

Early Intertextual Uses of Parallels with the *Laozi*
and Their Role as Sources of Authority

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Larson Di Fiori received an A.B. in East Asian Studies and Classics from Brown University in 2008. After a stint teaching English in Xi'an, China, he received a M.St. in Chinese Studies from the University of Oxford in 2011, following which he returned to Brown to join the then recently established Asian Religious Traditions program. At Brown and in the surrounding community, he has given several public talks on Daoism and Chinese culture in both English and Chinese. He has been awarded with the Brown/Wheaton Faculty Fellowship, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Global Scholarship Programme for Research Excellence, and the Confucius Institute New Chinese Studies Plan Doctoral Fellowship. In addition to experience as a teaching assistant, he has designed and taught his own courses at Brown, Connecticut College and Wheaton College. Additionally he has published in *Philosophy East and West* and contributed entries for the ongoing *Daozang Jiyao Project* based out of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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1: INTRODUCTION

Like a forest growing, what we might call a “textual ecosystem” had begun to spring up together with the *Laozi* 老子 by the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). Other texts referenced it, and even used it as a source of authority for their arguments like a font of sustenance to further their growth. Clearly, the *Laozi* was playing an important role in the conversations taking place in written form. But it did not reach this point of significance overnight.

Research into the origins of the *Laozi* suggests that it emerged not from the brush of a single eminent sage, but over decades or even centuries of accumulation, although there are still a few defenders of the story of a single author.¹ There is evidence to suggest much of the text emerged from an oral tradition that only later was written down and collected.² Its compilation, and association with a mythical sage named Laozi, may only have occurred toward the end of the Warring States period, in the middle of the third century BCE, centuries after Laozi would have lived had he actually existed, according to the earliest biography which places him as an older contemporary of Confucius (c. 551-

¹ Most notably Chen Guying. His argument for Laozi as the single author has recently been translated from the original Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Lao Zhuang Xin Lun* 老莊新論, Xiu ding ban, di 1 ban. (Beijing : Shang wu yin shu guan, 2008). in Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Rediscovering the Roots of Chinese Thought: Laozi's Philosophy* (Three Pines Press, 2015).

² This view marks the opposite of the single author view. Michael LaFargue sees evidence of a 'Sayings Collage', wherein pre-existing oral sayings were deliberately organized into a single text. See Michael LaFargue, *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Ching* (Suny Press, 1994), 301–336.

479 BCE).³ Still other scholarship has called into question whether a historical Laozi existed at all, arguing that the legend of his existence formed over time.⁴

When the first description of a 'Family of the Dao' *Dao Jia* 道家⁵ appears in the writings of Sima Tan 司馬談 (c. 165-110 BCE), concepts and related practices closely associated with the *Laozi* – non-action (*wuwei* 無為) and emptiness – feature in this definition.⁶ Elsewhere, the *Shiji* states that the Han Empress Dowager Dou 竇皇后 (d. 135 BCE) was fond of the *Laozi* and encouraged some members of her court to read it.⁷ Traditional story has it that during the reign of her son, Han Jingdi 漢景帝 (r. 157-141 BCE) the *Laozi* achieved official status as a *jing* 經, a term indicating a text of great significance and authority.⁸ This is a story that has been lent support by the titles *Laozi shang/xiajing* 老子上/下經 (“*Laozi* upper and lower *jing*”) on the recently discovered (2009) “Beida Laozi” (141-87 BCE).⁹ Some process must have occurred between its

³ This earliest complete biography of Laozi appears in the *Shiji* 史記 chapter 63, *Laozi Hanfei Liezhuan* 老子韓非列傳. For a recent translation see Sima Qian 司馬遷, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, ed. William Nienhauser, vol. VII (Indiana University Press, 2011), 21–23.

⁴ For an argument on the gradual development of the Laozi legend see A.C. Graham, “The Origins of the Legend of Lao Dan,” in *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-Te-Ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (State University of New York Press, 1998), 23–40.

⁵ Louis Komjathy has suggested this quite literal translation for *daoia*, and it does serve well to avoid the baggage carried by more commonly used 'Daoist school' and its overtones of formal organization. See Louis Komjathy, *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction*, 1st ed. (Continuum, 2013), 8.

⁶ *Shiji* chapter 130, *Taishigong Zixu* 太史公自序

⁷ *Shiji* chapter 121, *Rulin liezhuan* 儒林列傳

⁸ The story that the *Laozi* became a *jing* during the reign of Emperor Jing can be traced back to Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540-1620). For more information, please see the second chapter of this project.

⁹ Alan Chan, “Laozi,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/laozi/>.

hazy, multivocal origins and the coherent perception of the *Laozi* as an authoritative text and the work of a single sage.

The status of the *Laozi* as a text and the legendary sage also called Laozi can be seen shifting in the way they are referenced in texts leading up to the early Han. The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (third -early second c. BCE)¹⁰ contains (most likely) fictional stories about Laozi, and connects his character to passages recognizable from the received *Laozi* in several places. The *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, attributed to the author Hanfeizi (d. 233 BCE), and compiled after his death,¹¹ contains two early commentaries, entitled “Jie Lao” 解老 and “Yu Lao” 喻老, on passages recognizable from the received *Laozi*, but do not cite the text by name. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, compiled in the court of Liu An, the King of Huainan, and presented to the throne in 139 BCE contains another early commentary, titled “Dao Ying” 道應, though this time the text is cited by name.¹² These texts, compiled approximately within a century (or less) of one another and Sima Tan's definition of a “Family of the Dao” show different relationships to the parallels with the received *Laozi* they utilize, and with the legendary sage Laozi, though all maintain an attitude of great respect.

¹⁰ The *Zhuangzi* is a heavily stratified text, with different sections originating from different dates. The most extensive research on the text's history originate from A.C. Graham and Liu Xiaogan, though there have been many additions to their work over the years. See A.C. Graham, “How Much of Chuang Tzu Did Chuang Tzu Write?,” in *A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, ed. Harold David Roth (University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 58–103.; Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004).

¹¹ Bertil Lundahl suggests, following Zhou Xunchu 周勛初, that the *Hanfeizi* was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE) sometime between 26 and 8 BCE. See Bertil Lundahl, “Han Fei Zi: The Man and the Work” (Institute of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University, 1992), 73.

¹² Or rather by the name of Laozi, or his other name Lao Dan.

I believe that these sources, especially the *Hanfeizi* and the *Huainanzi*, use the parallels with the received *Laozi* they quote as what I will call a “source of authority” even before the text received official *jing* status.¹³ I will explore how parallels with the received *Laozi* were used in a manner consistent with other recognized sources of authority, such as the “Five *jing*” 五經, sometimes known as the “Confucian Classics”, which were established during the Han dynasty. To this end, in the following chapters, I will discuss how the term *jing* 經 came to indicate a text as a source of authority. Next, I will also discuss how other documents of the Warring States and Early Han characterized sources of authority as documents inviting interpretation. Then, I will closely examine the commentaries contained in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi* to compare their utilization of parallels with the received *Laozi* as a source of authority, and to contrast their purposes in doing so. I will also contrast these early commentaries with the received commentaries of *Heshang Gong* 河上公 (Late Han?)¹⁴ and *Wang Bi* 王弼 (by Wang Bi 226-249 CE)¹⁵ to determine how the approaches of early commentators differed from later ones. Through

¹³ Although the term “source of authority” has a certain degree of vagueness, I find it preferable to other more common terms, such as “Classic” or “Scripture”. These terms carry with them overly specific implications of what sort of discourse they serve, implications which could potentially cloud the discussion in this project.

¹⁴ For years the only English translation of the Heshang Gong commentary has been Eduard Erkes, trans., *Ho-Shang-Kung's Commentary on Lao-Tse* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1945, reprinted 1950).

¹⁵ The perceived role and activities of the commentator Wang Bi (226-249 CE), who also produced commentaries on the *Yijing* and the *Analects* has been extensively studied. See for example Rudolph Wagner's life's work on *Wang Bi* in Rudolph G. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (State Univ of New York Pr, 2000); Rudolph G. Wagner, Laozi, and Bi Wang, *A Chinese Reading of the Daojèjng: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (SUNY Press, 2003); Rudolph G. Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (xuanxue)* (SUNY Press, 2003). Work has also been done comparing the *Heshang Gong* and *Wang Bi* commentaries such as Alan Kam-leung Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

this project, I will argue how parallels with the received *Laozi* had the characteristics of a source of authority.

Laozi Collections

But simply to say that there was a text called *Laozi* that was already a source of authority before it received the official title of *jing* is somewhat misleading. This is partially because the *Laozi* itself was very likely not a set text during much or all of the Warring States.

The legendary account has it that the *Laozi* originated from a sage named Lao Dan who taught the rituals to Confucius, dating both him and the text to the sixth century BCE. However, this legend is almost certainly just that: an imagined account of the authorship of a text that in actuality came together through a much more complicated process.¹⁶ Analysis of the language and structure of the text suggests that some portions, though not all of it, may originate from the fourth century BCE and hold some interesting similarities with the *Odes* 詩.¹⁷ These similarities may support a vision of the text arising

¹⁶ A.C. Graham rather definitively argued against the existence of a historical Laozi in his Legend of Lao Dan. See “The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan” in A.C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, National University of Singapore, 1986), pp 115-124., reprinted in A.C. Graham, “The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan,” in *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-Te-Ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 23–40. Some scholars still maintain that a historical Laozi existed, most notably Chen Guying. See his arguments throughout Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Lao Zhuang Xin Lun* 老莊新論. also translated into English as Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Rediscovering the Roots of Chinese Thought: Laozi's Philosophy* (Three Pines Press, 2015). However, an increasing majority of scholars appear to follow Graham's conclusions.

¹⁷ William Baxter has compared the structure and phonology of the *Daodejing* to other classical Chinese works that it is structurally similar to (such as the *Guanzi* chapters including *Neiyue*) and those it is phonologically but not structurally similar to (such as the *Odes*). He concludes that the phrasings (but not necessarily the compilation) of the *Daodejing* can be plausibly dated to the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE. William H. Baxter, “Situating the Language of the Lao-Tzu: The Probable Date of The

out of a pre-existing oral tradition, with short, easily memorizable phrases eventually being gathered together into a single collection.¹⁸

The earliest archaeological evidence we have at present for the *Laozi* comes from a series of tombs discovered at Guodian 郭店 in 1993.¹⁹ One of these tombs, sealed in approximately three hundred BCE, contained in it three manuscripts on bamboo slips that recorded passages clearly identifiable with those found in the received *Laozi*. However, the manuscript passages were in a radically different order than both the received *Laozi* and each other, raising new questions about the compilation of the *Laozi*. One potential theory was that each of the manuscripts represented a unique *Laozi* collection, and that the text we now know today was originally transmitted in variety of competing

Tao-Te-Ching,” in *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-Te-Ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 231–54. Similarly, before Baxter Liu Xiaogan has also briefly compared the poetic structure of the *Daodejing* to the *Odes*, leading him to support the even earlier conventional 6th century dating (to an older contemporary of Confucius). Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004), 172–186. Liu has also made frequent comparisons between the *Laozi* and the *Odes* in his detailed study Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Laozi Gujin* 老子古今, 2 vols. (Beijing 北京: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 2006). As Baxter's study was more extensive, I will be using his conclusions.

¹⁸ Michael LaFargue argued that the *Laozi* was composed of oral sayings in what he called a “sayings collage.” See Michael LaFargue, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching: A Translation and Commentary* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp 301-336.. It is interesting to note that his conclusions predated the discoveries at Guodian, which, by their short, phrase like nature appear to lend support to his positions. A number of others have embraced LaFargue’s position, including...

¹⁹ For an account of the discovery see Robert G Henricks, trans., *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: a translation of the startling new documents found at Guodian* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp 1-24.

collections like these.²⁰ Under this model, the *Laozi* collections gradually merged together until they formed a unified text.²¹

If this was indeed the original mode of transmission, the early commentaries studied in this project, particularly those in the *Hanfeizi*, may in fact be commentaries on *Laozi* collections rather than on a complete text. Similarly, because the commentaries in the *Hanfeizi* do not reference *Laozi* by name outside of their titles (which may have been added later), it is possible they existed at a time before the legend of a single author rose to prominence.

The next major piece of archaeological evidence comes from tombs excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆. These tombs, discovered in 1972 and sealed in approximately 168 BCE contained two manuscripts on silk that much more similar to the received *Laozi* than

²⁰ This position has been advocated by Tae Hyun Kim in Kim, "Other Laozi Parallels in the Hanfeizi: An Alternative Approach to the Textual History of the Laozi and Early Chinese Thought," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 199 (March 2010), http://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp199_laozi_hanfeizi.pdf. and by Sarah Queen in Sarah A. Queen, "Han Feizi and the Old Master: A Comparative Analysis and Translation of Han Feizi Chapter 20, 'Jie Lao,' and Chapter 21, 'Yu Lao,'" in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 2 (Springer Netherlands, 2013), 197–256. both of whom see the *Hanfeizi* chapters "Jie Lao" and "Yu Lao" as possibly representative of similar collections. Note that these scholars use the term "proto-*Laozi*" to refer to the collections to indicate their position that these collections predated the existence of the *Laozi* as we now know it. For the convenience of comparisons, I choose not to use the more exacting phrase "proto-*Laozi*" to designate these early collections, despite its greater accuracy in describing a scenario in which separate collections of passages circulated, none of which were yet called "*Laozi*", if this scenario was indeed the case, as some evidence suggests. For the purposes of this project, the emphasis is not on distinctly defining when the *Laozi* as a particular text came into existence, but rather to explore the role that its constituent passages played as sources of authority in the texts analyzed in this project.

²¹ Note that this is only one possible model for the relationship between the Guodian manuscripts and the received *Laozi*. Harold Roth has proposed three possible relations, which he calls the "anthology" model, wherein the Guodian manuscripts represent a selection of passages from a complete *Laozi* (which he feels is unlikely); the "source" model, wherein the Guodian manuscripts act, along with other undiscovered manuscripts, as sources for the received *Laozi*; and the "parallel" model, in which both Guodian and received stem from a common ancestor. See Harold D Roth, "Some Methodological Issues in the Study of the Guodian *Laozi* Parallels," in *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May 1998* (Society for the Study of Early China: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000), pp 77-78. The "collections" model advocated by Kim and Queen combines Roth's "source" and "parallel" models.

the finds at Guodian.²² These silk manuscripts differ in some significant ways from the received text, such as presenting an inverted first and second half of the text of the received text, showing a slightly different ordering of some of the verses, and using some additional grammatical particles and variant characters. However, the Mawangdui manuscripts are, in comparison with Guodian, largely similar to the received *Laozi* in their presentation of a unified text of a certain length. If there was a compilation process for the *Laozi* involving an early transmission of competing collections, that process had largely concluded by the early Han.

The Mawangdui discoveries in turn have an influence on our understanding of the *Laozi* commentary in the *Huainanzi*, a text presented to Han Emperor Wu in 139 BCE, not quite three decades after the sealing of the tomb at Mawangdui in 168.²³ Because longer *Laozi* manuscripts with clearly defined structure were in circulation, as evidenced by the Mawangdui find, the structure of this commentary around short quotations of *Laozi* parallels²⁴ was most likely a conscious choice, or at the very least would have been read as such. This is reflected also in the way the commentary cites *Laozi*, and even the text's putative author, Lao Dan 老聃, by name, indicating a late stage in the formation of the concept of a single authored text.

²² For an account of the discovery, see *Laozi, De dao Jing: A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Mawangdui Texts*, trans. Robert G Henricks (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), pp xi-xxxi.

²³ For an account of the presentation of the *Huainanzi* and the history around it see John S. Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (Columbia University Press, 2010), pp 1-13.; Harold David Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-Nan Tzu* (Association for Asian Studies, 1992), pp 12-26.

²⁴ Note that here and throughout this project I refer to “*Laozi* parallels” to indicate that there is debate over how the passages parallel with the received *Laozi* that appear in the three commentaries were transmitted. In this way, I intend to emphasize a reading of the passages in question based on their particular role in each commentary, rather than through the lens of an accepted narrative of a complete *Laozi* text which may or may not have existed during the composition of the commentaries.

Commentaries, with a Caveat

This project refers to the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” chapters in *Hanfeizi* and the “Dao Ying” chapter in *Huainanzi* as “commentaries”, but there is reason to distinguish them from the more common form of interlinear commentary. Firstly, there is the structure of these chapters. None of them follow the interlinear structure of presenting a passage from the source followed by a gloss or analysis. Instead, “Dao Ying” and to some extent “Yu Lao” follow a format of presenting a discursive passage followed by a capping quotation or parallels with the received *Laozi*. Parts of “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao” interweave quotations of *Laozi* parallels with anecdotes and, in the case of “Jie Lao”, glosses and analyses of the quotations.

A second difference these three commentaries show from later interlinear commentaries is that the quotations of parallels with the received *Laozi* are, in comparison to the received *Laozi* or even the excavated manuscripts from Mawangdui, only portions of larger sections, and do not appear in the order they do in any other surviving *Laozi* manuscript. There are two potential implications of these seemingly fragmentary and disordered quotations: first, as noted previously, the commentators may be working with different, lost *Laozi* collections that contained a different ordering and structuring of passages. The second possibility is that the commentators may simply have been picking and choosing quotations to fit their argument rather than attempting to

conform to the structure of some text in their possession. Both of these possibilities will be discussed in relation to the respective commentaries below.²⁵

In comparison, later commentaries in the standard interlinear mode maintain a very different relationship with their source text. It is the structure of the source text that determines the structure of the commentary, as the commentary is inserted *into* the source text. The early commentaries studied in this project, on the other hand, appear to be taking quotations *out of* the source text.²⁶ I believe this represents a different attitude toward the importance of the coherence of *Laozi* collections, or even of texts in general, and raises a suspicion that even though parallels with the received *Laozi* were beginning to be treated as sources of authority in the early commentaries, the importance of the *Laozi* collections' own structures and organization was less important than the possibility of the applications of their sayings. As we will see in chapter two, the term *jing* 經, originally referred not to complete texts, but to smaller units of argument. Similarly, chapter three will discuss how contemporary understandings of the relation between interpreters and the sources they interpret emphasize the practical use that interpretation can draw from even short passages of sources of authority. These two chapters together will provide background for understanding why the three commentaries may have chosen to make use of shorter passages in what are by comparison with other surviving examples, unique arrangements.

²⁵ For “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao”, see chapter 4. For “Dao Ying”, see chapter 5.

²⁶ Note here that I am not implying that the source text for the three commentaries was identical with the received *Laozi*. It more likely that they were making use of one or more collections of passages, in either written or even oral form, and using that as the source “text” for their commentary.

How the Early Commentaries Compare with Excavated Manuscripts

In order to emphasize how the three early commentaries contain unique orderings of *Laozi* parallels, I present below a list of the order *Laozi* parallels appear in each of the three early commentaries, as well as in the oldest known *Laozi* manuscripts found at Guodian (from c. 280 BCE):

Dao Ying: [2, 56], 70, 57, 14, 9, 28, 10, 4, [73, 74], 52, 9, 25, 13, [55, 52], 54, 1, 36, 5, 3, 22, (78, 70), (22, 66), 45, (4, 56), 78, 78, 27, 2, [21, 62], [7,44], 39, 23, 28, 20, 19, 27, 10, 71 (52, 56), (12, 38, 72), 43, [(14, 35), 43], 47, 27, 16, 75, 58, 58, 18, 15, 37
Jie Lao: 38, 58, 59, 60, 46, 14, 1, 50, 67, 53, 54
Yu Lao: 26, 27, 33, 36, 41, 46, 47, 52, 54, 63, 64, 71
Guodian A: 19, 66, 46, 30, 64 (part 2), 37, 63, 2, 32, 25, 5, 16, 64, 56, 57, 55, 44, 40, 9
Guodian B: 59, 48, 20, 13, 41, 52, 45, 54
Guodian C: 17, 18, 35, 31, 64,²⁷

What should be apparent from the above lists is that there is no similarity in ordering across the three commentaries or the early manuscripts. In fact, only one chapter, *Laozi* 54, is constant across all three commentaries, and appears in only one of the Guodian manuscripts.

There could be several explanations for the differences in passages present in each of the sources. In the case of the commentaries, the simplest explanation is that the compilers of each commentary selected the quotations that best fit the argument they chose to make over the course of the commentary, subordinating the order of the source to the order of their own project. To justify this claim, we will need to examine if there is

²⁷ Jie Lao on, from Queen, "Han Feizi and the Old Master," 203. Brackets show multiple overlap in the same commentary. [] indicate two separate source chapters, while () indicate a passage that appears in multiple source chapters.

in fact a logic to the ordering of the passages, which, in the case of “Dao Ying”, I will argue that there is reason to believe the commentary was constructed in this way.

However, particularly in the case of the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, there is another possibility. Viewed from the perspective of the Guodian manuscripts, the brevity of the passages in the earliest commentaries is less surprising. As noted above, Tae Hyun Kim and Sarah Queen have gone further to suggest that each commentary, in particular those found in the *Hanfeizi*, is representative of a separate *Laozi* collection similar to the manuscripts found at Guodian.²⁸ From this perspective, the tradition of viewing the transmission of the *Laozi* as a single thread is less tenable.²⁹ Indeed the understanding of transmission in multiple collections complicates the question of if a document is referring to the *Laozi* by asking to which *Laozi* collection it is referring. Furthermore, traditional models holding that the *Laozi* is the sole property of a single philosophical or ideological tradition are much less tenable when we become aware of the multiplicity of its transmission.³⁰

²⁸ Kim, “Other Laozi Parallels in the Hanfeizi: An Alternative Approach to the Textual History of the Laozi and Early Chinese Thought.” and Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master.”

²⁹ Although the present project does not engage extensively with the Guodian manuscripts and their relationship to the formation and role of the *Laozi*, a recent publication by Yanaka Shinichi does address this question, along with other excavated materials, portions of the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi* chapter 12. See Yanaka Shinichi 谷中信一, *Rōshi Kyōtenka Katei No Kenkyū* 「老子」經典化過程の研究 (Tokyo 東京: Kyūko-Shoin 汲古書院, 2015).

³⁰ Indeed, the entire practice of dividing texts and thinkers of the Warring States period into “schools” has been convincingly challenged in recent years. See Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T'oung Pao* 89, no. 1/3 (January 1, 2003): 59–99. for a challenge of the notion of schools and lineages in the Warring States and Sarah A. Queen, “Inventories of the Past: Rethinking the ‘School’ Affiliation of the ‘Huainanzi,’” *Asia Major* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 51–72. for similar concerns relating to the *Huainanzi*.

The following study will highlight how each of these earliest commentaries appears in highly synthetic collections, the study of which has helped to challenge older notions of the existence of philosophical “schools of thought” in ancient China.³¹ This project intends to add to the complexity of our understanding of the interaction of ideas in ancient China by exploring these commentaries on their own merits, through a lens of contemporaneous descriptions of the importance of interpretation of sources of authority, and as parts of an organic textual tradition in the process of development.

Order of the Chapters

The following study explores what the three essays found in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi* can tell us about the role and shape of parallels with the received *Laozi* in the late Warring States and early Han, up through 139 BCE, when the *Huainanzi* was presented to Han Emperor Wu. Specifically, the study asks what the three essays tell us about the status of parallels with the received *Laozi* as sources of authority - what we might broadly call a “classic” or “canonical” text, or, the term in Chinese - a “*jing*” 經. This question is a complicated one, largely because the conception of a “*jing*” as an authoritative text was still in its formative stages throughout this time period. Thus, to answer the question of

³¹ Artificially analyzing chapters of larger collections based on whether they conform to the supposed classification of the collection has previously proven to be a limiting approach. Alternatively, exploring chapters with knowledge of their contexts, but absent the baggage of labels allows for new and useful connections to be drawn. This insight is inspired by Harold Roth’s study of the “*Nei Ye*” chapter of *Guanzi*, which analyzed the chapter in ways beyond the traditional labels for the collection as a whole, allowing for new insights into the chapter’s close connection with other texts such as *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi*. See Harold David Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-Yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

what status the *Laozi* has in the three essays, we must also discuss the status of texts in general in ancient China.

To this end, this current chapter has laid out the basic problems and questions of the study, as well as the questions of textual history that surround the *Laozi* itself.

The second chapter will engage with the question of what constituted a “*jing*” in the late Warring States and early Han, prior to the recognition of experts in the “Six *Jing*” commonly dated to the reign of Emperor Wu (141-87 BCE) that would come to define this term. This chapter will show that “*jing*” was not restricted solely to complete texts, but could often indicate what we might call “theses” or points of debate. These theses, sometimes presented in numbered lists, would be given explanations, at times separate from the theses themselves. The goal is to establish that authoritative sources could appear in small units, and could gain their status as “*jing*” from their recognition as points of debate, not just as court appointed documents. However, with the Han and centralized power, official recognition became essential to the status of “*jing*” - and it is at this time that we find evidence of parallels with the received *Laozi* finding an audience at court, and suggestions that it was at this time that *Laozi* first received the character “*jing*” as part of its title.

The third chapter examines the role of texts as authorities more broadly, including what the concept of textual authority means in the ancient Chinese context. Specifically, the chapter presents the defining feature of a textual authority as its capacity for interpretation. The views of several modern scholars on textual authority and interpretation in ancient China are presented, as well as representative views on

interpretation and authority as depicted in the *Zhuangzi*, *Xicizhuan* and *Huainanzi*, in the very essay from that *Huainanzi* that makes use of parallels with the received *Laozi*. These representative texts give us a vision of what interpretation was meant to achieve: a means to circumvent the limitations of recorded language taken out of context so that those sayings might be made relevant for later generations. The sources that acted as the foundation for interpretation were revered not simply because they were the words of famous sages, but because they were open to the kind of interpretive navigation that allowed them to transcend their original contexts and remain relevant to later generations. Especially in the case of the *Huainanzi*, which presents its case for interpretation in the very chapter that quotes *Laozi* by name, it is clear that *Laozi* fit this definition as a source open to interpretation.

The fourth chapter begins the close examination of the early essays that make up the foundation of this study. It presents the historical context of the two essays found in the *Hanfeizi* - chapter 20: “*Jie Lao*” 解老 and chapter 21: “*Yu Lao*” 喻老. The chapter briefly considers the influence of *Laozi* in the *Hanfeizi* as a whole, and potential reasons why the essays may have been included in the text. Then, each of the essays is closely analyzed from the perspective of their formal structure and the themes they highlight in interpreting parallels with the received *Laozi*. In summary, “*Yu Lao*” uses anecdotes and stories to place emphasis on the concept found in *Laozi* of “knowing sufficiency” and yielding when one has attained enough in order to avoid conflict. “*Jie Lao*” uses extensive discursive passages to place more focus on reading parallels with the received *Laozi* as a correlation between the body of the person (especially the ruler) and the state

as a whole, advocating a physiologically oriented model of self-cultivation in the ruler as a way of bringing harmony in the state. Thus, while the two essays appear in the same collection and appear to draw on the same source, they advocate different approaches for different kinds of rulers using very different literary styles.

The fifth chapter continues the close study of the early essays, this time turning to the twelfth chapter of the *Huainanzi*, titled “*Dao Ying*” 道應. First the historical context of the *Huainanzi* is presented, including the significance of *Laozi* at the Han imperial court over the course of the *Huainanzi*’s creation. Both the authors and potential audience of the *Huainanzi* would have benefitted from an association with the name and use of parallels with the *Laozi* during this time period, making the explicit association presented in “*Dao Ying*” a political move in and of itself. The role of *Laozi* in the *Huainanzi* as a whole is presented, showing that *Laozi* was of key importance in the text as a whole, but that it appears primarily in subtle, uncredited quotations and resonances, while “*Dao Ying*” demonstrates a certain uniqueness by its explicit and frequent use of parallels with the received *Laozi*. Finally, the structure and themes of “*Dao Ying*” are mapped and explored, showing a highly formalized organization that may have been intended for instruction or debate. Thematically, “*Dao Ying*” revolves around themes of the acquisition and control of knowledge and how a ruler should first learn from self and others in the proper manner, and then control what others know of the ruler as a means of governing.

The sixth chapter brings the three essays together for comparison. Relatively few *Laozi* parallels are shared in common between two or more of the essays, and each of these are outlined and examined, both structurally and thematically. Structurally

speaking, even in the instances where a *Laozi* parallel is shared between the essays, they often utilize different lines from that passage, suggesting a wide divergence on which portions of *Laozi* were either available or viewed as significant for each of the essays. However, when examined from a thematic level, there is a much greater consistency of interpretation, with the essays often differing on subtle aspects of interpretation. Possibly, this suggests an ongoing discussion represented in these essays that accepted several general features of the parallels with the received *Laozi* which they use, in particular their political applications, but that differed on points of implementation - as one might expect of an ongoing interpretive tradition of an authoritative source. Finally, this chapter compares the only passage shared in common across all three essays - *Laozi* 54 - with the interpretations given in three significant later commentaries: the *Yan Zun* 嚴遵, possibly the earliest surviving interlinear commentary on *Laozi*, the *Heshanggong* 河上公, historically the most widely circulated commentary and the *Wang Bi* 王弼, one of the most influential commentaries for modern scholarship. This analysis shows great similarities in the emphasis on politics and physiological cultivation among the three essays, the *Yan Zun* and the *Heshanggong*, while in the *Wang Bi* these elements are conspicuously absent.

The seventh chapter presents conclusions and implications from the work in the preceding chapters. It reiterates that the three early essays reveal parallels with the received *Laozi* occupying roles as sources of authority that would support interpretation, as the underlying foundation of an ongoing discussion that the essays conduct on the specifics of how a ruler should govern.

2: DEFINING JING

“Yu Lao”, “Jie Lao” and “Dao Ying”, three essays found between the *Hanfeizi* and the *Huainanzi*, provide a window into the earliest uses of parallels with the received *Laozi*. Clearly, as later chapters will show, each of the three is deeply indebted to the *Laozi* parallels they quote, both structurally to support their arguments, and thematically to inform the basic underpinnings of the views they espouse. This indebtedness, in turn, shows that parallels with the received *Laozi*, in whatever collection they manifested for the authors of the essay, were of deep significance for those authors. The *Laozi* parallels provide shape for the worldviews of the essays, prescribe techniques and methods for living within those worldviews, and provide a greater sense of cultural context to the essays: they are in dialogue with another text, and with a community that held that text in high regard. In sum, these three essays, use parallels with the received *Laozi* as sources of authority, inviting or perhaps even requiring interpretation to provide benefit to the particular contexts each essay emerged from and sought to address.

We use the term “authority” here with some reservation. It is quite reasonable to read *Laozi* as advocating a mode of sagely rulership that does not impose itself on a population in a way that might be identified as exerting “authority” and in turn it is also reasonable to suppose that *Laozi* as a whole would be resistant to taking on the role of being an “authoritative” text. However, for the purposes of this project, we must also view the role of *Laozi* in light of the role its parallels play in the three essays found in

Hanfeizi and *Huainanzi*. In these contexts, as will be demonstrated in the respective chapters, the *Laozi* parallels act to shape and legitimate perspectives on rulership, placing the passages squarely in the light of debates about kingly (or eventually imperial) power and hence authority. Thus, this project makes use of the term “textual authority” understanding that there is an implicit notion of political power in the term, which the essays this project studies make full use of when quoting and interpreting *Laozi* parallels.

The term in Chinese that seems best able to match this sense of “a source of authority open to interpretation” is the term *jing* 經, which has been variously translated into English as “classic”, “canon”, “scripture” or in the case of Buddhist texts, “sutra”. However, as with much translation, the match is not a perfect one. It requires a choice on the part of the translator as to what sort of subfield a given text should belong. The Chinese term “*jing*” often appears in the titles of works, such as the alternate title of the *Laozi*, the *Daodejing* 道德經. Certainly it should not be called a “sutra”, but even making a choice between “classic” and “scripture” entails a judgement as to what sort of field of studies the *Laozi* should fit into, whether humanistic or religious. Yet this is not a distinction that is clearly indicated in the text itself, it is one the translator imposes on the text. Furthermore, not every text that may be understood as a source of authority in the Chinese textual corpus is given the title of “*jing*”. Instead, the title “*jing*” is more closely associated with the “Five *Jing*”³², a set of texts elevated through imperial patronage

³² The *Shijing* 詩經 (the *Odes*), *Shujing* 書經 (the *Documents*), *Yijing* 易經 (the *Changes*), *Li* 禮記 (the *Rituals*), and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (the *Spring and Autumn Annals*).

Note that the *Yili* 儀禮 and the *Zhouli* 周禮 have also been said to fill the role of the *Li*, as have the three texts together as the “Three *Li*” *Sanli* 三禮.

during the Western Han. Clearly, although the title “*jing*” was significant, it was not the sole way of designating the authority of a text.

We are then left with two questions relating to the use of parallels with the received *Laozi* in the three essays in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi*:

1. Do the essays show us that the *Laozi* collections they used were *technically* “*jing*”, given the way “*jing*” was defined in the Warring States and the early Han?

2. Do the essays demonstrate that the *Laozi* collections were *effectively* “*jing*”, given the manner in which they interpret *Laozi* parallels?

This chapter will endeavor to provide an answer to the first question, while the chapter after it will address the second. The following chapter will explore the question of what the term “*jing*” referred to in the times contemporaneous to the creation of the three essays found in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi*. It will look at how “*jing*” was used in a variety of Warring States and early Han sources, most particularly the “*Mojing*” 墨經 chapters of the *Mozi* 墨子, the “*Bajing*” 八經 (“Eight *Jing*”) chapter and the six “*nei/wai chushuo*” 內／外儲說 (“Inner & outer collected explanations”) chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, the *Huangdi Sijing* 黃帝四經, and some relevant passages in the *Xunzi* 荀子 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. These sources suggest that the term “*jing*” did not always indicate a coherent, complete text, but rather that the term initially described shorter “theses” that acted as framing elements in rhetorical and pedagogical contexts.

The distinction between a “*jing*” as “text” or “thesis” is important to the study of the three essays in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi* and their relationship with *Laozi* because the

essays present *Laozi* parallels of varying levels of coherence when compared with the received *Laozi*. Was the use of quotes that appear truncated and scattered in comparison to the received *Laozi* the result of the way the particular author of a particular essay related to those parallels, or was it symptomatic of larger cultural trends in the way “*jing*”, or texts like “*jing*” were approached? The discussion that follows will provide some context to address this question in later chapters.

When the *Laozi* technically became a “*jing*”

The precise time when the *Laozi* officially became a “*jing*” has been the subject of some debate. Ma Xulun 馬敘倫 has argued that the *Laozi* was recognized as a “*jing*” by the end of the Western Han.³³ Hatano Taro observed that during the Han the text was more likely called “*Laozi Jing*” rather than “*Daode Jing*”, a title that originated in the Three Kingdoms period, around the time of, but not necessarily from Wang Bi.³⁴

More precise dating is difficult, but has been attempted. During the Ming, the scholar Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540-1620) suggested that the *Laozi* was named a *jing* during the reign of Emperor Jing 景 (r. 156-141 BCE) in his *Laozi Yizhu Fulu* 老子翼註附錄, based on passages from the *Fayuan Zhulin* 法苑珠林 (A Buddhist encyclopedia, composed c. 668 CE by Dao Shi 道世).³⁵ The recently recovered “Beida *Laozi*” (c. 141-87 BCE) contains

³³ Ma Xulun 馬敘倫, *Laozi Jiaogu* 老子校詁 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1974), 7. Cf. Alan K.L. Chan, “The Essential Meaning of the Way and Virtue: Yan Zun and ‘Laozi Learning’ in Early Han China,” *Monumenta Serica* 46 (1998): 105.

³⁴ Hatano Tarō 波多野太郎, *Rōshi dōtokukyō kenkyū* 老子道德經研究 (Tokyo 東京: Kokusho Kankōkai 国書刊行会, 1979), 670.

³⁵ Hatano Tarō 波多野太郎, 668.

the titles “*Laozi upper/lower jing*” 老子上/下經, seeming to confirm the story.³⁶ We can see that this is roughly contemporaneous with, if not slightly earlier than, when the “Five *Jing*” were being named as such.³⁷

Therefore, we might say that the *Laozi* became a “*jing*” in the early Han, likely the court of Emperor Jing, and simply leave it at that. However, much of the time when we talk about the essentials of what makes a “*jing*” a “*jing*”, political approval is only one part of a larger puzzle.

How “*jing*” are typically understood

We cannot begin to ask when or how the *Laozi* became a “*jing*” without understanding what “*jing*” were over the course of the *Laozi*’s development. As indicated earlier, the term *jing* 經 is typically translated into English as “classic”, “scripture”, “canon” or in Buddhist contexts as “sutra”. All of these definitions indicate a text or group of texts that make authoritative statements. Furthermore, all of these statements imply a type of standardization of identity: classics, scriptures and canons (not to mention sutras) act to define the structures of thought and behavior of the groups that hold them in authority.³⁸ This definition does seem to hold for many periods of Chinese history when authoritative texts are referred to as “*jing*” or contain “*jing*” in their titles – though we

³⁶ There is a brief discussion of the relation between the story of Emperor Jing and the Beida *Laozi* in Alan Chan's entry on the *Laozi* in Alan Chan, “Laozi,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/laozi/>.

³⁷ The chapter on *Huainanzi* 12 will go into greater depth on the imperial politics that shaped the official recognition of texts

³⁸ For more on the discussion of what aspects of a text make it a source of authority beyond being given official recognition as a *jing*, see the next chapter.

still have the problem that “*jing*” is rendered differently in translation for Buddhist sutras, Daoist scriptures and Confucian classics, all of which serve to tell us much about how the translators viewed these texts, but little about what a “*jing*” is that it can cover all of these contexts.

Further complicating our understanding of “*jing*”, and what this chapter will show in greater detail below, the sense of the term as a standardized, textually-located source of authority only came to prominence during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) with imperial involvement in the classification and ranking of texts. Prior to that period there is little linkage of “*jing*” specifically with “authoritative text”, but rather is used more broadly, at times referring to authoritative statements generally.

In what follows, I will sketch a brief history of the term “*jing*”, starting with its supposed beginnings as a weaving term, and leading through its extension to principles that structure behavior, the world and discourse. Through its structuring of discourse, “*jing*” came to mean the specific points of debate or instruction that would be brought up in conversation. Later, as written collections became larger and movements to standardize texts gained momentum, “*jing*” came to be applied to entire texts that structure discourses.³⁹

Limitations Of The Study

³⁹ Much of my summary will follow the points already made in Mark Edward Lewis’s *Writing and Authority in Early China* pp 297-302, but there are several points of his narrative I will elaborate on for the purposes of specifically locating the *Laozi*.

However, before delving into this account, I would like to acknowledge some potential difficulties in this approach. First, our records of writings that have survived from the earliest period of Chinese history are selective. Much written material has been lost, and most of what survived did so precisely because it was valued as a source of authority. We do not have a complete picture of how a given term was used. Second, there is some difficulty in precisely noting if the term “*jing*” is being used to refer to particular written statements, collections of statements or oral statements. Certainly there seems to have been an element of orality, as there are several places that record “reciting” “*jing*”.⁴⁰ But there is no clear way to establish the nature of these recitations. Did the people in question recite entire texts? Or even entire collections of sayings? Or would they recite a single statement at a time, to debate and discuss its meaning? The custom has been to understand these as references to reciting “classics”, much as one might imagine reading aloud from a complete text in the school room, or the recitation of scripture in a public gathering. These recitations seem tied to education, and possibly debate as well. I wish to highlight, though, that there is reason to be question whether what was being recited were text-length classics, and not, say, the number of points we see labeled “*jing*” in *Hanfeizi*.

Lastly, let us also note that we still lack knowledge as to how texts were transmitted before the Han. Did they travel as complete works or as sections? It is possible that the expansion of the term “*jing*” from collections of theses to entire texts was prompted more

⁴⁰ These appear in *Zhuangzi* 33.7 and *Xunzi* 1.8 as numbered by chapter and counting paragraphs in the critical CHANT database. See D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching, eds., *Chinese Ancient Text Database (CHANT)*, Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, 2005, <http://www.chant.org>.

by the change of how a text was conceived of, or distributed, rather than a change in meaning of the term. In other words, earlier “*jing*” may have referenced a smaller collections of sayings, while later “*jing*” could have suggested larger bodies of work simply because the ability to copy, transmit and store longer texts improved with the increased stability of the Han over the Warring States.

Having noted these points (and I will say more about them later), let us examine evidence from various early sources we have available that speak to the development of the meaning of the term “*jing*”.

Definition of "jing" in the Shuowen

According to the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, at its root, *jing* is a weaving term,⁴¹ as in the compound *jingwei* 經緯, where *jing* stands for “warp” and *wei* for “weft”. Warp is strung on a loom before the weaving begins and acts as a foundation for the work. The warp remains in place throughout, as the first fiber to be strung and the last to be removed when the weaving is complete. To make the weaving, the warp is constantly manipulated, pulled back and forth as the weft is threaded between and caught amidst the thread of the warp. In a finished product, depending on the weave, the warp is at times indistinguishable from the weft, at other times visible, but in the process of weaving, the roles of warp and weft are clearly distinguished. Warp must be strong, but flexible to permit the continuous manipulation it undergoes while the weaving is practiced.

⁴¹ 說文：「經，織也。从糸，丕聲。」 From the entry on *jing* 經 in Kwan Tze-wan, “Multi-Function Chinese Character Database 漢語多功能字庫,” accessed April 27, 2016, <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/>.

The *Shuowen* would have us believe it was through an extension of the weaving metaphor that we find many uses of *jing* as the “basic threads”, which, as said in the *Shuowen* “are laid down first”,⁴² and upon which later theories and activities can be constructed. They function like strands, or web that binds together understanding, or channels or lines of demarcation. This included reference to irrigation channels.⁴³ This concept of delineation carried over from the ancient bronzes, through the *Huainanzi* where *jingwei* stand for latitude and longitude, respectively. Similarly, in medical contexts, *jing* indicates the meridians of the body, the web that structures and determines the health and wholeness of a person.⁴⁴ Even in modern Chinese *jingguo* 經過 means to pass by a place or pass through an experience.

In each case *jing* carries a sense of defined boundaries and framework - or we might say senses of orthodoxy and normativity. In discussions of human behavior *jing* could be applied to various types of “foundational principles” or “message”.

Orality

When “*jing*” appears in conjunction with statements or ideas, words paired with it in pre-Han sources are predominantly related to speech or verbalization. As we will see,

⁴² In explicating the *Shuowen* 說文 in his *Shuowen Jiezi Zhu* 《說文解字注》, Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815) quotes from the *Mao* commentary on the *shi* 毛詩: 「必先有經而後有緯。是故三綱五常六藝謂之天地之常經。」 “First there must be *jing* (warp) and only then can there be *wei* (weft). Thus the three principles, five virtues and six arts are called the constant *jing* of heaven and earth.” From the entry on *jing* 經 in Kwan Tze-wan, “Multi-Function Chinese Character Database 漢語多功能字庫,” accessed April 27, 2016, <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/>.

⁴³ From the entry on *jing* 經 in Kwan Tze-wan, “Multi-Function Chinese Character Database 漢語多功能字庫,” accessed April 27, 2016, <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/>.

⁴⁴ From the entry on *jing* 經 in Kwan Tze-wan, “Multi-Function Chinese Character Database 漢語多功能字庫,” accessed April 27, 2016, <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/>.

early explanations of “*jing*” are paired not with terms like *zhuan* 傳 that appear in systematic commentaries, but with *shuo* 說, a word which can also indicate speech. Similarly, as we will discuss shortly, early descriptions of how *jing* were used in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and the *Xunzi* 荀子 use the verb *song* 誦, which can indicate the verbal process of recitation. Both of these terms may simply indicate the greater presence of oral communication over written communication in the Warring States, but they may also tell us something about what “*jing*” were before the Han. In what follows, I will take examples from the *Mozi* 墨子, the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 and what has been called the “*Huangdi Sijing*” 黃帝四經 to show an early usage of “*jing*” that was decidedly rhetorical or pedagogical. Both sources make use of short, at times numbered “*jing*” to frame parts of their discussions, much as one might establish a set of talking points before a debate, or a teacher might lay out a set of discussion topics for students to master. This early usage stands in contrast to the later accepted use of “*jing*” as complete, coherent texts acting as sources of authority. It provides context for asking what a “*jing*” actually was and if parallels with the received *Laozi* in fact were “*jing*” (or a collection of them) at different points in its history.

In Mozi

What may be the earliest known usage of the term “*jing*” applied to a text is connected with the *Mozi*. This text contains six chapters that have been called the “*Mojing*” and have been translated as “the Mohist Canons” in past works. The following

section will discuss why the scope of what “*jing*” indicated in the *Mozi* differed from that indicated by titles such as “*Yijing*” or “*Shijing*”.

The *Mozi* is taken as the representative text of the Mohist tradition, said to originate from Mo Di 墨翟, a mysterious figure thought to have lived between the years of Confucius and Mencius.⁴⁵ Among many other contributions, the Mohists have been remembered for their interest in logic and rhetoric, much of which has been preserved in chapters 40-45 of the *Mozi*. These chapters have been at times referred to as the “*Mojing*”, partially due to the use of the character “*jing*” in many of the chapter titles, and also due to a reference in *Zhuangzi* 33 that characterizes “Mohists” as reciting from a “*Mojing*”.⁴⁶

However, there is reason to believe that the “*Mojing*” found in the received *Mozi* are not the ones intended in *Zhuangzi* 33. Hu Shih wrote what is referred to is not the six chapters now known as the “*Mojing*”, which he feels are later than the life of a historical Master Mo. The six chapters associated with the “*Mojing*” then developed in relation to the kind of debating exemplified in Hui Shi and Gongsun Long.⁴⁷ A.C. Graham reads Hu Shih as identifying the recited “*Mojing*” as referring not to the chapters named “Impartial

⁴⁵ More precise dating of Mozi’s life has proven extremely difficult. In the 1970’s Stephen Durrant catalogued seven different scholar’s views on the dates, covering the years between 500-295 BCE. See William D Durrant, “An Examination of Textual and Grammatical Problems in Mo Tzu” 1987, p.5. The intervening years have not provided a solution to this problem. In their 2013 translation of the *Mozi*, Knoblock and Riegel write: “Attempts to provide more precise dates for Mozi’s birth, death and the major events of his life all have involved allotting him an improbably long lifespan.” John Knoblock and Jeffrey K Riegel, trans., *Mozi: A Study and Translation of the Ethical and Political Writings* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies. University of California, 2013), pp 1-2.

⁴⁶ 俱誦《墨經》，而倍譎不同，相謂別墨；CHANT *Zhuangzi*, 33.7

⁴⁷ Hu Shih's main argument is that the canons have a more rhetorical quality to them, similar to what is associated with Hui Shi and Gongsun Long. Hu Shih places the “*Mojing*” in relation to the 「別墨」 “debating Mo” found in *Zhuangzi* 33. See Hu Shih 胡適, *Zhongguo Zhexue Dagang* 中國哲學史大綱, *Minguo Congshu* 民國叢書 (Shangwu 商務印書館, 1919), 185.

Caring” and so on, but to the original theses of Master Mo that went by these names.⁴⁸

These debates used a species of logical arguments to make their points, and it seems the so-called “*Mojing*” was made to answer the style of debating by point.⁴⁹

The descriptions Hu Shih and A.C. Graham give of the origins of the six “*Mojing*” chapters indicate that a “*jing*” did not even have to represent the central or core message of a text or tradition. If the six chapters are in fact the product of later Mohist debates both with each other and with other rivals, they cannot be said to even have been intended as representations of the “authentic” thought of Mo Di himself, even if they might have been used as a sort of boiling down or distillation of these points.⁵⁰ In this sense, they are not a looking back at an authoritative, earlier source, but are themselves later developments and interpretations of that source.⁵¹

Yet, even if they do not hold the authoritative statements of Mo Di, the *jing* chapters display what we could identify as an interest in presenting and explaining the authority of

⁴⁸ Graham references Hu Shih in note 56 on pg. 22 and again on pg. 243 of A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* (Hong Kong; London: Chinese University Press, Chinese University of Hong Kong; School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1978).

⁴⁹ As Graham claims of the *jing*: “They do not propagate Mohism, they codify the techniques for defending it in debate.” Graham, 24.

⁵⁰ Graham notes that much of the characteristic “ten theses” of Mo Di, like “impartial caring” *jian ai* 兼愛 are not defined in the *jing* chapters, possibly because it was assumed all participants would already be familiar with these terms. Graham, 235–36.

Of course, if it was assumed that everyone was familiar with these key ideas of the founder, the subject of the debate would be on topics and implications of those founding ideas, rather than explicating the founding ideas themselves.

⁵¹ Scott Lowe inadvertently touches on this issue of authority and authenticity in writing his own comments on the six logic chapters, saying “As evidence of a group’s or part of a group’s, thought after the death of its founder they are invaluable, but only where that later thought serves to clarify terms and concepts presented in an earlier strata of the *Mozi* can it prove useful in our study.

Scott Lowe, *Mo Tzu’s Religious Blueprint for a Chinese Utopia: The Will and the Way* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 65.

In other words, these “*jing*” in places serve as commentary on earlier strata of the *Mozi*, a role contradictory to the one attributed to Han and later “*jing*” which are themselves the sources and originators that need to be commented upon.

a text, but specifically intended for rhetorical purposes. At an organizational level, the four chapters with “*jing*” in their titles, 40-43, are paired (40 with 42, 41 with 43) in a structure of *jing* - the source text - in one chapter, and *shuo* 說 - an explanation of the source in another chapter.⁵² From the perspective of later commentaries, this is an unusual choice that physically separates the explanations from the source material upon which they comment, and which Graham thought may be indicative of a practice of memorizing the *jing*, which were relatively fixed, separately from explanations which may have been more fluid oral instructions.⁵³

The *jing* chapters themselves follow an organizational structure that Graham has divided into five general thematic divisions as follows:

1. Definitions: how names relate to their objects
2. Actions: making decisions in various situations
3. Principles: the unchanging axioms under the changing world
4. Examples of explaining objects through causes
5. Examples of explaining names through implications of definition⁵⁴

Each passage in the *jing* chapters is extremely short, and would often be difficult to understand without the application of the materials from the *shuo* chapters, which elaborate in somewhat longer passages. However, the emphasis on short, efficient passages remains in both *jing* and *shuo*.

⁵² These *jing* and *shuo* portions fit together so closely that AC Graham chose to combine the respective sections in his remarkable study and translation of these chapters, Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science*.

⁵³ Graham, 23.

⁵⁴ Graham, 232.

The remaining two chapters attributed to the “*Mojing*”, entitled *Da/Xiao Qu* 大/小取 (“major/minor selection”) are somewhat longer than the four *jing/shuo* chapters. These longer passages contain a variety of logical propositions, but unfortunately corruption often renders them difficult to follow. However, they do contain what Graham found to be the oldest portion of the “*Mojing*”, “*Yujing*” 語經, which he translates as “Expounding the *jing*”. In particular, this section begins with *yujing ye* 語經也 which Graham reads as “expounding as being a *jing*” – rather than as being anything else – a *jing* in this case being “...authoritative statements of Mohist doctrine...”⁵⁵ The lines that follow are logical propositions that are being expounded as *jing*:

語經。語經也，非白馬焉，執駒焉說求之舞說非也，漁大之舞大非也。

Expounding the jing. Expounding *jing* is [to propose] what is not so of a white horse is so of a colt, [then if] the explanation (*shuo*) seeks to make sense of these ideas [literally: make them dance] the explanation (*shuo*) is incorrect. [If one] pursues an [even] greater meaning, then it will be even more incorrect.⁵⁶

In essence, a “*jing*” in this case is a sort of proposition or thesis which can be expounded in a debate and which an interlocutor can challenge in what the passage expresses as a kind of rhetorical dance. It is not a set, authoritative, complete text which both parties agree needs to be interpreted, but a logical proposition employed for rhetorical purposes.

⁵⁵ Graham, 243.

⁵⁶ Graham, 101. Note, this may also be why few have attempted to translate these passages and as a result even Graham’s own translations are often tortuous and difficult to follow.

Given the structure and the appearance of “expounding *jing*” discussed above, it seems clear that the “*Mojing*” found in the received text were intended not as the sort of complete textual document that Han and later “*jing*” become, but were rather short, rhetorical talking points or theses that could be memorized and deployed in debate. The *Mozi* then gives us two points on the evolution of the term *jing*: first, if Graham is correct, as referring to the primary theses of Master Mo. Then the term applied to points used in debate.

In Hanfeizi

Similarly to the *Mozi*, the *Hanfeizi* also shows the use of “*jing*” as shorter units of argumentation rather than longer texts. In some cases, these “*jing*” are even clearly noted and numbered, indicating that what qualified as a “*jing*” was not even the scroll or chapter in which the sayings appear, but the sayings themselves. The following will briefly examine the structure of the “*Bajing*” 八經 (“Eight *Jing*”) chapter and the six “*nei/wai chushuo*” 內／外儲說 (“Inner & outer collected explanations”) chapters to show how they treat “*jing*” as discrete, countable units of discussion.

The *Hanfeizi* itself is a much later text than the *Mozi*, attributed to Hanfeizi (d. 233 BCE) and likely compiled by his students.⁵⁷ However, suffice it to say here that the *Hanfeizi* displays a particular interest in methods of rhetoric and argumentation, including, apparently, the use of “*jing*” and explanations of them.

⁵⁷ A more extensive discussion of the history and motivations surrounding the *Hanfeizi* appears in chapter 4 of this work, dealing with the “*Jielao*” and “*Yulao*” essays.

The “*Bajing*” or “Eight *Jing*” chapter consists of eight techniques or principles for ruling, introduced by numbers⁵⁸, and capped in all but the last case by a two-character name.⁵⁹ The “*jing*” in this case indicates a short principle, rule of thumb or perhaps thesis. Chen Qitian 陳啓天 says of the “*Bajing*” chapter:

凡理法之不可易者，通稱曰經。又凡以經名者，皆詞約而義博。八經之得名，以本篇所言有八術，為人君治國所不可易者。⁶⁰

Any principles that cannot be changed are designated as “*jing*”. Moreover, anything named a “*jing*” is concise and broad-reaching. Now, the “Eight *jing*” have received this name because this chapter talks of eight techniques which can be used by a ruler to govern a state and cannot be changed.

In other words, these “*jing*” constitute brief axioms of rulership, not complete, classic texts that rulers ought to study. The numbering of the passages further emphasizes that the “*jing*” come in discrete units, as do their capping titles. It is not unreasonable to assume that these “*jing*” could and would have been discussed as discrete units based on the numbering and titles.⁶¹

The collection of six chapters constituting the “*Nei/wai chushuo*” or “Inner & outer collected explanations” similarly present “*jing*” as shorter units worthy of brief commentary, not complete texts or even complete chapters or scrolls. Firstly, each chapter

⁵⁸ e.g. The opening: “First, in all governance of the world must be done through human emotions.” 一，凡治天下，必因人情

⁵⁹ e.g. The first principle presented in the previous note is capped with the name “Through emotions” 因情

⁶⁰ Chen Qitian 陳啓天, *Hanfeizi Jiaoshi* 韓非子校釋 (Taipei 台北: Zhonghua Congshu Weiyuanhui 中華叢書委員會, 1958), 150.

⁶¹ It is possible that the numbering and title of the chapter were the interpolations of a later, likely Han editor. However, even in this situation there are two points to consider. First, the passages themselves were constructed as discrete “theses” that could be given explicit numbers. Second, if this was in fact a Han interpolation, it means the Han editors were aware that “*jing*” could be used as “theses” that could be numbered even after “*jing*” as a term had been extended to include complete texts, such as the “Five *Jing*”. The same can be said of the other examples using numbered “*jing*” in this manner throughout the *Hanfeizi*.

begins with a series of numbered passages. The two “*nei*” chapters also contain two-character titles, similar to the “*Bajing*” chapter discussed above. Then, midway through each of the six chapters a line states “the *jing* are to the right” 右經, indicating, based on a traditional right-to-left reading pattern, that all the preceding passages are the “*jing*”. Then, in each of the six chapters, the second portion contains numbered “*shuo*” or “explanation” such as “explanation #1” 說一, etc.⁶²

Based on this structure we can conclude, similarly with “*Bajing*” that a “*jing*” in these situations indicates a discrete principle that can be enumerated and discussed. Furthermore, like the “*Mojing*” these principles are accompanied with explanations that are kept separate from the “*jing*” they comment upon, a style very different from interlinear commentaries that interweave source and comment.

What could be the purpose of this format of numbering principles and then separately explaining those principles? One possibility is that the principles originated from Hanfei himself, while the explanations are a later addition from his students.⁶³ Another

⁶² This style of pairing *jing* with *shuo* appears to be in use in the *Xinshu I* 心術上 chapter of the *Guanzi*, but does not specifically use the characters “*jing*” and/or “*shuo*” to designate the sections. See Harold D. Roth, “Redaction Criticism and the Early History of Taoism,” *Early China* 19 (January 1, 1994): 12.; Harold D. Roth, “Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 60, no. 2 (January 1, 1997): 306.; Randall Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1995), p.236. For the purposes of this study, I have focused on explicit references to the terms “*jing*” and “*shuo*”, but there is room for a future study to explore the extent to which this “*jing-shuo*” style of argumentation pervaded the textual landscape of Early China.

⁶³ Chen Qitian discusses this possibility and ultimately rejects it, saying: 按經與傳均聯繫甚緊，傳固所以解經，而經亦有言及傳者，如「其說在」，「其患在」，等是。經為綱要，傳為解說，不可分離，當俱出韓子一人之手。

Now, the connection between the “*jing*” and the “*shuo*” is extremely close, the “*shuo*” is certainly there to explain the “*jing*”, while the “*jing*” also has language that connects to the “*shuo*”, like “it is said in”, “it is harmed in” and so forth. The “*jing*” is an outline, the “*shuo*” is an explanation, and they cannot be separated, and so all of these came forth from Hanfei’s own hand.

(Though he does make an exception for the numbering, suggesting that was added later.)

possibility is that they were Hanfei's own explanations for principles he set down and organized for himself. But neither possibility explains the interest in both numbered precision and sterile separation of source and commentary.⁶⁴ Many other texts were not shy about interweaving source and commentary. It seems to me that the most likely reason for this format was as a rhetorical or pedagogical structure: the numbered “*jing*” could be systematically studied, memorized or even quoted from a text that gave them a clear and specific order, uncluttered by extraneous explanations. These “*jing*” could be deployed as discrete units of advice when advising a ruler or discussing the fine points of governing with others. Later, one could turn to the attached explanations to receive additional information on the content of the “*jing*” presented earlier.

In the Huangdi Sijing

Of important note when chronicling the history of the use of the character “*jing*” to refer to authoritative texts is the set of manuscripts identified as the *Huangdi Sijing* 黃帝四經 “The Four *Jing* of the Yellow Thearch”. In part, this is because the manuscripts have been identified as a set of “*jing*” and also in part because they contain the character “*jing*” in several section titles. What follows will briefly address first the issue of the title of the collection, and then with the section headings to question whether “*jing*” in this context refers to a complete, authoritative text.

Chen Qitian 陳啓天, *Hanfeizi Jiaoshi* 韓非子校釋, 378.

⁶⁴ As noted above, even in the situation where the numbering was itself a later interpolation, the discrete units of argument as “theses” would still have existed in the original. As for the separation of *jing* and *shuo*, see also the note above on the existence of non-explicit *jing-shuo* commentaries like *Xinshu* I, which also observe this separation.

When the tombs at Mawangdui were excavated, along with the two *Laozi* manuscripts,⁶⁵ a set of silk scrolls containing a theretofore undiscovered group of texts was unearthed. Because these manuscripts strongly featured Huangdi, the “Yellow Thearch”, as a prominent character, and were located in close proximity to the *Laozi* scrolls, scholars quickly identified them as the long-lost *Huangdi Sijing*.⁶⁶ However, because the scrolls did not carry written on them the official title of “*Huangdi Sijing*”, there has been some room for doubting this association.⁶⁷ However, for our purposes, whether the excavated manuscripts are actually the “*Huangdi Sijing*” matters less than when and who began to use that name to refer to a set of texts. After all, if we wish to read “*jing*” here as a complete, authoritative and canonical text, we ought to know when it was applied in that manner.

As far as the historical record shows, the title “*Huangdi Sijing*” first appears in the *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 section of the *Hanshu* 漢書, the portion that contains an extensive bibliographic list of texts and their number of sections (in this case, four *pian* 篇). This bibliographic information was material the *Hanshu* author Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 CE) assembled from the earlier work of Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) and his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (~50 BCE - 23 CE).⁶⁸ It is important to note that this bibliographic information was

⁶⁵ See Introduction for more information on excavated *Laozi* manuscripts.

⁶⁶ Perhaps the most influential article at this early stage was: Tang Lan 唐蘭, “*Huangdi Sijing* Chutan 黃帝四經初探,” *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1974): 48–52.

⁶⁷ For example, Robin Yates has disagreed with the identification of the texts as the “*Huangdi Sijing*” - see Robin D.S Yates, *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huanglao, and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 193–94.

⁶⁸ See A.F.P. Huslsey's entry on the *Hanshu* in Michael Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, CA: Society for the Study of Early China: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 130.

compiled long after the tomb at Mawangdui was sealed, and after the appearance of “*jing*” in the titles of the “*Six Jing*” in places like the *Shiji* and *Zhuangzi*, noted above. There is little reason to assume that texts could not have been given names, including the “*jing*” portion of their titles, over the period between when the manuscripts were sealed and the bibliography was compiled more than a century later. Were there an explicit title on the manuscripts themselves, it would be a different story, but as matters stand it seems premature to say that these manuscripts would have been given a designation of “*jing*” meaning an authoritative, complete, canonical text at the time of their burial.

This leaves us with the section headings, written in the manuscripts, which do bear the character “*jing*”. However, this usage of “*jing*” bears similarity to previous examples in the *Mojing* and in the *Hanfeizi*. As in *Hanfeizi*, there is a tendency to provide a specific number of arguments: in this case the *Huangdi Sijing* section title “Ten Great *Jing*” *Shidajing* 十大經 (which has also been read as “Sixteen *Jing*” *Shiliujing* 十六經) .⁶⁹ This section does not then proceed to discuss ten (or sixteen) separate texts, but rather lays out a series of passages, complete with their own headings (*liming* 立命, *guan* 觀, *wuzheng* 五正, etc.). We may infer that what is here indicated by “*jing*” is not complete texts, but short essays, treatises or theses that could be counted and gathered into a collection.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Yates has also noted this similarity: See Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, 200.

⁷⁰ For comparison, see the above discussion of the *Bajing* 八經 and *Shuonan* 說難 chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, which similarly enumerate “*jing*”

Similarly, the section title “*Jingfa*” 經法 clearly uses the term “*jing*”. Although this section lacks the numbering of the “Ten Great *Jing*”, it follows the same pattern of providing subheadings for each passage that follows (*daofa* 道法, *guoci* 國次, etc.), indicating that it too is oriented toward smaller argument units. Even if we take Robin Yates’ suggestion and translate the title as “The Canon: Law”⁷¹ we are left in a similar situation to the one encountered with the *Mojing*: it simply is not clear if the title is referring to the *entire* text as a “*jing*” or if the term refers to a collection of “*jing*”. Given that the latter use appears to be intended in the “Ten Great *Jing*” section, it would be logical to believe that the “*jing*” in “*Jingfa*” would refer to something of a similar structure.

Given the above, brief discussion, it seems that the *Huangdi Sijing* offers little concrete evidence in support of the practice of calling entire texts “*jing*” at the time the manuscripts were sealed at Mawangdui. To the contrary, the manuscripts provide some evidence supporting earlier observations made in this chapter about the more compact nature of “*jing*” found in the *Mozi* and *Hanfeizi*.

Distinction Between Text And Thesis in Xunzi and Zhuangzi

The distinction between *jing* as “text” or “thesis” is significant for understanding pre-Han works. As a particular example, let us first consider the *Xunzi* 荀子. Keeping in mind that the historical Xunzi was a predecessor to and, according to the *Shiji*, in fact a teacher of Hanfeizi, it is reasonable to consider that the text attributed to him would reflect a

⁷¹ Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, 49.

perspective on “*jing*” similar to that found in the *Hanfeizi*, instead of the notion of “*jing*” as a complete, authoritative text that developed in the Han. How does reading “*jing*” as “thesis” instead of text influence some significant passages?

Xunzi chapter 1 contains an admonition to learn through “reciting *jing*”.

學惡乎始？惡乎終？曰：其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮；其義則始乎為士，終乎為聖人。真積力久則入，學至乎沒而後止也，故學數有終，若其義則不可須臾舍也。為之，人也；舍之，禽獸也。故《書》者、政事之紀也，《詩》者、中聲之所止也，《禮》者、法之大分，（群）類之綱紀也，故學至乎《禮》而止矣。夫是之謂道德之極。《禮》之敬文也，《樂》之中和也，《詩》、《書》之博也，《春秋》之微也，在天地之間者畢矣。⁷²

Where does study begin? Where does it end? [I] say: as to method, it begins with reciting *jing* and ends with studying ritual. As for its purpose, it begins with becoming a scholar-official, and ends with becoming a sage.” Indeed, [one] gathers effort for a long time until it sinks in, and study only ends after one is dead. Thus, although the method of study has an end, as for its purpose there cannot be a moment of rest. To undertake this is to be a person, to take a break is to be a beast.

Therefore, the *Documents* is a record of correct action; the *Odes* is the stopping point in the midst of noise; the *Rituals* is the great separation of methodologies, of which it records many types. Thus I can be said that study ends with the *Rituals*. This can be called the pinnacle of morality (*daode*). The *Rituals* [hold] a respect for culture; the *Music* centers in harmony; the *Odes* and *Documents* have breadth, the *Chunqiu* has subtlety. These are revered in the world.

Should we choose to read this “*jing*” as “text” it would appear to indicate an intensive recitation and study of cohesive text collections, much as we might expect in later Chinese history where official examinations were given on the basis of knowledge of certain texts. But is this what the *Xunzi* intends? There is reason to believe it is actually discussing “*jing*” as one or more “theses” that could be recited in a short time, discussed and evaluated in a learning environment.

⁷² CHANT *Xunzi* 1.8 Translation mine.

Let us begin by looking at where the *Xunzi* does *not* use the term “*jing*” when we might expect it. The *Xunzi* is likely the first extant text to mention together the names and benefits of learning from five of the six “*jing*” “classics” that were established in 134 BCE (that is, all but the *Yi*) and later became the standard for official education.⁷³ However, the *Xunzi* does not refer to them as *jing*, but simply by their titles and relative merits. Admittedly, these come in the same passage that refers to “reciting *jing*” noted above. However, it does not use “*jing*” in the titles of the works, nor does it refer to them as “Five *jing*” or similar titles. Additionally, we might read “*jing*” as a general term due to its parallelism with *li* 禮 :

A: 始乎誦經，終乎讀禮

A specific reading would have us render the line “One begins with reciting the *jing*, and ends with reading the *li*.”

Given that the passage also contains the line:

B: 詩者，中聲之所止也；禮者，法之大分。

“Poems (or *Odes*) are the end of the middle sounds, Ritual (or the *Rituals*) is the great differentiation of method.”

We are left with several questions

1. In B are *shi* 詩 and *li* 禮 referring to poems and rituals in general, or to texts/collections of those specific titles?

⁷³ As noted above.

2. If B refers to specific texts by title, does that in turn imply that the in A “*jing*” indicates the *Odes* specifically?

3. If B is instead referring to poems and rituals more generally, does that in turn indicate that A is also referring to “*jing*” and *li* in general?

A and B differ from the final portion of the passage, which lists the five “classics” by name absent the character “*jing*”, in that the final portion is clearly inferring titles.

Based on the examples presented in this chapter, I believe there is room to doubt the assumption that “*jing*” in the first line refers simply to the texts as a whole, and that it is productive to read it as the component “theses” or other types of distinguishable units that go into creating the larger compilations, such as reciting the particular poems of the *Odes* rather than the entire text. In any case, this passage sits on the borderline between the two readings as it is one of the earliest descriptions of what we might describe as an educational curriculum prescribing the study of specific materials.

Next, there is the example in the twenty-first chapter where the *Xunzi* gives the citation “a *dao jing* says:” 「道經曰」, followed by a couplet now found in the *Documents*.⁷⁴

故《道經》曰：「人心之危，道心之微。」危微之幾，惟明君子而後能知之。⁷⁵

Thus a “*dao jing*” says: “The dangers of the human heart, the subtlety of the heart of the *dao*.” Only a clever exemplary person (*junzi*) can understand the difference between danger and subtlety.

⁷⁴ 人心惟危，道心惟微。CHANT *Shangshu* 尚書 3.2

The phrase is attributed to the Sage-ruler Yu 禹

⁷⁵ CHANT *Xunzi* 21.8

The sense that *jing* implies a text has led some commentators to hypothesize that the *Xunzi* is referring to a now lost text, or under some circumstances a specifically “Daoist” text. But if “*jing*” is read as a “thesis”, then the couplet in question is a talking point to support the argument, in which case the “dao *jing*” simply indicates “a principle of the path” or “an thesis about this way”. This understanding removes the puzzling element of why the *Xunzi* would suddenly cite another text here.

Reading “*jing*” as “theses” instead of “texts” is also a useful approach to a passage in *Zhuangzi*, when Confucius meets Lao Dan and expounds on the “twelve *jing*”.⁷⁶ If we render this as “classic text” it forces a reading that implies some selection of texts or commentaries that together reach the number of twelve and implies the existence of a “canon” of a certain size. However there was not an official list of “twelve classics” in use in the early Han or before, causing these “twelve *jing*” to remain a source of puzzlement if understood as “texts”. On the other hand, reading the reference as “12 theses” allows for the possibility that Confucius is setting out points of debate rather than expounding on complete texts, similarly to those points delineated in the *Hanfeizi*. However, as we will see in the next section, the *Zhuangzi* also contains another passage that undoubtedly intends “*jing*” as “text”.

Shift To Text

The *Zhuangzi* also includes what could be the earliest obvious use of *jing* as “classic text” when it lists the “Six *Jing*” and gives the titles of the works that would eventually

⁷⁶ 往見老聃，而老聃不許，於是繙十二經以說。 CHANT *Zhuangzi* 13.9

come to form the list of official “*jing*” after Emperor Wu of Han established the official positions of “erudites” in 136 BCE, each official an expert on one of these six collections. These six titles appear in a *Zhuangzi* passage depicting a dialog between Confucius and Lao Dan, also identified as Laozi.⁷⁷ Laozi dismisses the relevance of the “Six *Jing*” as traces of the past not suitable to the present day. His rejection is explicitly of the textual, standardized form of knowledge transmission that would be associated with canonical texts.

The appearance of the term “*Six Jing*” by name in *Zhuangzi* poses some significant questions of dating. Angus Graham has argued that the presence and arrangement of these titles shows that this passage, along with a larger cycle of dialogs between Confucius and Lao Dan, is of a significantly later, likely Han, date:

There are some indications, not however conclusive, that the cycle belong to a very late stratum of the book, later than the foundation of the Han dynasty in 202 BC. Confucius is represented as mentioning the 'Six Classics'. The Classics were assembled and canonised very gradually in the Confucian school, and not attested as numbering six before the Han.⁷⁸

On the other hand, Liu Xiaogan has argued that the passage is simply the earliest surviving example of this arrangement of the “*Six Jing*” and the *Zhuangzi* passage as a

⁷⁷ 孔子謂老聃曰：「丘治《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《樂》、《易》、《春秋》六經，自以為久矣，孰知其故矣；以奸者七十二君，論先王之道而明周召之迹，一君无所鉤用。甚矣夫！人之難說也，道之難明邪！」

Kongzi said to Lao Dan: "I've organized the Odes, Documents, Rituals, Music, Changes, and Spring and Autumn Annals, these six classics. From these {texts that} we can consider to be long lasting, we can become acquainted with their reasoning. From the seventy-two wicked lords we can discuss the way of the old kings and elucidate the traces of the Zhou brought together, {so that} a single lord will not {lack} a place to latch onto and use. Isn't that great! It's the assorted sayings of people, the assorted elucidation of the way!"

CHANT *Zhuangzi* 14.15

⁷⁸ A.C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-Tzû: The Inner Chapters* (Hackett Publishing, 2001), 126.

whole should still be considered a late Warring-States creation.⁷⁹ While it may indeed be the earliest surviving example of this formulation of the “Six *Jing*”, there are a number of reasons to speculate that, at the very least, this particular line is indeed a *very* late Warring States, if not a Han, intervention. Firstly, as noted above, when the *Xunzi* invokes the names of five of the six “*jing*”, it does not include the term “*jing*” in their titles.⁸⁰ As noted above, while it is possible the *Xunzi* passage implies that the works mentioned are “*jing*”, it is also possible to read the passage without this implication.

Next, as Graham noted, the use of “*jing*” to refer to a “canonized” text only begins appearing in Han works, specifically those beginning with the reign of Emperor Wu. Some of the first recorded and preserved references appear in the *Shiji*, which not only contains references to the standard collections of “Six *Jing*”, it also contains what may be the earliest surviving use of the title “*Yijing*”⁸¹, as earlier uses simply referred to the collection as the “*Yi*”. Potentially this usage reflects a shift in perception of what a *jing* was.⁸² Following this period the use of “*jing*” in the titles of the “Six *Jing*” appears to become standard.

Reasons For Shift In Scale Of *Jing*

⁷⁹ Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, 76–77.

⁸⁰ CHANT *Xunzi* 1.8 see above

⁸¹ CHANT *Shiji* 日者列傳第六十七 (ch. 127). 20

⁸² Mark Edward Lewis locates the beginning of *jing* indicating a coherent, authoritative text with the *Shiji*, seeing it as a guiding principle for the creation of the history itself, saying: “...the defining traits of a *jing* 經 were to be universal, to regulate, and to provide a guiding thread, the rules attributed both to a true monarch and Sima Qian's chronicle (i.e. the *Shiji*).” Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 311.

There are a number of potential explanations for why the intention of “*jing*” shifted to include complete texts. First, the increased stability of the Han enabled for better copying, distribution and storage of texts. Although court libraries had existed before, the relative peace of the Han compared to the preceding centuries, along with the prestige accorded to maintaining a library may have allowed for the transmission of longer works, and the comparison of those works with others of similar size. Second, scholars and elites working in the Han had to find a way to accommodate the legacy of Warring States thinkers and incorporate them into a new context. Drawing on earlier models of *jing* as the framework of a discussion, they simply expanded the frame to accommodate larger sets of ideas.

Both of the above suggestions revolve around a central phenomenon: the consolidation of power in the Han court. The presence of an imperial library provided a physical standard that could be cataloged. The consolidation of power in a single ruler also limited the number of arenas for debate, both physical and intellectual, changing the nature of those debates without putting a stop to them. We might see Sima Tan’s definitions of *jia* as a way of organizing the wealth of ideas carried over from the Warring States, structuring and streamlining them to fit in a world dominated not by many struggling kings, but by a single Emperor. Even debates in far flung provinces of the empire would have had to recognize this centrality of power. The classification of certain texts as *jing*, that is as the frameworks of discussion, similarly simplified discussions to the comparison of a few representative texts.

Of key importance is the connection of the term *jing* as text with the imperial court. In chapter five of this work, we will see that the *Huainanzi*, produced in the rival power center of Huainan, treats quotations of *Laozi* parallels as though they were *jing*, in the sense of authoritative statements needing commentaries, but does not call these passages *jing*, as in “theses”. Meanwhile, during the composition of the *Huainanzi*, as noted at the start of this chapter, the court of Emperor Jing was said to have named the *Laozi* as a *jing*, while the subsequent reign of Emperor Wu appears to have been the watershed moment for the establishment of the “*Six Jing*”. This different usage is suggestive of a court-centered shift in meaning to accommodate the need for an organized structure for a discussion with more clearly defined sides, while Huainan continued to work following an older model of debate. A subsequent chapter of this work, on the *Huainanzi*, will provide more detail on the imperial power structure and the influence of the Dowager Empress Dou, an important advocate for the *Laozi*, on the intellectual context of the imperial court.⁸³

The “*jing*” of the Beida *Laozi*

The history of the term “*jing*” examined above casts new light on the appearance of the term “*jing*” in the titles of the Beida *Laozi*. If the dating of the manuscript to the reign of Emperor Jing proves accurate, the Beida *Laozi* could very well be one of the earliest surviving uses of the term “*jing*” in connection with a text collection, emerging at precisely the point when the meaning of the term shifted to include complete text

⁸³ The role of Empress Dou and her influence at court is explored at greater length in chapter 5.

collections. Part of this early labeling of the *Laozi* as a “*jing*”-as-text, may very well have been because the *Laozi* shares characteristics with the earlier “*jing*”-as-thesis model discussed above.

The *Laozi* is composed of short poems that are in turn made of smaller phrases or rhyme couplets.⁸⁴ There are several stories in the *Zhuangzi* where the character of Lao Dan (Laozi) speaks lines now found in the *Laozi* to instruct students, demonstrating a potential pedagogical use for *Laozi* passages.⁸⁵ These passages on their own, or in a collection as they become arranged into over time, bear a resemblance to the numbered *jing* found in *Mozi* and *Hanfeizi* in that they are discreet statements that are open to interpretation.

The chapter above has argued that during the Warring States period the term *jing* often applied to smaller units of argument we might refer to as “theses”. Then, the concept of *jing* as a coherent, collected text that provides a structure for debate for its supporters began to take hold in the first half century of the Han. As a collected work, such as we find in the *Laozi* collections excavated from Mawangdui (168 BCE), the *Laozi* could also fill the role as a “classic text”. Given its popularity with the powerful Dowager Empress Dou and her influence on the Emperor Jing, it is not surprising to think that the *Laozi*’s official recognition as a “*jing*” came in the early Han, and may even have acted as a sort of intermediary between the meanings of “thesis collection” and

⁸⁴ Michael LaFargue has given the most radical argument for the composite nature of the *Laozi*, calling it a “Sayings Collage”, saying of the *Laozi* that : “(1)...the bulk of material in the book consists of sayings from the oral tradition of a Warring States *shih* school, and (2) that these sayings have been deliberately arranged in artfully composed collages of Sayings.” Michael LaFargue, *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Ching* (Suny Press, 1994), 301.

⁸⁵ Especially *Zhuangzi* chapters 23 and 27.

“authoritative text”. In other words, though it may sound unimpressive at first glance, it would appear that the surviving *Laozi* collections were *always* “*jing*”, even before “*jing*” came to mean an authoritative, complete text, because the meaning of “*jing*” shifted over time and the passages that became organized into the *Laozi* happened to always fit the definition. We will see later that passages now found in the received *Laozi* consistently acted as an authority in the three essays found in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi*, even though it was not the same sort of authority in each case.

3: THE ROLE OF INTERPRETATION

As noted in the introduction to the previous chapter, we may consider the problem of which sources acted as sources of authorities from two perspectives. Firstly, as the previous chapter indicated, there is the question of what sorts of materials were given the official stamp of being called “*jing*”. Secondly, as we will explore in the following chapter, there is the broader question of how texts acted as sources of authority, regardless of whether they were actually called “*jing*”. Arguably, the most important marker of the significance of a given text as a source of authority is the presence of secondary literature, in this case commentary, which attempts to explicate it or use it to support new arguments. In either case, the simple fact that a source was perceived as important enough to be quoted and analyzed demonstrates that it played a significant role in the worldview of whoever quoted it, and to whomever they were quoting it.

However, there need not be a single, widely accepted interpretation for a source to be considered a significant text and source of authority. It is important when considering the significance of the earliest interpretations of *Laozi* collections to keep in mind that they do not need to agree on what the *Laozi* parallels mean, or how they should be arranged or even if the *Laozi* is itself a coherent text. What is most important is the act of interpretation itself, which, more than any political decree or semantic custom, is what cements the position of any work as a “*jing*” in its most fundamental sense as the “warp upon which understanding is built.”

The following section will explore “*jing*” in its broadest sense: as a source of authority both inviting and being validated by interpretation. We will examine a variety of ways that authority manifests in the process of interpreting text. First, we will consider a variety of modern scholarly opinions on textual authority in early China, and how the process of interpretation worked to establish and extend that authority. In particular, we will find that, to a large extent, the presence of commentary is a key marker of a text’s status as a source of authority, and how a process of interpretation could help to cross between potential audiences of a work. Next, we will explore how thinkers roughly contemporaneous to our period of study viewed the reasons for and process of interpretation. In particular, we will look at how early Chinese sources, particularly the *Lunyu*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Xicizhuan* and *Huainanzi* 12 depicted interpretation as a way of circumventing the fixity a written record creates and enabling dialog with great teachers of the past, or even with the cosmos itself. We begin this process by exploring how interpretation of pre-existing textual or oral tradition featured in stories about teaching found in the *Lunyu* and *Zhuangzi*. Next, we will see how the *Zhuangzi* chapter 27 approaches the use of persuasive language, the authority of the past, and the importance of making past wisdom relevant to the present. The following section will show how this theme of interpretation giving relevance to past works is extended in the *Xicizhuan* to the point where an act of interpreting a particular text can be synonymous with exploring the underlying patterns of the cosmos. Finally, we will turn to the way in which *Huainanzi* chapter 12, itself one of the commentaries on *Laozi* parallels presented in this project depicts its own relationship to sources of the past and the process of interpretation. Over

the course of these evaluations, we will see that a source of authority was consistently valued for having two aspects: first that it was considered to possess profound insight into the workings of human society or even the cosmos as a whole. Second, it was itself open to a variety of interpretations so that it could be rediscovered and made relevant in new contexts. Together, these aspects define a source of authority in ancient China in a way more broadly applicable than the official recognition implied by the specific use of the term *jing* to refer to a text. These aspects also characterize the usage of *Laozi* parallels in the three early commentaries, suggesting that the passages themselves were acting as a source of authority: something *Huainanzi* 12 itself appears to be suggesting about those passages in its own description of interpretation.

Scholarly definitions of "Classics"

Many modern scholars tend to treat “*jing*” as authoritative texts that welcome commentary and provide a framework for groups that value them. From this standpoint, what defines a “*jing*” is not an official title granted the text by imperial decree, but the larger context that text existed in, and with whom it interacted. Most specifically, a “*jing*” must be a touchstone for discussion. Drawing on the writings of Han scholar Wang Chong, Mark Edward Lewis argues that the critical factor of establishing a text as a “*jing*” – the term translated as “classic” “canon” and “scripture”, is the addition of a commentary, a *zhuan*:

Virtually any text could have been established as a *jing* through the addition of a *zhuan*. When Wang Chong argued that *jing* need *zhuan*, he meant that only with a commentary could a canon/classic be understood, but in practice the addition of a

commentary certified a text as a constant, fundamental norm by showing its hidden depths or polyvalent application to many situations.⁸⁶

For our purposes, we might consider that what makes a text a “*jing*” is its utility: that it served a purpose as both a legitimator of arguments and a repository of knowledge that welcomed or perhaps even required commentary to be understood and repurposed for the uses of a community. Any text that could not fulfill this requirement could not become a “*jing*”. On the point of the significance of community, Sarah Queen has supplied a definition of “*jing*” as “scripture” in the Han context:

Scripture must be understood as a religious phenomenon whose ‘scriptural’ qualities are not inherent in any particular text, but are instead relational. Sacred texts exist only in relation to a community that ascribes certain roles and ideas to them within a particular historical setting.⁸⁷

Here, Queen is indicating that a text cannot be viewed as a source of authority separately from the context in which it was created, distributed and utilized. And furthermore, a scripture cannot be just any text:

Perhaps the most essential attribute of a scripture is the belief that it possesses greater authority and is deserving of greater veneration than all other books.⁸⁸

Although Queen is referring in this specific case to the role the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of the “Five *Jing*”, played in the thought of Dong Zhongshu, these definitions could be applied just as well to the *Laozi*. In some ways, this application is what she observes in her article on *Huainanzi* chapter 12:⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 301.

⁸⁷ Sarah A Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-Shu* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 230.

⁸⁸ Queen, 232.

⁸⁹ A chapter which will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent portion of this work.

In short, although the anecdotal narratives collected in *Huainanzi* 12 are hardly new, the manner in which they are framed by lines from the *Laozi* generate novel readings of the anecdotes and, conversely, new understandings of the *Laozi* passages that have been wedded to them. Besides their narrowing of the potentially multivalent import of *Laozi* passages... they ultimately expand the range of techniques understood to be encompassed by the *Laozi*. In doing so, they masterfully present the *Laozi* as a kind of counter-canon which speaks to the multifarious and multitudinous moments at hand. In this manner the *Huainanzi* upholds the limits of language and argues for its instrumental value.⁹⁰

Specifically, she notes that the power of the conjunction of anecdotes with quotations of parallels with the received *Laozi* not only generates new readings of both anecdote and quote, but also presents the *Laozi* parallels as a “counter-canon”. Her conclusion inspires several questions, related to interpretation, language, and the concept of canon. For example, to what exactly are the *Laozi* parallels acting as a counter-canon? The most obvious answer would appear to be the “Five *Jing*” that were established as canon during the Han. However, Queen would likely not argue that the *Laozi* parallels are “counter” to this canon because of old notions of clashes between schools of “Daoists” and “Confucians”.⁹¹ Rather, we should perhaps take the “counter-canon” to signify the *Laozi* parallels as sources of authority on par with the authorities in the “Five *Jing*”, and possibly with other textual authorities as well. In other words, it could be seen as one of a number of textual sources of authority held in high regard and treated as such, not because of a specific school affiliation, but because of its own value. In defining those

⁹⁰ Sarah A. Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 246.

⁹¹ She has previously argued against this simplified depiction of schools in her article Queen, “Inventories of the Past.”

“Five *Jing*” Michael Nylan has given the following criteria for what might constitute a “*jing*” as a “classic” in the early Han:

- (1) the classic or set of classics must constitute a complete and perfect order of sufficient breadth to answer every moral question put to it;
- (2) the classic must be “easy to know” and “easy to follow” in the sense that it contains no “treachery or trickery,” that is, no internal contradictions;
- (3) the classic must be eternally relevant in the ever-changing present, so that its traditions remain alive in every generation;
- (4) the classic must function as a kind of access route to the ethical makeup of its sage author(s), providing models of inner strength and integrity, if not conventional power; and
- (5) on both the literary and ethical levels, reading of the classics must yield such reliably exquisite pleasures as to forge in the most knowledgeable adherents – the connoisseurs of morality – the strong desire to emulate the ethical exemplars of the past.⁹²

As may be clear from observing this list, although Nylan is intending to describe the function of the “Five Classics” in the Han, these criteria could just as easily be applied to the *Laozi* parallels present in the early commentaries.

In many of the scholarly definitions visited above, one of the central factors to establishing a given text as a “*jing*” was the addition of commentary. Commentary demonstrates that a text has a range of applicability that transcends the distance between author and interpreter in time and place. Interpretation shows that a text has the potential for newly contextualized meanings, ones that can give insight to an interpreter, just as commentary can further aid the production of new contextualization, interpretation and commentary. In short, a “*jing*”, or any of the other terms we may choose to call it by, is something that never truly ceases being written. The emergence of commentary marks,

⁹² Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 12.

on the one hand, the closing of a source text, so that future generations will alter that text only slightly. However, it also opens the text to continual development, to the re-working of that text in each new generation of interpreters. Commentary indicates that a text has transcended the ordinary limits of time and space.

Now, although all of the definitions supplied above could be applied to the parallels with the received *Laozi* used in the early commentaries, we may ask if they are actually applicable. Because commentary features so heavily in the definitions of classic/canon, it seems logical that an examination of early commentaries on passages parallel with the received *Laozi* would better explain the role it played as a “counter-canon”.

Role Of Interpretation

In ancient China, perhaps the essential quality of a textual source of authority is its openness to interpretation.⁹³ Openness then goes hand in hand with the desirability of that interpretation, the degree to which interpreting a text would serve the purposes of an interpreter. The more flexible the text, the more people will desire to interpret it. The more often it is interpreted, the greater presence the text will have in social consciousness.

⁹³ Note that openness does not imply that there were no customs or established interpretations. Openness here refers to how the text itself contains a potential for interpretation. Rather than simply being treated as a statement that can be understood at its face value alone, texts open to interpretation invite deeper analysis and contextualization. Some of these interpretations could become standard and generally accepted, influencing later readings of the text, but even those standard interpretations were only possible because of an understanding of the text as something containing a deeper meaning than a simple surface reading.

The model of authority as the transmission of “authorship” is one explored in connection with the concept of *ren*, which Ames and Rosemont translated as “authoritativeness” in their 1998 translation of the *Lunyu*, offering the following reason:

The authoritative person is a model that others, recognizing the achievement, gladly and without coercion, defer to and appropriate in the construction of their own personhood.⁹⁴

In essence, a person is authoritative by dint of their capacity to inspire others to grow and thereby themselves become authoritative. Ames expanded on this concept in his later work, stating:

...*ren* conduct is “road building,” and requires continuous participation in a resourceful “authoring” of the culture for one’s own place and time.⁹⁵

Hereby emphasizing the connection that being “authoritative” is a work undertaken by an entire culture, where elements of the past inspire current participants to “author” their own cultural models and in turn provide resources for the “authoring” of future participants. Ames and Hershock further expand this concept:

Not infrequently, authority is associated with authoritarianism and hence with uncritical, often coerced, compliance with “elite” dogmas. But the exercise of authority can also be seen in the sensitively appropriate translation of an existing constellation of values and customs into novel and changing contexts - a personalization of tradition uniquely suited to prevailing circumstances. Authority in this sense is allied with authoring and hence with initiative, openness, and creativity.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, 1st ed. (Ballantine Books, 1999), 51.

See Also Roger T Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 179.

⁹⁵ Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 178.

⁹⁶ Peter D Hershock and Roger T Ames, *Confucian Cultures of Authority* (Albany (N.Y.): State University of New York Press, 2006), ix.

This interpretation defines authority not as a centralized exercise of control over others, but as a communal participation in the translation and extension of culture across generations, wherein each person is given a role as an “author” engaging in the continual co-creation of that culture.

Less optimistic readings of the role of textual authority in ancient China still point to the role of texts and the interpretation of texts as active forces in the generation and transmission of culture. Christopher Connery writes:

...texts do not just constitute but also *perform* textuality’s authority. Just as every classical Chinese poem can be read as a poem of praise to the emperor, so every text in early Literary Sinitic works to bolster the authority of the textual regime.⁹⁷

Even though Connery places emphasis on the power of texts to reinforce the centralized power of the empire, it is through the act of interpretation, of reading something as a representative of something else that they enact authority. Rather than static monoliths of past glory, texts are active agents of transformation in society. Similarly, expanding on Joel Kuiper’s observations on oral performance to the context of texts, Connery writes:

The entextualized oral performance must appear as a mediation of absent or abstract authority because of the potential interference of the physically absent performer. A text holds presence and absence in tension and opens up the problematic of distancing that hermeneutic activity requires.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 22.

⁹⁸ Connery, 25.

In his view, the text functions much like the participants in a ritual or stage play, who perform their roles, actively transmitting and projecting the influence of the past rather than merely delivering a message. As Connery states of texts:

...they are not vehicles for explanatory or instructional content. Content is not the issue; entextualization, rather is how government is done...⁹⁹

Although texts do contain content, for Connery their most significant feature is the way they actively shape the government or culture with which they are connected.

Thus, while Connery sees texts as potentially agents of imperial power¹⁰⁰ in contrast to Ames et al who see textual authority as a communal property, both emphasize that the importance of texts is the continual, active role they play in shaping culture. With this in mind, we may offer that textual authority is the capacity of texts to affect the continual transformation of cultures through the process of interpretation, and the degree to which a text influences cultural transformations is a measure of its relative textual authority within that culture.

Audiences And Sources Of Authority

The next question that arises when discussing texts as sources of authority is the question of audience. Who took a given document as a source of authority? Can we identify multiple, overlapping audiences that viewed that document as a source of authority held in common, even though they may have disagreed on other points? Was a

⁹⁹ Connery, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Note that Connery does separate out the idea of a “textual community” with more distributed authority from “textual authority” with a more centralized control. See Connery, 28.

document a sort of publicly held source of authority, or did it obtain only for a small group? Or were portions of the document read and valued differently in different contexts?

For the purposes of illustration, I will highlight an example of a source of authority held in common by a variety of audiences, even though their understanding of what that authority meant differed. In this case we can look not at a specific document, but at the image, or we might say the mythology, of Confucius. By the late Warring States, Confucius had become a cultural touchstone, a representative of certain moral ideals and an exemplar of the practice of teaching. There were authors, such as those of the *Mencius* or *Xunzi*, that clearly valued Confucius as a representative of their own values. To whatever extent these authors may have disagreed with each other, they consistently held Confucius in high regard. Even authors, such as those of the *Zhuangzi*, who embraced ideas that at times challenged the ideals represented by Confucius, told stories about him that illustrate his importance to the contemporary intellectual discussion. Whatever the position, if social values were addressed, authors could not help but to bring him up. As Ronnie Littlejohn has pointed out, even within the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius is portrayed in a wide range of lights, at times deriding him as a representative of values opposed to the *Zhuangzi* authors, and embracing him as a spokesman for the *Zhuangzi's* own views.¹⁰¹ This suggests that there was a multiplicity of views on what Confucius represented and how best to employ his character in discussions. Moreover, Littlejohn suggests we can see that differences in representations of Confucius line up with our understanding of the

¹⁰¹ Ronnie Littlejohn, "Kongzi in the *Zhuangzi*," in *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Three Pines Press, 1983), 177–94.

multivocal, stratified nature of the *Zhuangzi* as a text: quite simply, views of Confucius differ according to the strata of *Zhuangzi* in which they are found.¹⁰² Different authors made use of his character in different ways, possibly because they were making appeals to audiences that also held differing views on Confucius. In tracing these audiences we may ask, was he a representative of an opposing cultural view that must be challenged, or was a better strategy to co-opt him as a representative of a different set of views? In either case, the role of Confucius as a source of authority was not denied, even if it was questioned.

Let us then enumerate several possible approaches to the vision of Confucius as a source of authority:

1. He is unquestioningly accepted as an authority and the ideas he represents are embraced
2. His authority is accepted, but he is appropriated as a speaker, discarding his ideas
3. His role as an authority is acknowledged, but called into question
4. He is simply ignored, negating his role as an authority.

Category 1 requires a sense of orthodoxy, the existence of an established set of values of which Confucius acts as a representative. There must be a place where the values Confucius represents can be found and investigated, such as in a well-established set of classics or canon. We can infer that an audience for this category would have an understanding of what were the orthodox views that Confucius represented, and would

¹⁰² Littlejohn classifies these using two sets of criteria: is Confucius depicted as a teacher or a student, and “right-thinking” or “wrong thinking.” He takes these criteria and maps them onto the various textual strata of the *Zhuangzi*. See Littlejohn.

recognize at least some heterodox views. This group might, for example, recognize Confucius as the teacher who expounded on *ren* and *yi* (a claim substantiated by most texts) and the author of the *Chunqiu* (an orthodox, though likely historically false claim), but reject representations of him as an instructor of "sitting and forgetting" (*zuowang* 坐忘, as depicted in a story found in *Zhuangzi* chapter 6, and thus heterodox).

Category 2 requires only the sense that Confucius is important, and in this way can proceed orthodoxy. It even plays a role in the development of orthodoxy: for example, the claims that Confucius authored, compiled or commented on each of the "Five *Jing*" are a way of appropriating the role of Confucius as an authority to lend that authority to the construction of an orthodox canon. Similarly, the passages in *Zhuangzi* that read Confucius in a favorable light are appropriating his role as an authority. We can hypothesize that this audience understood the cultural importance of Confucius and responded to his presence in a story, even if he was presented as espousing views that might otherwise be deemed heterodox. Perhaps the audience themselves felt Confucius was an inspiring example who would have embraced their views if he had considered them, or perhaps they understood that his presence might be persuasive to others. Of course, satire is also a possibility, but even in that case the audience would find a passage amusing because they were aware of more common representations of Confucius.

Category 3 acknowledges that Confucius is important to ongoing cultural discussions and that certain questions could not be raised without mentioning him. However, the role of authority attributed to Confucius is ultimately not accepted, even if it is acknowledged that other people would see him as an authority. The process of questioning and

challenging his authority may have served a purpose of persuading people who held Confucius as an authority to change their views, or it may have appealed to an audience that already doubted the validity of the values attributed to him.

Category 4 is the most radical, but it is also highly problematic. Certainly, not mentioning Confucius could constitute a rejection of the authority attributed to him, but it could also mean that the author did not consider Confucius as a person relevant to a given discussion, or even that the author was writing at a time when Confucius was not viewed with such reverence.

In short, we have the not terribly impressive sounding observation that not everyone agreed with Confucius, even if most people recognized that he played an important cultural role. Similarly authors and audiences also varied in their views on Confucius. Texts and anecdotes differed based on these pre-existing views of authors and audiences, and on the purpose of a text. An author seeking to reinforce pre-existing views would write one way, while another author might seek to challenge or subvert those views.

Commentary arising from instruction

The commentaries on passages parallel with the received *Laozi* in *Hanfeizi* 20 and 21, and in *Huainanzi* 12 share in common that they are very interested not just in explaining their source text, but making a greater argument that the source text is broadly applicable to the art of governance. In these situations, quotations were deployed to support an argument, lend authority to a statement and provide a context for discussion. It is quite likely that these commentaries have roots in oral instruction and debate. Emphasis was

not placed on the integrity or authority of a single, coherent text, but on the knowledge of a compiler, interpreter or instructor who could bring together disparate statements, place them in apposition to each other and in this way make old statements relevant to new contexts.

Before the advent of widespread literacy and distribution of written material, and even afterward, knowledge transmission often occurred in the context of verbal exchanges. These exchanges often hinged on the authority of a teacher or presenter who could knowledgeably contextualize the common stories and sayings of a culture to make them relevant to contemporary circumstances.

In this form of interpretation, there was little concern for establishing what a text “really” meant or was originally intended to mean. Writings from earlier times were interpreted from the perspective of what they could contribute to the philosophical agenda of the authors, editors and compilers who included them in their later texts. An excellent example of this is in the *Analects*, passage 3.8:

子夏問曰：「『巧笑倩兮，美目盼兮，素以為絢兮。』何謂也？」子曰：「繪事後素。」曰：「禮後乎？」子曰：「起予者商也！始可與言詩已矣。」¹⁰³

Zixia inquired: “What does the song mean when it says:

Her smiling cheeks – so radiant,
Her dazzling eyes – so sharp and clear,
It is the unadorned that enhances color?”

The Master replied: “The application of color is to the unadorned.”

“Does this mean that observing ritual propriety itself comes after?” asked Zixia.

The Master replied: “Zixia, you have stimulated my thoughts. It is only with the likes of you that one can discuss the *Songs*.¹⁰⁴”

¹⁰³ CHANT *Lunyu* 3.8

¹⁰⁴ Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 84.

Zixia re-interpreted a love poem to highlight an essentially philosophical question. He uses methods of analogy and metaphor: if human nature is like this woman's beauty, is ritual an adornment or a necessity? This sets Kongzi to thinking, not because he believed the author of the original love poem understood more about the philosophical concepts he was setting out than he did, but rather because Zixia was able to use it to articulate his own point: are the concepts Kongzi was setting out like these basic aspects of human experience, or not? How far can the metaphor be taken, and at what point is it no longer adequate to explain the philosophical concepts? If Zixia had simply stated his question about *li* being an external adornment or not, it would not have caused Kongzi to think as much, because it would not have carried with it the implications of fundamental human experience that the poem contains.¹⁰⁵

What makes this passage important for later audiences reading, hearing or discussing the text, is that it contains three voices approaching a single issue: Zixia, Kongzi and the voice of the poem. Zixia's insight connects the poem to the concept of *li*, something that would not be obvious. Kongzi's approval of that connection indicates that Zixia's interpretation is a worthwhile question to consider. Acting together, these three voices help the text's audience to examine the passage from new angles.

¹⁰⁵ We can note here that Kongzi and Zixia were likely also making reference to a frame of already existing interpretations surrounding the poem they discuss. The *Zuozhuan* records instances of diplomatic exchanges conducted primarily through the recitation of poetry, wherein all parties involved appear to have some sense of the potential range of meanings already applied to those poems and draw their own conclusions based not just on the interpretation of the words of the poem itself but also the tradition surrounding it. See Li Wai-Yee 李惠儀. "Poetry and Diplomacy in the *Zuozhuan*." *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1 (January 13, 2015): 241–61.

Because it presents these reinterpretations of the past through dialogs, the *Analects* can be viewed as an idealized vision of teacher student interactions in Pre-Warring States China, and influential on the understanding of how teachers should transmit texts in the centuries that followed. Although many passages feature only a quote from Kongzi, other passages begin with a framing narrative or a student posing a question, followed by a statement from Kongzi that presents his view on the matter.

子貢曰：「貧而無諂，富而無驕，何如？」子曰：「可也；未若貧而樂〔道〕，富而好禮者也。」¹⁰⁶

子貢曰：「《詩》云：『如切如磋，如琢如磨。』其斯之謂與？」子曰：「賜也，始可與言詩已矣！告諸往而知來者。」

Zigong said: “What do you think of the saying: ‘Poor but not inferior; rich but not superior’?” The Master replied: “Not bad, but not as good as: ‘Poor but enjoying the way; rich but loving ritual propriety.’”

Zigong said: “The *Book of Songs* states:

Like bone carved and polished,

Like jade cut and ground.

Is this not what you have in mind?”

The Master said: “Zigong, it is only with the likes of you that I can discuss the *Songs*! On the basis of what has been said, you know what is yet to come.”¹⁰⁷

This passage presents several features of the idealized interactions found in the *Analects*. A student presents an anecdotal situation to his teacher, arising from his understanding of what an ideal person might look like. Kongzi then comments on this anecdote with another one, suggesting that there are even more desirable qualities than Zigong had raised. In response, Zigong quotes a poem that expresses his understanding of

¹⁰⁶ CHANT *Lunyu* 1.15

¹⁰⁷ Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 75.

what his teacher has told him. Kongzi approves this connection and Zigong's new understanding.

What has happened in this sequence is that knowledge is conveyed and tested indirectly. Zigong does not open with a theoretical definition, but with a hypothetical example. When he modifies his understanding he expresses this modification through an already established saying which he explicitly quotes. Kongzi then approves of the connection. Learning in this situation is contextual.

There *Zhuangzi* also contains examples of *Laozi* passages deployed in idealized teaching scenarios.

陽子居南之沛，老聃西遊於秦，邀於郊，至於梁而遇老子。老子中道仰天而歎曰：「始以汝為可教，今不可也。」陽子居不荅。至舍，進盥漱巾櫛，脫履戶外，膝行而前曰：「向者弟子欲請夫子，夫子行不聞，是以不敢。今聞矣，請問其過。」老子曰：「而睢睢，〔而〕盱盱，而誰與居？大白若辱，盛德若不足。」陽子居蹴然變容曰：「敬聞命矣！」其往也，舍者迎將，其家公執席，妻執巾櫛，舍者避席，煬者避竈。其反也，舍者與之爭席矣。¹⁰⁸

Yang Ziju went south to Pei, Lao Dan was wandering west through Qin. So he invited Lao Dan to [meet] at the border. When he got to Liang, he met Laozi.

Laozi stood in the middle of the road, looked up at the sky and with a sigh said: "At first I thought you could be taught, now I know that you can't."

Yang Ziju did not respond.

When they got to the guest house, [Yang Ziju] took his sandals off outside the door and came in on his knees, carrying a bowl for washing and rinsing, a towel and a comb. Facing [Laozi] he said:

¹⁰⁸ CHANT *Zhuangzi* 27.7

“Previously your student wished to ask his master, but the master was walking and not at rest, so the student didn't dare [to ask]. Now you are at rest, so I ask what you meant.”

Laozi said: “You stare at things all goggle-eyed, who'd ever live with you? ‘*The most pure seems filthy, being filled with virtue seems like it's not enough.*’”

Yang Ziju's demeanor became serious, and he said: 'Respectfully I hear your command.’”

When he had gone out, the residents had invited him into their home, the owner carried out a mat, and his wife took out a towel and comb. The residents gave up their seats, and the cook gave up his spot at the hearth.

When he came back, they all fought with him over the seats.

A quotation, found now in *Laozi* 41, is placed in the mouth of the character of Laozi, who deploys it for the purposes of instructing his student Yang Ziju. There is a framing story that suggests that Yang Ziju has a specific problem: he appears to be haughty in his demeanor to the extent that Laozi dismays that he can ever teach Yang Ziju. Furthermore, when he arrives at the inn for the night, the other guests treated him as though he were some lofty person worthy of respect as an honored guest. This attitude prevents him from properly learning from Laozi, both, perhaps, because it is not fitting behavior for a student, and also because it goes against ideals of humility and yielding found in both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. To correct this deficiency, Laozi utters a single phrase, one that now appears in the text bearing his name. Yang Ziju experiences an instant transformation in behavior after hearing this phrase and as a consequence the other residents of the inn treat him as though he is one of their own, jostling with him for a seat. The quotations of a *Laozi* parallel, here placed in the mouth of the character Laozi,

carries a message that resonates specifically with Yang Ziju and the context of his surroundings.

All of these passages suggest that, at least in idealized situations, instructors used quotations pedagogically both to make their own points and to test the understanding of their students. In these teaching environments, the structure of the source of the quotations was less important than the context in which the quotation was used, suggesting that the efficacy of the quotation came in large part from the student's ability to interpret it and make it relevant.

The Trouble With Language as Expressed in Lunyu and Laozi

The interaction of instruction and interpretation of quotations provided by a teacher noted above highlights how students at the time were expected to actively engage with the implied or subtle meanings their teachers were hinting at in their choice of a specific phrasing for a specific context. Even though the exact wording of a phrase, particularly from the collection of oral sayings that would come to be known as the *Odes*, along with the already existing tradition of interpretation surrounding those sayings, were important in these exchanges, even more important was the student's grasp of why that quotation was used in a particular context. This active engagement with interpreting sayings of the past speaks to a larger problem raised by many thinkers in the Warring States period. Specifically, there was a question over how much meaning language – either spoken or written – could communicate. This concern appears to have cut across philosophical affiliations, and while the solutions differ, it was a concern for all.

Kongzi went so far as to wish he could instruct without using speech:

子曰：「予欲無言。」子貢曰：「子如不言，則小子何述焉？」子曰：「天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？」¹⁰⁹

The Master said, “I think I will leave off speaking.”

“If you do not speak,” Zigong replied, “How will we your followers find the proper way?”

The Master responded, “Does *tian* speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within it. Does *tian* speak?”¹¹⁰

Partially, this quote can be understood in light of how Kongzi taught his disciples.

When explaining key concepts he prepared individually tailored recommendations and definitions for each student according to that person's temperament:

公西華曰：「由也問『聞斯行諸』，子曰：『有父兄在』；求也問『聞斯行諸』，子曰：『聞斯行之』。赤也惑，敢問。」子曰：「求也退，故進之；由也兼人，故退之。」¹¹¹

...Gongxi Hua said, “When Zilu asked the question, you observed that his father and elder brother are still alive, but when Ranyou asked the same question, you told him to act on what he learns. I am confused – could you explain this to me?” The Master replied, “Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, and so I sought to rein him in.”¹¹²

This indicates that he felt ideas could only be learned if they were personally relevant and could resonate with a person's life experiences.¹¹³

The *Laozi* also doubts the capacity of language to express concepts:

¹⁰⁹ CHANT *Lunyu* 17.19

¹¹⁰ Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 208.

¹¹¹ CHANT *Lunyu* 11.22

¹¹² Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, pp 146-147.

¹¹³ This concept is central to Henry Rosemont Jr.'s suggested approach to reading the *Lunyu*: read all the passages associated with a given student of Kongzi to see what that student's temperament was like. Then approach problematic passages on the meaning of terms like *ren* 仁 from the perspective of who it was being communicated to. This offers a way of accessing some of the context surrounding the passage. See Henry Rosemont, *A reader's companion to the Confucian Analects* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22.

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。¹¹⁴

The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.¹¹⁵

One interpretation of this cryptic statement is that as soon as a label is given to a concept – especially one as broad as the Dao – the label fixes that concept and allows the production of its opposites:

天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已。皆知善之為善，斯不善已。
When all in the world know what they consider beautiful, ugliness is present.
When all know what they consider good, what is not good is present.¹¹⁶

Again, these fixed concepts of beauty and ugliness are no longer related to an individual experience. Taken out of the personal context, these terms lose something of their impact. Even so, ideas must still be communicated:

上士聞道，勤而行之；中士聞道，若存若亡；下士聞道，大笑之。¹¹⁷
When the best student hears about the way
He practices it assiduously;
When the average student hears about the way
It seems to him one moment there and gone the next
When the worst student hears about the way
He laughs out loud.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ CHANT *Laozi* 1

¹¹⁵ D.C. Lau, trans., *Tao Te Ching: A Bilingual Edition*, Revised (The Chinese University Press, 1982), pp 2-3.

¹¹⁶ My translation, to emphasize the appearance of one quality when its opposite is determined. Adapted from Lau, pp 4-5.

¹¹⁷ CHANT *Laozi* 41

¹¹⁸ Lau, *Tao Te Ching: A Bilingual Edition*, pp 60-61.

Significantly here, the best student puts the knowledge into practice, while the worst simply hears and laughs. The knowledge has no impact without personal experience.¹¹⁹ Instead, the best students actively engage with what is learned, perhaps, we might say, interpreting that knowledge in terms of their own contexts. Therefore, even if a particular quotation or allusion was itself acting as a source of authority, carrying a perceived profound truth and the sorts of structural elements that allowed it to support a wide range of interpretations, a burden still lay on the student as interpreter to relate that range of potential interpretations to particular contexts and draw out the potential inherent in the source of authority.

Authority As Defined In Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi chapter 27 offers a potential roadmap to communication that circumvents the limitations of language. The first passage of the chapter presents three types of language: *yuyan* 寓言 “what is said from a lodging place”, *chong/zhongyan* 重言 “repeated/weighted saying”, and *zhiyan* 卮言 “goblet saying”, which will require some explanation.

Yuyan

寓言十九，藉外論之。親父不為其子媒。親父譽之，不若非其父者也；非吾罪也，人之罪也。與己同則應，不與己同則反，同於己為是之，異於己為非之。¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ This passage can also be interpreted with laughing as a spontaneous act being superior to study, an act of concentrated effort. The question is whether the *Laozi* is inverting a standard conception of what is desirable and what is not (laughing at something is not desirable), as it does so often with other concepts. In this case too, personal spontaneous response is valued over a cold objective approach.

¹²⁰ CHANT *Zhuangzi* 27.1 Translation mine.

Borrowed words are nine-tenths. They rely on things outside for discussion. A father does not act as matchmaker for his own son. A father praising his son is not as good as someone else praising him. It's not me that's to blame, it's [another] person. People resonate with what they approve of, and reject those they disapprove of. What they approve of they consider "so", and what they disapprove of they consider "not so".

Yuyan are statements that are "lodged" in an imagined speaker. They borrow the voice of someone believed to be important to make a point, such as imputing words or actions to Confucius to make them seem important, regardless of whether Confucius ever said or did those things. *Yuyan* demonstrate that authority is located in people who are considered important. Even if we may decide that such authority is being applied inappropriately, such as when we find a misattributed quote or a spurious anecdote, we still are forced to pause and question if the information is important because of the person who is claimed to be the source of that information.

Chong/zhongyan

重言十七，所以已言也，是為耆艾。年先矣，而無經緯本末以期年耆者，是非先也。人而無以先人，無人道也；人而無人道，是之謂陳人。¹²¹

Weighted words are seven-tenths,
The means by which one puts an end to speech,
words from the ancients.
Those of our predecessors who did not grasp the warp and weft, beginning and
end of things,
As the ancients did,
They are not exemplars,
Those who are not considered our exemplars,
Did not have the way of people (i.e. the way of social interaction).
Those without the way of people,
Ought to be called common people.

¹²¹ CHANT *Zhuangzi* 27.1 Translation mine.

Chong/zhongyan are statements or anecdotes that have been repeated over time and have the weight of precedent. These sayings can be quotations from the past, attributed or not, or other stories that have been repeated enough that they seem familiar. As *Zhuangzi 27* suggests, these repeated sayings seem important because they have been repeated so frequently, surely, the passage suggests, they must be meaningful otherwise they would have been forgotten. *Chong/zhongyan* show that something repeated frequently enough will carry with it a sense of authority, even if we may ultimately dismiss it as a mere repeated meme. We should also consider that, just as *yuyan* can be fabricated quotations or anecdotes that appear to originate from a revered speaker, *chong/zhongyan* can present a form that makes them appear as though they are repeated sayings through their construction.¹²²

Zhiyan

卮言日出，和以天倪，因以曼衍，所以窮年。不言則齊，齊與言不齊，言與齊不齊也，故曰無言。言無言，終身言，未嘗言；終身不言，未嘗不言。¹²³

Zhiyan emerge each day,
and blend on the wheel of Heaven,
Because they overflow their boundaries,
They can be used to the limit of one's years.

With no speech things are even
Evenness and speaking together are uneven,
Speaking and evenness together are [still] uneven.
Thus it is said 'be without words.'
Speaking without words,

¹²² e.g. "Thou shalt not consume cotton candy" is constructed in a way reminiscent of the King James Bible, but is clearly not the eleventh commandment.

¹²³ CHANT *Zhuangzi 27.2* Translation mine.

Your whole life you can speak,
and not have begun to speak.
Your whole life you can not speak,
and have never ceased to speak.

Zhiyan are by far the most abstract, likened to a cup with a rounded bottom that tips over when too full (according to Guo Xiang's commentary). In terms of communication, *zhiyan* can be thought of as statements made within a contextual framework that are only meaningful in that context. The simplest example is demonstrative such as “this” or “that”, which are meaningless without a context. More broadly speaking, *zhiyan* apply to situations where questions of what is said when, in what manner, between whom and with what purpose are all essential to conveying the meaning of what is said.

Zhiyan represent an ideal form of communication in the *Zhuangzi*, a kind of temporary or even personal authority that appears in a specific place and time and then vanishes again. These words are constantly in flux, and so seem new each time they are encountered. The chapter presents these words as the key to speaking in a way that is fully appropriate to the situation, and because of its transitory nature, does not leave behind the kind of dualism and differentiation that more permanent statements do – essentially if it was only referring to something for a single moment, it is pointless to ask about opposites, because by the time one enquires about opposites or alternatives, the original statement itself no longer holds. This kind of authority is plainly visible in the context of teaching, when an instructor tailors a statement to a student, or even in every day conversation, but it is far more difficult to use in a written document.¹²⁴ For now, let us say that *zhiyan* represent a

¹²⁴ Though perhaps not impossible. My master's thesis, entitled “An Analysis of the *Yuyan* Chapter of *Zhuangzi*: Interactive Layering” has previously argued the *Zhuangzi* itself attempted to do this.

kind of idealized authority that people experienced every day, but not in the context of texts. As such *zhiyan* represent the authority vested in a teacher instructing students, while *yuyan* and *chong/zhongyan* arise in second hand and more distant accounts.

Zhuangzi 27 presents these three types of sayings, or for our purposes, three sources of authority, in a practical manner. We might even be inclined to read some cynicism into the account. For what the passage emphasizes is whether or not a particular way of saying something will be persuasive, not saying anything about whether the statement must be accurate. The appearance of authority is more effective in persuading, convincing or even transforming a person than the authenticity of what is said. What *Zhuangzi 27* is telling us is what was considered to be sources of authority in the late Warring States: famous people and oft-repeated sayings (perhaps things are not so different today).

Authority is linked to persuasion, whether in the process of convincing someone of a point of view or in the process of education, teaching someone information. If you do not perceive me as having authority, I have no way of persuading you of anything. If I should cite some other thinker or phrase that you also do not perceive as having authority, I still will not be able to convince you. Of course, what you and I take to be authoritative may be quite different, and as *Zhuangzi 27* suggests, we tend to agree with statements with which we are predisposed to agree. The trick of persuasion suggested in *Zhuangzi 27* is one of using sources of authority an interlocutor already values to transmit new messages, such as having Confucius act as a messenger. In other words, to the audience in question, a source of authority is something that is considered to have a profound insight worthy of consideration. By simply implying that such a source may agree with the rest of a passage

by association, *Zhuangzi* 27 suggests one is able to make appeals to an audience who reveres that source.

Zhuangzi's approach to language issues

Yet interpretation must also wrestle with an additional problem: that the written word may not be able to fully convey the meanings its original author or context intended. The *Zhuangzi* goes to great lengths to detail just how much is lost when words are recorded, or even spoken aloud. While the use of allegory or quotation can help in understanding a complicated idea, there is an important yet fleeting contextual component to language. This context is lost when the moment passes, and so the reader or subsequent audience of a saying is missing a key part of its significance.

Language can preserve events or sayings of the ancients, but only to a certain extent. While it can convey the broad details of an event, it lacks the individualized significance that context provides. Because of this, written language alone is incapable of supplying a transformative experience for an individual.

This suspicion can be seen most clearly when attached to skill-based knowledge. Skills, in their most obvious form, are the abilities people learn through practice, mistakes and experience. Playing a musical instrument or a sport, creating a work of art or framing a house all require applied experience before a person can become proficient. Perhaps the clearest example of this appears in the thirteenth chapter of *Zhuangzi*:

桓公讀書於堂上，輪扁斲輪於堂下，釋椎鑿而上，問桓公曰：「敢問公之所讀者何言邪？」公曰：「聖人之言也。」曰：「聖人在乎？」公曰：「已死矣。」曰：「然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫！」桓公曰：「寡人讀書，輪人安得議乎！有說則可，無說則死。」輪扁曰：「臣也，以臣之事觀之。」

斲輪，徐則甘而不固，疾則苦而不入。不徐不疾，得之於手而應於心，口不能言，有數存焉於其間。臣不能以喻臣之子，臣之子亦不能受之於臣，是以行年七十而老斲輪。古之人與其不可傳也死矣，然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫。」¹²⁵

It is when it is to be found in a book that the world values the Way. A book is no more than sayings, but there is value in sayings; what is valuable in them is the thought. A thought is about something; What the thought is about is untransmittable in words, yet for the sake of it the world values the words and transmits the book. Even though the world values them, to me they seem valueless, because what is valued in them is not what is valuable...

Duke Huan was reading a book at the top of the hall, wheelwright Pien was chipping a wheel at the bottom of the hall. He put aside his mallet and chisel and went up to ask Duke Huan

'May I ask what words my lord is reading?'

'The words of a sage.'

'Is the sage alive?'

'He's dead.'

'In that case what my lord is reading is the dregs of the men of old, isn't it?'

'What business is it of a wheelwright to criticise what I read? If you can explain yourself, well and good; if not, you die.'

'Speaking for myself, I see it in terms of my own work. If I chip at a wheel too slowly, the chisel slides and does not grip; if too fast, it jams and catches in the wood. Not too slow, not too fast; I feel it in the hand and respond from the heart, the mouth cannot put it into words, there is a knack in it somewhere which I cannot convey to my son and which my son cannot learn from me. This is how through my seventy years I have grown old chipping at wheels. The men of old and their untransmittable message are dead. Then what my lord is reading is the dregs of the men of old, isn't it?'¹²⁶

While a book may be able to supply models for those training these abilities, progress is made only through the performance of the desired skill. These sorts of skills are also the type of knowledge that provide the most direct benefit for society: a skilled farmer

¹²⁵ Ctext.org *Zhuangzi* 13.9

¹²⁶ Translaton Graham, *Chuang-Tzū*, 140.

grows more food, a skilled builder constructs houses that do not fall down, and, by implication, a skilled ruler guides a state to prosperity and safety. This art of rulership was highly prized and the subject of much of the philosophical debates in early China. While all the participants in this debate saw skillful rulership as desirable, they differed over how to achieve this state. For example, those we now identify as “Ruists”¹²⁷ ascribed to a form of self-cultivation through studying and interpreting the words of the ancients, which would give a ruler proper role models for how to act. Those we identify as “Daoists” advocated a form of personal inner cultivation that would allow a ruler to act spontaneously and impartially in response to a situation. This division is possibly oversimplified as looking for authority on the one hand in sages of the past, or on the other, in the direct observation of the patterns of nature. In both cases, while a text or collection of sayings might recommend how to act, it could not exist in a vacuum: it had to be interpreted and placed in a personal context to be useful.

Skills making language relevant

As we might draw from the above example from the *Zhuangzi*, skill-based knowledge appears to be prized over book learning. However, a specific skill, the art of interpretation, might be used to make recorded sayings relevant, even if it can never fully overcome the limitations of language. At best, the interpreter is still left with the “dregs

¹²⁷ The existence of schools of thought in ancient China is a somewhat hotly debated topic. Strong arguments have been made on both sides, all of which serve to show the complexity of the interaction between different thinkers in this period. For the sake of simplicity, I use the labels “Ruist” and “Daoist” here to identify the group of texts and thinkers traditionally grouped under these labels, or which show significant influence from one or the other of these categories.

of sages” that can only be unraveled with a skill of interpretation developed, in part, through a process of self-cultivation. The suggestion the wheelwright Pian seems to assert is that unless one takes the path of cultivating spontaneous responses to situations through the cultivation of skill, one can only be a transmitter of the ideas of the sages and never a sage oneself.

The *Xicizhuan* presents a similar problem with books, words and ideas that the *Zhuangzi* does:

子曰：「書不盡言，言不盡意。」然則聖人之意，其不可見乎？子曰：「聖人立象以盡意，設卦以盡情偽，繫辭焉以盡其言。變而通之以盡利，鼓之舞之以盡神。」

The Master said: “Books do not reach the limit of words, and words do not reach the limit of meaning..” Because of this, are we unable to perceive the meaning of the sages? The Master said: “The sages established the images in order to reach the limit of meaning, and set up the hexagrams in order to reach the limit of the essential and the artificial, and appended explanations thereon in order to reach the limit of their words. One alternates and penetrates these in order to reach the limit of advantage, drums and dances these in order to reach the limit of the numinous.”¹²⁸

This is where the *Xicizhuan* provides its unique solution: if a text were to depict the source of the sages' authority rather than their interpretations of that source, anyone using the text would have access to the same level of insight as the sages. Just like in scholarship, having access to a primary source as well as secondary materials allows for novel insight that is not possible when only relying on the interpretations of others. For the *Xicizhuan*, this primary source is the *Yijing*, which it claims not only perfectly mirrors

¹²⁸ CHANT *Xicizhuan* 1.13 My translation

the interactions of the cosmos, but was also the inspiration for the innovations of the sages.

The Xicizhuan and Interpretation

Few books in the corpus of Chinese thought have inspired as much discussion as the *Yijing*. In popular imagination even Kongzi himself prized the oracles of the *Yi* over all other texts.¹²⁹ This image cemented the importance of the *Yi* for the literati, allowing it to somewhat incongruously join the ranks of “Ruist” foundational texts.¹³⁰ In one version of the story Kongzi even penned commentaries on the *Yi*, including the 大傳 *Dazhuan* “Great Commentary”, also called the 繫辭傳 *Xicizhuan* “Commentary on the Appended Sayings”. This commentary differs from the standard form of interlinear exegesis; instead it presents a philosophical discourse, elaborating an entire cosmology from the interaction of the divination symbols in the *Yi*. While it is highly unlikely that Kongzi was the actual author of the *Xicizhuan* (or that there was even a single author), adding his name may have helped the text inspire the worldview of many other Chinese thinkers.

¹²⁹ This seems to originate from Sima Qian's biography of Kongzi (see Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (中華書局, 1959), 1937.), which he bases prominently on *Lunyu* 7.17: 子曰：「加我數年，五十以學易，可以無大過矣。」 (Lau, D.C. 刘殿爵, Ho Che Wah 何志华, and Chen Fong Ching 陈方正, eds., *A Concordance to the Lunyu* 论语逐字索引, ICS (Hong Kong: Shangwu 商务印书馆, 1995), 16.) However, not all editions of the *Lunyu* contain the character 易 *yi*, e.g. the Dingzhou manuscripts translated in: Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, 1st ed. (Ballantine Books, 1999), 114–115.

¹³⁰ This canonization appears to have occurred in the reign of the first Han emperor with the appointment of an official teacher of the *Yijing*, Tian He (c202-143 BCE). However, the received version was likely compiled by Liu Xiang (79-8 BCE). See Richard Rutt, *Zhouyi: A New Translation with Commentary of the Book of Changes*, New edition (Routledge, 1996), 39–40.

The attribution to Kongzi also increases the commentary's emphasis on a specific type of human being: sages.¹³¹ The commentary not only discusses the benefits the sages brought to humanity through their innovations, it also provides the mechanism by which they were able to act in this way. In the *Xicizhuan*'s presentation, human innovation rests on the accurate discernment of natural phenomena. A process of drawing inspiration from external sources and transforming them to new purposes is presented as the definitive capability of sages.

However, apart from the very earliest sage, Fuxi, all the others relied on a special tool to analyze these patterns of heaven and earth: the symbols of the *Yi*. Although the *Xicizhuan* expresses some distrust in the capacity of language to fully express meaning, it attributes the foundations of civilization to the use of the *Yi*, a single text. The reason for this is that the symbols of the *Yi* hold a special place as exact mirrors of the cosmos. The capacity of the interpreter determines the level of insight granted by the text, and the most powerful of interpreters were the sages.

Interpretation in the *Xicizhuan* appears divided into two basic types: 1. interpretation of cosmic phenomena and circumstance, which is the source of all human innovation and the authority of the sages and 2. interpretation of human language which is accessible to more people, but is limited by the capabilities of human language. The *Xicizhuan* suggests that the *Yi* combines these two types, allowing the use of textual interpretation to understand cosmic phenomena. Through this mechanism, an average human being is able

¹³¹ Although Kongzi protested that he was not a sage in *Lunyu* 7.34: 子曰：「若聖與仁，則吾豈敢？...」 Lau, D.C. 刘殿爵, Ho Che Wah 何志华, and Chen Fong Ching 陈方正, *A Concordance to the Lunyu* 论语逐字索引, 16.), he has always been strongly associated with the ideal of the sage, and used many sages as his own role models.

to gain access to the same source of authority the sages drew on to create civilization, allowing a user of the *Yi* to act in a sage-like manner simply by properly utilizing a text.

Although a user must have proper training to use the text in this way, the text, not the user's inner power or level of self-cultivation, is what enables sage-like action. To the extent that training and cultivation is needed, the *Xicizhuan* presents a mechanism contained within the *Yi* and its commentaries that allows individuals to cultivate and model themselves after the patterns of heaven and earth. In this way, the *Yi* becomes a guide to act like a sage in the present, and to actually become a sage in the future.

The Role of Humans

In the *Xicizhuan*, humans are added to the binary of heaven and earth. However, humans are not given a notation in the system of the hexagrams. Rather, humans exist as observers, interpreting the flux and interchange of heaven and earth and acting according to those transformations. Among humans, the very best at observing are the sages, whose perspicacity enables them to discover inventions based on the patterns of heaven and earth.

古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。In the past when Baoxi (Fuxi) ruled the world, looking up he observed the images in heaven, looking down he saw methods on the earth. He observed the tracks of birds and beasts and how they adapted to what was on the earth (i.e. the methods). For what was close at hand he took himself and for what was far away took other things, and thereby began to make the eight trigrams in order to communicate

with the virtue of numinous brightness and classify the essentials of the myriad things.¹³²

These diagrams are descriptions of the world outside of human beings which the sages were perceptive enough to create. Upon further inspection, they discovered that the symbols could also inspire the creation of human technologies and practices:

作結繩而為罔罟，以佃以漁，蓋取諸《離》。包犧氏沒，神農氏作，斲木為耜，揉木為耒，耒耨之利，以教天下，蓋取諸《益》。日中為市，致天下之民，聚天下之貨，交易而退，各得其所，蓋取諸《噬嗑》。

He made thread and cord into nets and traps for hunting and fishing, which he probably took from *Li*.

When Baoxi passed on, Shennong made cut wood into plows and flexible wood into plow handles. Using the utility of plows and hoes he taught the world, which he probably took from *Yi*.

Using midday for markets, reaching to all the people in the world and bringing together all the goods in the world, haggling and then departing, each getting their own, this must have been taken from Shike.¹³³

Because the legendary sage Fuxi (Bao-xi) had made an initial observation and recorded it in the hexagrams, subsequent generations were able to make use of that knowledge to create new things. Interpreting the hexagrams allows for the same level of sagely innovation that Fuxi engaged in when observing heaven and earth to create the hexagrams – a text that is a perfect mirror of the cosmos.¹³⁴ Indeed, in this sense, the *Xicizhuan* holds up the hexagrams of the *Yi* as the paradigmatic example of a source of

¹³² CHANT *Xicizhuan* 2 para. 2 My translation

¹³³ CHANT *Xicizhuan* 2 para. 2 My translation.

¹³⁴ This also begs the question of if there was a different quality in the “sageliness” of Fuxi, who directly observed phenomena to create the hexagrams, and the subsequent sages who observed the hexagrams to create other technologies.

authority that both was considered to hold profound insights and was open to a variety of interpretations to make it useful to new generations.

The Significance of the *Xicizhuan*

The *Xicizhuan* appears to be a multi-layered text composed at different times and then assembled into a final version. The order of these sections can at time seem random: one section does not obviously follow on the one before. Other sections seem to repeat themes already established in earlier ones. This suggests that the text originally comes from many hands composing smaller parts that were at some point in time woven together into the present form. Edward Shaughnessy has made the argument that the earliest strata appears to date from the fourth century BCE, due to the appearance of portions of it in the *Yueji* 樂記.¹³⁵ However, the final date of compilation of the *Xicizhuan* is unknown, though some scholars place it as late as the early Han.¹³⁶

Despite its patchwork nature, the text does have several central themes. Willard Peterson has argued that the *Xicizhuan* presents a coherent argument for its worldview.¹³⁷ In particular, it presents the image of an ordered cosmos divided between heaven and earth, coexisting with humans. These principles of heaven and earth alternate with one

¹³⁵ Edward Shaughnessy, "Writing of the *Xici Zhuan* and the Making of the *Yijing*" (presented at the Measuring Historical Heat: Event, Performance and Impact in China and the West, Heidelberg, 2001), 205.

¹³⁶ Historically, it was thought that the *Xicizhuan* might have post-dated the *Huainanzi* (49 BCE), but the excavations at Mawangdui have conclusively proven that the text was composed at the latest by the early Han. See Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* / (Stanford University Press, 2001), 261–262. The earliest known reference we have to it is in the writings of Sima Qian (c. 100 BCE) in once case as *Dazhuan* (Book 130) and in another as *Xicizhuan* (Book 47). See Rutt, *Zhouyi*, 404.

¹³⁷ Willard J. Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on The Attached Verbalizations' of The Book of Change," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 1 (June 1982): 67–116.

another in a constant process of change. These alternations in turn produce all other phenomena.¹³⁸ These two archetypes are represented in the *Yi* as solid and broken lines, respectively, or as the hexagrams / trigrams *qian* and *kun*. The subsequent interactions of these archetypes leads to the production of all other phenomena:

天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。動靜有常，剛柔斷矣。方以類聚，物以群分，吉凶生矣。

Heaven is exalted and earth humbled, so *qian* and *kun* are established.

Expanding on the low and high, so the esteemed and the lowly are set out.

Movement and stillness have constancy, so hard and soft are broken up.

Places are gathered in types, things are divided in groups, so good and bad fortune arise.¹³⁹

Through this introduction it becomes clear that the cosmic principles of heaven and earth are being conflated with the conceptual units of the *Yi*, specifically 乾 *qian* and 坤 *kun*. This pairing refers to several things: most obviously to the hexagrams *qian* and *kun* (numbers 1 and 2 in the received version), and by extension the three-line trigrams of the same names, which then combine to form other hexagrams. Extending this idea further, *qian* and *kun* can also refer to solid and broken lines, respectively, and thereby to the fundamental building blocks of all the hexagrams of the *Yi*. By extension, the hexagrams are composed of lines that either represent “heaven” or “earth” and represent different configurations of those two cosmic principles. Alternation (變 *bian*) and transformation

¹³⁸ Gerald Swanson has argued for alternation and transformation and their extension over time and space as the key principle behind the philosophy of the *Xicizhuan*, and identified a technical vocabulary of change in the text. See Gerald Swanson, “The Concept of Change in the Great Treatise,” in *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, vol. 50 Number 2, JAAR Thematic Studies (Chico, California: Scholar’s Press, 1984), 67–93.

¹³⁹ CHANT *Xicizhuan* 1 para. 1 My translation

(化 *hua*) also become represented in the notation of the hexagrams: “Whole and broken lines replace one another, bringing alternation and transformation.”¹⁴⁰ The divination symbols of the *Yi* appear to be able to fully capture this alternating cycle, and thereby depict the ongoing process of change in the cosmos, acting as sources of authority open to interpretation.

The Process of Interpretation

However, the *Xicizhuan* does not stop at simply establishing that the *Yijing* represents the same source of authority from which the sages drew inspiration. Because the patterns of heaven and earth are recorded in a written format in the *Yijing*, they have become more accessible to the average human. The process of observing the cosmos has been replaced by the much more approachable process of interpreting a text.

The most obvious act of interpretation is also the most familiar to a modern audience: the act of interpreting the sayings and actions of the ancients. A simple glance at a version of nearly any classical Chinese text immediately reveals the act of interpretation: the long lines of commentary, often times from multiple individuals, neatly printed in tiny characters next to the larger characters of the primary text. At times, this commentary swells to the point that it is nearly a page of notes to a single line of original text, while at other times it is more modest. In its most strongly expressed form, interpretation of text and ritual is essential for being human in this worldview. It is what Kongzi means when he tells his son that, in order to speak, he must know the *Odes*.¹⁴¹ Specifically, in the

¹⁴⁰ Rutt, *Zhouyi*, 409.

¹⁴¹ *Lunyu* 16.13 Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 200–201.

Xici's vision, the *Yi* functions like a text that is continuously being written by worldly/cosmic events. It is like a dictionary, where human thinkers of the past have opined on what particular signs mean. This allows an educated individual to, very practically, treat the world as a text.

Learning the *Yi* then has some commonality with Kongzi's recommendation that one must learn the *Odes* in order to be able to communicate properly. In the case of the *Odes*, they express something essential about the way humans interact with each other and relate to the world – learning them gives one a manner of expression that has been handed down from our forebears.¹⁴² We can readily identify with this phenomena whenever we seek to express a complex intellectual or emotional response to events, and find that someone before us has already turned a phrase that captures the experience better than we could ourselves. Whether quoting Kongzi or Shakespeare, the effect is essentially the same: we appeal to a source of authority believed to possess great insight which can be reinterpreted to provide a meaningful comment on our present situation.

Mechanism for interpretation in the *Xici*

Now, the *Xici* itself exploits this configuration in the first two cases:

1. a source text with immense authority: the *Yi*
2. a common interpretation of it: the judgments and images appended to the hexagrams

¹⁴² Much like *Zhuangzi* 27's *zhongyan*, discussed above.

3. a personal context: the “master” sections in the *Xici* that explain the judgments

4. The individual context of the audience

The goal is not to convey the story of a single event to which later observers can react. Rather it is to present a rubric by which that audience can gain insight into their current environment.

However, the ability to accomplish these acts of interpretation is something that takes practice to perfect. Although many interpretations are possible, not all of them are equally valid. The *Xicizhuan* has a solution for this need for training as well: it offers an alternate way of using the *Yijing* in order to cultivate qualities of the individual, as well as reveal the context of a given situation.

The user of the *Yijing* is advised to use the text depending on conditions present at the moment of use. If there is a situation requiring action from the user, the recommendation is to turn to the “judgment” portion of the discussion and act accordingly. On the other hand, if the user is “at rest”, the recommendation is to look at the “image” portion of the text, with its descriptions of the model behavior of refined persons.

是故君子居則觀其象而玩其辭，動則觀其變而玩其占，是以自天祐之，吉無不利。

Therefore, the superior person at rest observes the images and interacts with the explanations,
in motion observes the changes and interacts with the divination
thus good fortune comes from heaven, good fortune with nothing that is not advantageous.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ CHANT *Xicizhuan* 1 para. 2 My Translation.

Essentially, when there is no immediate problem, the book acts as a source of wisdom, a catalog of models for the user to follow. This is a similar function to rituals or the words of past sages: internalizing and understanding these models allows the user to become closer to an ideal individual. However, when used as a divination text prescribing action, the hexagrams become stand-ins for the condition of the broader world, and the judgments appended to them carry a special weight. These are no longer just recommendations for action, which must be internalized by the user, but instead are a description of the world at hand, which itself is interpreted through the medium of the text.

This speaks to the issue of where a thinker's – or ruler's – authority is derived from when making claims about the order of the world. On the one hand, people can rely on tradition handed down to them from past sages as authority for their statements; while on the other hand, they could root their statements in a direct observation of the workings of the world. The *Xicizhuan* finds a way to unite these competing views in the *Yijing*: it is simultaneously past and present, a part of tradition, and yet a window on the present moment. The two modes of using it, described above, allow both for it to be a textual role model, drawing on the authority of the ancients, and as a tool for observing the present world. In fact, as already mentioned, it was its capacity as a tool for understanding the world that allowed the ancients to create civilization, and hence give authority to the tradition of sayings and rituals. Thus, the *Xici* raises the *Yi* up as a source of authority that combines both the authority of the sages who authored it with their profound understanding and access to the authority obtained through a profound and direct

observation of natural patterns. This can be seen as the *Xici*'s definition of what constitutes the paradigm of a textual source of authority.

The First Four Passages of *Huainanzi* 12

Another articulation of the relationship of interpretation and textual authority comes in one of the commentaries on *Laozi* parallels that is a subject of this study: *Huainanzi* chapter 12, entitled “*Dao Ying*”. The first four passages of this chapter form a bridge between the problem of conveying meaning in language, and the importance of interpretation as a means of keeping old texts relevant.¹⁴⁴ These four passages appear in an organized sequence, beginning by presenting a problem in 1, and a potential solution to it in 2.¹⁴⁵ 12.1 lays out the essential problem for all authors who choose to write about *dao*: the difficulty of being able to say anything about it!

太清問於無窮曰：「子知道乎？」無窮曰：「吾弗知也。」又問於無為曰：「子知道乎？」無為曰：「吾知道。」〔曰〕：「子之知道亦有數乎？」無為曰：「吾知道有數。」¹⁴⁶

Grand Purity asked Inexhaustible, “Do you know the Way?”

Inexhaustible responded, “I don't know it.”

[Grand Purity] then asked Non-action, “Do *you* know the Way?”

Non-action replied, “I know it.”

[Grand Purity said,] “Does this Way that you know have norms?”

Non-action responded, “Yes, the Way that I know has norms.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ My interpretation, as is often the case in this project, is deeply indebted to the work Sarah Queen has already done on “*Dao Ying*” and many of my insights follow on hers. See Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12.”

¹⁴⁵ Numbering here is based on the translation in: Major et al., *The Huainanzi*.

¹⁴⁶ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 1

¹⁴⁷ Queen (trans.) in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 439.

This passage involves Grand Purity on a quest to find knowledge about *dao* (the Way). The only problem is that knowledge related to *dao* does not behave in the same way as conventional knowledge. The first two people he asks give him the information as seen above, and Non-action then elaborates on what the norms of the *dao* are. Grand Purity then goes to speak with another individual, Non-beginning, to ask about the first two and their knowing and not knowing. Non-beginning praised Inexhaustible for “not knowing”, which Non-beginning characterized as deep, internal and refined. On the other hand, Non-action provided an intelligible response, but Non-beginning characterized this kind of knowledge as shallow, external and coarse. The reason given for this is that *dao* is something that cannot be seen, heard or of course, spoken. Whatever is seen, heard or said is not *dao*. The explanation Non-beginning gave for this was “Who knows the formlessness of what gives form to form?” The quote from *Laozi* highlights a specific aspect of this point:

皆知善之為善，斯不善已

When all the world recognizes good as good, there is ill.¹⁴⁸

As soon as there is one extreme, that of “good”, its opposite must exist as well. Characterizing something one way, as “A”, means that there is an accompanying quality of being “not-A”. Duality arises, which cannot be used to describe the undifferentiated nature of *dao*. Of course, even calling *dao* “undifferentiated” implies that it is not “differentiated”, and a duality is present even in a definition saying there is no duality!

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in *Huainanzi* 12.1, found in *Laozi* 2

Non-action had attempted to get around this problem by characterizing *dao* with both terms in a dualism:

可以弱，可以強；可以柔，可以剛；可以陰，可以陽；可以窈，可以明；可以包裹天地，可以應待無方。¹⁴⁹

can be weak or strong;
it can be soft or hard;
it can be yin or yang;
it can be dark or bright;
it can embrace or contain Heaven and Earth;
it can respond to or await the Limitless.¹⁵⁰

However, even this form of locution is unable to properly capture the nature of *dao*. If it can be weak or strong does it mean that it's both, or it's neither, or it's one and then the other, or it's something in-between? Before giving any definition of *dao*, all of these possibilities and none of them exist, but as soon as anything is said, questions and definitions arise.

Therefore, the *Laozi* recommends:

知者不言，言者不知¹⁵¹
those who know do not speak;
those who speak do not know.¹⁵²

How then can any knowledge about *dao* be communicated? Especially in the case of a text like the *Huainanzi*, it would seem there would be no way to communicate ideas without using words. However, the second section discusses a possible solution.

12.2

¹⁴⁹ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 1

¹⁵⁰ Queen (trans.) in Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 440.

¹⁵¹ *Laozi* 56, quoted in CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 2

¹⁵² Queen (trans.) in Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 440.

白公問於孔子曰：「人（可以）〔可與〕微言〔乎〕？」孔子不應。白公曰：「若以石投水（中），何如？」曰：「吳、越之善沒者能取之矣。」〔白公〕曰：「若以水投水，何如？」孔子曰：「蓄、澆之水合，易牙嘗而知之。」白公曰：「然則人固不可與微言乎？」孔子曰：「何謂不可！（誰）〔唯〕知言之謂者乎！夫知言之謂者，不以言言也。爭魚者濡，逐獸者趨，非樂之也。故至言去言，至為無為。夫淺知之所爭者，末矣！」白公不得也，故死於（洛）〔浴〕室。故老子曰：「言有宗，事有君。夫唯無知，是以不吾知也。」白公之謂也。¹⁵³

The Duke of Bo asked Confucius: “Is it possible for people to share subtle words?” Confucius did not respond. The Duke of Bo asked again: “Isn't it like throwing stones into the water?”

Confucius replied: “Skilled divers from Wu and Yu could retrieve them.”

“Then perhaps it is like throwing water into water?” the Duke of Bo asked.

Confucius replied: “When the waters of the Zi and Sheng rivers were blended together, Yi Ya tasted [the water] and recognized [which was which].”

The Duke of Bo responded: “Then is it not the case that people certainly cannot transmit subtle words?”

“Why consider it impossible?” asked Confucius. “[But it is possible] only for those who really know to what words refer. Now those who know to what words refer do not rely on words to speak. Fishermen get wet and hunters chase after their prey, but not because they like to do so. Therefore, the best words reject words [altogether], and the best acts are devoid of action. What [those of] shallow knowledge squabble over is inconsequential.” The Duke of Bo did not grasp Confucius's meaning and consequently died in a bathhouse.

Therefore *Laozi* says:

“Words have an ancestor and affairs have a sovereign.

It is only because people lack this knowledge that they fail to understand me.”

These words describe the Duke of Bo.¹⁵⁴

The Duke of Bo did not understand the technique of subtle words, the idea that a meaning could be buried within sayings, one that could only be retrieved through a process of interpretation. For Duke Bo, this method of communication seemed

¹⁵³ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 3

¹⁵⁴ Queen (trans.) in Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 440.

impenetrable, possibly even a waste, like stones thrown away in water so they could not easily be retrieved, or even more impossibly, water thrown into water. However, Kongzi insisted that someone with sufficient ability would still be able to recover them – just as a skilled interpreter could recover the meaning hidden in the words. The passage claims that because Duke Bo did not understand Kongzi's method, he died in a bathhouse. The quotations of a *Laozi* parallel reinforces this interpretation:

「言有宗，事有君。夫唯無知，是以不吾知也。」白公之謂也。¹⁵⁵

“Words have an ancestor and affairs have a sovereign.

It is only because people lack this knowledge that they fail to understand me.”¹⁵⁶

Words and affairs have something they come from and which governs them – there is a meaning concealed within at least certain types of sayings (words) and anecdotes or teaching by action (affairs). It is because people do not have the knowledge that this buried intention exists that they do not understand the meaning of the sayings, anecdotes or information they have received.

Coming in succession after 12.1, 12.2 seems to offer a solution to the problem of how to communicate about *dao*: that while it may not be possible to say something meaningful about it using conventional modes of communication, ideas can be buried within anecdotes and sayings. A skilled interpreter can extract these ideas from the anecdotes. Chapter 12 assembles a collection of anecdotes and quotations suitable for interpretation, from the perspective of the compilers of the *Huainanzi*. To guide this process, the

¹⁵⁵ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 3

¹⁵⁶ Queen (trans.) in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 440.

anecdotes and quotations were placed in apposition to each other, highlighting specific aspects of the interpretation process.

Sections 12.3 and 12.4 continue to elaborate on concepts of knowledge and the sayings of others, and shows how they can or cannot be implemented. In 12.3, Huizi presented a well-crafted and beautiful plan to the king of Hui.¹⁵⁷ However, when the king showed it to Di Jian, he revealed a flaw. Comparing the shouts of laborers used to encourage their work to a functioning plan of government, Di Jian claimed that Huizi's plan was too pretty, and not a practical tool for governance. It is a question of appropriateness: just as the laborer knows that a court poem would not be appropriate to hauling stones and bricks, Huizi's theory of governance would be unable to function under the day to day difficulties of governing a state. It is also a question of knowledge from experience – that of actually governing a state in all its messiness, versus a theoretical model that despite its beauty cannot account for all the day to day unexpectedness of actually ruling.

One might be tempted to read this as a negative comment on the previous passage: Kongzi's subtle words sound nice, but they are of no help to ruling the state. However, the fate of poor Duke Bo who did not understand what Kongzi was saying tells a different tale: not understanding had the practical outcome of Duke Bo's death. From this perspective, what Huizi's plan must have contained “un-subtle words”, so to speak: directly stated, unconcealed theorizing about governance. 12.3 confirms and expands on what 12.1 was saying as well: that clear theorizing language is limited. Governing the

¹⁵⁷ Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 441–2.

state, like *dao*, cannot be contained easily within pretty maxims. These maxims create a situation where anyone using them comes to rely on them, as the king would have used Huizi's theory to run the state based on Huizi's theoretical model of how a state should function. Should a situation have arisen that contradicted that theoretical model, Huizi's plan would no longer have worked. On the other hand, Di Jian's reference to the shouts of laborers points to another mode of using language: situational, contextualized usage. It is completely appropriate to the task at hand, even though when the laborers finish they are sure to use regular language to talk with each other. Based on the situation they are in, they adjust how they speak, and in this way function better: not talking and distracting each other during work, and not grunting at each other over dinner.

Yet, how then can later rulers retrieve some of the insights on ruling that ancient thinkers possessed? 12.2 provides a starting point, from subtle words. 12.4 continues this suggestion. Here Tian Pian talked to the king of Qi about the “techniques of the *dao*” (道術). The king questioned the usefulness of these techniques, seemingly from the same perspective that Di Jian questioned Huizi's theory in 12.3: a lovely theory perhaps, but where is the practical application. Tian Pian has an answer:

臣之言無政，而可以為政。譬之若林木無材，而可以為材。¹⁵⁸

My words said nothing [about] governing, but they may be used to create governing. [My words] may be compared to trees in a forest. They are not lumber, but they may be used to create lumber.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 5

¹⁵⁹ Queen (trans.) in Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 442.

His sayings, in essence, function as the raw resources that rulers can then apply to governing. An uncut block of wood contains within it the potential to become many different things, from sculpture, to furniture, to weapons, to wheels and more. Once it has been cut, its potential is gone and it is only one thing and cannot be made into the others. Tian Pian's words are like that uncut block, rough, and on their own not particularly practical, but in the right hands with the right skill they can be made into effective tools of governance.

What are the tools needed to carve up the block of Tian Pian's words? The tools of interpretation used to analyze Kongzi's subtle words. This is why the Duke of Bo was killed when he failed to understand subtle words: he could not figure out how to properly cut up the block of words he was given, and could not respond appropriately to circumstances.

Here it is useful to return to the title of the chapter: “Responses to the Way” 道應 *dao ying*. “Responses” here does not indicate just verbal responses, rather the word 應 *ying* represents an automatic response to a stimulus. Just like pushing down on one side of a scale raises the other automatically, *ying* reflects this sort of automatic response. In most circumstances, people have some flexibility as to how they would respond: the rulers in 12.2, 3, and 4 all have a choice about how to understand the counsels they have been given. This flexibility speaks again to openness of sources of authority to a process of interpretation that allows them to be relevant in new situations.

Interpretation in Huainanzi 12

Applying this framework to *Huainanzi* 12, we can see that all of these elements are present. The anecdotes clearly constitute a form of *yuyan*: they contain characters speaking for the authors, sometimes fictional and sometimes based on historical figures, and they occur within specific situations. Except for 12.1, all the passages examined above take place in a situation of a ruler seeking advice from ministers and famous thinkers. Kongzi is of course famous as a great teacher and thinker. Huizi is now best known for being the friend and frequent interlocutor of Zhuangzi, where he usually presents highly reasoned arguments that appear rigid and overly intellectual next to Zhuangzi's responses to things. Lastly, Tian Pian was a thinker in the ancient state of Qi known for advocating “techniques of the way” and, like the others had some writings attributed to him, though they now exist only in fragmentary form.¹⁶⁰ The historical background of each characterizes the sorts of responses audiences expect from them: insightful, well-thought out sayings from Kongzi, clever but overly intellectual statements from Huizi, and clear advocacy of the “techniques of the way” and their usefulness from Tian Pian. Because each passage takes place in the situation of a ruler seeking advice from one of these famous thinkers, the audience expects it to be

¹⁶⁰ *Zhuangzi* 33 contains this small note on Tian Pian:

田駢亦然，學於彭蒙，得不教焉。彭蒙之師曰：「古之道人，至於莫之是莫之非而已矣。其風竅然，惡可而言？」常反人，不聚觀，而不免於鯁斷。其所謂道非道，而所言之騷不免於非。彭蒙、田駢、慎到不知道。雖然，概乎皆嘗有聞者也。

(CHANT *Zhuangzi* 33.13)

“It was the same with Tian Pian. He studied under Peng Meng and gained unteachable things from him. The teacher of Peng Meng said: ‘The men of the Way in antiquity simply got so far that nobody judged ‘That’s it’, nobody judged ‘That’s not’. But the wind of it is hushed, from where would it be sayable?’ By constantly thwarting people and making themselves unwelcome, they had no escape from that ‘rounding off the corners’. That which they called the Way was not the Way, and even in the right things they said they did not escape from being wrong. Peng Meng, Tian Pian and Shen Dao did not know the Way. However, speaking broadly, they were all men who had heard something about it. trans Graham, *Chuang-Tzū*, 280.

significant advice, focused very practically on how to govern a state. This expectation leads to reading and interpreting the advice given in very different ways: Huizi's advice is not practical, because it is too theoretical, and meant as a definitive plan for how to govern. Tian Pian's only appears impractical because it is meant to act as a resource of advice for the ruler to follow rather than a definitive statement.

Section 12.1 is the exception to this rule, involving completely fictionalized characters with odd names. These names, 'Grand Purity' (大清 *da qing*), "Inexhaustible" (無窮 *wu qiong*), "Non-action" (無為 *wu wei*), and "Non-beginning" (無始 *wu shi*) all point to theoretical conceptions of thought and cosmology. "Grand Purity" represents insight into the functioning of the cosmos, and the quest for that insight. Inexhaustible, Non-action and Non-beginning represent cosmological concepts, which apparently seem to be on a scale of accessibility to conventional human exploration: Inexhaustible, representing an ultimate, undifferentiated state, does not communicate at all in terms of conventional knowledge, simply saying that it "does not know" (that is, does not "know" in the way that Grand Purity initially seeks to "know"). Non-action, representing a difficult but humanly attainable state of acting without effort – in appropriate response to the situation. Non-action supplies words, but they are shifting and indefinite, giving multiple possibilities for what *dao* may be, leaving open the insight that it is not something to be easily conveyed in words. Lastly, Non-beginning stands closest of all. While Inexhaustible has no categories at all, and Non-action is completely fluid, Non-beginning is the state paralleled to beginning, it is something that has not yet begun to occur, and so is still outside the realm of normal understanding, but is less distant than the

others. Non-beginning can thus give insight to Grand Purity on the nature of knowledge when it leaves the realm of conventional knowing.

Using characters like this gives the passage a mythological air, a sense that it is taking place on a stage beyond normal human ken. While this sense of ultimate-ness gives incredible weight to the passage, it also shows that it cannot easily be understood without the help of other stages, just as Non-beginning helps Grand Purity to understand how he must change his way of knowing. The following sections with their more human situations and speakers act as essential bridges: the audience is able to climb up the words of great thinkers of the past to reach this ultimate level, and along the way come to understand how to apply those ultimate insights to the very practical realm of running a state.

The second element from *Zhuangzi* 27 carried over into *Huainanzi* 12 is the use of *zhongyan/chongyan* in the form of quotations and treasured anecdotes. Of the four sections examined here, three of them end with “therefore *Laozi* says:”¹⁶¹ (故老子曰:), while 12.4 contains “This is what Lao Dan referred to as:” (此老聃之所謂:), which does not end the passage, but serves as a reference point for discussing further what Tian Pian said. In each case Laozi/Lao Dan acts as a reference point, providing a hint for how to read the passage. What is also curious about the use of “Lao Dan” in 12.4, is that it indicates a quotation said by the person said to have been the author of the *Laozi*.¹⁶² This

¹⁶¹ I have removed the article 'the' here for reasons that will be explained momentarily

¹⁶² Modern scholarship is mostly in agreement that there was not a historical Laozi. See A.C. Graham, “The Origins of the Legend of Lao Dan,” in *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-Te-Ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (State University of New York Press, 1998), 23–40.

brings up an additional question: when the other sections cite Laozi, is it the text or the person/character of Laozi that is being cited? While this may be a subtle difference, citing a person called Laozi would have re-enforced the idea that these sayings were presented by an individual who had a high level of insight, just as Kongzi, Huizi and Tian Pian, and similarly letting these quotations act as an additional voice commenting on and guiding interpretation to the passage. In these quotes, Laozi, in addition to providing a quotation to ponder, adds a level of commentary guiding interpretation just as Kongzi did for Zixia's reading of the *Songs* in *Analects* 3.8 quoted above.¹⁶³

Here we may also return to the passage in *Zhuangzi* 27 and *Liezi* 2 where Laozi/Lao Dan appears as a character quoting the text attributed to him. Laozi and his student Yang Ziju meet and talk. Laozi comments that he feels Yang Ziju cannot be taught, and when they stop for a night Yang Ziju goes to his teacher on his knees to ask what it is that he did wrong:

老子曰：「而睢睢盱盱，而誰與居？大白若辱，盛德若不足。」

Laozi said: “You stare at things open-eyed and haughtily, who'd ever live with you? The most pure seems filthy, being filled with virtue seems like it's not enough.”¹⁶⁴

Laozi functions as an actual interlocutor who at the same time provides a textual quotation: simultaneously a fictional character and a book citation. Delivering a message in this way affects a radical transformation in his student: Yang Ziju alters his behavior in response to hearing it. This points to an insight about how quotations of parallels with

¹⁶³ Queen has noted the similarity of the use of *Laozi* in *Huainanzi* to the *Odes* in other texts: Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 208.

¹⁶⁴ CHANT *Zhuangzi* 27 para 7. My translation

Laozi (and potentially even from other texts similarly named after a single author) were read and interpreted: as a speaking voice as immediate and alive as the other fictionalized characters within the anecdote. *Huainanzi* 12 takes this living voice of *Laozi*, and places it in dialog with anecdotes from other texts, as equally open to interpretation as the more obviously fictionalized statements by, for example, *Kongzi* in 12.2. However, the *Laozi* quotes contain a weight that *Kongzi*'s fabricated statements do not have: the audience knows *Kongzi* is being used as a stand in for the author's ideas, but the quotations of a *Laozi* parallel appears more or less verbatim somewhere else. The insight highlighted by *Huainanzi* 12 using quotations as voices in dialog with anecdotes drawn from other sources is that all of these voices, regardless of whether it is something 'actually said' in another source, are speaking from the perspective of the compilers who arranged them together in this manner. Just as *Zixia* could interpret a love poem into a philosophical question, the *Huainanzi* 12 compilers were creating a collage of ideas out of the original source material. They were taking quotations and paraphrasing passages from earlier works (*zhong/chongyan*), and lodging them in new situations (*yuyan*) to allow for new interpretations.

The final type of language described in the *Zhuangzi* passage, *zhiyan*, or “goblet sayings” also make an appearance in *Huainanzi* 12, and just as *Zhuangzi*, they are the most significant form of communication. These contextualized, situational ways of speaking are apparent in all four of the sections. In 12.1, they appear in the term “knowing”. What “to know” means shifts radically and constantly throughout the passage, with not knowing at times meaning knowing, and at times not. Inexhaustible’s

statement was that he “did not know” but we later find out that “not knowing” is in fact knowing. The quotations of a *Laozi* parallel at the end then equates “knowing” with not speaking and “not knowing” with speaking, which is a reversal of the uses of “knowing” in the anecdote preceding it where Inexhaustible did not speak because it “did not know.”¹⁶⁵ The term “knowing” is in constant flux and refuses to refer to the same thing throughout the passage, yet the section's audience can follow what it means at any moment by seeing it in context. This contextualized reading leads to a questioning of how well established the concept of “knowing” actually is, and in the process inspires interpretation of what the passage has to say about “knowing” and “not knowing”, and by extension, what the chapter has to say about it.

Similarly, 12.2 talks about contextual language. Contextual language seems to be the core of understanding the subtle words of Kongzi, extracting what terms mean in a given context, rather than generalizing or focusing on a specific definition of the words themselves. Only when the fixation on the generalized definition of words are abandoned, and the intention to uncover what they refer to in a particular context is established, can these sayings be understood. The character of Kongzi even uses an instance of contextual language, playing with the concepts of “words” and “speaking,” saying:

夫知言之謂者，不以言言也。爭魚者濡，逐獸者趨，非樂之也。故至言去言，至為無為。¹⁶⁶

Now those who know to what words refer do not rely on words to speak.
Fishermen get wet and hunters chase after their prey, but not because they like to

¹⁶⁵ Sarah Queen had the insight that the 'knowing' in the anecdote and quotation were reversed: Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 215.

¹⁶⁶ CHANT *Huainanzi* 12 para. 3

do so. Therefore, the best words reject words [altogether], and the best acts are devoid of action.¹⁶⁷

It challenges notions of what is meant by “speaking” and “words” – how can one speak without words? How can the “best words reject words” and “best acts” be “devoid of action”? Only if each term is viewed contextually, with its referent shifting with each usage is it possible to unravel what the phrase means. Because the words are not fixed in reference, they alert their audience to the importance of the thing they are actually referring to, rather than remaining fixated on the term that is being used as an expedient, just as the fishermen must wade in water and hunters must chase through the woods. This metaphor is also reminiscent of another passage in *Zhuangzi* 26:

荃者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃；蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄；言者所以在意，得意而忘言。吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉！¹⁶⁸

The bait is the means to get the fish where you want it, catch the fish and you forget the bait. The snare is the means to get the rabbit where you want it, catch the rabbit and you forget the snare. Words are the means to get the idea where you want it, catch on to the idea and you forget about the words. Where shall I find a man who forgets about words, and have a word with him?¹⁶⁹

In it we again see the metaphor of catching a meaning, and using words as an expedient to getting it. Ideally, when the prize is obtained, one does not remain fixated on the method used to catch it, but somehow people do remain fixed on words. This is the situation in which 12.2 has placed Duke Bo, where he is not flexible enough to see the shifting, fluid nature of Kongzi's subtle words. The passage seems to suggest that because

¹⁶⁷ Queen (trans.) in Major, et al., *The Huainanzi*, 440.

¹⁶⁸ CHANT *Zhuangzi* 26 para. 12

¹⁶⁹ Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ*, 190.

he remains fixated on the water he must wade through, he unfortunately perishes in the bathhouse.

Section 12.3 contains an excellent use of contextual language in the form of the laborer's chants. The very words they use carry no specific meaning, but clearly carry the energy needed to urge on hard manual work. Being perfectly suited to the task they are used in, Di Jian held these shouts up as the ideal model of communication: that which responds appropriately to the situation. Huizi's theoretical model was not at all flexible or designed to adapt to situational changes – it was the opposite of contextual language, instead making fixed definitions of how a government should be run. While this sounds useful, especially to a ruler who does not understand subtle words, Di Jian recognized that appropriateness was a more useful quality.

Lastly, 12.4 again points to contextualizing sayings. Tian Pian's sayings would only be useful to the king of Qi if they were appropriately contextualized and fashioned to a given moment. Understanding them from the king's first perspective, seeing them as fixed language, yields little that could be used to adequately govern a state. Yet, understanding them through the lens of a given situation, cutting the trees in the forest into the appropriately lumber as needed, they become incredibly useful.

Conclusions

Having examined these passages from the *Xicizhuan* and the beginning of *Huainanzi* 12 from the perspective of the theory of language presented in *Zhuangzi* 27 leads to some conclusions on how interpretation was understood to work, what were the conditions that

enabled and supported the process of interpretation, and what that process was in fact extracting from the passages.

Interpretation was viewed as an essential process to understanding and learning, something that could give access to information otherwise not easily understandable. The *Xicizhuan* depicts interpretation as a means to accessing hidden knowledge, even to the extent of using written materials to come to a better understanding of the underlying patterns of the cosmos in order to generate the technologies of civilization. Even though a text acted as an intermediary between the interpreter and a direct perception of the cosmos, the *Xicizhuan* still suggests this is a way for people in the modern world to take a step closer to repeating the incredible insights of the early sages who discovered the foundations of culture. Meanwhile, the early sections of *Huainanzi* 12 imply that the process of interpretation both opens a path to understanding the notoriously difficult to discuss *dao*, and also is a means to find practical applications for the obscure sayings attributed to its depictions of thinkers like Kongzi, Zhuangzi, Tian Pian and Laozi. Not just a path to personal insight, interpretation was also an essential tool for rulers.

In order to facilitate this process of interpretation, an ideal framework had to be established. Ideally, it contained anecdotes describing insightful conversations between mythical or historical figures, set against a backdrop that emphasized or highlighted the importance of their conversation.¹⁷⁰ Quotations from respected historical sources, like the *Laozi* or the *Odes* also provided an anchor to the fictional discussion taking place in the

¹⁷⁰ Indirectly, this is also true of anecdotes like the story of Cook Ding in *Zhuangzi* 3, which occurs in the seemingly mundane setting of a cook cutting meat. However, this seeming ordinariness highlights the extreme of the cook's skill in cutting, and indicates that this sort of excellence is not confined to rulers and great thinkers alone.

anecdote. Most significantly, the interaction between quotation, speaking characters, and the historical background informing the understanding of quotation, speakers and situation, provided multiple voices that allowed for a discussion to occur not just between the characters in the anecdote, but between each of these elements. All of this allowed the text's audience to take multiple approaches to each passage, including reading them sequentially in context of other nearby sections. This multiplicity of perspectives highlighted the central element of interpretation: contextualized statements.

Contextualized statements constituted the goal of the interpreted process, because they offered an avenue to experience both the unverbalizable *dao* and the practical application of rulership. Examples from the text have shown that one method of creating contextualized statements was to use a single word or phrase repeatedly, but with different reference. This breaks the fixed link between word and reference, and allows interpreters to see that what is referred to is not married to the word used to describe it, and that the word is in fact inadequate to give a full definition of that to which it refers. The second method was highlighting how language can be used situationally, like the shouting of laborers, to affect an outcome better than fixed phrases and theories.

These two methods also imply two levels of interpretation: one that stays within the text as the interpreter tracks how a concept is used, re-used and changed over the course of a passage. Another that extends beyond the text, and reads passages from the perspective of a specific real world, practical situation. *Huainanzi* 12 advocates both of these levels, and formats itself in a way that facilitates the interpretation of ancient sayings and stories without bluntly stating what they should be understood to mean. Like

Tian Pian, the *Huainanzi* compilers have left behind a forest full of potential, waiting for a skilled interpreter to refashion the wood to suit the governing of a state.

One of the primary aims of the project is to argue that the three early commentaries show that passages parallel with the received *Laozi* acted as sources of authority even before there was a *Laozi* that was officially recognized as a “*jing*”. However, for this argument to be effective, we must have a clear understanding of what constituted a textual source of authority in the Warring States and early Han. This chapter has shown that a text’s capacity to function as a source of authority was in large part dependent on its openness to interpretation. Specifically, it presents three discussions of the significance and process of interpretation from this period: the fluid language of *Zhuangzi*’s chapter 27, the “warehouse of ideas” approach to texts taken by *Huainanzi*’s chapter 12, and the text as a medium for interpreting the cosmos found in the *Xicizhuan* commentary on the *Yijing*. Together, these three works praise the importance of interpretation as a means of unearthing hidden meanings in texts and sayings, elevating in value this hidden meaning above more direct or explicit statements. In large part, this is because a text or saying containing a hidden meaning, or “subtle words” has the flexibility to be reinterpreted in new situations while an explicit meaning will remain fixed by its original context. In the *Zhuangzi*, the hidden, re-contextualized meanings are shown as having a transformative effect in teaching situations. In *Huainanzi*, they are said to give rulers the flexibility to respond to whatever situations may arise in the process of their rule. In the *Xicizhuan*, the hidden meanings are said to give access to the knowledge required not only to make decisions in difficult circumstances, but also to invent the

technologies of civilization: everything from fishing nets to commercial marketplaces. In all three of these examples, the text or saying is important because it provides a medium for interpreters to bring texts to life and gain wisdom from them that is personal, practical and effective.

From these examples, it is clear that texts that were open to or even necessitated a process of interpretation were the most highly prized for their broad applicability. Referring to these texts, in turn, could be seen on the one hand as calling on a higher source of authority that provided justification on at times (if we take the *Xicizhuan* at its word) on a cosmic level. On the other hand, the act of creating a commentary in and of itself makes an argument that a certain text or collection of sayings belongs in this elite category that this project refers to as sources of authority. In turn, this suggests that the presence and survival of three sustained commentaries on passages parallel with the received *Laozi* demonstrate their significance as sources of authority.

The following chapters will proceed to explore each of the commentaries in turn in the context of the collections of which they are a part. They will demonstrate not only that passages parallel with the received *Laozi* were taken as sources of authority, but how each commentary particularly used those parallels.

4: HANFEIZI

The two essays, “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao”, provide a window into how passages parallel with the received *Laozi* were read and understood before they were organized into the text we know today. The two essays show a deep interest in applying the insights found in quotations of *Laozi* parallels to the question of ruling a state and surviving the chaos of the Warring States period. Both essays are focused on ruling, but they approach the question of how to rule from different perspectives, using a different argumentative structure. “Yu Lao” relies on anecdotal examples interwoven with quotations to argue for caution and yielding in one’s activities and decisions, so that a smaller and weaker state, or perhaps a minister in a difficult position, could survive trying conditions. “Jie Lao” uses formal assertions following the structure of the *Laozi* parallels it quotes to argue that rulers must first learn to manage themselves, and apply that management to the state as a whole.

These surface differences between the essays provide clues to deeper levels of contrast, not the least of which is the high likelihood that they are not by the same author.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the two essays appear to arise from different rhetorical strategies. The “Yu Lao” finds roots in the sort of “show-by-example” approach emphasized in

¹⁷¹ For example, Sarah Queen argues that the two chapters were written by different authors or at least by one author at very different points in life. See Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” pp 219-220.

Xunzi and other sources, while the “Jie Lao” makes use of logic chains and close commentary to make its argument.

Most significantly for this project, the two essays display different stances toward the passages parallel with the received *Laozi* that they quote. “Yu Lao” frequently makes use of, when compared with the received *Laozi*, isolated lines, and extends arguments across verses found in the received *Laozi*. On the other hand, “Jie Lao” presents *Laozi* parallels structured in a way that seems similar to the received *Laozi*, and at times even alters its own argument to follow the structure of those parallels. These differences could stem from two sources: the *Laozi* collection(s) on which the “Jie Lao” was drawing was organized more closely to the received *Laozi* than was the “Yu Lao” or the importance of respecting the structure of a source text changed between the writing of “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao” and across their audiences.¹⁷² Quite probably both were factors in the differing approaches to the use of passages parallel with the received *Laozi*.

However, both “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” share in common that they use the quotations of *Laozi* parallels as a sort of glue to combine and hold together disparate materials. In the case of “Yu Lao”, it is anecdotes and examples that are organized into a coherent argument with the help of quotations, making the *Laozi* parallels serve a function as a rhetorical organizational tool. In “Jie Lao”, the role of *Laozi* parallels is also thematic,

¹⁷² It is possible, if these commentaries represented novel arrangements of *Laozi* parallels instead of drawing on pre-existing sources, that they ultimately exerted an influence on the composition of the passages as they now appear in the received *Laozi*. However, without more precise details on how these commentaries fit in the overall composition history of the *Laozi* it is difficult to determine the directionality of this process.

using the *Laozi* to link together “medical” views of maintaining the health of the body with perspectives on how to maintain the stability of a state.

In light of an understanding of the evolving nature of the idea of what constituted a source of authority, discussed in the previous two chapters, it is reasonable to say that both “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” make use of *Laozi* parallels as a source of authority in the sense that it holds together different strands and sources in the way the warp on a loom holds together the weft.

Chapter Goals

The following chapter will first provide information on the historical background of the *Hanfeizi* as a whole and the two essays in it, “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao”. This background is intended to provide context for the two essays: who may have written them? Why might they be included in the *Hanfeizi*? How closely should we be reading them in connection with the rest of the *Hanfeizi*? This portion of the chapter will present how there have been doubts that Hanfeizi himself authored both or even one of the essays, but there is also reason to believe the two essays are nonetheless compatible with the content of the rest of the *Hanfeizi*.

Second, the role of *Laozi* in the *Hanfeizi* as a whole will also be touched on, beginning with a study of the frequency with which quotations of *Laozi* parallels appear in portions of the *Hanfeizi* outside of the two essays, and how frequently the name *Laozi* or *Lao Dan* appears. Thematic resonances with *Laozi* will also be examined, in particular in chapter 5, “*Zhu Dao*” 主道 and in chapter 8, “*Yang Quan*” 揚權. The aim of this

portion of the chapter is to establish that, while “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” are unusual in the extent to which they are reliant on passages parallel with the received *Laozi*, they are not complete outliers in the context of the *Hanfeizi* as a whole.

Third is a discussion of “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao” in turn, analyzing how each is structured, what themes they express, and how they make use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels. This examination will show that, although the two essays both make use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels, they differ substantially in their manner of citation, structure of argument and ultimate goals. This portion of the chapter will show that “Yu Lao” uses historical anecdotes to provide advice for rulers and ministers in weaker positions to survive difficult times by understanding their limitations and using the concept found in the *Laozi* parallels it quotes of “knowing sufficiency”, while the “Jie Lao” uses longer, discursive statements to argue that a ruler should first and foremost see to their own psycho-physiological self-cultivation as the means to rule a state, making use of the understanding in the *Laozi* parallels it quotes of the correlative relation between the body of persons and the world around them. Ultimately, the purpose of this chapter is to show that quotations of *Laozi* parallels served an essential role in structuring the differing arguments of “*Jie Lao*” and “Yu Lao”.

Historical Considerations

The issues of authorship

Let us turn now to the *Hanfeizi*, and give a brief overview of the text, its author, and the commentary chapters.

The man Hanfeizi, to whom the text of the same name is attributed, was a late Warring States thinker who passed away in 233 BCE. Much of the text that bears his name is thought to have, more or less, come from his hand, though not necessarily in the order it appears in the text. Indeed, there is reason to believe a complete *Hanfeizi* was not developed until as late as 8 BCE, when imperial library catalogs were assembled.¹⁷³ The long term compilation of the text, likely in the hands of Hanfeizi's students and their students appears to have allowed some material not written by Hanfeizi to enter the text. Two such alien chapters¹⁷⁴ are the two *Laozi* commentaries in chapters 20 and 21. These chapters not only appear different in style and content from the rest of the *Hanfeizi*, they even differ from each other significantly enough to raise doubts that they were written by the same author, or even using the same *Laozi* collection.¹⁷⁵ One interesting suggestion Bertil Lundahl made was that the two commentaries may have been materials Hanfeizi had collected and copied out of interest while he was alive, his disciples then assuming that something written with their master's handwriting was from his own hand, and in this way included the commentaries in the larger collection.¹⁷⁶ If this scenario were true, the two commentaries would have been contemporaries of Hanfeizi even if he did not write them, placing them in the middle of the third century BCE.

¹⁷³ This is in large part due to attributing the current form of the *Hanfeizi* to Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE). Lundahl places the date of composition between 26 and 8 BCE See Bertil Lundahl, "Han Fei Zi: The Man and the Work" (Institute of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University, 1992), 73.

¹⁷⁴ "inauthentic" as Lundahl called them

¹⁷⁵ Both Sarah Queen and Tae Hyun Kim have suggested the presence of differing *Laozi* collections in the *Hanfeizi*. See Queen, "Han Feizi and the Old Master," 204.

Kim, "Other Laozi Parallels in the Hanfeizi: An Alternative Approach to the Textual History of the Laozi and Early Chinese Thought."

¹⁷⁶ Lundahl, "Han Fei Zi," 235.

However, there have also been some arguments that the commentaries may be Han creations. The two chapters bear similarities to portions of the *Huainanzi*, most obviously to *Huainanzi* 12 “Dao Ying” 道應, but also to chapter 9, “Zhu Shu” 主術 and chapter 1, “Yuan Dao” 原道. These similarities prompted speculation that the commentaries may have been created in the Han, near the time of the *Huainanzi*, roughly a century after Hanfeizi passed away.¹⁷⁷ A more extreme stance was that “Yu Lao”, *Hanfeizi* 21 had originally been part of a contiguous chapter with “Dao Ying”, *Huainanzi* 12, though this view has largely been refuted.¹⁷⁸ However, Lundahl argued that the chapters in *Hanfeizi* were composed earlier than the *Huainanzi*, primarily because of the way the *Hanfeizi* chapters present passages parallel with the received *Laozi*.¹⁷⁹ I agree with him on this point, and will elaborate on it at length below.

The *Hanfeizi* commentaries differ from *Huainanzi* 12 in their manner of citation. While *Huainanzi* 12 credits its quotations with a “Thus *Laozi* says:”, the *Hanfeizi* chapters simply state “Thus it is said:”, omitting the reference to *Laozi*. Indeed, the only time *Laozi* is referenced even indirectly by name is in the two chapter titles: “Jie Lao” 解老 or “Explaining Lao” and “Yu Lao” 喻老 or “Illustrating Lao”, which may have been added after the chapters were composed, while the text was being compiled. The lack of clear citation raises some questions: did the authors of the *Hanfeizi* chapters actually have a document of some sort named “*Laozi*”? Were they aware of associations between the

¹⁷⁷ Lundahl, 125.

¹⁷⁸ Lundahl, 126.

¹⁷⁹ Lundahl, 128–29.

legendary figure of Laozi and the text he was said to author? Or were they writing at a time before the establishment of a set text known as *Laozi* and associated with that figure? We are left with three possibilities: that the sense of a “*Laozi*” as a text was not important enough for the *Hanfeizi* chapter composers to choose to include; or alternately so important they assumed there was no need to say anything; or, those associations had simply not become commonly established, if they were established at all.

The uncredited quotation also gives us an interesting picture: the content of the quotations are presented as an authoritative statement, but their source is not acknowledged. The quotations are not relying on an association with a famous figure or perfect text, but stand simply on their own. Of course, it may have been the case that the passages were well known to such an extent that they could go uncredited and still be recognized – the quotations could have been part of a body of knowledge assumed to be shared between the authors and the audience, even if that body of knowledge did not take the shape of a text called “*Laozi*”. Alternately, the commentary composers knew of the *Laozi* in some form, but assumed it was either unimportant or even detrimental to include the name in their work.

What I feel we can take away from these uncredited quotations is that the *Hanfeizi* commentaries were composed at a time before there was a complete and well-known

Laozi. There is an excellent chance that, as Sarah Queen has pointed out, they were written working from what we might call “proto-*Laozi*”¹⁸⁰ collections”.¹⁸¹

Next, there is the issue of the quotations themselves. Although they are recognizably passages found in the received *Laozi*, there are subtle but significant differences not only from the received *Laozi* but also from the Mawangdui manuscripts, lending support to the argument that the quotations are drawn from variant *Laozi* collections, and possibly predate the more complete Mawangdui collections.¹⁸² Queen has further pointed out that there are enough differences even between the quotations in chapters 20 and 21 to question if they were using the same collection, or if they are the only surviving examples of two different *Laozi* collections.¹⁸³

As has been noted previously, the sense that *Laozi* parallels were assembled in different sorts of collections is one way of explaining the three manuscripts excavated at Guodian (sealed before 280 BCE), which organize passages each in their own way, following their own logic.¹⁸⁴ There is no reason to assume they were the only collections in circulation at the time, though they do provide evidence that this was the way passages parallel with the received *Laozi* were circulated. If the two *Hanfeizi* commentaries do date from before Hanfeizi’s death in 233, it is quite possible that any sort of *Laozi* they

¹⁸⁰ Also, note that the term “proto-*Laozi*” places us in the position of distinguishing, at least roughly, a point in time where the *Laozi* becomes the *Laozi*, a complex issue that requires a project all its own to explore. For the purposes of the current project, I choose not to consistently use “proto-*Laozi*”, despite its greater precision, to emphasize the continuity of the role the constituent passages of the *Laozi* played as a source of authority, even before the text was formally compiled into what we know today.

¹⁸¹ Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 199.

¹⁸² Lundahl, “Han Fei Zi,” 128–29.

¹⁸³ Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 199.

¹⁸⁴ For a translation with context see Henricks, *Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching*.

would have been working from would have taken a form similar to that of the Guodian manuscripts, sealed not too long before.

Why Might the Essays be in the Hanfeizi?

Although it is impossible to conclusively prove the reasoning behind including the essays in the *Hanfeizi*, I would like to offer two possible theories depending on when the essays entered into the collection. First, there is a possibility that Hanfei did in fact author the essays or at the very least collected them into his personal library before his death, and as such the essays conform in some way to his agenda. Second, there is the possibility that the essays were added at a much later date, even as late as the Han, to fulfill the purposes of later compilers. I will discuss both of these below.

Possibility 1: Hanfei added the essays

This is my preferred of the two scenarios. In it, Hanfei either authored or collected the essays into his library. One potential reason for this inclusion would be that Hanfei was looking for some sort of generally accepted authority that could support his vision, but that was also not linked to the set of texts increasingly linked with the literati (*ru*). The *Laozi* collections and their commentaries demonstrated that a set of widely circulating aphorisms¹⁸⁵ could be applied to governance in a means similar to the *Odes* or the *Chunqiu* or other texts. The *Laozi* collections would be simultaneously novel, but also not unknown, with portions of them already circulating in elite circles and being buried in

¹⁸⁵ Michael LaFargue has made the argument that the *Laozi* initially circulated as collections of aphorisms that eventually came together in what he calls a “sayings collage”. See LaFargue, *The Tao of the Tao Tè Ching*, 301–36.

tombs. The *Laozi* collections, then, provided an interesting example of a source of authority alternate to the texts that were increasingly accepted as the classics and foundation of civilized debate. Simply the curiosity of these essays may have been enough for Hanfei to collect them.

Possibility 2: Later generations added the essays

Following the fall of the Qin, thinkers associated with its harsh rule were looked on with suspicion. After all, the Qin emphasis on heavy punishments was what upset the people and led to the downfall of the dynasty. Hanfei, among others, was tarnished with this brush. However, many of the so-called “Legalist” ideas did begin making their way back into debates in the Western Han, though always conjoined with other ideas with better reputations. In the *Shiji*, Hanfei is described as being “Huang-Lao”, a label that appears to have emerged around the time of the *Shiji* itself, wherein various figures are described as having a liking for Huangdi and Laozi. It is possible that Hanfei was added to this anachronistic category as a means of repairing his reputation. It is also possible that the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” were added, or at least given titles referring to “Laozi” as part of this repair project.

In either case, “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” were somehow seen as compatible with the rest of the *Hanfeizi*. Perhaps the practical, political orientation of the chapters seemed fitting with the rest of the content of the *Hanfeizi*, and the choice of quotations of *Laozi* parallels carried less baggage than, for example, the *Odes*.

Seen in this light, the use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels serves a function that is primarily rhetorical rather than exegetical. The structure, aims and intents of the source of

the quotations is subordinated to the purposes of the essay. Instead of seeking to draw out the “original” or “actual” intents of the source material, the essays show how that source can be practically applied and argue, in effect, for a more widespread use of that source.

The *Hanfeizi* as a whole, like the *Huainanzi*, has a number of collections of “persuasions”¹⁸⁶. One possibility is that the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” chapters are example “persuasions” that make use of a source text to support points made in the essay.

Laozi in other parts of the Hanfeizi

Quotations from Laozi collections

The *Hanfeizi* contains seven *Laozi* parallels outside of “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao”. Given the considerable size of the volume, this is a relatively small sample as we can see from this list of other chapters that contain *Laozi* parallels:

22	<i>Shuolin</i> I	說林上	1
24	<i>Guanxing</i>	觀行	1
30	<i>Neichushuo</i> I	內儲說上	1
31	<i>Neichushuo</i> II	內儲說下	1
38	<i>Nansan</i>	難三	2
46	<i>Liufan</i>	六反	1

¹⁸⁶ “Persuasions” are called such, as Major and Queen describe: “...to highlight the particular genre of persuasive oratory collected in these chapters and to underscore its possible function in oral argument and debate.” Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 618. In the *Hanfeizi* “persuasions” appear in chapters such as *Neichushuo* 內儲說, *Bashuo* 八說, *Bajing* 八經, *Shuolin* 說林, etc

However, even this small sample presents us with some curiosities. Beginning with the quotation from chapter 22, we can see that although it is parallel with *Laozi* 36, it is variant from both the received *Laozi* and the Mawangdui A manuscript:

Hanfeizi 22.8¹⁸⁷ 《周書》曰：『將欲敗之，必姑輔之；將欲取之，必姑予之。』

The *Book of Zhou* says: “If you wish to defeat something, you must assist it; if you wish to take something, you must give it.”

Laozi 36: 將欲弱之，必固強之；將欲廢之，必固興之。

If you wish to weaken something, you must strengthen it; if you wish to discard something you must join with it.

Mawangdui A: 將欲弱之，□□¹⁸⁸強之；將欲去之，必古與之；

If you wish to weaken something, XX strengthen it; if you wish to get rid of something, you must join with it.

Curiously, even though the quotation is very similar to one found in the received *Laozi* 36, the *Hanfeizi* cites a “*Zhou Shu*” 周書.¹⁸⁹ There are two potential conclusions we may draw from this quote: 1. That the *Laozi* parallel is itself patterning its passage after an earlier text from the Zhou, or 2. That the *Hanfeizi* regarded the *Laozi* parallel as being a “*Zhou Shu*”.

Chapter 24.1¹⁹⁰ contains the phrase 故以有餘補不足, which can be found parallel (after 以) in *Laozi* 77. The theme of “sufficiency” is one also found in both “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao”, though with slightly different articulations (see sections for each). It is possible that the “sufficiency” theme was one closely associated with the *Laozi* parallels that were

¹⁸⁷ Abbreviation of *Hanfeizi* Chapter 22, Paragraph 8 in CHANT.

¹⁸⁸ These characters are damaged in the original manuscript.

¹⁸⁹ A nearly identical formulation is also found in the *Zhanguoqi* at the start of chapter 24.

¹⁹⁰ Throughout this section I use the CHANT numberings of [chapter].[paragraph] to identify passages in *Hanfeizi*.

in circulation at the time, or that it was at least one of the themes most of interest to thinkers like Hanfei.

Chapter 30.44 contains a dialog between a king of Qi and Wenzhi¹⁹¹. Wenzhi's response contains a fragment similar to *Laozi* 36. Similarly chapter 31.96 contains a similar quote that is identical to *Laozi* 36:

Hanfeizi 30.43: 「夫賞罰之為道，利器也。君固握之，不可以示人。」

“Rewards and punishments as one's way [of ruling] are effective instruments. A lord must hold onto them and cannot reveal them to others.”

Hanfeizi 31.18: 故曰：「國之利器，不可以示人。」

“The effective instruments of state cannot be revealed to others.”

Laozi 36: 魚不可脫於淵，（國）〔邦〕之利器，不可以示人。

Fish are not allowed to leave the depths, the effective instruments of state cannot be revealed to others.

The theme of “not revealing the tools of state to the people” is fairly common. In addition to appearing in “Yu Lao”,¹⁹² it also makes an appearance in the *Hanshi Waizhuan* 7 and in *Zhuangzi* 10, in both of the latter cases exactly parallel with the passage in *Laozi* 36. It is worth noting that both instances are quotations and the one from 31.96 is introduced with the same “thus it is said” that begins quotations in “Yu Lao”.

Chapter 38 contains two *Laozi* parallels. First, in 38.8 a story featuring Zhongni (Confucius) discusses preventing chaos in the world and presents it as an example of a quotation parallel with *Laozi* 63:

Hanfeizi 38.8: 明君見小姦於微，故民無大謀；行小誅於細，故民無大亂。此謂「圖難於其所易也，為大者於其所細也」。

¹⁹¹ It is unclear if this is supposed to be the Wenzhi said to have studied under Laozi.

¹⁹² CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.8-9

The clearly [observant] lord sees small perversions in details, and so the people are without great plots; he enacts small punishments based on nuance, and so the people are without great chaos. This is what is called “approaching the difficult from where it is easy, approaching great things from where they are small.”

Laozi 63: 圖難於其易 [也], 為大於其細 [也]。

Approaching the difficult from where it is easy, approaching great things from where they are small.

The second quotation, in 38.10 is the only instance in the entire *Hanfeizi* that “*Laozi*” is cited as the originator of a quote. It caps off a story about the governance of Zichan:

Hanfeizi 38.13: 《老子》曰：「以智治國，國之賊也。」其子產之謂矣。

Laozi said: “Using knowledge to govern a state is an injury for the state.” This can be said of Zichan.

Laozi 65: 故以智治 (國) [邦], (國) [邦] 之賊 [也]; 不以智治 (國) [邦], 國之福 [也]。

Using knowledge to govern a state is an injury for the state; not using knowledge to govern a state is the state’s good fortune.

Finally, chapter 46.7 contains an extended discussion of the concept of “sufficiency” and supplies an example parallel to *Laozi* 44. This is the only instance in the entire *Hanfeizi* that introduces a quotation of a *Laozi* parallel as originating from Lao Dan:

Hanfeizi 46.6: 老聃有言曰：「知足不辱，知止不殆。」

Lao Dan had a saying: “With knowing sufficiency there will be no humiliation, with knowing where to stop there will be no disaster.”

Laozi 44: 知足不辱，知止不殆

With knowing sufficiency there will be no humiliation, with knowing where to stop there will be no disaster.

Lao Dan appears twice, once in the above noted passage from *Hanfeizi* 46, identifying a quotation parallel to *Laozi* 44. He also appears in 31.3, where he again appears credited with a statement:

Hanfeizi 31.3: 其說在老聃之言失魚也。¹⁹³

This is explained in Lao Dan's saying about the lost fish.

There is but little more to say on the appearance of the legendary author "Laozi" in the *Hanfeizi*. The name "Laozi" appears only once in the passage cited above from *Hanfeizi* 38, where the name is clearly linked with a parallel to *Laozi* 65.

Altogether these seven quotations show a range of relationships with *Laozi*, both by name and use of parallels with the received text. *Hanfeizi* 22 seems to acknowledge a completely different (or at least fairly generic) source for the quotation. 24 only hints at the presence of a quotation with the use of the character *gu*. 30 attributes the quotation to Wenzhi, while 31 provides only the generic "thus it is said" attribution. On the other end of the spectrum, 38 in one instance uses a story to gloss a *Laozi* parallel, much like "Jie Lao", and in another instance credits the quotation to "Laozi", while 46 provides credit to "Lao Dan". Put simply, there is no unified stance toward *Laozi* parallels and is likely a sign that the *Laozi* was still developing over the course of the compilation of these chapters, with 38 and 46 representing a fairly late stage in forming a text and linking it with an author.

The role of "Dao" in *Hanfeizi*

¹⁹³ Possibly a reference to *Laozi* 36

Even though the constituent passages of the *Laozi* may not have played a prominent role in the *Hanfeizi* outside of the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” chapters, there are a number of places where we may find signs of their influences throughout the text.¹⁹⁴

One chapter to show these influences is the fifth, “Zhu dao” 主道. This chapter begins with a rhapsody on the way: 道者、萬物之始 which is reminiscent of the first passage of *Laozi* (無名天地之始，有名萬物之母). The rest of the chapter proceeds to highlight some themes reminiscent of those found in the received *Laozi*: emptiness *xu* 虛 and tranquility *jing* 靜, the reduction of desires, the imperceptible perceptibility of the Dao (道在不可見), and yielding *tui* 退. All of these are well in keeping with the worldview of the received *Laozi*.

The eighth chapter, “Yang Quan” 揚權 similar to “Zhu Dao” in its emphasis on the Dao, and includes themes of emptiness, tranquility and *de* 德. It also includes a reference to “holding to the one to attain tranquility”(故聖人執一以靜), similar to language found in the received *Laozi*.

Other chapters occasionally talk about “Dao”, but apart from the portions noted above, do not seem to take a stance particularly reminiscent of the received *Laozi* (including chapter 26, named “Shou Dao” 守道). The chapters that do contain possible influence of *Laozi* passages, the “Zhu Dao” and “Yang Quan” chapters have often been

¹⁹⁴ Although the *Shiji* reports that Hanfei was affiliated with “Huang-Lao” I hesitate to throw him fully into a “Daoist” category and hence use a more reserved term here

treated as secondary or non-essential to the *Hanfeizi* as a whole.¹⁹⁵ However, Lundahl at least concludes that these chapters, unlike “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao”, are authentically from Hanfei.¹⁹⁶ We are left with the impression that Hanfei at least entertained ideas reminiscent of *Laozi*, and supplies some support for the argument that he collected the “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao” for his library, even if he did not author them himself.

Conclusions

Considering all of the above information on the use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels and names associated with “Laozi”, it appears that the *Laozi* was still in development over the course of the compilation of later chapters of the *Hanfeizi*. Furthermore, by the time the names “Laozi” and “Lao Dan” appear, they seem to be primarily associated with the text he supposedly authored.

All of this evidence points to a simple fact: that “Yu Lao” and “Jie Lao” are exceptional. They are clearly not part of a larger *Laozi*-focused project conducted throughout the entirety of the *Hanfeizi*. Rather they indicate a shift in tone, a slight yielding of the authority of the author, to accept another text as a source of authority that can clarify and justify the author’s assertions.

Comparing Jielao & Yulao

¹⁹⁵ See A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 285.

R. P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995), 146. cf. Hagop Sarkissian, “Laozi: Re-Visiting Two Early Commentaries in the *Hanfeizi*.” (National Library of Canada, 2001), 14.

¹⁹⁶ Lundahl, “Han Fei Zi,” 198–207.

Queen's comparison of 20 & 21

Sarah Queen has performed an extensive study into the use of *Laozi* parallels in the commentaries in the *Hanfeizi*. Although both are using *Laozi* parallels, she finds that the two chapters differ along the lines of seven criteria:¹⁹⁷

1. Exegetical strategies
2. Choice of passages
3. Style of citation
4. Manner of citation
5. Date markers
6. Viewpoints
7. Vocabulary

1. Beginning with exegetical strategies, Queen identifies a difference between “Jie Lao” (20) using a structured argument while “Yu Lao” (21) providing anecdotal illustration. “Jie Lao” frames its reasoning often in the form of Sorites chains (if A then B; if B then C; etc.), a fairly common argument structure in early Chinese texts.¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, “Yu Lao” presents an anecdote placed in apposition with a quotation, leaving the meaning of the quotation to be inferred from the anecdote. Queen suggests that these constituted two distinct commentarial styles, with the structured argument of “Jie Lao” surviving in interlinear commentaries while the anecdotal format of “Yu Lao” fell out of practice after the Han.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 198–99.

¹⁹⁸ Queen, 199.

¹⁹⁹ Queen, 200.

2. In terms of choice of passages, although both chapters use roughly the same number of quotations of *Laozi* parallels, only passages from the received *Laozi* 46 and 54 appear in both chapters. Based on the example of the *Laozi* manuscripts found at Guodian, Queen argues that the *Hanfeizi* chapters are drawing on “two distinct collections of materials” rather than a single *Laozi*.²⁰⁰ As such, the commentaries in fact preserve these older collections. We will discuss later the potential implications of this argument and how far we can follow it.

3. As for citation styles, while neither chapter cites *Laozi* by name, both use the formula “Thus it is said:” *guyue* 故曰 to indicate that they are inserting a quotation from a new source. Additionally, “Jie Lao” uses several other forms of citation, including such structures as “this is what the book terms:” *ci shu zhi suo wei* 此書之所謂.²⁰¹ Queen’s chapter makes the point that the verb “to say” *yue* may be more indicative of an oral transmission of ideas, while the “to term” *wei* verb could be a sign of a textually conscious gloss.²⁰² Certainly the use of the term “book” *shu* in “Jie Lao” is a sign that the author of that phrase was working from written rather than spoken material. I will return later to the question of forms of citation and the differences between *yue* and *wei*, taken in light of their presence in *Huainanzi* 12 as well, to consider if they may be indicative of other sorts of differences in addition to the oral/textual divide.

²⁰⁰ Queen, 199.

²⁰¹ Note that this citation format also occurs twice in *Huainanzi* 12, once to cite Lao Dan, a person, and once to cite *Guanzi* which could very well be viewed as a book.

²⁰² Queen, 202.

4. The chapters treat the source material differently. “Jie Lao” tends to quote entire passages and at times offers line-by-line explanations, while “Yu Lao” tends to use only a small fragment of a passage, at least when comparing both with the received *Laozi*. The “Jie Lao” in this case presents the majority of passages from the collection it was based on, while “Yu Lao”, which differs substantially in order and text from the received *Laozi* was using another collection. I will discuss these differences at length later, providing more support for Queen’s theory of multiple collections, but also suggesting that part of the reason for the different treatment of the source material in the *Hanfeizi* chapters is tied to their differing purposes as much as to differing sources.

5. Drawing on observations by Zheng Liangshu, Queen’s chapter compares the use of the characters *guo* 國 and *bang* 邦, seeing them as different markers on the historical concept of a “state”.²⁰³ Essentially, the “Yu Lao”, which uses the older sense of *bang*, in distinction from the rest of the *Hanfeizi*, could be viewed as the older of the two chapters. Zheng Liangshu had made an extensive study of these passages, finding that when “Yu Lao” passages appear in other sources, such as *Huainanzi* and *Liezi*, *bang* has been converted to *guo*, and that *bang* was more common in earlier Warring States material, suggesting that “Yu Lao” is older than the *Hanfeizi* itself. However, due to the appearance of a third century BCE historical anecdote, it is likely that the “Yu Lao” is not as early as these early texts, though it may be, as Sarkissian has suggested, intended to evoke an archaic feel.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Queen, 206–7.

²⁰⁴ Sarkissian, “Laozi,” 36.

While “Jie Lao” is primarily concerned with defining and explaining terms, only rarely making use of historical example, “Yu Lao” is characterized by its use of historical anecdotes. As Queen wrote: “...in the “Jie Lao” history is far less relevant as a didactic mirror for the present compared to the “Yu Lao”.”²⁰⁵ Perhaps, as Queen suggested, the chapters are responding to historical circumstance. She dated the “Yu Lao” to possibly shortly after 295 BCE, while the “Jie Lao” would have been composed closer to the Qin unification in 221 BCE.²⁰⁶ The greater thematic concern with establishing a sense of unity, and less interest in the models of the past found in “Jie Lao” would seem to correspond to a time quickly moving toward a new period of imperial unification, rather than looking to the stability of past exemplars.

6 & 7. In terms of viewpoints and vocabulary, the “Yu Lao” contains suggestions for the proper relations of ministers and rulers and the management of a state in difficult times to preserve the life of a ruler. The “Jie Lao” expresses more concern with the moral and inner cultivation of the ruler as an example to the state. It is possible that these views were shaped by historical context: with the “Yu Lao” appealing to rulers looking to survive in the midst of the chaotic Warring States period, while “Jie Lao” was already anticipating the skills needed for an established ruler of a unified empire.

In sum, Queen argued in her chapter that the two *Hanfeizi* chapters originated from different time periods, written for different purposes and audiences, likely by two different authors, making use of two distinct proto-*Laozi* collections. This conclusion

²⁰⁵ Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 208.

²⁰⁶ As Lundahl has pointed out, a Qin taboo character is present in “*Jie Lao*” suggesting that the chapter was already in circulation at that time. Lundahl, “Han Fei Zi,” 135.

raises an important question for our current study: why would *Laozi* collections be used in such diverse ways? To whom were these *Laozi* collections significant? What do these commentaries say about the developments in the status of these *Laozi* collections throughout the late Warring States?

Yulao

We begin with “Yu Lao” because it appears it is the earlier of the two essays. Several scholars have made this point, and I see no reason at this time to disagree with the dating, even though the evidence given is more coincidental than conclusive. The primary reasons for the earlier date may be as follows:²⁰⁷

1. No anecdotes can be dated to after the late fourth century BCE
2. “Yu Lao” predominantly uses the term *bang* 邦 instead of *guo* 國, which has been argued is a sign of an older text (or at least one attempting to be archaic)
3. “Yu Lao” concerns itself primarily with the survival of a small state surrounded by larger rivals, rather than a strategy for accomplishing a victorious hegemony. While this may simply reflect on the intended audience of the essay, it also may be indicative of an earlier stage of the Warring States when there were more smaller states seeking to survive than late-stage Warring States when there had been more consolidation.
4. “Yu Lao” never mentions *Laozi* by name outside of its title

²⁰⁷ See Queen, Sarkissian, Kim, Lundahl

5. There are some parallels with the Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts.²⁰⁸

This fifth point highlights that, if the “Yu Lao” is a late fourth/early third century BCE composition, it would have been roughly contemporary with the Guodian manuscripts. Guodian, as noted in the introduction, was sealed roughly around the end of the fourth century. The tomb contained three manuscripts, each one with a different arrangement of passages found in the received *Laozi*, with some passages appearing in multiple manuscripts. Seeing as each manuscript can be read as having its own coherent ordering of passages, it is reasonable to assume that each was intended to be in some way complete.²⁰⁹ This has led to some speculation that there were multiple *Laozi* collections in circulation, each one containing its own arrangement of passages. As such, it is possible that “Yu Lao” is representative of a lost collection, either as an exegetical commentary of that collection, or as simply an example of uses of passages eventually found in *Laozi*. Subsequently, I will argue in favor of the latter explanation, as I believe the primary function of both “Yu Lao” and to some extent “Jie Lao” was primarily rhetorical before exegetical.

“Yu Lao” is composed entirely of what I am calling the anecdote-quote format, wherein a historical or fictional anecdote is followed by a clearly indicated quotation from a classic – in this case *Laozi*. Of important note is that “Yu Lao” never cites *Laozi*

²⁰⁸ See table in appendix

²⁰⁹ Several scholars have noted that the manuscripts appear to contain a thematic arrangement of passages. See for example: Wang Bo, cited in Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, p.7.

Guo Yi takes this position a step further to argue that the Guodian Manuscripts are superior to the received *Laozi* and represent the works of an author contemporary to the time of Confucius:

Guo Yi 郭沂, “Cong Guodian Chujian *Laozi* Kan Laozi Qiren Qishu 從郭店出簡《老子》看老子其人其書,” *Philosophical Research* 哲學研究, July 1998, 47–55.

by name (apart from the essay title, which may well be a later addition), but uses the generic quotation indicator: “thus it is said:” *gu yue* 故曰.

The absence of a clear naming of *Laozi* could be taken to indicate that “Yu Lao” was crafted some time before the identification of *Laozi* passages with the mythical author of that name. There could, of course, be other reasons for this absence, such as an assumed familiarity with the source. It is worth noting, though, that repeating the name “Laozi” was not important for the purposes of “Yu Lao”, or “Jie Lao”, which also does not mention the name.

The anecdotes generally serve as illustrations of the quotations that accompany them. The examples tend to look to historical precedent as a way of deriving advice from the quotations on how to live and govern in a harsh society and, above all, survive through difficult times. The intention is clearly practical, and geared to a political stage, rather than toward a solo practitioner. As such, one way of reading the intent of the passages is as supplying evidence that the quotations of *Laozi* parallels can in fact be applied to the practical realities of governing a state in difficult times. In this way, the historical anecdotes lend the weight of a particular inflection to the quotations just as the quotations explore the potentially general application of the anecdotes.

Yulao's Structure: "Interwoven" Commentary

Despite the frequency of marked quotations in “Yu Lao”, there are also instances where quotations of *Laozi* parallels appear without any sort of credit.

Beginning with the very first passage of “Yu Lao”, we find the text of the essay interwoven with materials found in the received *Laozi*:

“Yu Lao” 1: 天下有道，無急患，則曰靜，遽傳不用。故曰：「卻走馬以糞。」天下無道，攻擊不休，相守數年不已，甲冑生蟣虱，鷲雀處帷幄，而兵不歸。故曰：「戎馬生於郊。」

When the world has the Way, there are no anxieties or worries and so it is tranquil and couriers are not employed. Therefore it is said: ***One relegates swift horses to fertilize [the fields].*** **When the world is without the Way**, attacks and battles do not end and mutual defense persists several years without ceasing, until the troops do not return home though their armor and helmets teem with lice and gnats, though swallows and sparrows nest in their curtains and tents. Therefore it is said: ***War-horses breed in the suburbs.***²¹⁰

Laozi 46: 天下有道，卻走馬以糞；天下無道，戎馬生於郊。

The first “Yu Lao” passage appears to be glossing the quotation of a *Laozi* parallel, first reporting a line, then glossing it, then using that gloss as an explanation for the subsequent line in *Laozi*. In other words, if read from the perspective of the received *Laozi*, “Yu Lao” 1 appears to function as an interlinear commentary. However, a problem appears when we note that the paired phrases “When the world has the Way” and “When the world is without the Way” appear without the “therefore it is said” marker of the beginning of a quotation.²¹¹ Considering that the parallels with *Laozi* in “Yu Lao” are typically signaled as quotations, what might we conclude from this? There is a possibility that the unmarked parallels may in fact not have been recognized as part of the body of

²¹⁰ Translation from Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 246.

Lines found in *Laozi* 46 in bold.

Interestingly, while the Mawangdui manuscripts are fairly similar to the received *Laozi* 46, Guodian A contains only the second half of the passage, the portion which is not glossed in “Yu Lao”.

²¹¹ Here we should also note that none of these four lines resembling received *Laozi* 46 appear in any of the Guodian manuscripts. We cannot use this excavated evidence to draw conclusions about why only half the lines are attributed as quotations in this passage.

sayings resembling the *Laozi* to which the “Yu Lao” was referring in this passage. Under this scenario, we might also speculate that the “Yu Lao” or another commentary like it that connected these passages may have played a role in the development of *Laozi* 46.

“Yu Lao” 7 partially employs a similar, nearly interlinear strategy:

“Yu Lao” 7: 制在己曰重，不離位曰靜。重則能使輕，靜則能使躁。故曰：「重為輕根，靜為躁君。」故曰：「君子終日行，不離輜重也。」邦者，人君之輜重也。主父生傳其邦，此離其輜重者也；故雖有代、雲中之樂，超然已無趙矣。主父，萬乘之主，而以身輕於天下。無勢之謂輕，離位之謂躁，是以生幽而死。故曰：「輕則失臣，躁則失君。」

When control rests in your person, you are called weighty. When you do not leave the throne, you are called tranquil.

When weighty, you can direct the light.

When tranquil, you can direct the restless.

Therefore it is said:

The heavy is the root of the light;

The tranquil is the lord of the restless.

Therefore it is said: ***The superior man travels all day without becoming separated from his heavy baggage cart.***

The state is the ruler’s “heavy baggage cart.” When Zhu Fu abdicated his state while still alive, he “became separated from his heavy baggage cart.” Therefore, though he enjoyed the music of Dai and Yunzhong ultimately he had already lost Zhao. Zhu Fu was a ruler of a ten thousand chariot state yet he considered himself “lighter” than the empire. When the ruler lacks strategic advantage (*shi*), he is said to be “light.” When he leaves the throne, he is said to be “restless.” This is why he lived as a hostage and then died. Therefore it is said:

If light, you will lose your subjects.

If restless, you will lose your lordship.²¹²

Laozi 26: 重為輕根，靜為躁君。是以聖人終日行，不離輜重。雖有榮觀，燕處超然。奈何萬乘之主而以身輕天下？輕則失本。躁則失君。

²¹² Translation from Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 248.

The passage weaves the quotations of *Laozi* parallels into its larger commentary, not beginning with a *Laozi* parallel, but placing it squarely within the passage's context. It is almost as if the quotations of *Laozi* parallels are supplying an interlinear commentary for the statements made by the passage authors, rather than the other way around.

“Yu Lao” 9 is even more clear in how it uses *Laozi* parallels to supply a type of interlinear commentary, dividing the *Laozi* parallel into two segments that are presented as logical conclusion to the statements made in the passage:

“Yu Lao” 9: 越王入宦於吳，而觀之伐齊以弊吳。吳兵既勝齊人於艾陵，張之於江、濟，強之於黃池，故可制於五湖。故曰：「將欲翕之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之。」晉獻公將欲襲虞，遺之以璧馬；知伯將襲仇由，遺之以廣車。故曰：「將欲取之，必固與之。」起事於無形，而要大功於天下，是謂微明。處小弱而重自卑〔損〕，謂（損）弱勝強也。

King [Goujian] of Yue entered into servitude in [the state of] Wu and showed its ruler how to attack Qi so as to exhaust Wu. Subsequently the troops of Wu vanquished Qi's men at Ailing; stretched as far as the Jiang and Qi Rivers; and showed their strength as far as Yellow Pool. Thus the King of Yue was able to take control at Five Lakes [where he defeated Wu]. Therefore it is said:

*If you wish to shrink it, you must certainly stretch it;
if you wish to weaken it, you must certainly strengthen it.*

When Duke Xian of Jin was about to attack Yu, he offered a jade disk and a steed; when Earl Zhi was about to attack the Qiu You, he offered a grand chariot. Therefore it is said:

If you wish to take something from someone, you must certainly give something to someone.

To initiate an undertaking in the formless realm and to accomplish great things in the world is called “subtle discernment.” To remain insignificant and weak and value humbling one's person is called “the weak defeating the strong.”²¹³

Laozi 36: 1. 將欲歛之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；將欲廢之，必固興之。將欲奪之，必固與之；是謂微明。柔弱勝剛強。

²¹³ Translation from Queen, 249.

The quotation of a *Laozi* parallel presents generalized statements, while the “Yu Lao” contextualizes them. At the same time, the quotations of *Laozi* parallels appear to supply an explanation for the historical anecdotes, asserting that they are simply following the regular, discernible rules that the *Laozi* has already recorded.

“Yu Lao” 10 appears to present a similar pattern at its beginning, but also branches out into using the “thus it is said” pattern to indicate some material from a currently non-extant source:

“*Yu Lao*” 10: 有形之類，大必起於小；行久之物，族必起於少。故曰：「天下之難事必作於易，天下之大事必作於細。」是以欲制物者於其細也。故曰：「圖難於其易也，為大於其細也。」

Among the category [of things] that have form, what is significant invariably arises from what was insignificant.

Among things that endure, what is abundant invariably arises from what was scarce.

Therefore it is said:

***The difficult undertakings in the world evolve from what is easy;
the great undertakings in the world evolve from what is small.***

This is why those who desire to control things must attend to the “minute.”

Therefore it is said:

***Plan for the difficult while it is easy;
Act on the great while it is small.***²¹⁴

Laozi 63: 為無為，事無事，味無味。大小多少，報怨以德。圖難於其易〔也〕，為大於其細〔也〕。天下難事必作於易，天下大事必作於細。

The quotation of a *Laozi* parallel as interwoven commentary appears only in the first line or so, though the lines are in reverse order from how they are presented in the received *Laozi* 63.

²¹⁴ Translation from Queen, 249.

Finally, “Yu Lao” 20 also interweaves quotations of *Laozi* parallels in the final part of its passage:

“Yu Lao” 20: 白公勝慮亂，罷朝，倒杖而策銳貫頤，血流至于地而不知。鄭人聞之曰：「頤之忘，將何（為）〔不〕忘哉？」故曰：「其出彌遠者，其智彌少。」此言智周乎遠，則所遺在近也。是以聖人無常行也。能並智，故曰：「不行而知。」能並視，故曰：「不見而明。」隨時以舉事，因資而立功，用萬物之能而獲利其上，故曰：「不為而成。」

Duke Sheng of Bo, preoccupied with his plans of rebellion, left the court and was standing alone when he picked up a horsewhip upside down and pierced his chin. Though his blood flowed all over the ground, he was not conscious of it. When a native of Zheng learned of this, he said: "If one forgets one's chin, what is there that one does not forget!" Therefore it is said:

*The farther one goes,
the less one knows.*

This means that if your intelligence penetrates afar, you will miss what is at hand. This is why the sage has no definite destination, but can know both far and near. Therefore it is said: **Know by not journeying**. Therefore it is said: **Understand by not looking**.

Follow the seasons to initiate your undertakings. Accord with the inherent qualities of things to establish your achievements. Employ the abilities of the myriad things to obtain benefits for the ruler. Therefore it is said: **Accomplish by not doing**.²¹⁵

Laozi 47: 不出戶，知天下。不闚牖，見天道。其出彌遠，其知彌少。是以聖人不行而知，不見而名，（不）〔弗〕為而成。

In total, the following passages follow a similar pattern of interweaving:

“Interwoven” Commentary:

“Yu Lao”	<i>Laozi</i> (received)
1-5	46 (primarily 1)
7	26
8-9	36 (primarily 9)
10	63

²¹⁵ Translation from Queen, 253–54.

13-14	52* (when taken together)
15-16	64* (when taken together)
18-20	47 (primarily 20)

Yulao's Structure: "Capping" commentary

The passages of “Yu Lao” that do not interweave commentary all follow what could be called a capping form, where the quotation of a *Laozi* parallel comes only at the end of the passage, signified by a “Thus it is said”.²¹⁶ These capping phrases seem to explain or justify the entirety of the passage before, just as the preceding passage appears to illustrate the capping quotation. A clear example is passage 6, which tells the story of Sun Shu’ao.

楚莊王既勝，狩于河雍，歸而賞孫叔敖。孫叔敖請漢間之地，沙石之處。楚邦之法，祿臣再世而收地，唯孫叔敖獨在。此不以其邦為收者，瘠也，故九世而祀不絕。故曰：「善建不拔，善抱不脫，子孫以其祭祀世世不輟。」孫叔敖之謂也。²¹⁷

King Zhuang of Chu had just been victorious, and was hunting in Heyong. When he returned he rewarded Sun Shu’ao. Sun Shu’ao asked for land in the space of the Han river, a sandy spot. According to the laws of Chu, salaried ministers had to return land after two generations, but only Sun Shu’ao was excepted. Because the land was barren the state did not request its return. And so, for nine generations the ancestral sacrifices were not interrupted. Thus it is said: “What is well built will not fall, what is well bound will not come loose, through this descendants can make sacrifices for generations without interruption.” This can be said of Sun Shu’ao.

²¹⁶ Sarah Queen has also referred to the use of quotations in “Dao Ying” as “capping” the anecdotes they accompany. Indeed, passages that employ this method in “Yu Lao” do seem quite similar structurally to the passages in “Dao Ying” See Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 430.

²¹⁷ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.6

Sun Shu'ao is depicted as a clever minister who asks only for a barren and craggy plot of land when his ruler offers him a reward of territory. Because the land appears undesirable, even though control of other fiefs was returned after two generations, no one bothered with the Sun family territory for nine generations. Following the story, the passage cites a line found in *Laozi* 54.

From the perspective of structure, the quotation plays a role similar to a punchline of a joke: it encapsulates and crystalizes a particular understanding of the preceding story. It is as though the passage says, choosing to prioritize the continuity of sacrifice over the fertility of the land is in fact what the *Laozi* parallel had in mind when it referred to things “well built”. Other readings, such as concern that Sun Shu'ao is effectively subverting the laws of the state, or a concern about the value of the land he took (were his descendants actually that well off making their living off of barren land?) are eliminated by the seemingly positive sense of the quotation of a *Laozi* parallel. Simultaneously, this structure connects the term “well” *shan* 善 with a certain type of perceptiveness, prioritizing and cleverness, rather than, say, the skillfulness of a craftsman, encouraging a reading of the quotation of a *Laozi* parallel that fits with a minister making best use of a position often viewed as weaker than a ruler to take advantage of that ruler. In essence, both the story and the quotation constrain how the other is read, rather than expanding on the potential meanings of the passage.

Yulao's Structure: Sequential passages

“Yu Lao” has typically been subdivided into passages based on the stories associated with each passage. Under this model of subdivision, importance is placed on differences in contexts and emphasizes the particular message of each passage. However, there are also a number of passages that appear to be commenting on the same chapter of *Laozi*.²¹⁸ The longest example of this sequencing is passages 1-5, all of which include quotations found in the received *Laozi* 46. Other sequences include 8-9, 15-16 and 18-20. The connection of several sequential passages to the same received *Laozi* chapter appears to emphasize the commentarial aspect of the essay.

Looking at the sequence from 1-5 we find the following sequence:

- 1: General statement about harmony in the world when the Dao is present
- 2: Desirable pelts or lands cause animals and states to become targets of hunters and other states
- 3: Overextending military forces leads to eventual defeat
- 4: Chasing after fine horses and jade leads to overextension and defeat
- 5: General statement that knowing sufficiency is a cause of lasting long

In this sequence the first and last passage make general statements, while the central three passages use stories of rulers to frame their message. As such, the first and fifth passage function as introductory and concluding material, providing an analytic framework for the group of passages and quotations contained between them. These five passages act as a miniature essay explaining and illustrating *Laozi* 46.

²¹⁸ As a result, in their translations, Queen and Sarkissian have grouped passages based on the chapter of the received *Laozi* they contain. See Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master.” and Sarkissian, “Laozi.”

Similarly, 8-9 contains an essay-like structure of using historical examples and quotations of parallels with *Laozi* 36 to illustrate general statements made on the importance of positional advantage (*shi* 勢), a common theme in the *Hanfeizi*. It follows a structure as such:

- General statement: positional advantage is important
- Example: Duke Jian lost it and fell from power
- Quotation: “Fish (weaker ministers) cannot be allowed to escape the abyss (their assigned role)”
- General statement: Rewards and punishments are the key tools of the state
- Quotation: “The efficacious instruments of state cannot be revealed.”
- Example: The King of Yue tricked his captor, the King of Wu into overextending himself, then took advantage of the situation.
- Quotation: “If you want to compress something, you must stretch it out, if you wish to weaken something you must strengthen it.”
- Example: Duke Xian and Earl Zhi both gave gifts before attacking
- Quotation “If you take something, you must give.”
- General statement: Undertaking matters before they have taken form
- Quotation “Is called bright subtlety.”
- General statement: to be in a weak position and prize that humility
- Quotation: “Is weakness overcoming strength.”

Passages 8-9 interweave quotations of *Laozi* parallels with examples to support the general claims they make about positional advantage. Together they function both as a

commentary on parallels with *Laozi* 36 - explaining what it might mean to a ruler, and also as a miniature essay using parallels with *Laozi* 36 to support claims about the power of understanding and using positional advantage. In other words, the sequence is fulfilling both exegetical and rhetorical functions.

Chart 1 Yu Lao Passage Ordering

CHANT ¶ #	LZ Verse	Summary	Purpose	Argument Unit
1	46	Harmonious world with the Dao, Chaos without	Introduction	1a: Dangers of not knowing sufficiency
2		Beautiful hides attract hunters	Example 1 (Nature)	
3		Overextending conquest leads to downfall	Example 2 (Politics)	
4		A lord pursuing precious goods leads to downfall	Example 3 (Synthesize ex 1&2)	
5		Knowing sufficiency is the secret to lasting long	Conclusion	
6	54	Choosing barren land leads to preservation	Example (Nature + Politics)	1b: Advantage of knowing sufficiency
7	26	A ruler well situated on the throne has positional advantage, without it he loses control	Introduces new cycle. Statement + example (Politics)	2a: Importance of positional advantage
8	36	Emphasizes positional advantage and gives an example of disaster when lost	Statement + example (Politics) + statement (new cycle)	2b: Dangers of revealing the “tools of the state” (losing positional advantage)
9		Using deception to achieve ends (weak using positional advantage overlooked by strong)	Example 1 (Politics) + example 2 (Politics) + statement	

CHANT ¶ #	LZ Verse	Summary	Purpose	Argument Unit
10	63	Addressing difficult situations when they are still small	New Cycle: statement + example (Nature) + statement	3a: Handling issues early, before they become problems
11		Noticing a disease before it becomes serious	Example (Politics/Nature) + statement	
12	64	Two rulers do not deal with issues early, which leads to their downfall.	Example 1 (Politics) + example 2 (Politics) + statement	
13	52	A ruler indulges in extravagance, a sign of eventual downfall	Example (Politics)	3b: When opponents see and take advantage of small flaws
14	(& 71)	Pretending to be defeated to prepare for victory	Example (Politics)	
15	64	Not valuing precious goods	Example (Life)	4a: Valuing what naturalness and discarding artifice
16		Experience more valuable than records in books	Example (Life)	
17		Following naturalness and discarding artifice	Statement + Example (Politics) + Statement	
18	47	Sensory stimulation leads to exhaustion	Statement	4b: Distraction is the path to defeat, better to avoid artifice
19		Fixation on opponents in a race leads to lagging	Example (Life)	

CHANT ¶ #	LZ Verse	Summary	Purpose	Argument Unit
20		Distraction leading to self-injury / knowing by paying attention / following nature	Example (Life) + statement 1 + statement 2	
21	41	Waiting to act until the time is appropriate	Example (Politics)	5a: Understanding one's own strengths and resolve is the key to victory
22	33	Not attacking others when one's own state is weak	Example (Politics)	
23		Resolving conflicts of ideas leads to strength	Example (Life)	
24	27	Not giving a precious object to the worthy, but only to the greedy, the ruler's actions may seem mysterious to the outside, but they follow principles	Example (Politics)	5b: Conclusion: Good rulers follow the above suggestions, even though it may make them appear strange to the casual observer (others do not understand the ruler).

Logical ordering of passages

One thing that becomes apparent when looking at the ordering of passages in “Yu Lao” is that there is a logical organization to the passages.

There are essentially three ways to number passages in “Yu Lao”:

1. By stories²¹⁹
2. By *Laozi* verse²²⁰
3. By units of argument

The first method of arrangement, roughly corresponding to the first column of the chart above, places the organizational emphasis on the anecdotes and stories that appear in the “Yu Lao”. This structure can provide us with an understanding of how each anecdote functioned independently of others, and how they relate to the quotations that are attached to them. However, this form of arrangement hides the many places where anecdotes link together to form longer discussions and arguments.

The second method of arrangement, corresponding to the second column, employed by Sarkissian and Queen in their analyses and translations, divides “Yu Lao” into units based on their relation to passages in the received *Laozi*. This method provides a better sense of the continuity of the arguments in “Yu Lao”, and provides some insight into how “Yu Lao” passages compare to the received *Laozi*. Queen suggests that these passages themselves present us with a “proto-*Laozi* collection” specific to “Yu Lao”.²²¹ From a

²¹⁹ This is the way most collections, including CHANT paragraphs

²²⁰ Employed by Sarkissian and Queen. See their translations in Sarkissian, “Laozi.” and Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master.”

²²¹ Queen provides a chart comparing the passages in the received, Wang Bi *Laozi* with the passages present in the “Yu Lao” proto-*Laozi* Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” pp 223-225.

perspective of compilation history, this arrangement is especially useful, as it shows what passages in “Yu Lao” are parallel with the received *Laozi*, allowing us to explore how “Yu Lao” may have contributed to the development of the *Laozi* as a text. However, this arrangement places the focus on reading “Yu Lao” as a commentary relative to the received *Laozi*, and may obscure interpretive strokes and rhetorical structures the “Yu Lao” contains that disrupt the accepted reading of *Laozi* parallels relative to the received *Laozi*.

The third arrangement, corresponding to the final column of the table, is the more novel way I would like to suggest for organizing passages in “Yu Lao”, one based on the rhetorical arcs of the “Yu Lao” itself. These groupings represent what I read as distinct arguments. Furthermore, they follow a logical structure of an introductory statement, followed by examples and finished with a concluding statement. These “mini-essay” units occur regularly throughout the chapter and reveal a series of larger themes.

My proposed chapter division, as presented in the chart above, groups passages into five paired logical units. These units show the positive and negative sides of each issue. For example, group 1a shows the dangers of not “knowing sufficiency” while group 1b shows the advantage of “knowing simplicity”. Together these groups cover the following topics:

- 1: Knowing sufficiency *zhi zu* 知足.
- 2: Positional advantage *shi* 勢.
- 3: Dealing with problems when they are small.
- 4: Value of direct experience and attention.

5: Understanding and obscuring one's own strength.

The general theme of “Yu Lao” could be read as “weakness overcoming strength” and displays examples where this principle works both for and against various rulers. “Yu Lao” appears to combine both the *Laozi* parallels’ emphasis on yielding with the *Hanfeizi*’s interest in effective and efficient rulership. Overall, the essay appears to place more value on restraint and survival than on growth and conquest, tending to more frequently advise rulers to reign in their ambitions than to expand their states.

The types of examples used in “Yu Lao” can be grouped into roughly three types: examples of natural occurrences, stories of political exchanges, and stories related to general life experiences. At the beginning of “Yu Lao”, the scope of discussion is broader, and alternates between examples of nature and politics, comparing acts of rulership to natural phenomena. As the essay progresses, the political examples begin to enter into dialog with life examples. These examples deal more with issues of distraction and knowledge and are principles more closely related to daily experience than those explored at the beginning of the essay.

The presence of a logical, organized structure in “Yu Lao” leads to some new conclusions and questions. First, it appears that the essay was purposely constructed to argue specific points. In structure, it resembles some parts of other “essayistic” writings of the late Warring States, such as portions of the *Xunzi*. However, by using a loose collection of stories interspersed with statements expressing the essay’s conclusions, “Yu Lao” gives the impression of being a less-organized collection of sayings pasted together.

Where, then does the logical structure originate from? Here we have two possibilities:

1: The composer of “Yu Lao” purposely picked passages and anecdotes from a larger collection or set of collections to create a logical structure.

2: “Yu Lao” follows a logical structure present in a lost *Laozi* collection and attempts to explain this structure.

In the first case, we have a situation where the composer purposely chose to link together statements, examples and quotations in a way that appears haphazard but also follows a pattern. In this example, the composer is much like a gallery owner hanging a show of many different artists, looking for similarities of color, pattern or theme to place separate pieces in an order that looks predetermined, even if the pieces were originally largely unrelated.

In the second case, the organization was already completed when the *Laozi* collection was assembled. Much like the finds at Guodian, this *Laozi* collection would have contained its own arrangement of passages following its own internal logic. The “Yu Lao” composer would then be acting as a gallery owner hanging a show where an artist or committee had already agreed on the theme and what major pieces would be shown. The gallery owner would then simply follow this pre-determined theme. Similarly, the “Yu Lao” compiler may have been writing a commentary dictated by the pre-existing ordering of a *Laozi* collection.

At this juncture, it is difficult to say decisively which of the two is the more likely scenario, or if “Yu Lao” is a product of a mix of the two scenarios. If the late fourth / early third century dating of “Yu Lao” is correct, the essay would have been roughly contemporary with the Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts. Each of these three manuscripts

contains an ordering of *Laozi* parallels that appear to be unique. Yet, each also appears to follow a logical ordering in the arrangement of passages.²²² There is a clear possibility that “Yu Lao” was commenting on a lost collection like the Guodian manuscripts. At the same time, given the extensive presence of argumentative and rhetorical collections in the *Hanfeizi*, it is also not unreasonable to suspect “Yu Lao” is structured as a persuasive argument built around, but not dependent on a particular *Laozi* collection.

Yulao and Xunzi's Vision of Rhetoric

One way of looking at “Yu Lao”’s structure is through the lens of the *Xunzi*’s advice for creating a persuasion, which advises the use of anecdotes in explaining and illustrating ideas. The very passage in *Xunzi* that explains these rhetorical devices even itself makes use of a quotation of a past source, in a manner similar to “Yu Lao” or “Jie Lao”:

談說之術：矜莊以莅之，端誠以處之，堅彊以持之，（分別）〔譬稱〕以諭之，（譬稱）〔分別〕以明之，欣驩芬薌以送之，寶之珍之，責之神之，如是，則說常無不受。雖不說人，人莫不貴，夫是之謂（為）能貴其所貴。

《傳》曰：「唯君子為能貴其所貴。」此之謂也。²²³

Introduce the topic with dignity and earnestness, dwell on it with modesty and sincerity, hold to it with firmness and strength, illustrate its meaning with parables and praiseworthy examples, elucidate its significance by making distinctions and drawing boundaries, and present it with exuberance and ardor. If you make it something precious and rare, valuable and magical, your persuasion will always and invariably be well received, and even if you do not please them, none will fail to esteem you. This may indeed be described as “being able to bring esteem to what one prizes.” A tradition says:

²²² As noted above in greater detail. See Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, p.7.

²²³ CHANT *Xunzi* 5.10

It is only the gentleman who is capable of bringing esteem to what he prizes.
This expresses my meaning.²²⁴

The *Xunzi* suggests providing a clear introduction for a topic, then spicing it up with anecdotes and examples while defining terms and concepts. This could very well be a description of “Yu Lao”. Even the use of a quotation to anchor and confirm the *Xunzi*’s suggestion seems similar to the way “Yu Lao” uses *Laozi* to support its claims. It is reasonable to say that “Yu Lao” is a representative of the essay style practiced by Xunzi and others - possibly a strategy popularized at the Jixia academy. It is even possible that, if the *Shiji* is correct, Xunzi acted as a teacher to Hanfeizi and may have transmitted this persuasive style to his student. “Yu Lao” is extremely vigorous in its use of anecdotes and quotations, possibly indicating a desire to replicate the rhetorical style perfectly, as an example piece.

In short, “Yu Lao” is not a random arrangement of passages, but follows what was likely an accepted stylistic pattern of rhetoric. Because “Yu Lao” is structured around this rhetorical pattern, it at times makes use of only portions of the received *Laozi* verses. It would appear that following this rhetorical pattern was more important to “Yu Lao” than the original structure and coherence of the *Laozi* verses, meaning either the verses did not have an established arrangement similar to the received *Laozi*, or any existing arrangement was not viewed as important to the message “Yu Lao” was trying to convey, and so the *Laozi* materials could be drawn from at will.

²²⁴ John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 209.

In other words, at the time “Yu Lao” was composed, in the circles it was intended for, the words of the *Laozi* were important, but the organization of complete verses, much less text, was not.

Exegetical and persuasive commentaries

Here, it may be useful to distinguish between two different purposes of commentary which I label the persuasive and the exegetical. Essentially, an exegetical commentary is one that places as its main stated purpose the explanation of difficult or obscure points in the source text. This explanation can be an attempt to bring the source up to date with the world contemporary to the commentator. However, it always, at least on the surface, attempts to remain true to the intentions of the source. In practice, of course, every commentary makes its own modifications to the source.

On the other hand, persuasive commentary is primarily focused on applying the source to problems and arguments of special importance to the commentator. In these contexts, the source is brought to bear as a powerful resource, lending weight and authority to the claims of the commentator. The intent and integrity of the source is less important in a persuasive commentary, while its ability to serve as rhetorical ammunition is paramount. Because persuasive commentary does not require extensive contextualization of the source, it can consist of as little as a single phrase drawn from the source and used as justification for the commentator’s argument.

In a very general sense, exegetical and persuasive commentaries can be mapped onto the structure of the commentaries themselves. An exegetical commentary that seeks to

remain as true as possible to the intentions of the source will, by necessity, follow the structure and format of the source as much as possible, unless there is a specific reason to do otherwise, such as the belief that a certain character is corrupted or passages have been misplaced. While an exact replication of the source's structure is not necessary for an exegetical commentary, it would be reasonable to suggest that, on the whole, they follow the source as much as possible.

On the other hand, a persuasive commentary has no such limitation. Because the importance of the source lies in the support it can provide for the commentator's argument, the commentary is free to use as little or as much of the source as necessary to justify its positions.

Now, the three early commentaries on passages parallel with the received *Laozi* present an unusual situation. They are not interlinear commentaries, as would become the standard in later years. They do appear to be advancing the agendas of their respective commentators. Both of these aspects point in the direction of persuasive commentary. However, it would be inaccurate to simply assume that they were not also intending to access some meaning inherent in the *Laozi* parallels they were quoting.

Shared Anecdotes with the Huainanzi

If we wish to show that the “Yu Lao” was part of a larger textual ecosystem, we would hope to find connections between it and other texts not just in the parallels with the received *Laozi* that appear in them, but also in the anecdotes the chapter uses. Indeed, this appears to be the case. For a short document, “Yu Lao” shares an unusual number of

parallel anecdotes or short sayings with the *Huainanzi*, fifteen in total, as this chart demonstrates:

Chart 2 Shared Anecdotes in *Yu Lao* and *Huainanzi*

CHANT “Yu Lao” ¶	<i>Huainanzi</i> chapter (Major et al. page #)	Comparison:
1	13 (510)	甲冑生蟣蝨，鸞雀處帷幄，而兵不歸 Image: Armies marching ceaselessly with insects in their helmets and swallows in their tents as a sign of a world in disorder.
3	18 ²²⁵ (737)	韓、魏反之，軍敗晉陽，身死高梁之東 Anecdote: Earl Zhi (智伯 d. 453 BCE) annexes Fan 范 and Zhonghang 中行 and attacks Zhao 趙. But Han 韓 and Wei 魏 rebel and he dies to the east of Gaoliang 高梁.
4	17; 18 (676); (726) *Note, the story is a popular one and appears often in passing throughout the <i>Huainanzi</i> .	虞君欲屈產之乘，與垂棘之璧 Anecdote: Because the Lord of Yu 虞 desired Chuiji’s 垂棘 jade, he lost his state through a foolish military expedition. The <i>Huainanzi</i> passages see this from the perspective of the state of Jin 晉 (and its ruler, Duke Xian 獻, r. 676-651 BCE), which captures Yu because of the mistake over the jade.
5	14 (576)	邦以存為常，霸王其可也。身以生為常，富貴其可也。 Saying: “For a state to consider survival its constancy, a hegemon may permit it. For a person to consider life their constancy, prosperity may permit it.” Both then recommend that a person who neither harms neither the state nor their own wellbeing is fit to be a ruler.
6	18 (722)	楚莊王既勝狩於河雍，歸而賞孫叔敖

²²⁵ Note this passage is also capped with a cited parallel to *Laozi* 44

CHANT “Yu Lao” 卍	<i>Huainanzi</i> chapter (Major et al. page #)	Comparison:
		Anecdote: King Zhuang of Chu (楚莊王 d. 591 BCE) rewards Sunshu Ao 孫叔敖 (or his son in <i>Huainanzi</i>) with a territory. Because he chooses a sandy, infertile spot, it is not taken away from his descendants.
10	18 (721)	千丈之隄以螻蟻之穴潰，百尺之室以突隙之煙焚。 Saying: “A thousand yard embankment will crumble from a hole bored by tiny insects, a hundred foot room will burn from sparks coming through a gap.” Both advise caution and care in planning and undertaking affairs.
12	12 (456) Prince Chongg'er is summarized in 18 (741) And repeat of the Duke Xian of Jin anecdote, noted above: 17; 18 (676); (726) And with the addition of a warning Gong Zhiji gives to Yu (and is ignored): 18; 18 ²²⁶ ; 20 ²²⁷ (726-727); (732); (817)	昔晉公子重耳出亡過鄭 Anecdote: Prince Chong'er 重耳 of Jin 晉 (r. 636-328) passed through the state of Zheng 鄭 (“Yu Lao”) or Cao 曹 (<i>Huainanzi</i>). The ruler treats the prince with disrespect. Later, the prince returns and crushes said state (note: in the <i>Huainanzi</i> , a man named Li Fuji 厘負羈, on advice from his wife, treats the prince well and his territory is spared when the prince returns.)
13	10; 16	昔者紂為象箸而箕子怖。

²²⁶ Note this passage is also capped with a parallel to *Laozi* 62

²²⁷ Note this passage quotes the *Yi*, hexagram 55 line reading six.

CHANT “Yu Lao” 卍	<i>Huainanzi</i> chapter (Major et al. page #)	Comparison:
	(384); (651) These chapters are both collections of short sayings and anecdotes. ²²⁸	Anecdote: Djou (r. 1075-1046), the last tyrannical king of Shang, made chopsticks out of ivory. Jizi 箕子 saw this and realized it was a prediction of dire events to come.
15	7; 16 (254); 631	子罕曰：「爾以玉為寶 Anecdote: Zihan 子罕 does not accept a gift of jade, saying he does not see it as valuable. Both texts praise this attitude.
16	12 (454-455)	王壽負書而行，見徐馮於周塗，馮曰：「事者，為也。為生於時，知者無常事。書者，言也。言生於知，知者不藏書。今子何獨負之而行？」於是王壽因焚其書而舞之。 Anecdote: Wang Shou 王壽 is travelling with a bag full of books when Xu Feng 徐馮 convinces him that “knowledge is not stored in books”. Wang Shou promptly burns them. This story is replicated almost exactly in both texts, and capped with different parallels to <i>Laozi</i> (64 in “Yu Lao” and 5 in <i>Huainanzi</i>).
17	20 (798)	宋人有為其君以象為楮葉者，三年而成。豐殺莖柯，毫芒繁澤，亂之楮葉之中而不可別也。此人遂以功食祿於宋邦。列子聞之曰：「使天地三年而成一葉，則物之有葉者寡矣。」 Anecdote: A resident of Song makes a leaf out of ivory in three years. Liezi comments that if nature took this long, there would be few leaves. This story is replicated almost exactly in both texts.
18	7 (244)	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

²²⁸ Note: “Djou made gardens of flesh” appears also in *Huainanzi* 8. (Major et al. 276)

CHANT “Yu Lao” 卍	<i>Huainanzi</i> chapter (Major et al. page #)	Comparison:
		Physiology: The eyes and ears act as apertures for <i>shenming</i> 神明 “spirit illumination” (“Yu Lao”) or <i>jingshen</i> 精神 “quintessential spirit” (<i>Huainanzi</i>). Excessive attention to the outside drains <i>jingshen</i> and even if “fortune and misfortune are as big as hills and mountains” one will not notice them.
20	12 (474)	白公勝慮亂，罷朝，倒杖而策銳貫頤，血流至於地而不知。鄭人聞之曰：「頤之忘，將何為忘哉！」 Anecdote: Duke Sheng of Bo 白公勝, while plotting rebellion (which he did in 479 BCE), becomes distracted and cuts his chin with a horsewhip. Note: both “Yu Lao” and the “Dao Ying” chapter of <i>Huainanzi</i> contain almost exact parallels of this story, connected with the same parallel to <i>Laozi</i> 47. ²²⁹
20	13; 17; 19 ²³⁰ (510); (709); (770)	隨時而舉事，因資而立功 Saying: “Undertaking affairs according with the times, Establishing works on the basis of inherent properties.”
22	17 (666)	智如目也，能見百步之外而不能自見其睫。 Saying: “Eyes can see a hundred paces outside but cannot see their own eyelashes/lids.” ²³¹

²²⁹ *Laozi* 47 also appears in the *Huainanzi* 7 passage about the eyes and ears in the cell above this.

²³⁰ Uses “following patterns” *xun li* 循理 instead of “according with the times” *sui shi* 隨時.

²³¹ “Yu Lao” uses this saying in a metaphor “Knowledge is like eyes that can see a hundred paces...”

What we may infer from these parallels is that “Yu Lao” and *Huainanzi* were drawing on some of the same anecdotes and sayings, frequently containing exact or almost exact parallels.²³² It is also of note that the majority of the parallels stem from the second half of the *Huainanzi*. The authors of the 2010 *Huainanzi* translation have noted about this portion of the text:

These chapters are generally compilations of materials from different literary genres meant to illustrate broader principles of the Way introduced in chapters 1 through 8 as specific kinds of human affairs, often accompanied by editorializing comments provided by the *Huainanzi* compilers.²³³

They further remark that:

Each of chapters 9 through 19 deals with an affair (*shi*) and how it naturally gives rise to a genre form of literature (*wen*), with the chapter itself illustrating the genre it surveys.²³⁴

Embarking from this insight that the later chapters of the *Huainanzi* were intended to conform to generally accepted genres of the early Han leads to an observation about “Yu Lao” and its use of parallel anecdotes and sayings: “Yu Lao” may also have been a participant in this broader literary culture to which the *Huainanzi* was responding. At the least, it is apparent that “Yu Lao” was using some of the very same examples in making its arguments that the *Huainanzi* later applied.

Returning to the *Xunzi*’s recommendation for making a persuasion, it is noteworthy the value placed on using “parables and praiseworthy examples”, which may very well

²³² This is distinctly different from “Jie Lao” which only contains one such parallel with the *Huainanzi*.

²³³ Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 17.

²³⁴ Major et al., 19.

have been referring to the use of anecdotes or set phrases. Previously, we have also noted²³⁵ that *Zhuangzi* 27 similarly highlighted a rhetorical strategy of “sayings from a lodging place” that borrowed the known positions of other speakers along with “repeated sayings” which can be taken to indicate commonly recited phrases. As the above table demonstrates, it is exactly these sorts of anecdotes and sayings that “Yu Lao” and *Huainanzi* share in common - meaning, perhaps, that they were sharing in a larger persuasive strategy outlined in places like *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi*. Furthermore, the commonality of anecdotes and sayings, used to assert the same kinds of arguments, shows that “Yu Lao” and the *Huainanzi* were participating in a similar sort of discourse, using similar rhetorical devices. All of this shows a degree of intertextual connection that demonstrates the existence of a textual ecosystem growing between “Yu Lao” and *Huainanzi* even without taking into consideration their respective use of *Laozi* parallels.

Jielao

The “Jie Lao”, although first in the ordering of the *Hanfeizi* is likely the later of the two essays. It is longer than “Yu Lao” and employs a greater diversity of approaches to employing the quotations of *Laozi* parallels. The sophistication and structure of the arguments, as well as their emphasis on an established and powerful ruler who must nevertheless interact with rival states has led some scholars to date “Jie Lao” toward the end of the Warring States period, not too long before Hanfei’s death.

²³⁵ In chapter 3

“Jie Lao” employs a variety of rhetorical techniques, including a Sorites chain style of argument (If A, then B, if B then C, etc.). This rhetorical style was common to a number of texts emerging from the Jixia academy in Qi, most notably the *Neiye* chapter of the *Guanzi*.²³⁶ “Jie Lao” also shares with *Neiye* themes of serenity leading to clear vision and not exhausting oneself. This has led to some speculation that “Jie Lao” may have emerged in some form from the larger project of the Jixia academy.²³⁷

Also of note is that “Jie Lao” explicitly acknowledges that its quotations of *Laozi* parallels are from a written text (referring to it as a *shu* 書), even while it does not supply the name of that text. From this, we may draw a contrast with “Yu Lao” that treated its quotations in a manner indistinguishable from oral sayings. “Jie Lao” was composed at a time that *Laozi*, in whatever ordering and by whatever name it took at the time was at the very least recognized as a written collection.

Perhaps because of the acknowledgement of working with a written document, the analyses in “Jie Lao” tend to be more precise than in “Yu Lao”. Several passages contain glosses of key terms found in the quotations. In many instances, multiple quotations are presented in a single passage, with each one explained and connected with the others and with the larger goal of the passage and the essay.

²³⁶ Harold Roth first noted these similarities of rhetoric and an underlying shared practice of inner cultivation in Roth, “Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism.”

²³⁷ Sarkissian, “Laozi,” 61–62.

Chart 3 Jie Lao Passage Ordering

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
1		Keeping the <i>shen</i> 神 internal leads to gathering <i>de</i> 德, while being enticed by the external achievements leads to loss		
2		Achieving emptiness (<i>xu</i> 虛) is to be without restriction. Even placing too much value on the goal of achieving emptiness is a restriction that prevents emptiness		
3		<i>Ren</i> 仁 is a quality of happily caring for others that emerges from the interior (中心欣然愛人), and is not found in the external.		
4	3 8	<i>Yi</i> 義 is acting in a suitable (<i>yi</i> 宜) manner, because one is suitable (宜而為之) – i.e. suitability is present inherently in the person/action, not something that is on the outside/object.	Begins with a model of conservation. Sets up a distinction between internal and external, where focus on the internal leads to accumulation and purity of intent, while focus on the external leads to artifice and dissolution.	In Sages: Conservation of <i>Shen</i> through reduction of desires for external things leads to well-being in a person
5		<i>Li</i> 禮 is an external marker that conveys the internal (外節之所以諭內也). Only <i>junzi</i> 君子 or sages (<i>sheng</i> 聖) understand that ritual is primarily for the internal (the self <i>shen</i> 身) and in this way are untiring in their practice		
6		Shows the gradual movement from the Dao to <i>li</i> (禮), with each yet a step further from the Dao.		
7		<i>Li</i> (禮) and <i>wen</i> 文 are external, while a true <i>junzi</i> pays most attention to what is internal and natural. The		

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
		ideal form of <i>li</i> (禮) is the natural harmony and respect between fathers and sons. Something of substantial (inner) quality appears simple (實厚者貌薄), but most rituals are practiced to gain the approval of others and are showy.		
8		A showy power of predicting the future that does little more than simply observing would be useless.		
9		The wisdom of a “great person” (大丈夫) lies in valuing the substantial (and internal) over the superficial, and looking for the (inherent) reasons and patterns of things (<i>luanli</i> 緣理).		
10		Encountering disaster leads people to be cautious and prudent so that they will avoid future disaster and even prosper		
11		On the other hand, too much success leads to overconfidence, which in turn leads to disaster.		
12	58	Understanding and following the (inherent) reasons and patterns of the Dao (<i>yuandaoli</i> 緣道理) leads to the highest success and is even more important than positional advantage (<i>shi</i> 勢).	Fortune and disaster are the seeds of each other. The sage, knowing this, stays in the middle, managing desires and not going too far in either direction.	
13		People desire things, yet are unable to avoid misfortune. The inability to realize their desires leads to being lost/confused (<i>mi</i> 迷)		
14		Those who understand the Dao are able to act in a manner that, essentially brings about just enough good		

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
		fortune without inviting disaster. They make their knowledge available to others, even realizing that most will never come to ask. They do not impose their teachings, for fear that the many who do not understand would resent the few who do.		
1 5		The <i>shen</i> 神 that enables clear perception and understanding is limited. Excessive activity wastes the <i>shen</i> . Balance and care must be exerted to conserve this resource.	Presents a model of the mind where clarity of perception and thought is determined by the amount of <i>shen</i> a person retains. <i>Shen</i> is gathered in stillness and dispersed in activity. Sages anticipate the course of events and remain still, maintaining their physical/mental integrity, and apply this principle to ruling as well.	
1 6	Sages conserve <i>shen</i> by being tranquil (<i>jing</i> 靜). Knowing how to conserve are “techniques born from the patterns of the Dao” (術也生於道理). Even when facing disaster they are empty, submitting to the patterns of the Dao (虛無服從於道理), thus conserving <i>shen</i> .			
1 7	5 9 Being tranquil (<i>jing</i> 靜) and empty (<i>xu</i> 虛), harmonious <i>qi</i> (<i>heqi</i> 和氣) enters and accumulates, while <i>de</i> 德 does not diminish. Accomplishing this state is referred to as “submitting” (<i>fu</i> 服). Through this process of accumulation, plans, battles, uniting the world and winning the trust of the people are all possible.			
1 8	Ruling either a state or one’s own body is rooted in preservation. Embodying the Dao (<i>tidao</i> 體道) is the key to preservation.			
1 9	The Dao is the “mother of having a state” (<i>youguozhimu</i> 有國之母). <i>De</i> 德 are like roots that go			

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
		deep underground, while good fortune/official reward (<i>lu</i> 祿) are the surface roots. Only because of the deep roots can one live long and prosper.		
20		Frequent changes in policy and work reduce productivity.	Transposes the previous sequence onto the state. Excessive changes and activity wear out the people just like they would wear out a person.	In ruling: The principles described above that provide health in people can be applied to the well-being of a state.
21	60	Ties the health of the people, and their relationship with ghosts, to the policies of the state and the ruler's own cultivation: a regulated state does not exhaust the people, giving no room for ghosts (<i>gui</i> 鬼) to harm (or be harmed by) people. The ruler does not impose excessive punishments or levies and so the people are able to conserve and preserve their <i>hun</i> 魂 and <i>po</i> 魄. In this way, they are healthy and flourish.		
22		A ruler with the Dao invites respect from other leaders, enters into few conflicts and brings about prosperity and wellbeing in the state. Horses are put to agricultural use.	Rulers who understand the Dao know when to stop. Just as sages do not allow themselves to be driven by desires that cause dispersion.	
23	4	A ruler without the Dao enters into conflicts and ruins the state. Horses are bred for war.		
24	6	Desires are ultimately the source of chaos and calamity.		
25		People naturally desire things because they have material needs for food and clothing. Sages know to do just enough to survive, but most people are so driven by their desires that they are prisoners.		

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
26		Desires set off a chain that leads to illness and self-resentment.		
27	14	Rhapsodizes on the Dao as underlying the many overlapping patterns (<i>li</i> 理) of each thing in the world. It changes constantly with things, sharing in life and death and all paradoxes and contradictions.	What is Dao?	Observable patterns exist in nature, yet they are not the Dao, which nonetheless underlies the patterns.
28		The Dao is only observed through its traces.		
29	1	Discusses apparent patterns (<i>li</i> 理) like square/round, and establishing (<i>ding</i> 定) patterns that are more abstract, like life/death. Only when these patterns are established can one realize that the Dao is not any of these.	What is <i>li</i> 理?	
30		Life implies death. Those who only see life and act constantly exhaust life and rush to death.	The forces that give rise to life also lead to death. Sages do not hurry this process.	For sages: Sages understand these principles and use them for the benefit of all.
31	50	Sages remain tranquil and are alert to hidden dangers in every activity. When they do act, they do not seek to contend with others, and so do not invite an aggressive response.		
32	67	The sage approaches events in the world in the way a loving mother cares for her children, thinking constantly and compassionately of what would be best for them, and willing to be courageous for their sake.	Sages approach the world filled with compassion (<i>ci</i> 慈) rather than ego-centric desire. They are careful, anticipating patterns and conserving energy.	
33		Growth and prosperity are built on rest and frugality		

¶ #	LZ #	Summary		
34		Things that have form (<i>youxing</i> 有形) have patterns/properties (<i>li</i> 理) that can be distinguished. Wise leaders make decisions and take action based on these patterns.		
35		Treating others and oneself with compassion/parent-like-love (<i>ci</i> 慈) leads to a victorious army and a healthy body.		
36	10	In a situation with too much love of extravagance and reliance on litigation, the state will become paralyzed and from leaders to common people crime will proliferate. Fundamentals such as food storage will be overlooked.	States that become too involved with externals will fall to ruin.	For states: Without the internal vision of sages: ruin
37	54	Everyone is born with an ability to differentiate and make decisions. However, most people find their judgement clouded with impulsive preferences and are caught up in obsession over external things. Sages are aware of their own emotional state and their relation to external things and so are able to make judgements from a neutral and unimpulsive position. The effects of their judgements ripple out throughout society.	Sages maintain a calm perspective and understand the natural patterns, leading them to make better judgements.	Conclusion: Sages are not agitated and so make better judgements

Structure of Jie Lao

If we make a comparison with the received *Laozi*, “Jie Lao” presents parallels with a similar structure to passages in the received *Laozi*, and organizes its arguments around them. The essay interweaves analytical statements with quotations of *Laozi* parallels, most of which are credited as quotations, though not specifically from *Laozi*, some of which are even noted as coming from a written document. All of this seems to suggest that “Jie Lao” is structured around written documents that contained a pre-existing structure of at least the *Laozi* parallels it presents.

As can be seen from the summaries presented in the chart above, the argument of “Jie Lao” works from the person of the sage out to the larger world, beginning with advice on how sages or rulers take care of themselves and then transposing that advice onto the rulership of the state. This translation of techniques used to maintain the person and the society is summed up in the final, concluding passage, which cites a parallel with *Laozi* 54, a passage that envisions concentric circles radiating out from the person until concluding in the entire world. As such, the structure of “Jie Lao” is partially summed up in this concluding passage.²³⁸

Following the chart above, there is a first cycle describing the sage’s management of the person which spans roughly until “Jie Lao” 19. The following section until “Jie Lao” 26 then applies the first set of principles to the state as a whole. Together these constitute a unit of equating the management of the person with the state.

²³⁸ *Laozi* 54 is also the only passage that has phrases of it appear in all three commentaries studied in this project. For a more in depth treatment, see the comparison in chapter 6 of this work.

Beginning in “Jie Lao” 27, a rationale is provided for why the techniques that apply to a person can also be applied to a state. This section describes the underlying patterns of the cosmos and associates them with the Dao. Because these patterns underlie both the care for the person and for the state, similar principles can be applied in both cases. It is also this section that features the earliest known usage of a parallel of the first line of *Laozi* 1 and its hesitancy to apply names to the Dao.

In “Jie Lao” 30-36, It is the caring, motherly concern of the sages for all (*ci* 慈) that enables them to live in the world without encountering harm or disaster. Similarly, when these same principles are applied to states, the people live harmoniously, are not worked to exhaustion and are not caught up in the pursuit of external success. “Jie Lao” 37 then concludes that what is true for the cultivation of the person will also be true for the cultivation of the state.

In summary the chapter follows roughly this development:

Introduction: The importance of preserving *shen* 神 within and avoiding desiring external success.

Argument 1: Maintaining tranquility, accumulating *shen* is good on a personal level

Argument 2: A wise ruler maintains a state that encourages tranquility and stability in the populace

Explanation: There are underlying patterns that are the same for both the person and the state

Argument 3: A sage applies motherly care in all activities and remains unharmed

Argument 4: A state that is ruled with motherly care and avoids desiring external success thrives

Conclusion: What is cultivated in the person can and should be cultivated in the state

Initial observations on Jielaos relationship with Laozi

As noted above, when comparing “Jie Lao” quotations to passages found in the received *Laozi*, there is largely a similar ordering. There is even some places where it appears “Jie Lao” has made modifications to its own argument to accommodate the structure of the quotations. Take for example paragraph 21:

人處疾則貴醫，有禍則畏鬼。聖人在上則民少欲，民少欲則血氣治而舉動理，〔舉動理〕則少禍害。夫內無痠疽瘰癧之害，而外無刑罰法誅之禍者，其輕恬鬼也甚。故曰：「以道莅天下，其鬼不神。」治世之民，不與鬼神相害也。故曰：「非其鬼不神也，其神不傷〔人〕也。」鬼崇也疾人之謂鬼傷人，人逐除之之謂人傷鬼也。民犯法令之謂民傷上，上刑戮民之謂上傷民。民不犯法則上亦不行刑，上不行刑之謂上不傷人。故曰：「聖人亦不傷民。」上不與民相害，而人不與鬼相傷，故曰：「兩不相傷。」民不敢犯法，則上內不用刑罰，而外不事利其產業。上內不用刑罰，而外不事利其產業，則民蕃息。民蕃息而畜積盛，民蕃息而畜積盛之謂有德。凡所謂崇者，魂魄去而精神亂，精神亂則無德。鬼不崇人則魂魄不去，魂魄不去而精神不亂，精神不亂之謂有德。上盛畜積而鬼不亂其精神，則德盡在於民矣。故曰：「兩不相傷則德交歸焉。」言其德上下交盛而俱歸於民也。²³⁹

When people fall ill then they prize physicians, when there are disasters then they are afraid of ghosts (*gui* 鬼). The sage above ensures that the people have few desires, when the people have few desires then blood and *qi* will be governed and their actions and motions will be patterned (*li* 理). When their actions and motions are patterned, then disasters and harm will be lessened. Now, when the interior is

²³⁹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.21 translation mine

without the injuries of swelling, boils, desiccation, and piles, and when the exterior is without the disasters of punishments, penalties, laws, and executions, then [the people's] relaxed attitude toward ghosts is strong. Thus it is said: "In using the Dao to attend to the world, its ghosts are not *shen*." When governing the people of the world, [sages will not allow the people] and ghosts and *shen* to harm one another. Thus it is said: "If it is not the case that the ghosts are not *shen*, then *shen* will not harm people." When ghosts are revered, sick people it is said that ghosts harm people. When people drive out ghosts, it is said that people harm ghosts. When people violate laws and rules, it is said that the people harm the ruler. When the ruler inflicts punishments on the people it is said that the ruler harms the people. When the people do not violate laws then the ruler will not have to implement punishments. When the ruler does not implement punishments it is said that the ruler does not harm the people. Thus it is said: "the sage also does not harm the people." When the ruler and the people do not injure each other then people and ghosts do not harm each other. Thus it is said: "the two do not harm each other." When the people do not dare to violate laws, then the ruler will not implement punishments inside [the state] nor will the ruler seek to gain a profit with their produce outside [the state]. When the ruler does not implement punishments inside [the state] nor seeks to gain a profit with their produce outside [the state], then the people will thrive. When the people thrive, then the stores will be plentiful. When the people thrive and the stores are plentiful, it is called having *de*.

Now as for all those who are called "revered", when the *hun* and *po* leave, then the *jing* and *shen* are chaotic. When the *jing* and *shen* are chaotic then [one is] without *de*. When ghosts do not revere people, then *hun* and *po* do not leave. When the *hun* and *po* do not leave, the *jing* and *shen* are not chaotic. When the *jing* and *shen* are not chaotic it is called having *de*. When the ruler fills the stores and ghosts do not cause chaos with his *jing* and *shen*, then his *de* will overflow to the people. Thus it is said: "when the two do not harm each other, then *de* interacts and returns to them." This speaks of how his *de* fills and interacts both above and below and completely returns to the people.

This is the only passage in "Jie Lao" that deals with ghosts (*gui* 鬼) or other extra-human entities. From the beginning there appears to be a tension in the text between the quotations found in the received *Laozi* 60, which speak of ghosts, and the commentary,

which continually seeks to speak of how a ruler should act. The result is an odd contrast between ensuring ghosts revere human beings instead of human beings revering ghosts on the one hand, and the ruler and the people's relationship on the other. The insertion of the concepts of *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄, the yang and yin bodily spirits is itself odd, being the only time in the entire *Hanfeizi* that these terms appear.²⁴⁰ However, these terms act as a bridge between the concept of ghosts²⁴¹ as an entity external to humans that can cause harm, and the concepts of *jing* and *shen*, which appear in earlier passages in “Jie Lao” in conjunction with human aptitudes and cultivation. Thus, the general *gui* ghosts become the human-specific *hun* and *po* in order to reconnect to the concept of the ruler's application of cultivation both in himself and in the state. Although this is a logical progression, it does seem that “Jie Lao” has taken a bit of a detour here from its primary themes, so as to accommodate the presence of a passage that discusses ghosts. Perhaps this is a sign that “Jie Lao” had to make allowances for a pre-existing arrangement of passages from which it was quoting. Either this is because “Jie Lao” was working off of a specific *Laozi* collection that ordered the passages in this way, or it simply chose the passages but maintained a belief that the structure of the verses was important.²⁴² Unlike in “Yu Lao”, where it's unclear if the commentary is working from a pre-existing collection or, in a sense, creating its own collection, “Jie Lao” is organized in units that appear to follow an order similar to the one found in the received *Laozi*.

²⁴⁰ 魄 *po* appears once in the received *Laozi*, in verse 10.

²⁴¹ 鬼 *gui* only appears in the received *Laozi* verse 60, the passage parallel to the one quoted here in “Jie Lao”.

²⁴² The one exception to this is possibly the appearance of a single line from *Laozi* 1, which appears separate from the rest of the verse. The appearance of this line in “Jie Lao” is the earliest surviving example of this passage, with its famous critique of names.

Themes of Jielao

“Jie Lao” generally emphasizes a ruler who, though serenity, caution, foresight and use of positional advantage, is able to manage a state effectively. It furthermore posits a theoretical underlying order to the world – the “Patterns of the Way” *daoli* 道理 which, when apprehended and accorded with, ensure the harmonious governance of both ruler and minister. The emphasis on proper rulership seems generally in keeping with the overall project of the *Hanfeizi*, but its particular inflection through serenity and the “Patterns of the Way” is not. This has led generations of scholars to doubt that “Jie Lao” was in fact one of Hanfei’s own compositions, or at the very least that it was not something central to his worldview – an “experiment” of sorts.²⁴³

Thematically, “Jie Lao” also preserves a sort of conservation-model of self-cultivation and psycho-physiological wellbeing that shares some similarities with the one presented in “Nei Ye”. However, in “Jie Lao” the preserved substance is *shen* 神, while in “Nei Ye” it is *jing* 精. “Jie Lao” extends this model, explaining that a good ruler runs a state in such a way that the people are able to preserve their *shen*. *Shen* is also connected to decision making – having more of it results in a capacity to make better decisions. So a ruler must maximize the conservation of *shen* or risk making bad choices.

²⁴³ Although I agree that the essay is likely not by Hanfei, I am dubious of the argument that the essay is not sufficiently “Legalist” or too “Daoist” for Hanfei. This sort of argument rests on the shaky ground of retroactively applied school affiliations that assume Warring States thinkers can be nicely divided into categories.

What's also interesting is the equation that the ruler's responsibility is to preserve the health of the people, not just to ensure that grain, land, military, etc. are well managed. This seems to be an extremely straightforward way of mapping the body onto the state. The state is composed of the bodies of the people. Keeping those bodies healthy results in the health of the state.

The worldview "Jie Lao" presents is of a world functioning along clearly discernible patterns. No matter how odd things may become, there is some underlying pattern (*li* 理) that they follow, and if one is able to figure out that pattern outcomes can be anticipated and prepared for.

Partially, patterns can be anticipated by understanding the source of the patterns – the Dao. But at the same time, the Dao is itself incomprehensible. A sage can embody the Dao, but cannot necessarily understand or perceive the Dao.

Tied into this discourse is a model of the human body (and other elements of the cosmos) as a sort of porous membrane. In some ways similar to modern models of cells, the ancient Chinese model of the body is like a thin membrane submerged in the larger cosmos. This thin wall that separates the "interior" from the "exterior" can be traversed, and different "substances" can be concentrated within or dispersed outside of the membrane in a sort of osmotic process.

Put simply, a quality like *shen* can be accumulated if the interior of the membrane is quiet and still. *Shen* then accumulates there. But if there is excess activity, in what we might today identify as mental, emotional or physical exertion, it forces the *shen* outside of the membrane. Because *shen* is essential for clarity of judgement and perception, a

higher concentration is desirable. With higher concentrations of *shen*, patterns can be better perceived and activity limited further.²⁴⁴

But the activity most likely to create an opposite spiral is to mistake the external forms for true substance. The trappings of society, the reputation, wealth and possessions that seem to signal success are actually empty goals. In a way it is as though “Jie Lao” is well aware of the power of the “two handles” noted elsewhere in *Hanfeizi*. If it is easy to control others through holding the carrot of worldly successes out, the ruler should be wise enough to recognize the carrot as a distraction and not chase pointlessly after this until all internal energies are exhausted. Similarly, a ruler must organize the state in such a way as to encourage stillness and conservation among the population. This will lead to better health and contentment and ultimately prosperity.

Similarities to Nei Ye

“Jie Lao” bears a number of similarities to the “Nei Ye” 內業 or “Inward Training” essay of the *Guanzi* 管子. As noted before, both essays make use of Sorites-chain arguments.

Thematically, the two essays also similarities in their understanding of how the “internal” aspects of a person interact with the “external” cosmos and society. Both envision the human body-mind as a semi-permeable membrane that continually shares

²⁴⁴ This understanding of *shen* has important parallels with passages found in the “Nei Ye”, and “Xin Shu, shang” chapters of *Guanzi*, the *Huainanzi* and the *Huangdi Neijing*, all of which will be explored at greater length below.

resources with the rest of the cosmos. These resources can be depleted or accumulated depending on the activity of a person.

The “resource” that both essays discuss is *shen* 神. Ample storage of this resource allows for clarity of perception and judgement. “Jie Lao” begins with this passage:

德者，內也；得者，外也。「上德不德」，言其神不淫於外也。神不淫於外則身全，身全之謂德。德者，得身也。凡德者，以無為集，以無欲成；以不思安，以不用固。為之欲之，則德無舍；德無舍則不全。²⁴⁵

“*De* 德 is internal while attaining (*de* 得) is external. “The greatest *de* is not *de*” (*Laozi* 38) speaks of one’s *shen* not overflowing to the outside. When the *shen* does not overflow to the outside, the body/self will be whole, when the body/self is whole this is called *de*. *De*, is the attainment of the body/self. It is common for *de* that it accumulates through non-action (*wuwei* 無為) and is completed through non-desire (*wuyu* 無欲); it is settled through not-thinking and is fixed through non-utilizing. But in acting and desiring there is no place for *de* to lodge (*she* 舍) and when the *de* is without lodging it is not whole.

Compare with “Nei Ye” 13:

有神自在<身>。

一往一來；

莫之能思。

失之必亂；

得之必治。

敬除其舍：

精將自來。

There is a numinous [mind] (*shen* 神) naturally residing within;

One moment it goes, the next it comes,

And no one is able to conceive of it.

If you lose it you are inevitably disordered;

If you attain it you are inevitably well ordered.

²⁴⁵ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.1

Diligently clean out its lodging place (*she* 舍)
And its vital essence (*jing* 精) will naturally arrive.²⁴⁶

Both texts conceive of *shen* as a “resource” that can gather within a person or disperse outside a person. Both present a model where the accumulation of *shen* leads to order and completion, while the loss of it through activity and desire leads to disorder and incompleteness. Both also specify that one must prepare a “lodging place”²⁴⁷ (*she* 舍) which is empty and “clean” in which *shen*, and in “Nei Ye” the accompanying “resource” of *jing* may accumulate.²⁴⁸

However, “Nei Ye” provides more detailed arguments on how to attain tranquility and accumulate “resources”. The model of these “resources” is also more complicated in “Nei Ye” which speaks to the interaction of *jing*, *qi* and *shen*.²⁴⁹ On the other hand, “Jie Lao” relates the membrane-person model to the activity of ruling a state, something less emphasized in “Nei Ye”.

²⁴⁶ Roth, *Original Tao*, 70.

²⁴⁷ In “Nei Ye”, *jing* is frequently stored.

In “Nei Ye” 1, it is “Stored in the chest” 藏於胸中

In “Nei Ye” 8, if one is tranquil one can store it 可以為精舍

In “Nei Ye” 15, brings health if stored “naturally” 精存自生

“Lodging” for *jing* is also referenced in NY 23.

²⁴⁸ And, for “Nei Ye” even *qi* can function like *shen* - “Nei Ye” 19 says “Concentrate the *qi* like *shen* and the myriad things will be stored [like *shen*]” 傳氣如神，萬物備存, indicating that when *qi* is accumulated it has a sort of physicality, i.e. The “myriad things”. Later, the same passage indicates that when approached this way it “is not the power of ghosts and *shen*, but the utmost of *jing* and *qi*” 非鬼神之力也。精氣之極也。 Indicating, perhaps, that when a person manages their own *qi* and *jing* in a manner of accumulation similar to *shen* it produces similar, if perhaps more reliable results. “Nei Ye” appears to be building a bridge between the “resources” model of the body as a semi-permeable membrane that can be enhanced with accumulation and the idea of external power manifested in “ghosts and *shen*” outside. “Nei Ye” 1 also notes that when *jing* is outside the body it is “called ghosts and *shen*” 謂之鬼神, indicating, perhaps, that the same “resources” act very differently inside and outside the body.

²⁴⁹ Though, in neither “Nei Ye” nor in “Jie Lao” do these “resources” function in exactly the same way that they appear in later Daoist articulations as the “three treasures” for use in cultivation.

In a sense, “Jie Lao” is applying the model of the person/body found also in “Nei Ye” and applying it to the more vague notions of person/body in the *Laozi* parallels. “Jie Lao” concludes with the *Laozi* 54 quotation exhorting one to “cultivate in the person/body, and one’s *de* will be genuine” (脩之身，其德乃真), and extrapolates this cultivation out to “cultivate in the world, and it *de* will be widespread” (脩之天下，其德乃普). By incorporating the membrane model, the sense of what it means to “cultivate in the person/body” is more tangible.

Similarities to Xin Shu, Shang

As with the “Nei Ye” chapter of *Guanzi*, “Jie Lao” also shares some similarities with the “Xin Shu, shang” 心術，上 chapter of that text.²⁵⁰ Like with “Nei Ye”, there is a similar model of gathering *shen*. However, “Xin Shu, shang” also shows similarities to “Jie Lao” in its depiction of *li* 理, which we may translate as “patterns” or “order”.²⁵¹ Both documents represent *li* as a set of underlying patterns or principles that, if properly apprehended by a person who has attained clear perception through a process of self-cultivation, can lead to a deeper understanding of the cosmos, and in a practical sense, better leadership from rulers.

²⁵⁰ As noted in chapter 2, “Xin Shu, shang” also appears to follow a pattern of a collection of *jing* 經 theses accompanied by *shuo* 說 explanations, though it does not use these terms in the body of its text. Although it is not commenting on the *Laozi*, it is significant to note that “Xin Shu, shang” is a type of commentary itself, intending to explain what was likely a pre-existing set of statements.

²⁵¹ In his study of the use of *li* in classical China, Harold Roth translates the term as “inherent patterns” and sees it as representing a “normative natural order” in texts he identifies as part of a classical Daoist tradition. See Harold D Roth, “The Classical Daoist Concept of *Li* 理 (Pattern) and Early Chinese Cosmology,” *Early China* 35–36 (2012): 157.

The first point of comparison is the way in which the cultivation process is represented in “Xin Shu, shang”. This is in many ways similar to the way “Nei Ye” depicted this process as a “cleaning out” of a place for *shen* to gather:

道，不遠而難極也，與人並處而難得也。虛其欲，神將入舍，掃除不潔，神不留處。²⁵²

The Dao is not distant yet it is difficult to reach its limit.
It dwells together with human beings yet it is difficult to find.
If you empty out your desires
Shen will enter its lodging.
If you sweep out what is impure,
Shen will stay in its dwelling.²⁵³

As with “Nei Ye”, desires must first be emptied out to provide space for *shen* to enter. Furthermore, this emptying is directly related to a process of emptying out desires, becoming expansive and tranquil, concentrating *jing* to reach a state of “solitude” (*du* 獨), which leads to “illumination” (*ming* 明) and finally to *shen*. This process from entering into tranquility through illumination is compared to cleaning out a building, which allows the *shen* to lodge within it:

道在天地之間也，其大無外，其小無內，故曰「不遠而難極也」。虛之與人也無間，唯聖人得虛道，故曰「並處而難得」。世人之所職者精也。去欲則宣，宣則靜矣，靜則精。精則獨立矣，獨則明，明則神矣。神者至貴也，故館不辟除，則貴人不舍焉。故曰「不潔則神不處」。²⁵⁴

The Dao is located within the Heavens and the Earth.
So vast, there is nothing outside it.
So minute, there is nothing inside it.
Therefore the text says:

“It is not distant yet it is difficult to reach its limit.”
“It dwells together with human beings.”

²⁵² CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 2

²⁵³ Adapted from the translation in Roth, Harold “The Resonant Way” Unpublished work. Passage 3, “Basic text”

²⁵⁴ CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 8

This means there is no gap between them.
Only the sage is able to find this empty Dao. Therefore the text says:
“It dwells together with human beings yet it is difficult to find.”
What the sage controls is *jing*.
When you get rid of desires you become expansive.
When you are expansive, you become tranquil.
When you are tranquil, then your *jing* [will be concentrated].
When it is concentrated then [your mind] will attain complete solitude.
When it attains complete solitude, it will be illumined.
When it is illumined, then it will be *shen*.
Shen is the most honored one.
Therefore, if the building is not cleaned out,
Then the honored one will not lodge there.
Therefore the text says:
“If it is not pure then *shen* will not dwell there.”²⁵⁵

This process appears to merge two sorts of understanding of what *shen* may be: first, as with the metaphor of lodging, *shen* is depicted as something independent of the person that can come to dwell within. This metaphor seems in keeping with the meaning of *shen* as a “spirit” or “divinity” that exists outside of human beings, or as the sort of “resource” we have previously discussed that can be gathered from external sources. Yet, at the same time, “Xin Shu, shang” depicts a process of transformation through which *jing* becomes *shen*. As the passage above notes, “what the sage controls is *jing*.” It is not *shen* itself that is gathered, manipulated or otherwise controlled, it is only gathered indirectly through working with *jing*, either to clean out a “lodging place” for something external, through a transformation of that *jing* into *shen*, or some combination of those processes.

As can be seen from these passages, “Xin Shu, shang” maintains a similar model to the gathering of *shen* as “Nei Ye” does. Thus on this point of similarity, the comparisons

²⁵⁵ Adapted from the translation in Roth, Harold “The Resonant Way” Unpublished work. Passage 3, “Commentary”

made between “Nei Ye” and “Jie Lao” hold here as well. However, “Xin Shu, shang” also holds in common with “Jie Lao” some similar views on the concept of *li* 理.

As noted before, “Jie Lao” identifies *li* as a set of patterns underlying interactions and objects in the cosmos. One who is able to understand *li* is given an even greater control over situations than one who holds “situational advantage”, *shi* 勢, an important concept in other parts of the *Hanfeizi*.

夫緣道理以從事者，無不能成。無不能成者，大能成天子之勢尊，而小易得卿相將軍之賞祿。夫棄道理而妄舉動者，雖上有天子諸侯之勢尊，而（天）下有猗頓、陶朱、卜祝之富，猶失其民人而亡其財資也。眾人之輕棄道理而易妄舉動者，不知其禍福之深大而道闊遠若是也，故諭人曰：「孰知其極。」²⁵⁶

For those who rely upon the *li* of the Dao (*yuandaoli* 緣道理) to administer affairs, there is nothing they cannot achieve. For those for whom there is nothing they cannot achieve, the greater among them can achieve the power and positional advantage (*shi* 勢) of the Son of Heaven while the lesser among them can easily attain the rewards and emoluments of a minister or a general. For those who abandon the *li* of the Dao and irresponsibly initiate various actions, though the highest among them may enjoy the positional advantage and dignity of the Son of Heaven or of a regional lord, and the lowest among them may enjoy the wealth of an Yi Dun and Tao Zhu, what you divine and pray for, they still will lose the support of their people and waste their resources and wealth. For the majority of people who scorn and abandon the *li* of the Way and irresponsibly initiate various actions, it is due to the fact that they do not understand that the depth and breadth of ill and good fortune and the expansiveness and far reaching quality of the Dao are like this. Thus it is said: “*Who knows its limit?*”²⁵⁷

In this passage we can see that “Jie Lao” depicts an understanding of *li* as absolutely essential for any ruler or one who desires to rule. Knowledge of *li* confers in fact unlimited potential on a ruler when taking action, and even a lesser degree of knowledge

²⁵⁶ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20 para. 12

²⁵⁷ Adapted from the translation in Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 232.

can perform better in their positions. However, “Jie Lao” also goes to pains to differentiate *li* from Dao:

凡理者，方圓、短長、麤靡、堅脆之分也，故理定而後可得道也。故定理有存亡，有死生，有盛衰。夫物之一存一亡，乍死乍生，初盛而後衰者，不可謂常。唯夫與天（與）地之剖判也具生，至天地之消散也不死不衰者謂「常」（者）。而常〔者〕，無攸易，無定理。無定理，非在於常所，是以不可道也。聖人觀其玄虛，用其周行，強字之曰「道」，然而可論。故曰：「道之可道，非常道也。」

As a general rule, *li* 理 constitute the distinctions between
the square and the round;
the short and the long;
the coarse and the fine;
and the strong and the weak.

Thus, only after *li* have been determined, can you apprehend the Dao. Thus, determinate *li* (*dingli* 定理) include
existence and extinction,
life and death,
and prosperity and decline.

Now things that first exist and then become extinct, first live and then die, or that first prosper and then decline cannot be said to be eternal. Only that which is born with the severing and separation of Heaven and Earth and will neither die nor decline until Heaven and Earth disperse and disappear is called “eternal.” What is eternal has neither a changing location nor a determinate *li*, and is not inherent in an eternal place. This is why the eternal cannot be spoken of. The sage observes its mysterious emptiness and makes use of its comprehensive course [of activity in the world]. Compelled to give it a name he calls it “The Dao” and only then was it possible to discuss it. Thus it is said: “The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao”²⁵⁸

This passage defines *li* by itself as what distinguishes between characteristics of concrete things, such as square or round, long or short and so forth. However, the passage says the principles can be set or determined (*ding* 定), and only then does the Dao become apparent. These determined principles characterize more abstract concepts, such

²⁵⁸ Slight adaptation from trans. Queen, 241.

as existence or extinction, life or death and prosperity or decline. Determining these *li* is important because they all characterize what is *not* the Dao. Because the Dao is said to be “eternal” (*chang* 常), based on what may be the earliest surviving parallel with the famous opening line of *Laozi* 1, “Jie Lao” says that the Dao must be beyond anything that can be distinguished with location or duration. In other words, anything that *li* can characterize is not the Dao, and the Dao is not *li*.

Furthermore, “the sage observes its mysterious emptiness and makes use of its cyclic movements” (聖人觀其玄虛，用其周行). This indicates that sages have gained a special awareness of the Dao, and make use of its natural courses. As the passage has noted, this is something that goes beyond following along with *li*, as the Dao is something eternal and beyond *li*.

“Xin Shu, shang” also recognizes that *li* are underlying patterns inherent in all things. Sages, like in “Jie Lao”, do not have some sort of special or unusual *li* of their own, but are people who have an increased perception of *li* in all things:

物固有形，形固有名，名當，謂之聖人。故必知不言〔之言〕，無為之事，然後知道之紀。殊形異執，不與萬物異理，故可以為天下〔始〕。²⁵⁹

Things inherently have forms; forms inherently have names.

Persons who match names [and forms], call them Sages.

Therefore, one must know the unspoken word and the non-acting deed.

Only then will one know how the Way sorts things out.

Though they have distinct forms and different conditions, [Sages] do not have different *li* than all other living things.

Therefore, they can become sources for the entire world.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 5

²⁶⁰ Translation Roth, “The Classical Daoist Concept of *Li* 理 (Pattern) and Early Chinese Cosmology,” 174.

Similar to “Jie Lao”, “Xin Shu, shang” places the practical power of sages in their knowledge of *li*, which, at least to some degree, also corresponds with the matching of form and name, both concerns in the second “Jie Lao” passage discussed above.

Similarly also, “Xin Shu, shang” connects the ability to perceive and move according to *li* to the overall clarity and freedom from desire of a sage:

人迫於惡，則失其所好；怵於好，則忘其所惡。非道也。故曰：「不怵乎好，不迫乎惡。」惡不失其理，欲不過其情，故曰：「君子。」「恬愉無為，去智與故」，言虛素也。「其應非所設也，其動非所取也」，此言因也。因也者，舍己而以物為法者也。感而后應，非所設也；緣理而動，非所取也

²⁶¹。

Most people are so burdened by their dislikes that they lose sight of what they like. They are so enticed by what they like that they forget what they dislike. This is not the Way. Therefore [the text] says:

“They (Exemplary persons) are not enticed by likes
Nor oppressed by dislikes.”

Their dislikes do not lose sight of their *li*. Their desires do not exceed what is essential to them. Therefore [the text] says:

“Exemplary persons, calm and tranquil, take no action
And discard wisdom and precedent.”

Therefore this says that they are empty and unadorned.

“Their responses are not contrived,
Their movements are not chosen.”

This says that they are adaptable. To be adaptable is to relinquish the self and take other things as standards. To respond only when stimulated is not something you contrive to do. To move according to *li* is not something you [deliberately] choose to do.²⁶²

Herein we also find some differences from “Jie Lao”. While “Jie Lao” connects awareness of *li* first and foremost to the governance of a state, “Xin Shu, shang” raises how an awareness of the *li* that govern one’s own person can provide a kind of easy

²⁶¹ CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 12

²⁶² Translation Roth, “The Classical Daoist Concept of *Li* 理 (Pattern) and Early Chinese Cosmology,” 173.

adaptability to sages on a personal level. As a result of not being swayed by preferences, sages in “Xin Shu, shang” maintain an awareness of their own *li*, and even find themselves following that *li* in all their actions rather than deliberately forcing themselves to act in one way or another. The result is that they are tranquil, non-acting (*wuwei* 無為), and adaptable (*yin* 因). They no longer rely on a contrived vision of a self (*ji* 己), but instead simply follow along with their *li*.

Similarly, while “Xin Shu, shang” makes references to how officials in government may be according with a type of *li* when performing their duties correctly, it is by means of an analogy for the functioning of the human body:

心之在體，君之位也；九竅之有職，官之分也。心處其道，九竅循理；嗜欲充（益）〔盈〕，目不見色，耳不聞聲。故曰：上離其道，下失其事。〔故曰：心術者，無為而制竅者也。〕²⁶³

The position of the mind in the body

[Is analogous to] the position of the ruler [in the state].

The functioning of the nine apertures (the sense organs open to the “outside” world)

[Is analogous to] the responsibilities of the officials.

When the mind keeps to its Way,

The nine apertures will comply with their *li*.

When lusts and desires fill the mind to overflowing,

The eyes do not see colors, the ears do not hear sounds.

When the one above departs from the Way,

The ones below will be lose sight of their tasks.

Therefore we say, "the techniques of the mind are to take no action (*wuwei*) and yet control the apertures."²⁶⁴

²⁶³ CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 7

²⁶⁴ Translation Roth, “The Classical Daoist Concept of *Li* 理 (Pattern) and Early Chinese Cosmology,” 172.

Thus, in “Xin Shu, shang”, the most important *li* to be aware of are those that govern one’s own body. When the “heart-mind keeps to its way” (*xin chu qi dao* 心處其道), then the rest of the body will comply with *li* (*xun li* 循理). This is compared to a ruler setting an example for ministers, but the emphasis appears to be on personal physiological and cultivation aspects. This is not to say that “Xin Shu, shang” is devoid of advice for rulers, only that it is less prominent than in “Jie Lao”. For example, “Xin Shu, shang” does connect *li* directly with the process of governance:

義者，謂各處其宜也。禮者，因人之情，緣義之理，而為之節文者也。故禮者謂有理也。理也者，明分以諭義之意也。故禮出乎理，理出乎義，義因乎宜者也。法者所以同出，不得不然者也，故殺僂禁誅以一之也。故事督乎法，法出乎權，權出乎道。²⁶⁵

"Rightness" means that each [person] keeps to what is suitable (*yi* 義). "Rites" are what adapt to the genuine feelings of human beings, go along with the *li* 理 of what is right for them, and then creates limitations and embellishments. Therefore, "rites" mean "to have inherent patterns." *Li* are what clarify [interpersonal] distinctions in order to illustrate the meaning of rightness. Therefore, rites are derived from rightness; rightness is derived from inherent patterns; and inherent patterns are derived from the Way.

Laws are the means by which [all people of] the same generation are made to conform. Therefore execution and extermination, prohibition and punishment are used to unify them. Therefore, human endeavors are supervised by laws; laws are derived from political authority (*chüan*); and political authority is derived from the Way.²⁶⁶

This passage from “Xin Shu, shang” appears to link “Ruist” concepts of “rightness” (*yi* 義) and “rites” (*li* 禮) with the understanding of *li* (理) as underlying or inherent patterns. It makes this link so strongly as to assert that “‘rites’ mean ‘to have *li*’” (*lizhe*

²⁶⁵ CHANT “Xin Shu, shang” para. 9

²⁶⁶ Adapted from the translation in Roth, Harold “The Resonant Way” Unpublished work. Passage 5, “Commentary”

wei you li ye 禮者謂有理也). It goes on to further assert the values of laws and punishments and their relationship with the Dao - concepts that would fit very well with the *Hanfeizi* as a whole, including “Jie Lao”.

In conclusion, then, we might observe that “Jie Lao” and “Xin Shu, shang” both understand *li* to indicate underlying patterns, the understanding of which and ultimately is an important quality of sages or other persons of significant cultivation. Both also recognize that an understanding of *li* can have benefits both in personal cultivation and in the governance of a state. However, the balance of these two modes is different for each text: “Xin Shu, shang” acknowledges the political applications, but prefers the personal benefits knowledge of *li* can bring, while “Jie Lao” sees even the personal benefits as ultimately one more method of bringing about effective governance. This difference is possibly indicative of the texts participating in different sorts of discourses with different intended audiences: “Jie Lao” is aimed at rulers, while “Xin Shu, shang” could appeal to a broader audience, including lower ranking officials and potentially even those who were not in a position of power at all.²⁶⁷

Thematic Similarities with Huainanzi 1 & 7

²⁶⁷ Harold Roth has noted that this may have been the very reason texts drawing on an Inner Cultivation tradition used *li* as referring to inherent natural patterns: because it provided an explanation as to why values of spontaneity and naturalness were desirable that would be reasonable for audiences not grounded in an Inner Cultivation background. In short, becoming spontaneous and according with *li* was to in fact follow along with the true, underlying patterns of the cosmos, something more fundamental than any human conception of rulership. See Roth, “The Classical Daoist Concept of *Li* 理 (Pattern) and Early Chinese Cosmology,” 166.

The “membrane model” of the body, as we are calling it, also appears in *Huainanzi* in several places, most notably chapters 1 & 7.

Huainanzi 1, “Yuan Dao” 原道 contains a description of *shen* that is well in keeping with the model in “Jie Lao”:

凡人（之）志（各）有所在而神有所繫者，其行也，足躓趨堦、頭抵植木而不自知也，招之而不能見也，呼之而不能聞也。耳目〔非〕去之也，然而不能應者，何也？神失其守也。²⁶⁸

In general, when people’s will (*zhi*) is occupied with something and their *shen* is fastened upon something, they will absentmindedly trip over roots and bump into branches when walking. One can wave, but they will not see and call but they will not hear. They have not departed from them and yet they cannot respond. Why? The *shen* has lost what was guarding it.²⁶⁹

The most important function of guarding and accumulating *shen* without losing it is the clarity of perception and judgment it brings. Without *shen*, people cannot properly relate to or understand the world around them. Furthermore *Huainanzi* 1 posits a relationship between the body, *qi* and *shen*:

夫形者，生之舍也；
氣者，生之充也；
神者，生之制也。
一失〔其〕位，則二者傷矣。²⁷⁰

The physical body is the lodging place of *qi*;
Qi is the source of living (*sheng* 生);
Shen is what regulates living.
If one of these loses its position the other two will be harmed.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.52

²⁶⁹ Adapted from Roth, trans. In Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 75.

²⁷⁰ CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.31

²⁷¹ Adapted from Roth, trans. In Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 74.

The body/form stores *qi*, which provides life energy, which the *shen* then guides and regulates. If anything occurs that could break or dissipate part of this system, it results in disaster for the whole. Hence, the advice is to conserve and protect these “resources” through tranquility and non-action.

Similarly to “Jie Lao”, *Huainanzi* 1 also proposes harmonizing with the underlying “Patterns of the Dao” (*daoli* 道理) as a means of regulating oneself and others.

所謂後者。。。貴其周於數而合於時也。夫執道理以耦變，先亦制後，後亦制先。是何則？不失其所以制人，人不能制也。²⁷²

What we call “one who comes afterward”... is to value circulating with the norms [of the world] and harmonizing with the opportune moment. Now, for those who grasp the Patterns of the Dao (*daoli* 道理) to meet changes, what comes first will regulate what comes after and what comes after will regulate what comes first. How could this be? They do not lose what they use to regulate people, and so people cannot regulate them.²⁷³

A key part of this process of regulation is recognizing what the “Patterns of the Dao” are in order to harmonize with them. Of course, the way to improve perception of these patterns is to cultivate the “resource” that improves perception - *shen*.

The model of the body as a semi-permeable membrane is even more apparent in *Huainanzi* 7, entitled “Jing Shen” 精神, which combines the concepts of *jing* and *shen* into a single compound and uses it in a manner similar of both “Jie Lao” and “Nei Ye”. One passage describes the loss/accumulation model and, not surprisingly, ties it to a quotation of a *Laozi* parallel:

耳目淫於聲色之樂，則五藏搖動而不定矣。

²⁷² CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.16

²⁷³ Adapted from Roth, trans. In Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 62.

五藏搖動而不定，則血氣滔蕩而不休矣。
血氣滔蕩而不休，則精神馳騁於外而不守矣。
精神馳騁於外而不守，則禍福之至，雖如丘山，無由識之矣。

。 。 。

故曰：「其出彌遠者，其知彌少。」以言夫精神之不可使外淫也。
是故五色亂目，使目不明；五聲譁耳，使耳不聰；五味亂口，使口（爽傷）
〔厲爽〕²⁷⁴

When the eyes and ears *overflow* (*yin 淫*) to the joys of sights and sounds, then the Five Orbs oscillate and are not stable... the blood at Qi are agitated and not at rest... the *jingshen gallops to the outside and is not preserved*... then when either fortune or disaster arrive, even if they pile up like mountains, one has no way to recognize it...

Thus it is said: “The farther one goes out, the less one knows.” (*Laozi 47*) This says that *jingshen* cannot be allowed to *overflow to the outside*.

Therefore:

“The five colors disrupt the eyes and make them unclear;

The five sounds confuse the ears and make them dull;

The five tastes disrupt the mouth and makes it unable to taste.”²⁷⁵ (Similar to *Laozi 12*)

The sections in the italics in the above translation emphasize the use of the term here translated as “overflow” (*yin 淫*), one related to flooding and the excessive movement of fluids as well as excess in general.²⁷⁶ that also appears as the verb indicating dissipation in the passages quoted above from “Jie Lao” and “Nei Ye”. This verb appears to indicate a fluid-like quality of *jing* and *shen*.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, the body appears to be a sort of

²⁷⁴ CHANT *Huainanzi* 7.6

²⁷⁵ Adapted from Roth, trans. In Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 244–45.

²⁷⁶ The *Shuowen* says: 淫：侵淫隨理也。从水淫聲。一曰久雨為淫。

²⁷⁷ Ishida Hidemi highlights this fluid-like quality as one of the features of the ancient Chinese model of the human body, going so far as to say:

“These fluids and energies are so essential to the body that the body is conceived as consisting basically of fluids; we may even say it *is* fluids and energy.” (Ishida in Kohn 1989, p. 45) {}

membrane in a larger fluid-like cosmos, such that excessive activity (brought about by excessive stimulation of perception) causes the “resources” of *jing* and *shen* to flood out of the body. This in turn reduces the clarity of perception.

The fact that *Huainanzi* 7 also provides marked quotations of *Laozi* parallels highlights that both “Jie Lao” and *Huainanzi* 7 see the *Laozi* parallels as making an explicit argument about the body, health and perception.

Thematic similarities with the Huangdi Neijing

Lastly, “Jie Lao” also shares its model of *shen* and the body with the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經, “The Yellow Thearch’s Internal Classic”. In particular, both texts emphasize that the “resources” of *jing*, *qi* and *shen* accumulate in stillness, which in turn leads to good health and clear perception. On the other hand, desires and emotions are activities that can cause these “resources” to scatter.

The first chapter of the *Huangdi Neijing* contains the following:

。 。 。 恬惓虛无，真氣從之，精神內守，病安從來。是以志閑而少欲，心安而不懼，形勞而不倦，氣從以順，各從其欲，皆得所願。²⁷⁸

...

Quiet peacefulness, absolute emptiness

The true *qi* follows [these states].

When *jing* and *shen* are guarded internally,

Where could a disease come from?

Hence,

The mind is relaxed and one has few desires.

The heart is at peace and not in fear.

²⁷⁸ CHANT *Huangdi Neijing* 1.2

The physical appearance is taxed, but not tired.
The *qi* follows [its appropriate course] and therefrom results compliance:
Everything follows one's wishes;
In every respect one achieves what one longs for.²⁷⁹

This model appears to emphasize “guarding internally” (*nei shou* 內守) *jing* and *shen* while *qi* courses or flows smoothly. This internal guarding and smooth flowing is the natural result of maintaining a state that is peaceful, empty and not disturbed with desires and emotions. Such a state of guarding and flowing naturally leads to good health and, in a more expansive sense, the ability to accomplish any (presumably limited and carefully chosen) goals one decides upon. One may note here the equation of a well-cultivated internal state with the capacity to accomplish matters externally, a perspective shared with the “Jie Lao” and other sources discussed above.

Later in the same chapter, we find the following ranking of different eras:

。。。上古有真人者。。。呼吸精氣，獨立守神，肌肉若一，故能壽敝天地，无有終時，此其道生。中古之時，有至人者，淳德全道，。。。積精全神，游行天地之間，視聽八達之外，此蓋益其壽命而強者也，亦歸於真人。其次有聖人者。。。外不勞形於事，內无思想之患，以恬愉為務，以自得為功，形體不敝，精神不散，亦可以百數。²⁸⁰

...

In high antiquity there were true people.

...

They exhaled and inhaled *jing* and *qi*.

They stood for themselves and guarded their *shen*.

Muscles and flesh were like one.

Hence,

²⁷⁹ With adaptations from Paul U. Unschuld, trans., *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery in an Ancient Chinese Medical Text: With an Appendix, the Doctrine of the Five Periods and Six Qi in in the Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2003), 34–35.

²⁸⁰ CHANT *Huangdi Neijing* 1.4

They were able to achieve longevity, in correspondence with heaven and earth.
There was no point in time when [their life could have] come to an end.
Such was their life in the Dao.
At the time of middle antiquity,
There were accomplished people.
They were of pure *de* and complete Dao.

...

They accumulated *jing* and completed *shen*.
They roamed between heaven and earth and their vision as well as their hearing
went beyond the eight reaches.
This way, they added to their lifespan and were strong.
They, too, may be counted among the true people.
Next, there were sages.

...

Externally, they did not tax their physical appearance with any affairs;
Internally they did not suffer from any pondering.
They made every effort to achieve peaceful relaxation and
they considered self-realization as success.
Their physical body did not deteriorate and
Their *jing* and their *shen* did not dissipate.
They, too, could reach a number of one hundred [years].²⁸¹

In ancient times, while *jing* and *qi* are inhaled and exhaled, *shen* was carefully guarded, leading to impressive longevity and a harmony with the Dao. By the middle period, people accumulated *jing* and completed *shen* (積精全神), which enhanced their perceptual abilities and extended their lifespans. Finally, sages were those who did not over-extend themselves and did not allow their *jing* and *shen* to dissipate (精神不散) which, in turn, led to reasonably long lives. This model of the body places heavy emphasis on preserving the “resources” of *jing* and *shen* in the body while living in

²⁸¹ With adaptations from Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen*, 42–44.

harmony with the greater cosmos. Just as in “Jie Lao”, when the patterns are understood and the resources preserved, a person acts from a position of receptive emptiness and does not tire or dissipate themselves.

Why the thematic similarities matter: using Laozi as "glue"

The above examples show that the “Jie Lao” is a part of a larger system describing how the body functions and how to preserve health and mental clarity. What “Jie Lao” brings as an innovation, one that the *Huainanzi* would later continue, is the correlation between the health of the body and the capacity to rule a state - and the glue between the medical understanding of the body and the discussion of rulership is the *Laozi* parallels it utilizes.

One of the features of the *Laozi*, exemplified in the *Laozi* 54 parallel quoted in both “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” (and “Dao Ying”), is the correlation between the human body and the larger world. As noted above, *Laozi* 54 correlates the cultivation of the body to the cultivation of increasingly larger concentric circles, until encompassing the entire world, exhorting one to:

“cultivate in the person/body, and one’s *de* will be genuine” (脩之身，其德乃真), ...

“cultivate in the world, and it *de* will be widespread” (脩之天下，其德乃普).²⁸²

Similarly, *Laozi* 13 (not found in “Jie Lao”, but present in Guodian B), contains the clearest equation of body/self and state:

故貴以身為天下，若可寄天下。愛以身為天下，若可託天下。

²⁸² The treatment of *Laozi* 54 will be discussed at length in chapter 6.

Thus, one who can value the world like [their own] person/body can be given the world. One who can love the world like [their own] person/body can be entrusted with the world.

The correlative equation of the person/body with the larger world is one of the features of even the earliest *Laozi* collections. But at the same time, these collections are not clear on how one should “cultivate in the person” (脩之身) or “love the world like [their own] person/body” (愛以身為天下). This is where “Jie Lao” supplies the innovation of connecting the *Laozi* parallels to the models of the body found in sources like “Nei Ye”.

Then, in “Jie Lao”, the *Laozi* parallels act as a bridge between the models of the body and the practice or rulership. After all, body and world are correlated in the *Laozi* parallels, thus, the logic goes, the practices of self-cultivation should be useful to the governance of a state. This argument would be more difficult for “Jie Lao” to make without reference to the example of the *Laozi* parallels.

The *Laozi* parallels act as a kind of glue between the medical and the political, transferring the logic and practices of one to the other. Or, perhaps more appropriately, the *Laozi* parallels act like the warp, or *jing* 經 placed down first on a loom that holds together all the other strands. Or, we might say, it is indicative of an active ecosystem wherein each of these concerns interacted organically, growing along with the *Laozi* parallels with which they intertwined.

Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted some of the key features of two essays found in the *Hanfeizi*, “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” and how they relate to *Laozi* parallels. What should be clear is that, while both chapters are both deeply indebted to *Laozi* parallels both for the content and form of their arguments, the intentions of the essays are markedly different. While “Yu Lao” advocates retreat and caution, especially on the admonition to “know what is enough” found in the *Laozi* parallels it quotes, the “Jie Lao” advocates for the self-cultivation of the ruler as a means to ruling a state, using the *Laozi* parallels as a bridge between personal, physiological cultivation and cultivation of the state as a whole. Furthermore, we have shown how the essays use differing structures to present their arguments and present quotations of *Laozi* parallels: the “Yu Lao” frequently making use of anecdotes to illustrate shorter quotations, while the “Jie Lao” tends toward more analytic discussions of larger passages. In this sense the essays live up to their titles: *Yu* 喻 - to illustrate and *Jie* 解 - to analyze.

What might we make of these differences? Above we have briefly considered some of the more formal implications of the difference: that the essays were likely written at different times and possibly by different people. We have also discussed how they might have been intended for different sorts of rulers: the “Yu Lao” for a ruler of a small, imperiled state, while the “Jie Lao” would better serve the ruler of a more powerful polity. Together these considerations make up the reference points of both authors and audiences and show that the context of the two essays may very well have differed on both points.

And yet, despite the differences, both essays structure their arguments and themes around quotations of *Laozi* parallels. What we might take from this is that *Laozi* parallels were significant in all the contexts of authors and audiences the two essays together encompass. Furthermore, the essays tell us something quite significant for our understanding of the relative role of *Laozi* parallels in the Warring States Period: that quotations of *Laozi* parallels were clearly seen as having direct pertinence to the ruling of a state and ensuring both its survival and its prosperity. In the sense of a “source of authority that lays down the framework of a discussion” that we have previously identified the term *jing* to signify, *Laozi* parallels appear to be playing this role, even before officially being named as such or the term even carrying with it the weight of imperial sanction. Thus, to the extent that a text becomes a “source of authority” through its recognition in political circles, *Laozi*, in whatever collections it was circulating in, had already gained much of this recognition among rulers in the Warring States.

5: HUAINANZI

The twelfth chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, entitled “Dao Ying” 道應,²⁸³ contains what can be considered one of the earliest surviving commentaries on passages parallel with the received *Laozi*. In the sense that it offers a reading of *Laozi* parallels that interprets passages, the chapter serves as a commentary. However, we must distinguish the format in “Dao Ying” from the sort of commentary we find in the later interlinear commentaries written on *Laozi*, or even earlier precedents, such as the commentarial traditions on the *Chunqiu*. Interlinear commentaries respect the format of their source material. They endeavor to create an explanation of the source text, as it appears, taking into account the ordering and structure of passages found in the source. These commentaries seek to offer insight into meanings buried in the source text, in its words and its format, meanings that may have originated from an author, or ones that may lie hidden, unknown even to the original authors, such as the hexagrams of the *Yi*. In each case, the source text is viewed as, if not a perfect vessel full of profound insights into the cosmos, at least as one that later commentators must struggle with in its entirety.

“Dao Ying” is not like this. Instead, it uses short quotations attributed, in most cases, to “Laozi”, and places them in an order not found in any extant *Laozi* collection. Instead, “Dao Ying” follows its own logical arrangement, utilizing *Laozi* parallels as a source of

²⁸³ “Responses of the Way” in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*.

authority to legitimate that logic. In comparison with extensive interlinear commentaries, but similar to the two commentaries found in *Hanfeizi* discussed in the last chapter, “Dao Ying” appears to be more of an argumentative tract than a commentary on these *Laozi* parallels.

And yet, even this depiction is incomplete, for the quotations of *Laozi* parallels are not used to support the original words of the “Dao Ying” authors, but is instead placed in apposition to anecdotes drawn from a variety of sources. Some of these anecdotes appear in a wide range of texts, usually serving an argumentative role.²⁸⁴ In this sense, as much as the anecdotes might be read as offering an interpretation on the *Laozi* parallels, the *Laozi* parallels are also presenting an interpretation of the anecdotes. The commentary, such as it is, runs both ways, repurposing both the *Laozi* parallels and the anecdotes to serve the greater ends of “Dao Ying” and the *Huainanzi* as a whole. In other words, the authority invested in the particular passages and even the name “Laozi” was valuable for the role it could play in supporting an argument.

In essence, the *Laozi* parallels are playing a functionally different role in “Dao Ying” than passages or references to the name “Laozi” do elsewhere in the *Huainanzi*. As this chapter will show, there is substantial evidence to suggest that the themes, ideas and even practices represented in *Laozi* parallels exerted a significant influence on *Huainanzi*, but it does not appear that the explicit quotation and citation of these passages, nor the name “Laozi” carried the same weight outside of “Dao Ying”. This chapter will consider the

²⁸⁴ These other sources include *Hanshi Waizhuan*, *Lushi Chunqiu*, and *Hanfeizi*. Sarah Queen, for example, has suggested that these texts may have drawn “...from a common pool of anecdotal literature...” in Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 206.

number of times “Laozi”, or a variant on the name appears, as well as the number of parallel *Laozi* passages that appear outside of “Dao Ying” in *Huainanzi*. We will find that these occurrences are relatively rare outside of “Dao Ying”. In this way, it is different from other texts like the received *Wenzi*,²⁸⁵ which begins the majority of passages with the phrase “Laozi said”, echoing the structure of earlier texts that relied on the authority of a wise master, most notably *The Analects* and *Mengzi*. Nor does Laozi appear extensively as a character and exemplar in the way he does in *Zhuangzi*. In general, throughout the *Huainanzi* it is ideas reminiscent of the content of *Laozi* that is more influential than either explicit quotations or the name of text or author. “Dao Ying” is different in that it is built around the explicit representation of *Laozi* parallels.²⁸⁶

Chapter goals

First, this chapter will present an overview of the historical context in which the *Huainanzi* and its twelfth chapter, “Dao Ying” arose. In this section I will review how the

²⁸⁵ The *Wenzi* is a somewhat problematic text, with the received text widely believed to be in some or large part a *weishu* 偽書 or “forged text”, possibly compiled during the fourth century CE. An excavated manuscript containing passages parallel with the fifth chapter of the received *Wenzi* was discovered at Dingzhou, a tomb sealed in approximately 55BCE. However, this manuscript does not contain the repeated “Laozi said” introductions of passages in the received *Wenzi*. For more information see the forthcoming Paul Van Els, *The Wenzi* (Brill, 2018)

²⁸⁶ The complexity of how explicit quotation influences the perception of a text can perhaps be highlighted by Charles Le Blanc’s early analysis of the *Huainanzi*’s use of quotations in Charles Le Blanc, *Huai-Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought: The Idea of Resonance (Kan-Ying). With a Transl. and Analysis of Chapter Six* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Pr., 1985), 84. Here he notes that along with the *Laozi*, the *Shi*, *Yi* and *Shu* enjoyed (relatively) consistent explicit citation, stating that “...special status and treatment... can only be explained by their being considered as canonical and authoritative by *Huainanzi*.” Even so, he views the sources other than the *Laozi* as being “...more ornamental than functional.” On the other hand, the *Laozi* “...stands for the authoritative spokesman of traditional Taoism.” In this case conflating authority of text, attributed speaker and presumed affiliation. Setting aside the question of if there was a “traditional Taoism”, Le Blanc does highlight that *Laozi* plays an important role not just as a quoted authority, but also in the way it informs the themes and worldview of the *Huainanzi* as a whole.

Huainanzi as a whole was the product of an elite culture of experts gathered together at the court of Huainan, under the direction of the imperial family member Liu An. The *Huainanzi* was written with a court audience in mind, most particularly the imperial family and the ruler, during a period when, according to historical records, materials related to *Laozi* were enjoying a high popularity in the court. From this historical standpoint, I would like to suggest that the *Huainanzi* was authored in an environment where connections with *Laozi* parallels and ideas connected with it enjoyed an unusual level of prestige and that the decision to include and shape “Dao Ying” around *Laozi* parallels may in part have been influenced by the impact of this prestige both on the authors/compilers themselves, and on the resonance they may have viewed associations with the name *Laozi* or quotations of *Laozi* parallels as having with their intended audience.²⁸⁷

Second, we will review the role *Laozi* parallels and named references played in the *Huainanzi* as a whole. This section will discuss how themes now found in *Laozi* served as an inspiration for some of the key themes of *Huainanzi*, yet “Laozi” is relatively infrequently cited by name or even directly quoted. The intent of this section is to suggest that, while themes associated with *Laozi* were influential for the *Huainanzi* authors, the

²⁸⁷ In many ways this is similar to the observations Sarah Queen has made on the composition of the *Chunqiu Fanlu*, portions of which may have been composed around the same time as the composition of the *Huainanzi*. She says of Dong Zhongshu, the attributed author of the text: “He maintained that the *Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu)* could resolve Qin excesses and endeavored to explicate how and why the text was relevant, indeed indispensable to the creation of an alternative social, political and religious culture for the Han.” Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*, 7.

constituent passages and name “Laozi” play a very different role in the “Dao Ying” chapter than they do anywhere else.

Third, this chapter will address the format of “Dao Ying”. I will give an overview of the passages to suggest that quotations in “Dao Ying” were chosen and sequenced to support the arguments of “Dao Ying”, rather than to follow the structure of the source in whatever *Laozi* collection the authors were drawing on. From this observation I will argue that the “Dao Ying” authors were not intending a precise exegesis of a perfect text, but were rather interested in applying passages to support a project of persuasion or education.

Finally, this chapter will examine the content of the passages in “Dao Ying”, identifying thematic elements, and how those elements are linked to quotations of *Laozi* parallels. My intention is to establish the central concerns of “Dao Ying” and the vision of *Laozi* which it applies in its arguments. Understanding the position of “Dao Ying” will help not only in analysis of its own position on *Laozi*, but will also become useful when making comparisons with materials found in *Hanfeizi* and elsewhere.

My ultimate goal is to suggest that “Dao Ying” was written to take the *Huainanzi*’s larger vision of a ruler governing practically and responsively from a foundation of self-cultivation, and frame that vision in terms of a source that resonated with a prospective court audience: *Laozi*, as it was at the time. In this sense, “Dao Ying” recognizes the *Laozi* parallels and the explicit citations it presents as a source of authority in the sense that it is an important common ground of communication that harmonizes well with the larger message of the *Huainanzi*, and was appealing to a prospective audience. Unlike an

interlinear commentary that presents itself as an exegetical project completely structured around the ordering of passages found in its source, “*Dao Ying*” does not subordinate its structure to the ordering of any known *Laozi* collection, instead picking parts of passages that support its own arguments.²⁸⁸ As such it sits in-between the view of texts as a resource for teachers to apply freely, and the view of texts as perfect structures that can be accessed only through interpreters. In other words, in a setting of relatively open discussion and exchange of ideas during the reigns of Wen and Jing, *Laozi* was one of a number of texts that enjoyed a particular relevance, in some ways as much or even more than the eventual five or six texts that later would be codified as “*jing*” through imperial patronage. Thus, the *Huainanzi* was created in a context where *Laozi*, in whatever form it took at that time, was important and the authors at Huainan responded to this context.²⁸⁹

Historical Context

Much can be said about early Han history and the circumstances in which the *Huainanzi* was created. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on just two primary aspects of that context: first, the situation of the imperial court, where there was interest

²⁸⁸ It is worth noting again that the Mawangdui manuscripts, with their ordering of passages, were sealed in a tomb nearly three decades before Liu An presented the *Huainanzi* to the throne. Even though these cannot themselves be said to be the same as the received *Laozi*, they do represent the existence of larger collections of passages that were in circulation at the time.

²⁸⁹ In a sense, this portion of the work is responding to the question Sarah Queen raises in the sixth note in her study of “*Dao Ying*”, Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 203. : “Why *Huainanzi* 12 in some sense canonizes *Laozi* is a question worthy of further investigation. Such an investigation might consider such factors as the usages and non-usages of *Laozi* across the text, trends in court patronage, and political issues that may have generated interest. Given the length and profundity of *Huainanzi*, it was likely composed over a number of years in the decade prior to emperor Wu’s accession, in 141 BCE. The historical records suggest that *Laozi* was patronized by key political figures at the central court during these same years. It may very well be that the compilation of *Huainanzi* 12 was generated by such factors, although it would be difficult to prove, given the evidence.”

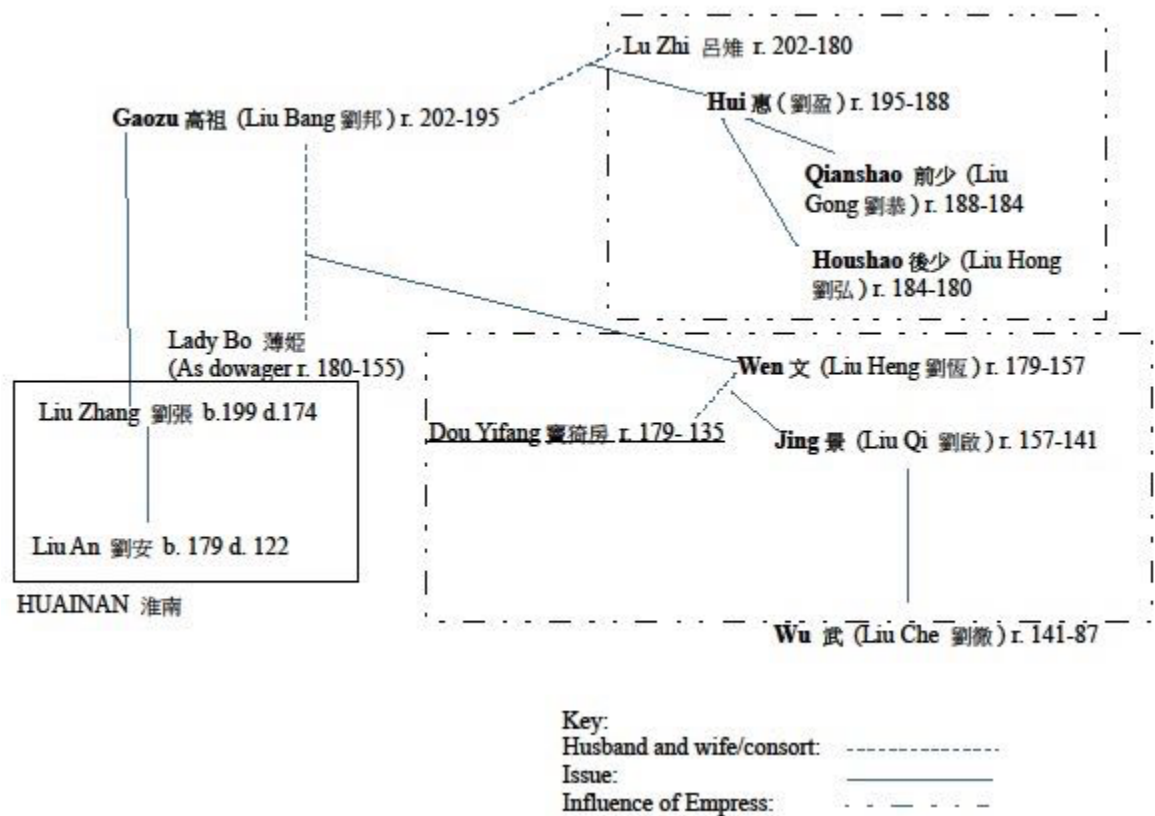
in *Laozi*, most prominently in the person of the Empress Dou (r. 179-157 BCE, as Dowager r. 157-135). Given that her immediate predecessor, Empress Dowager Lu, had secured immense power for herself, there is reason to believe that the interests of an Empress would have influenced many members of the court. Second, the scholars who gathered together at the court of Huainan²⁹⁰ to create the *Huainanzi* were later remembered as depicting themselves as masters of “techniques of the Dao” and, to some extent, the *Laozi*. The conditions of both imperial court and Huainan together describe a situation where a claim to mastery of themes associated with *Laozi* would have given a measure of power and authority.²⁹¹ This section will suggest that the “Dao Ying” chapter may have been written both to legitimate the *Huainanzi*’s claim to mastery of the themes and techniques present in the passages parallel with *Laozi* that it quotes, and also to further demonstrate *Laozi*’s broad practical applicability to governance. One way of reading the chapter is as an assertion to the legitimate and authoritative interpretation of *Laozi*, as well as an assertion that *Laozi* could play a central role in guiding rulers. Making both of these assertions would in turn lend legitimacy to the *Huainanzi*’s project as a whole, at least in the eyes of those who were convinced of the *Laozi*’s efficacy.

Han Family Tree

²⁹⁰ Huainan, at times described as a “state”, was one of many territories under Han imperial rule. The “king” of Huainan at this time, Liu An, was a member of the imperial family and answered to the imperial court.

²⁹¹ There are other instances in the *Shiji* where persons are identified as having an interest in the works of *Laozi*. However, I do not wish to make a sweeping argument about the existence of a single, coherent faction with clearly articulated ideals. Hence, I focus on what I view the most clearly identifiable key players in this story.

The Han imperial family tree was somewhat complicated. Below is a graphical representation of the members of the family both in the imperial court and in the court of Huainan. A cursory glance at this tree reveals that while the Han was generally stable, at least in comparison with the preceding periods of disunity and conflict, the imperial court featured complex succession politics. Powerful empresses, in particular Empress Lu and to a lesser extent her successor, Empress Dou, exerted influence over multiple generations of rulers.



Early Han History

The Han began with a rebellion and military victory. Following the unification of the Warring States under the Qin, that dynasty collapsed shortly after the death of its founder. After a relatively brief period of conflict, Liu Bang, henceforth known as Emperor Gaozu, successfully established the Han in 206 BCE. Carefully balancing central control in the imperial court with local lords, often members of the imperial family, the new imperial system brought with it a stability that had been unknown for centuries.²⁹² Even after Gaozu's death in 195, the system did not collapse.

However, following Gaozu's death, the Empress Lu became increasingly involved in imperial politics. She wielded the influence she held over her son, Emperor Hui, to punish her rivals and give positions of power to her relatives in the Lu clan. When Emperor Hui died in 188, a child was named heir, while in effect Empress Lu took full control of the empire and continued to consolidate the family's power. At her death in 180, there was uncertainty as to who would succeed the throne, and which family, the Liu or the Lu, would hold power.²⁹³

Key officials sought out the then king of Dai, a son of Emperor Gaozu and brother of Emperor Hui, who had survived largely because his mother was not one of Gaozu's

²⁹² The source of much of our historical information on the early Han comes from the *Shiji*, begun by Sima Tan and authored in large part by his son, Sima Qian. The *Shiji* represents history in a manner that differs at many points from a modern understanding. For one, the *Shiji* often contains records of historic figures giving speeches that the author would have had no means of hearing. As such, the *Shiji* often records what the author thought would have been the most appropriate thing to have been said, even in situations where still living witnesses were likely consulted. A second issue of note is that the history was heavily affected by the political climate of the time. Sima Qian was writing during the reign of Emperor Wu, and had to be careful not to include anything that might have been offensive to the powerful ruler. Because of these and other factors, we should keep in mind that the *Shiji* does not present a historical account by modern standards. However, it does contain some useful points of note. In this case, Gaozu's biography in the *Shiji* constitutes one of the richest sources for information on the ruler, even if the text was strongly biased toward depicting him favorably. 《史記·高祖本紀》 ch. 8

²⁹³ 《史記·呂太后本紀》 ch. 9

favorites. In 179, he ascended to the throne as Emperor Wen, along with his wife the Empress Dou.²⁹⁴

Emperor Wen's reign was relatively stable, meeting with great praise from the Grand Historian. At the emperor's death in 157, power transferred peacefully to his son, Emperor Jing. His reign was marred in 154 when seven rulers of states led their troops in armed rebellion against the central court. Although the rebellion was quashed, it left the specter of dissension behind.²⁹⁵ When Emperor Jing died in 141, the throne passed peacefully to his son, the Emperor Wu.

The most prominent supporter of the *Laozi* at the Han court appears to have been the Empress Dou (d. 135 BCE), the wife of Emperor Wen (r. 179-157 BCE), mother of Emperor Jing (r. 157-141 BCE) and grandmother of Emperor Wu (r. 141-87 BCE). She exerted influence over the reigns of her husband and son, an influence that Emperor Wu had to struggle to distance himself from.

Throughout the reigns of Wen and Jing, the Empress Dou remained an influential figure. Out of a desire to not repeat the rise of Empress Lu, court officials appear to have taken measures to reduce the influence of her family and their ability to exert power. However, with such a powerful precedent, it seems likely that Empress Dou and her supporters would have been well aware of the limits and possibilities of her position. One way in which she appears to have exerted influence is over the intellectual climate of the court. Her biography in the *Shiji* concludes with the following statement:

²⁹⁴ 《史記·孝文本紀》 ch. 10

²⁹⁵ 《史記·孝景本紀》 ch. 11

竇太后好黃帝、老子言，帝及太子諸竇不得不讀《黃帝》、《老子》，尊其術

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Dowager Empress Dou enjoyed the words of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, and so Emperor Wen and the crown prince (future Emperor Jing) had to read “The Yellow Emperor” and “Laozi” and honor their techniques.

The *Shiji* elsewhere records the dowager empress’s preference for *Laozi* over the *ru* teachings that would become central during the reign of her grandson:

太皇竇太后好老子言，不說儒術...²⁹⁷

Dowager Empress Dou enjoyed the words of Laozi, and would not speak of the *ru* techniques...

Another passage even records her pushing the text of the *Laozi* on other members of court:

竇太后好《老子》書，召轅固生問《老子》書。固曰：「此是家人言耳。」太后怒曰：「安得司空城旦書乎？」乃使固入圈刺豕。²⁹⁸

Dowager Empress Dou enjoyed the book *Laozi*, and summoned Yuan Gu to ask him about the book (note: Yuan Gu was known as founder of the Qi tradition on the *Odes*). Gu said: “This is just the words of a school partisan” (*jia ren yan* 家人言) The Empress raged, replying: “Now how can I get a copy of the Minister of Work’s book of punishments?” She then had him thrown in a pen to fight a boar.

Yuan Gu’s experience underscores another facet of Empress Dou’s influence: it was actually hazardous to disagree with her. In the end he only survived the incident because of Emperor Jing’s intercession. This is not to say that the Empress’s decision was entire capricious. In addition to her noted fondness for *Laozi*, the Dowager Empress Dou may

²⁹⁶ Chant *Shiji* 49.16

²⁹⁷ CHANT *Shiji* 121.8

²⁹⁸ CHANT *Shiji* 121.11

also have reacted in the way she did due to political undercurrents. Yuan Gu was known for his knowledge of the *Odes*, and the authority they gave him may have posed a threat to the empress and her family's position. She also appears to have dealt harshly with advocates of what might be deemed "Ruist" positions.²⁹⁹ It was not until approximately the time of her death that the advocates of these *ru* texts gained the positions of special erudites and greater prominence in court.

Perhaps it is reasonable to say then that anyone intending to present a case for a political policy during the lifetime of Dowager Empress Dou would have had to take into account her preference for the *Laozi* in shaping their arguments.

The Court Of Huainan And The Early Han

Such was the historical context at court that the *Huainanzi* developed in. As a text devoted in many parts to techniques of governance, the *Huainanzi* would have had to respond to situations and conditions at the imperial court. Additionally, the *Huainanzi* was influenced by the more local context of events at the court of Huainan.

The *Huainanzi* is a multi-vocal text, comprised of the writings of a group of authors who gathered together in the court of Huainan 淮南. The prince of Huainan, Liu An 劉安 (179-122 BCE), was the grandson of the Han founder, and a prominent supporter of intellectual pursuits.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 348.

³⁰⁰ As noted above, much of the historical record of this time period was extremely biased because of the environment it was written in. Liu An presents a particularly clear case, as he was accused of treason in 122 BCE, leading to an emphasis on this accusation in his biographies. That said, this is still the historical record we are left with, and we must piece together the story as best we can from what we have.

Scholars in Huainan engaged in inquiry ranging from forms of governance, to cosmology, rhetoric to self-cultivation techniques and many others. Many of these inquiries were written down, together with parts of other pre-existing documents the scholars brought together. One of the results was the *Huainanzi*.³⁰¹

In 139 BCE, Liu An presented the *Huainanzi* to Emperor Wu, who had recently ascended to the throne in 141. From one perspective, the presentation was a crowning moment for the project Liu An had begun years before: at last he could pass on the results of his inquiries on governance to a young and potentially impressionable new leader. From another perspective, Liu An may have been giving up a manual of rulership he had intended to use himself, had he succeeded to the throne.³⁰² In either case, the presentation supplies us with a firm date for the completion of the *Huainanzi* and places the text firmly in the context of debates over the best practices of rulership held in the imperial court.³⁰³

Unfortunately for Liu An, the *Huainanzi* did not ensure his position as an adviser to Emperor Wu. Within seventeen years, Liu An was accused of treason, and was forced to

For a thorough treatment of the story of Liu An, and a glimpse at the bias present in the historical record see Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). (This work will be discussed at greater length below) For the histories themselves, consult 《史記·淮南衡山列傳》 *Shiji* ch. 92 and 《漢書·淮南衡山濟北王傳第十四》 *Hanshu* ch 44.

³⁰¹ Another result may have been the compilation of the *Zhuangzi*. Harold Roth and Esther Klein have argued for Huainan as the origin of the pre Guo Xiang *Zhuangzi*.

See Harold D. Roth, "Who Compiled the Chuang-Tzu?," in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham*, ed. Henry Rosemont (Lasalle IL: Open Court, 1991), 79–128. Esther Klein, "Were There 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*," *T'oung Pao* 96, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 299–369.

³⁰² This is a theory presented in the introduction to Major et al., *The Huainanzi*

³⁰³ Of course, there is some debate over whether the *Huainanzi* continued development even after the presentation to the throne. At the very least, the presentation gives us a date for the existence of an at least mostly complete *Huainanzi*. For a discussion on the issues of *Huainanzi* transmission during the Han, see Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-Nan Tzu*, 55–58.

commit suicide. The histories make the case that he was plotting to overthrow the emperor.³⁰⁴ There is a possibility that the charge of treason was fabricated and Liu An was eliminated in part because of his claim to authority as an expert on governance and self-cultivation exemplified in the *Huainanzi*.³⁰⁵ The death of Liu An marked the end of the intellectual center he had formed, and in turn the end of a community exploring the ideas recorded in the *Huainanzi*.

When Gao You (高誘 c. 160-220 CE) wrote the preface to his commentary on the *Huainanzi*, he made note of eight “masters of esoteric techniques”³⁰⁶ (方術之士) who had worked together with Liu An to compile the *Huainanzi*:

天下方術之士多往歸焉。于是遂與蘇飛、李尚、左吳、田由、雷被、毛被、伍被、晉昌等八人，及諸儒大山、小山之徒，共講論道德，總統仁義，而著此書。其旨近老子淡泊無為，蹈虛守靜，出入經道。³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ For a discussion supporting the histories’ charge of treason, presenting a portrait of Liu An as a scheming egoist seeking to use the techniques in *Huainanzi* to gain power, see Benjamin E. Wallacker, “Liu an, Second King of Huai-Nan,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (1972): 36–51.

³⁰⁵ For a critical view of the account of treason may have been exaggerated for the political gain of certain actors at court see Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority*.

At its core, Vankeerberghen’s study argues that Liu An became a threat to the imperial center because he made a claim to a moral authority, articulated in the *Huainanzi*. During the reign of Emperor Wu, in Vankeerberghen’s view, the essential conflict was not between schools of thought such as “Daoists” and “Confucians” but was instead a tension between an older culture of intellectual openness and a new movement to centralize control of ideas. Part of this centralization entailed the limiting of acceptable texts to the five or six “*Jing*” that received official sponsorship during Emperor Wu’s reign. This consolidation of textual authority was situated in a larger political struggle where powerful ministers and factions sought to establish their own advantage in court, and one way of doing so was through asserting the textual authorities that supported their own position. In the end, Vankeerberghen’s book argues that Liu An’s fall from grace coincided with the consolidation of power and authority that raised a few key officials and the texts that supported them into a position of prominence, while simultaneously degrading the status of all other texts and their supporters. Especially suspect in this consolidation of authority were works that sought to synthesize the many ideas of earlier periods into a coherent new pattern, like the *Huainanzi*.

³⁰⁶ This terminology from Roth’s translation of this passage, from which this translation has been adapted. See Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-Nan Tzu*, 21.

³⁰⁷ CHANT 《全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文·淮南子敘》(J. 87.3 “高誘”)

Many of the world's masters of esoteric techniques came [to Huainan]. Thus, [Liu An] together with the eight [masters] Su Fei, Li Shang, Zuo Wu, Tian You, Lei Bei,³⁰⁸ Mao Bei, Wu Bei, Jin Chang and others, with all the Ru of the “great mountain” and the students of the “small mountain” together discussed the Dao and De, systematized Ren and Yi, and compiled this text [the *Huainanzi*]. Their purpose was close to the *Laozi*'s simplicity and non-action, to tread in emptiness and maintain stillness, with going and coming [following the] principles of Dao.³⁰⁹

Little information has survived on most of the eight listed in Gao You's preface, except in cases where they became involved in court cases filed against Liu An. For example, Lei Bei is mostly remembered for his role in a case against Liu An. Lei Bei was known for his skill with the sword and acted as fencing instructor for the Huainan heir, Liu Qian. Lei Bei accidentally struck the heir during practice, leading to his dismissal from the Huainan court and alleged subsequent dismissal from the imperial army through the influence of Liu Qian.³¹⁰ Lei Bei took the matter to a court in Chang'an, and the incident was used as legal fodder for Liu An's enemies in the imperial court to attack him.³¹¹

The bias of Han historians toward only recording information related to the case against Liu An is even more apparent in the sheer volume of information recorded on another of the eight, Wu Bei. The histories primarily remember Wu Bei as a co-conspirator with Liu An, devising a plan to overthrow the Han. Eventually, Wu Bei

³⁰⁸ Vankeerberghen gives the pronunciation for the character 被 in these three names as “Bi” rather than “Bei”. See Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority*.

³⁰⁹ Translated while consulting the translation on Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 8.

³¹⁰ This story is found in the *Hanshu*, chapter 44, the 19th paragraph in the CHANT edition. See CHANT 《漢書·淮南衡山濟北王傳第十四》 *Hanshu* 44.19

³¹¹ Vankeerberghen sees this as one of a series of legal attacks levied against Liu An. See her account of the incident in Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim to Moral Authority*, 27–28.

“confessed”³¹² these crimes and was used as evidence in the charge of treason against Liu An.³¹³ Even mention of the writings Wu Bei worked on with other members of the court are cast in a conspiratorial light, as in this example from the *Lunheng*:

伍被之屬，充滿殿堂，作道術之書，發怪奇之文，合景亂首，八公之傳欲示神奇，若得道之狀。道終不成，效驗不立，乃與伍被謀為反事，事覺自殺。

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Those like Wu Bei filled the court [of Huainan] writing book(s) on the techniques of the Dao, publishing strange writings, mixing up circumstances and confusing themselves. The comments of the Eight Masters were meant to show [their] miraculous [insight], as though they were in a state of having attained the Dao. But in the end, they did not attain the Dao, their effectiveness did not stand up to examination, and with Wu Bei they plotted revolt. When the plan was discovered, they committed suicide.

The *Lunheng*'s account does not doubt that the masters gathered at Huainan were interested in creating “book(s) on the techniques of the Dao” (道術之書), but rather that the masters were actually capable of accomplishing that goal.³¹⁵ The historians' account appears to be that the Huainan court attempted to position itself as a collection of experts on the Dao, but failed to gain power thereby and so decided to revolt. The criticism is not that they failed because they were interested in the Dao, but that they were incapable in

³¹² There is reason to be suspicious of Wu Bei's testimony under pressure. See Vankeerberghen, 74–76.

³¹³ The sources for this story are extensive. For major accounts of the story see:

CHANT 《史記·淮南衡山列傳第五十八》 (92.18-24)

《漢書·淮南衡山濟北王傳第十四》 (44.22-23)

《漢書·蒯伍江息夫傳第十五》 (45.11-17, 39)

《前漢紀·前漢孝武帝紀三卷第十二》 (12.55-59)

And other places in passing

³¹⁴ CHANT 《論衡·道虛篇》 (24.14)

³¹⁵ Elsewhere, the *Lunheng* uses a nearly identical phrasing to discuss the intentions of Wu Bei and Zuo Wu. Ultimately, it criticizes their work on the *Huainanzi*'s writings on geography as inadequate. See 《論衡·談天篇》 (31.8)

their realization of the Dao, and thus were inauthentic representatives of it. In other words, the significance of the “techniques of the Dao” was not in dispute, only the authenticity of the Huainan authors’ claims to authority as representatives of those techniques was called into question.

Potentially, the *Huainanzi* was intended just as much for an audience of its authors as for the imperial court. If the techniques described in the *Huainanzi* were as potent as claimed they would provide an invaluable tool for someone hoping to rule, possibly even Liu An himself.³¹⁶ Certainly, this would be a strong possibility if Liu An and his co-authors believed fully in their own techniques. While it does not seem implausible that Liu An believed in the value of his own text, the histories tend to emphasize the potential influence claims to mastery of the “techniques of the Dao” could have in the court. We must thus be aware of the potential political motivation that could have lain behind appeals to the authority of the Dao and the *Laozi*.

In review, we have on the one hand the imperial court with the influential Empress Dou, who was fascinated with *Laozi*, and her supporters who risked physical harm if they refused to express respect for *Laozi*. On the other hand, we have the court of Huainan, where Liu An and his co-authors sought to create comprehensive works on the “techniques of the Dao” and all the authority those techniques would bring. Even through

³¹⁶ Wallacker makes the argument that the *Huainanzi* represents Liu An’s vision of himself as a potential, efficacious ruler quite strongly:

“The essays of the *Huai-nan tzu* present a faithful image, I submit, of Liu An’s view of himself and his relationship with the world. We find pictured in the book the consummate Taoist, an ideal man endowed with that sublime omniscience-omnipotence which gives recognition and realization to the great moving unity underlying the world’s bewildering particularity.”

Benjamin E. Wallacker, “Liu an, Second King of Huai-Nan,” 39.

However, Wallacker emphasizes the military side of the *Huainanzi* and its techniques, potentially casting the text and Liu An in too stark a light.

the biased lens of the Han historians, it is clear that a claim of understanding the “techniques of the Dao” or even *Laozi* would have given power and influence, just as ultimately expertise in the “Five *Jing*” did.

Regardless of whether the *Huainanzi* authors themselves believed in the “techniques of the Dao” or the themes of *Laozi* (though there is good reason to believe they did), from a purely political standpoint their claim to expertise would have resonated with the Empress Dou and her supporters. Furthermore, it would also have been expedient for the *Huainanzi* authors to attempt to convince others in court that the *Laozi* and the Dao were significant.

Role Of Laozi In The Huainanzi

The above exploration of historical context has shown that *Laozi* played a significant role in discussions both in the imperial court and in the local court of Huainan. Next we turn to the question of how much influence *Laozi* had on the content of the *Huainanzi*. As we will see, some of the foundational themes of *Huainanzi* owe much to *Laozi*.

However, there is a question of in what manner the *Huainanzi* is indebted to *Laozi*. Specifically, in the following discussion I will distinguish between an indebtedness to the themes and content of *Laozi* from an indebtedness to explicit quotations or references to the name of *Laozi*. I will argue that, while the *Huainanzi* as a whole draws on the themes of *Laozi*, in the context of the text as a whole, “Dao Ying” is unusual in its invocation of quotations from and the name of *Laozi*. I believe this difference in emphasis is suggestive

of “Dao Ying” being intended for a different use, and possibly different audience than the *Huainanzi* as a whole.

Influence On Thought

The *Huainanzi* owes much to the themes now found in *Laozi*. One of the clearest connections *Huainanzi* shows to *Laozi* themes, outside of the twelfth chapter, “Dao Ying” which will be treated at greater length further on, is in the first chapter, “Yuan Dao”. This chapter contains rhapsodies on the cosmic scope of the Dao, often using language reminiscent of *Laozi*.³¹⁷ For example, the second passage contains the phrases:

已彫已琢，還反於樸。無為為之而合于道，無為言之而通乎德³¹⁸

Both carved and polished,

They returned to the Unhewn (*pu* 樸).

They acted non-actively (*wuwei* 無為) and were united with the Way (*Dao* 道).

They spoke non-actively and were suffused by its Potency (*de* 德).³¹⁹

The chapter utilizes the terms *pu*, *wuwei*, *Dao* and *de* together in close proximity. All of these terms have close associations with materials in the received *Laozi* and the intention appears to be to emphasize this association. The ninth passage even contains what may be a gloss of *Laozi*’s famous notions of *wuwei er wu buwei* “Not acting yet leaving nothing undone” and *wuwei er wu buzhi* “Not acting yet leaving nothing ungoverned”

³¹⁷ We may note here that this does not necessarily indicate the existence of a complete *Laozi* by the standards of the received *Laozi*. One possibility is that these passages were drawing on shorter collections that later became associated with said figure. On the other hand, this does not negate the possibility that there may have been larger collections more closely resembling, but not identical to the received *Laozi* from which the *Huainanzi* authors were drawing.

³¹⁸ CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.3

³¹⁹ Roth(trans.) in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, p.50.

是故聖人內修其本，而不外飾其末，保其精神，偃其智故，漠然無為而無不為也，澹然無治（也）而無不治也。所謂無為者，不先物為也；所謂〔無〕不為者，因物之所為〔也〕。所謂無治者，不易自然也；所謂無不治者，因物之相然也。³²⁰

Sages internally cultivate their root [of the Way within them]
And do not externally adorn themselves with its branches.
They protect their Quintessential Spirit
And dispense with wisdom and precedent.
In stillness they take no deliberate action, yet there is nothing left undone.
In tranquility they do not try to govern, but nothing is left ungoverned.
What we call “no deliberate action” is to not anticipate the activity of things.
What we call “nothing left undone” means to adapt to what things have [already] done
What we call “to not govern” means to not change how things are naturally so.
What we call “nothing left ungoverned” means to adapt to how things are mutually so.³²¹

As with the previous passage, the *Huainanzi* authors appear invested in the terminology of *Laozi*, in this passage going so far as to provide their own explanation of how to apply those terms. Numerous other passages throughout “Yuan Dao” take a similar approach, subtly referencing *Laozi* passages through key terms or short phrases, and tying those references into the larger themes of the *Huainanzi*.

Part of the reason for this may have been a shift in scope. While the *Laozi* as we know it advocates for small states and simple societies, the *Huainanzi* acknowledges and embraces what was already the reality of a complex imperial system. As a whole, the *Huainanzi* draws on a wide range of ideas, mixing them together to produce a single vision of governance. This mixing has led to much confusion over how to classify the

³²⁰ CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.14

³²¹ Roth (trans.) in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 59.

Huainanzi and its outlook on the world. We will not pursue the question of classification further at this juncture, leaving that for another discussion. However, it is suggestive that *Laozi* references occupy a significant place in the very first chapter, indicating that it played a key role in the vision the *Huainanzi* authors were attempting to outline.³²² This does not mean that the *Huainanzi* owed its full allegiance to either the text of *Laozi* or to its mythical sagely author. It does not arrange itself like the *Lunyu* or *Mengzi* that consistently reference the sagely figures upon which they are based, nor even like the received *Wenzi* a text that shares many parallels with *Huainanzi* but begins the majority of its passages with the phrase “Laozi said”. Nor yet does *Huainanzi* structure itself on the back of a pre-existing source as a commentary like the *Zuozhuan*. Instead, the *Huainanzi* makes use of each of the sources from which it borrows, arranging them according to its own logic, both in the overall structure of the text, and, as we will see, even in the chapter “Dao Ying” that most explicitly and consistently references *Laozi*.

Appearances By Name

Is the name of *Laozi* given equal weight throughout the *Huainanzi*? Did the *Huainanzi* value *Laozi* because it was the creation of a sagely exemplar? The name “Lao Dan”, which most clearly identifies a sense of a person as author of the *Laozi*, appears only three times in the *Huainanzi*. Once in chapter 1, where it marks off a quotation from

³²² Harold Roth has noted the significant influence of the *Laozi* on “Yuan Dao” and elsewhere in the *Huainanzi* in Harold D. Roth, “Daoist Inner Cultivation and the Textual Structure of the *Huainanzi*,” in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, ed. Michael J. Puett and Sarah A. Queen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 40–82.

Laozi 43.³²³ Once, in chapter 12, as we will see, where it also introduces a quotation of a parallel with the received *Laozi*. Finally, Lao Dan appears once in chapter 19, in association with a “Nanrong Chou” (南榮疇), which may be an alternate spelling of the Nanrong Chu (南榮瞿) who travels to meet Lao Dan in *Zhuangzi* 23.³²⁴ From these three associations we can tell that, to the *Huainanzi* compilers of the chapters in which his name appears, Lao Dan was viewed as the originator of the *Laozi* parallels he is credited with, and also possibly acts as a teacher and lineage head as he does in the story in *Zhuangzi* 23.

The term “Laozi” appears rarely outside of *Huainanzi* 12, a total of five times in four chapters. It appears once in chapter 10, where it discusses a person, Laozi, who knew how to keep to softness.³²⁵ It appears again twice in 11, where it is associated with a brief quotation from *Laozi* 2,³²⁶ and again where it quotes from *Laozi* 60, and compares this statement to quotations taken from Duke Ping, Kongzi, Hanzi and Mizi and more, making it seem as though Laozi is here taken to be a person.³²⁷ “Laozi” appears again in chapter 14, introducing a quotation from *Laozi* 50 in a manner similar to the way quotations are introduced in chapter 12.³²⁸ Lastly, it appears in chapter 18 twice, once introducing a quotation found in *Laozi* 62³²⁹ again following a similar pattern (but without “thus” *gu* 故) to introduce a quotation from *Laozi* 44.³³⁰

³²³ CHANT *Huainanzi* 1.18

³²⁴ CHANT *Huainanzi* 19.16

³²⁵ CHANT *Huainanzi* 10.58

³²⁶ CHANT *Huainanzi* 11.6

³²⁷ CHANT *Huainanzi* 11.25

³²⁸ CHANT *Huainanzi* 14.33

³²⁹ CHANT *Huainanzi* 18.28

³³⁰ CHANT *Huainanzi* 18.35

In comparison, the term “Zhuangzi” appears three times, in chapters 11, 12 and 19. Taken from the perspective of sheer frequency of appearance, *Laozi* and its sagely supposed author do not seem to be held in significantly higher esteem than the *Zhuangzi* or its author, outside of chapter 12. Comparing again both of these texts/figures with other popular figures of the times, *Liezi* appears four times (once, in chapter 20, introducing a quote found now in *Liezi* ch 8, and also in *Hanfeizi* 21), *Mozi* 15 times, *Mengzi* only once. *Kongzi* appears 52 times, frequently as a character in stories, far more than any other thinker.³³¹ Again, there is little outside of chapter 12 to point to the status of the name “Laozi” in association with an authority much greater than any other thinker. Indeed, *Laozi* as a sage was far less popular than *Kongzi*.

What we may draw from this evidence is that, outside of its appearance as a cited source in chapter 12, the greatest value of *Laozi* lay not in the authority vested in either its integrity as a text nor in the wisdom of its attributed sagely author, even though the latter was at least slightly significant. Instead, it seems value was placed on the practical use of passages parallel with the received *Laozi*.

What about the use of passages throughout the *Huainanzi*? How frequent were they? Below is a table showing the number of times a *Laozi* parallel of at least four characters in length appears in each chapter of *Huainanzi*.

Interestingly this same *Laozi* quotation also appears in *Hanshiwaizhuan* (CHANT 9.16)

³³¹ For a detailed discussion of how the *Huainanzi* presents Confucius in these many passages, see Sarah A Queen, “Representations of Confucius in the *Huainanzi*,” in *Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, by Michael Puett and Sarah A Queen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 83–123

<i>Huainanzi</i>	# of quotations of <i>Laozi</i> parallels () is number with passages that appear multiple times in the received <i>Laozi</i> ³³²
1	10 (15)
2	1 (2)
3	1
4	0
5	0
6	2
7	3 (4)
8	2
9	5
10	1
11	3 (4)
12	92 (99)
13	2
14	1
15	1
16	1
17	1
18	5
19	1
20	0
21	0

While this counting method is not perfect (some four character phrases may not be an intentional quoting of *Laozi* parallels), it gives us an idea of how (in)frequently direct quotations of *Laozi* parallels appear outside of “*Dao Ying*” in the *Huainanzi*. Apart from

³³² For example, the phrase 去彼取此 occurs in *Laozi* 12, 38 and 72. The number outside of parenthesis would count this phrase only once instead of three times, while the one in parenthesis would count it three times.

chapters 1 and 12, no other chapter quotes *Laozi* parallels more than 5 times. Even chapter 1, which has 10 unique quotations (i.e. not counting a single phrase that appears multiple times in the received *Laozi*), falls far short of chapter 12. This suggests that the name “Laozi” or the explicit wording of *Laozi* parallels were not treated systematically as a source of authority, nor is there any meaningful way to say any chapter other than 12 is built around parallels with *Laozi*.³³³

I would speculate that “Dao Ying”, while not outside the realm of ideas espoused in the text as a whole, is special in the way it interacts with *Laozi* parallels. It may even have been composed as an independent essay, representative of the ideas of a specific compiler or compilers, which was later included in the *Huainanzi* because it filled a useful role as a representative of a commentarial genre that also harmonized with the overall themes of the *Huainanzi*.

Chapter 12 - An Overview

As Sarah Queen has argued in the introduction to her translation of the chapter³³⁴ and in her article devoted to the work,³³⁵ the 56 passages in the “Dao Ying” chapter take the form of a discursive anecdote followed with a capping quote, in 53 cases clearly cited as being from “*Laozi*”.³³⁶ Different from the commentaries found in *Hanfeizi*, which marks out quotes of *Laozi* parallels with anonymous citations, *Huainanzi* 12 references *Laozi* by

³³³ This is not to say that that ideas of the *Laozi* do not permeate the *Huainanzi*, simply that that it is the spirit and not the letter of the text of *Laozi* that carries weight

³³⁴ Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, pp 429-438.

³³⁵ Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12.”

³³⁶ One of these cases cites Lao Dan, another name for *Laozi*

name. The chapter even goes so far in one passage as to credit Lao Dan, the supposed author of the *Laozi* with a quotation parallel to a passage in the received *Laozi*. The anecdotes that accompany the quotations of *Laozi* parallels appear to be drawn from a number of other sources, most notably from the *Zhuangzi*. The final, summary chapter of *Huainanzi* even makes note of this pairing in its synopsis of “Dao Ying”:

《道應》者，攬掇遂事之蹤，追觀往古之跡，察禍福利害之反，考驗乎老、莊之術，而以合得失之勢者也。³³⁷

Responses of the Way

picks out and draws together the relics of past affairs,
pursues and surveys the traces of bygone antiquity,
and investigates the reversals of bad and good fortune, benefit and harm.
It tests and verifies them according to the techniques of Lao and Zhuang
Thus matching them to the trajectories of gain and loss.³³⁸

The synopsis effectively describes the format of “Dao Ying”: the anecdotes are in many cases historical, and parallels to *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are often found linked in the same passage. The view of the synopsis appears to be that “Dao Ying” processes historical anecdote and example through the lens of techniques associated with *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.³³⁹ However, this reading of the synopsis leaves us with some puzzles. If the

³³⁷ CHANT *Huainanzi* 21.13

³³⁸ Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 854.

³³⁹ The phrase “Techniques of Lao and Zhuang” appears especially problematic at first glance, as it seems to be the first reference to something called “Lao-Zhuang”, because of the associations that combination of characters has with the theories of a “philosophical school” of the same name. Roth has previously suggested that the two characters may in fact be the interpolation of a later editor, influenced by Wei-Jin ideas. See Harold D. Roth, “Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51, no. 2 (December 1, 1991): 604–5 note 17

On the other hand, other scholars see the appearance of this linkage as a crucial step in the development of the *Laozi*. Recently Yanaka Shinichi has written that that “Daoying” represents a final stage in the development of the *Laozi* as a classic. Specifically, that “Daoying”, like the *Huainanzi* as a whole, combines the ideas of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* together in a form known as “Lao-Zhuang”. In his reading this is a stage in the development of the *Laozi* away from being associated with “Huang-Lao” to becoming a

ideas of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are to hold center stage, why is the *Zhuangzi* cited by name only once, while the *Laozi* is credited 53 times? Similarly, as both *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are named in the synopsis and are depicted as the source of techniques for examining the past, why should we consider “*Dao Ying*” a commentary on *Laozi* and not on *Zhuangzi*, or even a commentary on the entire set of anecdotes, examined through the lens of credited *Laozi* parallels?

Typically studies of commentary look to how the intentions of the commentator affect the interpretation of the source. I would like to add to this methodology another consideration: the anticipated audience of the commentary. Here I suggest that examining the likely intended audience of “*Dao Ying*” will give us a better understanding of the commentary’s purpose, and why it is indeed a sort of commentary. In short, I will argue that “*Dao Ying*” presents the larger themes of the *Huainanzi* in terms that would be agreeable to a powerful faction in the Han court that was interested in *Laozi* during the formation stages of the *Huainanzi*. In this sense “*Dao Ying*” can be said to recognize *Laozi*, in both the parallels it quotes and in name, as a source of authority, because it was already a significant source for a specific court audience. While the *Zhuangzi*, such as it was at the time, clearly exerted a strong influence on the “*Dao Ying*” authors, perhaps it was not familiar to their intended audience, and so only *Laozi* was cited by name.³⁴⁰

“Lao-Zhuang” text. Yanaka Shinichi 谷中信一, *RōshiKyōtenka Katei No Kenkyū* 『老子』經典化過程の研究 p. 166.

³⁴⁰ I am indebted to Sarah Queen's insightful study of anecdote and argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12, which has greatly informed my discussion. Sarah A. Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 201–47.

Role in the *Huainanzi*

The *Huainanzi* is composed of 21 chapters. As the translation team of Major, Queen, Meyer and Roth have argued, the twenty-first and final chapter acts as a summary to the entire text and provides explanations of what purpose each chapter serves in the larger structure of the text.³⁴¹ Chapter 21 shows that the *Huainanzi* compilers were assembling a text according to a logic that they themselves could articulate. In essence, chapter 21 suggests that *Huainanzi* 12 is meant to trace the ebb and flow of fortune and success across a series of past examples, and show how those examples are explained by ideas from “Lao and Zhuang” - *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, or the attributed authors of those texts.³⁴² As we have seen, the chapter is composed of exactly these components – historical anecdote connected with quotations of *Laozi* parallels, as well as substantial source material parallel with *Zhuangzi*.

If little of the chapter is “original”, and is largely drawn from preexisting bodies of anecdotes and sayings, how should we understand the contributions of this chapter? Roth has understood the chapter as not providing new ideas relative to the *Huainanzi* as a whole, but merely expressing earlier ideas in a new format, saying: “These narratives do not introduce any new philosophical ideas into the text, but reinforce ones previously enunciated.”³⁴³

³⁴¹ Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 20–22.

³⁴² See quotation above.

³⁴³ Harold D Roth, “Huainanzi: The Pinnacle of Classical Daoist Syncretism,” in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, ed. Liu Xiaogan (Springer, 2015), 359.

On the other hand, the special contribution of the chapter may lie in the unique readings its format allows. Queen argues that this particular linkage of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* provided room for new readings in the text:

This handful of anecdotes shape the *Laozi* in important ways, orienting the reader to interpret key *Laozi* passages as specific references to the meditative techniques and mystical gnosis revered in the *Zhuangzi*. Conversely, glossing these anecdotes with *Laozi* citations invests the stories with potentially new nuances of meaning.³⁴⁴

Another reason why format may supersede ideas is the location of *Huainanzi* 12 in the text as a whole. The *Huainanzi* is divided into two major sections: what are called the “root” and the “branch” portions of the text, where the “root” chapters introduce the key ideas of the text and the “branch” chapters elaborate on these foundational ideas. While there is some debate over in which portion chapter 9 belongs,³⁴⁵ there is a consensus that chapter 12 fits squarely within the “branch” chapters that elaborate on the ideas of the text. One feature of the “branch” chapters appears to be a desire to communicate the foundational ideas of the text through a variety of literary genres. A possible explanation for the sudden appearance of a commentary-like format is that it represents one of a number of genres the *Huainanzi* compilers felt were significant means of communication, and thus should be included in the text.

The summary in chapter 21 also suggests that the *Huainanzi* compilers saw chapter 12 as serving a function of linking ideas with precedents – both those told in the semi-

³⁴⁴ Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 205.

³⁴⁵ Leblanc, Major, Queen and Meyer argue that it is a “branch” chapter while Lewis and Roth argue that it is a “root chapter” See Roth, “*Huainanzi*,” 346.

historical anecdotes used in the chapter and those presented as the ideas of past visionaries, as presented in quotations. The function of the chapter appears to not be providing definitions and explanations of ideas contained in the quoted material, but rather using the quotations as a form of persuasion on the merits of ideas defined elsewhere in the *Huainanzi*.

The desire to connect the presentation of a new set of ideas to precedent is by no means surprising. Especially so in early China where so many texts appeal to past exemplars to justify their claims and where reverence for the past was one of the fundamental pillars of the ideas attributed to Kongzi, by the early Han arguably the most significant thinker. What is unusual about *Huainanzi* 12 is the source it uses: while quotations from the *Shi* or the *Chunqiu* or even the *Yi* were the choice of many other surviving texts, the *Huainanzi* makes use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels. This has led many scholars to conclude that *Laozi* was some synonym of “canonical” to the *Huainanzi* compilers. The implication being that the *Huainanzi* places *Laozi* on a pedestal in a manner similar to the way other texts approach other “canonical” sources.

As noted before, the use of *Laozi* parallels as a means of persuasion or instruction forces us to tighten up definitions of what it means for *Laozi* parallels to be a source of authority beyond notions of its “canonicity”, an attribute that could only be officially conferred through imperial sanction. Acting as a source of authority in this context does not mean that *Laozi* parallels exist as a perfect source with answers to all questions, one that defines ideas and that the commentators are merely attempting to explain. Instead, it is serving the purpose of linking and extending the ideas of the *Huainanzi*. From the

perspective of the relationship between author and audience, the inclusion of quotations of *Laozi* parallels must be for one of two reasons: either the *Huainanzi* authors wish to introduce these quotations of *Laozi* parallels as an important source that the audience should pay attention in order to elaborate on the ideas of the *Huainanzi*, or *Laozi* or some configuration of its component passages was already important to the audience and thus served to support and carry the ideas of the *Huainanzi* to that audience.

Huainanzi 12 perhaps provides us a glimpse into a time where *Laozi* parallels held a persuasive power in court equal to or exceeding the “Five *Jing*”, and in this way held a sort of authority of parallel significance to those other texts – a “parallel classic”, to give one possible term.³⁴⁶ The authority of *Laozi*, as it is used in *Huainanzi*, can be linked to its status at court.

Manner of quoting Laozi

As mentioned previously, while “*Dao Ying*” contains many passages parallel with other sources, it is *Laozi* that is credited by name far more frequently than anything else. That said, there are many ways quotations are used in the chapter, including in the discursive anecdotal sections. Here is a breakdown of the different ways quotations appear:

1. X Said (X *yue* 曰) – A quotation in a dialog always follows after the verb *yue* 曰, “to say”. Even in situations where a character asks a question will use a construction such as *wen zhi yue* 問之曰 “asked, saying” (note, in Classical Chinese *wen* “to ask” can be

³⁴⁶ See the above historical discussion for the role of *Laozi* in the imperial court at this time.

used by itself to show asking a question). Other verbs indicating speech, such as *yan* 言 or *wei* 謂 are used in a manner similar to *wen*. The verb *yun* 云, also meaning “to speak” is completely absent. As such, in *Huainanzi* 12 the act of a person speaking is always represented with the verb *yue*, except for the cases mentioned in the next point.

2. What X called (*X zhi suo wei* 之所謂 / *suo wei* 所謂X) – appears only twice as a means of citation, once when marking a quotation from Lao Dan (12.4), once in marking a quotation from the *Guanzi* (12.51). (Though there are several instances where it follows a quotation, reinforcing the sense that the quotation is explained in the anecdote above). These also account for the only instances where quotations are marked by some form other than *yue*. The implication of *suo wei* could be marking the explanation of a specific technical term or phrase, rather than the presentation of an entire quotation. The Lao Dan passage glosses the phrase “A condition without a condition, an image of what is without materiality.” (*wuzhuang zhi zhuang, wuwu zhi xiang* 無狀之狀, 無物之象), what could be seen as a technical description. Similarly, the *Guanzi* quote states “taking the flight of an owl as a marking cord” (*xiao fei er wei sheng* 梟飛而維繩), which also bears the sense of a technical term for an activity rather than a detailed statement. It is also of note that *suo wei* appears the only time Lao Dan is mentioned instead of “Laozi” - the only time the origin of a *Laozi* parallel is definitively cited as a person.

3. Thus X says (*gu X yue* 故X曰) – marks nearly every time a quotation is introduced, and all but two of those instances are citing *Laozi*. The particle “thus” *gu* 故 often signals the linking of two originally unrelated passages, and can often be used to

identify these linked passages, like seams in clothing. In *Huainanzi* 12 *gu* is explicitly used for this purpose to signify the introduction of a quotation separate from an anecdote. It is never used within an anecdote in conjunction with someone speaking, and only appears connected with speech when a quotation is introduced. Throughout early Chinese texts, *gu yue* 故曰 appears to have been a common way to introduce a quotation from another source, and it is applied this way also in both *Hanfeizi* chapters on *Laozi*.

The first and third point above show that there was essentially no distinction between the act of speaking, as depicted in an anecdote, and the quotation of a text. When *Huainanzi* 12 gives an anecdote showing Kongzi conversing, he will “say” *yue*. When *Laozi* is quoted, it/he will *yue*. The only distinction made is when the term *gu* indicates that material from a new source is being introduced. Because the term *yue* is applied universally, there is essentially no way to tell if the intention is to cite a text or to quote a person, meaning that the status of *Laozi* as either an authoritative text or an authoritative sage (who happens to have his sayings recorded in a text) is indeterminate. Potentially this means two things: first, that we should be cautious in attributing a sense of textual authority to these passages, when the implication may in fact be indicating what the *Huainanzi* authors believed was the authority of a person. Second, that the use of *gu*, typically translated as “thus” or “therefore” does not absolutely mean that the quotation that follows it is meant to be a conclusion, a logical extension of what follows; *gu* might only be marking off a seam where two sources are stitched together.

Does Quotation Imply Recognition of Authority?

Let us now turn to why we tend to assume the use of a credited quotation implies that the *Huainanzi* is holding *Laozi* up as a source of authority, and why we should be cautious of those assumptions.

First, there is the matter that *Laozi* is quoted by name at the end of each passage. This seems to imply that *Laozi* is being given the final word, that the entirety of the passage above explains the quotation that follows and that the quotation in turn lends authority to the passage. However, when we look at interlinear commentaries that follow the order of the source text, the source precedes the explanatory passage. Because of its intended use as a form of persuasion, the anecdote-quote format does not need to observe the structure of a source text, and instead appears to be using the source for its own purposes.

Second, we may believe that because *Laozi* is cited while the *Zhuangzi* is not that this implies that *Laozi* was viewed as more authoritative to the authors of *Huainanzi* 12. As noted previously, another possibility is that the authors believed *Laozi* would be more familiar to a target audience than *Zhuangzi*, and thus *Laozi* is used out of an appeal to familiarity more than authority (though *Laozi* could also be authoritative for the intended audience).

Third, we might also believe that because text is cited that this implies that the *Huainanzi* is making an appeal to textual authority. But, as noted above, there is an ambiguity about whether the authority is placed in a written text or in the supposed author of that text. If the authority is placed in the person, then we must recognize that *Laozi* is one of a number of authorities noted in the chapter, including Kongzi (who, in anecdotes, provides quotations now found in the *Kongzi jia yu*), Tian Pian and others.

What separates *Laozi* from these other authorities is that, through the particle *gu*, it is consistently signified as a source different from that of the anecdote.

Lao and Zhuang

Meanwhile, the anecdotes found in the chapter also appear in a wide range of other sources, leading Sarah Queen to speculate that there may have been commonly circulated stories used in debate and instruction on which the *Huainanzi* and other texts drew. Most strikingly, “*Dao Ying*” frequently makes use of material now found in the *Zhuangzi* without identifying the source of these passages in all but a single instance (12.42), where the *Zhuangzi* is cited in the same way *Laozi* is in other passages.³⁴⁷ As noted above, the final, twenty-first chapter of the *Huainanzi* contains summaries of all the other chapters, and in its description of chapter 12, it specifically references the teachings of “Lao and Zhuang”, indicating that the *Huainanzi* authors were aware of the linkage they were making, and that it was a significant connection. The question arises, if commentary in part makes a classic,³⁴⁸ what significance is there in the differing treatment of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*?

Beginning with *Zhuangzi*, it is possible many of the passages were borrowed because they were not yet associated with a single text. Roth and Klein have proposed that the *Zhuangzi* was taking shape in the court of Huainan, with some of the same people

³⁴⁷ Indeed, using the same computer assisted methodology that uncovered 99 parallels with *Laozi* in “*Dao Ying*”, we find 74 parallels with *Zhuangzi*, ranging from short lines to entire anecdotes.

³⁴⁸ As discussed at length in chapter 3 of this project.

responsible for its compilation also involved in the creation of the *Huainanzi*.³⁴⁹ Under these circumstances, the uncredited passages from *Zhuangzi* may simply have been parts the editors had not yet formally placed in the *Zhuangzi*, while the single credited quotation may have already been formally associated with the text. Given that the single credited quotation is found in the first chapter of *Zhuangzi*, part of the oldest stratum of the text, there is some weight to this argument.³⁵⁰

But does that mean that the *Zhuangzi* passages are given no recognition when they are not mentioned by name? *Huainanzi* 21's description of "Lao and Zhuang" seems to indicate an awareness that much of chapter 12 is connected with *Zhuangzi*. Is it possible that the *Zhuangzi* was so familiar to the authors of the chapter that they would recognize the anecdotes from it without citation? Or perhaps the intention was to make these anecdotes relevant to someone who already held *Laozi* in high regard – such as officials in the court under the rule of Wen and Jing, where *Laozi* was practically required reading?³⁵¹

In other words, the authors of *Huainanzi* 12 could very likely have been more familiar with the *Zhuangzi* than they expected their audience to be, while *Laozi* would have been much more commonly known. The juxtaposition of uncredited *Zhuangzi*

³⁴⁹ See: Roth, "Who Compiled the Chuang-Tzu?" and Klein, "Were There 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States?"

Setting aside the problems of authorship, even the possibility that portions of the *Zhuangzi* were compiled in the court of Huainan has implications that the text was still in a formational state.

³⁵⁰ An alternative possibility also hinges on the stratification of the *Zhuangzi*. Is it possible the *Huainanzi* compilers viewed the earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi* as more authentic, or even as belonging to the original author of the text, while they viewed later strata as additions from succeeding generations? However, selections from *Zhuangzi* 1 appear several times throughout *Huainanzi* 12, and only once is it credited, indicating that position within the received *Zhuangzi* has little to do with the credit given a quotation.

³⁵¹ See the historical portions of this chapter.

anecdote with credited quotation of a *Laozi* parallel then serves the function of introducing the *Zhuangzi* to a new audience through a medium they were already familiar with.³⁵² In this scenario *Laozi* lends authority to *Zhuangzi* by being more familiar.

Another aspect to consider when determining what level of prestige is awarded to quotations of *Laozi* parallels is how quotations are generally used throughout *Huainanzi* 12. As noted above, *Zhuangzi* is given a single credited quote, as are *Shenzi* (12.50) and *Guanzi* (12.51). Furthermore 12.4 credits the quotation of a *Laozi* parallel to Lao Dan, the supposed author of the *Laozi*. The Lao Dan and the *Guanzi* quotations share in common that they are the only two to be signaled by the phrase “this is what xx meant by..” rather than the more common “thus xx says...”

What are we to make of the quotations of materials other than *Laozi* parallels? Were they placed in at the last minute, accidentally, in some process of editing because they were in the quote-anecdote form? Had an author mistaken them for quotations of *Laozi* parallels only later to be corrected in editing? Were there other instances of the anecdote-quote format that treated these other texts in the same way *Huainanzi* 12 treats *Laozi* parallels, and somehow this is all that survives of them? In any case, I do not feel that these few instances constitute an attempt at directed, systematic commentary on a text, in the way the chapter approaches *Laozi* parallels. Thus it seems that the *Huainanzi* still treats *Laozi* in a special category, either because it is trying to make a case for *Laozi* parallels as a source of authority, or because the anticipated audience of the chapter already held *Laozi* in high regard.

³⁵² Perhaps this is like the *yuyan* of *Zhuangzi* 27 that encourage borrowing a speaker to persuade an audience. See chapter 3 of this work.

Chart 4 Dao Ying Ordering of Passages

DY	LZ	Summary of Passage	Smaller Arcs	
1	2/56	Ineffability of Dao	Value of interpretation	Listening to advice
2	70	Interpretation and “subtle words”		
3	57	Practical, contextual language		
4	14	Words as raw materials		
5	9	Ruler yielding to people	Ruler remains cautious and humble, receptive and open even when successful	
6	28	Enduring Humiliation		
7	10	Contemplation as road to knowledge		
8	4	Remaining cautious even when successful		
9	73	Caution against aggression	Ruler knows when to value others and what to value in them.	
10	74	Delegation and seeking able advice		
11	28/39	Applying advice for great situations to small ones		
12	52	Understanding the bigger picture, according with custom		
13	9	Caution against reckless expansion		
14	25	Value strengths over minor flaws		
15	13	Yielding territory for well-being of people	Cultivating the self	
16	55/52	Caring first for life, setting aside the material		
17	54	Ordering the person first		

DY	LZ	Summary of Passage	Smaller Arcs	
18	1	Experience not transmitted in words		
19	36	Dangers of yielding the wrong sort of power		
20	5	Discouraging attachment to books and recorded knowledge	Understanding the value and danger of what is hidden and what is visible	
21	3	Too much comfort can be harmful		
22	22	What seems weak can become strong and signs are visible		
23	78	The weak can overcome the strong	Using the subtle and seemingly weak to overcome difficulty.	
24	22	A sign of just treatment can be better than battle		
25	45	Perceiving the essential, allowing mistakes in the superficial		
26	4	Dangers of change to further personal ambition	In dealing with ministers and the people, a ruler values the contribution each person brings, sets aside personal ambition, and behaves in a humble and trustworthy manner.	
27	78	Idealized humility/vulnerability of ruler and ministers		
28	78	Responsibility of ruler valuing state over personal		
29	27*	Use of seemingly useless abilities		
30	2	Leader recognizes contributions of others		
31	21/62	Trustworthiness (standing by one's word) better than battle		
32	7/44	Setting aside personal for larger goal		

DY	LZ	Summary of Passage	Smaller Arcs	
33	39	Loftiness leads to resentment, importance of humility		
34	23	Focus on one thing means ignoring others	Rulers must find and focus on the essential in every situation, not being swayed by externally imposed abstract labels.	
35	28	Contrasting rulers who know the essential with those who see the surface		
36	20	Ruler must always be cautious and aware of the people		
37	19	Abstract labels of virtue can justify criminal action		
38	27	Even a thief can be useful for a ruler		
39	10	Forgetting labels		
40	71	Not knowing limits leads to disaster		
41	52	Revealing too much leads to disaster		
42	ZZ 1	The vastness of the unknown		
43	12/38/72	Mysterious effects of sincerity trickle down		
44	43	<i>Shenming</i> permeates all		
45	43	State of formlessness		
46	47	Focusing on the far neglects the near		
47	27	Rule not through harshness, but openness and virtue	Rulers practice receptiveness to create and maintain a stable empire.	

DY	LZ	Summary of Passage	Smaller Arcs	
48	75	Receptiveness discovers knowledge		
49	75	Valuing the essential, not swayed by temporal		
50	SZ	Value of standing by a decision	In striving for a goal, both consistency and receptiveness are needed	Dealing with others fairly
51	GZ	Unexpected paths to goals		
52	58	Excessive sharpness and clarity bad for governing	A sound ruler gives space for ministers to hide when making mistakes and learn from them, even if it seems like disloyalty	
53	58	Wise minister knows when to cover for others		
54	18	Overt loyalty to ruler is only important in times of crisis		
55	15	Things at the apex begin to decline.	Wise rulers understand the flux of all things and the importance of keeping to the essential. They use this to build their own strength through receptiveness and weaken threats by using their own desires against them.	
56	38	Receptive ruler uses desires of threats to weaken them		

The table above presents a layered structure, which I have divided into an overarching structure of five parts. Each part contains in it both epistemological questions of how one comes to know and understand the world with suggestions for both the ethical conduct of a ruler and practical applications to the ruling of a state.

The chapter begins with a discussion of how a ruler can learn from the advice of others: how to interpret persuasions that are presented, why the ruler should yield and delegate in some cases, how to select able ministers and rule cautiously.

The second arc engages with how the ruler can learn from the self: understanding what is “essential” in every situation and choice hinges in large part on how clouded the ruler’s vision is with personal desires and ambitions. Through acting with humility and reserve, being receptive to others without becoming distracted from a focus on the essential, the ruler can come to embody exemplary conduct that inspires others to follow.

The third arc discusses the limits of knowledge. Not knowing one’s own limits is presented as a danger for a ruler, but also as a useful tool. Allowing others to see the ruler’s limits is as dangerous as the ruler not knowing where they are set, but correctly managing how much is revealed can give the ruler a mysterious aura that will permeate throughout the structure of the empire and inspire others to trust the ruler.

The fourth arc now acknowledges the limitations of others and advises a ruler be forgiving and open, allowing ministers who have not yet found their own limits to be able to cover their minor mistakes for a time until they can learn to improve. In this way, a ruler tolerates a certain amount of disloyalty if it allows ministers to grow in their capabilities, because the well-being of the state is always foremost.

The fifth and final arc summarizes the chapter in two passages: that all things have a limit, an apex, from which they will decline. However, the wise ruler utilizes this principle, never overstepping the limits of knowledge and capability, knowing when to defer and utilize others, and always maintaining a humble and unassuming demeanor. However, the ruler also is able to use the principle of apex and decline to deal with threats, using the desires and ambitions of others against them.

The chapter presents a sequence of development in the thinking of the ruler, almost as though it is an educational sequence:

1. Learning from and depending on others →
2. Discovering and learning from the self →
3. Coming to understand the limits of one's own knowledge →
4. Recognizing and forgiving the limitations of others (and no longer depending on them) →
5. Being able to freely and expertly utilize limitations to manage self and others.

The ruler is at first dependent on texts and teachers, forced to interpret the words of the ancients and re-apply them, until reaching a point where the ruler begins to cultivate the self and discover personal limits of knowledge. This understanding of limits then gives the ruler power over others, even those ministers who at first acted as instructors and advisers. They are no longer seen as a source of infallible wisdom, but are recognized as limited human beings in their own right, and treated with understanding. Thus, by

understanding limitations of self and other the ruler is set free to exercise power and authority as a just ruler.

Themes of "Daoying"

“Dao Ying” presents an image of an ideal ruler who selflessly manages the state, calmly weighing options and making decisions that provide the most positive outcomes for the state. This paradigmatic ruler embodies key virtues often associated with the Ru - such as trustworthiness, humaneness, righteousness and so forth. As such, this ideal ruler is not incompatible with “Ruist” visions of a ruler who places the wellbeing of the people and harmony in relations with ministers ahead of his own personal gain.

However, the method of reaching this paradigmatic state is different from a characteristically “Ruist” perspective, most fundamentally in that ritual is not the principle method of cultivation. Furthermore, a mechanism is provided for how the paradigmatic ruler is able to respond to often times non-ideal circumstances: positional advantage. In essence, the ruler understands that even the talents of a man who is good at yelling or a professional thief can have their uses in certain circumstances, and so he keeps such specialists in his employ. Additionally, the paradigm ruler is able to recognize the most valuable or essential aspect of a situation, such as deciding that it is better to surrender territory and move an entire kingdom rather than face a brutal war of conquest. By constantly being aware of the underlying aspects of any given situation, a paradigmatic ruler is able to respond to threats in ways that seem novel, clever or even effortless, because all the preconditions for a solution have been prepared far in advance.

“Dao Ying” does not merely provide this mechanism, but also gives advice for cultivating this capacity of foresight.

Foresight and the ability to clearly read a situation are gained through a process of self-cultivation, “Dao Ying” argues. In this process, self-centered, limited views are cast aside allowing the cultivator to respond to situations from a point of stillness. As previously discussed, “Dao Ying” follows a structure that leads first through the general instruction of others into a close introspection of the self, before returning with a new and clear understanding of how to respond to others. In this sense the structure itself mirrors the process of self-cultivation, which calls for a closing off of extraneous perception and desires.

There are some ways in which “Dao Ying” mirrors other common readings of *Laozi* and some ways in which it diverges. The interest in reaching a point of simple stillness and managing affairs in an effortless, *wuwei* manner would appear to be relatively common understandings of *Laozi*. However, “Dao Ying” appears to extend the applicability of these principles from their use in a small, rustic village to the context of a large state, even arguing (in passage 11) that the same advice applies whether a state is large or small. Furthermore, “Dao Ying” embraces a ruler who externally embodies what appear to be “Ruist” virtues, even if that ruler understands that such names for virtues are simply labels and not definitive things that exist out in the world. This application of ideas in *Laozi* to broader issues of running a large state appears to draw on the ideas of a wide variety of thinkers, and has led to the categorization of this chapter and the

Huainanzi as a whole as a “syncretic³⁵³” work, meaning it represents the synthesis of a variety of modes of thought.

What then is the role of the *Laozi* parallels in this syncretic blend? To begin with, let us return to Queen’s basic categorization of three types of concerns in “*Dao Ying*”: self-cultivation, ethics and pragmatics. According to old methods of categorization, the ethics portion of the chapter appears to follow “Confucian” concerns with a humane and virtuous ruler inspiring the people with proper conduct, while the pragmatic portions appear more “Legalist” with an emphasis on the clever use and manipulation of people and their abilities. While these old categories are no longer viewed as particularly descriptive of actual groups active at the time, they do highlight an underlying tension of Warring States views on rulership: whether a state is managed best through the exemplary behavior of a ruler who inspires, or through the carefully structuring of a governing system that utilizes the skills of its members and rewards or punishes them based on their effectiveness. In this sense, “*Dao Ying*” represents a sort of synthesis, positing an exemplary ruler who nonetheless sits at the top of a well-regulated system run by effective and skillful ministers. The glue between these two visions appears to be the ruler’s capacity to act in a selfless and calm manner, constantly embodying virtue even while managing an otherwise amoral governing system. The method for attaining this special perspective of the paradigm ruler appears to lie in a process of self-cultivation.

³⁵³ Harold Roth has called the text the “Pinnacle of Classical Daoist syncretism” in Roth, “*Huainanzi*,” expanding on A.C. Graham’s understanding of a “syncretist” layer of the *Zhuangzi*. See Graham, *Chuang-Tzû*, 257.

Previously, Harold Roth has argued that the self-cultivation present in the *Huainanzi* is part of a system of techniques that also are present in the “Nei Ye” and “Xin Shu I, II” chapters of *Guanzi*, portions of *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*.³⁵⁴ Through this shared practice of self-cultivation he has argued that these texts should be seen as representative of a practice-centered tradition, of which the *Huainanzi* is an exemplar. Setting aside for a moment whether this makes the *Huainanzi* a full-fledged representative of this tradition or simply a borrower, let us begin simply by stating that this provides a possible explanation for why *Laozi* parallels appear here. The “Dao Ying” compilers were less interested in what the *Laozi* parallels had to say about the art of ruling a large state – something that many passage in fact seem to discourage – largely because the compilers had many historical anecdotes that could do the work of illustrating the circumstances of ruling. Instead, the *Laozi* parallels might be lending legitimacy to claims of the efficacy of self-cultivation in “Dao Ying”.

Conclusion

Could "Dao Ying" represent a movement from in-group to out-group?

As noted, “Dao Ying” consistently cites the *Laozi* as the source for its quotations.

Most scholars have seen this as a sign that the *Laozi* was viewed as in some sense

³⁵⁴ For example, Roth has argued:

“It is only through the methods of self-cultivation advocated in the classical Daoist tradition that the *Huainanzi*’s ideal ruler may comprehend the inner workings of the cosmos and apply that wisdom to governing in harmony with them.” Roth, “*Huainanzi*,” 348.

He has argued for the existence of a tradition defined by shared techniques of self-cultivation in many other works, including: Roth, “Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought.”

“canonical” for the “Dao Ying” authors. However, it would also be logical to suppose that not citing *Laozi* by name would indicate a sign of respect, because the quotations would be so well known to both authors and audience that the authors could assume automatic recognition. Indeed, as noted above, other portions of the *Huainanzi* draw heavy thematic influence from *Laozi*, even glossing key terms, without explicitly naming *Laozi* or even giving exact quotations. In some sense, this lack of explicit recognition demonstrates an even more fundamental importance of *Laozi* as a text that the authors could assume everyone already knew and that served as a bedrock of conversation.

How then should we take “Dao Ying” and its explicit citations? One explanation is that it was simply a matter of format. The *Hanshi Waizhuan* uses the same approach to citing the *Odes*, even though there is good reason to believe that the *Odes* would have been widely recognized (see for example, in *Analects*, Kongzi’s advice that his son study the *Odes* in order to communicate and the widespread use of the *Odes* in diplomatic negotiation). Similarly, the *Odes* and *Changes* are also quoted as capstones to anecdotes in other portions of the *Huainanzi*. It would seem that the choice to quote explicitly was a matter of format.

What was the purpose of this format? In his study of the *Hanshi Waizhuan*, James Hightower makes the argument that the primary function was pedagogical. The text presents examples of how the *Odes* could be applied to a variety of situations, instructing its readers in their proper use.³⁵⁵ Sarah Queen has observed that Hightower’s observation

³⁵⁵ See James Robert Hightower, trans., *Han Ying’s Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1952), 2.

could also apply to the way *Laozi* passages are presented in “Dao Ying”.³⁵⁶ In this sense, the audience of a pedagogical text is not yet convinced of the authority and utility of a source text - they are in the process of learning why it is so important, and the pedagogical text is making a case that they should be more attentive to the source.

If we begin from a perspective of “Dao Ying” as a pedagogical or persuasive text, we can offer some potential reasons for the explicit citation. To begin with, as already discussed, there were important members of the imperial court who would have been happy to see *Laozi* placed on equal level with the *Odes*.³⁵⁷ Putting *Laozi* in this format would imply that it could be taught and utilized in the same way that the *Odes* were. To the people who already thought *Laozi* was important, this would be a welcome development.

The other potential audience for “Dao Ying” would be those who had not yet decided on how useful *Laozi* was. To them, “Dao Ying” represents a concerted effort to prove the applicability of *Laozi*. In this way, “Dao Ying” could have been acting as a sort of bridge between an “in-group” that already valued *Laozi* and an “out-group” that was yet undecided.

What can we say about group affiliation?

³⁵⁶ Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” 207–8.

³⁵⁷ This is one of the arguments in the *Huainanzi* translation, also noting that this was a form of “hijacking” the authority of the “Five *Jing*” Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 26.

If “Dao Ying” is an attempt to bridge the gap between an “in-group” and an “out-group”, what might have defined those groups? Why would there have been a need to make a broader communication like this?³⁵⁸

I wish to highlight that there were important persons at court who were interested in *Laozi*, and others who were not. There is good reason to believe that the *Huainanzi*’s own authors were among those interested in *Laozi*. If they wanted their project of defining an ideal practice of governance to be a success, they would need to convince those who were on the fence about *Laozi* that it was a valuable source.

Practice and argument

Another way of looking at this gap between groups is from the perspective of practice. As Roth has argued, there are many signs of shared practices between the *Huainanzi*, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and the “Nei Ye” and “Xin Shu 1&2” chapters of *Guanzi*.³⁵⁹ These apophatic breathing practices, identifiable in written documents through shared technical vocabulary, indicate a lineage of teachers and students, and can in this way be taken as a sign of affiliation.

However, practices typically require direct instruction from a teacher to a student, which also means that the student must already believe the practices are valuable enough

³⁵⁸ The problem of group affiliation in the early Han has become a matter of extensive scholarly debate. Old categories, like “Huang-Lao”, which sought to place key figures in intellectual affiliations, have been questioned, prodded and are now of only limited usefulness. To be clear, I do not want to make an attempt to resuscitate the Huang-Lao discussion here. However, this does not change the fact that there were clearly persons whose biographies featured an interest in *Laozi* (and often Huang Di as well) and that in certain situations, such as in the case of the Dowager Empress Dou, *Laozi* was placed in opposition to the “techniques of the Ru” (*rusbu* 儒術).

³⁵⁹ Roth, “Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought.”

to seek instruction. The intricacies of the Han court meant that not everyone believed in the value of these practices, much less that everyone was initiated into them. Under these circumstances, it would have been necessary to make a broader case for the value of the practices and the texts that related to them.

Hence, I believe “*Dao Ying*” does not itself sit within the core writings of a practice community, but instead shows how some principles of self-cultivation practice can be useful to governance in an effort to convince the uninitiated of their efficacy, and create a broader appeal for the theories of governance presented in *Huainanzi*. In this sense, it demonstrates an active ecosystem wherein those interested in a self-cultivation practice and those concerned with governance could intertwine their arguments around *Laozi* parallels acting as a source of authority.

6: COMPARING COMMENTARIES

Introduction

If *Laozi* was a “*jing*”, in either its officially recognized or its more broadly perceived varieties, it would stand to reason that we would find evidence of a nuanced and informed discussion about its contents in other sources. We might also expect this discussion to be rooted in largely consistent understandings - after all, a “*jing*” is supposed to be largely recognized as a significant source - with arguments made for subtly different readings that nonetheless have significant results. This is the sort of discussion we find among the three early essays under examination: one where they largely agree on how to read the few *Laozi* parallels they share in common, while at the same time extrapolating out readings that are applicable to widely different situations - in this case, to rulers governing different sorts of polities.

While the previous chapters have treated the three essays in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi* and their relationship with *Laozi* parallels separately, the following chapter will compare the essays with each other.³⁶⁰ In particular, this chapter will highlight that, although each

³⁶⁰ My work here is once again indebted to the articles and translations written by Sarah Queen, where she has made comparisons of her own. In particular: Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master.”; Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12.”; and her translation in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*.

of the essays is deeply indebted to the *Laozi* parallels to shape their arguments and themes, each essay takes a different approach to *Laozi* parallels.

The chapter will first make a raw structural comparison: which *Laozi* parallels are quoted in each of the sources? Evidence will be provided to show that there is in fact very little overlap between any of the three essays in their use of *Laozi* parallels.

Next, the chapter will engage in a thematic comparison of the few parts of the essays that do make use of the same *Laozi* parallels. Were the sorts of arguments the authors were making similar with similar passages? This chapter will show that, in fact, while there are often stylistic differences between the essays, there is a high degree of correspondence in their interpretation of quotations of *Laozi* parallels from the same passage, even if they are not quoting the same line from that passage. All three show an interest (to somewhat varying degrees) in four facets of the *Laozi* parallels:

1. Political applications
2. Yielding when sufficiency is attained, and its applications to politics
3. Physiological cultivation and its correlation with politics
4. The control of knowledge and its application to politics

In particular, “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” share many similarities. For example, when interpreting lines found in *Laozi* 47, the same story is used to explain the same passage in both essays.

Finally, in comparing the sole passage shared across all three essays, *Laozi* 54, this chapter will also compare them with the interpretations found in the oldest interlinear commentary on *Laozi*, the *Daode zhenjing zhigui* 道德真經指歸 also known as the Yan

Zun 嚴遵 commentary (attributed to Yan Zun, fl. 80-10 BCE), as well as the most widely-known commentaries on *Laozi: Heshanggong* 河上公 (attributed late Han) and *Wang Bi* 王弼 (attributed to Wang Bi 226-249 CE).³⁶¹ This comparison will show that, there is a similarity in the politicized and physiologically oriented interpretation found in the earlier works, one that fades in the more commonly studied Wang Bi commentary.

All of this comparison will build on the context provided for each of the essays in previous chapters to show that, *Laozi* parallels were important to each essay, primarily for its political applications. While this chapter focuses on presenting the comparisons between essays, from the evidence I would like to suggest the presence of an essentially consistent understanding of *Laozi* parallels throughout all three early commentaries, even in situations where different portions of the same passages are presented in quotation. It seems possible that these essays demonstrate an awareness of the overall arc of even the portions of the passages they do not quote.

Structural Comparison of Parallels

Shared “verses”	
“ <i>Dao Ying</i> ” and “ <i>Jie Lao</i> ”:	1, 14, 38, 54, 58
“ <i>Dao Ying</i> ” and “ <i>Yu Lao</i> ”:	27, 36, 47, 52, 54, 71
“ <i>Jie Lao</i> ” and “ <i>Yu Lao</i> ”:	46, 54
All Three:	54

³⁶¹ The perceived role and activities of the commentator Wang Bi (226-249 CE), who also produced commentaries on the *Yijing* and the *Analects* has been extensively studied. See for example Rudolph Wagner's life's work on *Wang Bi* in Rudolph G. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (State Univ of New York Pr, 2000); Rudolph G. Wagner, Laozi, and Bi Wang, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (SUNY Press, 2003); Rudolph G. Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (xuanxue)* (SUNY Press, 2003). Work has also been done comparing the *Heshang Gong* and *Wang Bi* commentaries such as Alan Kam-leung Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Chart 5 Laozi Parallels in the Three Essays

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	Laozi Critical Text ³⁶²
1	道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。	道之可道，非常道也。		道可道，非（常）〔恒〕道。（…）
14	視之不見其形，聽之不聞其聲，搏之不可得，望之不可極也			視之〔而〕（不）〔弗〕見，名〔之〕曰夷；聽之〔而〕（不）〔弗〕聞，名〔之〕曰希；搏之〔而〕（不）〔弗〕得，名〔之〕曰微。此三者、不可致詰，故混而為一。〔一者〕、其上不皦；其下不昧。繩繩不可名〔也〕，復歸於無物。
	無狀之狀，無物之象	無狀之狀，無物之象。		是謂無狀之狀，無物之象。
27				善行〔者〕無轍迹，善言〔者〕無瑕謫，善數〔者〕不用籌策，
	善閉者，無關鍵而不可開也。善結者，無繩約而不可解也。			善閉〔者〕無關鍵而不可（開）〔啟〕，善結〔者〕無繩約而不可解。
				是以聖人（常）〔恒〕善救人，
	人無棄人，			故無棄人；

³⁶² Note the CHANT critical text also contains variant characters drawn from Mawangdui and other sources. They are presented here for purposes of comparison.

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	Laozi Critical Text ³⁶²
				常善救物，
	物無棄物，			故無棄物；
	是謂襲明。			是謂襲明。
				故善人者，不善人之師；
	不善人，善人之資也。			不善人者，善人之資。
		不貴其師，不愛其資，雖知大迷，是謂要妙		不貴其師，不愛其資；雖智大迷，是謂要妙。
36			將欲翕之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；	將欲歛之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；
				將欲廢之，必固興之。
			將欲取之，必固與之	將欲奪之，必固與之；
				是謂微明。柔弱勝剛強
	魚不可脫于淵，國之利器不可以示人。		魚不可脫於深淵邦之利器，不可以示人	。魚不可脫於淵，（國）〔邦〕之利器，不可以示人。
38		上德不德，是以有德。		上德不德，是以有德；
				下德不失德，是以無德。
		上德無為而無不為也。		上德無為而無以為；

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	Laozi Critical Text ³⁶²
				下德為之而有以為。
		上仁為之而無以為也。		上仁為之而無以為，
		上義為之而有以為也。		上義為之而有以為。
		上禮為之而莫之應。		上禮為之而莫之應，
		攘臂而仍之。		則攘臂而扔之。
		失道而後失德，失德而後失仁，失仁而後失義，失義而後失禮。		故失道。〔失道矣〕而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。
		夫禮者，忠信之薄也，而亂之首乎。		夫禮者、忠信之薄，而亂之首〔也〕，
		前識者，道之華也，而愚之首也。		前識者、道之華，而愚之始〔也〕。
		大丈夫		是以大丈夫
		處其厚不處其薄		處其厚不居其薄；
				處其實，不居其華。
	去彼取此。		故去彼取此。	
46		天下有道，卻走馬以糞也。	天下有道卻走馬以糞。	天下有道，卻走馬以糞；
		天下無道，戎馬生於郊矣。	天下無道戎馬生於郊	天下無道，戎馬生於郊。
		禍莫大於可欲。	罪莫大於可欲	〔罪莫大于可欲〕，
		禍莫大於不知足。	禍莫大於不知足	禍莫大於不知足，
		咎莫憚於欲利。		咎莫大於欲得。

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	Laozi Critical Text ³⁶²
			知足之為足矣	故知足之足，（常）〔恒〕足矣。
47	不出戶以知天下，不窺牖以見天道。其出彌遠，其知彌少。		不出於戶，可以知天下；不闕於牖，可以知天道 / 其出彌遠者，其智彌少	不出戶，知天下。不闕牖，見天道。其出彌遠，其知彌少。(...)
52	塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。			(...) 塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。
				(開) 〔啟〕其兌，濟其事，終身不救，
	見小曰明。		見小曰明	見小曰明，
			守柔曰強	守柔曰強。
	用其光，復歸其明也			用其光，復歸其明，
				無遺身殃，是謂習常。
54		不校		善建〔者〕不拔，
		不悅	善建不拔，善抱不脫，	善抱者不脫，
			子孫以其祭祀世世不輟	子孫以祭祀不輟。
	修之身，其德乃真也。	脩之身，其德乃真。		修之於身，其德乃真；
		脩之家，其德有餘。		修之於家，其德乃餘，

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	Laozi Critical Text ³⁶²
		脩之鄉，其德乃長。		修之於鄉，其德乃長；
		脩之邦，其德乃豐。		修之於（國）〔邦〕，其德乃豐；
		脩之天下，其德乃普		修之於天下，其德乃普。
		以身觀身，以家觀家， 〔以鄉觀鄉〕，以邦觀 邦，以天下觀天下。吾奚 以知天下之然也？以此。		故以身觀身。以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以（國）〔邦〕 觀（國）〔邦〕，以天下觀天下。吾何以知天下 〔之〕然哉？以此。
58	其政惛惛，其 民純純。其政 察察，其民缺 缺。			其政悶悶，其民淳淳。其政察察。其民缺缺。
		禍兮福之所倚。		禍兮、福之所倚，
		福兮禍之所伏。		福兮、禍之所伏；
		孰知其極。		孰知其極？
				其無正〔也〕？正復為奇，善復為妖。
		人之迷也，其曰故以久 矣。		人之迷〔也〕，其曰固久〔矣〕。
				是以聖人
	方而不割，廉 而不剝。	方而不割，廉而不（穢） 〔剝〕，		是以聖人方而不割，廉而不剝；
	直而不肆，光而不耀。		直而不肆，光而不耀。	

LZ #	“Dao Ying”	“Jie Lao”	“Yu Lao”	<i>Laozi Critical Text</i> ³⁶²
71	知而不知，尚矣。不知而知，病也。			知不知、上〔矣〕，不知知、病〔矣〕。
				夫唯病病，是以不病。
			聖人之不病也，以其不病，是以無病也。	聖人〔之〕不病〔也〕，以其病病〔也〕，是以不病。

An analysis of parallels shows that even when two of the three essays make use of the same *Laozi* parallels, they often do not use the same portions of that passage as it appears in the received *Laozi*.

- Of the 5 parallels between “*Dao Ying*” and “*Jie Lao*” only those found for 1, 14, 54 and 58 share any overlap. In each case, the overlap is only by a single couplet, even though in 54 “*Jie Lao*” contains much more of the received passage, in 14 “*Dao Ying*” contains more and in 58 both essays contain other portions of the received passage not found in the other.

- Of the 6 parallels between “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” only those for *Laozi* 36 and 47 overlap. While 47 is very similar, in the case of 36, it is only by a single couplet despite “*Yu Lao*” containing other portions of the received passage.

-The two passages where “*Jie Lao*” and “*Yu Lao*” overlap present a conflicting picture. While in 46, they are nearly identical in the parts of the received *Laozi* passage they present, save one line, in 54 they appear to contain different portions of the same received passage.

From a purely structural standpoint, the three essays appear either to have radically different understandings of which passages were important to their arguments and worldview or appear to be quoting from different arrangements of *Laozi* parallels, or even wholly different collections, which only overlap in only a very few places.

Comparing *Yu Lao* and *Jie Lao* - *Laozi* 46³⁶³

³⁶³ Despite appearing in the same larger collection, “*Yu Lao*” and “*Jie Lao*” comment on virtually none of the same *Laozi* passages. One of the two exceptions to this is *Laozi* 46, which appears almost identically

“*Yu Lao*” begins with five sections that discuss parallels with most of *Laozi* 46.³⁶⁴ This opening section more closely resembles the sort of interwoven commentary found in “*Jie Lao*” than many other passages in “*Yu Lao*”. The first passage interprets the first four lines found in the received *Laozi* 46: “When the world has the Dao, one wishes [only] to use swift horses for manuring the fields. When the world is without the Dao, warhorses breed in the suburbs.”³⁶⁵ The passage glosses these lines, explaining that in peace time there is no need for couriers to rush delivering messages, and so horses are only needed for agriculture. But in times of disharmony, war persists and troops march without returning home for years at a time, thus there is time for warhorses to breed even in occupied territory.

The second passage presents an anecdote of a ruler accepting the hides of foxes and leopards from a hunter. The ruler comments that, because of the exceptional quality of their fur, these creatures brought ruin on themselves. Similarly, rulers with territories too prosperous risk drawing the attention of rivals. The parallel with *Laozi* 46 quotation follows: “There is no greater misstep worse than having something desirable.”³⁶⁶ The advice here being that it is better to stay small and inconspicuous than a powerful but tempting target.

The third passage presents the story of Earl Zhi, who continuously attacks other kingdoms in hopes of expanding his own realm. In the end, some of his own territories

in both essays, the only substantial difference being a different ending line. Both of these ending lines have been preserved in the received *Laozi*, with the “*Yu Lao*” line coming last.

³⁶⁴ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.1-5

³⁶⁵ 天下有道，欲走馬以糞。天下無道，戎馬生於郊。

³⁶⁶ 罪莫大於可欲

rebel and he is executed. A *Laozi* 46 parallel is quoted: “There is no misfortune worse than not knowing sufficiency.”³⁶⁷ Clearly, the message is once again a condemnation of seeking expansion and prosperity: that which grows too powerful will meet its end soon enough.

The fourth passage makes a reference in passing to yet another lord who desires a swift horse and a precious jade disk belonging to others. Without elaborating on the mechanism by which he met his end, the passage assures us it was not a pleasant one. A *Laozi* 46 parallel is again quoted: “There is no fault more regrettable than obtaining what one desires.”³⁶⁸ Again, the assertion is that pursuing desires, even when they are obtainable, is ultimately a cause for sorrow, not rejoicing.

The fifth passage concludes the cycle, making once more a statement instead of using an anecdote. Surviving, it says, is the most important thing for both people and states. One should know what is harmful, otherwise one will face disaster. The sequence concludes with a parallel to the final line of *Laozi* 46: “To know sufficiency is sufficient.”³⁶⁹ The *Laozi* parallel has been fully interpreted in terms of historical anecdotes and analysis, and the position “*Yu Lao*” takes is clear: it is best to know how much one needs and stay within that limit, especially in the case of rulers of states.

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“*Jie Lao*” also divides its interpretation over five contiguous passages. “*Jie Lao*” begins its use of parallels with *Laozi* 46 with an extended discussion of how rulers who

³⁶⁷ 禍莫大於不知足

³⁶⁸ 咎莫憚於欲得

³⁶⁹ 知足之為足矣。

have the Way do not provoke the rulers of other states, and thus conflicts rarely arise.³⁷⁰

The passage explains horses were primarily used for carrying armor and weapons to supply troops on campaign. If the ruler rarely enters into war, the horses will not serve these functions. Furthermore, because the ruler does not import luxury goods from far away, due to his state being satisfied with what they already have, horses are not employed in this manner either, leaving only agricultural uses for the horses. Thus the line parallel with *Laozi* 46: “When the world has the Dao, one wishes [only] to use swift horses for manuring the fields.”

The second passage presents the opposite scenario.³⁷¹ When the ruler lacks the way, chaos reigns and leads to constant war. This in turn leads to a limitation of livestock, and even the horses used for war diminish in number. Therefore, the ruler must send mares to the stables near the capital and ensure that enough horses are breeding to keep the military supplied. This is offered as an explanation for the line parallel with *Laozi* 46: “When the world is without the Dao, warhorses breed in the suburbs.”

The third passage turns from the ruler to the people of a state.³⁷² It states that when people desire things it leads down a dark road until eventually their minds are twisted to the pursuit of desire. In the end, poor decision-making leads to disastrous activities that harm both ruler and subjects. A line parallel with *Laozi* 46 is offered in confirmation of this observation: “There is no greater misstep worse than having something desirable,”

³⁷⁰ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.22

³⁷¹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.23

³⁷² CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.24

and rulers are advised to avoid interaction with any sorts of entertainments, amusements or delights that might lead them down the dark and distracting path of desire.

The fourth passage turns to the biological limitations of the human species.³⁷³ Comparing humans with animals, it recognizes that without fur or feathers human beings suffer from the cold and must trudge along above the ground. The one thing humans do have, the passage says, is a stomach that hungers in order to survive and this hunger is the root of desire for material things. While sages may be able to live within the bounds of wearing and eating only as much as they need to survive, most people are not like this. The passage points to a kind of general anxiety about survival as the root of the human desire to accumulate. No matter the wealth and power of a person, there is always an underlying fear that it will not be enough. The passage compares this constant, generalized fear of death and want to the fear condemned criminals might feel, yet the criminals can always obtain a pardon, while the fear of death and lack hangs over people for their entire lives. This is how the passage reads the line parallel with *Laozi* 46: “There is no misfortune worse than not knowing sufficiency,” because even the condition of a condemned criminal appears better than the constant anxiety of always wanting more.

The fifth passage concludes the sequence with a summation.³⁷⁴ Excessive desire for material things leads through anxiety and long sequences of other misfortunes until manifesting as physical illness.³⁷⁵ In short, it traces the root of physical and social

³⁷³ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.25

³⁷⁴ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.26

³⁷⁵ In particular, stomach illness. One wonders if the pains it describes are akin to the ulcers and acid reflux experienced by stress sufferers of today.

problems to the simple desire for too much. Hence it concludes with the line parallel with *Laozi* 46: “There is no fault more regrettable than obtaining what one desires.”

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“*Yu Lao*” and “*Jie Lao*” share most of the lines parallel with *Laozi* 46 in common, and also share some aspects of interpretation: not placing a limit on desire leads to disaster, while knowing sufficiency leads to contentment. However, they differ in a number of significant ways.

First, they make use of different formats. “*Jie Lao*” provides detailed discussions and rationalizations of exactly what it believes the *Laozi* lines are intending. “*Yu Lao*” prefers to illustrate its interpretations through the use of historical anecdote. These formatting differences are consistent with other portions of the essays.

Second, they differ in the focus of their arguments. “*Yu Lao*” directs its concerns squarely at the ruler: for it is the ruler who makes the military decisions and has the power to overreach and lead the state to disaster. “*Jie Lao*” casts a wider net, implicating the people in the problem of desire as surely as the ruler. On this broader scale, excessive desires disorder people’s activities and lead to chaos in the state both from the bottom-up and from the top-down.

Third, they differ in their understanding of the mechanics through which desires bring about disaster. “*Yu Lao*” is more pragmatic, pointing out that overextended states and militaries with bulging coffers make ripe targets for rivals. Rulers who value the attainment of their own desires furthermore risk oppressing and angering their subjects, opening the door for revolt from within as well. On the other hand, “*Jie Lao*” sees a

psycho-physiological connection. Desires disorder the thoughts and plans of both ruler and subjects and cause anxiety and illness. As a result, people who are led by excessive desire are trapped in a fate worse than condemned criminals, for no matter how they strive they will never be able to fully sate their hunger and quell their anxiety. Apart from the opening passages discussing the use of horses, “*Jie Lao*” seems little concerned with the relations between states, and more with the daily lives and plans of the people.

Comparing Yu Lao and Dao Ying

Similarly to the comparison above, “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” contain few common *Laozi* passages, and even when they do comment on the same passage, they typically use different parts.

Laozi 27³⁷⁶

“*Yu Lao*” presents a nuanced story about King Wen of Zhou in its final passage.³⁷⁷ Djou, the³⁷⁸ tyrannical last king of Shang, heard that the state of Zhou had a precious jade tablet and dispatched his talented minister Jiao Li to request it. King Wen did not give it to him. Later, when the less-talented minister Fei Zhong arrived (presumably also at the ruler’s urging), King Wen gave it to him. Jiao Li, the passage suggests was “worthy” (*xian* 賢) while Fei Zhong was “tactless” or, perhaps “lacked the Dao” (*wu dao* 無道),

³⁷⁶ *Laozi* 27 is found in both essays, but they do not use the same portions of the received passage.

³⁷⁷ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.24

³⁷⁸ Although the character is written *Zhou* 紂, custom has been to transliterate the last Shang ruler’s name as “Djou” or some other variant to distinguish from the state of Zhou and the dynasty it established in overthrowing him.

and it was precisely because of this that one was rebuffed and the other accepted. Why? Because, we are told, King Wen “despised worthies” (*zhou e xian zhe zhou* 惡賢者) and so gave the tablet to Fei Zhong. Adding to the mystery, the passage suggests that King Wen elevated the Grand Duke, a former butcher, because he prized him (*gui zhi* 貴之) and granted the tablet to Fei Zhong because he loved him (*ai zhe* 愛者). These last two are meant to parallel the *Laozi* 27 quotation: “Not prizing one’s teacher, not loving one’s resources, although one knows things, it is a great confusion. This is called ‘necessary subtlety’.”³⁷⁹ Keeping in mind that this is the closing passage of “*Yu Lao*”, let us consider what it might be intending.

First, King Wen was said to have been quietly but actively preparing to resist Djou, the last tyrannical king of the Shang, ultimately laying the groundwork for his son, King Wu, to overthrow the Shang and establish the Zhou. Read from this perspective, practically speaking, it would be more useful to give credit to the less competent Fei Zhong while humiliating the capable Jiao Li, subtly undermining the advisors of Djou.

Second, Jiao Li is described as “worthy”, a trait that King Wen dislikes, much in keeping with the received *Laozi* passage 3 - “Do not promote the worthy to keep the people from competing.”³⁸⁰ Perhaps the implication is that King Wen had already internalized other principles of *Laozi* as well.

³⁷⁹ 不貴其師，不愛其資，雖知大迷，是謂要妙

³⁸⁰ 不向賢使民不爭

Finally, in parallel with the received *Laozi 27* passage, King Wen is depicted as valuing his “teacher” in the Grand Duke, while loving his “resource” in Fei Zhong. A “resource” in the sense of a tool that could be used to undermine the tyrant.

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“*Dao Ying*” divides the received *Laozi* verse over three widely separated passages. In the first passage, “*Dao Ying*” tells the story of Gongsun Long hiring a man who was good at shouting.³⁸¹ Although the man appears to possess a useless talent, when the need arises to hail a ferry from the opposite shore of a river, the man proves himself invaluable. The passage ends with a quotation parallel with the received *Laozi 27*: “When among people there is no one abandoned and among things there is nothing abandoned, this is called following illumination.”³⁸²

The second passage gives a similar message to the first.³⁸³ In it, a general of Chu hires on a local thief over the objections of his advisors. Later, when faced with a difficult battle, the thief sneaks into the rival camp and steals objects from the tent of the rival general on three successive nights, each time growing closer to the person of the rival general himself. The threat of assassination is understood and the rival general surrenders. The passage ends with a parallel to a *Laozi 27* line: “the person who is not worthy is the resource of one who is.”³⁸⁴ The emphasis is that a clever leader is able to

³⁸¹ 12.29 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.30

³⁸² 人無棄人，物無棄物，是謂襲明

³⁸³ 12.38 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.39

³⁸⁴ 不善人，善人之資也

make good use of even those who society would normally find undesirable, and channel their talents to more productive ends.

The third passage compares the rule of perceived tyrants, like the first Qin emperor, with wise rulers, like King Wu of Zhou.³⁸⁵ While the tyrants must impose their rule by force, wise kings instead make gestures of peace and prosperity that inspire others to accept their rule. These rulers, the passage suggests, are described by a line parallel with *Laozi 27*: “Those good at sealing close no bolt, yet what they seal cannot be opened. Those good at tying use no cord, but what they tie cannot be undone.”³⁸⁶ The assertion is that good rulers can bind together a society without exerting overt control.

All three passages deal with the unconventional yet effective actions of leaders relating with others. The first two employ witty stories to carry home a point about how ministers or generals should be looking for talent, while the third relies on historical examples to describe how a ruler should be relating with the ruled.

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In comparing the “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” interpretations of parallels with the received *Laozi 27*, we find that both essays are concerned primarily with how actions that initially appear counterintuitive ultimately result in success. Whether it comes to how to recognize talent (or the lack thereof) or properly managing a state, in each case a more perceptive and subtle approach is advised over one dictated by raw force or conventional wisdom. Both essays also make their points through the use of anecdotes capped with a

³⁸⁵ 12.47 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.48

³⁸⁶ 善閉者，无關鍵而不可開也。善結者，無繩約而不可解也

quotation of a *Laozi* parallel, asserting the allegorical and even literary merit of the passages.

Laozi 36³⁸⁷

“*Yu Lao*” presents two contiguous anecdotes, reversing the order of the received *Laozi* 36.³⁸⁸ It begins by stating, quite straightforwardly, that a ruler’s positional advantage (*shi* 勢) must outweigh that of any ministers. Listing the names of two rulers who had lost this advantage it invokes the line parallel with the received *Laozi* 36 “Fish are not allowed to leave the depths.” Ministers should not overstep their stations. The passage continues, elaborating that rewards and punishments are the instruments of state and that a ruler should reveal neither of these, or else ministers will take advantage of them, quoting the line parallel with the received *Laozi* 36 “the effective instruments of state cannot be revealed to others.”³⁸⁹

Historical anecdotes follow of rulers who acted weak or presented their enemies with gifts in order to allow the enemies to overextend themselves and become complacent. In the end, the weaker rulers triumphed, which the “*Yu Lao*” holds up in complement with the parallels with the received *Laozi* 36 it interweaves into the anecdotes, which say that something must be contracted before it can be expanded, weakened before it can be strengthened, and that one must give before one can take.³⁹⁰ The passage concludes by

³⁸⁷ *Laozi* 36 appears more completely in “*Yu Lao*” but both essays contain the image of the fish.

³⁸⁸ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.8-9

³⁸⁹ Using *bang* 邦 instead of *guo* 國.

³⁹⁰ 將欲翕之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之。 / 將欲取之，必固與之。

praising “beginning works in the formless,”³⁹¹ only to later have visible results. As with the rest of the “*Yu Lao*” reading of parallels with the received *Laozi* 36, power rests in subtle, barely perceptible action. Revealing this action prematurely leads to disaster, while managing it properly brings desirable results.

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“*Dao Ying*” tells the story of a clever minister who convinces the lord of Song to let him handle all the punishments, while the lord can give out the rewards. In a short period of time, people have figured out which of the two is to be feared and the minister soon seizes power for himself. Rewards and punishments are the “two handles” the ruler uses in governance, much promoted in the rest of the *Hanfeizi* and here we see the danger of distributing that power. The passage parallel with the received *Laozi* 36 deals directly with giving away too much control: “Fish are not allowed to leave the depths, the effective instruments of state cannot be revealed to others.”³⁹² The fish, in this case, being the minister who moved above his station when he saw the proper function of the instruments of state.

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“*Dao Ying*” makes its point entirely through the use of a memorable story, while “*Yu Lao*” employs both assertions and brief historical analogy. Yet, both “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” appear to agree that the lines parallel with the received *Laozi* 36 refer to the way a ruler manages the balance of power with ministers. Both also agree that it is important the

³⁹¹ 起事於無形

³⁹² 魚不可脫于淵，國之利器不可以示人

ruler keep some degree of power concealed from the ministers, in particular the control of rewards and punishments. The ruler's power in these essays is a subtle one, best exercised quietly and carefully away from curious eyes that might seek to exploit it.

Laozi 47³⁹³

“*Yu Lao*” begins by simply stating that the orifices of the body are the doors and windows for *shenming* 神明 and that sensory activity causes *jingshen* to be exhausted on the outside, in this way providing a gloss of what is meant by “doors” and “windows” in the *Laozi 47* parallel it quotes.³⁹⁴ It then presents two anecdotes: the first about a Lord Xiang of Zhao who is learning charioteering but fails to progress because he is always only thinking of his competitors and never bothers to pay attention to his own chariot; the second is once again the story of Duke Sheng of Bo absentmindedly cutting his chin open. In conclusion, the passage provides the line parallel with the received *Laozi 47*: “the further one goes the less one knows.”

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“*Dao Ying*” presents the story of Duke Sheng of Bo, who is so distracted with plans of rebellion that he fails to notice when he cuts his chin open with a riding crop.³⁹⁵ It presents an interpretation that when *jingshen* 精神 moves excessively to the outside, knowledge and thought are weakened within, and even the body will not be properly

³⁹³ *Laozi 47* is nearly identical in the two essays, differing only by the appearance of additional grammatical particles in “*Yu Lao*”.

³⁹⁴ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.18-20

³⁹⁵ 12.46 in *Huainanzi* 2010
CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.47

regulated.³⁹⁶ In conclusion, the passage links with a quotation of a line parallel with the received *Laozi* 47: “Use not going out the door to understand the world, use not looking through the window to see the world. The further one goes out, the less one knows.”³⁹⁷ Through making this connection, “*Dao Ying*” makes a comparison. Duke Sheng was going far “out the door” in his planning future events, and as a result he became completely unaware of his physical presence in the world and the things happening directly in front of him.

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The most curious aspect in comparing how “*Dao Ying*” and “*Yu Lao*” interpret a pair of couplets parallel with part of the received *Laozi* 47 is that, despite the relative infrequency of overlap between the two essays, in this one particular instance they not only quote the same lines but even use the same anecdote to illustrate it. Keeping in mind as well that these passages are concerned with a model of the physicality of attention that is also present in “*Jie Lao*”, we may be looking here at one of the most widely accepted understandings of the *Laozi* collections available by the early Han. Essentially, the primary concern is that excessive sensory or mental stimulation leads to dissipation which in turn produces a loss of attention. Because each of the three essays are largely concerned with one’s ability to make reasoned decisions based on clear, attentive perception, this loss of faculties appears to be among the most dangerous possible

³⁹⁶ This vision of the body and attention is very similar to the one expressed in “*Jie Lao*” - see the analysis in chapter 4 of this work.

³⁹⁷ 不出戶以知天下，不窺牖以見天道。其出彌遠，其知彌少。

maladies. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising to see the tenacity of the vivid story of Duke Sheng of Bo failing to notice blood pouring out of his chin while he plotted his rebellion.

Laozi 52³⁹⁸

“*Yu Lao*” makes use of parallels with the received *Laozi 52* in two contiguous anecdotes. The first passage tells the story of the ivory chopsticks of the tyrant Djou.³⁹⁹ The Viscount of Ji observes the tableware and realizes that with rare and valuable utensils come rare and valuable cups and bowls, and then extravagant fare with which to fill them. All of these luxuries for the ruler require austerities somewhere else. In a series of logical leaps the Viscount maps out the descent of Djou’s rule into tyranny and oppression from the simple sign of a set of fancy chopsticks. Therefore, he is held up as a paradigm example of a line parallel with the received *Laozi 52* “to observe the details is called clarity,” because from a small sign he foretold the decay of a ruler.

The second passage similarly makes use of historical anecdote, this time recounting the story of King Goujian of Yue.⁴⁰⁰ The king was initially defeated by the state of Wu. However, by making an extensive show of submission and loyalty, including, the passage points out, placing himself at the forefront of dangerous battles, he earned the trust of King Fuchai of Wu. King Goujian ultimately used this trust to slay his rival and restore his own authority. Similarly, the passage points out that King Wu of Zhou was able to defeat the tyrant Djou through a similar overt display of submission. The passage links to

³⁹⁸ *Laozi 52* appears more fully in “*Dao Yüing*”, overlapping “*Yu Lao*” with only a single line. However, “*Yu Lao*” contains the second half of that couplet, not found in “*Dao Yüing*”.

³⁹⁹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.13

⁴⁰⁰ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.14

the *Laozi* 52 parallel “guarding the soft is called strength,”⁴⁰¹ asserting that it was through yielding that both kings were able to prevail. The passage follows with a quotation of a line parallel with part of the received *Laozi* 71, which will be discussed in the next comparison.

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“*Dao Ying*” divides quotations of parallels with the received *Laozi* 52 across three widely separated passages. In the first passage, “*Dao Ying*” narrates the story of one of Kongzi’s disciples, Zigong, who refused a customary reward for ransoming a captured native of the state of Lu.⁴⁰² Kongzi criticizes his student, arguing that sages (or anyone wishing to act like one) adapt to the customs of the society they are in and seek to make changes subtly, from the inside, rather than openly restructuring that society based on their own values. Thus, Kongzi argues, even though Zigong was right that it is better to rescue someone without the expectation of reward, by doing so he was undermining a system that encouraged people to rescue others in hope of that reward. The argument fits very well with the “two handles” model of governance where a ruler administers rewards and punishments to maintain order in the state. If an exemplary figure refuses the rewards it removes an important aspect of the ruler’s capacity to manage the state just as much as a criminal flaunting the punishments. The passage conclude with the *Laozi* 52 parallel “To observe the details is called clarity.”⁴⁰³ The implication is that Zigong only saw the

⁴⁰¹ 守柔曰強

⁴⁰² 12.12 in *Huainanzi* 2010
CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.13

⁴⁰³ 見小曰明

larger picture of the values he thought a society should uphold and overlooked the details of how that society was functioning.

In the second passage, Prince Mou of Zhongshan speaks with Zhanzi. The prince appears to have a problem of attention: although he is out in the country, he is still preoccupied with courtly dealings.⁴⁰⁴ Zhanzi advises him to simply prioritize living (*zhong sheng* 重生). Although the prince admits familiarity with the concept, he feels unable to overcome himself (*zi sheng* 自勝), or in another way of looking at it he understands the theory but has not mastered the practice. Hence he is aware that his mind wandering away from his present experience and back to the requirements of court is a problem, but he has no way to fix it. Zhanzi advises him to take a step back and practice “following along (with the self)” (*cong zhi* 從之)⁴⁰⁵ Zhanzi suggests that fighting with the self is counter-productive, producing resentment and ultimately injury. Thus without either overcoming the self or following along with it, one is doubling the harm. Here a passage parallel with part of the received *Laozi* 55 is quoted first: “When knowing (or thought) is harmonious it is called ‘constancy’, when knowing (or thought) is constant it is called ‘clarity’, to add to life is called ‘propitiousness’, for the heart-mind to move *qi* is called ‘strength’.”⁴⁰⁶ This line is then followed with one parallel with part of the received

⁴⁰⁴ 12.16 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.17

Note this also contains a quotation found in *Laozi* 55

⁴⁰⁵ The passage reads: (不能自勝) 則從之

I take 自 as the object of 之 here.

⁴⁰⁶ 知和曰常，知常曰明，益生曰祥，心使氣曰強

Note that the character 強 here often carries a negative connotation of compulsion in the *Laozi*, e.g. *Laozi* 25: “if compelled I would name it ‘great’” 強為之名曰大. Or it is a less desirable quality than, in fact, weakness:

Laozi 52: “Use its light and return again to clarity.”⁴⁰⁷ The emphasis appears to be that “clarity” (*ming* 明) is a type of stable, constant state that exists when the mind is harmonious. However, when thoughts are disturbed and one might even say dwelling in a place different from one’s physical presence it reduces this harmony. As seen previously, the interaction of senses and thoughts with the outside world disperses the resources of the body and attention - the *qi* travels with the mind. Thus, the passage concludes by advocating using the light of attention when necessary, but returning to clarity.

The third passage presents the story of a king of Qi whose queen passed away.⁴⁰⁸ Instead of making a choice himself, he asks advice from his ministers on who should be made the new queen. The particularly clever Duke of Xue gathers up a set of ten earrings, one pair of which is said to be particularly beautiful, and presents these to the king. Unsurprisingly, the king chooses the beautiful pair and the woman they (presumably) belong to as his new queen. In the process, the Duke becomes a more trusted advisor. The passage cautions that this is in fact an undesirable outcome - after all, it says nothing of whether any of the earrings actually belonged to any of the women in question, or if there even were ten women under consideration. Instead, it implies the Duke understood that the king would pick the “beautiful” earrings and either chose to associate them with his preferred candidate or, if a more sinister reading is given, only gave the illusion of choice

Laozi 76: “The strong and the great are below while the soft and yielding are above.” 強大處下，柔弱處上

But the appearance in the preceding passage of the notion of “overcoming the self” in the passage above calls to mind *Laozi* 33: “one who overcomes the self is strong” 自勝者強, where the character carries a positive implication.

⁴⁰⁷ 用其光，復歸其明也

⁴⁰⁸ 12.41 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT 12.42

to the king while already having made his own decision. In either case, the king is manipulated because the Duke both understands what the king finds attractive in earrings and realizes that the king for whatever reason has little interest in interviewing prospective candidates himself. The passage concludes with the *Laozi* 52 parallel: “Block the openings, shut the doors, and all one’s life will be without exhaustion.”⁴⁰⁹ The message here appears less connected with the physiological model of the other passages. Instead, the passage deals directly with the control of knowledge: knowing what the ruler truly thinks creates an opening for controlling the ruler, therefore wise rulers should “close the doors” and prevent others from knowing their intentions.

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Both essays focus on the idea found in parallels with the received *Laozi* 52 of paying attention to details. In each case these details carry powerful possibilities, whether in the case of the ivory chopsticks of “*Yu Lao*” foretelling future calamity, or the potential for subtle manipulation of rulers and societies found in “*Dao Ying*” which the Duke of Xue understands and Zigong overlooks. Even in the case of the stories of King Goujian and King Wu in “*Yu Lao*” a subtle and perceptive approach is advised as the best way to achieve results. The episode in “*Dao Ying*” with Prince Mou of Zhongshan appears at first to be an exception to this pattern - after all, he appears more interested in his preoccupation with the court. Yet even here, the advice he is given is to find a way of becoming less rigid in the hopes that he would develop clarity - which, we may assume, would ultimately lead to an ability to perceive and act on details.

⁴⁰⁹ 塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。

Laozi 71⁴¹⁰

Returning again to the passage from “*Yu Lao*” discussed in conjunction with parallels with the received *Laozi* 52, above, we find a situation nearly the opposite of the one “*Dao Ying*” depicts.⁴¹¹ As noted above, the passage praises King Goujian of Yue and King Wu of Zhou for their ability to make use of a disadvantaged and submissive position to ultimately overcome their enemies. It connects this thought to *Laozi* 71 by elaborating on the concept of “illness” (*bing* 病). Neither of the kings looked upon their disgrace as a completely undesirable illness, or flaw, and hence they were able to make use of it. The passage concludes with the *Laozi* 71 parallel: “Sages are not ill because they considers themselves to be not ill, and so are without illness.”⁴¹² While the passage could be read from a sort of medical standpoint - wherein sages are able to remain healthy simply by choosing to be so, “*Yu Lao*” encourages a reading of “illness”, *bing*, as something more akin to “fault” or “misfortune”. The message is that sages appear to be without misfortune because they choose to see instead the advantage in whatever situation they encounter.

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“*Dao Ying*” tells an extended story of the military folly of Duke Mu of Qin.⁴¹³ The Duke decides to lead a surprise expedition against the distant state of Zheng, crossing

⁴¹⁰ *Laozi* 71 appears in both essays, but not the same portions of it. The essays practically divide the received *Laozi* passage in half, with each of their portions connected by a couplet found only in the received *Laozi* and not in either essay.

⁴¹¹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.14

⁴¹² 聖人之不病也，以其不病，是以無病。

⁴¹³ 12.40 in *Huainanzi* 2010

over the lands of the state of Jin. One of his advisors cautions him against this attack arguing, in essence, that it was too far away. The Duke ignores him and begins his march. However, he turns back before completing the expedition when a clever merchant sends along a banquet he pretends is from the state of Zheng. Now, thinking that their plans had been leaked, the Qin army marches home. However, in their marching, they had neglected to communicate with the state of Jin during a period of transition from one ruler to his underage heir. As a result, Jin takes advantage of the exhausted Qin army and strikes a decisive blow. The passage concludes with the fairly straightforward judgment found in a parallel with part of the received *Laozi* 71: “Understanding that one does not know something is admirable. Not knowing something yet thinking that one does is an illness.”⁴¹⁴ Essentially, the Duke did not understand the limitations of his own strategic knowledge, overextended himself and ushered in defeat.

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While “*Dao Ying*” focuses on the disadvantages of not understanding the limits of one’s own knowledge, “*Yu Lao*” focuses on the advantages of a kind of positive thinking. In both cases, rigid, uninformed thought is treated as a kind of disease, something that ultimately will wear down and plague someone who lets it. On the other hand, acknowledging one’s own limitations and being open to new, unexpected possibilities hidden even in defeat is depicted as the key to success. Both essays make their point through historical examples, arguing that message of these parallels with the received *Laozi* 71, and *Laozi* as a whole, is applicable to governance and war.

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.41

⁴¹⁴ 知而不知，尚矣。不知而知，病也。

Comparing Jie Lao and Dao Ying

As noted above, “*Dao Ying*” and “*Jie Lao*” share very few *Laozi* parallels in common. But do they at least show some similarities in the ways that they interpret those overlapping passages?⁴¹⁵

Laozi 1⁴¹⁶

“*Jie Lao*” takes a more cosmological approach to a line parallel with the received *Laozi* 1, beginning with a description of how opposites like long and short naturally appear in accordance with any sort of “pattern” (*li* 理) that is not yet “stabilized” (*ding* 定).⁴¹⁷ However, because there are opposites that naturally arise like this they “cannot be called ‘constant’.”⁴¹⁸ Only when the pattern is stabilized can one finally attain the Dao.⁴¹⁹ The problem is, in order to discuss Dao, we must give it the working name “Dao”,⁴²⁰ which prevents the kind of stabilized pattern that would enable true attainment.

⁴¹⁵ Although this chapter deals largely with the primary sources directly, I would like to acknowledge my debt to the translations and interpretations Sarah Queen has provided to these chapters which have significantly informed my own understanding.

See Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master.”, Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12.” and her work on chapter 12 in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*.

⁴¹⁶ *Laozi* 1 appears almost identically in both essays, the only difference being that while “*Jie Lao*” contains only the first couplet on the Dao, “*Dao Ying*” also contains the second couplet on naming.

⁴¹⁷ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.29

⁴¹⁸ 不可謂常

⁴¹⁹ 故理定而後可得道也

⁴²⁰ 強字之曰「道」

“*Dao Ying*” links the famous opening passage from the received *Laozi* to the story of the wheelwright lecturing the duke, also found in the *Zhuangzi*,⁴²¹ making the assertion that knowledge of the Dao is like knowledge of a skill.⁴²² The anecdote makes the case that certain types of valuable knowledge, such as carving wheels or, by extension, ruling states, cannot be transmitted through books, even those supposedly written by sages. Instead the emphasis is on experiential knowledge - learning by doing. Connecting this anecdote to the opening lines of the received *Laozi* gives the sense that knowledge of the Dao must be gained through experience and that any name or description given to it must be only temporary, doomed in time to become, like the books the duke loves, just the “traces of sages” with little use for the present.

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Thus, while “*Dao Ying*” places an emphasis on the transmission of skill-based knowledge through hands-on experience rather than book learning, “*Jie Lao*” uses the same passage to emphasize the cosmological process of “attaining Dao” through a process of “stabilizing patterns”.

Laozi 14⁴²³

“*Jie Lao*” enters into a theoretical discussion of what, exactly is meant by an “image” (*xiang* 象), indicating that because people wish to see an image of life, even when

⁴²¹ *Zhuangzi* chapter 13

⁴²² 12.18 in *Huainanzi* 2010,

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.19

⁴²³ *Laozi* 14 appears in both essays, but “*Dao Ying*” quotes more of the received passage, albeit in two widely separated passages, with the latter portion of the received *Laozi* 14 appearing first.

confronted with the deathly image of bones, they still see what they wish to see, and this imagining is what is called an “image”.⁴²⁴ “*Jie Lao*” then proceeds to summarize but not quote a rhapsody now appearing in the received *Laozi* 14 on imperceptibility that characterized Wuyou in the “*Dao Ying*” interpretation. “*Jie Lao*” concludes by saying that even though the Dao is imperceptible, sages can observe outcomes (*gong* 功) in order to ascertain the form of the Dao. This, the “*Jie Lao*” asserts, is what is meant by “A shape without a shape, an image without a thing.”⁴²⁵

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In “*Dao Ying*”, The first passage shows an anecdote of Tian Pian giving advice to the king of Qi.⁴²⁶ The king is convinced the advice is flowery and useless unless it can be directly used to govern the state. Tian Pian responds by saying his words are like raw materials in a storehouse that can be fashioned into whatever shape is needed at a given moment, saying that they are like what Lao Dan (Laozi) calls “A shape without a shape, an image without a thing”⁴²⁷ - the line now found at the end of the received *Laozi* 14.

Later, in another passage much farther in “*Dao Ying*” an anecdote parallel with one found in *Zhuangzi* 22 is tied together with the first portion of the received *Laozi* 14. In this mythopoetic story someone asks “Nonbeing Being” (*Wuyou* 無有) a profound

⁴²⁴ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.28

⁴²⁵ Note that in her translation, Sarah Queen reads this passage as a discussion of the etymology of the term *xiang* 象 and how it came to mean both “elephant” and “image”. In essence, much like modern paleontologists, sages saw the bones of elephants and imagined what they looked like alive, hence using the outcomes to determine the original shape of a thing.

⁴²⁶ 12.4 in *Huainanzi* 2010, CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.5

⁴²⁷ 無狀之狀，無物之象

question and receives no response.⁴²⁸ Then, the passage quotes, without providing a citation, a parallel with the received *Laozi* 14 to describe the appearance of Wuyou who is presumably in a sort of transcendent state. The passage concludes with a credited quotation of a parallel with the received *Laozi* 43, making a play on the opening words of the passage, which are the same as the character in the anecdote, Wuyou. In both instances, the *Laozi* parallels are being used in a literary manner to describe attributes of a fictional character, who in turn represents a certain kind of profound state that the “*Dao Ying*” wishes to promote.

Thus, while “*Dao Ying*” makes use of the literary aspects of the *Laozi* parallel to illustrate an idealized state and to assert the hidden power of subtle meanings buried in words and stories, the “*Jie Lao*” uses the same passage to discuss, in broad terms, how something unknowable can be perceived through its traces. In this particular case, the two essays show a striking similarity reading a concern with how to perceive the imperceivable into the *Laozi* 14 parallel. But, while “*Jie Lao*” resorts to a technical gloss or even etymology to explain this process of perception, “*Dao Ying*” throws analysis out the window and embraces literary analogy.

Laozi 38⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ 12.45 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.46

⁴²⁹ *Laozi* 38 shows virtually no overlap, with “*Jie Lao*” containing almost the entire passage found in the received *Laozi*, while “*Dao Ying*” contains only one line. This line is also found in the received *Laozi* 12 and 72, making it difficult to place whether “*Dao Ying*” is in fact referring to the rest of *Laozi* 38 at all.

“*Jie Lao*” begins by closely analyzing parallels with almost the entirety of the received *Laozi* 38.⁴³⁰ Through a process of supplying exegesis on each line, “*Jie Lao*” develops an argument whereby superior qualities of *de* 德, *ren* 仁, *yi* 義 and *li* 禮 all emerge from the interior of a person who maintains stillness and gathers *shen* 神 within their bodies. Furthermore, *de*, which is the root of these qualities, is said to be “the outcome of Dao” (道之功), making Dao the ultimate source of these positive qualities. On the other hand, when these qualities are only derived from external, socially conditioned definitions, they are less pure and less useful. Hence, when “*Jie Lao*” concludes its discussion of parallels with the received *Laozi* 38 with the final line:

所謂「去彼取此」者，去貌徑絕，而取緣理好情實也。故曰：「去彼取此。」

⁴³¹

What is called “discarding that and taking this” is referring to discarding external adornment and unreasonable actions, adopting instead the reality of related patterns and good conditions. Thus it says: “Discarding that and taking this.”

—

“*Dao Ying*” connects the *Laozi* 38 parallels to an anecdote about ideal rule.⁴³²

Traveling at night, Wuma Qi encounters a fisherman who catches fish and throws them back. The fisherman explains that Mizi, the ruler for the last three years, has told them to throw back the small fish. Later, Kongzi explains this incident as a sign that Mizi’s rule was so inspiring in his sincerity (*cheng* 誠) that people follow his wishes even in the dark of night when presumably no one is watching. This anecdote is then tied to the *Laozi* 38

⁴³⁰ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.1-9

⁴³¹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.9 (translation mine)

⁴³² 12.43 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.44

parallel “Discarding that and taking this” 去彼取此), both metaphorically because Mizi has chosen to emphasize sincerity in his rule and literally in that the fisherman was discarding the small fish and choosing only the large ones. The connection can be read as a sort of witty literary allusion.

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While “*Dao Ying*” highlights a more literary and even punning use of the line parallel with *Laozi* 38 to make a point about a well-run state, “*Jie Lao*” presents a theoretical argument that is cosmological, physiological and political. Both essays seek to harmonize ideas in *Laozi* parallels with what could be termed “Ruist” values: in “*Dao Ying*” Kongzi is sympathetically portrayed, advocating governing through sincerity. In “*Jie Lao*” the qualities of *ren*, *yi*, and *li* are all said to derive, in their best forms, from Dao. These differences may relate to a difference of audience: “*Jie Lao*” focuses primarily on how the actions of a single, cultivated ruler may bring harmony to a state, and as such locating all “Ruist” values as originating in a Dao that the ruler has direct access to would be advantageous. “*Dao Ying*” pays more attention to the evaluation and employment of ministers, and as such how a ruler should relate to them, meaning that an association with the fictional Kongzi’s advocacy of governing through sincerity could be tied to a ruler better relating to a court full of experts. Additionally, the *Huainanzi* as a whole presents a wide variety of literary engagements with Kongzi and “Ruist” values that seek to harmonize them with its overall conception of rulership.⁴³³

⁴³³ For an extended discussion of how the *Huainanzi* presents Kongzi, see Queen, Sarah A. “Representations of Confucius in the *Huainanzi*.” In *Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, by Michael Puett and Sarah A Queen, 83–123. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014.

Laozi 58⁴³⁴

“*Jie Lao*” contains parallels with most of the received *Laozi* 58.⁴³⁵ It begins by using the *Laozi* to discuss the interchange of good and ill fortune and ties their manifestations to personal behavior. Disaster, the essay asserts, promotes caution, which in turn leads to correct behavior, which causes a return of prosperity. On the other hand, too much honor and success breed pride and carelessness which open the path to misfortune. “*Jie Lao*” asserts that the interchanges are all related to the *li* 理, or patterns of Dao and that a ruler who understands these patterns can navigate shifts of fortune with ease. “*Jie Lao*” then extends its argument, quoting again from *Laozi* 58 and asserting that what people truly want in wealth, honor and success are ultimately derived from proper conduct, and it is only through confusion that they are thwarted. Finally, “*Jie Lao*” concludes with the same line from *Laozi* 58 that “*Dao Ying*” used above, and adding another couplet: “orderly, but not causing harm, honest, but not cutting, direct, but without measure, bright but not glaring.”⁴³⁶ “*Jie Lao*” glosses each significant term and goes to lengths to explain how ideal scholar-officials (*shi* 士) are talented, but act carefully and courteously to express their message. Because they are both wise and conduct themselves appropriately, they are better able to convey their expert opinions to rulers and thereby reduce confusion.

⁴³⁴ *Laozi* 58 is especially puzzling because, although both essays contain portions of the passage found in the received *Laozi*, they only overlap by one line.

⁴³⁵ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.10-14

⁴³⁶ 方而不割，廉而不（穢）（戾），直而不肆，光而不耀。

“*Dao Ying*” contains two consecutive anecdotes containing materials from *Laozi* 58. In the first passage, “*Dao Ying*” presents a dialogue between two characters who discusses the proper exercise of power, and suggests that those who rule through harsh punishments are liable to stretch their power too thin, ultimately resulting in upheaval and their own demise.⁴³⁷ This evaluation is capped with a phrase parallel with the received *Laozi* 58: “When the government is muddled, the people are simple, when the government is alert, the people are cunning.” The connection suggests that excessive punishments are an overt demonstration of power that could lead to revolt and ruin, while other means of control might be less disastrous.

In the second passage, “*Dao Ying*” presents the story of a diviner claiming supernatural powers to move the earth to a ruler.⁴³⁸ One of the ruler’s ministers, Yanzi, has his doubts, but instead of voicing them directly to the ruler, speaks with the diviner and encourages him to clarify that it is not that he himself moves the earth, but that he has divined that it will move. This small difference saves his life, and prevents the ruler from being deceived. This anecdote is paired with the quotation parallel with part of the received *Laozi* 58: “orderly, but not causing harm, honest, but not cutting,” which is used to describe the minister who acts in the best interests of the ruler he serves without causing unnecessary harm - even if it means acting without the ruler’s knowledge.

⁴³⁷ 12.52 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.53

⁴³⁸ 12.53 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.54

“*Dao Ying*” chooses literary analogies to show how rulers and ministers might better act. In particular, the essay shows how a clever and tactful minister can act in the shadows to disarm potential situations, remaining loyal to his ruler while at the same time concealing some of his actions. “*Jie Lao*” utilizes a combination of exegesis and structured argument to paint the picture of ministers who act tactfully precisely so that they will be believed when they attempt to dispel a ruler’s confusion. Thus, though both essays agree that especially the final line parallel with the received *Laozi* 58 pertains to ministers acting in the interest of their rulers, they differ both in style of presentation and in how they seek to portray those ministers: the “*Dao Ying*” minister is autonomous and willing to confuse his ruler if it ultimately yields a better outcome for that ruler, the “*Jie Lao*” ministers seek to appear upright and honest so that they may dispel confusion. We might understand this difference in perspectives from a difference in audience, as in the last comparison above. “*Jie Lao*” places the focus on the ruler, and so presents ideal ministers as being loyal, honest and capable of clearly presenting situations so rulers may act on them. On the other hand, “*Dao Ying*” emphasizes the importance of managing ministers with a wide range of skills, including in this case one who knows when to conceal information from a ruler that might lead to a rash decision.

Comparing 54 (All Three)

Despite the frequent use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels in all three of the essays, there is only a single passage in the received *Laozi* that they share in common - what is now found in *Laozi* 54. Because this passage gives the best ground for comparing the

essays with each other, the following section will devote additional space to evaluating how each of the essays treats this particular passage. Additionally, the following will provide points of reference on how the early interpretations found in the three essays relate to the what is likely the earliest interlinear commentary - the *Yan Zun*, as well as the most widely read commentaries on *Laozi* - the *Heshanggong* and *Wang Bi* - in order to give a sense of how the early essays differ in their treatment and understanding of *Laozi* from subsequent readings.

Jie Lao

人無愚智，莫不有趨舍。恬淡平安，莫不知禍福之所由來。得於好惡，怵於淫物，而後變亂。所以然者，引於外物，亂於玩好也。恬淡有趨舍之義，平安知禍福之計。而今也玩好變之，外物引之。引之而往，故曰「校」。至聖人不然：一建其趨舍，雖見所好之物，不能引，不能引之謂「不校」；一於其情，雖有可欲之類，神不為動，神不為動之謂「不悅」。為人子孫者，體此道以守宗廟，〔宗廟〕不滅之謂「祭祀不絕」。身以積精為德，家以資財為德，鄉國天下皆以民為德。今治身而外物不能亂其精神，故曰：「脩之身，其德乃真。」真者，慎之固也。治家，無用之物不能動其計，則資有餘，故曰：「脩之家，其德有餘。」治鄉者行此節，則家之有餘者益眾，故曰：「脩之鄉，其德乃長。」治邦者行此節，則鄉之有德者益眾，故曰：「脩之邦，其德乃豐。」莅天下者行此節，則民之生莫不受其澤，故曰：「脩之天下，其德乃普。」脩身者以此別君子小人，治鄉治邦莅天下者，各以此科適觀息耗，則萬不失一。故曰：「以身觀身，以家觀家，〔以鄉觀鄉〕，以邦觀邦，以天下觀天下。吾奚以知天下之然也？以此。」⁴³⁹

People whether stupid or wise, never fail [to be able] to accept and reject [things]. Whether indifferent or tranquil, they never fail to understand the causes of ill and good fortune. But if people become caught up in their likes and dislikes and beguiled by extravagant things, only then do they change and become disordered.

⁴³⁹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.37

The reason that this is so is due to the fact that they are enticed by external things and disordered by their playful preferences. When indifferent they can ascertain the significance of rejecting and accepting and if secure they understand how to calculate ill and good fortune. Yet if playful preferences change them and external things entice them, they follow what entices them. Thus the expression “*uprooted.*”

Coming to a sage, however, this is not so. Once the sage establishes that which he rejects and accepts, although he may see things that he desires they are unable to entice him. Since he cannot be enticed it is said he is “*not uprooted.*” The sage is one with his emotions so that even though he may encounter things that are desirable, his spirit remains unperturbed. Since his spirit remains unperturbed it is called “*not slipping away.*” If as a son or grandson, you embody this way in order to preserve the ancestral temples from destruction this is called “*sacrifice without end.*”

The body accumulates vital essence to become potent, the family accumulates possessions and property to become potent, the village, state, and world, rely on their people to become potent. Now if you regulate yourself, external things cannot disturb your quintessential spirit. Thus it is said: “*If you cultivate it in your person, your potency will be genuine.*”

“Genuine” refers to the stability of your potency. For those who manage the family, if useless things cannot disturb their calculations, their families will enjoy a surplus of goods. Thus it is said: “*If you cultivate it in your family, your potency will overflow.*”

When those who manage a village act on such regulation, those families who possess a surplus of goods will increase and multiply. Thus it is said: “*If you cultivate it in your village, your potency will be long lasting.*”

When those who manage states act on such regulation, those within the states who possess potency will increase and multiply. Thus it is said: “*If you cultivate it in your state, your potency will be abundant.*”

When those who rule the world act on such regulation, the lives of the common people will all benefit from his kindness. Thus it is said: “*If you cultivate it in the world, your potency will be pervasive.*”

Those who cultivate themselves by means of this [principle of regulation] will distinguish the Gentleman from the petty man. Each of those who manage villages, states, and oversee the world by means of this [principle of regulation] will judge production and consumption and never err, not a single time in ten

thousand. Thus it is said: "Use the individual to examine the individual; the family to examine the family; the village to examine the village; the state to examine the state; and the world to examine the world. How do I know that the world is so? By means of this" ⁴⁴⁰

In its concluding passage, "*Jie Lao*" interweaves the source text found in *Laozi* 54 into the commentary, integrating it into the overall argument, yet the text of the *Laozi* is still treated as an authority. The argument hinges on glosses of terms and the ordering of the *Laozi* 54 parallels.

The "*Jie Lao*" begins on the individual level, showing that:

- a. People are naturally inclined to like and dislike things
- b. Following these likes and dislikes leads to disorder
- c. Sages are able to separate from likes and dislikes

This claim is then extended outward, to family, town and state – showing that in each case this sort of clear-minded behavior on the part of the sage is what enables prosperity and flourishing.

At each level, the head or leader of each group regulates themselves. The quality of regulation is still individual, but its effects can be felt externally. These effects include increasing the number of individuals who can regulate themselves in a similar manner, and thus the number of social groups that can be properly regulated and prosper.

The "*Jie Lao*" reads the passage as one on self-cultivation that has visible effects on improving the functioning of the world and society. This cultivation is practical: not allowing oneself to be controlled and distracted by desires. The "rootedness" in question

⁴⁴⁰ trans. Queen, "Han Feizi and the Old Master," pp 245-246.

is being stable despite the vicissitudes of external things and personal likes and dislikes. Coming from this centered perspective, one is then able to make clear and calculating decisions without error and bring prosperity to those around them.

Yu Lao

楚莊王既勝，狩于河雍，歸而賞孫叔敖。孫叔敖請漢間之地，沙石之處。楚邦之法，祿臣再世而收地，唯孫叔敖獨在。此不以其邦為收者，瘠也，故九世而祀不絕。故曰：「善建不拔，善抱不脫，子孫以其祭祀世世不輟。」孫叔敖之謂也。⁴⁴¹

When King Zhuang of Chu was victorious in war, he held a hunt at Heyang. Upon his return, he rewarded Sunshu Ao. Sunshu Ao then requested that he be given the sandy and stony land near the Han River. According to the laws of the Chu state, gifts to subjects are confiscated after two generations, however the lands of Sunshu Ao alone remained intact. The reason his land was not confiscated was because it was barren. Accordingly nine generations carried out sacrifices to him without interruption. Therefore it is said:

What is firmly established will not be uprooted;

What is firmly embraced will not slip away.

Your sons and grandsons consequently will sacrifice without end.

This refers to Sunshu Ao.⁴⁴²

The “*Yu Lao*” presents a portion of the same *Laozi* 54 parallel through the lens of an allegory. In the allegory, Sunshu Ao is praised for his cleverness in selecting an otherwise undesirable plot of land when offered a reward from the king of Chu. As a result, while most land is taken from a family after a certain number of descendants, because no one else cares about the land his family is able to maintain ancestral sacrifices for nine

⁴⁴¹ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.6

⁴⁴² trans. Queen, “Han Feizi and the Old Master,” 247.

generations, which is of great significance from the perspective of the passage. The allegory chooses to illustrate the image of “...sons and grandsons consequently will sacrifice without end” and give an explanation for how this phrase fits with the lines above it.

This commentary also places a special interpretation on the word *shan* 善, here translated as “firmly”. This word carries the meaning of “good” or “well” or “excellent”. The implication is that one who “is good at rooting... is good at holding..” behaves in the same way as Sunshu Ao: in a canny and clever way. Sunshu Ao has a particularly good understanding of what others desire and how the political world functions; specifically he understands:

- a. What is desirable to most people (fertile land)
- b. What is more desirable for his family (stability)
- c. How the government system works (land is taken away after two generations)

With this knowledge, he carefully makes a choice that will produce the optimal result, even if it means giving up on immediate gains. Sunshu Ao embodies the ideal of a savvy individual who, through trained and cultivated cleverness, is able to benefit his family. This cleverness is completely practical, rooted in an understanding of how human beings behave, combined with a degree of self-restraint to choose the optimal solution regardless of short term gain.

Dao Ying

楚莊王問詹何曰：「治國奈何？」〔詹何〕對曰：「何明於治身，而不明於治國？」楚王曰：「寡人得（立）〔奉〕宗廟社稷，願學所以守之。」詹何對曰：「臣未嘗聞身治而國亂者也，未嘗聞身亂而國治者也。故本（任）〔在〕於身，不敢對以（未）〔末〕。」楚王曰：「善。」故老子曰：「修之身，其德乃真也。」⁴⁴³

King Zhuang of Chu inquired about Zhan He [i.e. Zhanzi]: “How should I bring order to my state?”

Zhan He replied: “I, [Zhan] He, know how to order my person but know nothing of ordering the state.”

The king of Chu responded: “I, the orphaned one, have inherited the shrines and temples of my ancestors and the altars to the soil and grain. I would like to learn how to preserve them.”

Zhan He replied:

“I have never heard of a ruler who brought order to his person yet found his state to be in disorder.

I have never heard of a ruler whose person was disordered yet found his state to be ordered.

Thus when the root of the matter rests with bringing order to your person, I would not presume to answer your query by speaking of the branches.”

The king of Chu exclaimed: “Excellent!”

Therefore the *Laozi* says:

“Cultivate it in your person,
and your Potency will be genuine”⁴⁴⁴

The “*Dao Ying*” version of parallels with the received *Laozi* 54 includes an episode involving, again, King Zhuang of Chu, who asks Zhan He (Zhanzi) about ruling the state. Zhanzi replies that the king should first bring order to himself or his own body (*zhi shen* 治身), and only then worry about the state. Zhanzi’s advice is linked to a parallel with the

⁴⁴³ 12.17 in *Huainanzi* 2010

CHANT *Huainanzi* 12.18

⁴⁴⁴ Trans. Sarah Queen in Liu An et al., *The Huainanzi: a Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 452–453.

received *Laozi* 54 line “Cultivate the body, and the *de* will be authentic,”⁴⁴⁵ which appears to act as confirmation of his emphasis on beginning with one’s own person, especially if a knowledge is assumed of the following lines found in the received *Laozi* 54, where the focus of cultivation extends outward in concentric social circles until it encompasses the entire world. We may also here ask whether the *shen* 身 in the passage indicates specifically the ruler’s body or a more general sense of self. In the context of the other passages examined above, there appears to be evidence on both sides. As we have seen, all three of the essays have highlighted a physiological model of attention and decision-making. A person who dissipates themselves via sensory or mental stimulation becomes distracted, while one who is calm gains clarity. This clarity in turn leads to better decision-making. Thus what we might call “self-regulation” (*zhi shen* 治身) involves cautious approach toward both sensory and mental stimulation.

A possible answer to why King Zhuang was connected with this passage may be found in the “*Yu Lao*” where he also appears:⁴⁴⁶ for the first three years of his reign the then Duke Zhuang was silent and did not issue any commands. However, after a Minister posed him with a riddle that challenged this state of inaction, King Zhuang rallied and within a short time ordered his state and began to challenge the authority of the central Zhou government. From the viewpoint of *Laozi* 54 parallels, he put himself in order first, separated out from the distractions of his likes and dislikes and the draw of external things. Following that he then brought the state into order. In other words by this reading,

⁴⁴⁵ 修之身，其德乃真也

⁴⁴⁶ CHANT *Hanfeizi* 21.21-22

the King realized he was initially disordered and spent three years placing both himself and his state in line. Then, when the time for action came, it was simply a matter of setting in motion what had already been prepared.

Three Later Commentaries and Laozi 54

Yan Zun

The *Daode Zhenjing Zhigui* 道德真經指歸 (“Pointers on the True Classic of the Dao and *De*”), also known as the *Yan Zun* 嚴遵 commentary is possibly the oldest surviving interlinear commentary on the *Laozi*. Only the portion covering the “*De Jing*” section of the *Laozi*, or roughly the last half has survived in full. The commentary is attributed to Yan Zun, styled Junping 君平 (fl. 80-10 BCE), a recluse who was known to have taught the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and the *Yi*.⁴⁴⁷ At an uncertain later date,⁴⁴⁸ the text acquired the further commentary of a certain Gushenzi 谷神子 (“Valley Spirit Master”), apparently a pen-name referencing the “valley spirit” in *Laozi* 6.

There are two layers of commentary. The first is an interlinear one which serves primarily to gloss terms and concepts in *Laozi*. The second is a more extensive discursive section discussing the key ideas of the passage. The presence of two interpreters causes difficulties of dating each of these sections, though we may guess at who is responsible

⁴⁴⁷ *Laozi Jicheng* v. 1 p 92

⁴⁴⁸ Possibly as late as the Tang, according to Chao Gongwu 晁公武 cf. *Laozi Jicheng* v. 1 p 92

for which. Because the discursive section contains more content and argument, and echoes the interlinear glosses, I have translated it as interpretation of *Laozi* 54.

天地之間，廣大修遠，殊風異俗，笏類眾巨，變化無窮，利害謬詭，故能不能制，而為不能為也。我為天下，而天下為我，彼我相遇，則彼眾而我寡，則眾寧寡殆。故，以己知立，則知奪之；以己巧立，則巧伐之；以己力立，則力威之。

The space between the heavens and the earth, spreads wide and stretches far. There are myriad traditions and varying customs. There are all kinds of official tablets and crowds of officials. It all alternates and transforms without limit. Fortune and arm are false and deceitful, and so what is possible cannot be controlled, and action cannot be acted upon. If I act on the world the world will act on me, I and other meet each other, and the other is legion while I am alone, and the legion is tranquil while the lone is in peril. Thus, if one uses self-based knowledge to establish something, then knowledge will steal it away; if one uses the self-based cleverness to establish something, then cleverness will cut it away; if one uses the self-based force to establish something, then force will destroy it. 唯無所為，莫能敗之。何以效其然也？夫默而求響，響不我應；託陰求影，影不我從；畏響而扣金，響愈我應；惡影而處陽，影益我從。由此觀之，無為不能遁福，有為不能逃患。是以，聖人去力，去巧，去知，去賢。建道抱德，攝精畜神，體和襲弱，履地戴天。

It is only in the case of having no action where none can defeat it. How could it be so effective? It is like being silent and seeking sound: sound does not respond to me. It is like entrusting oneself to shadow while searching for a reflection, the reflection does not follow me. But if I fear making a sound and strike a piece of metal, the sound responds to me more. If I hate reflections and I stand in the sun, the reflection will follow me even more. Looking from this perspective, non-action cannot follow fortune, while having-action cannot escape disaster. Therefore, sages discards force, discards cleverness, discards knowledge and discards worthiness. They establish Dao and embrace *de*, accumulate *jing* and pile up *shen*, harmonize the body and follow softness, covering the earth and carrying the heavens.

空虛寂泊，若亡若存，中外俱默，變化於玄。無為無事，反樸歸真，無法無度，與變俱然。抱小託大，牧養萬民，方圓先後，常與身存。體正神寧，傳嗣子孫。德積化流，洋溢無窮，衰而復盛，與天俱終。故治之於身，則性簡

情易，心達志通，遠所不遠，明所不明。重神愛氣，輕物細名，思慮不惑，血氣和平。筋骨便利，耳目聰明，冗膚潤澤，面理有光。精神專固，生生青青，身體輕勁，美好難終。

Empty, void, alone and still, seeming to vanish and seeming to exist, both center and exterior silent, changing and alternating with the profound. Without action or affairs, reverting to the uncarved and returning to the authentic. Without law and without measure, in combination and alternation it is all like this. Holding to the small and entrusting to the great, like a shepherd nourishing the myriad people, the square and the round, before and after, constantly merge and the body exists. When the body is aligned and the *shen* tranquil, [there is] an inheritance for one's descendants. When *de* is accumulated and transformed flows, [so that] it permeates without limit, sorrow returns to prosperity, and all things end together with the heavens. Thus, when one “governs in the body” then one's nature is simple and one's emotions easy, the heart-mind reaches [to where it needs to go] and the will passes through [where it ought]. Distance has that which is not distance. Brightness has that which is not bright. When valuing *shen* and loving *qi*, disregarding things and diminishing reputation, thoughts are not confused and blood and *qi* are harmonious and even. Joints and bones become {effective?}, ears and eyes are bright and clear, the skin smooth and moist, wrinkles on the face have a gleam. When *jing* and *shen* circulate like this, lively and vibrant, the body is light and energetic, happy and difficult to end.

治之於家，則夫信婦貞，父慈子孝，兄順弟悌，九族和親。耕桑時得，畜積殷殷，六畜蕃殖，事業修治，常有餘財，鄉邑願之。治之於鄉，則睹綱知紀，動合中和，名實正矣。白黑分明，曲直異理，是非自得，姦邪不起。威嚴尊顯，令行禁止，奉上化下，公若父子，敬愛信嚮，上下歡喜。百姓和集，官無留負，職修名榮，稱為君子，常有餘德，沒身不殆。

When one “governs it in the home” then the husband is trustworthy and the wife faithful, the father compassionate and the son filial, the older brother agreeable and the younger loving, the nine degrees of kin harmonious and close. When it is the time to till and cultivate, the livestock gather and flourish, the six kinds of animals propagate, facilities are in good repair, there always is wealth to spare, and towns and villages all want them [to live there]. When one “governs it in the village” then one sees the outline of a net and [from that] knows its weave, [people] act together and are harmonious within, names and actualities are correctly related. Light and dark are separated clearly, the twisted and straight are

different patterns, “is” and “is not” naturally obtain [their intended use], perversion and wickedness do not arise. Dignified and respected, moving when ordered and stopping when prohibited, revering those above and transforming those below, the lord is like a father with a son, respectful, loving, trustworthy and supportive, above and below all are happy and delighted. The people gather harmoniously, the ministers leave behind no responsibility, in work and study their names are bright and so they are called “*junzi*”, constantly having *de* to spare, so that the loss of self is no disaster.

治之於國，則主明臣忠，朝不壅賢，士不口功，邪不蔽正，讒不害公。和睦順從，上下無怨，百官樂職，萬事自然。遠人懷慕，天下同風，國富民實，不伐而疆。宗廟尊顯，社稷永寧，陰陽永合，禍亂不生。萬物豐熟，境內大寧。鄰家託命，後世蕃昌，道德有餘，與天為常。

When “governing it in the state” the ruler will be clear and the ministers loyal, the court does not obstruct the worthy, the scholar officials do not {character missing} works, wickedness does not cover over correctness and slander does not harm the lord. Harmonious and peaceful in according and following, above and below are without resentment, the hundred ministers delight in their work, and the myriad affairs [resolve] of themselves. People far away think [on the state] with admiration, and the world [becomes] of the same customs, the state flourishes and the people are wealthy, and without attacking the borders [are accepted]. The ancestral temple is respected, the alters of soil and grain are eternally tranquil, yin and yang are eternally harmonious, disaster and chaos do not develop. The myriad things grow abundantly, and within the borders is great tranquility.

Neighborhoods of homes are sheltering, later generations flourish, Dao and *de* are in surplus, and all together will the heavens becomes constant.

治之於天下，則主陰臣陽，主靜臣動，主圓臣方，主因臣唱，主默臣言。正直公方，和一大通，平易無為，寂泊無聲。德馳相告，神騁相傳，運動無端，變化若天。不行而知，不為而成，功與道倫，宇內反真，無事無憂，太平自興。

When “governing it in the world” then the ruler will be yin and the ministers yang, the ruler still and the ministers active, the ruler round and the ministers square, the ruler harmonizes and the ministers sing [the melody], the ruler is silent and the ministers speak. Correct and straight, the lord is square, harmonizing with the one and the great pervasion, smooth and easy and non-acting, silent and still without a sound. The *de* gallops in announcing to others, the *shen* speeds in

transmitting to others, it moves and shifts without end, alternating and transforming like the heavens. Without moving it knows, without acting it completes, works are coherent with the Dao, all in the world returns to authenticity, without affairs and without worries, greatly peaceful and spontaneously prosperous.

是故，我身者，彼身之尺寸也；我家者，彼家之權衡也；我鄉者，彼鄉之規矩也；我國者，彼國之准繩也；人主者，天下之腹心也；天下者，人主之身形也。故天下者與人主俱利俱病、俱邪俱正。主民俱全，天下俱然。家國相保，人主相連。苟能得已，天下自然。故，可以知我者，無所不知；可以治我者，無所不治；便於我者，無所不可；利於我者，無所不宜。可不於我而可於彼者，天下無之。⁴⁴⁹

Therefore, [through] one's body [one sees]⁴⁵⁰ the inches and feet of others' bodies; [through] one's family [one sees] the weights and measures of others' families; [through] one's village [one sees] the extent of territory of others' villages; [through] one's state, [one sees] the standards and marking cords of others' states; [through] the people and the ruler, [one sees] the stomach and heart of the world; [through] the world, [one sees] the body and form of the people and the ruler. Thus, the world with people and the ruler flourish together and are diseased together, they are wicked together and upright together. The ruler and the people together are complete, just as the heavens and the earth are together. The home and the state protect each other, the people and the ruler link with each other. If one can attain this already, then the world would be self-so. Thus, if one can know the self, nothing will be unknown; if one can govern the self, nothing will be ungoverned; if one can see the advantageous in oneself, then nothing will be impossible; If one can see the benefit in oneself, then nothing will be unfavorable. But if these things cannot [be found] in oneself, yet they can [be found] in others, then the whole world is without them.

⁴⁴⁹ *Laozi Jicheng* vol. 1 pp 92-93

Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁵⁰ I place the notion of "seeing through" in the commentary to keep it consistent with the text of *Laozi* 54: 故以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以國觀國，以天下觀天下。

Thematically, the *Zhigui* adheres to many of the same concepts introduced in the earlier essays: *Laozi* 54 deals with bridging the gap between self and other, is primarily political in orientation, and sees that harmonious cultivation of the self produces effects that radiate out to increasingly larger aspects of society. The *Zhigui* is detailed in its normative descriptions of exactly how a cultivated person, family or state should be, to a much greater extent than the earlier essays. The descriptions of a harmonious society are vivid, but also convey a sense of being formulaic, embracing commonly accepted and even “Ruist” models, such as fathers being compassionate and sons filial.

There is also some evidence of the physiological model present in the *Zhigui* - it repeatedly notes that the accumulation of *jing* and *shen* and the circulation of *qi* are essential to health and prosperity. Although these are fundamentally present at the personal level their influence is felt at the more general level of society, though not in a manner of mysterious influence exhibited by sages or cultivated persons like Gengsang Chu⁴⁵¹ improve harmony and the quality of the harvests simply by their presence in an area. Instead, we see that there is careful regulation and rectification at every level, leading ultimately to a well-ordered society.

Similarly, the passage asserts that there is a fundamental continuity between the people, the ruler and the heavens and the earth. These entities influence each other and are, in a sense, inseparable, as though they were one body. Hence, the connection between the microcosmic level of governing one’s own body and the macrocosmic level

⁴⁵¹ *Zhuangzi* chapter 23. Gengsang Chu had been cultivating for a long time when he came to live on a mountain outside of a village. The harvest is unexpectedly plentiful, which the text suggests was caused by his presence, and the aura of cultivated energy he was giving off.

of governing the world implied in *Laozi* 54 is made explicit and used to project a sense of unity between ruler, ruled and the world they inhabit. In this sense, and in the way the *Zhigui* sees using each level of “governing” as a way of measuring and comparing self and other, there are similarities with the *Heshanggong* commentary, similarly credited to the Western Han.

He Shang Gong

The *Heshang Gong* 河上公 commentary has historically been the one most commonly attached to *Laozi*. Its author and date of composition remain a mystery. The story of an old hermit living by the riverside during the reign of King Wen of Han (r. 179-156 BCE) is most likely a legend.⁴⁵²

<i>Laozi</i> 54 ⁴⁵³	Heshang Gong ⁴⁵⁴
What is firmly uprooted cannot be pulled out;	<i>'Uprooted' is to set up. The excellent person [is one who] uses the way to set up [one's] person and set up the state, that person cannot be grasped or dragged along or pulled up.</i>
What is tightly held in the arms will not slip loose;	<i>The excellent person uses the way to embrace jing and shen, and in the end cannot be pulled up or cut loose.</i>
Through this the offering of sacrifice by descendants will never come to an end.	<i>In conducting themselves, descendants can cultivate the way like this, live a long time and not die, and each generation will thus be long; the sacrifices [to] the ancestors,</i>

⁴⁵² For more discussion on the story and authorship issues, see Alan Kam-Leung Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu*, First Edition (State University of New York Press, 1991), 90–95.

⁴⁵³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching: A Bilingual Edition*, 78–79.

⁴⁵⁴ Translated based on the *Laozi Heshang Gong Zhangju* 老子河上公章句 [*Heshang Gong Laozi*] edition See Xiong Tiejie 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星, eds., *Laozi Jicheng* 老子集成, vol. 1 (Beijing 北京: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe 宗教文化出版社, 2011), pp.163-164.

	<i>and the ancestral shrine will never be cut off.</i>
Cultivate it in your person And its virtue will be genuine;	<i>[If one] cultivates the way in [one's] person, loving qi and nourishing shen, [one will] increase longevity and prolong life. [If] one's virtue is like this, then [one] will become a true person (zhenren).</i>
Cultivate it in the family And its virtue will be more than sufficient;	<i>[If one] cultivates the way in the family, [then] fathers [will be] benevolent and sons filial, older brothers friendly and younger brothers obedient, husbands trustworthy and wives chaste. [If] one's virtue is like this, then there will be an abundance of celebration even up to following generations of descendants.</i>
Cultivate it in the hamlet And its virtue will endure;	<i>[If one] cultivates the way in the hamlet, [then] the elderly [will be] revered, the young loved and cared for, and the ignorant instructed. [If] one's virtue is like this, then nothing will be covered over.</i>
Cultivate it in the state And its virtue will abound;	<i>[If one] cultivates the way in the state, then lords [will be] trustworthy and ministers loyal, humaneness and righteousness (renyi) [will be] produced spontaneously, rituals and music [will] flourish spontaneously, and the governance [will be] fair and without partiality. [If] a one's virtue is like this, then [the state] will become prosperous.</i>
Cultivate it in the empire And its virtue will be pervasive.	<i>[If] the leader of people cultivates the way in the world, [the people will] transform without being told, be governed without being taught, those below will respond (ying) to those above, and in their trust they [will be] like shadows or echoes [in that they follow exactly]. [If] one's virtue is like this, then [one will] become rich and popular.</i>
Hence look at the person through the person;	<i>Using the person of [one who has] cultivated the way, observe the person of</i>

	<i>[one who has] not cultivated the way, which is lost and which endures (cun)?</i>
Look at the family through the family;	<i>Using the family that has cultivated the way, observe the family that has not cultivated the way.</i>
Look at the hamlet through the hamlet;	<i>Using the hamlet that has cultivated the way, observe the hamlet that has not cultivated the way.</i>
Look at the state through the state;	<i>Using the state that has cultivated the way, observe the state that has not cultivated the way.</i>
Look at the empire through the empire.	<i>Using the leader who has cultivated the way, observe the leader who has not cultivated the way.</i>
How do I know that the empire is like that? By means of this.	<i>Laozi says: 'How is it that I know those who cultivate the way flourish, and that those who turn their backs to the way perish? Using these five matters (self, family, hamlet, state and world) I observe and know this.'</i>

From the first line it is clear that a more mysterious power is at work. The commentary advises one to make use of the way to establish the person and the state, and to use the way to “embrace the quintessential spirit.” Cultivating oneself like this produces a number of results. First, for the individual it nourishes *qi* 氣 and *shen* 神, and prolongs life. This energy then seems to radiate out, producing harmony in the family, the village and the state. In each case the harmonious qualities that emerge are those that are commonly associated with “Ruist” virtues: *xiao* 孝, *ren* 仁, and *yi* 義. These virtues arise spontaneously when the Dao is properly cultivated, meaning that the Dao supersedes all human and social values.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ This establishing Ruist virtues as rooted in cultivation of the Dao is similar to the opening passages of “*Jie Lao*”. There also the cultivation and preservation of *shen* is ultimately a key to connecting with the

When the commentary comes to the level of the world, a ruler's cultivation of the way affects how the people respond. The people “resonate” (*ying* 應) with the ruler and become like shadows or echoes, exactly following their model without being told or instructed how to act.⁴⁵⁶ If the ruler is able to master utilizing these responses, he can direct the empire through simple actions that have extended effects on the functioning of the empire. *Heshang Gong* seems recognize that the key to utilizing this resonance phenomenon is through cultivation of the way.

Wang Bi

Wang Bi (226-249 CE) was a young and intelligent scholar who completed influential commentaries on the *Analects*, the *Zhouyi* and *Laozi*. His *Laozi* commentary is philosophical and practical in nature, and has served as the basis for many modern scholarly analyses of *Laozi*.⁴⁵⁷

Wang Bi utilizes an interlinear commentary style for the *Laozi* 54 passage, where a line of the source text is directly followed by interpretation. Given this format, it presents an argument that is linked closely with the pattern of development of the source text. However, this does not mean that there is less room for interpretation, though the ideas of the commentator are more difficult to separate from the ideas of the source text.

Dao and in turn establishing a true, internal foundation for these virtues, rather than the socially conditioned one it asserts most people accept.

⁴⁵⁶ his idea of resonance is similar to the one expressed in *Huainanzi* 6, 'Lanming Xun' 覽冥訓 [Surveying Obscurities] that details a world where every event causes resonance in other events.

⁴⁵⁷ The most extensive work on Wang Bi's commentary has been done by Rudolf Wagner. Most significant for this paper was his history and critical edition of the text in Rudolf G. Wagner, *Laozi, and Bi Wang, A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (SUNY Press, 2003).

Laozi 54 ⁴⁵⁸	Wang Bi ⁴⁵⁹
What is firmly uprooted cannot be pulled out;	<i>Set its roots and after nourish its branches, thus it will not be pulled out.</i>
What is tightly held in the arms will not slip loose;	<i>Not coveting too much, managing what one can do, thus nothing will slip loose.</i>
Through this the offering of sacrifice by descendants will never come to an end.	<i>Descendants transmit this way so that the sacrifices will never come to an end.</i>
Cultivate it in your person And its virtue will be genuine;	<i>Using one's self to reach others, if cultivated, the person will be genuine; if cultivated, the home will be more than sufficient; if cultivated and not abandoned, that which it gives will be great.</i>
Cultivate it in the family And its virtue will be more than sufficient;	
Cultivate it in the hamlet And its virtue will endure;	
Cultivate it in the state And its virtue will abound;	
Cultivate it in the empire And its virtue will be pervasive.	
Hence look at the person through the person;	<i>These are all like this.</i>
Look at the family through the family;	
Look at the hamlet through the hamlet;	
Look at the state through the state;	
Look at the empire through the empire.	
How do I know that the empire is like that? By means of this.	<i>This is what is said above. It says 'how can I attain knowledge of the world?', [one] observes oneself in order to know it, and does not seek for it on the outside, [this is] that which is called 'one who does not go out the doors in order to know the world.'</i>

⁴⁵⁸ Translated by D.C. Lau Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. D.C. Lau, Revised (The Chinese University Press, 1982), 78–79.

⁴⁵⁹ Translated using the text of Wagner's critical edition Rudolf G. Wagner, Laozi, and Bi Wang, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (SUNY Press, 2003), 301–302.

Wang Bi begins by clearly delineating the metaphor present in the original text. A tree needs strong roots and proper nourishing, which is identified with limiting desires and understanding one's abilities. This level of cultivation then spreads out in concentric circles. Wang Bi then proceeds to make bolder claims:

- a. The way of the world is like the way of the people
- b. The way of people can be used to observe the way of the world
- c. Through self-cultivation one can observe the world and others

Wang Bi's commentary thus describes three levels of knowable things: self, people and world. All three are knowable through self-cultivation. Although this may sound like a mysterious capacity for knowledge, there is a clear logical progression following the lines of *Laozi* 54. An initial assumption is made, as in “*Jie Lao*”, that people are influenced and controlled by likes and dislikes. Knowing this provides an understanding of the functioning of the family, village, state and world. Thus, by knowing one's own faults and strengths, one can understand how everything else functions. This interpretation combines the emphasis in “*Yu Lao*” on knowing others with the recommendation in the “*Jie Lao*” to know oneself, showing that these two are in fact one and the same.

There is also no mention made that the individual cultivating must be a ruler. Given the context, it is just as likely to apply to a minister or private individual as to the ruler.

Bringing the Interpretations of Laozi 54 Together

The two essays in the *Hanfeizi* show a rationalistic reading of parallels with the received *Laozi* 54 passage. The “Yu Lao” depicts a minister who cleverly decides to take a less desirable piece of land so that his family might be able to continue to hold on to it, even after the government has seized the lands of others who chose more desirable plots. The “*Jie Lao*” focuses on a person who is able to remove himself from the grip of his desires. This ideal person is then able to make reasoned decisions from a neutral standpoint. Both passages praise rational decision-making and political savvy. The “*Yu Lao*” passage shows a man who is highly aware of the political situation in his state. He also understands human nature and what people like and dislike, and uses this to his advantage to choose a plot of land others would be uninterested in taking from his family. He makes a reasoned decision based on an understanding of others. However, the sage in the “*Jie Lao*” is one who knows himself very well. He knows what his preferences are and the effect outside influences have on him. Thus, when he makes decisions, he can remove himself from the influence of those externalities, and can make decisions in an unperturbed manner.

These are two visions on how to make decisions in a reasoned manner derived from interpreting parallels with the same passage in the received *Laozi*. In the first, it is knowledge of others, while in the second is knowledge of oneself that grants this power. These two, although different, could be combined to take a broader viewpoint. That one who knows oneself well, and knows others well, is then able to act in a reasoned manner. Combining knowledge of both self and other is also a key theme in “*Dao Ying*”, and when the essay provides an interpretation of parallels of a portion of the received *Laozi*

54, it suggests that a ruler must first order himself. It is clear that this interpretation seems to have much in common with the “*Jie Lao*” interpretation, which places the emphasis on people cultivating themselves first, and then being able to make clear judgments about the outside world. It is implied that, if one is able to overcome one's own limitations, natural decision-making will automatically reflect what is needed in the world.

As noted, *Laozi* 54 presents an ever widening circle of cultivation, but when the text states that *de* is cultivated in the person, the family, the village, the state, and ultimately the world as a whole, it is unclear whether the cultivation is taking place within the person who is running the societal unit in question, or the unit itself? In many places, the essays appear to point to the idea that it is the person who governs who is cultivating.⁴⁶⁰ Because this person has unusual perception and clear decision-making abilities the rest of society is able to become ordered and harmonious. A village, for example, cannot simply order its desires, rather it must be the people who are within the village or, more likely, the ones in charge of the village ordering and regulating themselves. The same goes for making a choice about what kind of land to receive when the spoils of war are handed out, as in the “*Yu Lao*”. One can only do this on a personal level, and the knowledge of others that is required to do this must also come from personal experience. In each case it is a clear dynamic coming from an individual and radiating outward, and this is perhaps the significance for choosing lines now found in *Laozi* 54 that correlates cultivation on a personal level with cultivation in the world as a whole.

⁴⁶⁰ Although “*Jie Lao*” also suggests that a wise ruler provides the opportunity for people to live in a way that does not exhaust their *shen* or their bodies, likely in the hopes that they too will cultivate themselves. See CHANT *Hanfeizi* 20.20-21

The *Daode Zhenjing Zhigui* or *Yan Zun* commentary maintains and elaborates on the image of a radiating structure of cultivation. However, it places the burden for cultivation on everyone, rulers and subjects included, seeing them as inextricably intertwined with one another and with the cosmos as a whole. Furthermore, the *Zhigui* presents a more clearly articulated model of how an ordered world looks - one where people fulfill their roles, embodying “Ruist” virtues, where the ruler is silent and hidden while the ministers are active, and where it all derives from the accumulation of *jing* and *shen* on a personal, physiological level - just as in the earlier essays. In fact, apart from the appearance of an interlinear structure and more elaborate descriptions in its discursive sections, the *Zhigui* appears to hold an interpretation of *Laozi* strongly compatible with the early essays, seeing it as a text that applies self-cultivation on a physiological level to the practice of ruling the state and ultimately, the empire.

The *Heshang Gong* commentary also appears to share much in common with the early essays. It advises "using the Dao to embrace the quintessential spirit" and by means of this special power everything else works in harmony. In the individual one's *qi* and *shen* are nourished and one lives a long time. Elsewhere, as in the *Zhigui* the Ruist virtues spontaneously arise in society when the Dao is cultivated. At the level of the world or empire, it clearly becomes the leader again, whose cultivation causes the people below respond, like an echo, or shadow exactly and precisely following the motions and sounds of their model, the ruler, a metaphor again mirrored in the *Zhigui*. However, the description of the ruler's virtue mysteriously affecting the harmonious governance of the state is a departure from that of the clear minded decision found in the three early essays.

The *Wang Bi* commentary also seems to follow the image of a radiating structure of cultivation, suggesting using the hearts the people of the world to observe the way of the world. However, Wang Bi's commentary makes little reference to the practice of rulership. Instead, the emphasis is on knowledge of self and other. One observes oneself in order to know others, and does not rely on external things. These statements seem to suggest that it is an individual who is cultivating special qualities in himself and then by means of this special capacity to observe, makes decisions about the world. Also absent is any mention of physiological cultivation: *jing*, *shen*, and *qi* do not appear in the text, nor are any mentions of an interest in improving the health or attention of a person engaging in cultivation. Instead, self-cultivation appears to be narrowly applied to the acquisition of knowledge.⁴⁶¹

Conclusion

In previous chapters, we saw that the three early essays that use parallels with the received *Laozi*, found in *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi*, were developed in particular contexts and political milieus, both before and after the Qin and later Han unification. Those chapters also explored the thematic orientations of each essay and, on the surface, it

⁴⁶¹ We might clarify this point by noting that the difference may be in the type of knowledge valued in the Wang Bi in comparison with the other commentaries. As Alan Chan notes: "For Heshang Gong, meaning is always 'referential,' in the sense that the meaning of the *Laozi* is to be found in the external objects to which it refers. Wang Bi's commentary, on the other hand, is guided by a hermeneutical model that I shall describe as 'etiological.' For Wang Bi, the meaning of the *Laozi* is ultimately to be found in the text itself, and can be traced to a few fundamental concepts dialectically related to one another." Alan Kam-leung Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Heshang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p.13. Perhaps it is this difference of hermeneutical model that Chan has identified which can account for the variation between the Wang Bi commentary and the others explored in this project. While all the other commentaries, like Chan's description of the *Heshanggong*, rely in part on reference to something external to themselves for understanding, the Wang Bi is employing a different relationship with the text.

appeared as if they were similar in their political applications, but different in their approach. “*Yu Lao*” focused on the pragmatic aspects of surviving difficult times as a minister or a weaker state. “*Jie Lao*” focused on how the personal cultivation of a ruler, and the encouragement of popular cultivation among the people, could lead to a prosperous state. “*Dao Ying*” presented views on how knowledge is obtained from both self and others, how it can both guide and mislead, and how a wise ruler chooses to control it. All three deal with rulership, but from a different focus.

This chapter has examined the relatively few places where the essays overlap, interpreting parallels with the same passage in the received *Laozi*. While the three differ stylistically, some preferring direct statements while others make use of anecdotes, they generally seem to agree on the central meanings of the passages in question. This is largely true even when the essays make use of different portions of parallels with the same passage in the received *Laozi*, which suggests an awareness of the continuity of theme each passage is arranged around. We cannot dismiss the possibility that this is evidence pointing to a generally accepted arrangement for the passages that do overlap, at least within the community of authors who composed these essays.

An objection might be raised that the similarity of interpretation is present simply because that is the extent of the range of interpretation that a given passage allows. The essays reach similar conclusions because they are limited by what the source itself says, not because of some shared communication between them outside the text itself. In an attempt to address this question, the above chapter has presented a comparison of the three essays’ readings of parallels with parts of the received *Laozi* 54 with other

interpretations found in the potentially oldest interlinear *Yan Zun* commentary, the widely circulated *Heshanggong* commentary, and the frequently studied *Wang Bi* commentary. Together these three commentaries can be seen as constituting other views of *Laozi* with which to measure the early essays. What does this comparison show us? The *Yan Zun* is strikingly close to the three early essays, as does the *Heshanggong*, while the *Wang Bi* diverges, diminishing the emphasis on politics and physiological cultivation in favor of the acquisition and control of knowledge.⁴⁶² These results should give us pause as the *Wang Bi* is often taken as the representative commentary on *Laozi*, even though, in this selection of commentaries looking at this one passage, it is the most widely divergent.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, we may identify four primary themes found in the early essays:

1. Political applications
2. Yielding when sufficiency is attained, and its applications to politics
3. Physiological cultivation and its correlation with politics
4. The control of knowledge and its application to politics

Political application is clearly the overarching theme in all of the early essays, though they show thematic differences in their degree of emphasis on the remaining three categories. “*Yu Lao*” focuses most on 2, “*Jie Lao*” on 3, and “*Dao Ying*” on 4. Turning to

⁴⁶² Alan Chan has noted that this difference is in fact reflective of historical changes: “The Heshang Gong commentary... is clearly rooted in the Han ethos. The cosmological framework and the application of Huang-lao thought betray its indebtedness to Han thinking... By the time of Wang Bi, however, this mode of understanding was no longer immune to criticism as questions of meaning were raised by a new generation of interpreters.” Chan, 189.

We should here note that, if all attributions are correct, the Wang Bi commentary is the only commentary considered in this project that is *not* a part of a Han cosmological system.

the three other commentaries, the *Yan Zun* maintains the political focus (1) and the physiological aspects (3), much like “*Jie Lao*”; “*Heshanggong*” has a decreased interest in politics (1), though it is still present, has an increased focus on physiology (3) and some on acquisition and control of knowledge as well (4); *Wang Bi* is the outlier, saying nothing of politics (1) or physiological cultivation (2), opting instead to throw the weight of its interpretation behind the acquisition and control of knowledge (4).

Historically speaking, the *Wang Bi* is the latest commentary.⁴⁶³ Both *Yan Zun* and *Heshanggong* make claims to being Han texts. Given the evidence, it would appear that a strongly politicized reading of *Laozi*, viewed through the lens of physiological self-cultivation, was a common one up through the Han, at least in those surviving texts that made explicit use of *Laozi* as these did.⁴⁶⁴ Herein we may see the outline of some commonly accepted interpretations and uses of *Laozi* from the end of the Warring States into the Han.

The fact that there are some small differences even among the early essays points us in another direction: that while the three may agree in general about what a given passage is discussing, they share slightly different views that they wish to argue for through their interpretation. Can we perhaps see this as evidence of an ongoing conversation on how to read *Laozi*? It does not seem a stretch of the imagination to suggest that there was such a

⁴⁶³ It is possible that the second commentator on the *Yan Zun*, Gushenzi, modified the text in his interpretation. We do not know his exact dates, but he may have lived as late as the Tang, putting his influence as the latest, historically, of the commentaries reviewed here.

⁴⁶⁴ The exceptions to this rule being for one uncredited quotations that appear in passing in many Han and earlier texts that focus on other aspects of *Laozi*. Another critical exception is the use of quotations of *Laozi* parallels, both credited (in the form of having the character of *Laozi* speaking them) and not in the *Zhuangzi*, which often ignore or downplay political implications.

conversation occurring. If *Laozi* acted as the framework, the warp underlying that debate on how exactly a ruler should cultivate, manage ministers and govern the people, is this not the very definition of a text acting as a *jing*? At the very least, it shows the ways arguments and conversations grew up around *Laozi* and its constituent passages, acting as a source of authority, and an essential component of a textual ecosystem.

7: CONCLUSION

The role of passages parallel with the received *Laozi* as a source of authority that interpreters drew on is itself part of a long history of valuing the process of interpretation. From the earliest written records in China, the divinatory oracle bones used to query ancestors and spirits about the unknown, language, ritual and texts have centered around a process of interpretation. In those earliest of bones, the interpretation was of the mysterious suggestions of extra-human entities. Later, as we saw in chapter 3, when the *Xicizhuan* provides an explanation of the *Yijing*, it suggests that the hexagrams it contains are indications of larger cosmic patterns, ones that will only become apparent if interpreted properly. As tradition accumulated and became articulated, ritual practices and ultimately texts emerged that, in the cultural imagination, were said to contain the insights of ancient sages. These insights could continue to exert a transformative influence in later eras if they were interpreted correctly. At times this influence was as mysterious and profound as the hidden insights into the cosmos hinted at through the oracle bones and the *Yijing*. At others, the influence was simply in the form of sound advice that could be derived from learning from the ancient sages' clear understanding of humanity and the cosmos. These insights were stored away in these ancient texts, as one

story puts it, like the raw lumber in a storehouse, ready to be turned into furniture or carts or whatever else was needed when the time came.⁴⁶⁵

In this cultural context, the greater the hidden insight a text or practice was understood to contain, the more influential it could be in discussion. A text that allowed for a wide and subtle range of interpretation was especially valuable, because its raw materials could be worked into the finest of instruments. The texts that became the so-called Five *Jing* were paradigmatic documents from an interpretive sense. The *Odes*, with poems covering a wide range of themes, could support a variety of insights. In the *Lunyu*, Kongzi is seen using the *Odes*, which on the surface appear to deal with such themes as jade polishing and romantic inclinations, to instruct students in proper etiquette and the art of ruling well.⁴⁶⁶ In one of his few recorded interactions with his son, he is reported as recommending that his son study the *Odes*, so that he would be able to speak.⁴⁶⁷

Texts like the *Odes*, then, form the foundation of a discourse. They constitute the fundamental references and vocabulary an educated person would have used to engage with others in Classical China and beyond. Under these circumstances it is clear that these texts provide the framework of discourse, or perhaps the underlying weave, as early etymologies of the title given to them, *jing* 經.⁴⁶⁸

It is also within this context that we must understand commentaries and other acts of interpretation. Commentaries simultaneously reaffirm the importance of the source they interpret as they also advance their own agendas. The existence of a commentary, then,

⁴⁶⁵ See chapter 3

⁴⁶⁶ For example *Lunyu* 1.15 See chapter 3

⁴⁶⁷ *Lunyu* 16.13

⁴⁶⁸ See chapter 2

carries with it an implication that the text it interprets is important, even fundamental; it implies at the very least a desire, if not an established practice, of recognizing the source as a framework of discourse.

It is with an understanding of this context of the importance of interpretation that we must approach the three earliest surviving commentaries on *Laozi*. We must understand from the start that the very act of creating a sustained commentary, where entire arguments and examples are structured around *Laozi*, such as it was, implies something about the significance of *Laozi*. In other words, the existence of commentary implies a source of authority.

The three earliest surviving commentaries on Laozi

The earliest surviving documents that might be considered commentaries on *Laozi* raise many questions by their very existence. They appear as parts of larger collections, the *Hanfeizi* and the *Huainanzi* rather than stand-alone works, and as such must be read in the context of those collections. They only include a small portion of passages now found in the received *Laozi*. Their message is geared primarily toward rulers looking to govern their states in efficient, effective, and at times unconventional manners. But, looking over the many different commentaries on *Laozi* written over the years, it is clear *Laozi* has been admired for a much wider scope of readings than these documents alone would reveal. This project argues that each of these documents present their own visions of *Laozi*, visions that treat *Laozi* as a source of authority that lends merit to the interpreters' message, making it more convincing and appealing to an audience interested

largely in governance. These documents are representations of the role *Laozi* played in persuasive discourse, or the role these authors were attempting to make *Laozi* play. Quotations and references to *Laozi* as a source of authority could justify political and ethical views in a manner similar to how commentaries citing *Odes* or other members of what became known as the Five *Jing* supported their interpreters. In this sense, the following project presents evidence that the three earliest surviving commentaries on *Laozi* present that text as a source of authority, even before *Laozi* received official designation with the character *jing*.

Work accomplished in the previous chapters

The previous chapters have explored the relationship between the “Jie Lao”, “Yu Lao”, and “Dao Ying” commentaries and the source(s) on which they comment, passages that now appear in *Laozi*. Chapters two and three explored conceptions of verbal or textual sources of authority in the Warring States and early Han periods. Chapter two explored this question through the lens of the term *jing* to indicate a source of authority, while chapter three presented views from these periods on the practice of interpretation and its relationship to sources of authority. Together these two chapters highlighted two features of sources of authority in the periods of study: first, that sources of authority played important roles in structuring debate and discussion, and second that sources of authority gained prominence and maintained relevance through their openness to interpretation and commentary. Chapters four and five then made close examinations of first the “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” chapters of the *Hanfeizi*, and the “Dao Ying” chapter of

the *Huainanzi*. Together, these three chapters constitute the earliest surviving sustained commentaries on passages now appearing in *Laozi*. Each one of these commentaries serves to further the two features of sources of authority found in chapters two and three: they engage in an active interpretation of *Laozi* parallels in order to present persuasive arguments to rulers on how to govern. In this way, the commentaries illustrate the role *Laozi* or early collections of *Laozi* played as a source of authority, by the definitions of their time.

Chapter six then compares the three earliest commentaries with each other and with three other significant commentaries on *Laozi*: the earliest surviving interlinear commentary, the *Yan Zun*, and the two most widely read commentaries, the *Heshanggong* and *Wang Bi*. This chapter highlights some of the differences among the commentaries, but also shows the high level of similarity between them. In fact, it suggests that the *Wang Bi* commentary, arguably the most influential on scholarly and philosophical readings of *Laozi*, differs the most in its reading of the passage all six commentaries hold in common.

All of the above leads to a conclusion that the three earliest surviving commentaries suggest that *Laozi* played a significant role as a source of authority, lending weight to discussions of topics as varied as politics, self-cultivation, the control of knowledge in a state, and the health of the body and mind of a ruler and the state he ruled. Although they appear in collections that have been difficult to categorize, these commentaries still have much to tell us about *Laozi* and about the interpretive culture surrounding them. These insights have perhaps been lost in concerns over categorization, whether they are Daoist,

Legalist, Syncretic or something else. Excess concern over categories has perhaps obscured exploration of the content of these commentaries in favor of questions of their authenticity and relation to larger, preconceived movements. As an alternative, this project has sought to present the commentaries on their own merits, and evaluate them in terms of the understanding of the role of commentaries and sources of authority that would have been contemporary to them.

What the commentaries tell us about the compilation of Laozi

The previous chapters have defined what a source of authority was in Warring States and Early Han China, both by the term *jing* used to designate such a source, and through the theories of interpretation of the time that define what a source of authority could do. Furthermore, the previous work has shown that the term *jing* itself had a range of meanings, in earlier periods indicating shorter units of argument so it might be translated as “theses” and only later expanding to encompass complete texts. Then, based on that framework the project analyzes each of the three earliest commentaries to show that they do, indeed use *Laozi* parallels in a manner consistent with being a source of authority. Thus, I argue, the commentaries show that *Laozi* parallels acted as a source of authority even before *Laozi* officially received the title of *jing*. Furthermore, in these earliest commentaries, *Laozi* parallels were consistently used to support arguments about how a ruler or minister ought to contribute to the successful governance of a state. These are inherently political discourses and show that *Laozi* played an important role in the conceptualization of how rulers should rule during this time period. This is the central

focus of the project, however there are some other threads running through it which may be considered.

For one, we may also make some observations about the state of compilation of the *Laozi* during the period of study. As noted previously, scholarship has largely questioned the integrity of the *Laozi* as a coherent text during the Warring States period, from a variety of angles. First, the manuscripts excavated at Guodian are, in comparison to the received *Laozi*, much shorter, and each even presents a different arrangement of passages than others. This has led to observations that *Laozi* at the time may have been transmitted in collections. However, this observation, in and of itself does not negate the possibility of other, yet undiscovered, more comprehensive collections that might more closely resemble the received *Laozi*. It does tell us, though, that there was a certain fluidity in how these passages were arranged and distributed in texts. Similarly, even before the Guodian discovery, Michael LaFargue had postulated that the *Laozi* is composed of a collection of oral sayings, gathered together at some point to form a text.⁴⁶⁹ In his analysis, he breaks verses of the received *Laozi* into smaller sections and demonstrates how this process reveals a logic of its own. Both Guodian and LaFargue's analysis appear to point to a greater fluidity in the way in which *Laozi* parallels could be configured, at least around the early third century BCE.

All three of the early commentaries studied in this project appear to confirm this observation. Each presents a set of passages that are, in comparison with the received *Laozi*, much shorter. Furthermore, each commentary presents passages in an order

⁴⁶⁹ LaFargue, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching*, pp 301-336.

different from each other, and from the Guodian manuscripts, making each a unique arrangement, as of the current state of excavated materials.

There are two possibilities for this unique ordering. The first possibility connects to the state of the *Laozi* itself as a text. In this scenario, there was no complete *Laozi* text by comparison with the received *Laozi* in circulation during the times these commentaries were composed. Under these circumstances, the commentaries were drawing upon and possibly even following collections similar to those found at Guodian that contained their own passage arrangements.⁴⁷⁰

In the second scenario the authors of the commentaries made a conscious choice in selecting the passages from whatever larger collection(s) of *Laozi* passages they had available to further their own arguments, instead of simply relying on the pre-ordained order of some collection they already had in hand.⁴⁷¹ This project has pointed to examples that suggest this second possibility. These examples have been of two types: first to show that presenting and discussing shorter passages was an accepted format during the

⁴⁷⁰ This possibility does seem to show a close link with the discoveries at Guodian, and there is no direct evidence refuting it, particularly in the cases of the “Jie Lao” and the “Yu Lao” chapters of the *Hanfeizi*. However, there are several reasons why we may be hesitant to accept this scenario. First, is that the “Dao Ying” chapter of *Huainanzi* presents a similarly unique and fragmentary passage arrangement to the other two commentaries. Yet, we know from the finds at Mawangdui, sealed roughly three decades before the *Huainanzi* was presented to the throne, that there were longer collections of *Laozi* passages, far more similar to the received *Laozi* than Guodian, in circulation during the early Han. Of course, we can speculate, perhaps the “Dao Ying” authors chose to work from a shorter collection, similar to Guodian, which was still in circulation. However, it is more likely that the “Dao Ying” authors made a conscious choice in their selection of passages, no matter the collection they were working from, for the purposes of making an argument of their own.

⁴⁷¹ Note, this does not mean I am arguing that any of these commentaries were drawing on a collection identical to the received *Laozi*. Instead, I am suggesting here that there may have been a larger pool of passages contained in one or more collections to which the commentary authors had access. For example, the presence of three different manuscripts at Guodian suggests these collections were at times read together and quite possibly compared. My point is, the commentary authors appear to have made a conscious choice about which passage to use in what place for the purpose of furthering their own arguments.

Warring States period; and second to show that in usage there are many examples of this sort of selective use of passages to further a an argumentative point.

First, it has demonstrated that during much of the Warring States period, a common form of argumentation was to present a short statement of position, which was labeled a *jing* 經, connected with a kind of commentary elaborating on it, sometimes found in a separate chapter of the same collection and often composed later than the *jing*, sometimes called a *shuo* 說. These bundles of arguments were much shorter than the extended interlinear commentaries of later eras that were appended to text-length *jing*, suggesting that using compact theses paired with explanations was an accepted form of transmitting argumentation in documents.

Furthermore, we have seen that the selective use of quotations to support or illustrate arguments was a well-established tradition. The *Analects* shows several passages where Confucius discusses passages from the *Odes* as a teaching practice.⁴⁷² The *Zuozhuan* 左轉 records stories of diplomacy conducted through the quotation of the *Odes*.⁴⁷³ Even the structure used extensively in “*Dao Ying*” and to a lesser extent in the other commentaries of capping a discursive passage or illustrative anecdote with a quotation was a common pattern at the time. The *Hanshiwaizhuan* 韓詩外傳, a text contemporary to the *Huainanzi*, follows the same format when quoting the *Odes* for explicitly pedagogical purposes.⁴⁷⁴ Similarly, the “Black Sleeves” (*Zi Yi* 緇衣) chapter of the *Liji* exclusively

⁴⁷² See notes above on *Lunyu* 1.15 and 16.13, and also the discussion in Chapter 3.

⁴⁷³ For a discussion of this depiction of diplomacy see: Li Wai-Yee 李惠儀, “Poetry and Diplomacy in the *Zuozhuan*,” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1 (January 13, 2015): 241–61.

⁴⁷⁴ James Hightower says of the *Hanshiwaizhuan*:

uses this format to quote from a wider range of the “Five *Jing*”.⁴⁷⁵ Similar passages appear scattered throughout a wide range of Warring States and early Han texts, including the *Hanfeizi* and *Huainanzi*.⁴⁷⁶ Most of these examples quote from the “Five *Jing*”, making the quotation of *Laozi* parallels in the three commentaries notable. However, the purpose of these passages is usually clear: they are not meant to represent a thorough and extensive presentation of the source text, following exactly its inherent structure. Instead, these passages and quotations are intended to make a point, either for persuasive or pedagogical purposes, to convince an audience of a specific viewpoint advocated by the authors. The quotations used lend weight and authority to the views of the authors. As *Zhuangzi* 27 points out: people are more likely to rely on the views of an independent matchmaker when deciding on a betrothal for their children, just as they are more likely to trust the “weighted sayings” that have been handed down from past generations. It is a simple appeal to authority, with the source of the quotation acting as the source of authority.⁴⁷⁷

It was a textbook used by Han Ying’s [the attributed author’s] school, not to present his interpretations of the Classic (other works performed that function) but to demonstrate the practical use of the Classic: a tag to clinch an argument, a stanza to sum up a philosophical principle, a punning line to delight or confuse. Quotations from the *Shih Ching* had been so used in pre-Han times and continued in use in Han times. Han Ying provided his disciples with a convenient handbook from which they could study to perfect their technique of apt quotation.

See Hightower, *Han Ying’s Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs*, 2.

⁴⁷⁵ *Liji* chapter 33. The chapter primarily quotes from the *Odes*, though it includes several other works as well.

⁴⁷⁶ For example, *Hanfeizi* chapters 22, 32, 34 and 51 all contain explicitly cited quotations from the *Odes*. *Huainanzi* chapters 2, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 18, 19, and 20 all contain explicit citations of the *Odes*, sometimes occupying the position of a capping quotation. This is only one example of a text used this way, although it is the most common one.

⁴⁷⁷ *Zhuangzi* 27, paragraph 1. For a discussion of the types of language described in this passage, see chapter 3.

Simply recognizing that the three early commentaries were likely making conscious decisions about which passages they were using casts doubt on whether they were working from predefined collections, like those found at Guodian. There very well could have been much longer collections similar to the received *Laozi* in circulation which these commentaries were drawing from in making their arguments. On the other hand, the commentaries might offer an explanation for the variety of arrangements found in the Guodian manuscripts: each one may be a conscious ordering of passages based around the intentions of the compiler, similar to the way the commentary authors chose passages to include in their arguments. There is no more evidence to prove that the Guodian materials derive from a complete *Laozi* than there is to prove the commentaries derive from such a source.

What the commentaries tell us about how the *Laozi* was viewed

The primary goal of this project has been to show that the *Laozi* provided authority to a variety of arguments in the Warring States and early Han. A close examination of the earliest surviving commentaries on parallels with the received *Laozi* appear predominantly in connection with governance. These readings are not the same as those that would seek to find a mystical, transformational purpose behind the *Laozi*, nor are they particularly philosophical in the mode of the later *Wang Bi* commentary. Instead, these early commentaries do share an interest in how knowledge can be controlled, acquired and disseminated to make for an effective state. In part, they make use of a physiological model of consciousness embodied in a person, specifically through the

quality or resource *shen* 神, which can be accumulated or dispersed.⁴⁷⁸ Accumulation of this resource leads to greater clarity of perception, which in turn leads to a better understanding of the flow of knowledge, the relative positions of different figures within the state and other states, and a greater ability to resist the capricious turns of desires and sensory indulgence. All of these features allow a ruler to function more effectively, and so for the person of the ruler, the commentaries recommend care taken to guarding and accumulating *shen*.

On the level of the ruler's relations with others, the commentaries highlight the principle of knowing sufficiency. They warn against states that attempt to overreach and praise those who know when to stop when they are ahead. Once more, the ruler's capacity for perception is key to understanding these markers of sufficiency and acting on them.

Together, the commentaries paint a picture where *Laozi* parallels were clearly being used as a guide for rulers in the contexts in which these commentaries circulated. Roughly corresponding to the period of composition of the latest of the three commentaries studied in the project, the *Laozi* itself was elevated to the status of a *jing*, as evidenced by the recently discovered Beida manuscripts. The term *jing* itself had shifted over the preceding centuries from a more closely delineated set of shorter, discrete theses that set the terms of a discussion to become an indicator of entire texts that shaped the official narrative as determined by the imperial Han court. It is perhaps no surprise

⁴⁷⁸ See chapter 4.

that a text like the *Laozi* which provided the framework for explicitly practical and political commentaries, should be given official recognition.

In short then, turning to the commentaries gives us a glimpse not into the original meaning of the *Laozi*, such as it might have been, but into the earliest applications of the text and its significance as a political guide that advocated for self-cultivated, perceptive rulers who knew how to act and disseminate information to precisely the right extent to keep a society functioning harmoniously. A study like this does not invalidate more cosmological or non-politically philosophical readings of *Laozi*, but it does suggest that for a significant section of late Warring States and early Han readers, these facets of the text were not as important as its potential practical application for shaping a more harmonious state.

Tracing Overlapping Communities in the Commentaries

Modern scholarship is well aware of problems with the longstanding categorization of ancient Chinese texts and thinkers into lineages and schools.⁴⁷⁹ At the same time, other studies have demonstrated that reading texts based on their own merits, independent of the traditional labels they have carried, can reveal new and exciting connections between texts and the people that surrounded them.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, Nylan, and Queen have aptly raised these problems with definitions of school affiliation. See Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China." and Queen, "Inventories of the Past."

⁴⁸⁰ This is one of the innovations of, for example, Harold Roth's studies of the "Neiyue" chapter of *Guanzi*. Instead of accepting traditional labels of the *Guanzi* collection as a whole, he analyzes the chapter on its own merits and discovers connections with texts like the *Zhuangzi*, *Laozi*, and *Huainanzi* based on evidence of a shared inner cultivation practice. See Roth, *Original Tao.*, Roth, "Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism.", Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought."

Additionally, the work of textual historians and the appearance of excavated manuscripts has revealed that many of the texts long held as the anchors of traditions were in fact works in progress through the Warring States and early Han periods. The chapters above have noted that, just for *Laozi* alone, finds at Guodian and Mawangdui have shown that the text we have today was the product of an extended compilation process. Thus, long-standing identifications of both texts and traditions as rigidly defined categories are increasingly seen as inaccurate descriptions of the way texts and thinkers actually interacted in ancient China.

The commentaries reviewed in this project have similarly challenged these old categorizations. For example, “Jie Lao” and “Yu Lao” appear in the *Hanfeizi*, a text traditionally associated with the “Legalists”. Thus the appearance of commentaries referencing parallels with the received *Laozi* in this document have often begun from the question of what the appearance of “Daoist” material in a “Legalist” text means. On the other hand, this project has shown how these commentaries defy an easy categorization, synthesizing themes and practices from a variety of sources. It is clear that these documents do not fit well into the artificially rigid system of classification based on schools and lineages.

When tracing connections among the three early commentaries we see a number of commonalities in themes, in modes of expression, and in marks of shared practice. These commonalities, in turn, are shared with other contemporaneous texts. However, for the purposes of this study, instead of using these commonalities to place the three commentaries in a singular category of affiliation, I would like to propose instead

analyzing them as evidence of overlapping communities. Herein I define communities as groups of people, evidenced through the texts they created, shared and revered in common. For the purposes of this definition, these communities are non-exclusive and a single person could be viewed as participating in multiple communities simultaneously. In particular, I would like to highlight three commonalities that connect the commentaries to texts, thinkers and communities outside themselves:

1. A community centered around discourse on governance.
2. A community sharing a format or genre of expression using quotations of revered sources of authority as support for its arguments.
3. A community engaging in a practice of self-cultivation.

We may further characterize these communities as sharing, respectively, purposes, modes of expression, and methods of cultivation.

There are reasons why, in the case of the three commentaries, these communities do not immediately map onto well-known and much debated affiliations of thinkers in the Warring States and early Han. Let us address each community separately:

1. Discourse on governance: the three commentaries are all preoccupied with providing recommendations on governance. Conceptually they make use of “Rui” values like *ren* and *yi*, and the guiding power of ritual. They also advocate rewards and punishments, the positional advantage of the ruler and the power of deception in rule, aspects more commonly associated with texts like the *Hanfeizi* as a whole or the works of Shang Yang and others. Finally, they also highlight principles drawn from quotations of *Laozi* parallels to define, defend and clarify their points. Thus, thematically, although the

primary concern is governance, the presence of other values appears in differing degrees in each of the commentaries.⁴⁸¹

2. Rhetoric involving quotation: Structurally, the commentaries all follow a format of supporting their positions using distinctive quotations from an outside source of authority. As has been noted in this project, this was a relatively common practice in this period, ranging from more informal quotations appearing in conversations, such as in the *Analects*, to the regular use of capping quotations found in *Hanshiwaizhuan*. Even the size of the passages commented on and their accompanying commentaries is reminiscent of materials found in sources as widespread as the *Mozi*, *Guanzi* and *Hanfeizi*.⁴⁸² However, the three commentaries veer from the norms of this rhetorical structure in their choice of source on which to comment. The majority of the other examples of this rhetorical community chose to draw on members of what became established during the Han as the “Five Jing”, most frequently the *Odes*, these three commentaries use parallels with the received *Laozi* as their source.

3. Self-cultivation practice: the three commentaries, to varying degrees, show an involvement with self cultivation practice. Particularly in the “Jie Lao”, this self-cultivation is clearly not of a type we might identify as “Ruist” ritual practice and acculturation. Rather, it bears striking similarities to the “Inner Cultivation” practices Harold Roth has identified in texts such as the “Nei Ye” and “Xin Shu, Shang and Xia” chapters of *Guanzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi* and *Laozi*.⁴⁸³ It also shows signs of

⁴⁸¹ See the analyses of each commentary in chapters 4 and 5 for specifics.

⁴⁸² See Chapter 2.

⁴⁸³ First articulated in Roth, “Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism.”

influence of the physiological models described in the *Huangdi Neijing*. In the three commentaries, these practices are applied to the practice of governance. Even in cases that involve a personal benefit, such as the health of the ruler, it is framed in terms of the benefit it brings to the state. Lastly, although these signs of practice are very strong in “Jie Lao” they are less prominent in “Dao Ying”, and even less in “Yu Lao”, suggesting more variation on the centrality of these practices among the commentaries than their views on the importance of either proper governance or the significance of *Laozi* as a source of authority.

Because all of these elements are present in the commentaries, I would here suggest that we look at these commentaries as evidence of overlapping communities. This overlap may be a function of both authors and audiences: because these commentaries appear to have a persuasive intent, it is possible that the authors purposely chose to create this overlap to cross between different communities of interest. Rulers would enjoy the themes of governance. Those who respected textual sources of authority would recognize the framing of the arguments with quotations. And anyone with experience in inner cultivation would nod in agreement at the significant role it plays in underlying other arguments in the commentaries. Although we might choose to select one of these aspects as the most prominent or significant, the true intention of the commentators behind the mask of rhetoric, I would here like to propose that we read them as liminal documents, ones that seek to cross between communities and establish new discussions.

A Textual Ecosystem

What, then, might be a more productive approach to looking at documents like “Jie Lao”, “Yu Lao” and “Dao Ying”? I would like to suggest viewing them not in terms of clear, artificially defined categories, but instead as representatives of an often messy, organic process of growth and interaction between thinkers, practices, discourses and texts. This is what we might call a “textual ecosystem”.

To use a metaphor: think of a text like a tree that shelters various creatures from the wind and cold. Some huddle on the branches, others in hollows of the tree. Yet others gain sustenance from living among the roots. Some fly, some crawl, some climb and some dig, but they all find a shelter in the tree. Some stay for a long time, others are only passing through, but it gives a home for whatever time they are there. In this way, the text acts as a hub in a sort of ecosystem, where other thinkers make use of its sheltering branches and nourishing nuts and fruits to sustain themselves. Some may even cut off pieces of the tree and graft them onto other trees, forming hybrids that still show signs of their link to the original tree. Other times, seeds fall in new places and give rise to new trees that still show some of the heritage of the old tree. In each case, the essential feature is that the text-tree exists in a context, and is given meaning through its interactions.

Potentially, commentaries allow us to better understand the role their source text played in this larger ecosystem. Sometimes, commentaries may use the source to clarify their own ideas, or argue for their own positions rather than attempt to elucidate an original or inherent meaning in the source. But this too is an important aspect of understanding the larger ecosystem. The commentaries present the source in context, giving us a lens into how the commentators conceptualized of themselves in relation to

each other and the society at large. Commentaries tell us what ideas were important to particular interpreters and why those ideas were important, even when they appear to stray beyond accepted lines of traditions. Instead of dismissing these readings as “inauthentic” or “appropriations”, we should see them as representative of communities that were embracing and utilizing parallels with the received *Laozi* as an authoritative foundation of discourse and, ultimately, a marker of identity.

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