary echoes another description of Gu Sou in the Shi ji and the Ershisi xiao as well—“Shun’s father, Gu Sou, is wan.” (The same description is also found in the Shang shu text which Kong Anguo comments on). What does “wan” (頑) mean? According to the Zuo zhuan, “wan” means “not following the classics of virtuousness and righteousness,” that is, being ignorant of the moral laws. In this way, “gu” and “sou” become synonymous with “wan”; the sagely musician became a “wan” person, who did not know and hence failed to follow the law.

The negative perception of Gu Sou is accompanied with a shift in Shun’s family genealogy. In the Shi ji, we find two contradictory narrations of Shun’s family background. As mentioned above, in the Zuo zhuan, Gu Sou and Shun are said to be descended from the sagely musician Mu. This identification reappears in the Shi ji which cites: “The Chen is the clan of Zhuan Xu 顓頊. … From Mu up to Gu Sou there was none who went against the command [of Heaven]. Shun
doubled this with his brilliant virtue/power.”21 It seems that the Chen family line continued from Zhuan Xu through Mu and Gu Sou, until it arrived at Shun. However, the sagely musician Mu disappears from the biograph of Shun, where Sima Qian records in the same book another genealogy of the family.

Chong Hua’s [Shun] father was called Gu Sou, Gu Sou’s father was called Qiao Niu 橋牛, Qiao Niu’s father was called Gou Wang 句望, Gou Wang’s father was called Jing Kang 敬康, Jing Kang’s father was called Qiong Chan 窮蟬, Qiong Chan’s father was called Emperor Zhuan Xu 帝顓頊, Zhuan Xu’s father was called Chang Yi 昌意. Until Shun, there were seven generations. From Qiong Chan up to Emperor Shun 帝舜, they were all commoners.22

With the elimination of Mu from the family genealogy, the entire family background is changed; Gu Sou is no longer regarded as a courtly musician but diminished to the status of a commoner. It seems that, in the Shi ji, Shun has two different fathers who come from two different families. This juxtaposition of two different accounts of Shun’s family history in the same book allows us to read one version against the background of another, which renders the process of negation visible: the change of Gu Sou from a virtuous musician to a deficient commoner involves the negation of the ancestor Mu, whose symbolic death leads to (or, at least, coincides with) the shift of the symbolic systems represented here by the two family genealogies. What does this negation mean?
II

The Imaginary Father: the Primordial Father and His Death

To analyse the different fathers, I will start with the Freudian myth of the “primordial father”: the sons of a primal horde murdered their father, because he possessed all enjoyments (all women of the horde) which were therefore inaccessible for the sons. After the murder, the sons, due to their guilt or anxiety, re-established the dead father as the master of the symbolic universe, the universe organized by totem and taboo. In Lacanian terminology, the re-established father becomes the Name-of-the-Father—the Father who rules as the dead signifier, while the primordial father who never died completely returns in the form of the Father-of-Enjoyment.

The murder of the father is integrated into the symbolic universe insofar as the dead father begins to reign as the symbolic agency of the Name-of-the-Father. This transformation, this integration, however, is never brought about without remainder; there is always a certain leftover that returns in the form of the obscene and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment … (Žižek, Looking Awry 23)

It should be noted that, in the Lacanian development of the Freudian myth, there are not two, but three fathers—the primordial father, the Name-of-the-Father and the Father-of-Enjoyment. In this section, I will focus on the primordial father; the other two fathers will be discussed in the following sections.

This crime of patricide is undoubtedly a myth which functions to articulate the impossible origin of a given symbolic order. Accordingly, the primordial father is positioned as an imaginary, pre-symbolic father. There are several reasons for us to view Gu Sou—the musician—as occupying the same pre-symbolic, mythical position as the primordial father does. First, in the Guo yu, it is said that
The mouth takes in flavors and the ears absorb sounds, sounds and flavors generate qi.\textsuperscript{23} When qi is located in the mouth it forms words; when located in the eyes, it forms clarity of perception. Words serve to examine names (commands); clarity of perception serves to adjust oneself to the seasonal movements.\textsuperscript{24}

The hearing ears and the eating mouth are considered in this text as the primary organs, connecting the person’s body with the external world, and absorbing directly the sounds and flavours as a source of energy (or the qi in the Chinese terminology) which is then to form the words and the perceptions/representations of the world. (The primary role played by the ear and the mouth may explain why the Chinese written character for “sage” 聰 is composed of the radicals of “ear” 耳 and “mouth” 嘴.)

Hence, in the Guo yu, the stage of hearing is conceived of as prior to the symbolic order, since the words are formed only after the qi has been generated by the sounds (and flavours). The ear can therefore be viewed as a pre-symbolic organ which is not yet colonized by the signifiers; and, accordingly, the sound resembles the formless, unnamed life-substance which, for the Lacanians, is synonymous with jouissance.\textsuperscript{25} The eye, on the contrary, functions on the same level as the words, serving to make a judgement on the “natural” world and on oneself. That is, the unmediated relation between the ear and the world is unavailable for the eye. Hence, the division between the ear and the eye can be interpreted as the opposition between the pre-symbolic and the symbolic. As argued repeatedly, for the social subjects who are barred/castrated by the words, this pre-symbolic stage represents nothing but the imaginary state of jouissance.\textsuperscript{26} Gu Sou—the courtly musician who listened to the wind—can thus be conceived of as a pre-symbolic and thus uncastrated father whose ear provided him with a privileged access to jouissance.
To a certain degree, the difference between the ear and the eye marks the gap between the Confucian system and the mythical universe. In the former, the eye as an organ of knowledge triumphs over the ear as an organ of *jouissance*. It is probably not a coincidence that the first exemplar in the long list of filial sons is none other than Shun himself, whose story as established in the Confucian classics marks simultaneously the beginning of the moral universe exemplified by the son’s “visual acuity,” and the end of the sagely tradition centring on the father’s ear. The demarcation between these two worlds is represented in the *Shi ji* as the discordance between the two family genealogies. In the system where Gu Sou is ranked among other courtly musicians, Shun is simply a follower of his ancestors; when this system is negated, Shun raises as the future sage king at the expense of his forefathers: Mu is foreclosed from the family genealogy; Gu Sou is not only diminished as a commoner but also devalued as an morally deficient person.27

As demonstrated in the Freudian myth, and as Lacan has taught us, the establishment of a (new) symbolic system takes the form of the “symbolic castration.” At this point, we come to the second similarity between the primordial father and Gu Sou *qua* the musician: they both undergo the fate of death or castration. The two opposing images of Gu Sou suggest that there is a gap, a cut, between two family systems, which is literally manifested by the negation of Mu. This negation severs Gu Sou’s connection with the sagely tradition, thereby transforming him into a castrated, deficient father in the filial piety story. Is not his devalued blind eye a sign of castration, attesting to the father’s lack which is translated in the Confucian tradition as moral ignorance? However, as we will see, this castration is not complete; it generates its own remainder.

In short, when viewed from the symbolic space of the filial piety story, Gu Sou as a sagely musician is the lost, non-existing father; his appearance in the diegetic reality takes the form of an “anamorphic grimace”28 which transforms the lost father into a disturbing stain—the murderous
father as the obstacle threatening to disintegrate the moral universe exemplified by his son.

According to Žižek,

> [t]he boundary that separates beauty from disgust is ... far more unstable than it may seem, since it is always contingent on a specific cultural space: the “anamorphic” torture of the body which can exert such a fascination within some cultural spaces ... can evoke nothing but disgust in a foreign gaze. (Enjoy Your Symptom 161)

The “anamorphic” effect which is caused by the change of cultural space implies that what is negated in the Shun story is not only the positive image of Gu Sou but also the cultural system represented by him, which, viewed from the Confucian perspective, counts as nothing but moral deficiency.

Based on the above analysis, Gu Sou—the musician—resembles the primordial father in at least two aspects: (1) they both occupy the place of the imaginary, pre-symbolic father who enjoys; (2) their death/negation preconditions the establishment of a given symbolic order: the death of the primordial father inaugurated the regime of the brothers; for Shun to become a sage king—the ruler of the symbolic universe, Gu Sou—the pre-symbolic father—must be castrated and repressed. However, we will see below that this negated father returns in the form of the obscene father, from whom the son has no escape.

III

The Real Father: Gu Sou as the Father-of-Enjoyment

The filial piety story of Shun climaxes with two attempted murders. The Shi ji text reads:

Gu Sou still wanted to kill Shun. He asked Shun to climb up a granary to plaster it. Gu Sou [then] set the granary on fire from below in order to burn it
down. Shun, with two rain-hats, protected himself [against the fire], and jumped down. [He] run away and was able to survive. Thereafter, Gu Sou again asked Shun to dig a well. While digging the well, Shun made a secrete tunnel [which led to] another exit. When Shun went deep down into the well, Gu Sou and Xiang together threw earth into the well [in order to] fill it up. Shun escaped from the secret tunnel.29

A puzzling question lingering around this story is: Why does Gu Sou repeatedly try to kill his own son? Viewing it as an expression of the father-son opposition, Lewis argues: “Gu Sou’s rejection of Shun can be interpreted as a consequence of fearing a son who becomes a duplicate of the father in order to replace him and assume his position in the world” (102). This reading may be valid in a broader context, but it is unsatisfactory when the particular text in the Shi ji is concerned. For one thing, Lewis’s explanation is articulated from the father’s perspective which is certainly not the point of view adopted by the narrator in the Shi ji. Although it is an overt third person narrative, the text demonstrates that, at the key moment, Shun becomes an implied focalizor.

According to Bal, “[f]ocalization is the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part, of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what C is doing” (149). Among the three elements, the B element is the subject of focalization—the focalizor which “is the point from which the elements are viewed” (Bal 149). In a way, we can also understand the focalizor’s vision as his/her knowledge; he/she sees and knows something which is communicated to the reader. In the Shun story, the narrator is the external focalizor,30 narrating and watching the characters from an external view point. However, at the moment when Shun descends into the well, the narrator’s vision overlaps with the vision of Shun’s, since, logically speaking, Shun alone is able to
see/know what happens in the well. Besides, the act of digging a secret tunnel also betrays the fact that Shun not only knows what he is doing, but also “sees” the father’s intention to kill him, otherwise he would not prepare for a secret escape. On the contrary, the father’s vision/knowledge is more blanketed in the narrative; we know very little about what Gu Sou “sees” in and knows about Shun. Hence, the key event in the story is narrated in accordance with the son’s vision/knowledge: the narrator tells and sees what Shun sees and knows. For this reason, Lewis’s explanation is not sufficient in helping us to understand Gu Sou’s action, because this story is not told as the father’s story but as the son’s. Hence, insofar as this particular text is concerned, Gu Sou’s real motivation for killing Shun is simply unknowable, which, one could argue, constitutes the navel of the text, the locus of the unconscious truth.

The *Shi ji* text suggests another answer. It reads: “Gu Sou loved his later wife and (her) son, always having the intention to kill Shun.”³¹ It implies that the “evil” stepmother is responsible for the father’s corruption; she is at the root of social-familial disintegration. However, what if the *femme fatale* is already the Father’s fantasy? In Žižek’s words, “the *femme fatale qua* embodiment of the universe’s corruption is clearly a male fantasy, she materializes its inner antagonisms, which is why she cannot be made into the *cause* of the ‘loss of reality,’ of the paranoidic mutation of the Other” (Enjoy Your Symptom 178). Hence, we can understand the father’s “corruption” as primary, which necessitates the creation of the evil, corrupting stepmother.

To deal with the enigma as to why Gu Sou wants to kill Shun, we need probably to perform the Hegelian “negation of the negation.” According to Žižek, “this double, self-referential negation does not entail any kind of return to positive identity…” (Sublime Object 176). For example,
[i]f antagonism is always a kind of opening, a hole in the field of the symbolic Other, a void of an unanswered, unresolved question, the “negation of the negation” does not bring us the final answer filling out the void of all questions: it is to be conceived more like a paradoxical twist whereby the question itself begins to function as its own answer: what we mistook for a question was already an answer. (Sublime Object 177, original italics)

That is, if antagonism is the first negation which brings into question the “original” state of things, the “negation of the negation” does not negate the antagonism by restoring the “original” state; rather, the result is a kind of “speculative identity”:32 the question (antagonism) itself is the answer. What is changed (or negated) in this dialectical process is the subject’s perspective: the solution to the Other’s lack is to acknowledge that this lack is not an obstacle but the very essence of the Other; social antagonism, which negates the harmonious state of being, can be negated only when we realize that antagonism is the very definition of society as such.

Hence, in response to the question as to why Gu Sou wants to kill Shun, I suggest that the motivation or cause behind the father’s attempted murders is not a question at all, because this murderous father is structurally determined, rather than motivated by a pathological reason. A more productive question is probably: How is this murderous father created in the first place? The Lacanian answer would be: the murderous father is the inevitable remainder of the symbolic castration. The transformation of the primordial father into the Name-of-the-Father generates its own remainder; “there is always a certain leftover that returns in the form of the obscene and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment…” (Žižek, Looking Awry 23). The death/castration of the pre-symbolic father creates simultaneously two fathers—“the symbolic agency of the Name-of-the-Father” and “the obscene and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment.” The latter is the internal antagonism which exceeds the patriarchal-symbolic order. Hence, in contrast
to the symbolic father /the Name-of-the-Father, the Father-of-Enjoyment can be viewed as the Real father, in the sense that he embodies that which escapes from symbolization. (Here, the “Real father” refers to the father of the Real, rather than the real, empirical father whom we know in our everyday reality.) In what follows, I will argue that the structural relation between Yao and Gu Sou in the filial piety story can be formulated in accordance with the opposition between the Name-of-the-Father and the Father-of-Enjoyment.

Gu Sou as the Real father is actually suggested by the text: as argued above, he as the unknowable father forms the enigma of the text and is thus located at the place of the navel which indexes the unconscious side of the text. Besides, other characteristics of Gu Sou also allow us to establish this equation. What is the actual function of the father’s blind eye? In seminar X, Lacan states: “What gazes at us? The white glaze of the blind man’s eyes, for example” (254). For Lacan, the blind eye is an example of the gaze—the objet petit a on the scopic level, which demonstrates “the split between the eye and the gaze.”

Does Gu Sou’s blind eye suggest the gaze? To answer this question and to understand the difference between the eye and the gaze, we need to take a detour to explain Lacan’s theory on the gaze.

Lacan’s gaze

Usually, we do not see the eye and the gaze as one and the same thing. For example, we may view the eye as an organ, and the gaze as one of the functions of this organ: the eye gazes at something. However, this is not the difference which Lacan has in mind. Simply put, “[w]hereas the eye represents the cogito—the conscious, self-reflexive subject and the subject of knowledge—the gaze represents the desidero: the subject of the unconscious and of desire” (Berressem 175). The split between the eye and the gaze is thus correlative to the division of the
subject into the conscious and the unconscious; the former sees and knows, while the latter is the blind eye which does not see.35

To illustrate the status of the gaze, Lacan compares it with the “photo-graph,” stating that the gaze is “the instrument through which light is embodied and through which … I am photo-
graphed” (Seminar XI 106, original italics). The metaphor of photo-graph indicates that Lacan not only separates the gaze from the eye/subject, but also views the gaze as a formative agency which preconditions our being in the visual world. As Grosz explains, for the subject “[t]o occupy a place in the scopic field is to be able to see, but more significantly, to be seen. The gaze is what ensures that when I see, at the same time, ‘I am photo-graphed’” (Jacques Lacan 79, original italics). Hence, even for a blind person, his/her existence in reality can still be registered on the visual level, because to be a part of the visual world is not only to see but also, more profoundly, to be seen, to be visible. To be photo-graphed is thus to be inserted into a picture, that is, into the scopic field.

I agree with Grosz’s reading that the gaze functions to “photo-graph” us and to ensure our being in the scopic field. However, she then departs from Lacan and mislocates the gaze, arguing that “[t]he gaze must be located outside the subject’s conscious control. If it is outside, for Lacan, unlike Sartre, this means that the gaze comes always from the field of the Other,” and that “the Other is the locus of signification” (Jacques Lacan 80). That is, Grosz locates the gaze at the “locus of signification”— the place where meanings are generated;36 in this way, the gaze is viewed as functioning within the domain of the symbolic order. However, let us not forget the fact that, for Lacan, the subject’s first outside is not the big Other, but the maternal Thing.37 As argued in chapter 2, the conscious subject is created through the process of alienation, by which the Other forces an individual to choose meaning at the expense of his/her being. Hence, the conscious subject him/herself is already located in “the field of the Other” where, according to
Grosz, comes the gaze. In this way, Grosz places the gaze and the conscious subject in the same domain of the symbolic.

Grosz’s interpretation echoes Silverman’s influential definition of the gaze as “the manifestation of the symbolic within the field of vision” (Threshold 168). Through a comparison between Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* and Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar XI), Silverman reaches the conclusion that “Lacan not only refines Sartre’s distinction between the gaze and the look, he deanthropomorphizes the gaze.… He thereby encourages us to think of the gaze more as the symbolic third term, or Other, than as an imaginary rival” (Threshold 175). Explained in this way, the gaze refers mainly to the big Other—the symbolic order—which predetermines the visual world accessible to the eye/ the conscious subject. This interpretation does help us to analyse the power structure inherent in the field of vision, and explains on its own terms why the gaze preconditions the eye/subject.

However, in my view, this interpretation is inconsistent with Lacan’s main thesis: “The objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze” (Seminar XI 105, original italics). That is, for Lacan, the gaze is not the big Other, but a form of the lost object—the object which the Other does not have. 38

As Copjec points out, the theoretical misunderstanding of the Lacanian gaze is “produced by a precipitous, ‘snapshot’ reading of Lacan, one that fails to notice the hyphen that splits the term *photo-graph*—into *photo*, ‘light,’ and *graph*, among other things, a fragment of the Lacanian ‘graph of desire’—as it splits the subject that it describes” (Read My Desire 32). That is to say, the “photo” refers to the light which Lacan usually associates with the gaze (the instrument embodying light); and, the “graph” can be understood as the structure of subjectivity (as formulated through the ‘graph of desire,’ for example). Being “photo-graphed” is thus to be split between “photo” and “graph,” between the light and the figures of representation, and between the gaze and the barred, desiring subject in reality. The metaphor of the “photo-graph”
can thus be read as follows: having being “photo-graphed,” I am inserted into the space of visual reality (graph) and transformed into a barred subject who is barred from the gaze/light (photo). Moreover, what is barred from the gaze is not only the subject but also the field of the visible itself. As the instrument which takes pictures but itself cannot be located therein, the gaze is that which must be excluded from the visual field. (As shown in Lacan’s final graph of the scopic field, between the gaze and the “subject of representation,” there is an image-screen which blocks and conceals the gaze from the field of representation.)

We may at this point recall the incompatibility between the objet petit a and reality:

Lacan pointed out that the consistency of our “experience of reality” depends on the exclusion of the objet petit a from it: in order for us to have a normal “access to reality,” something must be excluded, “primordially repressed.” In psychosis, this exclusion is undone: the object (in this case, the gaze or voice) is included in reality, the outcome of which is the disintegration of our “sense of reality,” the loss of reality.

(Zižek, Less Than Nothing 667)

In the story of Shun, the gaze returns in the form of the father’s blind eye. Unlike the parents in story 7 whose blind eyes signify simply a lack/desire, Gu Sou bears another significance: as a man without eyes, he is not only unable to see but also ignorant of the social-symbolic norms; he is thus not portrayed as a conscious subject of knowledge. In this way, we can understand Gu Sou’s blind eye as an embodiment of the gaze (the desidero) in opposition to the “eye” (the cogito). On the one hand, Gu Sou occupies the place of the original light who fathers (photographs) the son’s being in the (visual) world. However, on the other hand, he is not the light from which the son is barred, but the light intruding into the son’s reality: endowed with a murderous
intention, his blind eye (his ignorance) becomes the impenetrable stain traumatizing the social intersubjective reality. If Gu Sou is a wan, ignorant person, it is probably because he has never been properly situated on the level of knowledge; that is, he somehow exceeds the domain of the symbolic order.

The father’s blind eye

If we can read Gu Sou’s blind eye as an embodiment of the gaze, this reading should be developed on two levels in accordance with the paradoxical nature of the objet petit a. First, as a signifier of desire/lack, the impenetrable gaze (that is, the father’s blind eye) can be read as indicative of the Other’s desire: is not the enigma of the father’s intention to kill the son an expression of the fundamental question of “Che vuoi”? “What do you want from me?” “Why do you want to kill me?” Second, this opacity of the Other’s desire is capsulated directly by Gu Sou’s blind eye—“the white glaze of the blind man’s eyes” which gazes at the son but does not see him. That is, this eye which doesn’t see eschews the intersubjective relation; it does not bespeak a person’s subjectivity, but attests to the materiality of an object—the gaze qua the surplus object. As argued in chapter 4, this surplus object—such as the birds in Hitchcock’s Birds—gives body to the return of the repressed; more specifically, they embody the impossible jouissance. In the essay “Alfred Hitchcock, or, the Form and its Historical Mediation,” Žižek argues that “the birds are Phi [Φ], the impassive, imaginary objectification of the Real—an image which gives body to the impossible jouissance” (8). In a way, the father’s irrational insistence on killing the son resembles the birds, generating the traumatic effect; his devalued blind eye is just another image of the return of the repressed, attesting to the “crime” of castration (represented here as the Confucian negation of the sagely connotation of the blind eye), and, at the same time, embodying the Real jouissance denied by the Confucian teachings. The
murderous Gu Sou can thus be understood as the Father-of-Enjoyment—a spectre of the Other’s lack/desire turned as the surplus enjoyment.

The son’s encounter with the gaze (the *objet petit a*) gives rise to his anxiety. It is probably not from the impending death that Shun must escape; he escapes from the anxiety aroused by his confrontation with the Other’s desire which is now materialized and present in the father’s impenetrable gaze. However, because Shun is a “Confucian” sage, he not only escapes from but also subjects himself to the gaze. The text in the *Shi ji* states: “[when Gu Sou] wanted to kill [Shun], [Shun] was not available; [when he] needed [Shun], [Shun] was always there.”

The *Ershisi xiao* text focuses entirely on the son’s effort to satisfy the father’s needs; he works hard to support the family. However, Shun’s unconditional obedience is demonstrated not only in his effort to satisfy the father’s need, but also in his cooperation in the father’s plot to kill himself. As shown in the two attempted murders, Shun knew the plot in advance; otherwise he would not dig a secret tunnel. That is, he does not escape from the father’s plot, but submits to it. It seems that, for a filial son, there is no way of escaping from the cruel father: he must take whatever risk, in order to satisfy his father; if he is lucky, he could probably avoid death.

This cruel, revengeful father repeatedly emerges in Confucian narratives. In the *Kongzi jiayu* (Family Sayings of Confucius), we find a story which narrates a conflict between Zeng Can 曾參 and his father Zeng Zhe 曾皙. It tells: Zeng Can made a mistake, which enraged his father. The father was so angry that he beat the son with a walking stick. This attack caused the son’s temporary loss of consciousness. However, without any complaints, the son, after regaining his consciousness, apologized to the father for making him so angry, and offered his thanks for the father’s discipline. This story resembles the Shun story in two aspects. The son
obeys the father unconditionally; and the father’s punishment on the son is unnecessarily cruel. However, Zeng Can, rather than being praised, was allegedly criticized by Confucius himself.

According to the Kongzi jiayu, Confucius used Shun as an example to ridicule Zeng Can’s behaviour, stating that

Have you ever heard that? In ancient times, Gu Sou had a son called Shun. Shun’s way of serving his father was that if [the father] needed him, he was always there. If [the father] wanted to kill him, he was never available. He accepted [the punishment inflicted by] a little hammer, but escaped from [the punishment brought out by] a big stick. Therefore, Gu Sou never committed an unfatherly crime; and Shun did not lose his great filial piety. Today, [you, Zeng] Can, serves [your] father by surrendering your body to [his] rage, [and] not escaping from [the possibility of being] killed. [It] will not only lead to your own death but also bring [the name of] unrighteousness to [your] father. There is no other thing which is more unfilial than your deed.45

According to “Confucius,” the difference between Shun and Zeng Can lies in their ways of responding to the father’s punishment. Unlike Shun who managed to escape from the punitive father, Zeng Can sacrificed himself to satisfy the father’s rage. However, “Confucius” was wrong on this issue. First, Shun did not escape from the father’s irrational killing, but obeyed his father’s demand. What he achieved is to diminish the consequence of the father’s action. Second, it is simply impossible for Zeng Can to avoid the father’s attack. The text in the Kongzi jiayu tells that the father attacked Zeng Can on his back. That is to say, this attack comes from behind, from a place which Zeng Can cannot see. How can the son avoid it, if he did not see/know the father is about to attack him? Hence, Zeng Can’s father highlights the unconscious nature of the Father-of-Enjoyment; the Real father strikes the subject from a place beyond his conscious knowledge.
Lacan’s term for this Real Father who is imaginarily equipped with the objet petit a (the gaze in Gu Sou’s case) is “superego”: “In calling to mind its obvious connection with this form of the object a that the voice is, I indicated that there cannot be any valid analytic conception of the superego that loses sight of the fact that, in its deepest phase, it is one of the forms of the object a” (Seminar X 295). Due to the limited space here, I am not able to clarify the connection between the superego and the voice qua the objet petit a on the invocatory level. It is probably sufficient to stress the point that, for Lacan, the superego is not the Law, but occupies the place of the objet petit a, functioning to supply the Law with that which the big Other lacks. Hence, the superego is “the awesome figure of ‘the Other of the Other,’ the Other without a lack, the horrendous Other—not merely the Other of law, but at the same time the Other of its transgression” (Dolar, Voice 100).

IV

The Symbolic Father: Yao as the “Name-of-the-Father”

Zeng Can’s story is not ended yet. Immediately after recovering from the father’s attack, Zeng Can retreated to his room, and played his zither. Why? The text in the Kongzi jiayu explains it as Zeng Can’s intention to comfort his father, saying that “[Zeng Can] wanted Zeng Zhe [his father] to hear him playing music, so that he would know his son’s health was unharmed.” The question is: since there could be many other ways of informing his father of his health, why did Zeng Can choose such an indirect method? It is probably not a coincidence that the same music instrument also appears in the story of Shun: in the Shi ji, we are told that Yao gives Shun a zither as a gift. Hence, it seems to me that the zither has a specific function in the filial piety narratives.
Among all music instruments, the zither (*qin* 琴) was probably the most honourable one in ancient China. The name “*qin*” is believed to be derived from the character “*jin*” 禁 meaning “to prohibit,” or “to imprison,” because the sounds of the zither “restrain and check all evil passions” (Williams 259). This function served by the zither is consistent with the Confucian ideal of harmony. As one scholar points out that, for the Confucians, “a crucial characteristic of harmony is heterogeneity rather than singularity. Harmony implies the fusion of various elements into a coherent order” (Li 42). Implicitly, harmony requires the regulation (or rather restraint) of heterogeneous elements, whose purpose is to establish a coherent (social) order. By integrating different sounds of instruments and different tones of voices into a coherent whole, music seems to exemplify this ideal. For this reason, together with the rites, music had been regarded as an important measure of disciplining and educating social subjects. (This relation between music [*yue* 樂] and rites [*li* 禮] is also attested to by the fact that these two terms are usually used as a compound—“*li yue*” 禮樂.) Hence, I suggest that the zither does not figure in the filial piety narratives randomly, but carries out a symbolic function as a token of social order. In this sense, Zeng Can’s plying the zither can be understood as an attempt to restore the order—the homeostatic state of harmony which has been disturbed by his father’s irrational violence.

In the story of Shun, the zither—a gift given by Yao—brings into Shun’s life another father who counterbalances the excessive force embodied by Gu Sou. As suggested above, Yao can be viewed as the symbolic father—“the symbolic agency of the Name-of-the-Father” (Žižek, Looking Awry 23) who guarantees the social order. The Name-of-the-Father—acting merely as an abstract signifier—is an accurate description of Yao’s existence in the Shun story. In the *Shi ji* and the *Ershisi xiao* texts, this symbolic father only makes his appearance through his name (or an object such as the zither). He is a character, but not an actor, who is absent from the events
involved in the son’s family life. Yao is the father-in-law—the Father existing only in the Law, that is, in the symbolic order.

The division between Yao and Gu Sou seems to illustrate Lacan’s early thesis on family which is summarized by Žižek as follows:

In the modern bourgeois nuclear family, the two functions of the father which were previously separated, that is, embodied in different people (the pacifying Ego Ideal, the point of ideal identification, and the ferocious superego, the agent of cruel prohibition; the symbolic function of totem and the horror of taboo), are united in one and the same person. (Ticklish Subject 313, original italics)

As Žižek points out in this passage, in the pre-modern family, there was a physical separation between the two paternal functions: “the symbolic function of totem” versus “the horror of taboo” which were related respectively to “the pacifying Ego Ideal” and “the ferocious superego.” One of Žižek’s examples of the symbolic father is “a stone or an animal or a spirit” which some aborigines believe to be their “true father” in contrast to the “real father” in their daily life (Ticklish Subject 313). (Here the “real father” should be distinguished from the Real father.) Is not the zither in the story of Zeng Can another example of the “symbolic function of totem,” serving as a stand-in for the “true father”—the “pacifying Ego Ideal”? When Zeng Can plays the zither, he probably finds the pacifying father in the music instrument which helps to maintain the Confucian ideal of harmony. In the Shun story, the equation between the zither and the ego ideal is probably more evident. For one thing, Yao—the original owner of the zither—demonstrates all characteristics which can be attributed to the ego ideal. First, in contrast to Gu Sou, he was the pacifying father. Rather than ignoring Shun’s virtue, he not only rewards him with material things, but also marries off his two daughters to him. Second, as the ego ideal, Yao functions as
the point of view, in accordance with which Shun examines and models himself. Hence, the son follows in Yao’s footstep and becomes a sage king by himself.

If Yao and the zither function as the ego ideal, we may accordingly view Gu Sou and Zeng Zhen as the superego embodying the “horror of taboo”—a taboo which, as we will see, functions primarily to prevent patricide. At this stage, we can already discern the coexistence and even complicity between the two fathers. Why has Gu Sou’s position in the family never been challenged by the sage king Yao (and, for that matter, by the symbolic order), despite his moral deficiency? Why is it that Shun must first submit himself to Gu Sou’s demand, before being rewarded by Yao and becoming a sage king? The Lacanian explanation is that “symbolic authority is by definition the authority of the dead father, the Name-of-the-Father; but if this very authority is to become effective, it has to rely on a (phantasmic) remainder of the living father, on a piece of the father which survived the primordial murder” (Žižek, Indivisible Remainder 154, original italics). When Žižek talks about the living, he refers not only to a living person but also to the life-substance—jouissance—as opposed to the symbolized body. Hence, the “living father” designates the superego dimension of the Father—the dimension which actually exceeds and transgresses the Law represented by the Name-of-the-Father.

This relation between the two fathers explains the seemingly strange phenomenon in late imperial China: according to the imperial legal system, the parent who killed his/her child was to receive only a minor or no punishment.49 If we follow “Confucius’s” logic as formulated in the story of Zeng Can, this phenomenon can be explained as follows: if the child is dead due to the parent’s punishment, it is not the parents’ fault but the fault of the child’s. It is the child’s responsibility to avoid such a punishment; if he/she fails to do so, he/she is unfilial. No matter how ridiculous this logic may sound, it actually attests to the fact that, in the case of parent-child relation, the parent is not the subject of the law, but its executioner. Why did the state tolerate
those murderous parents who actually violated the law against murders, if not because the law actually needed the transgressors—the superego figures—to impose the patriarchal-phallic power? In this sense, the Yao-Gu Sou relation can be formulated as follows: Yao provides the Confucian morality with a benevolent and pacifying façade, while Gu Sou forms its coercive and violent foundation. More dramatically, one is tempted to argue that, if Yao stands for the Law—the big Other which lacks the organ of jouissance and is thus impotent, Gu Sou embodies the castrated organ, functioning as the phallus for Yao. In short, these two paternal functions are not antagonistic towards each other, but functionally complementary: first, the Name-of-the-Father depends on the superego to have a real impact on the subject; second, I suggest, the symbolic father (Yao) can be viewed as pacifying only in comparison with the anxiety-raising Father-of-Enjoyment (Gu Sou): the more horrifying the latter is, the more appealing the former becomes.

V

Back to the Imaginary Father

If Shun was viewed as a (or the) exemplar of filial piety, his family relationship should also be considered exemplary of the ideal Confucian family structure in general. The characteristics revealed by this story should therefore inform us about not only the Confucian way of being a son, but also the way of structuring a family relationship. One of the most salient features of the family, in which a sage king is to emerge, is the rigid separation between the two fatherly functions represented respectively by Yao/the ego ideal and Gu Sou/the superego. As I will argue, this division helps to maintain the rule of the Name-of-the-Father.
As Žižek points out above, in a modern nuclear family, these two functions “are united in one and the same person” (Ticklish Subject 313, original italics), which, he continues, contributes to the undermining of the symbolic authority.

The ambiguous rivalry with the father figure, which emerged with the unification of the two functions in the bourgeois nuclear family, created the psychic conditions for modern Western dynamic creative individualism; at the same time, however, it sowed the seeds of the subsequent “crisis of Oedipus” (or, more generally, with regard to figures of authority as such, of the “crisis of investiture” that erupted in the late nineteenth century): symbolic authority was more and more smeared by the mark of obscenity and thus, as it were, undermined from within. (Ticklish Subject 313)

The existence of only one father in a family necessitates the redoubling of the symbolic father: the ego ideal is inevitably undermined by the obscene superego, due to their unification in one and the same person. Following Žižek’s logic and rephrasing his argument in a reversed fashion, one could suggest that the patriarchal authority would not be undermined, if and only if the two paternal functions can remain separated. In other words, the Name-of-the-Father can keep its power untouched only under the condition that the unification of the two paternal functions is dissolved. In this sense, the division between Yao and Gu Sou in the Shun story is probably staged for a particular reason: it serves to prevent the internal deficiency of the patriarchal rule.

In addition to the separation between the two fathers, there is still, in my view, another requirement for the absolute patriarchal rule. When Žižek identifies the two paternal functions, he seems to overlook the function of the empirical father—the father who supposedly carries out these functions. That is, there are actually three fathers: besides the symbolic father (Name-of-the-Father) and the Real father (Father-of-Enjoyment), there is the empirical father with flesh and blood who, as a social subject, is not much different from the son. To a great degree, this
empirical father—a subject of desire—always undermines the paternal functions. As Zupančič argues, there are always “the gaps between the empirical father and the name-of-the-Father”; “Oedipus’ dramatic trajectory crosses a space where his symbolic parents and his real (in the empirical sense) parents fail to coincide” (Ethics 191). To support her point, Zupančič quotes from Lacan:

At least in a social structure truly like ours, the father is always, in some way, a father discordant with his function, a deficient father, a humiliated father …. There is always an extremely sharp discordance between that which is perceived by the subject on the level of the real, and the symbolic function. It is this gap that gives the Oedipus complex its value. (qtd. in Zupančič, Ethics 191, original italics)50

The Oedipus tragedy results from Laius’s failure to fulfil his symbolic function. He is killed unknowingly by his son, simply because he is perceived by the son not as the father representing the Name-of-the-Father, but as “a rude and aggressive traveller” (Zupančič, Ethics 192). In other words, Laius—the empirical father—has failed to establish the Name-of-the-Father, which leads not only to his own death but also to the failure of the symbolic system itself; this failure is represented by the son’s violation of the fundamental Law—that is, the incest taboo: Oedipus unknowingly marries his mother.

Because the Confucian social-familial structure is not truly like ours, Laius’s failure was somehow avoided in the Confucian system. However, it is not because the gap between the symbolic father and the empirical father did not exist in pre-modern China, but because the Confucian system was, to a great degree, sustained by such a gap. In other words, there was not only a division between the Name-of-the-Father and the Father-of-Enjoyment, but also a separation between the symbolic father and the empirical father. The second separation was best demonstrated in the practice of ancestor worship, by which the symbolic father was embodied.
literally by the dead father’s Name—such as the name written on the ancestral tablet which was to be worshiped by the son as well as by the son’s empirical father. In this way, this name had more authority than the living father himself did. Resembling the zither in the two filial piety stories, the ancestral tablet can be viewed as a family totem, serving to register a symbolic position separated from the empirical living father. Consequently, the function of the symbolic father was unlikely to be compromised by the failure of the empirical father, since the latter was not the primary agency to carry out this function; no matter how weak or deficient the empirical father was, the symbolic father couldn’t be diminished, because he was already the dead father—the ancestor embodied only by a dead signifier. In this way, we can better understand why the ancestor worship was so important for the Confucian society: it served to overcome the inevitable discordance between the empirical father and his symbolic function, and thereby to ensure the longevity of the patriarchal rule in China.

Still, a third separation is needed, if the absolute patriarchal system can be achieved. Actually, Laius’s tragic end is caused not only by his failure to fulfil his symbolic function as the Name-of-the-Father, but also by his failure to act as the Father-of-Enjoyment/superego. He “stupidly” engaged in a dispute with Oedipus, and tried to compete with him. It is not what the superego father will do, who, like Gu Sou and Zeng Zhe, will never let himself be involved in a competition with the son, since he is simply beyond the son’s reach. As portrayed in the filial piety stories, the father and the son are not situated on the same level: the Father-of-Enjoyment gives body to the unconscious domain of the Real, while the son belongs to the symbolic-imaginary reality. Hence, in the case of Laius, there is another discordance—the discordance between the Real father and the empirical father, which, in my view, makes Laius ultimately a humiliated father killed by his own son: in the last analysis, Laius’s mistake is that he allows the son to treat him as the son’s other—an ordinary individual with whom the son can identify or
compete; that is, Laius’s failure resides in the fact that he is somehow placed within the imaginary order—the order of our daily life.

To a certain degree, the coincidence between a Real father and an empirical imaginary father seems unavoidable. In “Beyond the Oedipus Complex,” Russell Grigg argues:

Lacan refers to this real father as the master-agent and guardian of enjoyment. Although impossible to analyze, he says in *Television*, it is quite possible to imagine the real father. What the subject has access to in analysis is figures of the imaginary father in his multiple representations: castrating father, tyrannical, weak, absent, lacking, too powerful, and so on. (60-61)

That is, because the order of the Real is inaccessible for the subject, the Real father can only be approached through the imaginary order. Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the Real father from an imaginary formation created through the subject’s imagination and perception. Here, the imaginary father refers not only to the mythical father such as the primordial father or the sagely Gu Sou, but also to the empirical father whom we experience in reality.

The consequence is that, insofar as the Real father is embodied by an imaginary-empirical father, he is subjected to the son’s rivalry. As Žižek argues,

> The Oedipus myth is based on the premise that it is the father, as the agent of prohibition, who denies us access to enjoyment (i.e., incest, the sexual relationship with the mother). The underlying implication is that parricide would remove this obstacle and thus allow us fully to enjoy the forbidden object. (Looking Awry 24)

This passage points out one of the essential weaknesses of the imaginary father: once trapped within a rivalry dual relation with the son, the father (such as Laius) is perceived as a *removable* obstacle. Hence, the imaginary father—be it the “too powerful father” like the “primordial father,”
or the humiliated father as Laius—is always vulnerable to the possibility of being “killed” or “negated” by the son, since “a ‘humiliated father’ [is] caught in imaginary rivalry with his son” (Žižek, Ticklish Subject 313). As pointed out above, Žižek argues that, in our modern times, the symbolic authority is weakened by the unification of the ego ideal and the obscene superego. To add to this insight, I would like to argue that, prior to the weakened “symbolic authority,” the power of the ferocious superego has already been undermined by the “humiliated father”; that is, insofar as the Real father is positivized by a person in reality, he cannot but be perceived as a finite and thus avoidable individual (which is clearly demonstrated by the tragic fate undergone by Laius and the “primordial father”).

This weakened Real father has also a role to play in undermining the patriarchal authority, because, as argued earlier, the Name-of-the-Father depends on the Father-of-Enjoyment to execute its rule effectively. My hypothesis here is that the modern “crisis of Oedipus” becomes possible, not only due to the unification of the two paternal functions, but also because of the intervention of the imaginary-empirical father. Or, we may even argue that the patriarchal system has never been solid, and is always vulnerable from within, since the influence of the empirical father is an unavoidable fact. However, this generalized argument is not without exceptions. At this point, we need to return to the filial piety stories. Gu Sou is not Laius, because he is not a humiliated father. One of the important reasons for it is that, strictly speaking, Gu Sou is not even portrayed as a normal person. His unfathomable insistence on killing his son functions to locate the father at a place beyond the ordinary run of things. In this way, Gu Sou is not treated as a Laius-like subject—an empirical father—with whom the son identifies or rivals, but constructed as an anxiety-raising object—the gaze embodying both the Other’s desire and its jouissance. Hence, the key difference between the filial piety stories and the Oedipus myth is that there is a lack of the empirical father in the former. This lack makes the formation of a father-son rivalry
relationship impossible: even if the father is viewed as an obstacle, he is not imagined/perceived as something removable, because he is simply beyond the subject’s reach and strikes the son from the unconscious. In this way, the punitive superego father makes patricide unthinkable and impossible.

The point is not that the imaginary father did not exist in the Confucian family. As a matter of fact, insofar as we perceive things with our earthly eyes, we necessarily create an imaginary reality. My argument is rather that, according to the Confucian ideal, the empirical father was not supposed to be treated as an imaginary father. That is, although the individual father can be perceived as revengeful or weak, the Confucian model of filial piety, as reflected in the filial piety stories, dictates that these perceptions should not have any real implications for the son’s behaviour in his interaction with his father. It seems that, insofar as the father-son relationship is concerned, the father’s (imagined) personality did not really count; the filial son should react to his father in a uniform way, unconditionally obeying his wish, regardless of the son’s perception of the father. In other words, there was a depersonalization of the empirical father at work, which, in my view, served to objectify the father, and to transform him into a fetish—a stand-in for the impossible objet petit a.$^{51}$

This fetish-like parent is vividly demonstrated in story 12 ("Kemu shiqin 刻木事親") which tells the story of a son’s serving two wooden sculptures carved in the likeness of his deceased parents. Knapp reads this story as a literal enactment of the mourning principle that “[one should] serve the dead as if [one] serves the living” (shi si ru shi sheng 事死如事生) (152).$^{52}$ In my view, this story can also be interpreted as the reverse of the principle: the living should be served as if they are dead, insofar as the dead can be understood as referring to an inanimate object. In other words, this story seems to articulate the idea that the parents should be treated not as people but
as fetishes. As we have observed so far, all parents in the _Ershisi xiao_—such as the mother in story 11 (discussed in chapter 3) who is deprived of any activities in the narrative—resemble more or less a passive object receiving their children’s service in a way that a fetish does. Yet, this fetish-like parent is different from the ancestral tablet—a symbolic stand-in for the missing Father. For one thing, as demonstrated in story 12, the wooden sculptures are not quite dead, but possess real life; they shed blood and tears.\(^53\)

If the wooden sculpture can be interpreted as a literal rendering of the status of an empirical parent, we can probably argue that, when the parents are reduced or elevated to the status of a fetish-like object, they become something akin to the ghost mother caught between the two deaths: they are dead in the sense that they are treated as a motionless object; at the same time, they are alive, embodying the life substance—blood and tears.\(^54\) As argued in chapter 2, this liminal position between the two deaths marks the impossible place of the Thing. In this sense, the affinity between the wooden sculptures and the murderous Gu Sou becomes evident: in different ways, they represent the Real dimension of the Other. In short, in the ideal Confucian family, there are two and only two fathers—the Name-of-the-Father (ego ideal) and the Father-of-Enjoyment (superego). If the former was represented by a symbolic object—such as the name written on an ancestral tablet or a zither, the latter was embodied by the depersonalized empirical parent, by which the parent in reality was simultaneously negated and elevated to the level of the Thing—that is, becoming the Real Father. Stated in this way, the Confucian filial morality uncannily resembles the Lacanian sublimation which is defined as the elevation of an object to the level of the Thing (Seminar VII 112). However, as I will argue, there is a crucial topological difference between them.

In the Freudian tradition, sublimation is generally regarded as a process of substitution which replaces a sexual object with a socially accepted (or even valued) object.\(^55\) Lacan redefines...
sublimation, stating that: “[T]he most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises an object...to the dignity of the Thing” (Seminar VII 112). What does Lacan mean by “raising an object”? One of his examples is Jacques Prévert’s collection of matchboxes, whose massive presence generates a satisfying effect.56 In his discussion of the matchbox collection, Lacan maintains that his purpose of providing this example is to show “what it means to invent an object for a special purpose that society may esteem, valorize, and approve” (Seminar VII 113, my italics). The point here is that Lacan relates sublimation with “invention”; the object in question is not (or not primarily) a found object (a matchbox) but an object which is invented; that is to say, for him, sublimation is not simply the substitution of one thing for the Thing, but involves the creation of something new. The matchbox fable is thus followed directly by a new chapter titled “On creation ex nihilo” (Lacan, Seminar VII 115), where Lacan maintains: “I posit the following: an object, insofar as it is a created object, may fill the function that enables it not to avoid the Thing as signifier, but to represent it” (Seminar VII 119). Creation is specified here as creating a particular signifier which is able to represent the Thing.

Lacan’s example of this signifier is the vase:

If it really is a signifier, and the first of such signifiers fashioned by human hand, it is in its signifying essence a signifier of nothing other than of signifying as such or, in other words, of no particular signified. …

This nothing in particular that characterizes it in its signifying function is that which in its incarnated form characterizes the vase as such. (Seminar VII 120)

This passage makes it clear that, if the vase signifies the Thing, what is represented here is not the Thing as such, which is simply impossible, but the nothingness of the Thing within the symbolic reality. In other words, by containing a void, the vase functions as a pure signifier—a signifier without the signified, whose fundamental purpose is to create an empty space in reality. Through
the vase, Lacan demonstrates that sublimation is a process of creating not only an object but also a void. It is probably not the object but the void which represents the Thing.

Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as nihil, as nothing. (Lacan, Seminar VII 121)

Hence, as Stavrakakis summarizes, “sublimation is closely related to an attempt to encircle the real, to create a space for the unrepresentable within representation” (132).

In short, in the Lacanian sense, sublimation is a creation ex nihilo, which raises an ordinary object (the vase for example) to the level of the Thing in order to create, through the object, the empty space for the Thing. Hence, one could argue that the difference between sublimation and the filial morality is actually a matter of topology: if sublimation aims at rendering visible the gap in the symbolic order—that is, the Thing in its radical negativity, filial morality served to create a fetish—an imaginary embodiment of the Real Father whose function is to positivize the impossible Thing. The former shows the Other’s desire/lack, the latter fills it up with the Other’s demand. In other words, the Father-of-Enjoyment is simply the surplus object which is installed as a means of plugging the hole in the Name-of-the-Father; the symbolic edifice of a Confucian society is thus always sustained by the Father’s jouissance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate the division between two Fathers. Although usually viewed as a negative figure, Gu Sou—the Real Father—is indispensable to the regime of the symbolic Father (represented here by the sage king Yao). These two Fathers carry out two
paternal functions: the symbolic Father is the pacifying ego-ideal, in accordance with which the subject forms his/her symbolic identity, while the Real Father—represented by a superego figure such as Gu Sou and Zeng Zhe—constitutes the coercive and punitive force, functioning as the executioner the Father’s Law. Despite the huge contrast between these two Fathers, they are not contradictory but complementary: the superego supports the symbolic Father by being his phallus, embodying the return of the castrated organ. Hence, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows us to see the fact that the patriarchal system is never ruled by the Name-of-the-Father alone. This implies that the negation of the symbolic Father is not enough to challenge the Father’s rule, because it will leave the Real Father intact; the negated Father will return and rule as the murderous obscene superego. “Superego emerges,” says Žižek, “when the Law—the public Law, the Law articulated in the public discourse—fails; at this point of failure, the public Law is compelled to search for support in an illegal enjoyment” (Metastases 54).

Hence, the Lacanian ethical imperative is: “never give up on your desire!” The only way to resist the Other is not to kill the Father, but to desire: because the subject’s desire is always already the desire of the Other, it is only through our desire that the Other’s desire/lack can be rendered visible. “Without this lack in the Other,” Žižek warns us, “the Other would be a closed structure and the only possibility open to the subject would be his radical alienation in the Other” (Sublime Object 122). Hence, desire is an ethical stance; to desire is to insist on our own lack, whereby we keep the hole of the Other widely open. It is only then that we can distance ourselves from the Other’s dominance. There is probably no better way to end our discussion than to cite a passage from Žižek’s Tarrying with the Negative.

[T]he duty of the critical intellectual—if, in today’s “postmodern” universe, this syntagm has any meaning left—is precisely to occupy all the time, even when the new order (the “new harmony”) stabilizes itself and again renders invisible the hole as such,
the place of this hole, i.e., to maintain a distance toward every reigning Master-Signifier. In this precise sense, Lacan points out that, in the passage from one discourse (social link) to another, the “discourse of the analyst” always emerges for a brief moment: the aim of this discourse is precisely to “produce” the Master-Signifier, that is to say, to render visible its “produced,” artificial, contingent character. (2, original italics)

When somebody is calling for the resurrection of the Confucian Father, we only need to show how the Master-Signifier “xiao” was produced and reproduced.

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1 Yao is one of the legendary sage kings who ruled China in the pre-historical times; he was followed by Shun and then by Yu. 

2 Sima Qian 司馬遷 was a Grand Scribe at the Han imperial court. The Shi ji records the history from the pre-historical time of the legendary kings to the author’s own time, and has been ranked among the twenty-four official histories. For more bibliographical information, see Hulsewé.

3 Although untold in the Ershisi xiao, this episode was not unknown to its audience, which had been transmitted through various means such as the Confucian classics and the Buddhist texts called “bian wen” 变文 (transformation text). For the Buddhist version of the Shun story, see Zheng 363-406.

4 There are two exceptions: in story 4, the father is portrayed generally as an impartial father; and, in story 10, there is a faceless father.

5 Ranked among the Four Books, the book Meng zi 孟子 is organized as a collection of Mencius’s (ca. 372-289 BCE) conversations with his contemporaries. For bibliographical information on the Mencius, see Lau. In the Meng zi, Gu Sou is mentioned on several occasions, mostly in the Chapter “Wan zhang shang 帥章上.” For a narration of Gu Sou’s attempted murders in the Meng zi, see Meng zi ji zhu, juan 5, 3A. In terms of the written form of Gu Sou’s name, there is a difference between the Meng zi and the Shi ji: while, in the Meng zi, the second character of the name is written as瞍, it is changed into叟 in the Shi ji. These two characters seem to be exchangeable.
The Zuo zhuan—also known as the Chunqiu zuo zhuan 春秋左傳— was traditionally attributed to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 who was probably a contemporary of Confucius. Conventionally, the Zuo zhuan is believed to be a commentary on the Chun qiu 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) allegedly compiled by Confucius himself. For bibliographical information on the Chunqiu and the Zuo zhuan, see Cheng.

“自幕至于瞽瞍，無違命。舜重之以明德.” Lewis’s translation. See Lewis 100. For the Chinese text, see Chunqiu zuo zhuan zhushu, juan 44, 38A-B.

After quoting this passage from the Zuo zhuan, Lewis puts forward a similar argument, stating that “this passage simply reveals an early tradition of a virtuous Gu Sou who established a foundation for the subsequent achievements of Shun” (Lewis 100).

The authorship of this book is unclear, which is traditionally attributed to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, the same author of the Zuo zhuan. Supplementing the Zuo zhuan, the Guo yu is a collection of speeches of rulers and prominent persons from different states in the Spring and Autumn period. For more information, see Chang et al. In the Guo yu, we find the following statement: “Mu 幕 of Yu was able to discern the harmonious wind and thereby complete music, so that things would be born. Yu 禹 of Xia was able to completely level out water and earth, and thereby properly place everything according to their categories (虞幕能聽協風，以成樂物生者也。夏禹能平治水土，以品處庶類者也).” Lewis’s translation, see Lewis 101. For the Chinese text, see Guo yu, juan 16, 4A.

For a survey of the meanings of “gu” and “sou,” see Sterckx 197-98.

The Chou (or Zhou) 周 dynasty is dated roughly from 1046 BCE to 256 BCE.

For other scholarly literature on this topic, see, for example, Sterckx 167-202; Lewis 100-02.

It is generally believed that the Lüshi chunqiu was created under the patronage of Lü Buwei 吕不韋—a chancellor of the state of Qin 秦 and died in 235 BCE. This book contains texts covering various subjects, ranging from music to agriculture. For bibliographical information, see Carson and Loewe.

For an English translation of the text in question, see Lewis 101.

For a discussion of the social-discursive factors in transforming the myths in early China, see Allan.

“虞舜者，名曰重華。重華父曰瞽叟；“舜父瞽叟盲，而舜母死.” For the Chinese text, see Shi ji jijie, juan 1, 11A.
The *Shang shu*, also known as the *Shu jing*, contains some of the earliest writings in Chinese history. But parts of the book were added in a much later time. The passage in question is from the chapter “yao dian” which is now generally believed to be one of the later texts, roughly dating from the last century of the Zhou dynasty. For more information of the *Shang shu*, see Shaughnessy. Kong Anguo—-a scholar from the Western Han dynasty—is believed to be a descendent of Confucius’s.

“無目曰瞽。舜父有目，不能分別好惡。故時人謂之瞽，配字曰瞍。瞍無目之稱。” See *Shang shu zhushu*, juan 1, 30B.

“舜父瞽叟頑。” See *Shi ji jijie*, juan 1, 11A.

“心不則德義之經為頑” See *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhushu*, juan 14, 30B.

This passage is basically identical to the text in the *Zuo zhuan*. Hence, I continue to use Lewis’s translation of the *Zuo zhuan* text. In the *Shi ji*, this passage appears in the chapter “Chen Qi shijia” see *Shi ji jijie*, juan 36, 6A.

“重華父曰瞽叟，瞽叟父曰橋牛，橋牛父曰句望，句望父曰敬康，敬康父曰窮蟬，窮蟬父曰帝顓頊，顓頊父曰昌意：以至舜七世矣。自從窮蟬以至帝舜，皆微為庶人。” See *Shi ji jijie*, juan 1, 11A.

Qi 氣 is generally translated in English as the “life energy” or “life force.”

“口內味而耳內聲，聲味生氣。氣在口為言，為目為明。言以信名，明以時動。” Sterckx’s translation, see Sterckx 176. For the Chinese text, see *Guo yu*, juan 3, 20B.

In *The Indivisible Remainder*, Žižek translates the murder of the primordial father as “the king of the pre-symbolic substance of enjoyment” (150).

For a discussion of this point, see chapter 2 above.

Lewis’s study may lend some support to my argument. According to him, Shun as the heir to Yao’s throne reversed the familial hierarchy, and placed himself above his father; it seems that there were some negative views of Shun as unfilial. Hence, “the emphatic insistence on Shun’s filial piety in the *Mencius* [Meng zi]and texts derived from its account almost certainly reflect the need to defend the sage from these widespread accusations of betraying his father” (Lewis 85). Lewis’s argument implies that Mencius’s conception of filial piety emerged as a response to the son’s “betrayal,” “negation,” of his father.
The phrase “anamorphotic grimace” is borrowed from Žižek. See Enjoy Your Symptom! 161.

“瞽叟尚复欲杀之，使舜上涂廪，瞽叟从下纵火焚廪。舜乃以两笠自捍而下，去，得不死。后瞽叟又使舜穿井，舜穿井为匿空旁出。舜既入深，瞽叟与象共下土实井，舜从匿空出，去。” See Shi ji jijie, juan 1, 12A.

We have an external focalizor, when “an anonymous agent, situated outside the fibula, is functioning as focalizor” (Bal 152).

“瞽叟愛後妻子，常欲殺舜。” See Shi ji jijie, juan 1, 11A.

The most famous example of the “speculative identity” is Hegel’s thesis that “spirit is a bone.” In psychoanalysis, it would be the formula of fantasy: $<>a$. See, Žižek’s Indivisible Remainder 101-02.

“The Split between the Eye and the Gaze” is a chapter title in Lacan’s eleventh seminar, see Seminar XI 67.

In terms of the drive, the distinction between the eye and the gaze can also be seen as the difference between the erogenous zone and the object of the scopic drive.

In Seminar XI, Lacan states that “our position in the dream [that is, in the unconscious] is profoundly that of someone who does not see” (75).

The notion of “signification” had been developed throughout Lacan’s career. It basically denotes “the process by which the effect of meaning is produced” (Evans 188).

See chapter 2 above.

As Lacan points out, “[t]he gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the trust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety” (Seminar XI 73). Although Lacan uses the word “symbolic” in this passage, he does not mean that the gaze belongs to the symbolic order. Rather, as the phallus, it is a symbol or a signifier of the lack.

For Silverman’s explanation of the function of the screen, see Silverman, Threshold 150.

For the objet petit a as the signifier of the Other’s desire, see chapter 3 above.

Generally speaking, Φ (Phi) is “[t]he phallus as signifier of desire or jouissance” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 173). For Φ as the signifier of desire, see chapter 3 above.

For anxiety as an response to the Other’s desire, see chapter 3

“欲殺，不可得；即求，嘗在側。” See Shi ji jijie, juan 1, 11B.
The Kongzi jiayu (or simply Jia yu 家語) is “basically a collection of ancient lore centring around the figure of Confucius, his teachings and his principles, and the events in his life” (Kramers 258). For bibliographical information, see Kramers.

“子曰：「汝不聞乎？昔瞽瞍有子曰舜，舜之事瞽瞍，欲使之，未嘗不在於側；索而殺之，未嘗可得。小棰則待過，大杖則逃走，故瞽瞍不犯不父之罪，而舜不失烝烝之孝。今參事父，委身以待暴怒，殪而不避，既身死而陷父於不義，其不孝孰大焉！” See Jia yu, juan 4, 5A-B.

Lacan’s theory of the superego departs from the Freudian tradition. For Freud, “the super-ego’s role in relation to the ego may be compared to that of a judge or a censor. Freud sees conscience, self-observation and the formation of ideals as functions of the super-ego” (Laplanche and Pontalis 435). As we will see these three functions of the superego are, for Lacan, the functions served by the ego-ideal which is a symbolic agency.

欲令曾晳而聞之，知其體康也.” See Jia yu, juan 4, 5A.

“[T]he ego-ideal is essentially a point outside of the ego from which one observes and evaluates one’s own ego as a whole or totality, just as one’s parent observes and evaluates it” (Fink, Lacan to the Letter 117).

See Ch’ü 24-30.

The sculpture’s shedding tears is not mentioned in the Ershisi xiao text, but narrated in many earlier versions of this story. For a survey of different versions of this story, see Knapp 191-94.

For the story of the ghost mother and the notion of the two deaths, see chapter 2 above.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis, sublimation is a “[p]rocess postulated by Freud to account for human activities which have no apparent connection with sexuality but which are assumed to be motivated by the force of
the sexual instinct...The instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones” (431).
