

MOLECULAR INCOHERENCE, CONTINUITY, AND THE PERFECTION OF THE *LAOZI*

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Abstract

The *Laozi* is a well-loved and oft-translated ancient text, whose popularity with interpreters and translators seems to have hardly ebbed in over two thousand years. This is attested in part by the number of bamboo and silk manuscript versions of the text unearthed in recent years from the Warring States (475–221 B.C.E.) and Western Han (221–206 B.C.E.), such that few transmitted Chinese texts have so many corresponding manuscript versions. The *Laozi*'s popularity and relative abundance have also made the text instrumental in shaping theoretical approaches to book formation in early Chinese manuscript culture. In particular, the *Laozi* has been central to the study of how books were assembled out of pre-existent, stable, coherent molecules of text, or *zhang* 章 (chapters). Emerging from a case study of *Laozi* chapter 13, in which interpretive problems of the written commentarial tradition are shown to be continuous with those in manuscript culture, this article re-examines the theory of molecular coherence in the *Laozi*'s formation, showing ultimately that the textual and rhetorical patterns by which *zhang* cohere internally are created by the same forces that deposit *zhang* in proximity to one another. Moving from the molecular to organismic level, the article also examines the use of conjoining phrases in Peking University's *Laozi* manuscript to demonstrate how editors, compilers, and interpreters may sacrifice coherence at one level of organization to achieve perfection at another.

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I hope that this article will help commemorate the life and contributions of Rudolf Wagner (1941–2019). I would also like to thank the many scholars who have very generously read and responded to partial or complete drafts in the course of its long development, including (in chronological order) Donald Harper, Victor Mair, Michael Nylan, Christopher Foster, Edward Shaughnessy, and two anonymous reviewers for *Early China*. Their many constructive suggestions have greatly benefitted this paper, although some problems remain unsolved. I take solace in the *Laozi*'s claim that "great perfection appears to lack."

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大成若缺* ^{No-[k]} wh ^{et}	Great perfection appears to lack;
其用不弊* ^{[b]e[ɬ]-s}	when used it never goes slack.
大盈若冲* ^{[d]ruŋ}	Great fullness seems like nothing is in it;
其用不窮* ^{[g]l(r)uŋ}	when used it has no limit. ¹

Introduction

Who wrote ancient Chinese books, who edited them, and how was a writer's labor divided from an editor's (if at all)? How are books remade in the processes of transmission and interpretation? This article explores aspects of the formation of one book, the *Laozi* 老子, primarily at and between two levels of description: that of the fixed book or canon, and that of the (ostensibly fixed) *zhang* 章 (textual unit; chapter), usually demarcating a single recognizable idea or maxim.

John B. Henderson's *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary* sets forth several interpretive assumptions shared by diverse commentarial traditions.² The first is that canons are comprehensive and the second is that canons are well-ordered and coherent.³ "Comprehensive," as applied here, means that they are assumed to be all-encompassing and complete; "coherent" means that they present a single, unified, and comprehensible point of view. The two are not unrelated; the reason canons can be viewed as comprehensive derives in part from their diverse and varied contents. Such a diversity of contents, however, does not often emerge from a single source, nor does it become well-ordered and coherent of itself. Below, I am concerned not only with comprehensive books, but also with their parts. It has become common to speak of these parts—the *zhang* that Rudolf Wagner proposed as the "molecules" of early Chinese literature—as relatively coherent structures, in contrast to the books

1. *Laozi* chap. 45; phonetic reconstructions from William H. Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

2. John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

3. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, chap. 4. Among the assumptions are that canons are: 1) comprehensive; 2) well-ordered and coherent; 3) moral; 4) profound; 5) devoid of superfluties; and, sometimes 6) clear and/or obscure. When we pursue a methodology of reading or structural theory that assumes assumption 2 is true, we operate within the sort of interpretive tradition that Henderson describes. The fact that canons in China, such as the five classics scheme of the early empire, could be composed of multiple books, did not inhibit Chinese interpreters from making claims of comprehensiveness about one book or another, e.g. the *Yi jing* 易經 or the *Chunqiu* 春秋. See Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, 100.

they formed.⁴ Nonetheless, by peering closely at the seams along which canons were stitched and glued, I hope to show that the internal, cohesive forces that hold these discrete parts together share more in common than we thought with the intermolecular forces by which books cohere.

The *Laozi* has been a ruler's handbook, a religious scripture, and a guide for self-cultivation, among other things. Although its transmission and interpretation have already generated over a thousand titles,⁵ new sources—ancient manuscript versions of the text—that have come to light in recent decades now offer unprecedented insight into the formation and early transmission of the text. In addition to *Laozi* manuscripts from late antiquity and medieval times removed from the library cave at Dunhuang,⁶ several earlier Han and Warring States manuscripts have been unearthed recently, beginning with two early Western Han copies on silk excavated at Mawangdui in Changsha, Hunan, in 1973,⁷ three bamboo manuscripts containing *Laozi* material excavated from Guodian, Jingmen, Hubei, in 1993 (estimated to have been buried around 300 B.C.E.),⁸ and,

4. Rudolf Wagner set this forth most thoroughly for the *Laozi* in several revisions of his study of interlocking parallel prose style (IPS). See Rudolf G. Wagner, "Interlocking Parallel Style: *Laozi* and Wang Bi," *Asiatische Studien* 34 (1980), 18–58; "The Impact of Conceptions of Rhetoric and Style on Early *Laozi* Editions: Evidence from Guodian, Mawangdui, and the Wang Bi *Laozi*," *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies* 44 (1999), 32–56; and "Technique and the Philosophy of Structure: Interlocking Parallel Style in *Laozi* and Wang Bi," in *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 53–114. Below, I use the terms *zhang* and "chapter" interchangeably, and although I question their fundamental integrity, I do not offer a terminology of sub-*zhang* or literary "atoms."

5. After the *Bible*, it is probably the most often translated book in Anglophone literature, with well over a hundred translations. In Chinese literature, Yan Lingfeng's 嚴靈峯 compendia of important *Laozi* commentaries and editions contain some 343 distinct titles, ostensibly spanning some two millennia, see Yan Lingfeng, ed., *Wuqiubeizhai Laozi jicheng chubian* 無求備齋老子集成初編, 160 vols. (Taipei: Yiwen, 1965), and *Wuqiubeizhai Laozi jicheng xubian* 無求備齋老子集成續編, 280 vols. (Taipei: Yiwen, 1972). Wing-Tsit Chan 陳榮捷 counts approximately seven hundred known Chinese commentaries, of which about half are completely extant, in addition to roughly 250 more written in Japanese. Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-Tê Ching)* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 77.

6. Listed in William G. Boltz, "Lao Tzu," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1994), 281–83.

7. See Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所, *Changsha Mawangdui er, san hao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆二、三號漢墓, ed. He Jiejun 何介鈞 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004). The most complete publication and study, with new photographs and analyses of the original texts is Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 ed., *Changsha Mawangdui Han mu jianbo jicheng* 長沙馬王堆漢墓簡帛集成, 1st ed., 7 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2014), vols. 1 and 4 (hereafter *Mawangdui jicheng*).

8. Hubei sheng Jingmen shi bowuguan 湖北省荆門市博物館, "Jingmen Guodian yi hao Chu mu" 荆門郭店一號楚墓, *Wenwu* (July 1997), 35–48. For the original publication

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most recently, a nearly complete version of the *Laozi* obtained by Peking University in 2009 (hereafter “Beida *Laozi*”), which appears to have been written in the middle of the Western Han.⁹ The latter manuscript is the first explicitly labeled as a canon (*jing* 經). All of these texts shed light on different aspects of the *Laozi*’s textual formation, and they reveal struggles at both the molecular and organismic levels to make a canon that is coherent, well-ordered, and comprehensive.

Nearly fifty years ago, as leading scholars began to digest evidence from the Mawangdui manuscripts, it was commonplace to voice hopes about recovering an urtext of the *Laozi*.¹⁰ Whether this ostensible point of

of the slips see Jingmen shi bowuguan 荊門市博物館, ed., *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). For a comprehensive study and extensive review of secondary scholarship see Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2013), and Robert G. Henricks, *Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

9. Han Wei 韓巍 and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所, eds., *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書 貳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2012), vol. 2, 209. The script is a left-leaning Han *li* 隸 clerical script, by which the editors estimate the text to be from the middle Western Han, most likely later than the slips excavated at Yinqueshan 銀雀山, for which the *terminus ante quem* is 118 B.C.E. Taboos on reign periods, used to date other manuscripts, are of limited use in dating this one. Although the graph *bang* 邦 (federation) of the first Han emperor Liu Bang’s 劉邦 name is replaced throughout by *guo* 國 (state), taboos on the personal names *heng* 恆 (Liu Heng 劉恆, Emperor Wen 文帝, 200–157 B.C.E.), *qi* 啟 (Emperor Jing 景帝, 188–141 B.C.E.), and *che* 徹/徹 (Emperor Wu 武帝, 141–87 B.C.E.) are not consistently observed, complicating the dating. See Han Wei and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo, eds., *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu*, vol. 2, 208–9. One slip within the cache bears the graphs *Xiaojing yuannian* 孝景元年 (first year of Emperor Jing, 157 B.C.E.), so the slips were almost certainly buried after that time. This calls to question the certainty with which the dating of prior manuscript discoveries, such as those from Mawangdui, can rely on taboos. Much scholarship on the Peking University (Beida) *Laozi*, which comes from a purchased, unprovenanced cache of manuscripts, regards its authenticity. Two articles by Xing Wen 邢文 attempt to refute the authenticity of the Beida *Laozi*. For an overview of the manuscripts, their contents, the debate on their authenticity, and a point by point rebuttal of Xing Wen’s arguments, see Christopher J. Foster, “Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Strips: On the Authentication and Study of Purchased Manuscripts,” *Early China* 40 (2017), 167–239. See also Thies Staack, “Could the Peking University Laozi 老子 Really Be a Forgery? Some Skeptical Remarks,” *HeiDOK—University of Heidelberg Open Access Platform*, deposited January 11, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00022453>. The manuscripts’ lack of provenance is deeply regrettable; the cache was almost certainly robbed from a tomb that if scientifically excavated would offer a much richer context for interpretation of the materials.

10. In 1982, for example, William Boltz pointed out that the Mawangdui texts are “by a period of more than four centuries, our oldest witnesses, and can therefore be regarded as the most faithful extant representatives of the original *Lao tzu* text.” Around the same time, in another foundational study, Robert Henricks set the mission of determining whether the chapter divisions of the *Laozi* were indeed “in the right places,” a

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origin marks an authorial or editorial event was not then, and is not now, a matter of consensus.¹¹ The quest for the urtext of the *Laozi*, however, is not very fashionable of late, not least because the discoveries at Guodian produced three manuscripts containing *Laozi* material with a completely different and seemingly random order of *zhang*. These texts, and the narratives of textual accretion they seem to enable, has further shaken our faith in the existence of a single historical *Laozi*, and shifted attention to the collective actions of the many nameless scribes—the invisible hands of manuscript culture, operating under a model in which editorial work is understood to be at the center of school-based textual production.¹²

Whether one subscribes to a model in which the *Laozi* was produced by an author, a school, or a set of historical processes, the sources we have clearly demonstrate that *Laozi*—the book as we know it—was altered and refined by editors and scribes. Its *zhang*, the molecules of its textual matter, the cells of its organism, appear to have evolved early on as motile creatures, such that, for example, essentially all the *zhang* found in the Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts are found in the transmitted text, albeit arranged differently, sometimes concatenated or divided, and often with significant textual variation.¹³

determination that could only be done with recourse to a more authoritative text, or with a clear understanding of the compositional practices that ought properly to have produced the chapters. These quotations are unlikely to represent the current views of their authors; I cite them only to illustrate a shift in the field of textual studies. William G. Boltz, "The Religious and Philosophical Significance of the 'Hsiang Erh' 'Lao Tzu' 相爾老子 in the Light of the 'Ma-Wang-Tui' Silk Manuscripts," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45.1 (1982), 99; and Robert G. Henricks, "On the Chapter Divisions in the 'Lao-Tzu,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45.3 (1982), 501–24.

11. The accumulation of manuscripts has proceeded in step with debates concerning the *Laozi*'s time of composition and the existence of a historical Laozi-author, articulated most fully in the New Culture periodical, *Gushibian* 古史辨 (Disputations on Ancient History). For an overview of debates on the nature and time of the *Laozi*'s composition, see Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-Tê Ching)*, chap. 2–3 and Edward L. Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts and Their Place in Twentieth-Century Historiography on the 'Laozi,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 65.2 (2005), 417–57.

12. Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 58.

13. Several models for considering the relation of the Guodian materials to later *Laozi* redactions have been considered, including that the Guodian materials represent either 1) an anthology that reproduces selections from a preexisting, more complete *Laozi*; 2) source materials from which the *Laozi* as we know it was compiled; or 3) a different version of the *Laozi*, which circulated in parallel to the one we know and derives from some 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*, ed. Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams (Berkeley: SSEC and IEAS, 2000), 71–88; Li Ling 李零, *Guodian Chujian jiaodujì* 郭店楚簡校讀記 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 2002), 28–30; for a comprehensive overview, see Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation*, 199–205. The

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Zhang, if viewed as a stable precursors of canons, have become the new face (or heritable facial features) of the urtext, in that they are presumed to be the raw, identifiable, discrete chunks-of-text out of which editors compiled canons, and which therefore implicitly pre-exist canons. In the *Laozi*, *zhang* have what the late Rudolf Wagner called “molecular coherence,” which implies that a *zhang* coheres both structurally and semantically, expressing a complete, bounded idea, thereby constituting the stable, independent building block of the book.¹⁴ In recent years, this same relationship of *zhang* to book has been understood as a more pervasive, general phenomenon of book formation in early China.¹⁵

Integral to the theory, and most relevant to the formation of textual units in the *Laozi*, is Wagner’s theory of interlocking parallel prose, or IPS, a method by which *zhang* cohere. Since IPS is central to a formal account of the relationship between the *Laozi* and its parts, it merits a brief, illustrative, digression: in IPS, two or more parallel “strains” are held together by linking or summary sequences that generalize the relationships between parallel elements within each strain. There are thus horizontal structures more familiar from parallel prose in classical Chinese, and vertical structures, which semantically link the two upper and lower portions of each strain.

Wagner uses part of *Laozi* chapter 64 to illustrate the phenomenon:

I		
1a 為者敗之		2b 執者失之
	3c 是以聖人	
II		
4a 無為故無敗		5b 無執故無失
I		
1a He who interferes destroys them;		2b He who holds fast loses them.
	3c That is why the Sage	
II		
4a Does not interfere and thus does not destroy		5b Does not hold fast and thus does not lose. ¹⁶

C manuscript of *Laozi* materials from Guodian appears to have contained a previously unknown text, named by the editors as the *Taiyi shengshui* 太一生水. Its relation to the *Laozi* materials is a matter of controversy, although it appears quite distinct in both rhetorical structure and genre.

14. See note 4, above, for Wagner’s work on IPS.

15. William G. Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 61–62; and Sarah Allan, *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts* (Albany: State University of New York, 2015), chap. 3.

16. The translation is Wagner’s; see Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 62–66.

The two horizontal strains *a* and *b* represent phrasal parallelism, whereas vertical rows I and II represent semantically interlocked parallel elements. This most basic example is what Wagner terms “open” IPS, in that its identification can be made on the basis of syntactic characteristics, by following continuity in the use of *wei* 為 (interfere), *bai* 敗 (destroy), *zhi* 執 (hold fast), and *shi* 失 (lose). *C*, in this case, is a generalized linker that interlocks the strains, although *c* passages can also be summative.¹⁷

IPS is presented primarily as a theory of how *zhang* of the *Laozi* were interpreted by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 C.E.), although it is presumed also to be an inherent, stylistic feature of chapter composition.¹⁸ Wagner’s related theory of “molecular coherence” stands in starkest contrast to models of *Laozi* composition such as those of D. C. Lau 劉殿爵,¹⁹ in which *Laozi* chapters are viewed as the product of preexisting, unrelated fragments having been assembled by editors.²⁰ In Lau’s model, the interpretive assumption of coherence has been abandoned even for the *zhang* of the *Laozi*. It is worth noting that Wagner’s example above of chapter 64, is only part of a *zhang* as the text is divided in the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong 河上公 recensions, but circulates independently in the Guodian version; sometimes the Guodian manuscripts lend support to Lau’s model, sometimes to Wagner’s.²¹ Moreover, the two models are by no means the only attempts to grapple with the problem of form and

17. See n. 4 above. “Closed” IPS requires that the reader apply cultural knowledge to identify conceptual relations that hold each strain together, such as knowing that a particular term *X* in the top of a strain is generally perceived as opposite to term *Y* in the bottom of that strain. Wagner goes on as well to identify more complex, stepped structures. In the example case above, the structure is *a b c a b*, but inversions are possible to yield sequences like *a b c b a*, or any number of more complex structures.

18. Wagner, “Technique and the Philosophy of Structure” and other versions of this work enumerate instances of IPS in a wide range of Warring States texts; Wagner, “The Impact of Conceptions of Rhetoric and Style on Early Laozi Editions,” 46, suggests that IPS indicates an authorial style, rather than editorial practice, in the composition of the *Laozi*.

19. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 57; D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), as reprinted in his *Tao Te Ching (A Bilingual Edition)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001). Lau divides his translation of the *Laozi* into 196 sayings, such that many of the 81 chapters of the received edition are viewed as composite. Kimura Eiichi 木村英一, *Rōshi no shinkenkyū* 老子の新研究 (Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1959) presents a similar view. For a summary in English, see Leon Hurvitz, “A Recent Japanese Study of Lao-Tzu: Kimura Eiichi’s 木村英一 *Rōshi no shinkenkyū* 老子新研究,” *Monumenta Serica* 20.1 (Jan, 1961), 311–67.

20. Lau writes: “In my view, not only is the *Laozi* an anthology but even individual chapters are made up of shorter passages whose connexion with one another is at best tenuous”; Lau, *Lao Tzu*, xiv.

21. See Shaughnessy, “The Guodian Manuscripts,” 435–36 for a discussion.

composition in the *Laozi*,²² but it is likely the case, if indeed the *Laozi* is composed of varying forms that became disposed on varying codices prior to the various versions we know, that to rely on a single theory of interpretation is to assume that some coherent set of rules or principles is applicable to this complex process—that there can be some unified M-theory governing the *Laozi*'s formation. While I do not think such an assumption is tenable or likely to provide results any different from Henderson's assumption of textual coherence, I do hope that the following pages constitute an incremental step towards a more coherent account of some of the processes at work in the *Laozi*'s formation and canonization.

The study proceeds in three parts, working from the interpretation of a single *zhang*, or chapter, to groups of *zhang*, to the book/canon (*jing* 經) as a whole. First, I examine chapter 13 of the *Laozi* in detail, in a case study of what I call "molecular incoherence." Rather than revealing a molecular *ur-zhang*, versions of chapter 13 demonstrate a level of continuity in the processes of composition, editorship, and interpretation that has not yet been fully described. Second, I peer along the seams of *Laozi* recensions, examining chapter punctuation variants, showing that some of the processes by which chapters collocate—namely by repetition of themes, phrases, or patterns—are indistinguishable from those that help individual chapters cohere. Third, I examine structural features of *Laozi* recensions, which reveal emphatic efforts to ensure chapter separation in the Beida *Laozi*. More generally, I show that for editors and scribes who sought to perfect the *Laozi*, coherence of message was sometimes sacrificed for the continuity of a *zhang*, or for comprehensiveness in the ordering of the book.

Part One

Hypervariability and Molecular Incoherence: A Case Study of *Laozi* Chapter 13

Zhang of the *Laozi* that appear to be coherent may not have always been that way. This applies for cases of semantic (or philosophical) coherence, in which a *zhang* addresses a single comprehensible idea, as well

22. Other notable studies deal with the prosody and form of the text, such as Bernhard Karlgren, "The Poetical Parts in Lao-Tsü," *Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift* 38.3 (1932), 3–45; William Baxter, "Situating the Language of the Lao-Tzu: The Probable Date of the Tao-Te-Ching," in *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-Te-Ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), 231–53. And David Schaberg, "On the Range and Performance of Laozi-Style Tetrasyllables," in *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 87–111.

as for cases of structural coherence—in which a *zhang* coheres as a single textual unit. I treat primarily the former here and the latter in Part Two. In both cases, chapter 13 of the *Laozi* serves as a crucial subject for case study.

Chapter 13', by which I mean the textual sequence homologous to chapter 13 in the received Wang Bi and Heshang Gong editions, is in all versions of the text difficult to decipher.²³ When a bewildered student asked Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 C.E.), for guidance in the matter, Zhu replied that “[people] have long tried in vain to make sense of this chapter” (從前理會此章不得), and left it at that.²⁴ In the thousand or so years since he lived, many others have tried. The Mawangdui A and B 馬王堆甲、乙, Guodian A, B, and C 郭店甲、乙、丙, and Peking University (“Beida” 北大) *Laozi* manuscripts each present distinct versions of the chapter, and in response to these new manuscript discoveries, at least two full-length articles by prominent scholars in China and Taiwan have been devoted to deciphering 13'.²⁵ It may be tempting to hope that an authoritative early manuscript could help untangle the interpretive knot, and indeed new studies of paleography have been marshalled to do so authoritatively.²⁶ As I hope to show in Part Three of this article, it is certainly the case that those who produced the Beida recension hoped their reading would be recognized as authoritative, correct, and clear. Here, however, I suggest that looking at all witnesses of 13' sheds as much light on the continuity of interpretive problems in the *Laozi* at the level of the *zhang* than it does on any original, correct, or clear meaning.

A look at how several modern translators have dealt with the opening phrase of 13' is representative of the diversity of interpretations engendered by the chapter (see Table 1).

Note that as varied as these translations are, they do not nearly exhaust the grammatical possibilities for interpreting the line. And

23. Here and throughout, I use a prime sign, e.g. 13', to indicate the textual sequence homologous to chapter 13 in the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong versions; it does not refer to the reading of any particular recension. Others often preface the number by “R” for “the received text,” (e.g. R13), for this purpose, whereas I use R13 to refer to the *specific* variant of the sequence homologous to chapter 13 found in the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong versions.

24. Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 and Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 2995.

25. He Zeheng 何澤恆, “Laozi Chong ru ruo jing zhang jiu yi xinjie” 老子寵辱若驚章舊義新解, in *Xian-Qin rudaoyi xinzhi lu* 先秦儒道舊義新知錄 (Taipei: Da'an, 2004), 309–402, originally published in National Taiwan University's *Wen shi zhe xuebao* 49 (December 1998); Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “Chong ru ruo jing' shi chong ru ruo rong de wudu” 寵辱若驚是寵辱若榮的誤讀, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 3 (2013), 1–12.

26. Qiu, “Chong ru ruo jing' shi chong ru ruo rong de wudu.”

Table 1 *Laozi* Chapter 13, Section One: 寵辱若驚 貴大患若身.

Lin Yutang	Michael Lafargue	Chad Hansen	David Hinton
1 “Favor and disgrace cause one dismay; What we value and what we fear are within our Self.” ^a	“Favour and disgrace: this means being upset high rank does great damage to your self.” ^b	Favor is as disgraceful as a warning. Nobility is as great a trouble as a self. ^c	Honor is a contagion deep as fear, renown a calamity profound as self. ^d

a. Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Lao-tse* (York: Modern Library, 1948), chap. 13.

b. Michael LaFargue, *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Ching* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 382. My reading of Michael LaFargue’s sentence might be a misreading due to a missing semicolon in his book; if so, perhaps it is all the better an analogy to the problems left in manuscript editions.

c. Chad Hansen, *Tao Te Ching: On the Art of Harmony* (London: Duncan Baird, 2009), chap. 13.

d. David Hinton, *Tao Te Ching* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), 15.

although Michael Lafargue’s translation does not conform to the conventions of the English sentence, perhaps for that very reason it bears the most resemblance to our extant versions of the text: it is something that we struggle to make sense of, not something clear of itself. This fact is obscured in part by the work of interpreters who seek coherence, including Wang Bi and Heshang Gong, to whose commentaries the most influential transmitted versions of the text are attached.²⁷ The Wang Bi and Heshang Gong versions read as follows, as translated according to their commentarial glosses (see [Table 2](#)).

27. Rudolf Wagner has argued that the recension transmitted with the Wang Bi commentary may have been conflated to bring it into greater agreement with the Heshang Gong recension, such that they may be regarded as a single recension. The two versions nonetheless vary significantly at 13’, and variant forms are found among different editions of the Heshang Gong edition. Regarding conflation, see Rudolf G. Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi’s Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), chap. 1. The wording of Wang Bi’s commentary does not indicate that his version of chapter 13 differed from the transmitted version. On the matter of Wang Bi and Heshang Gong as a single recension, see Harold D. Roth, “Text and Edition in Early Chinese Philosophical Literature,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.2 (1993), 222–23 and n. 36. For an account of the many variants in different editions, consult Jiang Xichang 蔣錫昌, *Laozi jiaogu* 老子校詁 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1937), 67–75.

Table 2 Wang Bi (WB) and Heshang Gong (HG) Variants of Chapter 13¹.

WB ^a	HG ^b
1 寵辱若驚 貴大患若身。 Favor and disgrace [come as] equally startling; esteem is as great a disaster as [having a] self.	寵辱若驚 貴大患若身。 Favor and disgrace [come as] equally startling; fear that great disaster will <u>reach</u> your body.
2.1 何謂寵辱若驚？ What does it mean to say “favor and disgrace [come as] equally startling? ”	何謂寵辱 _____？ What does it mean to say “favor and disgrace _____?”
2.2 () 寵為下 [When] favor is bestowed on an inferior	(寵為上) 辱為下 (Favor is elevating);^c disgrace is debasing.
2.3 得之若驚 失之若驚， he gets it as if startled and loses it as if startled.	得之若驚 失之若驚， he gets it as if startled and loses it as if startled.
2.4 是謂寵辱若驚。 This is the meaning of “favor and disgrace [come as] equally start- ling.”	是謂寵辱若驚。 This is the meaning of “favor and disgrace [come as] equally start- ling.”
3.1 何謂貴大患若身？ What does it mean to say “ <u>esteem</u> is as great a disaster <u>as [having a] self?</u> ”	何謂貴大患若身？ What does it mean to say “ <u>fear</u> great disaster will <u>reach your body?</u> ”
3.2 吾所以有大患者，為吾有身， The reason I [can] have great disas- ter is that I have a self	吾所以有大患者，為吾有身， The reason I [can] have great disas- ter is that I have a body.
3.3 及吾無身，吾有何患？ if I had no self, what disaster could I have?	及吾無身，吾有何患？ if I had no body, what disaster could I have?
4.1 故 Therefore	故 Therefore
4.2 貴以身為天下，若可寄天下； When one esteems the <u>self as the</u> world, <u>the world thus can be</u> <u>entrusted to him</u> ;	貴以身為天下者，則可寄於天下； When one esteems his own <u>body</u> <u>in undertaking rule of the world,</u> <u>then he can [temporarily] lodge in</u> <u>the world</u>
4.3 愛以身為天下，若可託天下。 when one loves the self <u>as the</u> world, <u>the world can thus be</u> <u>bestowed on him.</u>	愛以身為天下，乃可託於天下。 When one loves his body <u>in undertak-</u> <u>ing rule of the world, then he can</u> <u>[successfully] entrust his body to</u> <u>[extended rule of] the world.</u>

a. The base text for Wang Bi's *Laozi Daodejing zhu* 老子道德經注 canon and commentary are the Zhejiang shuju 浙江書局 reprint of the Ming Huating Zhang Zhixiang 明華亭張之象 edition, which is the basis for Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008).

b. Base text: Southern Song Jian'an Yushi kanben 建安虞氏刊本; modern edition in Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozi Daodejing Heshanggong zhangju* 老子道德經河上公章句 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997).

c. Chen Jingyuan's 陳景元 edition of the Heshang Gong text, as well as some Japanese manuscript editions, include the phrase “favor is elevating” (*chong wei shang* 寵為上). See Wang Ka, *Laozi Daodejing Heshanggong zhangju*, 50, n. 1.

Although all the sections are essential to understanding the chapter as a whole, the variants of obvious consequence come mostly in section two: note that for the question “What does it mean to say ‘favor and disgrace [come as] equally startling?’” The Heshang Gong version asks merely the meaning of “favor and disgrace.”²⁸ In 2.2, Wang Bi’s “favor” becomes Heshang Gong’s “disgrace.” In the latter reading, as He Zeheng 何澤恆 has pointed out, the suggestion that someone would be startled by “losing disgrace” does not make much sense, and especially in the vast majority of Heshang Gong editions, which lack “favor is elevating,” it is not clear what the “it” of “losing it” 失之 should be.²⁹ What is very clear about the Heshang Gong variant and especially that which adds “favor is elevating” (寵為上), is that “favor” and “disgrace” must have the same lexical function; it cannot be sensibly read “favor is disgrace,” “favor the disgraceful” or “deem favor as disgraceful” etc., all of which are otherwise in principle possible.

The Heshang Gong commentary generally gives much more concrete explanations, although they are not always plausible. For example, in reading “fear that great disaster will reach your body” (畏大患若(至)身), it reads *gui* 貴 (esteem) as *wei* 畏 (fear), which has no philological basis and is inconsistent with the gloss in part four which reads *gui* 貴 in its normal sense of “esteem” (albeit portraying “esteem” as bad). It also reads *ruo* 若 (like; equally) as *zhi* 至 (arrive, reach), even though *ruo* 若 is read more conventionally as “equally; like” in the previous line. As is often the case in the Heshang Gong commentary, coherence of message is achieved only by bending conventions of grammar and use.

Both editions and their commentaries set down some influential cart tracks for the medieval interpretive tradition, but they also both leave open crucial ambiguities. Wang’s commentary seeks as often to accentuate the multivalence of the *Laozi* as it does to explicate it. Some of the most important questions are left open by both commentaries: should the ideal person, for example, be startled? Both commentaries agree that the first line is something like “favor and disgrace [come as] equally startling,” but in saying this is the *Laozi* describing the emotional disposition of the sage or the simpleton? Wang Bi evades this problem by expanding the valence of the first lines:

28. Wang Bi’s primary interpretation of section 2.2 reads “[When] favor is bestowed on an inferior” but the phrase can also be understood, as other interpreters do, to mean primarily “favor is disgraceful,” and the Wang Bi commentary accommodates this view at least in the sense that disgrace and favor are seen as identical. Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 29–30.

29. He, “Laozi Chong ru ruo jing zhang jiuyi xinjie,” 352–53.

寵必有辱，榮必有患，驚辱等，榮患同也。為下得寵辱榮患若驚，則不足以亂天下

Where there is favor must be disgrace; where there is honor must be disaster; favor equals disgrace, honor and disaster are the same. When an inferior is startled by getting favor or disgrace, honor or disaster, it is insufficient to bring order/chaos to the world³⁰

Wang Bi's comment presents two opposite possibilities: the term *luan* 亂 means "chaos" in some circumstances and its opposite, "order" in others.³¹ This is Wang Bi's purposeful use of ambiguity, also seen in one of his central interpretive statements on the *Laozi*, *Laozi zhilue* 老子指略, wherein he advocates an aesthetic of *chongben ximo* 崇本息末 (to revere the root and cease/proliferate the branches), and in which the opposite senses of *xi* 息, "to cease" and "to proliferate," are both simultaneously intended.³² Thus, according to Wang's anti-reductive "explanation," an inferior being startled by honor or disgrace will either contribute to political order or chaos. Wang thus leaves open whether the fundamental topic of the chapter—being startled—is normative or counter-normative.³³

Some later interpreters are quite clear on the matter. The Tang interpreter, Wang Zhen 王真 (690–744), whose commentary follows the Heshang Gong tradition, says that "[to] the sage, losing or gaining [favor] always come as equally startling" (聖人的得失常若驚); Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112) said that "the attained ones of old knew to be startled by favor just as they were startled by disgrace" (古之達人，驚寵如驚辱).³⁴ For them, being startled is good. To some, however, being startled is bad. Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 636), for example, opines that favor and disgrace ought never disturb the mind of the attained:

30. Lou, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 29–30.

31. The Wang Bi translations of Rudolf Wagner and Richard John Lynn come up with roughly opposite translations of this sentence. See Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing*, 159; Richard John Lynn, trans., *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-Te Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia, 1999), 71.

32. See Lin Lizhen 林麗真, *Wang Bi* 王弼 (Taipei: Dongda, 1988), 55–56, 60.

33. Wang does specify that the imagined protagonist is in a subordinate role. See Lou, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 29–30.

34. Wang Zhen 王真, "Daodejing lun bing yao yishu 道德經論兵要義述," in *Wuqiu Beizhai Laozi jicheng chubian* 無求備齋老子集成初編, vol. 26, chap. 13. Wang follows Heshang Gong in differentiating the import of "esteeming the body" from that of "loving the body." Su Che 蘇轍, "Su Ziyou Daodejing zhu" 蘇子由道德經注, in *Wu qiu bei zhai Laozi jicheng*, vol. 99, chap. 13. Both Su Che and Cheng Xuanying follow the Wang Bi reading and explicitly reject the Heshang Gong reading of line 1.3 (寵為上辱為下) in their commentaries.

喜怖之情皆非真性者也，是以達者譬窮通於寒暑，比榮辱於儻來，生死不撓其神，可（何）貴賤之能驚也

Neither the emotions of happiness or fear are true nature, therefore to the attained, adversity and success are as winter and summer; honor and disgrace are like random events. Life and death do not disturb their spirits—how could they be startled by esteem or disfavor?³⁵

Lu Xisheng 陸希聲 (d. 895) takes this even further, interpreting both propositions of section one as counter-normative; not only should one *not* be startled, one also should *not* esteem one's self/body any more than one would esteem disaster.³⁶

Many have struggled to reconcile the ideal of maintaining composure under pressure, without abandoning compassion for the world, and while medieval commentaries employ Buddhist technologies of reason to navigate this apparent conundrum, the textual problems that underlie them are indeed present not only in the earliest manuscript versions, but in other early transmitted sources (the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Wenzi* 文子, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子, further discussed in Part Two). The problem of whether being startled is good or bad is crucial to making sense of the chapter, but ultimately its solution is not easily untangled from the problems of self and body in sections three and four, to which I now turn.

Section three of 13', which is ostensibly an explanation of the second proposition, section 1b, neither presents nor solves problems of interpretation: having a self/body is tied to disaster, which may be avoided by not having a body. Vague, perhaps, but the grammar is relatively straightforward and the meaning uncontested.

Section four is more difficult, Since *ji* 寄 (lodge; entrust) and *tuo* 託 (entrust) are opposed in the parallel structure of 4.2 and 4.3, they are most plausibly interpreted as either synonymous, opposed, or somehow complementary in meaning, but on this the two versions disagree. As customarily used, these meanings should be identical, as in the binome *jituo* 寄託 (to entrust) already well attested in the Warring States period. The same relationship normally obtains for *ai* 愛 (love) and *gui* 貴 (esteem). Yet while Wang Bi interprets these terms as two synonymous

35. Meng Wentong 蒙文通, "Jijiao Cheng Xuanying *Daodejing yishu* 輯校成玄英道德經義疏," in *Meng Wentong wenji* 蒙文通文集 (Chengdu: Bashu, 2001), 399–400.

36. Lu Xisheng 陸希聲, *Daode zhenjing zhuan* 道德真經傳, in *Wuqitubeizhai Laozi jicheng chubian*, vol. 28, *juan* 2, reads: "Those who esteem [i.e. overvalue] their bodies esteem great disaster ... therefore it says esteeming disaster is like [esteeming] one's body, to satirize excessive esteem of the body." 貴其身者乃貴大患也 ... 故言貴患若身譏其貴身之甚. The use of *gui* 貴 (esteem) is strained here, but that may be orthogonal to Lu's point.

or complementary pairs,³⁷ the Heshang Gong commentary sees them as contrastive:

言人君貴其身而賤人；欲為天下王者則可寄立，不可以久也。言人君能愛其身，非為己也，乃欲為萬民之父母，以此得為天下王者，乃可以託其身於萬民之上，長無咎也

[Laozi] is talking about a ruler who esteems his own body and deems others as debased—such a ruler, in seeking [to rule] the world may be put in power, [but] cannot last long”; if a ruler is able to love his body, this is not to act selfishly, [but rather] is to be father and mother to all the people. In this way he can become the lord of the world, and his self/body can be entrusted above all the people, for ages without fault.

The decision to read *ji* opposed to *tuo* and *ai* opposed to *gui* is a way of solving the apparent paradox: how can one strive to not have a body, as is clearly advocated in section two, while simultaneously loving one’s body? In the Heshang Gong interpretation, there is one way of having a body that is selfish, and another that is at least in some sense selfless. Wang Zhen expands on this, offering perhaps the clearest justification for the reading of *gui* and *ai* as opposites in *Laozi* 72’: “The sage knows himself but does not show himself; he loves (*ai*) himself but does not esteem (*gui*) himself” (聖人自知不自見 (現) 自愛不自貴).³⁸ Although advocacy of *ai*/ “love” definitely finds support within the text of the *Laozi*, there are also pronouncements to the contrary, for example, that “those who love deeply pay steeply” (甚愛必大費).³⁹ In addition to reversing the conventional meaning of parallel word pairs, the consistency of the Heshang Gong reading also relies on the highly dubious assumption that *gui* can be read as “fear” 畏 in the first sentence—a reading that even Wang Zhen does not follow.

Liu Xiaogan insightfully identifies a major source of confusion in *Laozi* 13’: how to reconcile “not having a self/body” 無身 with the apparent advocacy of “esteeming the body,” or “using the self/body to serve the world,” “loving the self/body” 愛身, so as to serve the world, “esteeming the self/body” above the world, or any combination of these that would enable a person to be “entrusted with the rule over the world” or just simply to “lodge in the world.” As Liu more succinctly poses it, is

37. This is contrary to the pattern that Wagner observes for Wang Bi’s IPS, in which opposed elements tend to be contrastive and opposite in meaning. See Wagner *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 83.

38. Wang Zhen, *Daodejing lun bing yao yishu*.

39. *Laozi* 44’, Lou, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 122.

Laozi ultimately advocating a form of egoism, altruism, or neither?⁴⁰ All are possible if we are not bound by one school or another of commentarial exegesis.

Liu's solution to the paradox is ultimately by recourse to the pervasive trope of reversal within the *Laozi*, in which commonsense notions are overturned.⁴¹ There is doubtless evidence of this trope throughout the text, from the opening sentence of chapter one, "the way that can be way-ed is not the eternal way" (道可道非常道), to the exhortation to "do the doing that does not and nothing's undoable" (無為而無不為). There are even a number that are of special relevance to the themes dealt with in chapter 13, such as is found in *Laozi* 7':

聖人後其身而身先；外其身而身存。非以其無私耶？故能成其私。

The sage puts himself last to come out first; he casts his body aside so as to keep it. Is it not by being unselfish? Thereby he can achieve his selfish ends.⁴²

Certainly, this or any other like example can be used to reconcile the problems of 13'. Nonetheless, the main difference between the examples of reversal above and the difficulty of 13' is that reversal generally announces quite clearly that it is turning convention on its head: opposites are presented within the same phrase, or words are repeated to have obviously distinct meanings; parallelism is often employed to clarify and elaborate on the reversal. And while there is some measure of parallelism in 13', favor and disgrace are not natural opposites, nor are the terms of section one addressed with any symmetry in the remainder of the chapter, with "love" 愛 seeming to come out of the blue and "great disaster" 大患 going unexplained. This makes and relationship of reversal non-obvious, at best, at least as compared to the trope as exemplified by 7' and other examples above. This, I think, is part—but not all—of why 13' has long seemed incoherent.

Moreover, to insist that the trope of reversal as present in 13' should be just like every other instance in the *Laozi* is to homogenize the text to itself in search of coherence; the idea that Laozi often means the opposite of what he says, applied indiscriminately, is precisely the sort of commentarial strategy that Henderson identifies, bound to smooth over any incongruences in the text, rather than reveal the seams along

40. Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Laozi gujin* 老自古今 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue, 2009), 207–9.

41. Liu, *Laozi gujin*, 208–9.

42. *Laozi* R7, cf. R66.

which chapters may have been spliced together from previously unattached material.

What is *Chong-ru* in Excavated Manuscripts?

One can merely speculate about the possibility of a *Laozi* urtext, produced by a historical Laozi, but we are learning ever more about how *Laozi* manuscripts were read and copied. Rather than coming up with elaborate written explanations to make sense of the text, it seems that when the editors that produced our variant versions of the *Laozi* sought coherence, they were able to “clarify” the text by rewriting it (within certain limits) so as to conform to their interpretation. The evidence that they did so is that nearly every known manuscript that represents a Han or prior state of the text has a reading for 13’ that differs from all other versions in consequential ways.⁴³ The variants are listed in Table 3, and it is clear from the pattern of consequential variants (bolded or underlined) that the underlying interpretive knots—the points which generate textual variance and exegetical confabulations in the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong traditions—are the same points at which we find variance in the manuscripts, primarily in sections two and four. One might speculate that a number of other variants we do not know of also circulated during or prior to the Han, but especially in light of the Guodian and Beida manuscripts, the sources are now already sufficient to conclude that the apparent incoherence of 13’ was problematic for readers of even the oldest extant manuscripts.

To scholars that assumed a linear filiation among manuscripts, wherein older manuscripts represent readings closer to a historical *Laozi*, it might have seemed likely after the 1973 discoveries of the Mawangdui texts that the Heshang Gong reading in section 2.1, “what does it mean to say *chong-ru* (favor-disgrace)” (何謂寵辱), was simply the result of a later mistake.⁴⁴ The Mawangdui manuscripts seemed instead to corroborate the Wang Bi text at this locus. Now, however, both the Guodian B and the Beida manuscripts suggest that the Heshang Gong reading circulated in parallel with the longer form of the question, “what does it

43. By consequential variants I refer to those which significantly change the interpretation of the text. I am not concerned with phonetic loans or the substitution of equivalent particles, which are present in large numbers. Consequential variants exist for numerous chapters, and redaction critical methods may yet reveal patterns in interpretive tendencies, although in the case of 13’ the interpretation is especially contested.

44. This reading is shared with Xiang’er, Guodian, and Beida.

Table 3 *Laozi* 13' Variants

	1a	1b	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	
WB	寵辱若驚	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱 若驚	寵 為下	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂寵辱若驚
HG	寵辱若驚	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱	(寵 為上) 辱 為下	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂寵辱若驚
FY	寵辱若驚	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱 若驚	寵 為下	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂寵辱若驚
XE	寵辱若驚	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱	為下	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂寵辱若驚
Ma	寵辱若驚	貴大椀若身	何謂寵辱 若驚	寵之為下	得之若驚	□之若驚	是謂寵辱若驚
Mb	弄辱若驚	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱 若驚	弄之為下也	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂弄辱若驚
GD	人態辱若 繫	貴大患若身	可謂態辱	態 為下也	旻之若繫	達之若繫	是謂態辱、繫
BD	寵辱若□	貴大患若身	何謂寵辱	寵 為下 是謂寵辱	得之若驚	失之若驚	是謂寵辱若 駮
	3.1	3.2	3.3				
WB	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患者	為吾有身	及吾無身	吾有何患		
HG	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患者	為吾有身	及吾無身	吾有何患		
FY	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患者	為吾有身	苟吾無身	吾有何患		
XE	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患	為吾有身	及吾无身	吾有何患		
Ma	何謂貴大椀若身	吾所以有大椀者	為吾有身也	及吾無身	有何椀		
Mb	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患者	為吾有身也	及吾無身	有何患		
GD	□□□□若身	虛所以又大患者	為虛又身	刃虛亡身	吾或可□		
BD	何謂貴大患若身	吾所以有大患者	為吾有身	及吾無身	吾有何患		

	4.1	4.2		4.3
WB	故		貴以身 為天下 若可 寄 天下	愛以身 為天下 若可 託 天下
HG	故		貴以身 為天下者則可 寄於天下	愛以身 為天下 乃可以託於天下
FY	故		貴以身 為天下者則可以託 天下矣	愛以身 為天下者則可以寄 天下矣
XE	故		貴以身於 天下	愛以身 為天下 若可以寄 天下
Ma	故		貴為身於為天下 若可以迺 天下矣	愛以身 為天下 女可以寄 天下
Mb	故		貴為身於為天下 若可以橐 天下□	愛以身 為天下 女可以寄 天下矣
GD	□		□□□□為天下 若可以卮 天下矣	悉以身 為天下 若可以迭 天下矣
BD	故		貴以身 為天下 若可 橐 天下	愛以身 為天下 若可 寄 天下
ZZ	故		貴以身於為天下 則可以託 天下	愛以身於 為天下 則可以寄 天下
WZ	故	老子曰 …	貴以身 治天下 可以寄 天下	愛以身 治天 所以託 天下矣
HZ	故	老子曰	貴以身 為天下 焉可以托 天下	愛以身 為天下 焉可以寄 天下矣

Abbreviations and notes: WB, Wang Bi; HG, Heshang Gong; FY, Fu Yi 傅奕; XE, Xiang'er; Ma, Mawangdui A; Mb, Mawangdui B, GD, Guodian; BD, Beida; ZZ, Zhuangzi 莊子; WZ Wenzhi 文子; HZ, Huainanzi 淮南子. ZZ found in Zhuangzi "Zai You" 在宥 (chap. 11), Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1995), 91. WZ in Wenzhi "Shangren" 上人 in Xin Bing 辛鉞, *Tongxuan zhenjing* 通玄真經 (Chang shou ju shi Tieqintongjianlou cang ming kanben 常熟瞿氏鐵琴銅劍樓藏明刊本), *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1985), *juan* 10. Note that the Wenzhi places the phrase "Laozi said" 老子曰 prior to the same segment that also contextualizes the 13' section 3 homolog in the Huainanzi. The contextualizing segment is also found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. HZ, Huainanzi 淮南子 "Daoying" 道應.

mean to say *chong-ru ruo jing* (favor-disgrace-like-startle)" (何謂寵辱若驚) in the Western Han (see Table 3).⁴⁵

There are in essence thus two versions of the question asked in section 2.1,⁴⁶ of which the Beida version poses the short form. Whereas other recensions seem to present and answer one or another of the short or long forms, the Beida text is unique in answering them both. Moreover, because the Beida insertion brackets the definition of *chong-ru*, it makes the grammatical interpretation more lucid than in any other version, if not coherent at the *zhang* level:⁴⁷

1

寵辱若驚，貴大患若身。

Favor-disgrace-like(wise)-startle; Esteem-great-disaster-like(wise)-self.

2.1

2.2

何謂寵辱？寵為下，是謂寵辱

What does it mean to say "favor-disgrace?" Favor is low-down.⁴⁸ **This is the meaning of "favor is disgraceful."**

2.3

2.4

得之若驚，失之若驚，是謂寵辱若驚

One gets it as if startled and loses it as if startled. **This is the meaning of "favor is disgrace come as equally startling [sic]."**

The reading of 2.1–2.2 is one that translators have advocated for other versions of the text,⁴⁹ and it is the first case in which the text of section two is considerably more restricted in meaning. *Chong ru* here can only really be grammatically interpreted as "favor is disgraceful." Moreover, such a reading is consequential in that it runs counter to those found both the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong interpretations of this section that read both *chong* (favor) and *ru* (disgrace) as parallel elements belonging

45. Long form shared with Wang Bi, Fu yi, Mawangdui A, and Mawangdui B; Beida variant shares the answer to this question but not the question itself.

46. It is possible that the form "what is *chong-ru wei xia*?" 何謂寵辱為下 (favor-disgrace-as/is-down), found in the Xiang'er manuscript represents a third variant, although based on the commentary, I punctuate it as in Table 3.

47. Since the manuscripts do not benefit from extensive commentaries, I leave the unexplained parts translated into a tentative gibberish until clear.

48. One might also read "Favor is something bestowed on inferiors."

49. Such as Chad Hansen's translation, "Favor is as disgraceful as a warning"; David Hinton's; Victor Mair's, "Being favored is so disgraceful that it startles." See notes to Table 1.

to the same lexical class,⁵⁰ although it is unclear whether this can also be followed in section 2.4.⁵¹ Like the emendations of modern interpreters, the contortions of the Heshang Gong commentary, and the vagueness of Wang Bi's commentary, the variant readings encountered here represent another strategy for grappling with the chapter's difficult opening sequence: emend the text.

The matter of how slightly or greatly one might be able to alter or emend is a question of interest. As will be discussed in greater detail in part three, the Beida manuscript shows every sign of a maturing canon, and in the fixed version it seeks to establish, the likely answer is "not very much." What might one do when faced with two conflicting, earlier versions of the text? The two variant answers to the question posed in section two *shi wei chong ru* 是謂寵辱 and *shi wei chong ru ruo jing* 是謂寵辱若驚 appear to have been present in the earlier Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts, and the Beida text suggests one speculative answer: include them both. It might be argued that this is merely a scribal repetition error, but for a number of reasons I will make clear in Part Three, I think this represents an attempt to account comprehensively and authoritatively with a plurality of variants during a process of collation. Nonetheless, the topic of being startled (*ruo jing* 若驚), which is precisely the difference between the two variant versions of the answer just examined in section two, merits yet some additional attention below.

Returning to Prior Readings? The Quest for Symmetry in a *Laozi Ur-zhang*

The Beida manuscript has been employed recently by Qiu Xigui to make a radical argument about the original reading of the *Laozi*. He argues that the character that appears as 榮 in the GD manuscript should not be read as *jing* 驚 (startle) but as *rong* 榮, or "honor."⁵² Qiu argues that the Guodian and Beida versions share common sequences in sections 2.1 and 2.2 because the Beida is an old version that preserved the phrasing of Laozi's words while getting the characters wrong; the editions that

50. One might question to what extent a grammatical reading of the text mattered to early imperial readers. It seems that the time of the HSG and Xiang'er commentaries in the development of the *Laozi* as a *jing*, it was no longer possible to dramatically alter the text. Ways to reconcile the problems of the text were engaged by commentary, as we have seen, and often sacrifice conventions of grammar, usage, and collocation for the sake of advancing an argument. See also below on the Xiang'er and Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 30.

51. If the two must be consistent, 2.4 would read "This is the meaning of 'favor is disgraceful and comes like a start.'"

52. Qiu, "Chong ru ruo jing' shi chong ru ruo rong de wudu," 3.

add *ruo jing* 若驚 (as [equally] startling) to 2.1, such as the Mawangdui and Wang Bi texts, got both the characters and the phrasing wrong.⁵³

Qiu's solution seeks a form of semantic symmetry that is otherwise missing from 13': namely that between *rong* 榮 (honor) and *ru* 辱 (disgrace), which is absent between *jing* 驚 (startle) and *ru* 辱 (disgrace). The use of *rong* and *ru* as opposites is firmly established by the late Warring States; the *Xunzi*, for example, has an entire chapter on the topic, treating *rong-ru* as an opposed dyad.⁵⁴ There are obvious advantages to reading the chapter as Qiu's interpretation suggests, which although made explicit only fragmentarily, can be translated roughly as follows:

寵辱若榮	Cherish disgrace as [you] cherish honor
貴大患若身	Esteem great disaster [i.e. death] as [you] esteem your body.
可謂憊辱	What does it mean to say "cherish disgrace"? ...
寵為下也	Cherish being below [others]
旻之若絜	receive it as [you would] honor
之若絜	lose it as [you would] honor ... ⁵⁵

One can certainly find elsewhere in the *Laozi* passages in which the *Laozi* advocates situating oneself below others,⁵⁶ and the paleographic evidence for the above interpretation is quite plausible. The graph 絜, seen below was originally interpreted as *ying* 纓 *ʔeŋ (ribbon; twist),⁵⁷ read as a sound loan for *jing* 驚 *kreŋ (startle). While the upper element of 纓 was initially interpreted as the phonophore *ying* 嬰 *ʔeŋ (strung pearls) by the Guodian editors, Bai Yulan 白於藍 has argued that the upper part of 絜 should be interpreted as two eyes, or *qu* 瞿 *[k]w(r)a-s, and that the graph as a whole may thus be transcribed as *qu* 瞿,

53. Qiu, "Chong ru ruo jing' shi chong ru ruo rong de wudu."

54. *Xunzi* 荀子, chapter four; see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 52–71.

55. Qiu does not translate the entire chapter into modern Chinese, and he addresses only parts of the chapter explicitly, so I translate based on the points he has made clear.

56. See *Laozi* chapters 28, 39, 61, 66, and 68. perhaps most convincing is the directive to "know their 'honor,' hold [fast] to their 'disgrace'; be valley to the realm" 知其榮，守其辱，為天下谷, although it should also be noted that "honor" is replaced by *bai* 白 (white) in the Mawangdui and Beida manuscripts. The chapter does not appear in the Guodian corpus.

57. *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, 119 n.5.

an element of *ju* 懼 (fear) or *ying* 營 (dazzle),⁵⁸ written interchangeably with *ying* 榮 *[N]-q^wen, *ying* 營 and probably also with *rong* 榮 *[N-q^w] ren (glory; honor).⁵⁹

Laozi B, *rong* 榮 or *jing* 驚⁶⁰



5-14



6-9



6-13



6-18

Phonologically, both *jing* 驚 (startle) and *rong* 榮 (efflorescence; glory; honor) seem possible. The problem of interpretation now is whether we interpret the two eyes at the top of the graph as the semantophore for the wide-eyed look of astonishment or as eyes bedazzled by “glory.” Both are plausible, although Qiu’s solution achieves a new and satisfying coherence, both with the opposed dyad of *rong* and *ru*, and with the *Laozi*’s advocacy elsewhere of taking up a low position.

Qiu’s argument, although ingenious, has not silenced the debate.⁶¹ One source of trouble is that the term *chong* 寵 (favor) as a verb, rendered in Qiu’s reading as “cherish” is strictly speaking more like “to [bestow] favor [on].” The use of *chong* in early texts is primarily transitive with animate beings: you can *chong* a person, perhaps a pet, but not so much an abstract concept, like “disgrace” or the state of “being below others.” Thus the verb–object interpretation seems somewhat forced unless the object is metonymic for an individual, e.g. “bestow favor on those who

58. Bai Yulan 白於藍, “Du Guodian jian suoji” 讀郭店簡瑣記, *Guwenzi yanjiu* 26 (2006), 308–9. The phonophore, which seems to be *ying* 營 (twist; wind) shows up in the Tsinghua *Rui Liangfu bi, for example, on slip 1-15 營 and slip 16-11 營 where it is equivalent to *ying* 營 *[c]^wen (encamp; conduct).

59. Qiu “Chong ru ruo jing’ shi chong ru ruo rong de wudu,” subsequently showed that in all but example 6-9, the element may be *yao* 眇 (look together?), although variation in rendering *huo* 火 (fire) in Chu script may also account for the difference between *qu* 眇 and *yao* 眇.

60. Graphs are labeled by slip and position, e.g. 5-14 is the fourteenth graph on slip 5.

61. See, for example Wang Ning 王寧, “Shi Guodian jian Laozi yi zhong de jing 釋郭店簡《老子》乙中的‘眇,’” accessed February 26, 2020, www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=2102. And Xu Wenxian 許文獻, “Zailun chong ru ruo jing” 再論寵辱若驚, in *Jinian Mawangdui Hanmu fajue sishi zhounian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 紀念馬王堆漢墓發掘四十周年國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Hunansheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2016), 211–14.

[regard] disgrace as honor" (寵辱若榮). This is expressly different from Qiu's reading.⁶²

Another problem is that the Guodian *Laozi's* punctuation does not clearly support the emendation to *rong* 榮. Within the Guodian *Laozi* B manuscript, the beginning section of 20' (henceforth 20^A) is written immediately preceding 13'. Between 20^A' and 13' there is a punctuation mark, underlined below. Such a mark elsewhere in the manuscript usually denotes a self-sufficient section or chapter of text. If this is indeed a chapter punctuation mark, the opening sentence of 13', read according to the punctuation, would begin with *ren* 人 (people):

人之所畏 不可以不畏_レ

人寵辱若繫 貴大患若身

What **people** fear, cannot but be feared.

people *chong ru ruo jing/rong gui da huan ruo shen.*

Many interpreters have regarded this as a mistake,⁶³ as it does not agree with other versions, but on closer examination it seems that whoever punctuated the manuscript may have read two parallel or related sentences at the juncture of these two chapters: the end of 20' and beginning of 13' open with the same word and thus seem to be punctuated as parallel phrases. This would of course make more sense rhetorically and thematically if the manuscript user perceived that both sentences are about fear, which better supports a reading of *jing* 驚 (startle) for 繫. This would not necessarily require us to abandon Qiu's reading of "honor 榮" as preferable to "startle 驚," but it suggests that the person who punctuated the manuscript is more likely to have read the graph as "startle," mistaken or not.

62. *Chong* usually takes a personified object, as in "to dote on" rather than "to favor," or "to cherish," in the sense that I can favor coffee over tea, but I cannot dote on coffee without personifying it. The type of interpretation Qiu suggests seems to me unusual, but it is not unprecedented in medieval commentaries to the chapter, such as that of Lu Xisheng 陸希聲 cited above. Qiu insists that both 寵辱為下 are V-O constructions in his 2013 article and in *Changsha Mawangdui jianbo jicheng*, vol.4, 47 n. 45.

63. The variant of this sentence in the Beida and Mawangdui recensions reads "What people fear, cannot but (also) fear people" 人之所畏 (亦) 不可以不畏人. The punctuation of the Guodian manuscript, if it designated a chapter break to readers, may be sufficient to explain how the reading now in the received versions came to be there. However, since we do not find a version of chapter 13' that begins with *ren* 人 in the received versions, we would have to assume that 13' and 20' were separately collated prior to finding their way into received versions.

If we are incorrect in interpreting the punctuation mark as a chapter punctuation, and it is instead a repeat marker, then we may read this section in two ways:

人之所畏不可以不畏畏人寵辱若繫貴大患若身

- 1) What people fear, cannot but be feared. Fearful people *chong ru ruo jing gui da huan ruo shen* [are equally startled by favor and disgrace, and regard great disaster as they do their body].
- 2) What people fear, cannot but fear being threatened.⁶⁴ People *chong ru ruo jing gui da huan ruo shen*.

In the first of these possibilities, the thematic connection becomes even more clear, such that 20^{A'} and 13' perhaps even compose a single chapter in the reading of the punctuator. Should we seek grounds for reading “、” as a repeat mark, it is found on an identical mark on the very same slip, such that the phrase in section 2.4 of GD13 may be read as in every other version of 13', provided we read *ru* 辱 (*nok) as a sound-loan for *ruo* 若 (*nak) as in option two below:⁶⁵

2.4

是為寵辱、繫。

- 1) This is *chong ru. Jing/rong*.

是為寵辱辱（若）繫

- 2) This is *chong ru ruo jing/rong*.

It is hard to make sense of the first option; the second is identical to the reading of all other versions, and thus preferable even though it is subject to the same problems of interpretation.⁶⁶ None of the readings discussed in the paragraphs above is a certainty, but the ones that see 13' and 20' as thematically connected do not generally support the reading of 繫 as *rong* 榮 rather than *jing* 驚. The lack of consistency of punctuation does not help us to make perfect sense of the chapter with the manuscript alone. There may still be some confusion or fluidity at play

64. Reading the second *wei* 畏 as a loan for *wei* 威. See n. 67, below.

65. Li Tianhong 李天虹, “Guodian Chujian wenzi zashi” 郭店楚簡文字雜釋, in *Guodian Chujian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin, 2000), 97.

66. One might be tempted to advocate the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* here, if the first option were intelligible at all.

in marking down the text,⁶⁷ a characteristic that later versions of the text, as we will see, did much to eliminate.

If we may return, on the other hand, to the possibility that the punctuation mark after “what people fear, cannot but be feared”(人之所畏 不可以不畏) indeed indicates chapter punctuation, then the scheme to make each of the first two lines five syllables shares with Qiu’s reading a desire for some sort of symmetry, although it seeks that symmetry in syntax, rather than (or in addition to) in the binary opposition of *rong* and *ru* (here merely parsed so as to visualize the symmetry):

人寵辱若鬮	貴大患若身
何謂寵辱	寵為下也
得之若鬮	失之若鬮

This quest for symmetry in interpretation—the key ingredient in Wagner’s IPS—is hardly a new strategy. To provide just a few more modern examples, Chen Guying 陳鼓應 suggests that the order of the second phrase of the chapter should be inverted to rhyme “startle” with “disaster,” to read “esteem the body like great disaster” (貴身若大患), thus achieving an acoustic or phono-rhetorical symmetry,⁶⁸ Gao Heng 高亨 agrees that the “phrase does not make sense” (此句義不可通), and suspects it should read as “great disaster is like the body” (身若大患; four graphs, matching phrase 1.1) achieving parallel structure and metrical symmetry.⁶⁹ D. C. Lau likewise suggests that the word “esteem” has crept in by mistake, and that the phrase should be “great trouble is like one’s body” (身若大患; again four graphs). The assumption behind these and many of the efforts to make sense of the chapter is that either Laozi or the *Laozi* adhered to certain aesthetic conventions of form (e.g. rhyme, rhythm, parallelism, etc.), and that the *Laozi* was written with conceptual clarity so as to produce a book of coherent philosophical

67. Note that the final line of 20^A bears a very close relationship to the first line of 72’ (i.e. 72^A), which reads “When the people do not fear threats, then a great threat will arrive” 民之不畏= 則大畏將至矣. Chapter 72’ in Mawangdui A (Ma72^A) is punctuated as separate from the rest of the chapter 72’. This would seem to suggest the reader recognized the phrase as the last—rather than the first—phrase of a chapter, similar to the way in which 20^A may be read to end a chapter in the Guodian version, or possibly as a self-sufficient unit of its own. Reading the punctuation mark in the Guodian text as a repeat mark rather than a chapter punctuation mark would bring the two sequences closer together.

68. Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Laozi jin zhu jin yi* 老子今註今譯 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 2000), 98.

69. Gao Heng 高亨, *Laozi zheng gu* 老子正詁 (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1941), 29.

outlook.⁷⁰ But what is particularly interesting is that in at least one regard, both the paleographic suggestions of Qiu Xigui and the speculations of other modern interpreters share more in common with the earliest scribes during textual formation than they do with medieval manuscript users for whom the base text was relatively fixed—namely that their solutions to the problems of incoherence prescribe the types of action that manuscript users actually took: emend the text, in a small but consequential way.

The foregoing has hopefully laid bare the struggle to achieve a perfectly coherent interpretation of the *zhang*. While one might have thought that early sources could reveal an original, long-lost solution (and perhaps, in the case of Qiu's solution, they do), they seem instead to reveal the continuity of interpretive problems across *Laozi* versions of varying fixity—problems evident not only in written commentaries, but in the punctuation of the earliest Guodian version, which as far as we know circulated prior to any written commentary. In the Guodian version, the unusual form and uncertainty of punctuation raises the question of where chapter 13' began, or whether it was joined with 20^{A'}. The matter of whether there was at some time in the *Laozi* (or in a proto-*Laozi*) a coherent interpretation at this locus, is for the moment inconclusive. Perhaps the *Laozi* was never coherent here, or was prone to misunderstanding even in the Warring States manuscript version, such that the statement “[people] have long tried in vain to make sense of this *zhang* (chapter)” has been true even longer than Zhu Xi imagined.⁷¹ The next section, as part of a larger examination of chapter separation in *Laozi* editions and manuscripts, will explore the premise of Zhu Xi's reply (and presumably of the question he was asked), namely, that 13' is indeed an integral *zhang* rather than a composite of superficially related parts.

Part Two

Laozi at the Seams: Repetition as a Cue for Compilation and for the Continuity of *Zhang*

The question of how 13' and 20^{A'} were connected in the Guodian version raises the topic of another sort of variance evident across manuscripts—that of how *zhang*, or their constituent subunits, might

70. For a related discussion of how editors have re-shaped versions of the *Laozi*, see Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, “Jianbo ben *Laozi* de sixiang yu xueshu jiazhi—yi Beida hanjian wei qiji de xin kaocha” 簡帛本老子的思想與學術價值——以北大漢簡為契機的新考察 *Guoxue xuekan* 國學學刊 2 (2014), 34–45.

71. Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei*, 2995.

Chapters 38'-81'

R II	.38 .39 .40 .41	.42 .43 .44 .45	<u>46^A-46^B</u>	.47	<u>48^{AB}</u>	.49 .50	<u>51^A-51^B</u>	<u>52^A-52^{BC}</u>	.53 .54 .55 .56 .57	<u>58^A-58^B</u>	.59 .60 .61 .62	<u>63^{ABC}</u>	<u>64^A64^B</u>	.65 .66		
YZ I	.38, <u>39-40</u>	.41	.42 .43 .44 .45	<u>46^A-46^B</u>	.47	<u>48^{AB}</u>	.49 .50	<u>51^A-51^B</u>	<u>52^A-52^{BC}</u>	.53 .54 .55 .56	<u>57-58^A</u>	<u>58^B-59</u>	.60 .61 .62	<u>63^{ABC}</u>	<u>64^A64^B</u>	.65 .66
Ma I	.38 .39	.41	<u>40</u> .42 .43 .44 .45	<u>46^A 46^B</u>	.47	<u>48^{AB}</u>	.49 .50	<u>51^A 51^B</u>	<u>52^A 52^{BC}</u>	.53 .54 .55 .56 .57	58 ^A 58 ^B	.59 .60 .61 .62	63 ^{ABC}	<u>64^A 64^B 65</u>	.66	
Mb I	.38 .39	.41	<u>40</u> .42 .43 .44 .45	46 ^A 46 ^B	.47	<u>48^{AB}</u>	.49 .50	51 ^A 51 ^B	52 ^A -52 ^{BC}	.53 .54 .55 .56 .57	58 ^A 58 ^B	.59 .60 .61 .62	63 ^{ABC}	<u>64^A 64^B</u>	.65 .66	
BD I	.38 .39 .40 .41	.42 .43 .44 .45	<u>46^A-46^B</u>	.47	<u>48^{AB}</u>	.49 .50	<u>51^A-51^B</u>	<u>52^A-52^{BC}</u>	.53 .54 .55 .56 .57	58 ^A	<u>58^B-59</u>	.60 .61 .62	<u>63^{ABC}</u>	<u>64^A 64^B</u>	.65 .66	
GDa/b	....40.. 41...	...44..45...	...46 ^B...	...48 ^A...				...52 ^B...	...54..55..56. 57...	....59...	...63 ^A .c...	<u>64^A 64^B</u>...	...66...		
GDc													... <u>*64^B</u> ...			
HF	38...	...41...	....46....47...					...54..	...58 ^A 58 ^B	59	60...				

Chapters 38'-81' (continued)

R II	.67 .68 .69 .70 .71	<u>72^A-72^B</u>	.73 .74	<u>75^A-75^B</u>	.76 .77 .78 .79 .80	<u>81^A-81^B</u>		
YZ I	<u>67-68</u>	.69 .70 .71	<u>72^A-72^B</u>	.73 .74	<u>75^A-75^B</u>	.76 .77 <u>78-79</u>	.80	<u>81^A-81^B</u>
Ma I	<u>.80 81^A 81^B</u>	.67 .68 .69 .70 .71	<u>72^A 72^B</u>	.73 .74	<u>75^A 75^B</u>	.76 .77 .78 .79.		
Mb I	<u>.80 81^A 81^B</u>	<u>67-68</u>	.69 .70 .71	72 ^A -72 ^B	.73 .74	75 ^A -75 ^B	.76 .77 .78 .79. ✓	
BD I	.67 .68 .69 .70 .71	<u>72^A 72^B</u>	.73 .74	<u>75^A-75^B</u>	.76 .77	<u>78-79</u>	.80	<u>81^A-81^B</u> ✓
GDa/b								
GDc								
HF	..67...							

Legend: Numbers map chapters of the *Laozi*

homologous to chapters in the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong editions (the two, labeled "R," are identical in sequence). Prime symbols, as in 13', are omitted. Editions compared include (top to bottom): Received editions (R), the Xiang'er (XE), Mawangdui A and B (Ma and Mb). Chapters appearing in the Guodian (GD) manuscripts and chapters commented on in the *Hanfeizi* (HF) are marked for reference; ellipses of two dots or more indicate disjunction). Chapter sequences within each manuscript in the Guodian corpus (a, b, and c) are mapped below the upper and lower canons

Chart 1 Schematic diagram of *Laozi* chapter organization

Chapters 1'-37'

RI	.1 .2 .3 .4 .5 ^{ABC} .6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13 .14 .15 .16 ^{AB} .17 .18 .19 .20 ^{AB} .21 .22 .23 .24 .25 .26 .27 .28 .29 .30 ^{AB} .31 ^{AB} .32 .33 .34 .35 .36 .37.
XE I	. . .3 .4 .5 ^{ABC} .6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13 .14 .15 .16 ^{AB} .17 .18 .19 .20 ^{AB} .21. .22 .23 .24 .25 .26 .27 .28 .29 .30 ^{AB} .31 ^{AB} .32 .33 .34 .35 .36 .37.
Ma II	.1 .2 .3 .4 .5 ^{ABC} .6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13 .14 .15 .16 ^{AB} .17-18 .19 .20 ^{AB} .21 .24. .22 .23. .25 .26 .27 .28 .29 .30 ^{AB} .31 ^{AB} .32 .33 .34 .35 .36 .37.
Mb II	.1 .2 .3 .4 .5 ^{ABC} .6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13 .14 .15 .16 ^{AB} .17-18 .19 .20 ^{AB} .21 .24. .22 .23. .25 .26 .27 .28 .29 .30 ^{AB} .31 ^{AB} .32 .33 .34 .35 .36 .37.✓
BD II	.1 .2 .3 .4 .5 ^{ABC} .6-7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13 .14 .15 .16 ^{AB} .17-18-19 .20 ^{AB} .21 .22 .23 .24 .25 .26 .27 .28 .29 .30 ^{AB} .31 ^{AB} .32-33 .34 .35 .36 .37✓
GD	... ..2 ..... ..5 ^B..... ..9... ..13. ... 15...16 ^A . .17-18... 19..20 ^A.... .25.... ...30 ^A ...31 ^B....32... .37
HF	1... ..14... ..26... ..33... ..36..37

Sequences of corresponding explications in *Hanfeizi* "Jie Lao" (HFj) and "Yu Lao" (HFy) and chapters in Guodian a, b, and c manuscripts

HFj	38, 58, 59, 60, 46, 14, 1, 50, 67, 63, 54
HFy	46, 54, 26, 36, 63, 64, 52, 71, 64, 47, 41, 33, 37
GDa	19. 66. 46 ^B . 30A. 15. 64 ^B . 37. 63 ^B . 2. 32./ 25. 5 ^B ./ 16 ^A / 64 ^A . 56. 57./ 55. 44. 40. 9.
GDb	59. 48 ^A . 20 ^A . 13./ 41/ 52 ^B . 45. 54
GDC	17, 18./ 35./ 31 ^B ./ 64 ^B .

Legend (continued): Chapter groupings within each manuscript are separated by slashes "/"; the sequence these groupings within the manuscript is unknown. Chapters are broken into sub-units based on actual known variant recensions and manuscript versions, thus for example since the middle of 5' is found in the Guodian manuscript, that unit is designated as "5^B" whereas the received versions that contain the beginning, middle and end as a single chapter are written as "5^A-5^B-5^C" or "5^{ABC}." Boxed sequences, eg. "5^{ABC}," or "67-68" indicate continuity that is made explicit within that version by punctuation or commentarial embeddment. Single black dots "." indicate chapter punctuation; dashes "-" indicate joining of units by conjunctions or other means that confer continuity. Italics indicate chapters that are displaced relative to their homologs in received editions; bolding highlights differences of particular significance in chapter separation. "✓" indicates a checksum at the end of a manuscript. Note that some chapters (19', 15', 32', 59', 48^A, 45') in Guodian may have internal disjunctions not marked here, due to problems of interpreting the punctuation.

have come together to make versions of the *Laozi*. Where does one chapter end and another begin? Many others have already noted that a chapter as punctuated in any given edition often contains two or more textual sequences that appear to have very little in common.⁷² In addition to ancient recensions, like the seventy-two-chapter Yan Zun 嚴遵 *Laozi* that is transmitted in part, other ancient and modern editions have arranged, punctuated, and divided the *Laozi* differently, and these variants of chapter punctuation often reveal disagreement about what properly designates a unit.⁷³ For reference in the following sections, [Chart 1](#) provides a map and overview of punctuation variance across the major editions, and makes clear where ancient recensions have drawn lines that separate units of text. The discussion below seeks to demonstrate that *zhang* are composite, that this compositeness matters for interpretation, and that the repetition of themes and patterns plays a role both in the compilation and in the composition of chapters. A close look at some of the seams along which the *Laozi* was stitched and glued will show that editorial processes operating between known units share more in common than is generally recognized with compositional processes operating within each unit; coherence and continuity in cell-like chapters and their multinucleate syncytia may not be merely a feature of some prior, urtextual act of *de novo* composition, but of editorial processes—including the strategies of emendation noted above—that operate on the units themselves. The apparent incoherence of chapter 13' may result from such processes.

Repetition of Passages is a Sign of Compositeness

One indicator that a *zhang* is a composite of sub-*zhang* particles is when a given fragment or passage shows up in more than one place. Such

72. See Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 135–6 for some good examples of this; see Henricks, “On the Chapter Divisions in the ‘Lao-Tzu,’” 513–23, for a chapter-by-chapter discussion of the problem of interpreting chapter punctuation variants.

73. For an overview see Henricks, “On the Chapter Divisions in the ‘Lao-Tzu.’” See also Robert G. Henricks, “A Note on the Question of Chapter Divisions in the Ma-Wang-Tui Manuscripts of the *Lao-Tzu*,” *Early China* 4 (1978), 49–51. Notable ancient and premodern variant editions include Yan Zun’s 嚴遵 (53–24 B.C.E.) 72-chapter version, Kong Yingda’s 孔穎達 (593–648 C.E.) 64-chapter version, the Longxingguan 龍興觀 stone inscribed version (708), which appears to be divided into 79 chapters (combining 4', 5', and 6'), Li Yue’s 李約 (fl. 780) 78-chapter version, and Wu Cheng’s 吳澄 (1249–1331) 68-chapter version. Modern editions divide the text differently, such as in Yao Nai’s 姚鼐 (1731–1815) version, and more recent studies by Ma Xulun 馬敘倫, D. C. Lau 劉殿爵, and Yen Ling-feng 嚴靈峯, who divide the text into 117 sections, 196 units, and 54 chapters, respectively. Ancient and manuscript editions, including the 77-chapter Beida manuscript will be further discussed in section three.

evidence is already visible within received editions. D. C. Lau has pointed out more examples of these chapters than I will do here,⁷⁴ but I begin with one example that he does not discuss. The last sentence of chapter R10 is essentially an abbreviated version of the latter half of R51 (underlined text translates parts present in both versions), presented here as found in the Wang Bi recension:⁷⁵

WB51^B

...故 道生之 德畜之 長之育之 亭之毒之 養之覆之
生而不有 為而不恃 長而不宰 是謂玄德

WB10^B ...

... 生之 畜之
生而不有 為而不恃 長而不宰 是謂玄德

...Therefore, The Way bears them, Virtue raises them; leads them, nurses them, tends them trains them, cares for them, covers them. To bear without being, do without depending, lead without ministering—this is called Profound Virtue.

One might argue that either version of this shared textual sequence is merely a formula that gets tacked on to the end of an otherwise complete chapter,⁷⁶ but analyzed in terms of Wagner's IPS, Wang Bi 51^B has all the interlocking parts of a complete *zhang*, and is at least by that measure self-sufficient. Moreover, if we look to its homolog in the Mawangdui manuscripts, we find that 51^{A'} and 51^{B'} are separated by punctuation marks in the A manuscript, and 51^{B'} omits the opening "therefore" 故 in

74. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 137–41, he discusses chapters 64' and 29'; 22' and 24'; 70' and 78'; see also his list on p. 119.

75. Much of *Laozi* 10' is found also in the last sentences of *Laozi* 2'; similarities in manuscript editions have been made nearly identical in received versions. Liu Xiaogan has argued that 51' is the source for 2' and 10'. I agree that the sequences in these chapters have been homogenized by editing, but not that 51' is necessarily the (presumably *ur*-textual) source for 2' and 10'. See Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, "From Bamboo Slips to Received Versions: Common Features in the Transformation of the *Laozi*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63.2 (2003), 356–61.

76. One might identify, non-exhaustively, several phrases repeated in the *Laozi*: "do away with that and take this up" 去彼取此 in 12', 38', and 72'; "How do I know X? Because of this" 吾何以知X? 以此 in 21', 54', 57'. The phrase "because he does not contend, thus none in the realm contend with him." 以其不爭, 故天下莫能與之爭 has homologs in 66' and 22'. The phrases "Block its passages, close its gates, blunt its sharpness, detach its threads, harmonize its brightness" 塞其兌 閉其門 挫其銳 解其分 和其光 同其塵 in 56' is partially repeated in 52', "Block its passages, close its gates ... open its passages" 塞其兌 閉其門 ... 開其兌.

both A and B manuscripts, so we know that in these versions, at least, the text was not read continuously at this juncture.⁷⁷

Chapter Fusion and Repetition of Phrases as a Cue for Adjacency

Chapter 51', as punctuated in the Mawangdui recension into two separate chapters, also illustrates another important feature that may help bring textual sequences together during text formation: repetition of words or patterns. Both parts of the chapter repeat variants of the phrase "The Way bears them, Virtue raises them" (道生之 德畜之):

● 道生之而德畜之 物刑之而器成之 是以萬物莫道貴德 道之尊也 德之貴也 夫莫之爵常自然

● 道生之 畜之 長之遂之 亭之毒之 養之覆□ □□弗有 為而弗寺 長而弗宰 此之謂玄德

- The Way bears them and Virtue raises them, matter gives them form, implements complete them. This is why the myriad things revere The Way and esteem Virtue. That The Way is revered and Virtue esteemed—so it is that none give them titles and they are eternally self-such.
- The Way bears them raises them; leads them, follows them, tends them trains them, cares for them, covers [them]... ...[To be] without being, do without depending, lead without ministering—this is what is called Profound Virtue.⁷⁸

Either of these could be a *zhang* on its own, or the two could function like two verses in a single poem. But the process of making them into a single chapter also coincides with a subtle change in the reading: the difference found in the Mawangdui recension between the two phrases, "The Way bears them and Virtue raises them" in 51^{A'} versus "The Way bears them, raises them" in 51^{B'}, is eventually erased in all received editions, in which 51^{A'} and 51^{B'} are read as a single chapter, R51, and the two lines underlined above read identically. As seen in Table 4, the Beida manuscript may illustrate an intermediate state in which the chapter separation has been erased but the two lines not yet fully homogenized (black dots represent chapter punctuation).

This offers us a glimpse of the process whereby textual units placed side-by-side on the basis of similarity could be made more coherent by editing the two similar phrases so as to make a perfectly identical

77. We do not know, because of the inconsistency of chapter punctuation marks, whether 51' was understood as continuous with 52^{A'} in the Mawangdui B manuscript. In all but the Mawangdui and Yan Zun recensions, 52^{A'} and 52^{B'} are linked by *gu* 故.

78. This translation is a conflation of the two Mawangdui manuscripts, both of which have lacunae in this chapter. Black dots here and below schematically represent punctuation marking the start of a chapter.

Table 4 Punctuation Variants of 51'

	MWD a	MWD b	Beida	WB,HG
51 ^{A'}	●道生之而 德畜之...	道生之 德畜之...	●道生之 德畜之...	道生之 德畜之...
51 ^{B'}	●道生之 畜之...	道生之 畜之...	故道生之 畜之...	故道生之 德畜之...
51 ^{A'} vs. 51 ^{B'}	similar; discontinuous	similar	similar, continuous	identical; continuous

refrain.⁷⁹ In this case, two single textual units transform to undergo a cell fusion of sorts, producing a cohesive syncytium. The same phenomenon is evident in other chapters, such as 75'.⁸⁰

Compositeness Matters for Interpretation

One might argue, perhaps, in the case of chapter 51' that because the two concatenated textual units are sufficiently abstruse or open-ended statements, they can be combined into a single chapter without much influence on their interpretation. In other cases, however, recombinant textual sequences can have more obvious consequences for interpretation. This can be seen more clearly with chapter 10', which contextualizes the same variant textual unit differently (underlined below):

載營魄抱一，能無離乎？專氣致柔，能嬰兒乎？滌除玄覽，能無疵乎？愛民治國，能無知乎？天門開闔，能為雌乎？明白四達，能無知乎？生之、畜之，生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德。

79. Liu Xiaogan has observed the same phenomenon as part of a larger set of features that mark text-formation in process; see his "Jianbo ben *Laozi* de sixiang yu xueshu jiazhi," 38–42. It may be problematic to assume that manuscript versions represent a linear progression in time, rather than disconnected lineages. But, there are many places at which the Beida version does indeed appear to occupy an intermediate stage between transmitted texts and older manuscripts. It may be that though lineages differ, interpretive processes that hone the rhetoric of the text (like the quest for parallelism discussed above), or make the text more stylistically consistent, converge among traditions.

80. Mawangdui B splits the chapter into 75^{A'} and 75^{B'}, the former begins with the phrase "That the *ren* 人 (people) are hungry" 人之飢也; the latter with the phrase "That the *min* 民 (subjects) disregard death" 民之輕死. In received editions that fuse the units together, both statements are made to refer the *min* 民. Coherence of topic accompanies continuity of the textual unit.

When bearing up the *hun* and *po* while embracing The One—can you be without separation?

While concentrating *qi* and attaining suppleness—can you be like a baby?

When cleaning and polishing your profound mirror—can you be without defect?

While loving the people and ordering the country—can you be without wisdom?

As the Heavenly Gate opens and shuts, can you be the female?

When your bright clarity penetrates the four directions, can you be without knowledge?

[WB10^A]

To bear without possessing, do without depending, lead without ministering—this is called Profound Virtue.

[WB10^B]

Should we have misunderstood what it means to at once hang on to one's heaven-bound *hun* and earthbound *po* soul, attain the suppleness of a babe, be without knowledge or wisdom, etc., the final textual unit offers a set of processes (or ways of being) and a name, "Profound Virtue"—to attach to the ideal presented in 10^{A'}. If we adopt a reading practice that presumes a chapter expresses a coherent idea, much as when contemplating the meaning of chapter 13' required some contemplation of each of its parts, we are also inclined to consider the whole of chapter 10' together as bearing out a single truth. Chapter concatenation thus matters for what the chapter means. And some versions take measures to ensure that a chapter coheres at seams where it might easily fall apart; in order to make the continuity of the two parts of 10' unmistakable, the Beida version of the text inserts *gu* 故 between 10^{A'} and 10^{B'}. Even more emphatic about the structural coherence of the passage, the Beida version of the chapter 51' places a *gu* 故 not only between 51^{A'} and 51^{B'}, but also another within 51^{B'} for good measure.

Repetition of Patterns as a Basis for Chapter Fusion

In the case of 51' identical phrases seem to be the glue that holds units together, as either a structurally coherent (continuous) chapter or as an editorially coherent sequence within the compilation. Nonetheless, one need not look far to find evidence that even imperfect or partial repetition may suffice to bring units into proximity; the very next

chapter, 52', which is a single chapter in the received and Beida versions, appears to be two unrelated units held together by the pattern "X *shen bu Y*" (X身不Y), "your life may X and yet you will not Y," bolded below:

52'

天下有始 以為天下母 既得其母 以知其子 既知其子 復守其母

沒身不殆 [52^{A'}]

(●Ma) 塞其兌 閉其門 終身不勤

開其兌 濟其事 終身不救 (■Gb) [52^{B'}]

見小曰明 守柔曰強 用其光 復歸其明 無遺身殃

是為習常 [52^{C'}]

[The Realm] Below Heaven has its beginning, it is the mother of Below Heaven.

Once we know its mother, so may we know its child;

Once we know its child, so may we hold to the mother.

And until your life goes under, you will never face danger.

[52^{A'}]

(●Ma) Block your passages, close your gates

And until your life ends you will never be weary.

Open your passages, conduct your affairs

And until your life ends you will get no relief. (■Gb)

[52^{B'}]

To see the small is called clarity;

To hold to the supple is called strength.

By brightness, return again to clarity.

No danger of losing your life.

This is to practice constancy [52^{C'}]

Chapter 52' can be divided into three sections on the basis of prosody. Aside from the presence of the word *shen* 身 (body; life), there is little clear theme that brings these units together. For 52^{A'} and 52^{B'}, the common use of "X *shen bu Y*" seems to be the main link between the passages. The same phrase "and until your life goes under, you will never face danger" 沒身不殆 appears in the unrelated chapter 16^{B'}, so even in received versions the pattern is not endemic to 52'. Aside from the thematic, metric, and prosodic bases for separating the units, the middle section 52^{B'} (boxed text) is punctuated at the beginning

in the Mawangdui A manuscript and at the end in the Guodian B manuscript,⁸¹ so at least some early readers of the text regarded these parts as self-sufficient. If in the preceding chapter, 51', one might suspect that the punctuation variance is merely an idiosyncrasy owing to one errant scribe, here it is much more difficult to argue that, since two independently excavated manuscripts concur on the discontinuity of 52'.

Traces of Fusion are Sometimes Erased in Transmitted Versions

Other examples further illustrate the mechanics of the fission and fusion of textual units. Punctuation variants of 17'–18', for example, illustrate how repetition that has been erased in received editions may have functioned in prior versions to order textual units. The Guodian C manuscript punctuates 17' and 18' as a single chapter; the Beida recension additionally combines 19' with them to produce a single, larger chapter. Between 17' and 18' in the received editions there is no obvious thematic connection. As with the parts of 10' or 13', one needs to interpret both together and consider how one might make them cohere before such possibilities arise:

WB17

太上
下知有之
其次
親而譽之
其次 畏之
其次 侮之
信不足焉 有不信焉

悠兮 其貴言
功成事遂
百姓皆謂我自然

As to his Supreme Highness,
those below know [only] that he exists.
[Ranking] after this,
they love and praise him.
After that, they fear him.
After that, they mock him.
When trust in him does not suffice,
there is insufficient trust in him.
How remote his precious words!
The work completed, affairs discharged,
The people all say “we did it of ourselves.”

81. The Mawangdui A manuscript punctuates 52^{BC'} as separate from 52^{A'}. It is not clear whether Ma52^A is continuous with Ma51^B, as the punctuation is not marked consistently. The Guodian B manuscript has a rectangular passage marker at the end of this sequence, but it is not certain that the text begins in the same spot marked by chapter start punctuation in the Mawangdui B manuscript. The Guodian B slip prior to this may be broken or missing, but the sequence homologous to 52^{B'} begins at the top of slip 13.

WB18

大道廢
有仁義
智慧出
有大偽
六親不和
有孝慈
國家昏亂
有忠臣

When the Great Way decays,
there is humaneness and propriety;
When wisdom and cleverness emerge,
there is great deceit;
When the six relations are disharmonious,
there are filiality and care;
When country and family are muddled and chaotic,
there are loyal ministers.

In the transmitted editions, there are few clues to why these should be put together, and they are regarded as separate. Chapter 17' is apparently about the ideal ruler, in contrast to the non-ideal ones. Perhaps being a good ruler has something to do with trust as well?⁸² The text here is unclear in received versions. Chapter 18' seems to be about the rejection of virtues most explicitly championed in Confucian literature; that is, when the world has The Way, such artifice is unnecessary. If forced to put the chapters together, it seems necessary to me to seek coherence in some higher-order virtue, such as *wuwei* 無為 non-action or non-artifice. 17' and 18' are a single chapter in all of the manuscript versions, in each case linked by *gu* 故. Although there is no repetition that would clue us in to continuity in the received versions, there are two phrases that read differently in all manuscript versions of 17' and 18' respectively (shared also with the Fu Yi edition):

[WB, HG] 17'

信不足焉 有不信焉

... When trust in him does not suffice, there is insufficient trust in him.⁸³

[BD, GD, FY, Ma, Mb] 17'

信不足 焉有不信

... When *his trust is insufficient, thereupon* is there mistrust.

[WB, HG] 18'

大道廢 有仁義

When the Great Way decays, there is humaneness and propriety

82. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 136, points out that this particular line, regarding trust, arises in chapter 23' as well.

83. According to Jiang Xichang, only the *Heshang Gong Daodejing* 河上公道德經, Changshou Qushi tieqin tongjianlou 常熟瞿氏鐵琴銅劍樓 Song printed edition reproduced in *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 omits the last four characters, "there is insufficient trust in him" 有不信焉. Most other Heshang Gong versions read like the Wang Bi edition. See Jiang, *Laozi Jiaogu*, vol. 2, 110. Other editions show considerable variability here.

[BD, GD, FY, Ma, Mb] 18'

故 大道廢 安(焉)有仁義

... Therefore when the Great Way decays, *thereupon* is there humaneness and propriety.

The important part shared by all the versions that read 17' and 18' continuously are the repetition of the words *yan you XX* (焉有 XX).⁸⁴ Only manuscript versions of 18' (and the Fu Yi) continue on to repeat the same pattern "thereupon there is XX" (焉有 XX) for each of the rejected virtues. Thus the presence of repetition in the units across different editions concurs with 17' and 18' being regarded as a fused syncytium; absence of repetition corresponds to punctuation as separate units. In most received traditions, which read 17' and 18' as separate, the clue to how the two passages came into proximity has been erased, and a case of fission is evident in the received versions.

Repetition May Help Index Sequences of Textual Units

In addition to precise and partial repetitions of phrase seen in examples above, repetition of theme may also play a role in compilation sequence. In most editions, chapter 19' appears to follow 17'–18' thematically, in that it continues the same critique of *ren* 仁 (humaneness), *yi* 義 (propriety), and *zhi* 知/智 (wisdom) in 18'. This is not the case in the Guodian version; both it and received versions are translated below for comparison:

19' (All R and manuscripts other than GD are nearly identical for this chapter)

絕聖棄智，民利百倍；

絕仁棄義，民復孝慈；

絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。

此三者以為文不足，故令有所屬：見素抱樸，少私寡欲

Reject sagacity, discard wisdom, and the people will benefit a hundredfold;

Reject humaneness, discard propriety, and the people will revert to filiality and care;

84. *Yan you bu xin* 焉有不信 (in him is trust insufficient) in 17' and *yan you ren yi* 焉有仁義 (thereupon there is humaneness and propriety) in 18' would have not only been parallel, but would have sounded almost like two semantically opposed phrases in early China. *Buxin* 不信 vs. *xin* 信 *s-ni[ŋ]-s vs. *ren* 仁 *niŋ, both written with the phonophore *shen* 身 *ŋ[ŋ] in the Guodian version. I suspect that either the two textual units were written together because reading the one evoked memory of the other, or because they were actually memorized together, aided by the repetition, as is likely to be the case with a number of the examples discussed here.

Reject cleverness, discard benefit, and thieving bandits will be no more.

These three do not suffice as a pattern, so let them have what is [here] attached:

Demonstrate the plain and embrace the unhewn; be short of selfishness, few of desires.

GD19

凶（絕）智弃（棄）支（辨），民利百倍（倍）；
 凶（絕）攷（巧）弃（棄）利，覩（盜）惻（賊）亡又；
 凶（絕）愚（偽）弃（棄）慮（詐），民复季（稚）子。
 三言以為夏（事）不足，或（又）命之或（有）辱（所）豆（樹）：
 視（現）索（素）保僕（樸）少△（私）寡欲。

Reject wisdom, discard discrimination, and the *min*-people will benefit a hundredfold;

Reject cleverness, discard benefit, and thieving bandits will be no more.

Reject artifice, discard deceit, and the people will return to being like children.

Three sayings are insufficient for the task (at hand), so again we define them to set things straight:⁸⁵

Demonstrate the plain and guard the unhewn; be short of selfishness, few of desires.

Again, as with examples above, wherever 18' and 19' are read as either continuous or adjacent, the two units cohere in ways that the Guodian homologs GD18 and GD19 do not. In all received versions, as well as the Mawangdui texts that read 18'–19' continuously and the Beida, which reads 17'–18'–19' continuously, the two units 18' and 19' cohere in rejecting *ren* 仁 (humaneness), *yi* 義 (propriety) and *zhi* 智/知 (wisdom). Conversely, in the Guodian manuscripts, GD18 (found in the C manuscript) and GD19 (found in the A manuscript) are discontinuous—and, correspondingly, the two reject completely different sets of virtue-elements.⁸⁶

85. The last lines of this chapter presents a number of paleographic problems of interpretation. For a detailed account of the possibilities, see Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation*, 225–30.

86. The only virtue-elements shared between GD19 and other versions of 18' and 19' are *zhi* 智 (wisdom) and *li* 利 (benefit; profit)—and even *zhi* 智 does not appear in GD18, such that GD18' and GD19' share much less thematically than 18' and 19' do in all other versions. In the Guodian manuscripts, the two passages seem to only share the term *xiao ci* 孝慈, “filiality and kindness” in common, at most, although the orthography differs. See Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete*

footnote continued on next page

Much has been said about the particular tolerance in GD19 of the same Confucian virtues rejected so roundly in other *Laozi* recensions;⁸⁷ here I emphasize that the divergent content of GD19 correlates tightly with its thematic and codicological disjunction from 18'.

A number of other links of theme or repetition apply to other chapters in manuscript and received editions, and although the identification of thematic connections are in some case more contestable matters of interpretation, it should be clear from the previous examples that the content of a chapter may be subtly altered, making themes or repetition more or less apparent, and blurring what appear as clear boundaries between *zhang* in transmitted recensions.⁸⁸

A larger question that remains in reflecting on the preceding examples is whether repetition causes or merely correlates with the co-compilation (and potential fusion) of textual units. The beginning of 20' as disposed differently across distinct *Laozi* versions indicates that repetition is likely to be a causative factor, rather than merely correlative, in determining how textual units become disposed during compilation. We have just witnessed the phrase opening 19', "reject [this] discard [that]" (絕 X 棄 Y), which in any variant version would suffice to link it to the beginning of 20':

WB20^{A'}

絕學無憂，
唯之與阿，相去幾何？
善之與惡，相去若何？
人之所畏，不可不畏。

Reject learning and there will be no worries.

To say "yes" to it or "no"—how far between them?

To regard it as good or bad—how different are they?

That which people fear cannot but fear [people?]

In 19', because the theme "reject [this] and discard [that]" (絕 X 棄 Y) and the first four graphs of chapter 20^{A'}, "reject learning and there will be no worries" (絕學無憂) constitute similar patterns, the opening of 20^{A'} was previously thought to belong somewhere within chapter 19', with "learning" functioning presumably as a summative category encompassing the several other virtue-elements of sagacity, wisdom,

Translation, 225–28 and n. 28 for details; see Han Wei and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu*, vol. 2, 196–7 for comparison.

87. See Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation*, 210–16 for summary of the scholarship. The Guodian cache includes a number of texts identified as Confucian, so that we should expect its version of the *Laozi* to better accommodate virtue elements esteemed by such texts. This is more true of GD19 than of GD18.

88. See also, chap. 75' and 64', both split in some versions; 58'–59'; 27' 48' 63'–64'.

cleverness, etc., rejected in 19'.⁸⁹ This has not been corroborated by any of the manuscripts. It is not obviously coherent with the rest of 20^{A'}, and 20^{B'} (which I omit for the sake of brevity) has a distinct prosody and no clear connection to either the call to "reject learning" or the rest of 20^{A'}. A related suspicion, that 20^{A'} and 20^{B'} do not cohere, is corroborated by the Guodian manuscript, which contains only 20^{A'}. Again, then, as with the examples enumerated above, the disposition of 19' and 20^{A'} on the same codex correlates with opening lines that appear similar or complementary. The same principle, however, seems to apply to the relationship between GD48^A and GD20^A, which are written in that order on the Guodian B manuscript: the former begins with "[in] pursuit of learning you add daily" (為學日益); the latter with "reject learning and there will be no worries" (絕學無憂). The fact that repetition of similar themes (or themes also complementary, in the Guodian case) functions according to a similar principle within these two distinct sequences indicates that repetition may in some cases play a causative role in the co-compilation or indexing of textual units. And such superficial similarities or partial repetition may bring together units that had no prior, fundamental philosophical connection.

We have seen so far that in addition to bringing units of text together in adjacent positions, the repetition of similar words, patterns, and phrases can be interpreted as continuity between textual units. Moreover, sometimes, where in two adjacent units, repetition of non-identical but similar phrases corresponds with division, identical versions of the phrases seem to confer continuity. The reason 52^{A'} is collated with 52^{B'} is probably because of the co-occurrence of the *X-shen-bu-Y* that is found repeated *within* 52^{B'} as well as between the two. The same is true of *jue-X-Y-Z*, found *within* 19' as well as between 19' and 20^{A'}. In essence, the same principle of repetition that can confer internal coherence on a chapter or syncytium may also present an organizing or mnemonic principle for groups of chapters, and a means by which editors used the rhetorical similarity of units to affect greater coherence on compilations.

Repetition Can Confer Structural Continuity on a Chapter

In the foregoing, it has perhaps been unnecessary to show that repetition is an internal feature of structurally coherent textual units. Repetition indicates a continuity of topic, and it is an assumed feature of closed IPS. Sometimes, such a repetition is integral to a larger parallel structure within a chapter. An example of this is found in 66'

89. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 29.

GD66

江海所以為百谷王 That the rivers and seas are king of the hundred valleys

 以亅能為百谷下 is because they can be below the hundred valleys.

是以 能為百谷王 Thus they can be king of the hundred valleys.

聖人 As to the sage,

之才民前也 his being in front of the *min* 以身後之 comes by standing behind them;

亅才民上也 his being above the *min* 以言下之 comes by speaking as if below them.

亅才民上也 His being above the *min* 民弗砒也 does not burden them;

亅才民前也 his being in front of the *min* 民弗害也 does not harm them.

天下樂推而弗詰 [That] the realm happily promotes him and does not complain

 以亅不靜也 is because he does not contend.

故天下莫能與之靜 Thus, none in the realm contend with him.

for which all versions but Guodian hold the chapter together with *gu* 故 or *shiyi* 是以 (for this reason) in the middle.⁹⁰ The Guodian version instead repeats “he is above the *min* (people)” 元在民上也 to maintain clear continuity at this junction. The passage exhibits impressive symmetry.

In this case, an example of what Joachim Gentz calls “bidirectional parallelism,” is the exception that proves the general rule that repetition and parallel structure confer coherence and continuity on a textual sequence:⁹¹ It shows on the one hand how repetition can be a fundamental signal of continuity, and yet, on the other hand, it is exceptional in that its repetition is integral to a thoroughgoing bidirectional structure. The primary axis around which the chapter is organized is the repeated phrase, “his being above the people” (元才民上也) although this repetition is replaced by *gu* 故 in all other versions of the chapter. We do not know whether the chapter as it is structured in the Guodian manuscript is the product of parallelism as a compositional principle, or a set of editorial iterations that was applied to some prior set of seed materials brought into proximity and subsequently edited. A version of the last line of 66’ is found in the middle of chapter 22’, so one or both of these chapters must be constructed from previously circulating formulae or sayings. Nonetheless, having achieved such a high degree of conceptual structure, it is hard to imagine 66’ falling apart or being mistakenly subdivided. Indeed, it shows that repetition, as part of a larger symmetrical structure, can anchor the continuity of a chapter even more unambiguously than conjunctions such as *gu*.

Chapters May Accrete by Partial Repetition

Sometimes, repetition may function in what appears to be either auto-commentarial accretion, or an otherwise indistinguishable process that splices units together. The final chapter punctuation variant discussed here, that within 16’, appears to be what D. C. Lau in 1963 called “a pre-existing passage ... followed by a passage of exposition.”⁹² In the received version of the text, 16’ reads as follows (here as in Wang Bi):

90. See Guodian *Laozi* A, slips 2–5.

91. Joachim Gentz points to this chapter as an example of bi-directional parallelism. See his “Zwischen den Argumenten lessen: Doppelt gerichtete Parallelismen zwischen Argumenten als zentrale Thesen in frühen chinesischen Texten,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 30 (2005), 35–56.

92. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 139.

致虛極	In achieving vacuity be exhaustive;	*[g](r)ək	A
守靜篤	in holding to stillness be intent.	*tʰuk	B
萬物並作	Ten thousand things arise at once;	*[ts]ʰak	a
吾以觀復	I abide by observing their return.	*[N]-pruk-s	B
夫物芸芸	Beings, so many as they are	*[ç]ʷə[n]	C
各復歸其根	each return back to the(ir) root. [WB16 ^A]	*[k]ʰə[r]	c
歸根曰靜	Back to the root is called stillness;	*[ts]ʰreŋ	D
是謂復命	this is known as return to emission;	*m-reŋ	D
復命曰常	return to emission is called eternal;	*[d]aŋ	E
知常曰明	knowing the eternal is called clarity.	*mraŋ	E
不知常	Not knowing the eternal,	*[d]aŋ	E
妄作凶	wrongly gives rise to doom;	*qʰ(r)onŋ	F
知常容	knowing the eternal you are capacious;	*[ç](r)onŋ	F
容乃公	being capacious you are lordly;	*C.qʰonŋ	F
公乃王	being lordly you are kingly;	*çʷaŋ	E
王乃天	being kingly you are heavenly;	*ʰi[n]	–
天乃道	being heavenly you have The Way;	*ʰuʔ-s	g
道乃久	having The Way you are extended;	*[k]ʰəʔ	G
沒身不殆	your body may pass, yet you are never endangered.	*ʰəʔ	G

[WB16^B]

Only the first part of the passage above, a homolog of 16^A, appears in the Guodian manuscripts, where its end is clearly punctuated.⁹³ The two parts are glued together in all other editions by repetition of “back to the root” (歸根) or “back to its root” (歸其根). Chapter 16^B appears to be a comment on 16^A, explaining, somewhat like the dialogic portions of 13', the vocabulary that came before. But the disjunction in the Guodian version shows clearly that the integrity of the chapter 16^{AB} as known from received versions was not guaranteed in a Warring States context.⁹⁴

93. The pronouncement on *xu* 虛 (vacuity) in GD16^A, as arranged by the editors, connects to the sequence prior in the Guodian A manuscript, repeating the closing theme of 5^B: “vacuous and [yet] not exhausted; active, and more comes forth” 虛而不居動而愈出. Slip 23 contains the end of 25' and 5^B; slip 24 contains only 16^A. Both slips end with a section marker and leave a few graphs worth of space unwritten at the end. Jingmen shi bowuguan, *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, 5. The editors' sequencing of slips 23 prior to 24 and thus Guodian A chapters 5^B preceding 16^A is uncertain, but certainly plausible given thematic sequencing seen elsewhere. Score marks on the verso might be helpful in determining the proper sequence, but have not been published. The independence of 5^B from 5^A in the Guodian manuscript concurs with D. C. Lau's assertion (prior to Mawangdui) that the two parts of 5' constitute completely unrelated chapters. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 135; Henricks, “On the Chapter Divisions in the ‘Lao-Tzu,’” 513 concurs.

94. For discussion of a somewhat similar problem, regarding textual chunks in the *Guanzi* 管子, see Herman-Josef Röllicke, “Hidden Commentary in Pre-Canonical

footnote continued on next page

Moreover, while 16^A bears some of the structural features of IPS, the latter part, 16^B, lacks the rhetoric of binary opposition in found in 16^A, and operates instead like a string of rhyming sorites, capped with the formulaic “X身不Y” pattern seen above in other chapters. The sorites each present an incrementally plausible connection to the next, but with each iteration the theme recedes further from that of 16^{A'}, to which the conclusion in 16^{B'} bears no obvious connection. The Guodian manuscript suggests either that 16^{B'} postdated the composition of 16^{A'}, and was written as inline commentary, or that 16^{B'} was simply a separate element that was later concatenated with 16^{A'} on the basis of its repeated element.⁹⁵

Is Chapter 13' Composite?

Given the varied models above for how textual units may be brought together at the seams, it is worthwhile to re-examine chapter 13' once more, from another perspective. The opening line reads as follows:

(人)	寵	辱		若	驚	/(榮)
(*ni[n])	*roŋʔ	*nok		*nak	*kreŋ	(*[N-qʷ]reŋ)
	貴	大	患	若	身	
	*kuj-s	*l'a[t]-s	*[g]ʳo[n]-s	*nak	*ni[n]	

We have seen above that *ru* 辱 and *ruo* 若 were homophones, with the former used as a sound loan for the latter in the Guodian manuscript. We might also, given the plausible argument that *rong* 榮 and *jing* 驚 are easily confused, that the same is true of those two words. The two lines, as reconstructed, contain substantial alliteration and consonance—a tongue-twister, perhaps; a brain-teaser, undoubtedly.

What is more, the overall structure of the chapter follows a layered, dialogical question and answer format that would be quite normal in early dialogues, but is rare in the *Laozi*,⁹⁶ such that one may wonder whether the layers are commentary that has sedimented on some prior

Chinese Literature,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch Zur Ostasienforschung* 19 (1995), 15–24.

95. The absence of 16^{B'} from the Guodian manuscript is insufficient to demonstrate that 16^B did not exist during the time of the Guodian’s composition, but it is sufficient to show that 16^A was self-sufficient in the eyes of the manuscript punctuator. Moreover, although also not conclusive, it is noteworthy that only 16^{A'} and not 16^{B'} is found quoted in other early sources.

96. My survey of questions in the *Laozi* yields finds the following instances: 1) Dialogical question and answer forms: 13', 50', arguably 23'. 2) Rhetorical questions: 5', 7', 13', 23', 26', 39', 79'; and rhetorical/paradoxical 10', 15', 20', 44'. 3) Closing/formulaic questions (i.e. “How do we know it is so? Because of this.” 何以知其然?以此): 21', 54', 57'.

bit of gnomic wisdom, as is plausible in continuous versions of 16'. The term, *he wei* 何謂 (what does it mean to say ...) is found nowhere else in the *Laozi*, but it is found repeated in 13'—a fact that may directly respond to the apparent incoherence of the opening line. And despite the promise of elucidation, the internal responses do not satisfy. To close, there is an apparently normative statement (section four) about who or what should be “esteemed” (*gui* 貴) and “loved” (*ai* 愛), but, as with thematic drift in 16', the mention of “love” downstream in 13' appears to be a non-sequitur. Are we looking at a chapter that was all written at once, or at a composite that brings fragments together?

In his translation of 1963, before any of the manuscripts came to light, D. C. Lau assumed that 13' is composite, and split it into three parts: 1) Lau's passage 30 (my section one); 2) a related passage 30a (my question and answer sections, two and three); and 3) an unrelated passage 31 (my section four).⁹⁷ The last of these Lau singles out as a Yangist statement that “does not fit well into the *Lao Tzu*, where survival is assumed, without question, to be the supreme goal in life.”⁹⁸ I will not take up the topic of whether the *Laozi* is at this locus philosophically incoherent. It is certainly possible that sections two and three are inline commentary that sought to decipher the opening line, but eventually became fossilized in the chapter itself. Notwithstanding the problems of linkage between 13' and 20', and the fact that there is a lacuna in GD13 obscuring the *gu* 故 that links the 13' together in all other versions, it is probably the case that even in the Guodian version, 13', was read continuously, as in all other versions,⁹⁹ but this does not mean that continuity in 13' was produced by a single act of composition.

Although generally critical of Lau's assumption that the *Laozi* is composed of fragments rather than *zhang*, Wagner sees more order than chaos; yet he can find IPS evident only in the first part of this chapter: he labels section four as a sequence of *c* elements—summary comments on the first parallel pair.¹⁰⁰ Strictly speaking, he is correct that 13' resists his analysis, but there is still a large degree of parallelism within sections

97. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 19.

98. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, xxxii, xxxivi, 139.

99. The Guodian B manuscript is damaged at this locus, corresponding to the bottom of slip 7, so we cannot be entirely sure whether or how it was linked by *gu* or some other conjunction. Nonetheless, the number of graphs missing at the bottom of the slip suggest that slips 7 and 8 read continuously, much like all other versions. *Guodian chumu zhujian*, 7. As mentioned above, it is also possible that 20' was read continuously with 13'.

100. Wagner *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 160–61. In the text, Wagner seems to indicate he analyzes the chapter as ababcc, but his arrangement is made illegible by several typos on page 161.

- I □寵辱若驚 貴大患若身
 [?] those who are equally startled by receiving favor or disgrace; (1a) Esteem those who regard great disaster as their body. (1b)
- II 何謂寵辱若驚?
 寵為下
 What does it mean to say “equally startled by favor and disgrace”?
 When you bestow favor on those below, (2)
- 得之若驚 失之若驚
 they get [favor] and they lose it and are
 are startled; (2a) [likewise] startled. (2b)
- 是謂寵辱若驚
 This is what it means to say “equally startled by favor and disgrace.” (2c)
- 何謂貴大患若身?
 What does it mean to say “Esteem those who regard great disaster as their body”? (3)
- 吾所以有大患者 及吾無身
 為吾有身 吾有何患
 The reason we have great disaster is because we have bodies. (3a) If we had no bodies, what disaster could we have? (3b)
- III 故 Therefore (4) 貴以身為天下
 若可寄天下
 esteem those who regard their body as the realm—
 such a person can lodge in the realm. (4a)
- 愛以身為天下
 若可託天下
 Love those who regard their body as the realm—
 such a person can be entrusted with the realm.
 (4b)

Figure 1 Nested parallel structure in 13'

Note: the translation follows another possible interpretation not discussed above.

two, three, and four that goes otherwise unaccounted for. I have tried to arrange the structure in [Figure 1](#), such that parallelism, if not precisely Wagnerian IPS, is visible throughout. Sections 2 and 3 (block II), in this arrangement, appear to be nested parallel comments on phrases 1a and 1b (block I) respectively, and considering that Wagner presents IPS as a theory of interpretation, reproduced also as a compositional style in

Wang Bi's commentarial *Laozi weizhi lueli* 老子微指略列, and numerous pre-imperial texts,¹⁰¹ one should not be surprised that those who interpreted and commented on a proto-*Laozi* would mimic its style in inline commentary that elaborated on a pre-existing maxim.

Although it is merely plausible speculation that the development of both 16' and 13' follow accretive processes or attached inline commentary to a previously existing passage correlated by its discussion of *gui* 貴 (esteem) and *shen* 身 (the body), it is a matter of fact that section four of 13' circulates independently as a saying or quotation in other known early texts, including the *Wenzi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Huainanzi* (see again Table 3), whereas the other sections do not. Variants of section four differ in the same consequential ways interpretations of the received texts differ.¹⁰² For our purposes, however, the variants show that the meaning of the text could be modified in subtle ways, and that section four could function as a self-sufficient passage, as it functions beyond the *Laozi*.

As we have seen above, based on an examination of the points at which chapters are divided differently across versions, the forces that deposit independent textual units adjacent to one another include the repetition of words, patterns, or themes. This attains a high degree of order in IPS or bidirectional parallelism, but such passages are not necessarily representative of the level of structure found throughout the *Laozi*. The features, other than conjunctions and discourse markers (*gu* 故, *shiyi* 是以, *shi wei* 是謂, etc.) that signal continuity within textual units are, likewise, the repetition of words, patterns, or themes. Since the same set of principles is associated with both the proximity of textual units on a codex and continuity within textual units, and, moreover, because the degree and closeness of repetition appears quite malleable even after units are assembled into sequences, we need to reconsider the extent to which compositional and editorial processes can ever be distinguished in producing the *Laozi*, even at the level of its smallest (ostensibly stable) chapter units.

101. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 105–11 and 96–105.

102. A number of differences are important to redaction-critical studies. Referring to Table 3, the graph *yu* 於 employed in both 4.2 and 4.3 of the *Zhuangzi* variant can be read as contrastive—“esteem [those who] employ their body *over* those who pursue the realm”—clearly a body-first interpretation, coherent with the self-preservationist thought of the “Zai you” 在宥 chapter in which it is found. The Mawangdui recension shares this contrastive reading in 4.2 but not in 4.3, suggesting that it viewed the parallel sequences in section four as contrastive, as per the Heshang Gong interpretation. The *Wenzi* makes the sequence explicitly about ruling (*zhi* 治) the kingdom.

Part Three

Perfecting the Book: Editorial Intentionality and the Conjoining of *Laozi* Chapters

The question of exactly how chapters such as 13' and 20^A' came to be composed and compiled as they did in the Guodian manuscripts versus all later recensions is still a matter of some speculation, particularly with regard to how a historical author may have been involved. Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–50), a Tang interpreter who lived during a time in which manuscript production was still the primary means by which ideas were disseminated, looked back merely hundreds rather than thousands of years on the origin of the *Laozi* as a book, and on the development of its early interpretive schools. Cheng divided his synopsis of the *Laozi* into five parts: 1) *Daode* 道德者, or “The Way and Virtue”; 2) “explaining the term *jing* (warp-text; canon; scripture)” 釋經者; 3) “the essence of [discrete] schools” 宗體者; 4) “the number of graphs [in the text]” 文數者; and 5) “[the number of] *zhang* (chapters) and *juan* (scrolls)” 章卷者.¹⁰³ Certainly, before Yan Zun (as we will see in more detail below) the term *Daode* was perceived as the core philosophical dyad of the *Laozi*. In regard to the rubric for Cheng’s synopsis, however, note that the first and second categories above spell together *Daodejing* (Canon of the Way and Virtue), the other common name for the canonized *Laozi*; Cheng’s third category marks out the (written) interpretive lineages by which the *Laozi* was transmitted in Cheng’s time. The structure of his overview mirrors, in part, the terse bibliographies found in the early dynastic histories. The “*Yiwenzhi*” 藝文志 (Record of Arts and Letters) bibliography in the *Han shu* 漢書 (Han History) provides much of the same data, listing first the name of a text, then the interpretive lineage, and then some accounting of its codicological features:

老子鄰氏經傳四篇。

Laozi, Lin lineage, *jing* (canon) and *zhuan* (commentary), four *pian*-scrolls

老子傅氏經說三十七篇。

Laozi, Fu lineage, *jing* and *shuo* (explications), thirty-seven *pian*-scrolls

老子徐氏經說六篇。

Laozi Xu lineage *jing* and *shuo*, six *pian*-scrolls

劉向說老子四篇。

Liu Xiang *shuo Laozi*, four *pian*-scrolls¹⁰⁴

103. Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, “*Laozi kaiti*” 老子開題, preserved in Dunhuang manuscript P.2353. See also n. 35, above, for Meng Wentong transcription.

104. “*Yiwenzhi*” in Ban Gu 班固, ed., Yan Shigu 顏師古 ann., and Wang Xianqian 王先謙 ann., *Han shu buzhu* 漢書補注 (Taipei: Dingwen, 1986), 1729.

These are precisely the data items most pertinent to the *Laozi's* textual identity in early imperial China: names of books, their status as *jing* and hence their relation to interpretive schools that transmitted them; as well as their codicological manifestations (number of chapters and scrolls).¹⁰⁵ The elements of Cheng's overview that official bibliographies do not address, such as the name *Daodejing*, or tallies of the number of graphs and chapters, are provided by the punctuation and paratextual sequences in some of our earliest manuscript sources.¹⁰⁶ Cheng did not ever live to see the Mawangdui, Guodian, or Beida manuscripts of the *Laozi*, but all these versions offer new perspectives on the features that were crucial both to the *Laozi's* integrity as a book and to Cheng's synoptic scheme.

Paratextual Markers of Editorial Intentionality: Making Books Books

The data items identified by Cheng Xuanying, by early bibliographers, and by the manuscripts themselves, reveal an interpretive environment in which the *Laozi* has a clear "textual identity."¹⁰⁷ Titles, the first crucial piece of data for imperial bibliographies, are also found in excavated manuscripts of the *Laozi*: The Xiang'er manuscript has a postface that says *Laozi Dao jing* 老子道經, below which *Xiang'er* 想爾 is written on a separate line; in the new Beida manuscript, the upper (38'–81') and lower (1'–37') scrolls are labeled respectively *Laozi shang jing* 老子上經 (*Laozi* upper canon) and *Laozi xia jing* 老子下經 (*Laozi* lower canon), on the verso of each scroll's third slip; the Mawangdui manuscripts are less consistently titled, their names appearing only in the *Laozi* B 老子乙 manuscript, where brief postfaces record them as *De* 德 and *Dao* 道.¹⁰⁸

105. Some differences are worth noting, such as that in the *Han shu*, the title of *Daodejing* is not used for the *Laozi*, and that the imperial library counts *pian* 篇, rather than *juan* 卷.

106. For a theoretical discussion of how the term "paratext" can be applied to premodern Chinese texts, see Heng Du, "The Author's Two Bodies: Paratext in Early Chinese Textual Culture" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2018), chap. 1.

107. See Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), Introduction; and Du, "The Author's Two Bodies," chap. 1.

108. The Mawangdui B (*yi* 乙) scroll of the lower canon is clearly marked at the end, in the middle of a blank column: "*Dao* two thousand four hundred and twenty-six [graphs]" 道二千四百廿六. (transcription *Mawangdui jicheng* vol. 2, 207; images vol. 1, 149) While more difficult to make out due to damage, the close of the upper canon has a similar count, and almost certainly read "*De*, three thousand forty-one" 德三千册一 (images *Mawangdui jicheng* vol. 1, 147, vol. 2, 197). The Mawangdui A (*jia* 甲) manuscript, on the other hand does not appear to have contained character counts, and it begins its lower canon (1'–37') on the line immediately after the end of the upper (vol. 1, 99).

The Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts, in contrast, do not bear any explicit titles, making it difficult to determine their nature and purpose.

Character tallies, which are found in a number of manuscripts from early China, are another indication that accurate reproduction of the text, rather than the text's free use and adaptation, was a desideratum of those who produced a manuscript. The presence of a verifiable number at the end, like computational checksums now used to prevent errors in data transmission, strongly suggests that the copyist strove for accurate reproduction. For the *Laozi*, the question of character count becomes especially important at least by the late Eastern Han or early medieval period, but it was not necessarily so from the beginning, at least in early records of the legend that portray Laozi transmitting his teaching to Yin Xi 尹喜 on his way westward out of China, here related by Sima Qian 司馬遷:

老子修道德，其學以自隱，無名為務。居周久之，見周之衰，乃遂去。至關，關令尹喜曰：「子將隱矣，彊為我著書。」於是老子乃著書上下篇，言道德之意五千餘言而去，莫知其所終。

Laozi cultivated *Daode* (The Way and Virtue). His learning was attained in reclusion and his concern was the nameless. He had lived long in Zhou and saw Zhou's decline, so he left. When he got to the [border] pass, the Director of the Pass, Yin Xi said: "You, sir, have determined to go into hiding; could you be bothered to write something for me?" Thereupon Laozi wrote a book in upper and lower *pian*-scrolls, discussing the significance of *Daode* in five thousand and some characters, whereupon he left. No one knows where he ended up.¹⁰⁹

After Sima Qian, the numbers in this story took on a much more rigid doctrinal significance, and the book often known simply as the *Wu qian wen* 五千文 (Five Thousand Characters), was understood not to have "five thousand and some characters," but to have *exactly* Five thousand characters, no more, no less. Or, in some doctrinal debates, precisely one less, as is explained by Cheng Xuanying:

尋青牛發診，紫氣浮關，真人尹氏親承聖旨，當爾之日，止授五千文。故《序訣》云：於是作《道德》二篇，五千文上下經焉。是知五千之文，先有定數，後人流傳，亟生改易。案：河上公本長五百四十餘字，多是「兮」、「乎」、「者」也。蓋逗機應物，故文飾其辭耳。但高士逸人多尚其業，好異之徒例皆添糅，遂使魚目亂珠，玉石無辨。

太極仙公欲崇本抑末，乃示以本文止五千字。故《序訣》云：吾已於諸天校定，得聖人本文者乎？

109. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記, ed. Pei Yin 裴駟 and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Taipei: Dingwen, 1981), 2141.

Recollect, [if you will,] the green ox crossing the boundary, purple clouds drifting across the pass, and the True Man, Mr. Yin [Xi] personally undertaking the sagely directive. On that day, he stopped at receiving five thousand characters. That is why it says in the *Xujue* 序訣 (Preface for Severing Doubt): “Thereupon [Laozi] created *Dao-de* in two sections, the *Five Thousand Characters*, upper and lower *jing* (scriptures).” Thus we know that the *Five Thousand Characters* initially had an established number, and as later people transmitted it, changes and revisions occurred repeatedly. Note: Heshang Gong’s book is longer by five hundred and forty-some characters, most of which are [grammatical particles such as] *xi* 兮, *hu* 乎, and *zhe* 者. This is because he was adapting the teaching to the taught, so he merely embellished its words. Only high-minded scholars and recluses greatly revered his undertaking, whereas lovers of heterodoxy and their ilk all adulterated [the text], disordering the pearls with fish eyes, such that one cannot tell jade from rocks.

The Utmost Immortal Duke [i.e. Ge Xuan 葛玄, 164–244 C.E.] wished to revere the root and inhibit the branches,¹¹⁰ and this is evident in that the current text stops at five thousand characters. Thus, the *Xujue* says: “I have already collated and revised the text with all the Heavenly Deities, can it not be the original text of the Sage?”

今所講誦，多依葛本。

.....

須諸學者，搜簡定數，云少一字，不滿五千。解者不同，而罕得厥中，或言闕此一字，用象太一之無，或云少此一字，以明絕言之理。斯並苟為異端，妄生抑度，竊尋經意，豈其然乎？只是經中卅幅也，且古者三十分為二文，今時卅惚（總）為一字，有此離合，故少一文也。

These days, what we intone and recite is largely in accord with the Ge [Xuan] edition [of the Laozi] ... Naturally, men of learning, who have pored over the slips and fixed the number [of graphs], will say they come up one character short, not reaching five thousand [i.e. 4,999]. There are different explanations for this, but rarely do they hit their mark. Some say that missing this one character symbolized the non-being of Taiyi [the Utmost One]; others say falling one character short served to elucidate the principle of rejecting language. This sort of thinking is careless to the point of heresy, and recklessly breeds obsta-

110. As to “Revere the root and inhibit the branches.” 崇本抑末 cf. n. 32 above.

Table 5 Paratextual Markers on Manuscript Editions of the *Laozi*.

Manu- script	Preface	Postface	Character Tallies	Estimated Count	Chapter Separation
XE	[missing]	老子道經/想爾	No	~5,000	None
BD	老子上經 老子下經	●凡二千九百冊二 ●凡二千三百三	I: 2,940 II: 2,303 Total: 5,243	I: 2,959 II: 2,306 Total: 5,265	Clear/ consistent
Mb	---	德 三千冊一 道 二千四百廿六	I: 3,041 II: 2,426 Total: 5467	Unknown	None
Ma	---	---	No	Unknown	Some
GD	---	---	No	N/A	Some

cles to salvation. If we may be so bold as to examine the meaning of the Scripture (*jing*), how can it be so? It is simply because of the words “thirty spokes” in the Scripture: in antiquity, “Thirty 三十” was written as two characters; today “Thirty 卅” is one character. It is due to this joining and separating that one character was missing.

Similar narratives are found elsewhere in received literature regarding the origin and truth of a five-thousand-character edition.¹¹¹ Cheng is certainly right that a number of manuscripts of over five thousand characters circulated, and that indeed many of the seemingly dispensable graphs are particles. It seems almost certain that an abbreviated text like the one Cheng describes circulated in the Eastern Han, many generations before the (terse but incomplete) Xiang'er *Laozi* came into being.¹¹² The omission of grammatical particles would have made the interpretation of the text even more reliant on attached commentarial or interpretive traditions. A more perfect text, at least from the perspective

111. For a doctrinal counterpoint in favor of the 4999-character version, see the citation of the *Dengzhen yinju* 登真隱訣 attributed to Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536 C.E.), preserved in Liu Dabin 劉大彬, *Maoshan zhi* 茅山志, *Daozang* vol. 154, *Dongzhen bu, jizhuan lei* 洞真部紀傳類 cited in Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaozheng* 老子想爾注校證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1991), 3–4.

112. Jao, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaozheng*, 4–5, cites quotations of Yu Huan's 魚豢 third century *Dian lue* 典略 preserved in the commentary to the “Biography of Liu Yan” 劉焉傳 in the *Houhan shu* 後漢書 and the Pei Songzhi 裴松之 commentary to the “Biography of Zhang Lu” in the *Wei zhi* 魏志, which claim that a 5000-character version of the *Laozi* was being taught as early as the Xiping 熹平 period (172–178 C.E.) of the Eastern Han. The Xiang'er manuscript writes 卅 rather than 三十 in chapter 11', so strictly speaking, it may have originally been a version of the 4999 character *Laozi*.

of those who sought truth in the numerological perfection, or a more perfectly underdetermined vessel for transporting extrinsic doctrine, in the case of the Xiang'er.¹¹³ Whatever the veracity of Cheng's narrative regarding an urtextual *Laozi*, it is clear that sometime during the Han, the numerology of *Laozi* character tallies became imbued with a philosophical and religious significance that was absent from earlier recensions, and it functioned as an abstract principle important enough to justify modifying what was ostensibly already a fixed canon.

It is harder to know what to make of character tallies in unearthed *Laozi* manuscripts that may predate Cheng's version of the legend, partly because few of the manuscripts that contain tallies are complete enough to allow an accurate count, nor can manuscripts tell us of the care with which their early users actually checked the tallies.¹¹⁴ The Beida manuscript allows for the best estimate, but the agreement is not perfect: the manuscript tally counts 5,243 graphs altogether, whereas the Beida editors estimate that the text had some twenty-two more than that, or 5,265 when complete, which would be roughly 99.6 percent accurate.¹¹⁵ For the lower canon of the manuscript, which can be completely reconstructed, the agreement is almost 100 percent, with only two graphs difference between the tally on the manuscript and the editors' count after reconstruction. The incompleteness of the Mawangdui B manuscript makes it more difficult to speculate about its original count, but it is worth noting that only the B manuscript—generally thought to be the later of the two—contains a character tally.¹¹⁶ The Guodian texts, earliest

113. As Stephen Bokenkamp has observed, "The Xiang'er commentary seems more interested in drawing specific lessons from the *Laozi* than in explicating its meaning. Because of this concern, he may, for instance only explicate a single phrase from the *Laozi* and then go on to discuss that, leaving the rest of the sentence alone"; see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 64. In such instances, a more philosophically explicit *Laozi* might only serve to distract from the commentary's point.

114. For a recent survey of the evidence, see Zhang Haibo 張海波, "Qiantan chutu jianbo wenxian zhong de jizi wei: jianbu Yinqueshan Hanjian 157 hao jian quewen" 淺談出土簡帛文獻中的計字尾題——兼補銀雀山漢簡157號簡缺文, *Chututwenxian yanjiu* 16 (2017), 280–88. Zhang does not find perfect accord in all cases, but many are close.

115. See Han Wei 韓巍, "Xi-Han zhushu *Laozi* de wenben tezheng he xueshu jiazhi" 西漢竹書《老子》德文本特徵何學術價值, in *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu*, ed. Han Wei and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo, vol. 2, 208. The counts do not include the *chongwen* 重文 (ditto; repetition) punctuation marks, of which the upper canon now preserves 49 of 53 estimated *chongwen*, and the lower canon preserves all 61. For the argument that such counts did not include *chongwen*, see Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "You shiwu suo jian Handai jiance zhidu" 由實物所見漢代簡冊制度, in *Hanjian zhuishu* 漢簡綴述 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 291–311, especially 301–3.

116. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 speculates that the manuscripts A and B "are intimately related but definitely were not copied from the same base-text; their respective sources,

footnote continued on next page

of the *Laozi* materials, contain no such indication that they sought to transmit a circumscribed whole. In the places where these checksums are written, the user would at least be aware that the manuscripts bore the textual authority of a recension in which someone at some point had sought to carefully reproduce the (bounded, complete) text. Users who sought to preserve this authority might think twice about changing it to fit their own needs, and it seems most likely that in the case of the Beida manuscript, the count is quite accurate.

Assembling Books, in Theory: Perfection by Numbers

When the Mawangdui texts were excavated, one of the earliest appraisals was that the Mawangdui recension lacked chapter divisions, and that such an undivided state was representative of the *Laozi's* urtext.¹¹⁷ Perhaps this hasty conclusion seemed justified by the lack of punctuation in the Xiang'er 想爾 commentary from Dunhuang, which at the time could have been regarded as the earliest manuscript.¹¹⁸ But manuscripts are made for different users and audiences. In the Xiang'er manuscript, the text and commentary are written inline, such that if one does not know *Laozi* by heart (so as to discriminate its text from the surrounding commentary), the text reads like gibberish. Given what little is known about the sequence of doctrinal training in the Celestial Masters sect, initiates would probably have already mastered the *Da zi* 大字 (Big Character; i.e. uncommented) text of the *Laozi* as well as the

rather, were [distinct] texts with a not-so-distant ancestor." Qiu's analysis seems to be based primarily on the number and nature of graphic differences between the texts, although it concurs with the earliest analysis of the topic, in Gao Heng 高亨 and Chi Xichao 池曦朝, "Shilun Mawangdui Han mu zhong de boshu *Laozi* 試論馬王堆漢墓中的帛書《老子》," *Wenwu* 222.11 (1974), 1–7. See Qiu's introduction to the *Laozi A* in his *Changsha Mawangdui Han mu jianbo jicheng* 長沙馬王堆漢墓簡帛集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2014), vol. 4, 2.

117. Gao and Chi "Shilun Mawangdui Han mu zhong de boshu *Laozi*," 4: "The excavated silk *Laozi* does not divide into chapters; thus we can see that the original form of the *Laozi* did not divide chapters" 出土帛書《老子》不分章。可見不分章是《老子》的原樣。

118. One might consider the Suo Dan 索統 manuscript of the *Laozi*, with its colophon date of 279 C.E., to be the earliest, although the Suo Dan has a complicated history of transmission and its date is not universally accepted. For an argument confirming the colophon, see Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤, "Suo Dan xieben *Daodejing* canjuan kaozheng 索統寫本道德經殘卷考證," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 2 (1955), 1–17; for the argument that the manuscript is a later medieval work, see William G. Boltz, "Notes on the Authenticity of the So Tan 索統 Manuscript of the *Laozi* 老子," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59.3 (1996), 508–15. The manuscript is currently held at Princeton University Art Museum.

Laozi Heshang Gong commentary, before turning to the Xianger.¹¹⁹ In such an event, punctuation in the Xianger would be superfluous. As I hope to show below, the Beida manuscript probably had a very different purpose from the Xianger, and it makes explicit the types of knowledge that were implicit for initiates who used the Xianger—including, importantly, how to parse the text into chapters. The idea that punctuation is a late development in the history of *Laozi* transmission, in any case, turned out to be unsupported by the Mawangdui *Laozi*, which does have some chapter punctuation (almost entirely in the upper canon of the A manuscript);¹²⁰ and although we cannot vouch for the state of a *Laozi* urtext, the Guodian discoveries have shown that *Laozi* manuscripts in the Warring States period already had some chapter punctuation even though they lack outward signs of completeness or unified closure.

In the Guodian manuscripts, there are punctuation marks that appear to delimit both individual chapters (as discussed above in parts one and two) as well as groups of chapters.¹²¹ We know that as early as the Warring States period, there were forms of the *Laozi* that sought to collect discrete units of text—or *zhang*, of varied yet delimited structure—together into collections. There are, of course, almost infinite ways of doing this, and a number of mechanisms by which the compilation of texts might operate: collection of units with thematic or literal similarity; collections that preserve sequences of prior manuscripts; collections that serve to anthologize a larger collection; collections written down from memory or oral recitation; collections that collate prior collections; and so on. Nonetheless, by the time of the next oldest extant *Laozi* manuscript was written, the Mawangdui A, the material that we find either compiled or excerpted in the Guodian manuscripts had taken on a sequence much like that of transmitted editions of the text, with just a few differences.¹²² Despite whatever set of imperfect theories may have been applied in composing or interpreting the chapter boundaries and punctuating

119. See Jao, *Laozi Xianger zhu jiaozheng*, 3.

120. The Mawangdui A text places round dots ● at the beginning of a number of chapters, although there is only one such mark in the lower canon (1'–37') at the very beginning of the text, before 1', and some fifteen other marks placed less consistently at the beginning of chapters in the upper canon (46A', 46B', 51A', 51B', 53', 57', 64A', 80', 81B', 69', 72B', 73', 75A', 75B', 76'; see also Chart 1.

121. For an overview of the use of punctuation in the Guodian manuscripts, see Scott Bradley Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study & Complete Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia, 2012), vol. 1, 60–64.

122. As compared to the received text, the Mawangdui recension places 24' between 21' and 22', 40' between 41' and 42', and 80'–81' between 66' and 67'. The upper and lower canons are reversed, such that the *De* canon (38'–81') comes first, before *Dao* (1'–37').

them, the array of sources we have now do this differently, some in ways that seek structural perfection at the level of the book, and often at the expense of the interpretation of individual *zhang* that are split or combined differently across different recensions.

The *Yi* 易 (Changes, or *Yi jing* 易經) provides a model whereby a book like the *Laozi*, or indeed any other number of canons may have been understood as numerically structured. The *Yi* may or may not be the oldest book of wisdom in China, but its completeness as a book is dictated fundamentally by its underlying numerological structure. One may have an accreted, multi-laminate text that includes disparate divination records or fragmentary bits of knowledge, but one does not have an *Yi* with more or less than sixty-four hexagrams. The hexagrams that structure the *Yi* are figures that exhaust the binary permutations of six lines that may each be broken or unbroken (or six quantities that may be either even or odd), making exactly sixty-four. And just as one may check characters, to make sure they are all there, so may one also count sixty-four chapters. Sixty-four, in this case, is not merely a checksum; rather, the lines and the hexagram figures they produce embody the mechanics of the cosmos, at least as is explained in the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations), part of the *Yi jing*'s earliest commentarial packaging.¹²³ As such, the figures and their numerological structure provide one model for organizing a comprehensive book of wisdom—a bible, or encyclopedia, if you will. The underlying numerical structure dictates the division of the book into sixty-four *zhang*, whatever their specific order may be. No such internal structure is apparent in the Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts, nor is it entirely clear in the Mawangdui manuscripts, but this additional, numerological signifier of comprehensiveness is a feature of transmitted editions of the *Laozi* and, as I will suggest below, the Beida recension as well. The exact numbers that governed the *Laozi*'s internal order, however, was a matter of disagreement among early recensions.

Yan Zun's *Laozi* Recension: A Yin-centric Model of Perfection?

One way of understanding the *Laozi*'s internal order is provided by the commentarial synopsis that prefaces the Yan Zun 嚴遵 (b. Zhuang Zun 莊遵, courtesy name Junping 君平; fl first century B.C.E.) recension of the *Laozi*.¹²⁴ In one edition the Preface is called "Junping shuo er jing mu"

123. For a general introduction to the text and philosophy of the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳, see Willard J. Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on The Attached Verbalizations' of *The Book of Change*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (June 1982), 67–116.

124. The name Zhuang 莊 was changed to Yan 嚴 to avoid imperial taboo.

君平說二經目 (Yan Junping's explication of the canon's two sections); in another simply called "Shuo mu" 說目 (explication of the sections), and it reads as follows:¹²⁵

莊子曰：昔者老子之作也，

變化所由，道德爲母，効經列首，天地爲象。上經配天，下經配地，陰道八，陽道九。以陰行陽，故七十有二首。以陽行陰，故分爲上下。以五行八，故上經四十而更始；以四行八，故下經三十有二而終矣。陽道奇，陰道偶，故上經先而下經後。陽道大，陰道小，故上經衆而下經寡。陽道左，陰道右，故上經覆來，下經覆往，反覆相過，淪爲一形。冥冥混沌，道爲中主。重符列驗，以見端緒。下經爲門，上經爲戶，智者見其經効，則通乎天地之數。陰陽之紀，夫婦之配，父子之親，君臣之儀，萬物敷矣。

Zhuangzi 莊子 [i.e. Yan Zun 嚴遵] said:

In antiquity, as to the composition of the *Laozi*:

It had change as its origin, *Dao-de* (The Way and Virtue) as its mother; head of all verified *jing*,¹²⁶ it takes Heaven and Earth as its figure.

The upper *jing* matches Heaven and the lower matches Earth;

the Way of *yin* is eight and the Way of *yang* nine;

By *yin* it runs *yang*, thus seventy-two pieces;

by *yang* it runs *yin*, thus dividing upper and lower.

By five it runs eight, so the upper *jing* counts forty and restarts;

by four it runs eight, so the lower *jing* counts thirty-two when done.

The Way of *yang* is odd; the Way of *yin* even,

thus the upper *jing* comes first and the lower one behind.

The Way of *yang* is great and the Way of *yin* small,

thus the upper *jing* is many and the lower one few.

The Way of *yang* is left and the Way of *yin* is right,

thus over and over does the upper *jing* come; again and again does the lower one go.

Repeatedly they cross each other, converging as one form.

Dim and dimmer, turbid and murky; the Way is their hub and master.

125. The primary source for the Yan Zun *Laozi* is the *Daozang* version, which contains both a commentary by Gu Shenzi 谷神子 and the text of the *Laozi*; herein preface is entitled "Junping shuo er jing mu" 君平說二經目. A second edition, less complete (missing an additional *juan*), and unaccompanied by the commentary or text, is Hu Zhenheng's 胡振亨 Ming dynasty *Mi ce huihan* 秘冊彙函 edition, reprinted in the *Qinding Sikuquanshu* 欽定四庫全書.

126. Reading *xiao* 効 as *jiao* 校 (verify), although the sense of *xiao* 効 (manifest) may also be intended here and below.

Again take their tally and confirm their order, to see where their strands meet up.

The lower *jing* is the gate; the upper *jing* the door.

The initiated see [how] the *jing* is verified, now conversant in the sums of Heaven and Earth.

It is the entwining of *yin* and *yang*;

the pairing of man and wife;

the closeness of father and son;

the duty-bond of lord and minister;

the circulation of the myriad things.¹²⁷

For Yan Zun, the perfection of the *Laozi* mirrors an intrinsic, natural order, much like that described in the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (Attached Phrases) commentary to the *Yi jing*, extending, as it does, from the cosmos and into the realm of fundamental human relationships (man and wife, lord and minister, etc.). The comprehensive order of the *Laozi* can be tested by comparing and verifying (*jiao* 校; 効)—or, perhaps even “collating”—the book against the *xiang* 象 (above translated as “figure”) of Heaven-and-Earth. Like the *xiang* of the *Xici zhuan*, these are understood as real, manifest structures underlying real phenomena.¹²⁸ Equally real, for Yan Zun, and representative of these structures, is the numerical truth of the text’s division into two canons, upper and lower, of forty and thirty-two sections respectively, for a total of seventy-two. Forty is the product of the highest *yin* number, eight, and the number of the five phases (*wu xing* 五行 metal, wood, water, fire, earth 金木水火土); thirty-two is the product of the same *yin* number by four, which is elsewhere in the Yan Zun commentary associated with four seasons (*si shi* 四時) or four seas (*si hai* 四海).¹²⁹ From Yan Zun’s description, we should

127. Yan Zun 嚴遵, “Junping shuo er jing mu” 君平說二經目, in *Daode zhenjing zhigui* 道德真經指歸, *Daozang* 道藏 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1988), vol. 12, 341; HY 693, with the Gu Shenzi 谷神子 commentary. Also known as “Shuo mu” 說目. This selection is in *juan* 1, panels 4a to 5b, i.e. 1.4a–1.5b. The term *fu* 敷 here means literally to “spread out” or “disperse” things. But it is also used (and I think intended) in the sense of “operate” or “implement.”

128. Willard J. Peterson, “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on The Attached Verbalizations’ of The Book of Change,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (June 1982), 80.

129. The commentary sets out the relationship between these numbers more explicitly: “As to the transformations of *Dao* and *De*, and the numbers of Heaven and Earth, one *yin* and one *yang* divide into the four seasons, separate into the five agents, order into webs and nets, [dispose things] such that there are no gaps between” 道德之化天地之數一陰一陽分為四時離為五行綸為羅網設為無間 (Yan Zun, commentary to 44’/YZ chap. 7, 8.11a). A variation occurs in the commentary to 73’ (YZ chap. 33), 12.17: “As to the Way of Heaven and Earth, one Yin and one Yang divide into four seasons,

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hardly expect the *Laozi* to be a sedimented jumble of sayings, accreted by idiosyncratic processes, or what D. C. Lau called “no more than a collection of passages with only a common tendency in thought.”¹³⁰ On the other hand, it is much harder to see how the *xiang* figures that allegedly undergird *Laozi* operate, since—in contrast to the case of the *Yi jing*—we do not know how we might diagram them. However imperfect the *Laozi*’s formation or accretion may appear by the standards of modern textual criticism, by virtue of the numerological order imposed by the Yan Zun’s scheme of chapter separations, the *Laozi* is able to embody perfection of another sort, even if it is a perfection brought about merely in theory or by wishful thinking.

Yan Zun’s commentary is transmitted with a forty-chapter *jing*, homologous to the lower (*De*) section of other received editions (R38–R81) and to the upper *jing* of both the Mawangdui and Beida recensions. The portion homologous to the *Dao jing* beginning with R1 and ending with R37 seems to have gone missing in the twelfth century.¹³¹ It seems almost certain that Yan Zun’s upper *jing*, described in “Shuo mu” as divided into forty chapters, is precisely the one that remains, and that the sequence of the two canons in the Yan Zun recension matched the Beida and Mawangdui sequence.¹³² Similarities of chapter punctuation between the Yan Zun edition and the Beida manuscript, discussed in more detail below, reinforce the conclusion that the current Yan Zun text preserves only its upper *jing*.

separate into the five phases, and flow into the ten thousand things. Essence becomes the three [celestial] lights; *yang qi* [vapor] controls *de* (virtue), while *yin qi* controls *xing* 形 (punishment) “夫天地之道一陰一陽分為四時離為五行流為萬物精為三光陽氣主德陰氣主刑. For a list of several relevant cosmological passages, see Alan K. L. Chan, “The Essential Meaning of the Way and Virtue: Yan Zun and ‘Laozi Learning’ in Early Han China,” *Monumenta Serica* 46.1 (1998), 116.

130. Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 134.

131. Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (mid-twelfth century) apparently had all thirteen *juan* of the Yan Zun commentary with Gushenzi subcommentary. See Chao Gongwu, *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志, *juan* 11.51, cited in Chan, “The Essential Meaning of the Way and Virtue,” 111 n. 19, cited in Wang Zhongming 王重民 *Laozi kao* 老子考 (Beijing, 1927; [Taipei: Dongxing, 1981]), 35; Aat Vervoorn, “Zhuang Zun: A Daoist Philosopher of the Late First Century B.C.,” *Monumenta Serica* 38.1 (Jan 1988), 73 n. 18. It is unclear how Chao’s edition was laid out. The Daozang edition begins with *juan* 7, such that *juan* 1–6 appear to be missing. *Juan* 7 is preceded by a preface and by the “Junping shuo er mu” translated above. It appears that the numbering of the *juan* was probably made on the bibliographic record that the work was originally thirteen *juan* and the erroneous assumption that the *Dao* (1–37) section came first. See Chan 1998, 111–112 n.22.

132. For a more detailed rendering of this argument, see Vervoorn, “Zhuang Zun,” 78–80; see also Chan, “The Essential Meaning of the Way and Virtue,” 111–112, n. 22.

Both Sima Qian's account and Yan Zun's "Shuo mu" recognize *Dao-de* as a key theme of the *Laozi*, and the titles in the Mawangdui manuscript indicate that in some early recensions of the *Laozi*, the upper and lower canons had *De* and *Dao* as book titles.¹³³ Based on the explicit associations familiar from other received recensions of the text, one might be tempted to associate *yang* with *Dao* and *yin* with *De* in the Yan Zun numerological scheme, but the claim in "Shuo mu" that the *yang* canon comes before the *yin* canon appears to be purely numerological: *yang* comes first in that eight is first multiplied by a *yang* quantity (i.e. the odd number, five) in order to place the forty-chapter *jing* first; the *yin* of the lower canon is likewise *yin* by virtue of multiplying four (*yin*) by eight (also *yin*).¹³⁴ Whatever relation the names *Dao* and *De* had to the upper and lower books of Yan Zun's recension, the *Laozi* of the "Shuo mu" has "*Dao-de* as its mother," which sounds decidedly *yin*. Moreover, in contrast to the Wang Bi/Heshang Gong recension, the division of the Yan Zun recension's upper and lower canons are both dictated by multiples of the *yin* quantity eight, so *yin* numerology has a prominent function in the Yan Zun recension.

Yang numerology and the making of an eighty-one chapter edition of the *Laozi*

There were indeed other schemes with more emphatic *yang* numerology that were far more influential in shaping the later *Laozi* tradition and its texts. If there is some truth to the perception that the Yan Zun seventy-two chapter recension was based on *yin* numerology, it should perhaps not be surprising that a scheme emphasizing *yang* numerology accompanied the reversal of the upper/lower sequence we find in Mawangdui, Beida, and Yan Zun, placing R1–R37 at the front of the canon. A quotation of Liu Xin's 劉歆 (c. 50 B.C.E.–23 C.E.) *Qilue* 七略

133. There is no clear sign of this association in the Yan Zun text itself, nor in the titles of the *Han shu* "Yiwenzhi," nor in the Beida manuscript, all of which are titled *Laozi* rather than *Daodejing*. See above n. 107.

134. The topical focus on *De* in chapter R38, which opens with "The highest *de* is/does not *de*, and therefore has *de*" 上德不德是以有德, would seem either to explain the naming convention by which 38'–81' became known as the *De jing* or the reason that 38' was placed first in a canon already known as such. Likewise for the relation between the title *Dao* and the opening of 1', which reads "The *Dao* that can be *dao*-ed is not the eternal *dao*" 道可道非常道. Regarding the term "Utmost *De*" of 38', the Yan Zun commentary says: "The lord of 'Utmost *De*' manifests the *Dao* and [thus] persists, his spirit a union with transformation" 上德之君, 體道而存, 神與化倫. *Daode zhenjing zhigui*, 7.2b. Clearly *Dao* and *de* bear some sort of interrelation, which may allow for R38–R81 to be associated simultaneously with *De* and with *yang* numerology.

and a discussion of early editions is preserved in Xie Shouhao's 謝守灝 (twelfth century) *Hunyuan shengji* 混元聖紀 (Sagely Chronicle of Chaotic Origin):

按劉歆《七略》劉向讐校中《老子》書二篇，太史書一篇、臣向書二篇，凡中外書五篇一百四十二章。除複重，三篇六十二章，定著二篇八十一章。上經第一，三十七章；下經第二，四十四章。此則校理之初，篇章之本者也，但不知刪除是何文句，所分章何處為限。中書與向書俱云二篇，則未校之前已有定本。參傳稱《老子》有八十一章，共云象太陽極之數，道經在上以法天，天數奇，故有三十七章。德經在下以法地，地數偶，故有四十四章。而葛洪等不能改此本章，遂減道經常無為一章，繼德經之末，乃曰：天以四時成，故上經四九三十六章，地以五行成故下經五九四十五章，通上下經以應九九之數。

According to Liu Xin's *Qilue*, when Liu Xiang 劉向 made his collation,

... the central [i.e. imperial palace's] copy of the *Laozi* had two *pian* 篇 (sections; scrolls), the Grand Astrologer's 太史 book had one *pian*, and my [i.e. Liu Xiang's] book had two *pian*. Altogether the external and central books came to five *pian* and one hundred and forty-two *zhang* 章 (chapters; textual units). [We] eliminated duplications of three *pian* [totaling] sixty-two *zhang*, finalizing a work of two *pian* and eighty-one *zhang*. The upper *jing*, number one, was thirty-seven *zhang*; the lower *jing*, number two, was forty-four *zhang*.

These are the numbers of *pian* and *zhang* they had in their initial collation, but we do not know what phrases were removed or in what places the boundaries between chapters were drawn. The central palace copy and Liu Xiang's copy are both said to have two *pian*, and thus prior to [Liu's] collation fixed recensions (*dingben* 定本) already existed. If we refer to the *zhuan* 傳 (commentaries), that say the *Laozi* has eighty-one *zhang*, they concur in saying that they take as their figure (*xiang* 象) the sun's extreme number (i.e. nine; lit. Greatest *Yang*; *tai yang* 太陽): the *Dao jing* lies above, emulating Heaven, and Heaven's number is odd, so there are thirty-seven *zhang*; the *De jing* lies below, emulating Earth, and Earth's number is even, so there are forty-four *zhang*. Moreover, Ge Hong 葛洪 and others were unable to change the [number of] *zhang* in this [eighty-one *zhang*] book, so they took the "Always do without doing" 常無為 chapter [37] out of the *Dao jing* and put it at the end of the *De jing*, saying:

"Heaven is completed by four seasons, therefore the upper *jing* is four nines, [making] thirty-six; Earth is completed by the five agents,

therefore the lower canon is five nines, [making] forty-five; the two canons, when joined, respond to the sum of nine nines."¹³⁵

Xie's account indicates that the *yang-by-yang* eighty-one chapter scheme may have predated (but did not postdate) Liu Xiang (77–76 B.C.E.). Ge Hong (283–343 C.E.) apparently moved one chapter to accord with his own numerological scheme, yielding 36 (4 × 9) and 45 (5 × 9) upper and lower, but did not change the overall number, perhaps, as Xie seems to suggest, because the eighty-one chapter had gained a certain traction in the Han.¹³⁶ A recension or recensions prior to the Lius' eighty-one chapter scheme was presumably the basis of the transmitted edition. While Xie does not speculate explicitly about them, he goes on to argue against Yan Zun's scheme of seventy-two chapters, saying that its divisions "are entirely in disagreement with those of Heshang Gong—they also are the product of [Yan Zun, i.e.] Junping, and are without any basis."¹³⁷

If Xie had lived to see the Mawangdui, Guodian, or Beida manuscripts in his time, he would have found that a plurality of schemes for dividing and arranging the canon circulated before Liu Xin, and he might have been less inclined to claim that Yan Zun's recension was without basis or precedent. While the Yan Zun and Beida versions are by no means identical, they bear important structural resemblances. As mentioned above, provided the number of chapter divisions in the Gu Shenzi edition of the Yan Zun commentary are correct, we can surmise that the overall structure of the Yan Zun *Laozi*, with 37'–81' as the upper canon, had a precedent in early recensions of the *Laozi*, as exemplified by the Mawangdui and Beida texts. At a more granular level, while the Yan Zun text must join more *zhang* together to get to seventy-two than the Beida text need do to get to seventy-seven, all of the *zhang* concatenations found in the upper Beida text are found also in the upper Yan Zun: both combine 78'–79' and 58^{B'}–59'.¹³⁸ Moreover, the two share some

135. Xie Shouhao 謝守灝, *Hunyuan shengji* 混元聖紀, *juan* 3, 18b–19a (HY 769), in *Daozang*, vol. 17, 779–884, 816. The placement of quotation marks and directness of quotation are uncertain.

136. As Ding Sixin points out, the Ge Hong 葛洪 arrangement also seems to emphasize the four seasons and *wuxing* 五行 (five agents/elements/phases) scheme mentioned by Yan Zun. Ding Sixin 丁四新, "Shu de zhexue guanlian yu zaoqi *Laozi* wenben de jingdianhua: jian lun tongxingben *Laozi* fenzhang de lai yuan" "數"的哲學觀念與早期《老子》文本的經典化——兼論通行本《老子》分章的來源, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* (*Shehuikexue ban*) 59.3 (2019), 113.

137. *Hunyuan shengji*, 3.19a–b.

138. The converse is not true: the Beida, it should be noted, splits R64A and R64B whereas the Yan Zun does not. The Yan Zun combines 39'–40', 57'–58B', and 67'–68' in addition to those shared with the Beida text.

peculiar features not shared with any other recensions: both have (distinct but possibly related) recombination variants at the locus of 39'–41'; both clip the final sentence of 58' (58^{B'}) and append it to the beginning of 59'; and both are missing a line in 73' that is found in all other transmitted recensions (the Mawangdui also concurs with Yan Zun and Beida in this regard). Finally, the presence of *gu* 故 (therefore) at the beginning of 68' in the Mawangdui B manuscript indicates it was read continuously with 67', also corroborating the Yan Zun chapter divisions. Although Xie Shouhao could find no precedent for the divisions in Yan Zun text, when we compare its structural features to excavated Western Han editions, the similarities are striking. It is of course possible that these variant methods of chapter division all arose independently in different transmission lineages, but especially with the unusual variant combining 58^{B'} and 59', and the missing line in 73', a much more likely explanation is that the recensions are related in some way, either vertically, by filiation, and/or horizontally, by comparison and collation.¹³⁹

The commentary of Yan Zun has enjoyed far less modern scholarly attention than that of Wang Bi, owing partly to philosophical trends, but also—I suspect—to some problems of the Yan Zun commentary's transmission in the Ming dynasty that have led to suspicions of forgery.¹⁴⁰ The structural similarities between manuscript editions suggest that there is little reason to doubt that the Yan Zun text, its "Shuo mu" numerology of seventy-two chapters, and its contemporary (or pre-existent) eighty-one chapter scheme, are representative of a plurality of recensions roughly contemporary to or slightly later than the Beida manuscript, that may have had different but intentionally significant schemes for numbering.¹⁴¹

139. Given that transmitted recensions—in particular the Wang Bi, Fu Yi, and Heshang Gong—are generally thought to have suffered from contamination or alteration that has brought them into greater agreement over the ages, a comparison of structural features such as chapter division schemes may be a key feature of a more comprehensive effort to study the filiation of *Laozi* editions. On contamination, see Boltz, "Lao tzu," in *Early Chinese Texts*, ed. Loewe, 276.

140. The suspicion of forgery has recently been rejected by a number of modern scholars; see Vervoorn, 74, for a summary. The main works on the topic are Wang Liqi 王利器, "Daozang ben *Daode zhenjing zhigui tiyao*" 道藏本道德真經指歸提要, *Zhongguo zhexue* 4 (1980), 340–41; Meng Wentong 蒙文通, "Yan Junping *Daode zhigui lun yiwen*" 嚴君平道德指歸論佚文, *Tushu jikan* 6 [Chengdu] (1948), 23–38; and Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峯, "Bian Yan Zun *Daode zhigui lun fei weishu*" 辨嚴遵《道德指歸論》非偽書, *Dalu zazhi* 29.4 (1964), 107–13, reprinted in *Wuqiu bei zhai Laozi jicheng chubian* 無求備齋老子集成初編 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1965) vol. 1, all cited in Vervoorn, "Zhuang Zun," 74.

141. In addition to schemes of 72, 81, and 77 chapters, medieval recensions varied in their number of chapters, including versions with 64, 79, 78, or 68 chapters; see above n. 72.

Although there is nothing akin to Yan Zun's "Shuo mu" to explicate the reasoning behind the Beida recension's chapter organization, one may suspect that its seventy-seven chapter scheme is reliant on some form of numerical structure. But before returning to consider what numerical theory may underpin the divisions in the Beida manuscript, it is worthwhile first to examine how that version divides the text, in practice.

Making Books in Practice: Stitching Continuity in the Beida *Laozi*

Whatever theoretical structure may undergird the *Laozi's* textual existence, there remains the matter of how the book's constituent parts are manifest within the whole. A set of possible mechanisms influencing how the text's order came about was set forth in Part Two. Once the text is laid out in sequence, a basic necessity for realizing any numerological scheme, is to make parts of the text clearly divided and countable. In this regard, the Beida manuscript punctuates each chapter at the beginning with a round dot, also leaving unwritten space at the end of each chapter such that no one slip contains material from two chapters. Using both punctuation (the dot) and codicological separation (blank space) is a robust approach to marking chapter separation. In this regard, the Beida manuscript is already perfectly consistent, whereas other early *Laozi* manuscripts mark separation partially and irregularly at best.

There are, however, other means of ensuring continuity and discontinuity. A chapter may be written so as to make its own cohesion explicit, and one way of doing this (seen in several examples above) is to conjoin phrases of the text with conjunctions or discourse markers of continuity, such as *gu* 故 (therefore), *shiyi* 是以 (for this reason), or *shiwei* 是謂 (the foregoing is called). Not only are such function words an important set of clues about how chapters were read—especially in editions like the Mawangdui and Guodian texts that do not use punctuation marks consistently, *gu* and *shiyi* are the most common, basic hardware holding the *Laozi* together, of central importance, as represented in word clouds in Figure 2.¹⁴²

Gu 故 (therefore), for example, may merely logically conjoin phrases, as in chapter R22: "[He] does not display himself, and therefore becomes clearly visible; [he] does not regard himself as correct, and therefore becomes prominent; [he] does not [of himself] attack, and therefore

142. Punctuation in some of these manuscripts may have been completed after the text was written, although they were clearly not in the Beida text. Word clouds generated on ctext.org, <http://ctext.org/plugins/texttoolsbeta/>, with the received *Laozi* hosted there. *Shiyi* and *shiwei* are the second and fifth most common binomes respectively; *gu* is the fifteenth most common graph.

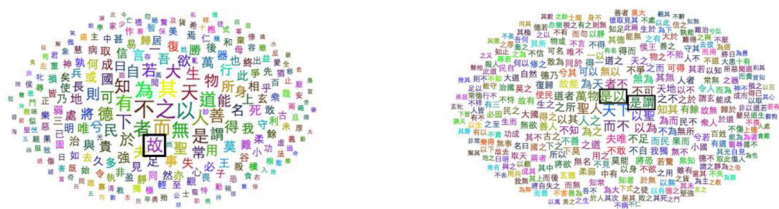


Figure 2 Prominent Graphs (left) and Binomes (right) in the Wang Bi *Laozi*

achieves merit; [he] does not take pride in himself, and *therefore* can lead [others]” (不自見，故明；不自是，故彰；不自伐，故有功；不自矜，故長). In many such cases, *gu* merely conjoins phrases. As we have seen in Part Two, however, *gu* may stitch two otherwise self-sufficient sayings together into a syncytium. Chapters never begin with *gu*, or with *shiyi* or *shiwei*, so when we see these linkers, we can be assured that the textual unit is intended to be read continuously.¹⁴³

What I have done, therefore, is to look across all manuscripts and major recensions of the *Laozi*, identifying points at which one or more of these linkers—*gu*, *shiyi*, and *shiwei*—are either present or absent. Where there is a significant variant among extant witnesses, I have listed it in Appendix 1.¹⁴⁴ By this measure, as it turns out, the Beida manuscript is by a wide margin the most explicitly conjoined of all recensions: at roughly seventy-two percent of the contested loci at which independent units of text might be divided, the Beida manuscript reads *gu*, *shiyi*, or *shiwei*. Even though the Yan Zun edition contains slightly fewer chapters and therefore is in principle more conjoined by its attached commentary, it explicitly conjoins textual units only about half as often as in the Beida manuscript, or thirty-five percent of the time. The remainder of recensions lie in between these figures and are summarized in Table 6.¹⁴⁵

143. One might question certain cases, however, such as that of the opening sequence of 68', for which some variants read *gu* 古 (ancient; anciently) rather than *gu* 故 (therefore). For example the Fuyi recension reads “the accomplished men-at-arms of old” 古之善為士者, whereas most transmitted versions and the Mawangdui A read simply “Accomplished men-at-arms” 善為士者, and the Mawangdui B text reads “therefore, accomplished men-at-arms” 故善為士者. One might argue that the reading of *gu* 故 is merely a copyist's error to the Mawangdui B, but the Yan Zun version reads this passage as continuous with 67', or at least punctuates them as a single chapter, corroborating the punctuation variant of Mawangdui B at Mb67–Mb68; see also variance at 64'–65' for what appears to be a similar phenomenon.

144. Where all witnesses agree, where the conjunction functions merely to hold a sentence together, or in other cases detailed in the legend, I have excluded a locus from the survey.

145. Strictly speaking, the Xianger manuscript is the least conjoined, but since it does not differ dramatically from other editions for which 1'–38' are extant, the data

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Table 6 Percentage of Variant Loci Conjoined by *gu*, *shiji*, and *shiwei*

	WB	HG	YZ	XE	FY	Ma	Mb	BD	GD
% Conjoined	48%	39%	35%	29%	48%	56%	58%	72%	45%

Why might transmitted editions be so much less conjoined than the Beida manuscript version? What we seem to be witnessing in the Beida manuscript is a highly robust and coordinated effort to clearly separate the chapters, both codicologically and by means of punctuation. Moreover, the conjunctions and discourse markers of continuity work in perfect coordination with these separations to ensure not only that the text is divided as it should be, but also that it is not divided as it should not be. Not only is disjunction marked more clearly in the Beida than in any other manuscript version, conjunction is made more explicit than in any other version of the *Laozi*. The punctuation of the text was in no way left for recipients of the Beida manuscript to complete as they saw fit. And, what is more, the continuity conferred by the aforementioned linker words would be robust in an oral context; continuity would be clearly marked even when texts are being read aloud.

Why are received versions less explicitly conjoined? The answer must be speculative, but it seems likely that later versions did not need to be because the problems addressed by Beida's explicit conjunction were already resolved by the Eastern Han. As Xie suggests above, by the time of Ge Hong, only limited changes could be made to the numerical structure of the *Laozi*. Moreover, as written commentarial metatext became disposed on the same codices as the texts being commented on (also during the Eastern Han, from the time of Ma Rong 馬融, 79–166 C.E.),¹⁴⁶ this commentarial material—now paratextual—could suffice to make chapter divisions clear, perhaps even with chapter titles interspersed

seems lacking to conclude that it is significantly or systematically less conjoined than other transmitted editions.

146. As Jao, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaozheng*, 1, points out, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 records the earliest statement on combining text and commentary onto a single codex: "When Ma Rong wrote the *Zhouli zhu*, he wanted to save scholars the trouble of reading from two [separate] books, so he included the entire text in his commentary" 馬融為《周禮注》, 欲省學者兩讀, 故具載本文. The quote is preserved in Kong's comment to the section title "Maoshi Guofeng" 毛詩國風 in the *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, Shisanjing zhushu bianweihui 十三經注疏編委會, *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Beida, 2000), 4. This practice of encapsulating text with commentary thus had probably begun by the Eastern Han, although it is clear from other manuscripts that paratextual elements, such as punctuation, prefaces, and postfaces, became attached to texts many centuries before this.

at the beginning or end of each of the eighty-one *zhang*, as are found in many transmitted editions. The Xianger, discussed above, highlights another unwritten force of textual conservation, namely underlying practices of memorization and repeated study that would enable a user to easily discriminate text and commentary on a single codex. A deep familiarity with chapter divisions built by memorizing other un-commented versions might have made it quite unnecessary to punctuate chapters in a text—especially one used as the Xianger was to advance an independent philosophy based on the authority of the *Laozi*, which initiates would have already memorized and internalized. Whatever other mechanisms may have helped conserve the integrity of canons, once those structures are securely in place—as they apparently were before Ge Xuan’s time—it is then possible for a version to shed extraneous conjunctions with little consequence, some of which would have enabled a freer, decoupled reading of composite *zhang*, without injury to the *Laozi*’s theoretical/numerological structure. As long, that is, as it is not the goal of that version to establish a particular scheme of chapter divisions, such as for those memorizing the text for the first time.¹⁴⁷

Conversely then, the Beida manuscript would seem to be a text circulating in an environment in which those mechanisms for preserving the integrity of the canon were *not* well enough in place, and where it was desirable to make abundantly clear exactly where one chapter was meant to end and the next to begin, not only by adding clear punctuation to divide the text into *zhang*, but by marking continuity with conjunctions and discourse markers to keep those *zhang* from splitting apart, even when read aloud. This would be especially important if the numerology of those chapter divisions was a matter of some significance.

There may also have been reason, within the editorial context of the Beida manuscript, to think that the text *might* come apart at certain junctures, disrupting the sequence deemed correct by the Beida recension. The Beida manuscript’s claim—again, unique among manuscripts—to be a *jing* 經 (canon; scripture) seems intended as a hedge against tampering, echoed in its clear titles, clear chapter separations, and verifiable character tallies.¹⁴⁸ If the variance among known manuscript versions

147. Note that in the “Yiwenzhi” of the *Han shu*, chapter counts are neither a feature of bibliographic record—even though the *Qilue* and *Shuomu* indicate their number was very significant—nor tallied at the scroll-end of manuscript sources. See “Yiwenzhi” passage above and n. 105. The Fu lineage does indicate the text was 37 *pian*, although this seems likely because a scroll of commentary was devoted to each chapter of the 1’-37’ canon.

148. For an interesting recent examination of the term *jing* 經 in light of the Beida *Laozi* and other excavated versions, see Shin’ichi Yanaka 谷中信一, “Shūshō” 終章 in “Rōshi” *kyōtenka katei no kenkyū* 「老子」經典化過程の研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko, 2015),

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of the *Laozi* is in any way representative of the pre- and early imperial Chinese manuscript culture, then it should be no surprise that the producers' fear of decay was based on their direct knowledge of competing, variant versions of the text. This is part of the reason, for example, that in sections two and three of the Beida 13' homolog I prefer to interpret the repetition of the long and short forms of the phrase that varies in the Mawangdui and Guodian versions, "this is what it means to say *chong ru*" (是謂寵辱) and "this is what it means to say *chong ru' ruo jing*" (是謂寵辱若驚), as an effort to achieve a comprehensive text by including variants found in two source texts during collation, rather than a simple repetition error in copying. There is every indication that the Beida manuscript derives from an environment in which multiple manuscripts were known and compared, so as to produce an authoritative, comprehensive version that avoided errors. Although the collative efforts of the Liu Xiang and Liu Xin are salient and well-documented in official histories, they can hardly be credited with inventing collation.

Perfection in the Flesh: The Beida *Laozi* as *Shanben* 善本

Another aspect of the Beida *Laozi* merits some attention. Much has been written about the codicology of the manuscript's verso score marks, particularly in regard to authentication, so I will not recount all the details here.¹⁴⁹ The Beida *Laozi* was reconstructed on the basis not only of the *Laozi*'s known textual sequence, but also in reliance on diagonal score marks on the verso. The slips were cut from cylindrical culms of bamboo that appear to have been scored in a spiral pattern before the culm was split into individual slips. In general, as the culm was split into slips, those slips preserved the order they had within the culm; excepting the first and last slips from a given culm, slips adjacent in the culm became adjacent in the manuscript. After cutting, the spiral score marks on the outside of the culm became diagonal score patterns on the verso of slips that can be used to link adjacent slips. Those diagonal patterns

translated into Chinese as Zhonggu Xinyi 谷中信一, Zhang Xuehe 張雪禾 trans., "Laozi jingdianhua guocheng (process) de yanjiu" 《老子》經典化過程(process)的研究, in *Gu jian xin zhi: Xi-Han zhushu Laozi yu daoia sixiang yanjiu* 古簡新知: 西漢竹書《老子》與道家思想研究, ed. Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所 and Han Wei 韓巍 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2017), 215–61.

149. See Sun Peiyang 孫沛陽, "Jiance bei huaxian chutan" 簡冊背劃綫初探, *Chutuwenxian yanjiu* 4 (2011), 449–62; Han Wei 韓巍, "Jianbei huahen de chubu fenxi" 簡背劃痕的初步分析, in *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu*, ed. Han Wei and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo, vol. 2, 227–235; Foster, "Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Strips: On the Authentication and Study of Purchased Manuscripts,"; Thies Staack, "Could the Peking University *Laozi* 老子 Really Be a Forgery? Some Skeptical Remarks."

are interrupted when the slips cut from a single culm are linked up with slips from a second culm to form a larger manuscript, but they are also interrupted in places where it appears a slip was discarded, rewritten on a fresh slip, and then replaced. Mistakes in copying are inevitable, yet whereas in other caches of bamboo manuscripts such mistakes are often cut off with a knife and rewritten on the cut surface, there is no indication of such corrections in the Beida report. The apparent lack of such piecemeal erasures and interruptions of the scoring patterns suggest that imperfect slips were discarded and replaced in their entirety, rather than shaved and corrected. Overall, the process, consistent with all indicators of editorial intentionality discussed above, points towards an advanced set of production and quality control processes, aimed at delivering an error-free manuscript that was both textually and codicologically perfect.

For unspecified reasons, the editors have called the manuscript a *shanben* 善本 (lit. “good book”), a somewhat vague term that may imply both the quality of its production and the presumed accuracy of its text.¹⁵⁰ On the basis of its identity as a *jing* 經 (canon), one might wish to draw lines between the clearest available dots, connecting the Beida manuscript to the context of the *Laozi*’s canonization, probably in the time of the Han Jing Emperor 漢景帝 (r. 157–141 B.C.E.). A quotation of the *Wushu* 吳書 (History of Wu) preserved in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 says:

吳書云 ... 至漢景帝以黃子老子義體尤深 改子為經 始立道學 勅令朝野悉諷誦之。

The *Wushu* says: “... The Han Jing Emperor regarded the *Huangzi* 黃子和 *Laozi* 老子 as particularly profound of meaning and essence. He changed them from *zi* 子 (masters) into *jing* (canons; scriptures), initiating the study of *doxue* 道學 (Daoism; lit. ‘Study of The Way’), and issuing an edict that all levels of society should recite and memorize them.”¹⁵¹

150. Han Wei and Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo, eds., *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu*, vol. 2, 215. It is probably wise to reserve a certain skepticism for such claims about artifacts, especially when they are made by the institutions that own them.

151. Dazangjing kanxinghui ed., *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, in *Dazheng xinxiu Dazangjing* 大正新脩大藏經, vol. 53 (1983), 701, upper register. This connection is explicit in Ding Sixin, “Laozi de fenzhang guannian ji qi jiantao” 老子的分章觀念及其檢討, *Xueshu Yuekan* 9.48 (2016), 27–37; also in English translation, as Ding Sixin, “The Section Division of the *Laozi* and its Examination,” trans. Chad Meyers, *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 48.3 (2017), 159–79; and Ding “Shu de zhexue guanlian yu zaoqi Laozi wenben de jingdianhua: jian lun tongxingben Laozi fenzhang de lai yuan.”

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The Beida manuscript's connection to such an imperial context is not impossible; and the edict here is reminiscent of *Dazi Laozi* 大字老子 as it functions in the Celestial Masters doctrinal program mentioned above.

I hope it is evident from the method applied in the foregoing that with regard to accuracy vis à vis some authoritative text or tradition of interpretation, I do not seek to confer any particular authority on one manuscript or another, or, for that matter, on one or another way of punctuating a manuscript. Nonetheless, there is every indication that those who produced the Beida manuscript sought to present a version of the text that was both authoritative and influential. There is little reason to suspect that the care in producing such a manuscript—codicologically perfect, uniformly written in beautiful calligraphy, and free of errors—was limited to its physical features. The shaping and assembly of a coherent text, the clear and robust delineation of chapters, and—most likely—the collation of several versions to produce an orthodoxy—were apparently undertaken with the same degree of care as was the crafting of its material carrier. But was the Beida manuscript version also numerically perfect?

Perfection in Spirit? Numerical Symmetry in the Beida Manuscript Recension

As mentioned above, the Beida *Laozi* upper book is forty-four chapters, the lower canon is thirty-three chapters, for a total of seventy-seven—multiples of eleven by four and three, respectively—numbers that at least superficially evoke the symmetries sought elsewhere by interpreters of the *Laozi*. If there is a numerological scheme at work, it is not obvious why these numbers were chosen, although three and four each have a number of associations in *xiangshu* 象數 (images and numbers) exegeses of the *Yi jing*.¹⁵²

Regarding the seventy-seven chapters in the Beida version, Wang Bo 王博 suggests that the division scheme seems “pretty ordinary,” with no underlying intentional numerology, although he does not substantiate the claim.¹⁵³ In contrast, Ding Sixin 丁四新 speculates in great detail that the

152. Three and four as the decisive factors of the upper and lower books have various possible correlates. As Ding Sixin has pointed out, multiples of three and four figure in the *Yi jing*'s division into books of thirty and thirty-four chapters, as laid out in the “Qian zaodu” 乾鑿度 (Cracking Open the Rule of *Qian* [hexagram]) in the *Yi Wei* 易緯 (Weft of the *Changes*) and in Jing Fang's 京房 (78–37 B.C.E.) commentary to the *Yi jing*. See Ding, “Laozi de fenzhang guannian ji qi jiantao,” 34.

153. Wang Bo 王博, “Xi-Han zhushu Laozi yu Yan Zun Laozi zhigui” 西漢竹書老子與嚴遵老子旨歸, *Zhongguo zhixue shi* 3 (2013), 7, writes the following: “The number [seventy-seven chapters] in itself is definitely not like seventy-two or eighty-one,

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numerology is related to Han cosmological ideas of the *Huntian* 渾天 (Canopy Heaven), in which three and four correspond respectively to Heaven (circular) and Earth (square).¹⁵⁴ The roughly opposite views of Wang and Ding represent perhaps two ends of a spectrum; a more cautious approach might seek to avoid being overly dismissive or overly speculative.

Nonetheless, the matter warrants some speculation. We do know, for one, that the other known Han versions of the *Laozi* that are identified as *jing* 經 (canons): the Yan Zun and Liu Xiang's eighty-one chapter versions both have underlying numerological schemes. While it is hard to underestimate the influence of the Wang Bi version in shaping the post-Han philosophical reception of the *Laozi*, we should also remember that Wang Bi's popularity also marks the decline of *xiangshu* exegeses that were popular before him, roughly contemporary to the Beida manuscript. What is more, one need not look beyond the Beida Han manuscript cache to see that many of the texts found along with the Beida *Laozi*—at least half of the cache—are technical texts expressly concerned with *shushu* 數術 (numbers and arts).¹⁵⁵ Just for example, a previously unknown divination text from the Beida cache, the *Jing jue* 荊決 (Methods of Jing; Jing Decisions), prescribes a method in which thirty divination stalks are divided into three piles, then removed in successive handfuls four by four.¹⁵⁶ This is not at all to say that the numerology of thirty-three and forty-four directly link the *Jing jue* and the Beida *Laozi*; it merely illustrates that numerology was a major concern of other texts in the cache, many of which are not previously known.

which have a special significance; rather it seems pretty ordinary. From the looks of it, the [Beida] bamboo version definitely does not have any conscious numerological awareness in regard to the division of chapters—it's just the continuation of some sort of tradition” 七十七章……這個數字本身並不像七十二或者八十一那樣有什麼特別的意義，顯得有點樸素。看來竹簡在分章上並沒有自覺數字意義，只是某種傳統的延續。

154. Ding, “Shu de zhexue guannian,” 111. Three and four also correspond to the mathematical relationship between the circumference of a circle of diameter one and the perimeter of a square of side length one, within which that circle is inscribed. A number of sevens present themselves for speculation: seven lunar lodges (*xingxiu* 星宿) in each of four sectors of the sky; the seven stars of the Big Dipper; or the seven concentric orbits of the *Qiheng tu* 七衡圖. See also Qian Baocong 錢寶琮 *Suanjing shi shu* 算經十書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963), 13, cited in Ding, “Shu de zhexue guannian.” See also Christopher Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The “Zhou Bi Suan Jing”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59–66, 181–82.

155. For a summary, see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, Han Wei 韓巍, and Chen Kanli 陳侃理, “Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu gaishuo” 北京大學藏西漢竹書概說, *Wenwu* 6 (2011), 49–70.

156. Li Ling 李零 ed., “Jing jue” 荊決, in *Beijing daxue cang Xi-Han zhushu* vol. 5, ed. Beijing daxue chutuwenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2014), 102.

Without a statement like that found in Yan Zun's *Shuo mu* or Xie Shouhao's lost *Qilue* passage, and given the decontextualized nature of the Beida cache, it is impossible to ascertain the exact reasoning behind any underlying numerology the Beida *Laozi* might have. Nonetheless, in light of the accompanying materials, our knowledge of other *Laozi* regarded expressly as *jing* 經, and in particular, due to the especially emphatic nature by which the Beida text punctuates its chapters, it seems unlikely that the exact number of divisions was left to chance. Although we cannot say for certain what the rationale might have been, it seems most reasonable to speculate that the Beida recension had some underlying numerology—a numerological perfection that the chapter divisions sought to fix.

Closing Reflections

The perfection perfected by the Beida *Laozi* was not an eternal perfection. We have seen above that the perfection of the book may come at the expense of the plausible interpretation of a *zhang*. The case of *Laozi* 10' shows that punctuation variants can alter the meaning of chapters, and in many more cases, chapters of no intrinsic connection were stitched together explicitly in order to perfect the *Laozi*'s numerological structure. This seems to have been the case for the Beida recension as well.

The perfect interpretation of a *zhang*, on the other hand, as examined for *Laozi* 13', may be a never-ending quest, both in practice and in theory. In practice, interpretations such as Qiu Xigui's, which seek to emend the text of 13' (more plausibly, I think, than emendations by D. C. Lau, Gao Heng, Chen Guying, or others that did so before them), might be better substantiated by manuscript evidence yet to come out of the ground, both graphic—i.e. pertaining to the interpretation of *rong* 榮 versus *jing* 驚—and bibliographic, indicating whether the Guodian manuscripts represent selections from a formed *Laozi*, precursor materials or a dead-end branch of some proto-*Laozi* transmission lineage.¹⁵⁷ Given that three different caches have yielded *Laozi* materials so far, it is possible another one will come along that tells us more about the state of the book in the Warring States. For the moment, however, especially if we choose to follow Qiu's emendation, we can say that chapters like 13'—and indeed other parts of the *Laozi*—are still being written.

157. Although I began this study with the impression that a close examination of the chapters that separate 13' from 20' in received versions might show how Guodian A, B, and C manuscripts were copied from a text similar to the received order, I am now more agnostic about the validity of one or another of these models. I suspect the unusual punctuation variance in this stretch of chapters is simply because it is the longest run of received chapters for which we have Guodian homologs.

With regard to theory, although the foregoing has essentially tested Lau's model of compositeness against Wagner's model of *zhang* composition, and although both are crucial contributions to the study of the *Laozi*, neither suffices alone to explain the formation of the *Laozi*, much less that of canons more generally. In many but not all cases, Lau's 1963 translation, and indeed some earlier works on which it builds, have correctly predicted points of disjunction later corroborated by manuscript discoveries.¹⁵⁸ Wagner's theory, which must be regarded as *both* a theory of interpretation *and* a theory of composition, is undoubtedly a powerful way of analyzing texts, but given the tendency for proverbs to collocate by similarity of phrase or theme, one cannot rule out the possibility that IPS patterns were produced by editors of a proto-*Laozi*. Even by Wagner's account, IPS is only found in half of the *Laozi*,¹⁵⁹ and the presence of structures that appear fixed in the Guodian manuscripts can only tell us that indeed some of the *zhang* of the *Laozi* did form earlier than others. The shapes that IPS can take are however quite flexible; in the most basic scheme the *a* and *b* strains is like a pair of gloves or socks, cuffed together by linking or summative *c* elements. But we have seen numerous examples where linkers like *gu* are inserted by editors, and both Lau and others such as Kimura Eiichi have identified proto-commentarial chapter-final comments that operate like summative *c*-elements (e.g. 16^{B'} discussed above, in which case it cannot be ruled out that the commentarial 16^{B'} was composed sometime after the Guodian *Laozi* was written). Linking or especially closing *a* and *b* strains with final *c*-elements, or by way of more elaborate structures, like Gentz's bidirectional parallelism in 66', may be editorial innovations that—like the presence of commentary—delimit and stabilize a textual unit. Variance in chapter punctuation shows that even the *Laozi*'s molecules were reactive during the Han.

On the matter of how *Laozi*—the book—came about, Xie Shouhao, writing in the Song dynasty, provides a number of insights still relevant to the discussion:

今檢類眾本，有依文連寫者，亦有分題八十一章，若古詩之章句，每章分別，於文為繁，則其所擇科段可了，不復每章皆題也。謹按《列子》引谷神不死，稱為《黃帝書》曰，則五千之字或有舊書。故《老子》亦

158. Wu Cheng's 吳澄 (1249–1331) concatenations of 17'–18'–19', 57'–58', and 67'–68' are corroborated by other editions and manuscripts, as are Yao Nai's 姚鼐 (1731–1815) at 39–40 (as per Yan Zun). Yao also predicted the division of 46', but most of his other predictions have not been corroborated by manuscript variants. Ma Xulun 馬敘倫 also split the *Laozi* into a number of sections. See Henricks, "On the Chapter Divisions in the 'Lao-Tzu,'" 506, 509–10.

159. Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, 95.

云：古之所謂曲則全者，豈虛言哉。亦其義也。是以孔子謂述而不作，信而好古，竊比老彭之嘆。今檢他書，所引《老子》，或曰玄經，及韓非之述謂《老子》，與今見行之本，文字微有不同，猶《論語》之有齊、魯，《尚書》之有古、今，聞見異辭，未足怪也。

Now, if we inspect and compare all editions [of the *Laozi*], there are those that follow the practice of writing the text continuously, and there are others that separate and title each of the eighty-one chapters, just like the *zhang* and *ju* (phrases) of ancient poetry, in which each *zhang* is separated, augmenting the text such that the passage selections are made clear. One need not additionally label each *zhang*. I cautiously note: the *Liezi* cites “The valley spirit does not die” [*Laozi*, chap. 6], as a quote from the *Huangdi shu* 黃帝書 (Book of the Yellow Thearch), so [*Laozi*’s] “Five Thousand Characters” may have had an older book [as its source]. Thus when Laozi says: “The old saying, “when partial it is whole”—How can those be empty words?!” he is also referring to this [i.e. the *Laozi*’s incomplete state]. This is why Confucius sighed, saying “[I] transmit but do not create, [I] am faithful and love antiquity, dare I compare myself to Laozi and Pengzi 老彭?” When we now look at other books, some that draw text from the *Laozi* attribute it to mysterious scriptures, and when we look at what Han Fei’s 韓非 explanations call the *Laozi*, the text has some subtle differences, just as the *Lunyu* 論語 had recensions from Lu and Qi, and the *Shang shu* 尚書 had new-text and old-text versions. That they heard and saw different words is hardly surprising.¹⁶⁰

We certainly should not be surprised that recensions of the *Laozi* took different forms. It is nevertheless a great surprise to be able to read exemplars of them (and perhaps even pre-recension texts) that have been lost for thousands of years, and I hope the foregoing has revealed some forces behind the separation of chapters that Xie notes. On the matter of authorship, touched upon only obliquely in the discussion of whether or not IPS represents the compositional style of a historical Laozi, even in Xie’s context it seemed plausible that material now found in the *Laozi* could have been passed on from older books, as is suggested by the presence of *Laozi* 6’ attested in a *Huangdi shu*. Xie suggests Laozi was much like the Confucius portrayed in the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*)—a transmitter and editor, but not necessarily a *de novo* inventor of texts.

160. *Hunyuan shengji*, 3.19b–20a. Xie notes that in the *Liezi* 列子, chap. 6 of the transmitted *Laozi* is attributed to a *Huangdi shu* 黃帝書 (Book of the Yellow Thearch), rather than to *Laozi*, and suggests on that basis that other books containing *Laozi* material might have circulated under different names and configurations.

We should keep in mind that Xie's larger project was to recount the long history of the deified Laozi's creation of the universe, as well as Laozi's sagely manifestations on Earth and his revelations to later interpreters such as Heshang Gong and Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (notes on how to revise the text, perhaps?).¹⁶¹ In some ways, despite the implicit authority with which a deified Laozi created the universe, Xie's view of the *Laozi's* creation as a book seems in practical terms more compatible with an editor-centric model of book formation than it is with a quest for an urtext or its *ur-zhang*. Books, as in Cheng Xuanying's discussion above, might be edited to "adapt the teaching to the taught" (逗機應物), and ought to differ significantly in response to the needs of time, place, or readership. Despite ancient attempts to perfect the textual, numerological, and codicological manifestation of the *Laozi*, like that evident in the Beida *Laozi*, or modern efforts to reconstruct a more perfectly coherent *ur-zhang* (Qiu's ancestral 13'), perfection in one context is imperfection in another. As Xie suggests, perhaps the *Laozi's* apparent imperfection is what makes it so perfectly ripe for reinterpretation. Perhaps this is encoded in the *Laozi's* very DNA:

曲則全，枉則直，窪則盈，弊則新，少則得，多則惑 ... 古之所謂曲則全者，豈虛言哉！誠全而歸之

When partial it is whole
 when crooked, straight
 when hollow, filled
 when tattered, new;
 when reduced you get it,
 when increased you get perplexed ...
 The old saying "when partial it is whole"—Can those be empty words?!
 Whole it is indeed! And [to wholeness] it returns.¹⁶²

161. For an overview, see Franciscus Verellen, "Hunyuan shengji" in Kristofer M. Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), vol. 2, 872–74.

162. *Laozi* 22', Lou, *Wang Bi jijiaoshi*, 55–6.

APPENDIX 1 CHART OF CONJUNCTION VARIANTS IN *LAOZI* VERSIONS

Rationale/method:

1 Variants are listed:

Where any one or more witnesses contains a significant variant in the use of *gu*, *shiyi*, *shiwei*, or any other clear conjunction or discourse marker that makes a potential or actual difference for the continuity of the chapter.

2 Variants are omitted:

2.1 When they only separate clauses of a sentence, and do not have a potential effect on agglomeration of sentences or larger units of meaning. For example in the last sentence of 60', "The two do not harm each other, (therefore) virtue transfers [between then] and returns [to each]" (兩不想傷, (故) 德交歸焉). Since *gu* here merely links a sentence together, I do not consider it a potential point of chapter separation.

2.2 When variants at a locus all have a word of equivalent function with respect to continuity. For example, when all editions have either *shiyi* 是以 or *gu* 故 or *shiwei* 是謂 etc. In some cases, *shi* 是 (the foregoing) and *fu* 夫 (as a rule; as to [the foregoing]) are used in equivalent ways (see R74, for example).

2.3 In special cases, for other reasons, as follows:

2.3.1 The phrase "Therefore do away with that and take this" (故去彼取此) comes up repeatedly, as a stock closing phrase in the *Laozi*, at the end of 12', 32', and 72'. In the Yan Zun version of the text, at the end of 32' and 72', the *gu* 故 is omitted, but since this phrase formulaically ends a chapter, there is unlikely to be any question of how to punctuate the chapter at these loci, so I consider it of no particular consequence for continuity.

2.3.2 The phrase in 63' "So the sage also regards it as difficult" (是以聖人猶難之) is present in most transmitted versions, however, the entire phrase is not found in the Mawangdui and Beida versions, and it does not appear decisive in punctuating the chapter, so I have omitted it from the comparison.

38'–81'

Chapter	WB	HG	YZ	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
39'	是以侯王 ...	是以侯王.	_侯王 ...	是以侯王 ...	夫是以侯王.	夫是以侯王.	是以侯王.	N/A
42'	_強梁者不 ...	_強梁者不 ...	_強梁者不 ...	_強梁者不 ...	故強良者不 ...	... □□□ □ ...	故強梁者不 ...	N/A
44', i	是故甚愛必 ...	_甚愛必 ...	是故甚愛必 ...	是故甚愛必 ...	_甚□□ □ ...	...	是故甚愛必 ...	_甚必 ...
44', ii	_知足不辱 ...	_知足不辱 ...	故知足不辱 ...	_知足不辱 ...	故知足不辱 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	故智足不辱 ...	古智足不辱 ...
46', i	_禍莫大於 ...	_罪莫大於 ...	_罪莫大於 ...	_罪莫大於 ...	○罪莫大於 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	故罪莫大於 ...	▽鼻莫砮唬 ...
46', ii	故智足之足 ...	故知足之足 ...	知足之足 ...	故知足之足 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	... □□□□ □ ...	故智足之足 ...	_智足之為足 ...
51', i	故道生之 ...	故道生之 ...	_道生之 ...	故道生之 ...	○道生之 ...	_道生之 ...	故道生之 ...	N/A
51', ii	_生而不有 ...	_生而不有 ...	_生而不有 ...	_生而不有 ...	.□□弗有 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	故生而弗有 ...	N/A
54'	故以身觀身 ...	故以身觀身 ...	故以身觀身 ...	故以身觀身 ...	... □以身觀身 ...	_以身觀身 ...	故以身觀身 ...	... □□(宀+冢).
56'	故不可得而親 ...	故不可得而親 ...	_不可得而親 ...	_不可得而親 ...	故不可得而親 ...	故不可得而親 ...	故不可得而親 ...	古不可尋而 ...
57'	故聖人云 ...	故聖人云 ...	_聖人之言云 ...	故聖人云 ...	是以聖人之言云 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	故聖人之言云 ...	是以聖人之言曰 ...
58'	是以聖人方 ...	是以聖人方 ...	○方而不害 ...	是以聖人方 ...	... □□□□ □ ...	是以方而不害 ...	○方而不害 ...	N/A
59'	是謂深根固柢 ...	是謂深根固蒂 ...	_深根固蒂 ...	是謂深根固柢 ...	是謂深壑固氏 ...	是謂□根固氏 ...	是謂深根固抵□□□□ ...

Chapter	WB	HG	YZ	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
61', i	故大國以下 ...	故大國以下 ...	故大國以下 ...	故大國以下 ...	_大邦以下 ...	故大國以下 ...	故大國以下 ...	N/A
61', ii	故或下以取 ...	_或下以取 ...	故或下以取 ...	_或下以取 ...	故或下以取 ...	故或下 □□□ ...	故或以下取 ...	N/A
61', iii	故大國不過 ...	_大國不過 ...	_夫大國不 過 ...	_大國不過 ...	□大邦不過 ...	故大國不過 ...	... □□□□ ...	N/A
64B', i	是以聖人無 為 ...	_聖人無為 ...	故聖人無為 ...	是以聖人無為 ...	□□□□也 ...	是以耶人無 為 ...	是以聖人無 為 ...	A_慎冬女始 C_聖人無為 ...
64B', ii	_慎終如始 ...	_慎終如始 ...	_慎終如始 ...	_慎終如始 ...	故慎終如始 ...	故曰慎終如 始 ...	故慎終如始 ...	A_斲各女始... C_斲冬若哥.
64B', iii	是以聖人欲 ...	是以聖人欲 ...	是以聖人欲 ...	是以聖人欲 ...	□□□□欲 ...	是以聖人欲 ...	是以聖人欲 ...	A_是以聖人欲 ... C_聖人谷 ...
64', iv	以輔萬物之 ...	以輔萬物之 ...	以輔萬物之 ...	以輔萬物之 ...	能輔萬物之 ...	能輔萬物之 ...	以輔萬物之 ...	A_是古聖人能專 萬物 ... C_是以能搏□ ...
65'	古之善為道 ...	古之善為道 ...	古之善為道 ...	古之善為道 ...	故曰為道者 ...	古之為道 ...	古之善為道 ...	N/A
66', i	是以聖人處 上 ...	是以聖人處 上 ...	故在上 ...	是以聖人處上 ...	故居民前 ...	故居上 ...	是以居上 ...	亅才民上也 ... _亅才民上也 ... ^a
66', ii	是以天下樂 推 ...	是以天下樂 推 ...	_天下樂推 ...	是以天下樂推 ...	_天下樂隼 ...	_天下皆樂 誰 ...	是以天下樂 推 ...	_天下樂進而 ...
68'	_善為士者 ...	{古之}善為 士.	_善為士者 ...	_古之善為士 ...	_善為士者 ...	故善為士者 ...	善為士者 ...	N/A

Chapter	WB	HG	YZ	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
71'	__聖人不病 ...	__聖人不病 ...	__聖人不病 ...	__聖人之不病	是以聖人之 ...	是以耶人之 ...	__聖人□□ 病 ...	
76'	是以兵強 ...	是以兵強 ...	是以兵強 ...	是以兵強 ...	__兵強 ...	□[是]以兵 強 ...	是以兵強 ...	N/A
77'	·天之道 ... 天之道 ...	·天之道 ... 天之道 ...	·天之道 ... 天之道 ...	·天之道 ... 天之 道 ...	·天下□ ... 故天之道 ...	·天之道 ... 天之道 ...	·天之道 ... 天之道 ...	N/A
79', i	__弱之勝強 ...	__弱之勝強 ...	夫水之勝強 ...	__弱之勝剛 ... ...	... □□□□ ...	水之勝剛也 ...	故水之勝剛 ...	N/A
79', ii	是以聖人云 ...	故聖人云 ...	聖人言云 ...	故聖人之言云 ...	故聖人之言 云 ...	是故耶人之 言 ...	故聖人之言 云 ...	N/A
79', iii	__有德司契 ...	__有德司契 ...	__有德司契 ...	故有德司契 ...	故又德司介 ...	故又德司芥 ...	故有德司契 ...	N/A
81'	__聖人不積 ...	__聖人不積 ...	是故聖人不 積 ...	__聖人不積 ...	○聖人不積 ...	__耶人无積 ...	__聖人無責 ...	N/A
Subtotal	18/31	14/31	11/31	16/31	14/23	15/24	23/30	7/16

○ Chapter initial *zhang* 章 punctuation mark

▽ Passage continues from a different sequence from that found in the received text (indicates truncation and/or definite chapter length variation)

1'-37'

Chapter	WB	HG	XE	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
10'	生之畜之 ...	生之畜之 ...	生之畜之 ...	生之畜之 ...	生之畜之 ... ^b	生之畜之 ...	故生之畜之 ...	N/A
11'	故有之以為利 ...	故有之以為利 ...	有之以為利 ...	故有之以為利 ...	故有之以為利 ...	故有之以為利 ...	故有之以為利 ...	N/A
18'	大道廢 ...	大道廢 ...	大道廢 ...	大道廢 ...	故大道廢 ...	故大道廢 ...	故大道廢 ...	故大道廢 ...
22'	是以聖人抱一 ...	是以聖人抱一 ...	是以聖人抱一 ...	聖人褻一 ...	是以聾人執一 ...	是以聾人執一 ...	是以聖人執一 ...	N/A
23'	同於道者 ...	同於道者 ...	同於德者 ...	於道者 ...	同於德者 ...	同於道者 ...	故同於道者 ...	N/A
25'	故道大，天大 ...	故道大，天大 ...	道大，天大 ...	道大，天大 ...	... □□道大 ...	道大，天大 ...	天大，道大 ...	天大， (陀+土) 大 ...
27'	故善人者 ...	故善人者 ...	善人 ...	故善人者 ...	故善□ ...	故善人 ...	善人 ...	N/A
29'	故物或行 ...	故物或行 ...	夫物或行 ...	凡物或行 ...	物或行 ...	物或行 ...	物或行 ...	N/A
30A', i	善有果而已 ...	善有果而已 ...	故善有果而已 ...	故善有果而已 ...	善有果而已 ...	善有果而已 ...	善有果而已 ...	N/A
30A', ii	果而勿矜 ...	果而勿矜 ...	果而勿驕 ...	果而勿矜 ...			故果而勿矜 ...	果而弗癸 ...
30A', iii	果而勿強 ...	果而勿強 ...	是果而勿強 ...	是果而勿強 ...	是謂□而不強 ...	是謂果而強 ...	[phrase omitted]	是謂果而強 ...
31B', i	君子居則貴左 ...	君子居則貴左 ...	君子居則貴左 ...	是以君子居則貴左 ...	君子居則貴左 ...	君子居則貴左 ...	是以君子居則貴左 ...	君子居則貴左 ...
31B', ii	兵者 ...	兵者 ...	兵者 ...	兵者 ...	故兵者 ...	故兵者 ...	兵者 ...	故曰：兵者 ...

Chapter	WB	HG	XE	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
31B', iii	_吉事尚左 ...	_吉事尚左 ...	故吉事尚左 ...	故吉事尚左 ...	是以吉事尚左 ...	是以吉事尚左 ...	是以吉事尚左 ...	_古吉事尚左 ...
31B', iv	_偏將軍居左 ...	_偏將軍居左 ...	是以偏將軍居左 ...	是以偏將軍處左 ...	是以便將軍居左 ...	是以偏將軍居左 ...	_扁將軍居左 ...	是以(丹+酉)軍處左 ...
33'	_知人者智 ...	_知人者智 ...	_知人者智 ...	_知人者智 ...	_知人者智 ...	_知人者智 ...	故知人者智 ...	N/A
34'	_常無欲 ...	_常無欲 ...	[omitted]	_常無欲 ...	_則恒无欲 ...	_則恒无欲 ...	故恒無欲 ...	N/A
Subtotal	1		5/17	10/31	14/23	15/24	22/30	7/16

Ratio of conjoined/ unconjoined	WB	HG	YZ	XE	FY	Ma	Mb	BH	GD
38'–81'	18/31	14/31	11/31	--	16/31	14/23	15/24	23/30	7/16
1'–37'	5/17	5/17	--	5/17	7/17	8/16	8/16	10/16	4/8
Total	23/48	19/48	11/31	5/17	23/48	22/39	23/40	33/46	11/24
Conjoined	48%	39%	35%	29%	48%	56%	58%	72%	45%

a. In this case, in the variant of Guodian *Laozi* A slips 2–5, cohesion in the chapter is produced by repetition of a phrase, which suggests continuity. It is impossible to know for certain, however, whether these two were composed together or brought into proximity by editors on the basis of their shared line.

b. Preceded by a lacuna.

《老子》篇章之「分子間斷性」、連貫性及其文本形成之力求完美

李博威

提要

《老子》的接受史悠久，從近幾十年陸續發掘的大量簡帛材料來看，早在戰國時期，其書已流行。《老子》的註釋和翻譯貫通歷代、風行全球，兩千餘年似無衰微。與其他傳世古書相比，《老子》簡帛古本之多元、豐富極為罕見。因此《老子》也成為文本形成研究的重要典範，對相關理論和探討有著巨大的影響。尤其在研究古書的篇卷是如何從已有的、穩定的段落（即「分子」）建構而來的問題上，《老子》扮演著很重要的角色。本文首先從《老子》十三章各本異文的比較出發，重新探討寫本文化中「章」的概念和瓦格納（Rudolf Wagner）所提倡的「分子銜接性」（molecular coherence）學說，論證《老子》經典詮釋中的一些難題，不是由於經文訛誤造成的，而是早在《老子》未成經的時候已有異議。進而基於各本分章歧異的探究，揭示章節內在的「銜接性」以及書中各章的分佈、章次和連貫性都依賴著同一套形塑力量。最後討論了北大漢簡《老子上下經》中的連詞，闡述詮釋者在抄寫和編纂的過程中，會犧牲文本中某一層次，以達到另一層次的完美。

Keywords: *Laozi*, *Daodejing*, canon, commentary, text formation, chapters, *zhang*, bamboo, Peking University,

老子, 道德經, 經典化, 注釋, 文本形成, 章, 北京大學, 漢簡, 竹書