

Body Metaphors and Body as Metaphor

**The language of the body and bio-political language
in ancient China and beyond**

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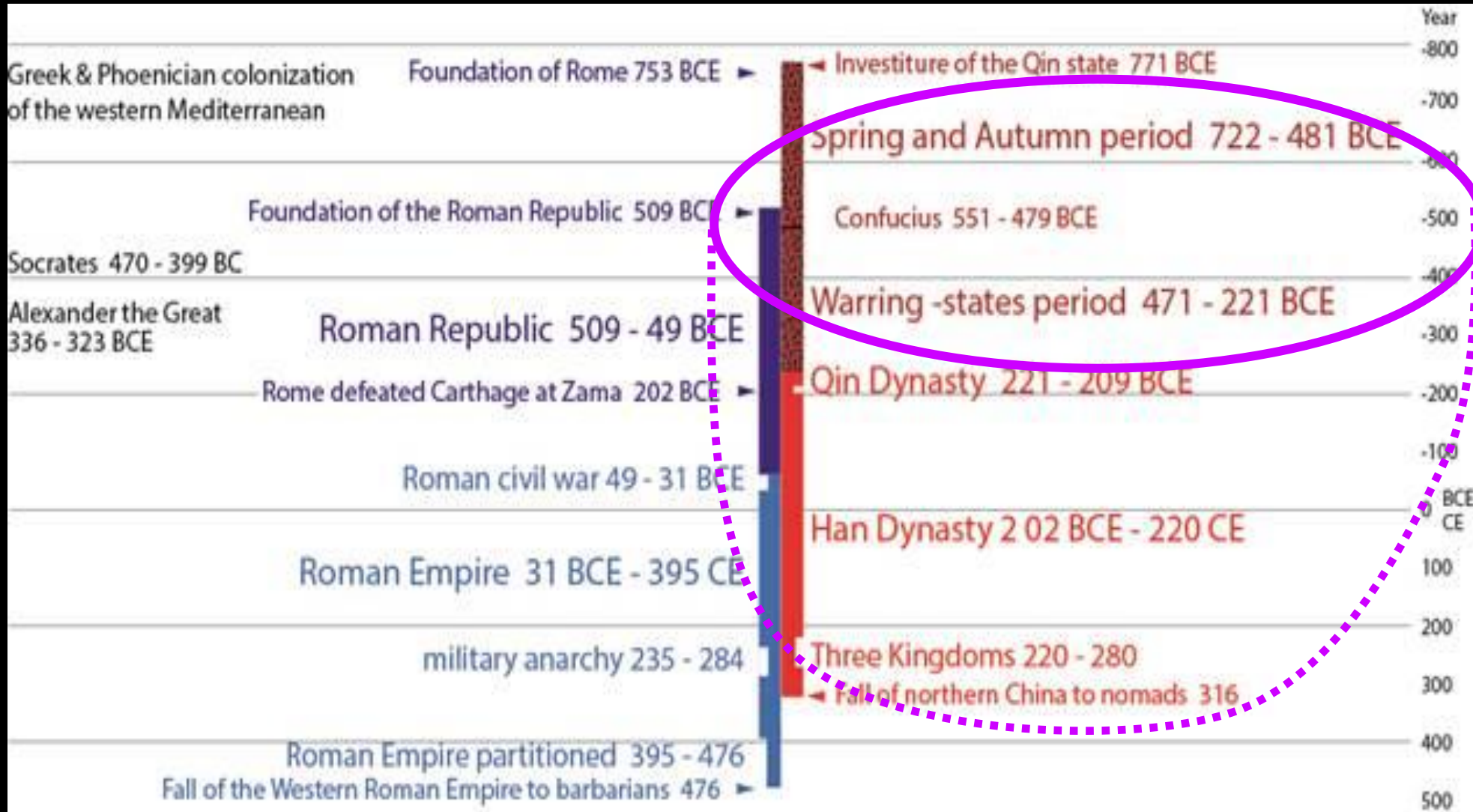
BODY METAPHORS AND BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- The body (both in its entirety and its component body parts) as socio-political metaphor as a well-established communicative strategy in Western philosophy
- Still a relatively understudied area in Classical Chinese thought, especially the attempt to synthesize similarities existing in “bio-political” language across different kinds of texts and/or traditions
- “bodily language” as a pervasive rhetorical strategy in early Chinese politico-philosophical discourse: ideal of an organic, holistically integrated, (ethical, or at least organically functioning, i.e. each component does its part) government

BODY METAPHORS AND BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- The **semantics of the body** in premodern China
- Entanglement between **self-body-mind**
- Different **types of “body”** in premodern China
- **the body as metaphor in politico-philosophical language in ancient China: the medical (physical and physiological) body and the socio-political body (the state and the government)**
- **Relevance and use of a similar “language of the body” in contemporary Chinese political discourse (?)**

ANCIENT CHINA AND CLASSICAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY A BASIC PERIODIZATION



ANCIENT CHINA AND CLASSICAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

A BASIC PERIODIZATION

- **Zhou**

- **Western**

1122–770 BC

- **Eastern**

770–222 BC

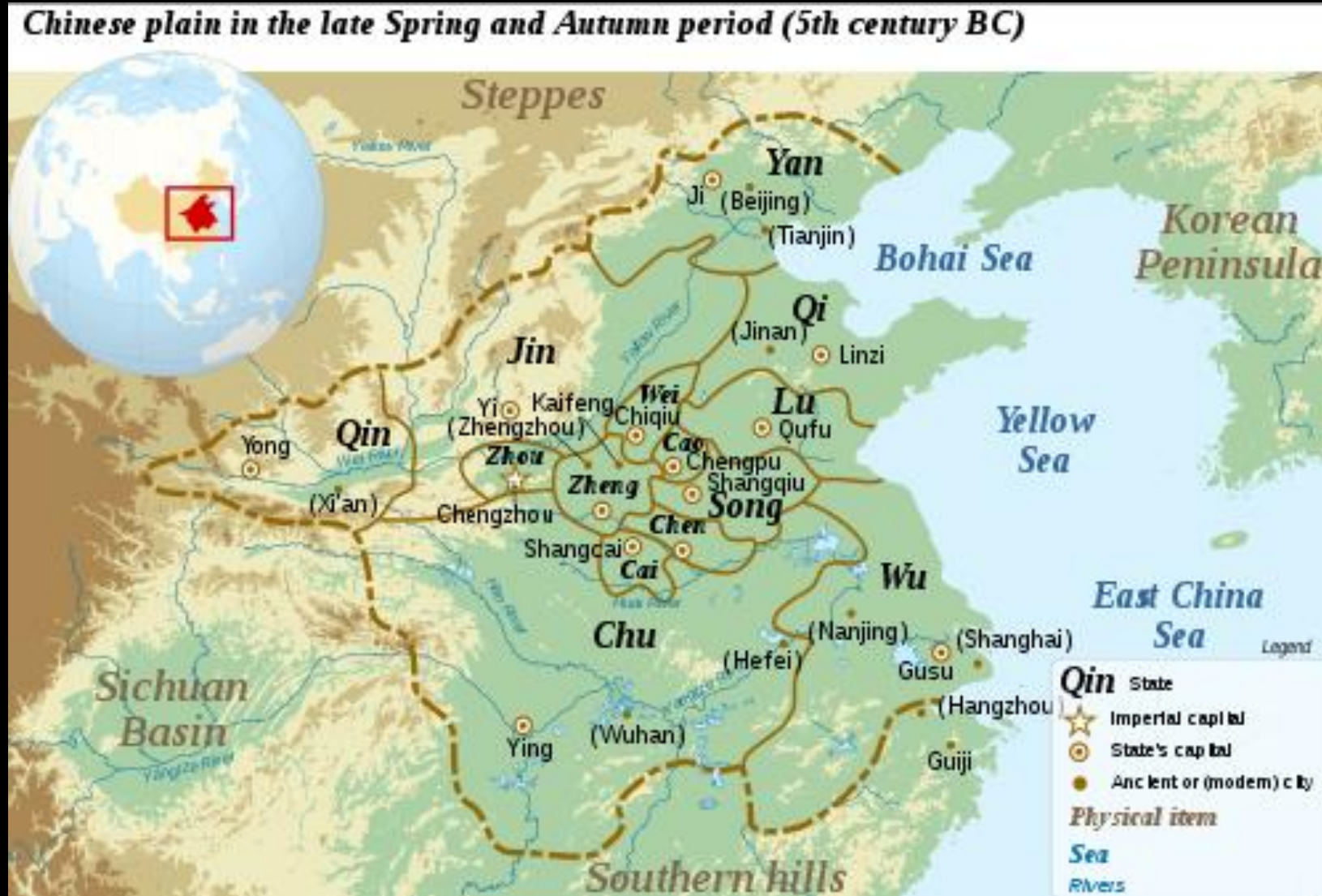
- **Spring and Autumn**

770–476 BC

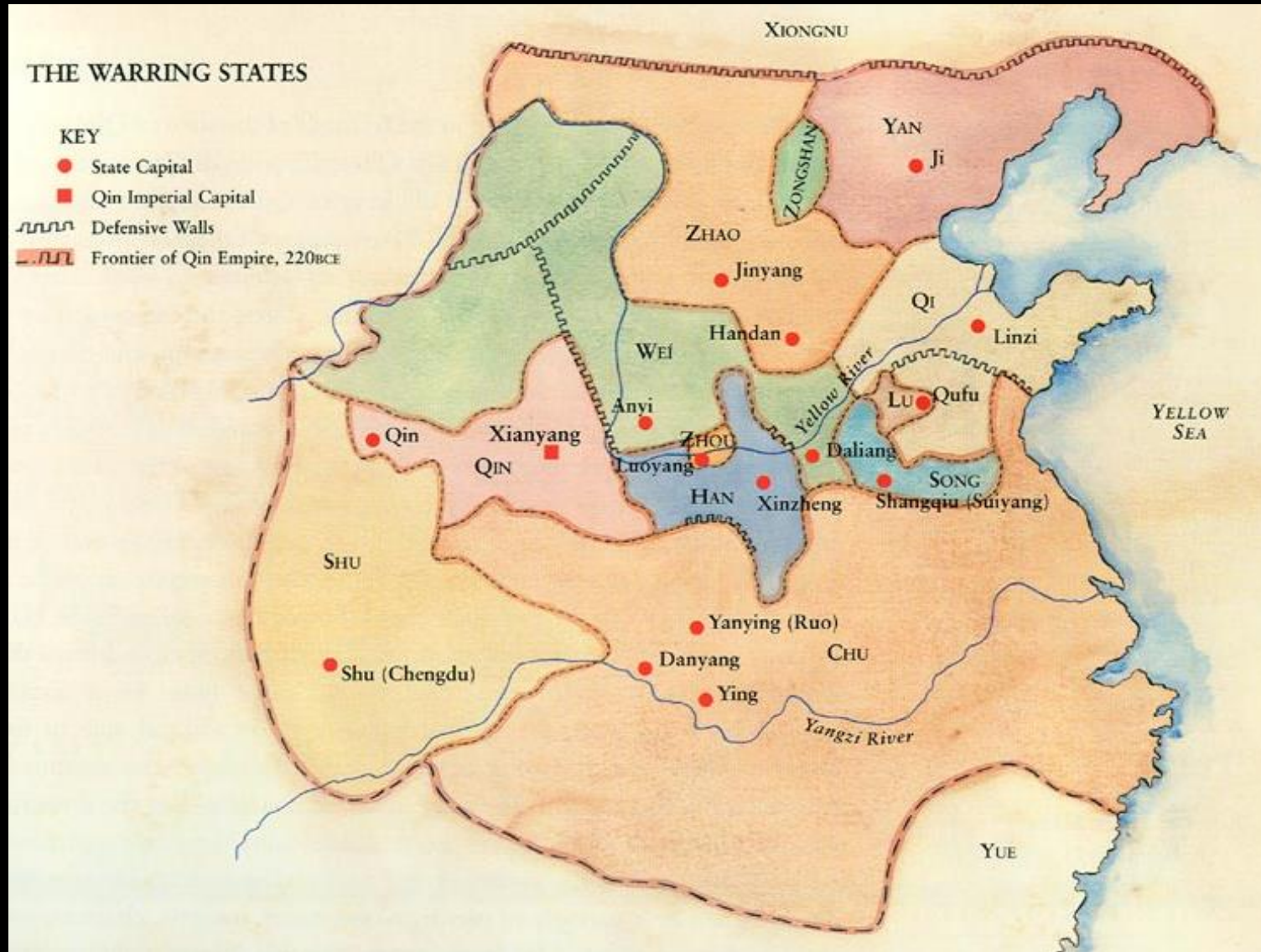
- **Warring States**

475–221 BC

THE SPRING AND AUTUMN PERIOD (770–476 BC)



THE WARRING STATES PERIOD (475–221 BC)



THE WARRING STATES PERIOD (475–221 BC)



(Image by B. Blair)

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- Entanglement between self-body-mind
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- the body as metaphor in politico-philosophical language in ancient China: the medical (physical and physiological) body and the socio-political body (the state and the government)
- Relevance and use of similar “language of the body” in contemporary Chinese political discourse (?)



DISCOURSES ON THE BODY IN EARLY CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

The polysemy of the body

- The medical (physical and physiological) body: medical texts
- The socio-political body: philosophical texts
- The mystical, Daoist body: the body as landscape and country

BODILY LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY IN ANCIENT CHINA

- The early Chinese intellectual landscape is characterized by a rich vocabulary to describe different aspects, dimensions, modalities, and/or functions of the body
 - The socio-political body
 - The body as the self, the “individual” (private dimension)
 - The body in its ritualized and/or social function (public dimension)
 - The medical/physical body
 - The body as physical, physiological and psycho-emotional entity
 - The body as “behavioral mirror”

BODILY LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY IN ANCIENT CHINA

- **shen 身** : one's (physical, psychical, and emotional) self, one's person, the self, persona, body, possibly the closest term to a "sense of self", personhood, embodied self
- **gong 躬** : one's (physical, psychical, and emotional) *ritualized* self, one's person, body, the torso – bowing at the waist out of respect
- **xing 形** : form, shape, body frame, constitutive and intrinsic attribute that makes something be what it is (in ontology, form)
- **ti 體** : the physical body, flesh and bones, the four limbs (also: zhi 支, extremities), (in ontology, substance)
- **rong 容** : outer appearance, demeanour, outward behaviour, countenance, facial expression
- **se 色** : outer appearance, countenance, looks, facial expression

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

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- Relevance and use of similar “language of the body” in contemporary Chinese political discourse (?)

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- The threefold nature and function of the body as:
- as psycho-emotional unity of the individual (the self, shen 身)
- as physical entity (the body, ti 體)
- as seat of consciousness (the heart-mind, xin 心)

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- **The threefold nature and function of the body as:**
 - as psycho-emotional unity of the individual (the self)
 - as seat of consciousness (the heart-mind)
 - **as physical entity (the body)**
 - The physical body (private dimension - the individual)
 - The political body
 - The social body } (public dimension - the community)

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- **The body as physical entity**

- The physical body (private dimension - the individual)
- The political body } (public dimension - the community)
- The social body }

- **The body as metaphor and body metaphors:**

Official titles and government roles and positions to describe the body and the relationship between its organs and their respective functions (even in medical texts)

- **Body as a state:** the heart (= ruler) governs the body (= country) and its organs (= his officers)

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

Body = Country

Heart = Ruler

Organ = Officer

Organ = Officer

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DISCOURSES ON THE BODY IN EARLY CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

**The polysemy of the body and the body as
(political) metaphor**

- **The medical (physical and physiological) body: medical texts**
- **The socio-political body: philosophical texts**
- **The mystical, Daoist body: the body as landscape and country**



THE MEDICAL BODY

THE MEDICAL BODY

The physical and physiological body

- The internal organs
- The external organs
 - The orifices
 - The limbs
 - The senses (= sensory organs)

THE MEDICAL BODY

The physical and physiological body and its political dimension

- On a macro-level:

- the heart governs the body and the organs
- the ruler governs the state and the ministers

- On a micro-level:

- the heart governs the other sensory organs
- the ruler governs the ministers



THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL BODY, BODY PARTS AND ORGANS

- Internal organs (zangfu 臟腑):

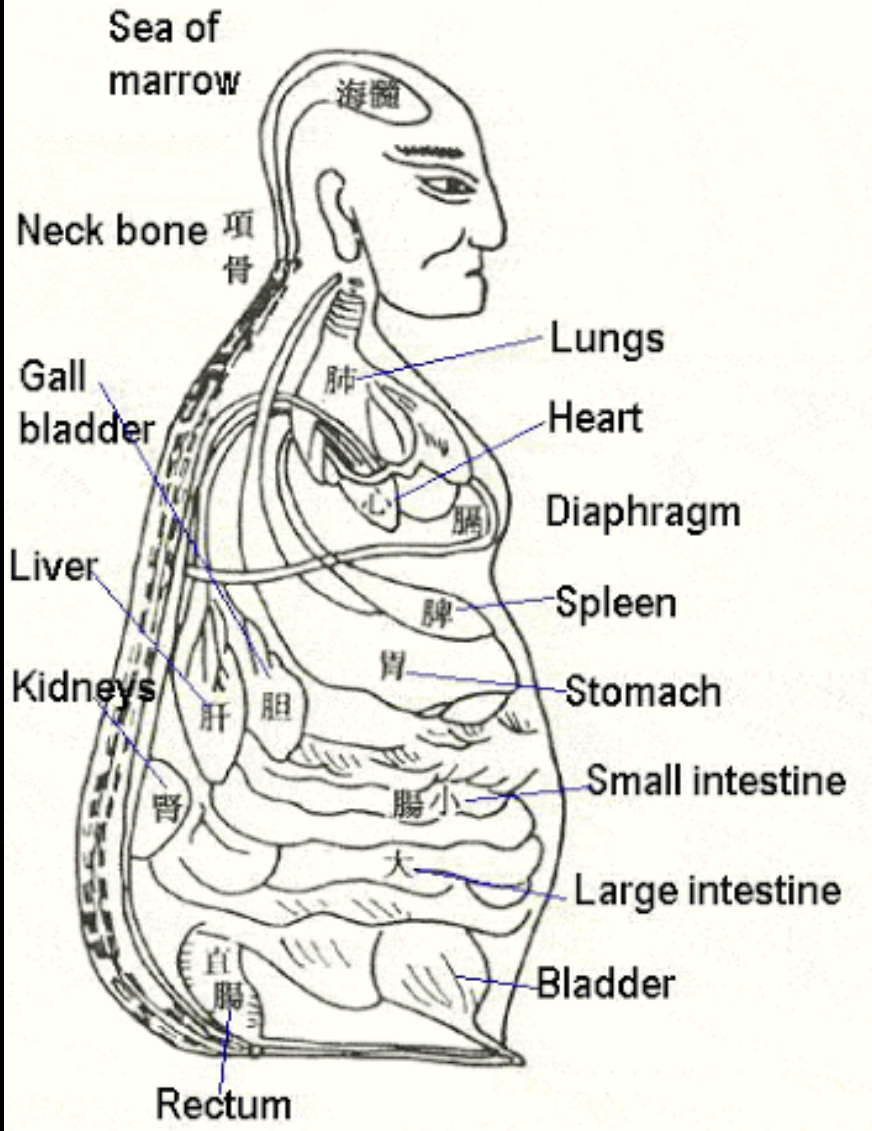
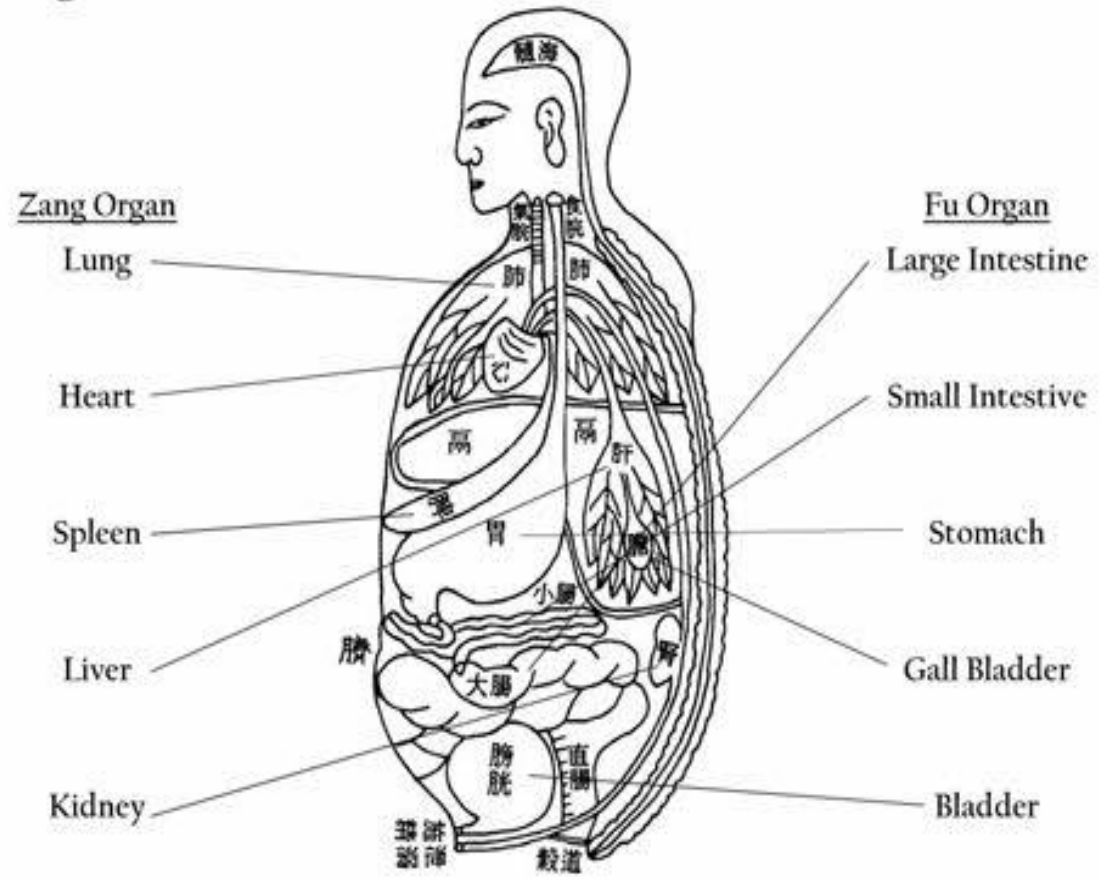
- **five zang 臟 “solid” organs or viscera** (associated with the cosmic principle of yin 陰): heart (xin 心); lungs (fei 肺); liver (gan 肝); spleen (pi 脾); kidney (shen 腎), ruling over:
 - **five constituents**, blood vessels (mai 脈); skin (pi 皮); tendons (jin 筋); muscles (ji 肌); bones (gu 骨)
- **six fu 腑 “hollow” organs or receptacles** (associated with the cosmic principle of yang 陽): gallbladder (dan 膽); stomach (wei 胃); small intestine (xiaochang 小腸); large intestine (dachang 大腸); urinary bladder (pangguang 膀胱); and sanjiao 三焦 “triple burner or energizer” (three visceral cavities housing internal organs).

- (External organs)

- **Five sensory organs and nine orifices (jiuqiao 九竅):** two eyes (yan 眼); two ears (er 耳); nose (bi 鼻); mouth (kou 口); genitalia (qianyin 前陰); urethra (niaodao 尿道); and anus (gangmén 肛門).
- **Four limbs or extremities (siti 四體 or sizhi 四肢/支)** (can also be a sense)

THE MEDICAL BODY

TCM Zang Fu



The “Twelve Officials” of the *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine, ca. 3rd cent. BC)

Organ System	Position	Meaning
Heart	Monarch	Represents the individual consciousness and serves as the sovereign of all of the organs and wisdom. Leads spiritual transformation
Lung	Minister	Aids the heart in regulating the qi of the body
Liver	General	Acts courageously and intelligently, carefully assessing circumstances and planning action
Gall Bladder	Impartial Judge	Applies discernment to guide appropriate action
Pericardium (Tanzhong, Tandanzhong)	Envoy (Ambassador)	Where joy is derived from, like a court jester
Stomach / Spleen	Officials in Charge of Food Storage	Act as officials for food storage and assimilation
Large Intestine	Transportation Official	Directs the processing of food and the transformation and passage of waste
Small Intestine	Receiving Official	Receives food from the stomach and spleen and further assimilates, distributes and divides the pure from the turbid (useful vs. waste)
Kidney	Health Official	Direct the creation of power in the body, distribution and activity of the extremities, coordination, and the mental powers of focus and willpower
Triple Heater (San Jiao, Triple Warmer)	Irrigation Official	Directs the transformation and use of fluids throughout the body
Urinary Bladder	District Official	Stores fluids so when they are enacted by qi they can flow outward to the systems

(adapted from www.yinyang.com)

心者，君主之官，神明出焉。肺者，相傳之官，治節出焉。肝者，將軍之官，謀慮出焉。膽者，中正之官，決斷出焉。膻中者，臣使之官，喜樂出焉。脾為諫議之官，知周出焉。胃為倉廩之官，五味出焉。大腸者，傳道之官，變化出焉。小腸者，受盛之官，化物出焉。腎者，作強之官，伎巧出焉。三焦者，決瀆之官，水道出焉。膀胱者，州都之官，精液藏焉，氣化則能出矣。凡此十二官者，不得相失也。

The heart is the official acting as lord and ruler, intellectual clarity stems from it. The lungs are the official acting as chancellor and preceptor, order and precepts stem from them. The liver is the official acting as general, planning and consideration stem from it. The gallbladder is the official acting as equalizer and rectifier, resolutions and decisiveness stem from it. The pericardium/dan zhong [cavity or chest hollow between the breasts, rules the qi and its distribution among the organs] is the official acting as minister and envoy, joy and happiness stem from it. The spleen is the official acting as admonisher and critic/debater, awareness and thoughtfulness stem from it. The stomach is the official responsible of granaries and warehouses, the five flavors stem from it. The large intestine is the official in charge of ways of transport, changes and transmutations stem from it. The small intestine is the official that receives and redistributes resources, the transformation of things stem from it. The kidneys are the official of fortification, techniques and skills stem from it. The triple burner/sanjiao is the official acting as ditch opener, water channels stem from it. The urinary bladder is the official in charge of provinces and municipal districts/municipalities, bodily fluids are stored in it, when the qi undergoes a change of physical state of mater, then (urine) can flow from it. In general, these twelve officials cannot lose track of one another. (Huangdi Neijing 'Suwen' 皇帝內經·素問)

THE MEDICAL BODY

The physical and physiological body and its political dimension

- On a macro-level:

- the heart governs the body and the organs
- the ruler governs the state and the ministers

- On a micro-level:

- the heart governs the other sensory organs
- the ruler governs the ministers



THE MEDICAL BODY

THE SENSES AND THE SENSORY ORGANS

Five senses ≡ sensory organs, “five offices or officers” (wuguan 五官)

- Competing taxonomies of the senses across texts and intellectual traditions, the most commonly acknowledged ones include:
 - **Sight** (mu 目, eye)
 - **Hearing** (er 耳, ear)
 - **Smell** (bi 鼻, nose)
 - **Haptics** (cutaneous + kinaesthetic perception, “muscle memory”) (ti 體, body; xing 形, form, body; tixing 體形, body; siti 四體, four limbs; guti 骨體, bones and body; shouzu 手足, hands and feet)
 - **Heart-mind** (xin 心, heart, heart-mind)

THE MEDICAL BODY THE SENSES AND THE SENSORY ORGANS

耳目鼻口形能各有接而不相能也，夫是之謂天官。心居中虛，以治五官，夫是之謂天君。

The ears, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, and the body shape/(frame) are all capable of receiving/have their receptive capacity (i.e. acquiring sensory information from external stimuli), but cannot perceive each others' percepts, these are called the Heavenly officers. The heart resides in the central hollow cavity to rule over the five officers, this is called the Heavenly ruler.

(Xunzi 'Tianlun' 荀子·天論)

DISCOURSES ON THE BODY IN EARLY CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

The polysemy of the body and the body as (political) metaphor

- The medical (physical and physiological) body: medical texts
- The socio-political body: philosophical texts
- The mystical (Daoist) body: the body as landscape



**THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BODY
THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR**

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BODY THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR

The physical body as socio-political body: bio-political language

- The **heart** is envisioned **as the ruler**, the different **organs as officials** ruling over different offices and in charge of specific, univocal tasks
- Harmony is ensured through a **correct functioning** of all the different organs/departments – **of the body, as well as of the state**
- **Disorder and turmoil (luan 亂)** are often depicted **as a disease** affecting the (social and political) body (illness metaphors)
- Pervasive discourse across different textual traditions: not an exclusive concern of certain trends of thought, or typology of texts

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BODY THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR

國君一體。

The country and the ruler constitute one single body.

(Gongyang Zhuan 'Zhuang Gang si nian' 公羊傳·莊公四年)

子曰：「民以君為心，君以民為體；心莊則體舒，心肅則容敬。心好之，身必安之；君好之，民必欲之。心以體全，亦以體傷；君以民存，亦以民亡。[... ..]」

The Master said: **“The people treat their ruler as their heart, the ruler treats his people as his own body.** If the heart is grave, then the body is at ease; if the heart is solemn, then countenance is respectful. If the heart is fond of something, a person will necessarily find solace in it; if the ruler is fond of something, the people will necessarily desire it. **The heart becomes wholesome through the body, and so it is also harmed through the body.** A ruler is preserved thanks to the people, and so he also perishes by the hand of the people. (Liji 'Ziyi' 禮記·緇衣)

BODY METAPHORS AND BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

Body = Country

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Organ = Officer

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THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BODY THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR

君之在國都也，若心之在身體也。[… …] 四肢六道，身之體也。四正五官，國之體也。四肢不通，六道不達，曰失。四正不正，五官不官，曰亂。

The ruler resides in the country's capital just like the heart resides in a person's body. [...] The four limbs and the six orifices are the (physical) body of a person. The four ministers and the five officials are the body of the country. If the four limbs are obstructed, the six orifices do not reach their goal, I call this a major failure. If the four ministers do not set things straight and the five officials do not perform their duties, I call this disorder.

(Guanzi 'Junchen xia' 管子·君臣下)

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BODY THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR

心之在體，君之位也。九竅之有職，官之分也。耳目者，視聽之官也，心而無與視聽之事，則官得守其分矣。夫心有欲者，物過而目不見，聲至而耳不聞也，故曰：「上離其道，下失其事」。故曰，心術者，無為而制竅者也。

In the body, the heart occupies the position of the ruler. The functions of the nine orifices corresponds to the subdivision of tasks of ministers/of the (nine) offices. Ears and eyes are the officers/sense organs of eyesight and hearing, if the heart does not get involved in the act of seeing and hearing, then the offices/sense organs will indeed be able to maintain their separate functions. If the heart is filled with desires, the eyes will not be able to see things passing by, the ears will not be able to perceive sounds that reach them. Therefore I say: "If superiors depart from the Way, inferiors will neglect their assignments." Therefore I say: "The art of the heart consists in regulating the orifices without engaging in proactive action." (*Guanzi* 'Xinshu shang' 管子·心術上)

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**The polysemy of the body and the body as
(political) metaphor**

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- **The socio-political body: philosophical texts**
- **The mystical (Daoist) body: landscape and country**

內經圖

魏蘭金張
魏蘭金張

延壽
一粒粟中藏世界
仙僊
昇陽府

eyes

head

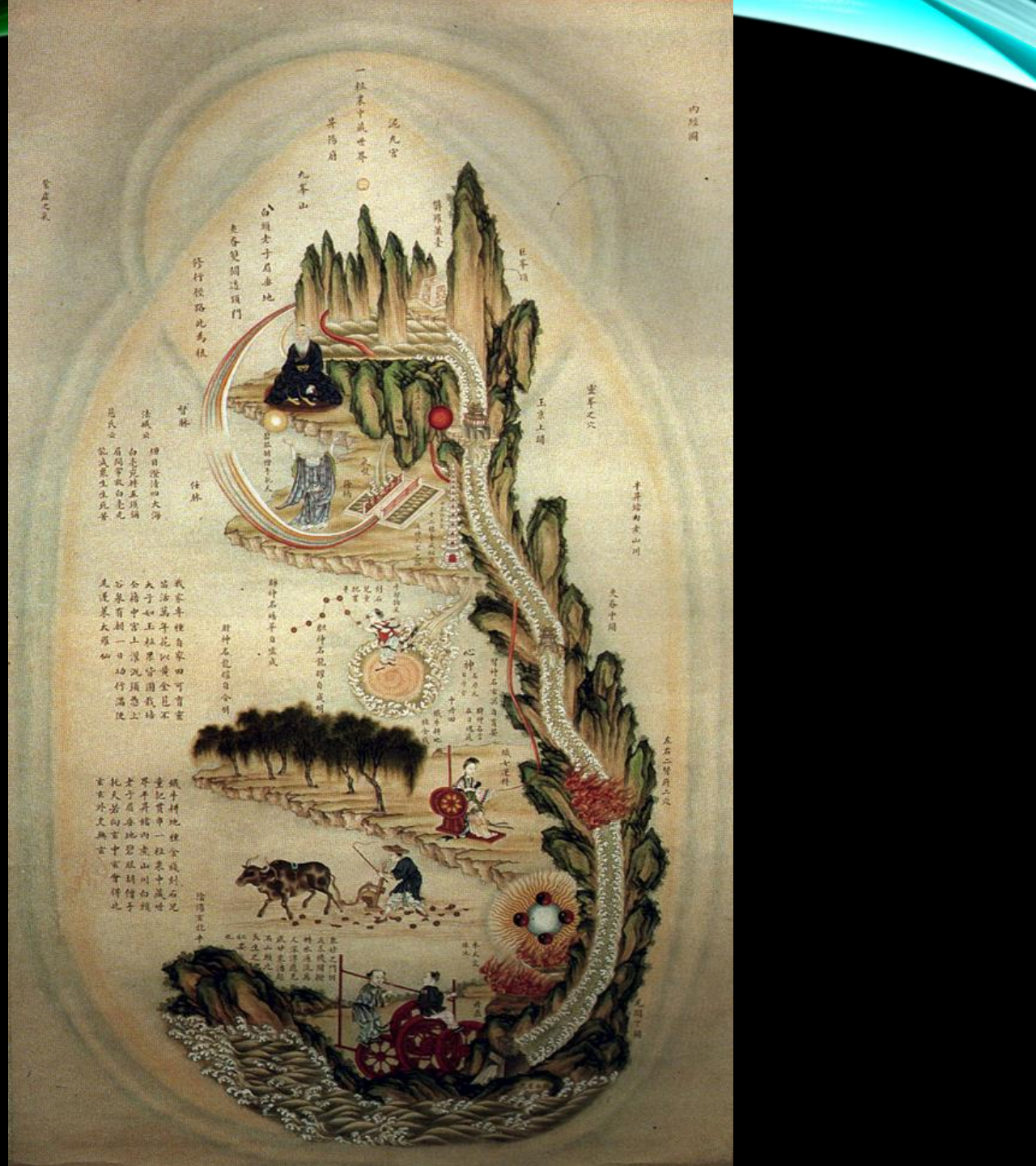
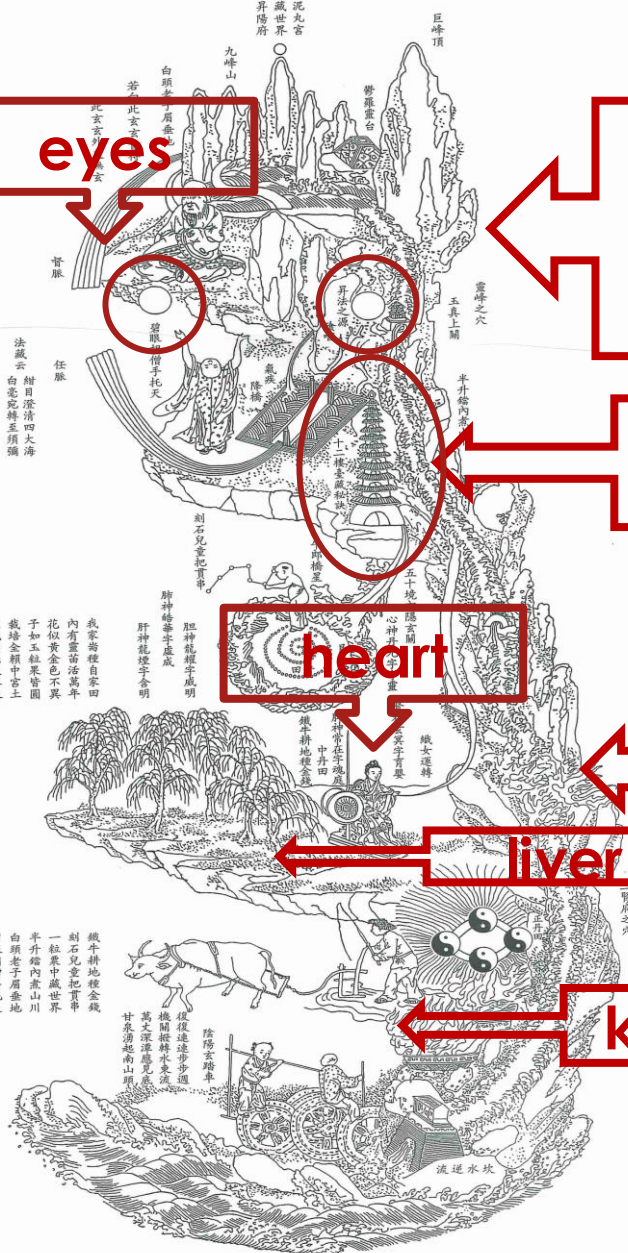
throat,
trachea

heart

dantian
丹田

liver

kidneys



THE DAOIST BODY

THE BODY AS LANDSCAPE AND COUNTRY

“The Daoists say that **‘the human body is the image of a country** [yi ren zhi shen, yi guo zhi xiang 以人之身，以國之象，(抱朴子·內篇·地真 *Baopuzi Neipian*, ‘Dizhen’)].’ For them the human body is like a landscape with mountains, lakes, woods, and shelters. Moreover, **the body as a “country” has an administration with a ruler and officials (guan). The heart**, or more accurately the spirit [...] inhabiting it, generally is considered to be **the ruler or king** of the body while the other **viscera** are **the officials.**”

(mod. Schipper, 1978: 355)

THE DAOIST BODY THE BODY AS LANDSCAPE AND COUNTRY

一人之身，一國之象也。胸腹之位，猶宮室也。四肢之列，猶郊境也。骨節之分，猶百官也。神猶君也，血猶臣也，氣猶民也。故知治身，則能治國也。夫愛其民所以安其國，養其氣所以全其身。

A person's body has the appearance of a state. The position of chest and belly is like that of palaces and buildings. The alignment (disposition) of the four limbs is like that of suburbs and border areas. The distinction between bones and joints is like that between the multitude (lit. the hundreds) of offices. **The intellectual capacity (spirit, "esprit") is like the ruler, the blood is like the ministers, the qi is like the people.** For this reason **if you will be able how to keep your body in good order, then you will be capable of keeping the state in good order.** To love one's people is the way in which one can pacify one's country, to nourish one's qi is the way in which one can make one's body whole. (Baopuzi Neipian, 'Dizhen' 抱樸子·內篇, 地真)

BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR IN ANCIENT CHINA

- **The physical body as social body: biopolitics**
- The **heart** is envisioned **as the ruler**, the different **organs as officials** ruling over different offices and in charge of specific, univocal tasks
- Harmony is ensured through a correct functioning of all the different organs/departments – of the body and of the state
- **Disorder and turmoil** depicted **as a disease** affecting the (social) body
- Pervasive discourse: not an exclusive concern of only certain trend of thought



**BODY METAPHORS AND THE BODY AS METAPHOR
THE ABSENCE OF THE BODY IN
CONTEMPORARY BIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

BIOPOLITICS A DEFINITION

Biopolitics: Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France

“biopolitics” of the human race. What does this new technology of power, this biopolitics, this biopower that is beginning to establish itself, involve? [...] a set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on. It is these processes – the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on – together with a whole series of related economic and political problems.”

(Foucault 2003: 243, lecture from 17th March 1976)

BIO-POLITICS AND BIO-POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA A CONUNDRUM (?)

- Biopolitics has been a fundamental aspect of the Chinese government's policies over the past forty years:
 - One-Child Policy (1979, Deng Xiaoping era)
 - Two-child policy (2016, Xi Jinping era)
 - Three-Child policy (2021, Xi Jinping era)
- Xi Jinping is famous for his widespread, colorful use of metaphors, a large pool of them drawing from the classical Chinese tradition
- We would tentatively expect a significant number of body metaphors to be part of the official bio-political and political discourse: it is the opposite – why is that so?

BIOPOLITICS AND THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

- Xi Jinping does make a widespread use of different kinds of metaphors, some original but mostly drawn from the classical Chinese repertoire
- While biopolitical metaphors, and in particular body metaphors, are not the most prominent and favourite kind, they are still present in his discourse, used to discuss:
 - family as a constitutive unit of the country
 - environment
 - (Gradual shift from body metaphors to illness metaphors: health poison, healing)
- the absence of the body in proper biopolitical discourse and in the text of policies (see text of the Three-Child Policy, and current discourse on the policy)

BIOPOLITICS AND THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

美德[... ..]铭记在中国人的心灵中，融入中国人的血脉中[... ..]。
家庭是社会的细胞[... ..]。家庭不只是人们身体的住处，更是人们心灵的归宿。

These family values have been imprinted on our (Chinese) people's heart and mixed into our (Chinese) people's blood vessels. [...] Families are cells of society. [...] Family not only provides a place for the physical body to reside, it is also where the people's heart lie.

(Xi Jinping, "Family Values, Family Education and Family Tradition," discourse delivered at the 1st National Conference of Model Families, 12th December 2016, in *The Governance of China* vol. 2, pp. 382–385)

BIOPOLITICS AND THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

要像保护眼睛一样保护生态环境，像对待生命一样对待生态环境。[… …]
地球 [… …] 我们要像保护自己的眼睛一样保护生态环境，像对待生命一
样对待生态环境 [… …]。

We should **protect the eco-environment as we protect our eyes,**
and cherish it as we cherish our own lives. […] We must protect this
planet **as we protect our own eyes,** and treasure Mother Nature the
way we treasure life.

(Xi Jinping, “Principles to Apply in Protecting the Eco-Environment”, discourse at
the National Conference on Eco-Environmental Protection 18th May 2018 + “Build
a Green and Beautiful Homeland for All”, discourse at the opening ceremony of
the International Horticultural Exhibition, 28th April 2019, both reprise discourse
from 2016, in *The Governance of China* vol. 3, p. 419, 435)

BIOPOLITICS AND THE BODY AS POLITICAL METAPHOR IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

A prominent shift from 'the country as body' to

- Macro-level: the country as family
- Micro-level: the family as basic constitutive unit/cell of the country (still maintains an underlying yet implicit idea of the country as body)

今天的亚洲，多样性的特点仍十分突出，不同文明、不同民族、不同宗教汇聚交融，共同组成多彩多姿的亚洲大家庭

In today's Asia, its diversity has become prominent, different civilizations, different ethnicities, different religions have come together and mingled, constituting together a multifaceted big Asian family.

(Xi Jinping, opening speech, "Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations," 15th May 2019, in 2021, 1053)

XI JINPING'S METAPHORS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF CHINA VOL. 4

Table 2. Data analysis of security-related metaphor in Volume IV.

Source Domain	Related Metaphor Discourse	Frequency	Proportion
War	War: it must command the gun; line of defense; remained undaunted; storm of gunfire and shells; surmounting difficulties; struggle; fight against; frontline; overcome; making breakthroughs	474	32%
Road	Road: way; journey; advance; work with; take important steps; mass line; commit ourselves to; the only way to survive	346	23%
Challenge	Challenge: challenge; left us vulnerable to attack; fear; deal a blow to; problems; obstacles; pressure; impact; difficult times; weak links	174	12%
Body	Body: health; pay more attention; dismayed; close bonds; stood together shoulder to shoulder; side by side; stand firm	157	11%
River	River: building new bridges wherever necessary to take us forward; source; climax; turbulence; population flows; upstream and downstream	98	6%
Building	Building: foundation; fortify; consolidate; collapse; worst-case scenarios	76	5%
Chessboard	Chessboard: a wider context of; new opportunity; new development dynamic	66	4%
Illness	Illness: virus; fear it or evade it; fight the virus	43	3%
Game	Game: achievement; victory; race against	24	1%
Art	Art: follow the fundamental principle; wrote an earth-shaking epic; new and splendid chapters; moving epic	24	1%

(Rui Chen 2024)

CONCLUSIONS

- In early Chinese thought, the body has different roles, and can be tentatively conceptualised as having a social, a political/public, and a physical & physiological/medical dimension
- Body metaphors are a widespread rhetorical phenomenon in ancient China as well as in the imperial period, and can be found in texts belonging to different genres (philosophical, literary, historical, medical, and so on). This kind of metaphors typically represents the body and its constitutive parts (internal and external organs, sensory organs, limbs, etc.) as parts of a country/landscape or of the government
- This is not just an ancient phenomenon. Even Xi Jinping and the CCP use this kind of metaphors in speeches, yet not directly in bio-political discourse or text of the policies proper, rather when discussing the family and environment protection – a choice that might be possibly motivated, at least in part, by their traditional use; since 2018-2019, a shift to illness metaphors and the country as family