Abstract for Nylan paper

No Future with a Capital 'F':
Why the Ancients in Early China Thought More Clearly about Most Things"

In both China and the US, we are seeing many different groups who are invested in futurist fantasies of various sorts (many of them deeply destructive, for various reasons). My paper therefore addresses the question of why beliefs in a future with a capital "F" (meaning, a qualitatively different future) are at once so attractive and so damaging to human societies. All such futuristic Futures (as opposed to simple acknowledgements that there will be "later generations," as the classical Chinese texts assert) in effect rely upon two main fantasies: first, that technology will have ameliorated or resolved the most pressing problems of today's existence as in mortality, climate change, and so on; and second, that humans, as adaptable creatures, will have adapted so quickly and thoroughly to new technological possibilities that they will be, in some sense, posthuman, meaning, not like us in their thinking and their motivations. The early Chinese thinkers acknowledged the impact over the ages of technological changes, but they believed that human motivations and the fundamental human condition have not changed over time. They urged that communities past, present, and future, recognize their reliance upon one another, as a preliminary step toward achieving what one modern philosopher has called "life-transcending interests," in the construction of workable sociopolitical orders.