

THE TERM SHENMING – ITS MEANING
IN THE ANCIENT CHINESE THOUGHT
AND IN A RECENTLY DISCOVERED MANUSCRIPT*

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In-depth research of the scope of meaning of the term *shenming* is essential for the better understanding of several important ancient Chinese texts and the ancient Chinese thinking. One of the recently discovered texts, in which the term appears in cosmogonical context, has made it more obvious for us. Although former studies threw light on several meanings of the term, I will demonstrate that on the basis of the ancient Chinese written sources (including both transmitted and recently discovered texts) we can explore even more extensively the scope of meaning of the term *shenming*, and we are able to determine some of its previously unknown connotations.

Key words: *shenming*, *qi*, nature of heaven, nature of earth, *qi*-condensing nature, *qi*-extending nature.

1. Introduction

The term *shenming* 神明, which can equally refer to a number of certain single concepts and certain pairs of concepts, often appears in ancient Chinese texts, and has several different and complex meanings, as demonstrated by researches carried out so far. Thanks to a recently discovered 4th century B.C. manuscript, titled as *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水, in the last few years the interpretation of the term *shenming* has become a central issue for researchers of ancient Chinese thought. Archaeologists discovered the *Taiyi sheng shui* at the excavation of *Guodian Chu Tomb No. 1*, at the end of 1993 (JSB 1997, pp. 35–48). The earliest manuscript version known of the work called *Laozi* 老子 or *道德經 and several other texts have also been*

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discovered in this tomb of the end of 4th century B.C. (Allan – Williams 2000, pp. 117–120; JSB 1998, pp. 1–2; Boltz 1999, pp. 590–608; Li Xueqin 2000, pp. 107–111; Henricks 2000, pp. 4–6). In the *Taiyi sheng shui* the term *shenming* appears within a cosmogonical context, and determination of its meaning is essential both for understanding the text as a whole, and in order to get better insight into the thought of the Warring States Period (5th century B.C.–3rd century B.C.).

In the first part of my study I briefly summarise some results of researches made so far on the term *shenming*. It will demonstrate that its scope of meaning is quite extensive. In the second part I try to reconstruct some previously unknown connotations of the term *shenming*, and parallelly with that I make an attempt to determine its meaning in the *Taiyi sheng shui*.

2. Previous studies

2.1. Overview of previous studies on the term *shenming*

According to Wang Bo and Harper, the term originally referred to religious concepts (Wang 2001, p. 221; Harper 1998, p. 120). In his glossary on this topic, Knoblock shows that the term *shenming* in the Warring States Period often represented “the gods in general”, “divine beings”, “spirits generally” (Knoblock 1988, p. 253). Machle, in his analysis of the meaning of the term *shenming*, is in agreement with Knoblock and even notes that: “This use is still current – images in Buddhist and Taoist temples are referred to as *shenming*” (Machle 1993, p. 160). Knoblock (1988, p. 253) and Machle (1992, p. 364) both believe, that in the following part of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 the term denotes spirits, divine beings:

良君將賞善而刑淫，養民如子，蓋之如天，容之如地；民奉其君，愛之如父母，仰之如日月，敬之如神明，畏之如雷霆，其可出乎？(*Zuo zhuan* [Xiang gong 14] 1992, p. 237)

“A good ruler will reward the virtuous and punish the vicious; he will nourish the people as his children, overshadowing them as heaven, and supporting them as earth. Then the people will maintain their ruler, love him as a parent, look up to him as the sun and moon, revere him as they revere *shenming*, and stand in awe of him as of thunder; – could such a ruler be expelled?”¹

Machle observes that in the chapter XVI of the book called *Xunzi* 荀子 the *shenming* is also being used in this sense (Machle 1993, p. 160). The passage, he refers to, reads as follows:

如是，百姓貴之如帝，高之如天，親之如父母，畏之如神明。
(XZJJ [Qiang guo pian] 1999, p. 315)

¹ Translated by Legge, modified (1960, p. 466); unless marked otherwise, the translation is my own. Quotations of translations where the English word is substituted by the Chinese word are also marked as “modified”.

“Consequently, the people value their ruler as they would the emperor, look up to him as they would to Heaven, love him as their parents, hold him in awe as they would hold the *shenming*.²

He also quotes a passage of *Chuci* 楚辭 as an example of this use, where, according to him, the *shenming* refers to the god of the *Kunlun* mountain (Machle 1992, p. 364):

樂窮極而不厭兮，願從容乎神明，涉丹水而駝騁。*(Chuci [Xi shi]* 1995, p. 187)

“Limitless bliss is there, without surfeit;
I wished I could sport with the *shenming*.
But I crossed the Red Water and rode still onwards.”³

Harper states that, one of the original meanings of the term *shenming* was: “external spirits”. In his opinion, during the Warring States Period, the term was often used in this sense, but already at that time it also had some newer meanings attached to it (Harper 1998, p. 120). Maspero claims, that one meaning of the term *shenming* is “the spirits” (Maspero 1933, p. 257). Xiong Tieji points out in his glossary on the term *shenming*, that the term in numerous ancient texts means *shenqi* 神祇, i.e. the spirits of Heaven and Earth (Xiong 2000, pp. 533–534). Among the texts he cited in support of his opinion, there is, for example, the passage of the *Zuo zhuan* quoted above. Xing Wen (2000, pp. 167–168), Xu Kangsheng (1999, p. 310) and Wang Bo (2001, p. 219) also argue that in ancient texts this term often denotes “the spirits of Heaven and Earth”.

Maspero observes that *shenming* as a verb meant “to give the qualities of the spirits”, “to deify” (Maspero 1933, p. 257).

Harper holds that one of the original meanings of the term was “magical efficacy possessed by spirits”, and this use of the term was common in the Warring States Period (Harper 1998, p. 120). Knoblock points out that the term *shenming* in the *Gongmeng* chapter of the *Mozi* 墨子 refers to “some characteristic of the spirits” that enables them to cause fortune or misfortune (Knoblock 1988, p. 253). The relevant passage of the *Mozi* reads like this:

古聖王皆以鬼神為神明，而為禍福(...). 自桀、紂以下，皆以鬼神為不神明，不能為禍福。*(MZJG [Gong Meng]* 1999, p. 673)

“The ancient sages all considered spirits and ghosts to be *shenming* and able to cause fortune or misfortune, (...) [but] from Jie and Zhou Xin onward, everyone has considered the spirits and ghosts not to be *shenming* and unable to cause fortune or misfortune.”⁴

Pang Pu believes, that one important meaning of the term *shenming* is “marvellous function of heaven and earth, nature’s nourishing influence”, and this usage of the term is reflected both in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Pang 2000, p. 193). He refers to the following passages of the two works:

² Translated by Machle, modified (1992, p. 373).

³ Translated by Hawkes, modified (1959, p. 116).

⁴ Translated by Knoblock (1988, p. 253).

天設日月，列星辰，調陰陽，張四時，日以暴之，夜以息之，風以乾之，雨露以濡之。其生物也，莫見其所養而物長；其殺物也，莫見其所喪而物亡，此之謂神明。(HNZZ [Taizu xun] 1999, p. 1118)

“Heaven has placed the sun and moon, has arranged the stars, has created harmony of yin and yang and has separated the seasons. By the help of the sun it illuminates existing things, it relaxes them by the help of the night, dries them by the wind, and makes them wet by the rain and dew. If it creates something, nobody can perceive how it nourishes it, but it still grows. If it destroys something, nobody can see how it gets destroyed, but it still perishes. This is what we call *shenming*.”

古之人其備乎！配神明，醇天地，育萬物，和天下。(ZZJJ [Tian-xia] 1999, p. 456)

“People of the ancient times were truly perfect. They assisted *shenming*, they were one with heaven and earth, nourished the myriad things, and established harmony within the world under the heaven.”

Ding Sixin also thinks that one of several meanings of the term *shenming* was a certain “marvelous influence” (Ding 2000, p. 106).

According to Xiong Tieji the *Huainanzi* reflects, that the concept of *shenming* is closely linked to the concept of *道, and the concepts of heaven and earth. He also argues that in the work the term *shenming* refers to “a kind of nature, spirit and influence of the *Dao*” (Xiong 2000, pp. 534–535). The passage of *Huainanzi* quoted above is one of several that he cites to support his conclusions.*

Harper states that one of the original religious meanings of the term *shenming* was “magical efficacy” which is “permeating sacred objects”. He thinks that this use of the term was also common in the Warring States period (Harper 1998, p. 120). Knoblock points out that the word *ming* often refers to “a kind of passive ‘sacred’ quality that is attached to anything used in sacrifices” (Knoblock 1988, p. 253). Machle observes: “(...) items being used in a religious ritual are also characterised as *ming*. This use occurs in the *Xunzi*, as in *pian* XIX, the discussion of rites, where *ming* articles special to the funeral are distinguished from *sheng* (“living”) articles actually used by the deceased” (Machle 1992, p. 365). According to Graham, the word *shen* could refer to “mysterious power (...) radiating from a (...) thing” (Graham (1989a, p. 101).

According to Knoblock, one meaning of the term *shenming* in the Warring States period was “spirit-like intelligence”, “sagely wisdom” and this is attested, for example, in the following piece of the chapter called *Neiye* of the *Guanzi* 管子: (Knoblock 1988, pp. 253–254)

神明之極照乎知萬物。(GZJZ [Nei ye] 1999, p. 867)

“Your perfected *shenming* clearly knows the myriad things.”

He further notes on this meaning of the term: “The idea of *shenming* intelligence seems to have been connected more with perspicacity and balance of judgement than with mere intellection or ratiocination. It seems a characteristic not of cogitation or analysis but of awareness and consciousness in evaluating circumstances and in making an appropriate response rather than in thinking reflectively or in logi-

cally analysing problems. (...) It suggests a ‘divine’ or ‘magical’ clarity and sharpness of awareness (...).” He also adds that, those who possess it were regarded as ones who know the myriad things, and understand the Way (*) (Knoblock 1988, pp. 254–255). Machle observes that Xunzi often uses the term in this meaning (Machle 1993, p. 160). According to Harper in the Warring States period one meaning of the term was “human intelligence”. He believes, that in the chapter called *Neiye* of *Guanzi* the term means “something like the divine spark of intelligence” (Harper 1998, p. 120). Xiong Tieji also claims, that one important meaning of the term *shenming* is: “omniscience”, “spirit-like intelligence” (Xiong 2000, p. 533). According to Pang Pu, one of several meanings *shenming*, can have is “great wisdom” (Pang 2000, p. 193). Xing Wen also believes, that one meaning of the term *shenming* is: “spiritual wisdom” (*jingshen zihui* 精神智慧) (Xing (2000, p. 168). Wang Bo points out, that the silk manuscript called *Jingfa* 經法 discovered at Mawangdui defines the term *shenming* the following way (Wang 2001, p. 222):*

神明者，見知之稽也。⁵

“*Shenming* is the basis of cognition.”

According to Peerenboom the term *shenming* is one of the basic technical terms of the “Huang-Lao epistemology” and means a “spiritual-like intuitive clarity” (Peerenboom 1993, pp. 70–71). [He also calls this “intuitive clarity”, based on Schwartz (1985, p. 249), as “synoptic or gnostic intuition” (Peerenboom 1993, p. 71)]. For humans to reach this “spiritual-like intuitive clarity” they have to go through a process that can be summarised as follows: at first one proceeds to “emptiness” 虛, then to “tranquility” 靜, then to the “elimination of personal bias” 無私 and finally one reaches “spiritual-like intuitive clarity” 神明 (Peerenboom 1993, p. 70). Peerenboom says, that “this intuitive clarity (...) leads to a direct discovery of reality such that one ‘apprehends and understands without confusion.’” (*jian zhi bu huo* 見知不惑) “The result is that one is able to (...) comply with the natural order, (...) know the origins of fortune and misfortune (...). In a word, one will know the Way [*] and how to implement it” (Peerenboom 1993, p. 71). Peerenboom claims that in the texts found at Mawangdui in 1973, several passages evidence this process (Peerenboom 1993, p. 71). The following for instance:*

靜則平，平則寧，寧則素，素則精，精則神。至神之極，【見】知不惑。⁶

“Where there is tranquillity, there is equanimity; where there is equanimity, there is peace; where there is peace, there is unadorned purity; where there is unadorned purity, there is focus on the essence; where there is focus on the essence, there is “*shen*” [Peerenboom treats the *shen* 神 as a synonym for the *shenming* 神明 (Peerenboom 1993, pp. 70–71)]. The zenith of utmost “*shen*” is to apprehend and understand without confusion.”⁷

Xiong Tieji argues that the term often meant “the spirit which opposes material”, including human spirit (Xiong 2000, p. 533). His opinion is that in the follow-

⁵ *Jingfa* [*Ming li*] in: MHBZX (1976, p. 41).

⁶ *Jingfa* [*Lun*] in: MHBZX (1976, p. 28).

⁷ Translated by Peerenboom, modified (1993, p. 71).

ing passage of the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Chuci*'s poem titled *Yuan you* the *shenming* represents the human spirit (Xiong 2000, p. 533):

勞神明為一而不知其同也。(*ZZJJ [Qiwulun]* 1999, p. 406)

“They wear out their *shenming* trying to unite things and are unaware that they are always the same.”⁸

保神明之清澄兮。*(Chuci [Yuan you]* 1995, p. 125)

“I keep the clarity of my *shenming*.”

According to him, Xunzi often uses the term *shenming* in the following sense: “spirit, the highest spiritual state, and spirit resembling heaven and earth” (Xiong 2000, p. 534). He refers to these parts of the *Xunzi*:

積善成德，而神明自得，聖心備焉。*(XZJJ [Quan xue pian]* 1999, p. 267)

“If you accumulate the good and perfect your virtues, then you will spontaneously acquire the *shenming*, and the sagely mind will be brought to perfection.”

今使塗之人伏術為學(...)積善而不息，則通於神明，參於天地矣。*(XZJJ [Xing e pian]* 1999, p. 340)

“If a common person studies following the proper way (...) and ceaselessly accumulates the good, then attains *shenming*, and becomes equal⁹ to heaven and earth.”

注錯習俗，所以化性也；並一而不二，所以成積也。習俗移志，安久移質。並一而不二，則通於神明，參於天地矣。*(XZJJ [Ru xiao pian]* 1999, p. 289)

“It is the cultivation of habits and customs through which we transform nature (*xing*). By creating unity (in mind) and not allowing development of duality (in it), we bring the accumulation to perfection. Habits and customs change the direction of will, and after a long time they transform the nature (*zhi*). If one creates unity (in his/her mind) and does not allow development of duality (in it), then attains *shenming*, and becomes equal to heaven and earth.”

心者，形之君也，而神明之主也。*(XZJJ [Jie bi pian]* 1999, p. 333)

“The heart is the ruler of the corporeal form [the body], and the lord of the *shenming*.”

Ding Sixin also believes, that the term could mean the human spirit (Ding 2000, p. 106). Machle observes that some passages of the *Guanzi* “surely suggest that *shenming* is a psychic state that obtains in the completely disciplined and developed individual” (Machle 1992, p. 370). Li Ling claims that the term *shenming* often denotes one's certain spiritual state. It is used, for example, in this sense in the phrase “*tong yu shenming*”通於神明 (he and McMahon translate it as to “attain spiritual illumination”, Li – McMahon 1992, p. 174) of the silk manuscripts found at Mawangdui (Li 2002, p. 37).

Li Ling argues that in the ancient written sources the term *shenming* can refer to both certain single concepts and certain pairs of concepts. As a pair of concepts it

⁸ Translated by Knoblock (1988, p. 253).

⁹ Regarding the meaning of the word *can* 參 see: Cullen (1993, p. 273).

often denotes two kinds of spirits which are associated with heaven and earth, with *yin* and *yang*, etc. (Li 1999, p. 318)

Machle did research on the usage of the term *shenming* in the *Xunzi*. Let us go over some of his remarks and conclusions. He writes that *Xunzi* “(...) uses the phrase only in contexts where he is speaking of sagehood, either as achieved or as a goal” (Machle 1993, p. 160). “*Shenming*, in the *Xunzi*, refers to something that will ‘come of itself’ as the end of a process of ‘piling up skillful goodness (*shan*) to perfect your virtuous inner power (*de*)’ so that ‘the sagely mind finds its completion in it’” (Machle 1993, p. 161). According to him, *shenming* does not only mean “mere psychological enhancement”, but also carries “overtones that are strongly of the supernatural” (Machle 1993, p. 160). He observes that in chapter III of the *Xunzi* “*shen* and *ming* occur separately, but in perfectly parallel constructions” (Machle 1992, p. 375). Here, “*ming* is correlated to *shen* as *yi* is to *ren*, *li* is to *xing*, and *bian* is to *hua*. In each pair, it is evident that the former stands for an external analogue of the much more inward latter term. *Ming* thus may have a more active meaning, as ‘exhibiting (inner) moral or spiritual power’” (Machle 1993, pp. 144–145). The part of the *Xunzi* he refers to reads like this:

誠心守仁則形，形則神，神則能化矣；誠心行義則理，理則明，明則能變矣。變化代興，謂之天德。(XZJJ [Bu gou pian] 1999, p. 273)

“When a sincere mind preserves *ren*, it will become evident (*xing*).

When evident, it will be *shen*;

Being *shen*, it can transform (*hua*).

When a sincere mind practises rightness (*yi*), it accords with

Basic order (*li*).

According with basic order, it will be *ming*.

Being *ming*, it can cause change (*bian*).

Orderly transforming and changing is Heavenly virtue.”¹⁰

The term *shenming* also often occurs in the *Heguanzi* 鶻冠子. Defoort writes in her book on the work: “In the Pheasant Cap Master [*Heguanzi*], *shen ming* is alternatively treated as one or two entities (*shen* and *ming*). (...) they are divine spirits as well as exceptionally powerful men, or a combination of both (...)” (Defoort 1997, p. 243). “Separately, *shen* and *ming* are attributed to the sage, but combined they often refer to divine beings with whom the sages communicate” (Defoort 1997, p. 274). Graham notes the following in his study on the *Heguanzi*: “As for the intelligence, which makes the sage’s reactions superior to other men’s, it is discussed in terms of a pair of concepts, which has always resisted English translation, *shen* and *ming*, used both nominally of the spirits and verbally of the kinds of intelligence possessed by the spirits and attained by man to the degree that he approaches sagehood. In Ho-kuan-tzu [*Heguanzi*] they are the active and passive sides of the unifying intelligence which exceeds a piecemeal acquaintance with things; as roughly equivalents we choose ‘clairvoyant’ and ‘illuminated’” (Graham 1989b, p. 515). He further explains his understanding of the terms *shen* and *ming* in the following way: “The ‘clair-

¹⁰ Translated by Machle (1992, pp. 375–376).

voyance' of spirits and sages is the insight and power radiating out of them to see into, and act on other things, their 'illumination' is the luminous clarity with which they open themselves to reflect other things and be moved by them" (Graham 1989b, p. 515). Graham quotes this part of the *Heguanzi* to support his view:

法之在此者謂之近，其出化彼謂之遠。近而至，故謂之神。遠而反，故謂之明。(*HGZ [Huan liu]* 1997, p. 320)

"As being here law is called near, as issuing to transform the other it is called far. From the near it reaches, so is called clairvoyant, from the far it returns, so is called illumined."¹¹

Defoort interprets the terms *shen* and *ming* in a very similar way, and her interpretation also strongly relies on this passage of the work. She says: "Shen, homophonous with *shen* 伸 (to stretch out), refers to influence, often strong and imperceptible, which extends from the center outward. Ming, then, is the insight that the ruler gets back from his sphere of influence" (Defoort 1997, p. 151).¹²

In the cosmogonical theories of the Yan Zun commentary on the *Laozi*, the *shenming* has similar prominence as in the *Taiyi sheng shui* (Harper 2001, p. 7). Although the text is relatively late, it is worthy to pay attention to it. [Yan Zun, the author of the commentary lived between c. 80 B.C. and c. A.D. 10 (Boltz 1993, p. 271)]. Xiong Tieji examines the meaning of the term in the context of the Yan Zun commentary, and draws the following diagrams to describe the cosmogonical thought appearing in the work (Xiong 2000, pp. 535–536) (the former one produces the later one during the cosmogonical process):

dao 道 → *shenming* 神明¹³ → grand harmony 太和 → *qi* 氣 → heaven and earth 天地 → the myriad of the existing things 萬物

self-so 自然 → *dao* and *de* 道德 → *shenming* 神明 → harmony 和¹⁴ → *qi* 氣 → form 形

He refers, for example, to the following passages of the text:

一者，道之子，神明之母，太和之宗，天地之祖。(*LZZG* 1997, p. 9)

"One is the son of *dao*, the mother of *shenming*, the progenitor of grand harmony, and the ancestor of heaven and earth."¹⁵

¹¹ Translated by Graham (1989b, p. 515).

¹² My personal view is that the passage of the *Heguanzi* presented here, and quoted by both Graham and Defoort, could also lead to a very different conclusion. In these sentences with parallel constructs "*shen*" 神 is associated with "*zai ci*" 在此 (being here) and "*jin*" 近 (near), while "*ming*" 明 is associated with "*chu hua*" 出化 (issuing to transform) and "*yuan*" 遠 (far). It suggests that it is *shen*, which represents the "passive side", while *ming* is the "active side" (which is "radiating" or "issuing to transform others"), and not the other way around.

¹³ In my opinion, it is apparent from the text itself, that in the Yan Zun commentary *shen* 神 or *shenming* 神明 is associated with *qing* 清 and *zhuo* 濁 (which were often considered to be two different qualities of the *qi* 氣 constituting heaven and earth), while *he* 和 or *taihe* 太和 is associated with *gao* 高 and *xia* 下 (which were often considered to be two basic formal attributes of heaven and earth). See for example the following extract of the text: "神有清濁，和有高下" (*LZZG* 1997, p. 3)

¹⁴ According to Xiong Tieji, *he* 和 and *taihe* 太和 denote the same concept (Xiong 2000, p. 536).

¹⁵ Translated by Harper, modified (2001, p. 6).

夫天人之生也，形因於氣，氣因於和，和因於神明，神明因於道德，道德因於自然。(LZZG 1997, p. 17)

“Now in the generation of heaven and humankind, form relies on *qi*, *qi* relies on harmony, harmony relies on *shenming*, *shenming* relies on *dao* and *de*, and *dao* and *de* rely on the self-so.”¹⁶

2.2. Summary of previous researches on the meaning of the term *shenming* in the *Taiyi sheng shui*

Having reviewed some of the related research findings, let us turn our attention to analysing the meaning of the term *shenming* in the context of the text called *Taiyi sheng shui* discovered at Guodian. In the *Taiyi sheng shui* it appears within the following cosmogonical context:

太一生水，水反輔太一，是以成天。天反輔太一，是以成地。天地【復相輔】也，是以成神明。神明復相輔也，是以成陰陽。(...)

陰陽者，神明之所生也。神明者，天地之所生也。天地者，太一之所生也。(JSB 1998, p. 125)

“The Great One (*Taiyi*) gave birth to water. Water returned and assisted *Taiyi*, in this way developing heaven. Heaven returned and assisted *Taiyi*, in this way developing the earth. Heaven and earth [repeatedly assisted each other], in this way developing *shenming/shen* and *ming*. *Shenming/shen* and *ming* repeatedly assisted each other, in this way developing *yin* and *yang*. (...) *Yin* and *yang* were produced by *shenming/shen* and *ming*. *Shenming/shen* and *ming* was/were produced by heaven and earth, and heaven and earth were produced by the Great One.”¹⁷

The first question to be raised is if the term *shenming* refers to a single concept or a pair of concepts in the text. Li Ling argues that in the *Taiyi sheng shui* it refers to a pair of concepts. According to him, in this text the phrase “相輔” (“assisted each other”) of the sentence “神明復相輔也，是以成陰陽” shows, that the characters *shen* and *ming* here denote a pair of concepts, furthermore in the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Heguanzi* they also often denote a pair of concepts (Li 1999, pp. 317–318). Similarly to Li Ling, Wang Bo (2001, p. 220), Peng Hao (2000, p. 539), Xu Kangsheng (1999, p. 312), Hirase (2001, p. 18), Allan (2000, p. 527), Robinet (1999, p. 334) and Henricks (2000, p. 218) also believe, that in the *Taiyi sheng shui* the term *shenming* stands for a pair of concepts. Harper, in his translation (2001, pp. 3–4) of the *Taiyi sheng shui*, interprets this term as a single concept, and claims that there is not sufficient evidence to prove that in the text it denotes two separate concepts (Harper 2001, pp. 5, 18).

Let us examine how different researchers interpret the term *shenming* of the *Taiyi sheng shui*. Henricks, in his translation of the text interprets the term *shenming* as the “gods above and below” (Henricks 2000, p. 123). Xing Wen also believes that

¹⁶ Translated by Harper, modified (2001, p. 6).

¹⁷ Translated by Henricks, modified (2000, p. 123).

the term holds the above mentioned meaning in the *Taiyi sheng shui* (Xing 2000, pp. 168–169). Henricks adds the following comment to his translation: “(...) in the present selection, *shenming*, while it surely refers to a pair, must be something with cosmological standing. So I agree with Xing Wen in reading *shenming* as *shenqi* (神祇, the gods above and below, or the gods of heaven and earth)” (Henricks 2000, p. 218). Boltz, in his translation of the *Taiyi sheng shui*, interprets the term *shenming* in the following way: “the Firmament of Spirits and the Inchoate Luminance” (Boltz 1999, p. 607). Harper, in his translation of the text, rendered the term by the words “spirit illumination” (Harper 2001, pp. 3–4), and he notes: “Not that I can give you the exact meaning of *shenming* in *Taiyi sheng shui*, which must lie somewhere between the original sense of the spirits of the spirit world and the sense indicated in the following passage from the *Huainanzi* ‘Binglue’ chapter in a description of *dao* ‘way’: Its changes and transformations are without regularity. Obtaining the origin of the ‘one’ and responding without limit – this is called spirit illumination” (Harper 2001, p. 5). Following this he concludes: “*Shenming* expresses the limitless responsiveness of a numinousness that is everywhere in the cosmos – including particularised spirits – and in the human microcosm, where it constitutes the spiritual and intellectual core of a human being” (Harper 2001, p. 5). Peng Hao thinks that *shenming* here denotes two different kinds of “marvellous influences”, originating from heaven and earth respectively (Peng 2000, p. 539). Wang Bo argues that in the *Taiyi sheng shui* “*shen*” refers to the moon, and “*ming*” refers to the sun (Wang 1999, p. 10; 2001, pp. 219–223). Li Ling claims that *shen* and *ming* denote two kinds of spirits which were associated by the ancient Chinese with the heaven and the earth, with the *yin* and the *yang*. It is worthy to note that he correlates *shen* with heaven and *yang*, while correlates *ming* with earth and *yin* (Li 1999, pp. 317–318; 2002, pp. 36–38). Xu Kangsheng in this case interprets *shen* as the non-manifesting, unexperiencable essential *qi* (*jing qi* 精氣), and *ming* as phenomena and influences manifested by the essential *qi*. In his argumentation he pays attention to the fact that while according to the *Taiyi sheng shui* the *yin* and *yang* are produced by the *shen* and *ming*, the concept of *yin* correlates with the concept of “obscure”, and the concept of *yang* correlates with the concept of “manifesting” (Xu 1999, p. 312).

3. Previously unknown connotations of the term *shenming* and its meaning in the *Taiyi sheng shui*

In the following part of my study I will demonstrate that on the basis of the ancient Chinese written sources we can explore even more extensively the scope of meaning of the term *shenming*, and we are able to determine some of its previously unknown connotations. I will argue that in the second half of the Warring States Period the term *shenming* often referred to a pair of concepts, namely two opposite natures. The word *shen* frequently meant the *qi*-condensing (or *qi*-absorbing) nature, the nature of the earth, while the word *ming* often denoted the *qi*-extending (or *qi*-issuing) nature, the nature of the heaven. In one of my earlier articles I already touched upon this

topic (P. Szabó forthcoming, 2003). While also presenting my earlier arguments on this topic, in this article I would also like to make some new remarks.

A passage of the text called *Shiwen* 十問 discovered at Mawangdui probably dating back to the 3rd century B.C. (Harper 1998, p. 38) says the following:

故曰：壹至勿星，耳目聰明。 (...) 九至勿星，通於神明。曹熬之接陰治神氣之道。 (MHBZX 1985, p. 146)

“Thus it is said: at the first arrival without emission [“arrival” refers to thrusting the penis inside the vagina – Harper (1998, p. 391)], ears and eyes are perceptive and bright; (...) at the ninth arrival without emission, *tong yu shenming*. Cao Ao’s way for coitus with *Yin* and cultivating spirit vapor (*qi*).”¹⁸ [The concluding line serves as a title for the technique described in the text (Harper 1998, p. 388).]

This text describes a sexual exercise the aim of which, based on the last sentence above, is to cultivate spiritual *qi*. The final stage of spiritual *qi* cultivation is, as reflected in the text, the “*tong yu shen ming*” 通於神明. According to Harper’s translation “*tong yu shen ming*” means “you penetrate spirit illumination” (Harper 1998, p. 391), however it can also be interpreted as “you attain the *shenming*” (Li Ling and McMahon translates the phrase this way. 1992, p. 178). Regardless of which one of these two otherwise possible translation versions is adequate, it seems apparent from the above passage that the concept of *shenming* or the concepts of *shen* and *ming* have something to do with the concept of *qi* 氣 as “*tong yu shenming*” can be carried out through cultivation of spiritual *qi* (*zhi shen qi* 治神氣) (which in this case happens to be a sexual exercise).

In the second half of the Warring States period theories about the *qi* 氣 formed an important part of Chinese thinking (Schwartz 1985, pp. 179–184; Harper 1999, p. 862). Numerous thinkers believed that there is a material substance, a “basic stuff” (Harper 1998, p. 77), the *qi*, which is the general constitutive of all the existing things in the universe, the primary material of the universe, the starting point and the end point in the changes of the material, from which everything is created and into which everything is transformed through its decay (Knoblock 1988, pp. 78–80; Li 1990, pp. 3, 76, 116–127; P. Szabó 2000, pp. 40–42; Graham 1989a, p. 101; Xi 2001, pp. 110–112). According to an important theory of the time, the coming into being of all the existing things is the result of the concentration of *qi*, and their decay is the result of the dispersal of *qi* (Li 1990, pp. 122–123; P. Szabó 2000, p. 41; Xi 2001, p. 111).

Luckily a text inscribed on a jade object enlightens us on what the relationship is between the concept of *qi* and the concepts of *shen* and *ming*. This inscription, which is often called “*Xingqi ming*” 行氣銘, derives from the Warring States Period (Li Ling 2000, p. 344), and according to many scholars dates back to approximately the same time (Harper 1998, p. 125; Needham 1956, p. 242; Chen 1989, p. 135) as the Guodian Chu Tomb No. 1, where the *Taiyi sheng shui* was discovered. The opinions of experts on ancient Chinese writing differs on the identification of some characters of the text written using script of the Warring States period. This however is of no bearing on our conclusions presented below, since in the case of the key charac-

¹⁸ Translated by Harper, modified (1998, p. 391).

ters most of the experts do agree, and the identification of these key characters is not too difficult, even for those, who are not deeply skilled in palaeography. The inscribed text just happens to describe the process and stages of transformation of the *qi*, more precisely the condensation and extension of it. In the text *shen* and *ming* stand as “stative verbs” or “quality verbs” (as Pulleyblank calls these verbs, 1995, p. 23), and refer to two opposite qualities of the transforming *qi*. *Shen* means “*qi*-condensing”, *ming* means “*qi*-extending”. According to the description, the process of condensation of *qi* begins with it becoming “*shen*” 神, and ends with its “aggregation” 固; the process of extension of *qi* begins with it becoming “*ming*” 明, continues with its “extending” 長 and ends with it “becoming great” 大 (according to Chen Mengjia’s transcription, 1938, pp. 35–37) or “rising to heaven” 天 (according to Chen Banghuai’s (Chen 1989, pp. 128–132) and Guo Moruo’s (Guo 1962, pp. 406–408) transcription – the difference is due to the fact, that the referred character denoted both the concept of “heaven” and “great” at the time, Chen 1938, p. 36). Here I present the transcription of Chen Mengjia¹⁹, differing character identifications will be provided in the footnotes:

行“氣”(氣) (...) 神則下, 下則定, 定則固, 固則明, 明則“張”(長), “張”(長)則“懶”(袤)²⁰, “懶”(袤)²¹則天²²。

“When the circulating *qi* (...) becomes *shen*, it begins to (sink) down. When it (sinks) down, it begins to solidify. When it solidifies, it begins to aggregate.

When it aggregates, it begins to become *ming*.²³

When it becomes *ming*, it begins to become extending. When it becomes extending, it begins to broaden. When it becomes broad, it begins to become great.”

The key topic of the *Nei ye* chapter of *Guanzi* is the cultivation of *qi*. Its sentence below clearly demonstrates that one of the meanings of *shen* is “*qi*-condensing”.²⁴

搏氣如神。(GZJZ [Nei ye] 1999, p. 867)

“Condense your *qi*, similarly to *shen*.”

The following passage of the text called *Shiwen* is also noteworthy. It clearly shows us that in the correlative cosmology of the time the concept of “*ming*” 明 correlated with the concepts of “*yang*” 陽, “stretching” 伸 and “extending” 張. The text is the following:

夫雞者, 陽獸也, 發明聲聰, 伸頭羽張者也。(MHBZX 1985, p. 150)

“The rooster is a *yang* animal. When *ming* [here: light] appears, its voice is clear, it stretches forward its head, and spreads its feathers.”

¹⁹ Chen (1938, pp. 35–37); the facsimile of the inscription can be found in Li Ling (2000, p. 343).

²⁰ Chen Banghuai: 復 (Chen 1989, pp. 128, 130); Guo Moruo: 退 (Guo 1962, p. 407).

²¹ Chen Banghuai: 復 (Chen 1989, pp. 128, 130); Guo Moruo: 退 (Guo 1962, p. 407).

²² Chen Mengjia: here 天 is equal to 大 (Chen 1938, p. 36).

²³ Here it most certainly reflects the concept whereby once a process reaches its ending point, it starts to progress into the opposite direction.

²⁴ Regarding the phrase *tuan qi* 搏氣 see Gao (1998, pp. 264–265).

In the second part of the Warring States period and in the Han period *qi*'s extension was regarded as *qi*'s "appearance" (*fa* 發) and its condensation as *qi*'s "concealment" (*cang* 藏). Let us see an example. According to a theory of the time in the second part of the year heavenly *qi* draws back to heaven, and earthly *qi* back to the earth. This process of *qi* condensation was frequently called *qi*'s "concealment" 藏. All this is reflected in the below passages:

是月也，（...）天氣上騰，地氣下降，天地不通，閉而成冬。令百官，謹蓋藏。（*LSCQ [Mengdong ji]* 1999, p. 1329）

"This month [the first month of winter] (...) the heavenly *qi* rises and the earthly *qi* descends, heaven and earth do not come to contact each other, they become closed, thus winter emerges. Officials to be ordered to take good care of concealment."

是月也，（...）助天地之閉藏也。（*LSCQ [Zhongdong ji]* 1999, p. 1331）

"This month [the second month of winter] (...) we support closure and concealment of heaven and earth."

冬政不禁，則地氣不藏。（*GJZJ [Qi chen qi zhu]* 1999, p. 871）

"If during the winter government the prohibitions are neglected, then earthly *qi* will not conceal itself."

... 血氣董凝。毋以聚眾鑿土。若以聚眾鑿土，是謂攻臧（藏）。（Wu 1985, p. 28）

"... the blood and *qi* are coagulated and congealed. Do not use the gathered multitudes to dig out the earth. If you use the gathered multitudes to dig out the earth, this is what is referred to as "attacking the concealment".²⁵

At the same time it was also thought that during the first part of the year heavenly *qi* descends from heaven and earthly *qi* rises from the earth. This process of *qi* extention was often called *qi*'s appearance (*fa* 發). The quotations below demonstrate the foresaid:

是月也，天氣下降，地氣上騰，天地和同，草木繁動。（*LSCQ [Mengchun ji]* 1999, p. 1305）

"This month [the first month of spring] *qi* of heaven descends and *qi* of earth rises, heaven and earth come to contact, plants get revived."

孟冬行春令，則凍閉不密，地氣發泄。（*LSCQ [Mengdong ji]* 1999, p. 1329）

"If in the first month of the winter orders given are such as the ones to be given in spring, then the ice does not close up properly, thus *qi* of earth shall appear (*fa* 發) and leak."

夫春氣發而百草生。（*ZZJJ [Gengsang Chu]* 1999, p. 439）

"The spring *qi* appears, and plants are revived."

In the second part of the Warring States period, the word *shen* 神 often meant the group of those existents which could not be experienced by humans, which did not appear for humans in a way that could be sensed. It is phrased the following way by the passage called *Xi ci* of the *Book of Changes*:

²⁵ Translated by Yates, modified (1994, p. 102).

陰陽不測之謂神。(*Zhou yi [Xici shang]* 1992, p. 40)

“Which cannot be perceived of *yin* and *yang*, that is what we call *shen*.”

Sources of the ancient times also reflect that humans were thought to be able to get into the non-sensible world, to the *shen* sphere by condensing their *qi*. A passage of the poem called *Jiu bian* from *Chuci*, for example, reads as follows:

乘精氣之搏搏兮，驚諸神之湛湛。(*Chuci [Jiu bian]* 1995, p. 153)

“Through condensing of essential *qi* I get among the plenty of *shen*.”

Therefore even in the Eastern Han Period, Xun Shuang (128–190) comments the terms *shen* and *ming* in a following way:

隱藏謂之神，著見謂之明。(Yang 1996, p. 694)

“The concealing is called *shen*, and the manifesting is called *ming*.”

Because of the associations of appearance with *qi*-extension, and of concealment with *qi*-condensation it was not only the words *shen* and *ming* which had the meaning of *qi*-condensing and *qi*-extending. Words, with a sense of “dark” and “concealing”, i.e. the synonyms of the word *shen*, also bore the meaning of *qi*-condensing. Words, on the other hand, with a sense of “bright” and “appearing”, i.e. the synonyms of the word *ming*, bore the meaning of *qi*-extending as well. Thus beside the pair of words *shen/ming* 神明, other pairs of words such as *you/ming* 幽明, *hui/ming* 晦明, *an/ming* 暗明, *ming/zhao* 夢昭, *yao/gao* 奕果, etc. also bore the connotation of “*qi*-condensing” and “*qi*-extending”.

Let us see some examples where either one or both components of the *shen/ming* character pair are substituted by a synonym word. In the passage below of the chapter called *Tianwen xun* of *Huainanzi* the *you/ming* 幽明 pair of characters have the meaning of “*qi*-condensing” and “*qi*-extending”:

明者，吐氣者也。(...)幽者，含氣者也。(HNZZ [*Tianwen xun*] 1999, p. 1043)

“The *ming* emits *qi*. (...) The *you* sucks in *qi*.²⁶

In one of the texts discovered at Mawangdui, the pair of concepts *hui/ming* 晦明 appear in a cosmogonical context much similar to the one described in *Taiyi sheng shui*. The pair of concepts *hui/ming* takes on the exact same position in the cosmogonical process as the *shen/ming* 神明 pair of concepts in the *Taiyi sheng shui*. These facts and the fact that *shen* 神 and *hui* 晦 are synonyms, thus can be substituted with each other, imply that the *hui/ming* pair of characters which appear in the text discovered at Mawangdui carry exactly the same meaning as the *shen/ming* pair of characters in *Taiyi sheng shui*. The text reads as follows:

夫天有榦，地有恆常，合□□常，是以有晦有明，有陰有陽。
(...)陰陽備，物化變乃生。²⁷

“Heaven came into possession of its pivot, earth came into possession of its ever invariability. [Heaven and earth] combined with each other [here two characters are missing, possibly: 而成 “and established”] constancy, thus *hui* and *ming* emerged,

²⁶ Translated by Major, modified (1993, pp. 64–65)

²⁷ *Shi da jing* [Guo tong] in: MHBZX (1976, p. 57); Regarding the question of punctuation of the last sentence I agree with Yates (1997, p. 116)

yin and *yang* came into existence. (...) After *yin* and *yang* were perfected, the change and transformation of things started."

The situation is very much similar in case of *an/ming* 暗明 pair of characters appearing in the cosmogonical concept²⁸ of *Tian wen*:

明明暗暗 (...) 陰陽三合。(*Chuci [Tian wen]* 1995, pp. 55–56)

"*Ming* became *ming*; *an* became *an*. (...) *Yin* and *yang* mixed together."

The *ming/zhao* 冥昭 pair of words, appearing on one of the bamboo slips discovered at Yinqueshan, also fits into a very similar context to the one in the *Taiyi sheng shui*. Although one important character on the bamboo slip is unfortunately missing, the text clearly suggests that the *ming* and *zhao* pair of concepts, just like the *shen* and *ming* pair of concepts, are closely related to the concepts of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. Further to the above mentioned, the words *ming/zhao* are synonyms of the words *shen/ming*, thus we have every reason to suppose that these two pairs of characters carry the same meanings within the two different texts. Let us compare the below extracts of *Taiyi sheng shui* with the text on the bamboo slip No. 31 discovered at Yinqueshan:

Taiyi sheng shui:

濕燥者，滄熱之所生也。(...) 陰陽者，神明者所生也。(JSB 1998, p. 125)

"Moisture and dryness were produced by cold and hot. (...) *Yin* and *yang* were produced by *shen* and *ming*."²⁹

Yinqueshan bamboo slip No. 31:

昭冥者，陰陽之口也。燥濕者，寒暑之精者也。(Wu 1985, p. 3)

"*Zhao* and *ming* are ... of *yin* and *yang*. Dryness and moisture are the essence of cold and hot."

Let us turn to discuss that the words *shen* and *ming* and their synonyms, do not only mean "qi-condensing" and "qi-extending", but they also refer to the two basic qualities of earth and heaven, to the nature of earth and the nature of heaven.

According to a certain view of the Chinese of the period, the nature is defined by the form possessed by *qi*, thus definite natures belong to definite forms. Heaven, which was often considered to be round shaped, was thought to have *ming* nature (the word *ming* can be substituted by its synonyms), and earth, which was often considered to be square shaped, was thought to have *shen* nature (the word *shen* can also be substituted by its synonyms). The *Nei ye* clearly reflects the theory, that the *qi*, which ascends to heaven, becomes *gao* 崇 (*gao* 崇 is a synonym for *ming* 明), and the *qi* descending to earth becomes *yao* 奕 (*yao* 奕 is a synonym for *shen* 神):

是故 (...) 氣，崇乎如登於天，奕乎如入於淵。(GZJZ [*Nei ye*] 1999, p. 866)

"Thus the *qi* (...) is *gao* just when it ascends to heaven and it is *yao* just when it descends to the deep."

²⁸ Regarding the cosmogony of *Tian wen* see Field (1992, pp. 86–93), and Major (1993, pp. 63–64).

²⁹ Translated by Henricks, modified (2000, p. 123).

The following part of *Huainanzi* shows, that the square shape of the earth is the *of the *you* 幽 (*you* 幽 is a synonym for *shen* 神), and the round shape of the heaven is the *of the *ming* 明. It means that *you* and *ming* qualities derive from the form of earth and heaven. The text reads as follows:**

天道曰圓，地道曰方。方者主幽，圓者主明。（HNZZ [Tianwen xun] 1999, p. 1043）

“The *Dao* of heaven is the circle, the *Dao* of Earth is the square. The square governs the *you*, the circle governs the *ming*.”

These two passages also evidence that the nature of earth is *shen* and the nature of heaven is *ming*. Several other texts lead to the same conclusion. Let us examine a few examples. It is reflected in *Shiwen*, that *ming* is accumulated in heaven and *hui* (a synonym of *shen*) is accumulated in earth:

天者受明，地者受晦。（MHBZX 1985, p. 151）

“Heaven receives *ming*; earth receives *hui*.”³⁰

From the following excerpt from *Huainanzi* – in which to each of the six directions (*liu he* 六合) a philosophical concept is attached – we can see that heaven has the quality of *ming* and earth has the quality of *you*:

所謂道者，（...）背陰而抱陽，左柔而右剛，履幽而戴明。
(HNZZ [Bing lue xun] 1999, p. 1096)

“What we call *Dao* (...) has behind its back [in the north] the *yin*, in front of its chest [in the south] it has the *yang*, to its left [in the east] it has the soft, to its right [in the west] it has the hard, under its feet it has the *you*, above its head it has the *ming*.”

Another passage of *Huainanzi* suggests that clear *qi* (清氣) constituting heaven has *ming* quality, and murky *qi* (濁氣) constituting earth has *an* (a synonym of *shen*) quality:

清之為明（...）濁之為暗。（HNZZ [Shuo shan xun] 1999, p. 1100）

“The clear is *ming* (...) the murky is *an*.”

Based on the fact, that various cosmogonical and cosmological theories (those which appear for example in Mawangdui texts, *Tianwen*, *Huainanzi*, and in *Taiyi sheng shui* as well, as shown below) attach primary importance to the *shen* and *ming* qualities of heaven and earth, it is clearly demonstrated, that they were considered to be two kinds of basic qualities, or in other words, two kinds of natures of the earth and heaven.

And now, let us examine the cosmogony of *Taiyi sheng shui*, into which the concept of *shenming* or the concepts of *shen* and *ming* fit(s). In my mentioned article, taking into account the intellectual context of the time, I examine the meanings of concepts appearing in the *Taiyi sheng shui*'s cosmogonical theory, and among others I argue for the following statements (P. Szabó forthcoming, 2003):

- For the Chinese of the period, water was the primary manifestation of *qi* in the universe. Thus the sentence “the Great One (*Taiyi*) gave birth to water” of *Tai-*

³⁰ Translated by Harper, modified (1998, p. 409).

yi sheng shui also meant that the *Taiyi* – the source of the existence and order of the universe – has created the *qi*, the material substance.

- For the Chinese of the time, heaven and earth were the two primary manifestations of the form (*xing* 形) in the universe. Therefore the sentences “water returned and assisted *Taiyi*, in this way developing heaven” and “heaven returned and assisted *Taiyi*, in this way developing the earth” of the *Taiyi sheng shui* also meant that following *qi* coming into existence, the two primary forms have developed from it. According to an important theory of the period, it happens so that in the *qi* – which has not assumed any shape in any kind of existing thing yet – a differentiation starts. Its lighter and clearer (*qing qing* 清輕) part rises and heaven develops from it, its heavier and murkier (*zhuo zhong* 濁重) part sinks down and earth develops from it. (This process, the rising up of the clearer part, and the sinking down of the murkier part, was considered to be a process characteristic of water.)

At the same time, we have seen above that the concepts of *shen* 神 nature and *ming* 明 nature correlate exactly with the concepts of “*qi*” 氣, “heaven” 天 and “earth” 地. Moreover, as we discussed, these two kinds of natures were thought to be derived from the forms of heaven and earth. Consequently the sentence “heaven and earth [repeatedly assisted each other], in this way developing the *shenming*” of *Taiyi sheng shui* for many Chinese of the time meant that heaven and earth, the two primary forms, produced the *shen* nature and the *ming* nature.

Then, how are – if at all – the heavenly *ming* nature and the earthly *shen* nature related to virtues (*de* 德)?

It is apparent that for Xunzi, for example, there is a close relationship between the *shenming* and the virtues. He states:

積善成德，而神明自得，聖心備焉。(*XZJJ [Quan xue pian]* 1999, p. 267)

“If you accumulate the good and perfect your virtues, then you will spontaneously acquire the *shenming*, and the sagely mind will be brought to perfection.”

The passage shows that the *shenming* is something, which is acquired by someone during the process of becoming sage (i.e. a person, who possesses the perfect virtues), and acquisition of *shenming* is a result of the accumulation of good and the perfection of virtues.

As we discussed before, in the second half of the Warring States Period many people believed that one of the main steps in the process of acquiring *shenming* is becoming “tranquil” 靜, and after acquiring *shenming* one is able to “know the Way (*) and how to implement it”. Xunzi has a similar view:*

人何以知道？曰：心。心何以知？曰：虛壹而靜。(*XZJJ [Jie bi pian]* 1999, p. 332)

“What do men use to know the *Dao*? I say that it is the heart. How does the heart know? I say by its emptiness, unity, and tranquillity.”³¹

³¹ Translated by Knoblock, modified (1994, p. 104).

But, how could someone through becoming tranquil develop to the state of “knowing the *Dao*” (*zhi dao* 知道)? Xunzi’s view is based on the theories of the *shenming*, which we have reconstructed above. He thinks that the heart (*xin* 心 – the organ of both emotions and thinking), which is constituted by *qi*, is “the lord of the *shenming*” (*shenming zhi zhu* 神明之主³²). According to him, if one’s heart becomes “tranquil”, then it turns into a microcosm, i.e. heaven made up of clear *qi* (*qing qi* 清氣) and earth made up of murky *qi* (*zhuo qi* 濁氣) gets separated within the heart. When the forms of heaven and earth appear within the heart, then as a matter of course the natures of heaven and earth also appear [nature originates from and is defined by the form], thus one “attains the *shenming*” (*tong yu shenming* 通於神明) and “becomes equal to heaven and earth” (*can yu tiandi* 參於天地). Xunzi describes this progress in the following way:

故人心譬如槃水，正錯而勿動，則湛濁在下而清明在上。
(XZJJ [Jie bi pian] 1999, p. 333)

“Thus human heart is like a bowl of water. If it stands upright and does not move, then the murky part sinks down in it, and the clear part rises.”

It is worth mentioning here that Xun’s cosmogonical theory on the emergence of the microcosm is absolutely the same as the cosmogonical theory appearing in the *Taiyi sheng shui*:

water (symbolising *qi*) → heaven and earth → *shenming*

There is also a basic theory in the chapter called *Nei ye* of the *Guanzi* that by tranquillisation of the heart the heart-constituting *qi* takes its proper place and becomes orderly:

心靜氣理。 (GZJZ [Nei ye] 1999, p. 866)

“When the heart becomes tranquil, then the *qi* becomes orderly.”

Then, how can one manage to make his/her heart tranquil? According to the theory described in the *Nei ye*, heart-constituting *qi* can be tranquillised with the aid of virtue:

(...)氣也，不可止以力，而可安以德。 (GZJZ [Nei ye] 1999, p. 866)

“The *qi* cannot be made tranquil by force, but it can be tranquillised by virtue.”

Xunzi shares this opinion, stating the following:

積善成德，而神明自得。 (XZJJ [Quan xue pian] 1999, p. 267)

“If you accumulate the good and you perfect your virtues, then you will spontaneously acquire the *shenming*.”

For Xunzi, the “accumulation of good and the perfection of the virtues” are methods for the cultivation of human nature (Xu 1990, p. 249). This fact and the following passage also evidence that according to Xunzi the progress of “attaining *shenming*” 通於神明 is the transformation of human nature 化性移質, and accomplishment of “attaining *shenming*” is the same as the acquisition of the natures of heaven and earth, which is the ultimate goal of the cultivation of human nature:

³² XZJJ [Jie bi pian] 1999, p. 333.

注錯習俗，所以化性也；并一而不二，所以成積也。習俗移志，安久移質。並一而不二，則通於神明，參於天地矣。(XZJJ [Ru xiao pian] 1999, p. 289)

“It is the cultivation of habits and customs through which we transform nature (*xing*). By creating unity (in mind) and not allowing development of duality (in it), we bring the accumulation to perfection. Habits and customs change the direction of will, and after a long time they transform the nature (*zhi*). If one creates unity (in his/her mind) and does not allow development of duality (in it), then attains *shenming*, and becomes equal to heaven and earth.”

The passage below from *Nei ye* indicates that by obtaining the nature of heaven and earth humans also take possession of the benevolence (*ren* 仁) of heaven and the righteousness (*yi* 義) of earth at the same time, thus acquiring the perfect virtues of heaven and earth:

正形攝德，天仁地義，則淫然而自至，神明之極照乎知萬物。(GZJZ [Nei ye] 1999, p. 867)

“If you cultivate the corporeal form and cultivate virtues, then you will be spontaneously filled with the benevolence of heaven and the righteousness of earth, and your perfected *shenming* will clearly know the myriad things.”

The following passage from one of the texts discovered at Mawangdui also reflects the concept that perfect virtues originate from heavenly and earthly *qi* [here referred to as “clear” 清 and “murky” 濁], while separation of heavenly and earthly *qi* can be achieved by the aid of virtues:

五行形，德心起。(...)清濁者德之人(居)(Wei 1991, p. 80)，德者清濁之淵。(Wei 1991, pp. 78–81)

“If the five virtuous acts take form, then virtuous heart develops. (...) The clear and murky is the dwelling place of virtue; virtue is the source of clear and murky.”

Based on the sources of the time, it can also be concluded that in the second part of the Warring States period *shen* and *ming* natures were often referred to as *zhi* 質 or *shi* 實. 質 and 實 were interchangeable characters, which often substituted each other (Gao 1997, p. 569). Let us examine this issue a little bit closer.

We concluded that, according to Xunzi, *shenming* is what makes humans capable of “knowing the *” (*zhi dao* 知道). Based on the sentence below however, it seems that he attributes this function of *shenming* to *zhi* 質:*

(...)塗之人也，皆有可以知仁義法正之質。(XZJJ [Xing e pian] 1999, p. 340)

“Common people all have the *zhi* (nature), using which they are able to get to know the *ren* and the *yi*, the *fa* and the *zheng*.”

This sentence reflects, that according to Xunzi *shenming* is *zhi* 質, more precisely it is the perfect (heavenly and earthly) *zhi* achieved by the transformation (*yi* 移) of human *zhi*. In fact, if we examine the text more closely, it becomes more and more apparent:

塗之人可以為禹。(...)塗之人也，皆有可以知仁義法正之質。

(...) 今使塗之人伏術為學 (...) 積善而不息，則通於神明，參於天地矣。(*XZJJ [Xing e pian]* 1999, p. 340)

“Common people can also become Yu. [For Xunzi, Yu was the symbol of virtuous people.] (...) Common people all have the *zhi* (nature), using which they are able to get to know the *ren* and the *yi*, the *fa* and the *zheng*. (...) If a common person studies following the proper way (...) and ceaselessly accumulates the good, then attains *shenming*, and becomes equal to heaven and earth.”

Han Feizi relates *shenming* to *shi* 實 (which was an interchangeable character with *zhi* 質). The passage quoted below reflects that, according to him, if “*shenming* does not leave the *shi*” of humans (*shenming zhi bu li qi shi* 神明之不離其實), they are capable of “knowing the world under heaven” (*zhi tianxia* 知天下) and “knowing the *of heaven” (*zhi tiandao* 知天道):*

空竅者，神明之戶牖也。耳目竭於聲色，精神竭於外貌，故中無主。中無主則禍福雖如丘山無從識之，故曰：「不出於戶，可以知天下；不關於牖，可以知天道。」此言神明之不離其實也。
(*HFZJJ [Yu Lao]* 1999, p. 960)

“The senses are doors and windows of the *shenming*. If eyes and ears are overflowed by sounds and colors, and human spirit is overrun by outer phenomena, there will be no control over the inner sphere. If there is no control over the inner sphere, then fortune and misfortune even as apparent as a hill or mountain, will not be recognised. Thus it is said: ‘Does not step out of the door, yet knows the world under heaven. Does not look out of the window, yet knows the *Dao* of heaven.’ It is about ones whose *shenming* does not leave their *shi*.”

Although it is quite possibly derives from the Han period, one part of the *Liji* 禮記 is well worth mentioning in relation to this subject, especially because it reflects an earlier tradition (Boileau 1998–1999, pp. 99–108). As is shown in the passage below, it considered improper to change the original character of the ritual objects used during sacrifices for *shenming* (*suo yi jiao yu shenming zhe* 所以交於神明者, *Li ji [Jiao te sheng]* 1992, p. 916), the *zhi* of these objects and items had to be preserved:

大羹不和，貴其質也。大圭不琢，美其質也。
(*Li ji [Jiao te sheng]* 1992, p. 916)

“Ritual food [“Great Stew”] should not be seasoned as it is its *zhi* (nature) that we value. Ritual jade should not be carved, as it is its *zhi* (nature) that we find beautiful.”

Thus ritual respect of *shenming* 神明 was joined to the honour of *zhi* 質. This manifestation of correlative thinking also reflects, that there was a close relationship between the concepts of *shenming* and *zhi*.

4. Conclusion

So we can conclude that although earlier studies extensively explored the scope of meaning of the term *shenming*, with the help of ancient Chinese written sources (in-

cluding both transmitted and recently discovered texts) it is possible to determine some previously unknown connotations of the term. We have shown that in the second half of the Warring States period the word *shen* 神 and its synonyms often referred to the *qi*-condensing nature or the nature of earth, while the word *ming* 明 and its synonyms frequently denoted the *qi*-extending nature or the nature of heaven. We also concluded that for many Chinese of the time, the words *shen* and *ming* of the *Taiyi sheng shui* also meant these two kinds of natures. We discussed that according to a theory of the period, humans can also acquire the *shen* and *ming* natures through cultivation of their own nature. If they succeed in acquiring *shen* and *ming* natures, then they become bearers of perfect virtues of heaven and earth, and are able to know the *Dao*. Finally we have seen, that these two kinds of natures were often referred to as *zhi* 質 or *shi* 實 in the period.

I am convinced that these findings on the meaning of the term *shenming* can lead us to a better understanding of several ancient Chinese texts and the ancient Chinese thinking.

Abbreviations

- GJZJ* = Guanzi jiaozheng
HFJJ = Han Feizi jijie
HGZ = Heguanzi
HNZZ = Huainanzi zhu
JSB = Jingmen Shi Bowuguan
LSCQ = Lu: shi chun qiu
LZZG = Laozi zhi gui
MHBZX = Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu Zhengli Xiaozu
MZJG = Mozi jiangu
WDZWY = Wuhan Daxue Zhongguo Wenhua Yanjiuyuan
XZJJ = Xunzi jijie
ZZJJ = Zhuangzi jijie

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